INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI®

ὁ θεὸς πλάττων:

PUNS ON PLATO'S NAME IN THE *REPUBLIC*

BY

Edward Lawrence de Boo

M.A., BROWN UNIVERSITY, 1993

B.A., KNOX COLLEGE, 1991

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

MAY 2001

UMI®

©Copyright 2001 by Edward Lawrence de Boo

Abstract of "ὁ θεὸς πλάττων: PUNS ON PLATO'S NAME IN THE
REPUBLIC", by Edward Lawrence de Boo, Ph.D., Brown University, May 2001

This dissertation examines the language and literary art of Plato's _Republic_ within the framework of recent scholarly observations about sophistic style, double entendres, and puns on the author's name in Platonic writing. It reviews ancient rhetorical texts and critical readings of Plato that comment on his use of wordplay and imitate his puns on his own name, and shows that these puns, based on forms of the verb _platto_, 'to mold as in clay or wax,' resonate with the proper name _Platôn_ and appear in contexts which deal with important themes in Platonic philosophy. The primary instance occurs in book 3 of the _Republic_, when Socrates has finished discussing the definition of justice and seeks to put it into practice by designing an imaginary political system. He states that the citizens 'have been molded' (_plattomenoi_) as if in a dream by 'the god molding' (_ho theos plattôn_) them. The phrase _ho theos plattôn_ alludes to the divine quality of literary creativity and statecraft as Plato theorizes them, and the image of molding calls attention to the flexibility of the artistic medium, namely _logos_ (i.e. both language and reason), which he elsewhere describes as a substance 'more flexible than wax' (_euplastoteron_). Forms of _platto_ are used in other contexts throughout the work as allusions to similar ideas important in Platonic philosophy, and these puns break down the dialogue's _mise-én-scene_ and alert readers and audience to the process of creativity as well to the fact that the author's true philosophical views are hidden in the mysterious, multifaceted quality, or 'plasticity', of his identity. With the reminder that the name 'Plato' is a pseudonym --the author's patronymic was Aristocles-- the dissertation uses post-modern philosophy and recent anthropological research on ancient Greek writing, reading, and naming to show that the Platonic dialogues interrogate the conventional 'wisdom' of contemporary society on many counts, particularly regarding self and identity, and establish a reality of their own based in linguistic and literary creativity.

This dissertation by Edward Lawrence de Boo
is accepted in its present form by the Department of Classics
as satisfying the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Date 4/30/01

David Konstan, Director

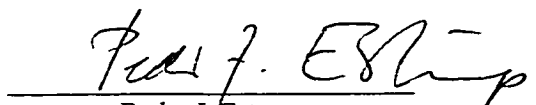Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date 4/30/01

Deborah Boedeker, Reader

Date 4/30/01

Joseph M. Pucci, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date 5/03/01

Peder J. Estrup
Dean of the Graduate School and Research

ii

VITA

I was born on May 7th, 1967 in Elmhurst, Illinois. I received my high school diploma from St. Vincent DePaul High School Seminary in Lemont, Illinois, which I attended from 1981 to 1985. I studied one year (1986-1987) of Latin at Cardinal Glennon College in Shrewsbury, Missouri. I received my B.A. in Classics from Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, which I attended from 1989-1991. In 1991 I was awarded a four-year fellowship from the Jacob K. Javits Foundation and I matriculated to Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island where I pursued graduate work in Classics. I held various teaching positions at the University of Rhode Island College of Continuing Education (1994-1996, 2001), was awarded a scholarship to the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Greece (1996-1997), and held an assistantship position at Brown University (2000) where I completed my dissertation and received a Ph.D. in Classics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to my primary readers, David Konstan, Deborah Boedeker, and Joseph Pucci. The mistakes that remain in this text are entirely mine. I should like to acknowledge my debts to scholars whose work has been particularly inspiring to mine: Martha Nussbaum, whose <u>Fragility of Goodness</u> offered a new way of thinking about Plato; Frederick Ahl, whose attention to details of composition and rhetoric revealed to me the riches of many ancient literary texts as well as the creative spirit of many writers; Andrew Ford and Diskin Clay, both of whose work optimally combines the sensibilities of Nussbaum and Ahl. I would especially like to thank teachers, mentors and friends like Stephen and Brenda Fineberg, David Konstan, and Joseph Pucci, for support and guidance through some of the more difficult parts of the degree program. Finally, friends whose brilliance, humor, and comaraderie have produced many of the most pleasant moments in my life: Keith Jones, Christopher McCurdy, Sherry MacDougall, Raymond Marks, Mark Sundahl, Philip Thibodeau, Bruce Hartzler, Alexandra Pappas, Philip Krauss, Lori Reid, Michael Fontaine, William Tortorelli and Emily Troiano, Alex Alderman, and many others whose names could fill several pages.

CONTENTS

for Arthur, Julie, and Mary Ann

Plato is supreme whether in acuteness of perception or in virtue of his divine gift of style, which is worthy of Homer, since he soars high above the levels of ordinary prose or, as the Greeks call it, pedestrian language, and seems to me to be inspired not by mere human genius, but, as it were, by the oracles of the god of Delphi (Quintilian 10.81).

Everything in this world has a hidden meaning, I thought. People, animals, trees, stars, they are all hieroglyphics; woe to anyone who begins to decipher and guess what they mean... When you see them, you do not understand them. You think they are really people, animals, trees, stars. It is only years later, too late, that you understand... (Nikos Kazantzakis, <u>Zorba the Greek</u>)

Busy, with an idea for a code, I write
signals hurrying from left to right,
or right to left, by obscure routes,
for my own reasons; taking a word like "writes"
down tiers of tries until its secret rites
make sense; or until, suddenly, RATS
can amazingly and funnily become STAR
and right to left that small star
is mine, for my own liking, to stare
its five lucky pins inside out, to store
forever kindly, as if it were a star
I touched and a miracle I really wrote.
(Anne Sexton, 'An Obsessive Combination of
Ontological Inscape, Trickery and Love')

What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescalin, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful. A little of the knowledge belonging to Mind at Large oozes past the reducing value of brain and ego into his consciousness. It is a knowledge of the intrinsic significance of every existent. For the artist as for the mescalin taker, [certain things] are living hieroglyphs that stand in some peculiarly expressive way for the unfathomable mystery of pure being (Aldous Huxley, <u>The Doors of Perception</u>).

1

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

> It is in large part the failure to appreciate the distinctive
> features of imaginative literature and to differentiate
> literary discourse from other modes of representation
> that has tended to hamstring critical understanding of
> the classics and allowed scholarship on ancient letters to
> lapse back into history, ethnography, psychology, or
> social science. In fact, it may well be that the principal
> function of literary texts is to put the relationship of
> language to the world of phenomena in question (Hexter
> and Selden, p. 4).

Quintilian's belief that Plato was "inspired not by mere human genius, but, as it were, by the oracles of the god of Delphi" constitutes a much-needed framing device for a reassessment of the age-old dichotomy between his philosophy and rhetoric, his thought and his writing style. While recent scholarship has examined the institutional character and cultural/political influence of the Delphic oracle (see Fontenrose), and at the same time much progressive writing has focused on Plato's literary methods and artistic aesthetic in general, Quintilian's observation of a connection between these two invites a kind of contemplation that has not yet been done in depth. Scholars have examined certain aspects of oracular discourse as it functions in the Platonic dialogues (Vlastos 243-5, 288-9) but there are many reasons for taking Quintilian's vatic gesture as a kind of *tabula rasa* for Plato scholarship: in addition to the fact that he is our primary connection to the ancient critical as well as creative sensibilities, and probably our foremost authority thereon, not least because his *Institutio Oratoria* is among few rhetorical works that survive intact with definite authorship (*On Style* and *On the Sublime* do not), and explain their intentions fully (Aristotle's and Cicero's works do not), as well as achieve

2

their ambitions agreeably (who can find Dionysius of Halicarnassus amiable?),

the structure and character of Plato's own corpus suggests that Delphi was at the

root of his whole enterprise as a writer of dialogues. We might say the oracle

was central in the formation of Plato's youthful experience, inasmuch as it made

Socrates famous and set him on the road to his downfall, especially since Plato

made much of the story in writing his version of Socrates' defense speech, the

Apology. But what is most important, for our purposes, in the story about the

Delphic oracle denying there was anyone wiser than Socrates, is the terminology

in which Plato wrote about it: he depicted Socrates posing the question "What in

the world is the god saying, and what riddle is he propounding?" (τί ποτε

αἰνίττεται;, *Ap.* 6 [b1]). While the enigmatic quality of oracular utterance is

proverbial,[1] Plato's own description of the oracle as propounding riddles serves

as a connection between his own understanding of and attitude toward Delphi

and Quintilian's recognition of it as the source of his inspiration. A broader

survey of Plato's references to Delphi will help fill out this picture.

Plato's attitude toward Delphi begins to emerge in his repeated critical

analysis of the oracle and of divinatory and prophetic or mantic phenomena in

general;[2] the observations he puts in the mouth of Socrates almost always

attribute oracular utterance to divinely-inspired madness (*Phaedo* 84e-85b, 111b-c;

---

[1]"The oracles of the gods are notoriously inscrutable" (Vlastos 244).

[2]William Race's recent comparison of Sophocles's Oedipus and Plato's Socrates helps explain Plato's critical analysis of these phenomena: "As in the case of Oedipus, the gods, and more specifically Apollo, lie behind Socrates' entire career...He, too, was the subject of an oracle from Apollo's shrine in Delphi: he, too, was astonished by it and tried to escape the oracle's pronouncment; ironically,....like Oedipus, through every action he takes in trying to disprove the oracle, he progressively fulfills it... Not only are there striking similarities in their experiences, but the main issue is the same: the limitations of human knowledge in the face of the divine σοφία possessed by Apollo. ...Sophocles and Plato in very different but complementary ways are

3

Phaedrus 244a-245a; *Timaeus* 71e), and in keeping with this distanced, almost skeptical attitude toward the mantic art, he had characters discuss the enigmatic quality of oracular discourse (*Tim.* 72b) and even adopt the Oedipean pose of riddle-solvers. The most striking instance of this occurs in the *Charmides*, an early dialogue generally considered contemporaneous with the *Apology*, where Plato depicted Critias, his own uncle, declaring that the famous inscription on the temple at Delphi, "Know yourself", was dedicated "in the more enigmatic manner of a prophet" (αἰνιγματωδέστερον δὲ δὴ ὡς μάντις λέγει, 164e), and is meant to be understood as equivalent to "Be temperate" (σωφρόνει), because these two phrases seem to mean the same thing.[3] The great irony in these interpretations of the Delphic ethos and mythos (cf. *Alcibiades* 1.132c-d) is that Plato made them seem so transparent and even plausible: Socrates says "So the command that we should know ourselves means that we should know our psyches" (*Alc.* 1 130e8-9). This is where Quintilian's proclamation becomes invaluable: it corroborates our suspicion that Plato's analysis of the oracular style was part of a larger program involving both imitation and appropriation for his own purposes.

The question is 'what were those purposes?' In two of his letters, Plato described himself as having used enigmatic expressions (δι' αἰνιγμῶν, 2.312d and αἰνιττόμενοι, 7.332d; cf. *Tim.* 72b) to try and influence acquaintances including

---

warning against rationalistic endeavors that may gain temporary mastery...but end in failure" (Race 2000, pp. 101-102, 104).

[3]"Being temperate and temperance and knowing oneself amount to knowing what one knows and what one doesn't know" (*Charmides* 167a6-7).

4

Dionysius the tyrant of Syracuse,[1] and his written dialogues exhibit the same quality: they rarely proffer transparent dogma and usually cloak their truths in mystery and struggle. Scholarship has usually addressed the nature of the dialogues as such primarily starting from the enigmatic character of Socrates, which leads to the wider observation that Plato's style not only imitates the real Socrates' famous irony but performs an almost hyper-Socratic tribute to the charismatic iconoclast: just as the Platonic Socrates' method is "to speak in a conspiracy of indirection, drama and allusion" (Fineberg, p. 70), so "Plato's dialogues... constitute a literary version of Socrates' irony" (Ausland p. 384). Stated more categorically, his writing is deliberately, playfully **and** seriously, aporetic and mimetic, it makes a mockery of both dogmatism and literal

---

[1]The question of the *Seventh Letter*'s authenticity has been a vexed issue for a long time. Stylometric analysis that would exclude the *Seventh Letter* from the Platonic corpus in contrast to the *Apology*, based on "the general opinion that one work is a Socratic apology, and the other a Platonic apology" (Levison, Morton and Winspear, p. 314), is flawed. The comparison of these two works on this basis is superfluous, given their obvious generic difference: the *Apology* is an exercise in forensic *logographia*, the form of which develops according to the rhetoric of elenchic drama. The *Seventh Letter* is, of course, an epistle, which follows a different rhetorical form and uses different diction. Plato's self-consciousness regarding the principle of stylistic versatility has been underrated by the scholarly tradition, and Levison, Morton and Winspear's search for "unconscious habits of style that are more likely...to remain constant with a writer through a long period of his productivity" (p. 310) are less than normally applicable with this author. The *Symposium*'s depiction of Socrates arguing that the same poet can compose both tragedy and comedy (see Clay 1975) alludes to Plato's rhetorical versatility, as does the *Phaedrus*' directive about "offering to the complex psyche elaborate and harmonious discourses, and simple discourses to the simple psyche" (277b-c, cf. *Theaet*. 146d). Victoria Wohl shows that the scholarly dilemma concerning authenticity is an anxiety produced by the epistles' rhetorical design: "The scholarship on the authenticity of the letters...polices the letters' desires and censors those letters that do not censor themselves... The ontology of a letter like 7 is reiterated at the metatextual level in the affirmation of its authenticity—the thing exists, the letter exists; the doctrine is true, the letter is true–, but this facile affirmation must ignore the letter's intense problematisation of the real, especially in its epistolary form: can the real be known, can the true be written, can there be a real letter, by Plato or anyone else?... The *Epistles*' traumas of philosophical non-presence, of philosophical failure in the face of tyranny, of writing and self-alienation, are denied: they have nothing to do with the real Plato. We disown these bastard children...; in this way we preserve the virility and legitimacy of the father, and ourselves become his legitimate offspring. Our response to the letters' endless deferral of certainty is thus the same as their own: we dream of an origin untouched by writing, a fantasy of Plato when he was young and beautiful, our ἐρώμενος and our father. Whether we find the letters genuine or spurious, then, we repeat their own defensive mechanisms, restoring to Plato a presence, authority and authenticity that he acknowledges in these letters—if in fact he wrote these letters—are lost forever" (Wohl 86-7).

reading,[5] and performs "the dynamics of talk that are so much a part of the psychagogic journeys through which [Socrates] leads his companions" (Gellrich, p. 304).

I prefer to move in the opposite direction, starting from a general assessment of the salient biographical material pertaining to Plato and from there structuring a view of his interest in and use of oracular discourse in his dialogues. Surely the abominable --and life-threatening-- failure of Plato's attempt to enlighten Dionysius was a contributing factor in a series of tragic and confusing experiences that informed his artistic aesthetic in addition to his intellectual and cultural ideology, his pedagogy, and his emotional attitude. The loss of Socrates --whose execution was brought about by the confounding and bewitching 'puzzle', as Plato presented it (αἴνιγμα, *Ap.* 14 [27a]; cf. 15 [27d]), of false charges and warped logic his accusers presented in court[6]-- precipitated the anguish of his subsequent exile from Athens, and the episode with Dionysius, which tradition says almost got him killed and did get him sold into slavery, produced the enigmatic quality and often pessimistic tone of his dialogues: they are fascinating, often disturbing enigmas, his Socrates is an engaging enigma, he himself was an enigma to contemporaries, and he remains largely an enigma to us. My reading of his most famous work then, his masterpiece the *Republic*, begins with the great writer's suggestion that the dialogue is a shrine to his experience of the world and his own genius as interlocked enigmas propounded

---

[5]"...he appears purposely to toy with readers who seek his own philosophical views, and the dialogue form seems chosen with a view to frustrating the natural desire for definitive answers... Plato's mimetic blend of seriousness with play can be seen as itself playing a part in his at least partly serious philosophy" (Ausland 1997, p. 381).

[6]"The unjust execution of Socrates in 399 B.C., when Plato was a young man of twenty-eight, filled him with horror and amazement" (Lamb, p. 249).

6

by divine intelligence and resonant with the oracular utterance characteristic of Delphi.

Scholars have acknowledged "the haunting elusiveness of Plato's persona in his own writings" (North 1998), but there is very little elusive about the program of extensive punning and systematic allusion to his own name that pervades the *Republic*. Contemplation of this program opens new windows of understanding regarding the dialogue itself and Plato's entire literary/artistic and philosophical/pedagogical endeavor; this dissertation will present this program and articulate some of its implications. The core of this allusive punning program is the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων (3.415a), which, in the context of the Socratic city's genesis myth (conventionally called the "noble lie"), trumpets the fact that Plato himself, ὁ Πλάτων, the writer of the dialogue and the inventor of this literary 'utopia', is the god described as "molding" (πλάττων), like wax or clay, the city and its inhabitants. Concerning this aspect of Plato's writing, scholarship made a breakthrough recently when Diskin Clay, discussing the myth of Atlantis, wrote

> Plato the plastic artist ought to be more familiar than he is. There are compendious studies of the place and function of myth in the Platonic dialogues, but in these studies little is said about Plato's art in creating philosophical fictions. Plato himself recognizes the concept, [since] he plays on his name when he has Socrates introduce the myth of the metals and speak of ὁ θεὸς πλάττων (*Republic* III, 415a) who created within the earth the three metallic races. Aristotle picked up on the latent meaning of Plato's name, when he said of Atlantis that the same poet who fashioned it (ὁ πλάσας ποιητής) destroyed it... Timon of Phlius, alert and sharp as always, produced an epigram on Plato in which he recognized not the broad flat head of portraiture but the delicate features of Plato's plastic art: ὡς ἀνέπλασε Πλάτων <ὁ> πεπλασμένα θαύματα εἰδώς, "As Plato the plastic artist fabricated fictions, in his knowledge of wonders."[7]

---

[7]Clay, 2000, p. 3.

7

In its immediate context, then, Plato uses the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων in allusion to his art in creating philosophical fictions. But the allusion also operates in theoretical discussions of education and philosophical life within the imaginary city: education is articulated as a process of using "fabricated myths" (μύθους πλασθέντας, 2.377b) to "mold souls" (πλάττειν τὰς ψυχὰς, 377c), and this constitutes an extremely laconic statement of Plato's ideological and pedagogical use of the many myths he composed for dialogues like *Phaedrus, Statesman, Timaeus,* and many others (see Brisson).

In fact Plato used the same terminology in several contexts in reference to various aspects of his entire creative enterprise as a thinker, a writer, a teacher, a citizen and political animal in Athens, a subject of the Greek language and culture, and a human being living in a complex and frequently troublesome world. Shortly before presenting the myth of ὁ θεὸς πλάττων, Plato had Socrates refer to the citizens as having been molded (πλαττόμενοι, 414d) in the earth as if in a dream, and shortly thereafter say "our first task then, ... is to mold happiness" (τὴν εὐδαίμονα πλάττομεν, 4.420c). Plato expressed the egalitarian ideal according to which that imaginary happiness was formed in a similar pun, with Socrates saying "we were making our guardians guardians and the city as a whole as happy as possible, and...we were not modelling our ideal of happiness (τοῦτο τὸ εὔδαιμον πλάττομεν, 5.466a) with reference to any one tribe." Elsewhere Socrates says the philosopher fashioning his way of life 'molds himself' (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν, 8.500d), and when a different mode of persuasion is needed for use with an interlocutor who refuses to agree that justice is profitable,

8

the strategy adopted is that of 'molding' (πλάσαντες, 9.588c) in words an image that represents the unjust man's soul; such a task is said to require a "cunning artist" (δεινοῦ πλάστου, 9.588d), but it is considered possible because "language/reason (λόγος) is a thing more flexible (εὐπλαστότερον) than wax."

This program has relevance to the entire spectrum of contexts in which the meaning of the dialogue is explored and discussed, partly because it illuminates a serious weakness in traditional and conventional western interpretation of Plato. While the last generation has enhanced our appreciation of (1) Plato's sophisticated literary artistry, (2) the self-referential irony (and almost perverse humor) in his figuration of Socrates, and (3) the rich multi-dimensionality of interpretation his writing evokes, the profession still needs a new 'postmodern Plato' (à la Zuckert) developed with the insights of Nietszche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, and Derrida in mind, but formed by a sensibility embedded in the theory and practice of ancient Greek poetry, rhetoric, and philology. Unfortunately, academic philology and especially philosophy have generally underestimated the importance and power of Plato's ironic and allusive ambiguity and wordplay: "Plato's use of double entendres is an unexplored field" (Arieti 1991, 244). The obvious but previously unexplored double entendre embedded in the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων may be the best and most significant example of such oversight, but it is certainly not singular. This phrase is only the core of the allusive punning program that forms the *Republic*'s artistic and conceptual skeleton: it is reinforced by innumerable puns using forms and

9

derivatives of the same verb and similar-sounding verbs (e.g. πράττω,[8] φυλάττω, ἀπαλάττω, etc.) that ring with the same poignant suggestive force (and in fact are directly linked to specific ideas of fundamental importance to the imaginary city's cultural ideology). Full appreciation of this program demands an almost comprehensive revision of traditional interpretation not only of the dialogue itself and the relationship between Plato's literary art (or 'rhetoric') and thought ('philosophy') but of his attitude (see Cook; cf. Zuckert) toward the entire intellectual and literary tradition conventionally labeled 'philosophy' in relation to likewise-conventionally-differentiated spheres of ancient Greek life like 'poetry' and 'mass culture' (i.e. the world of the proverbial *hoi polloi*).

Plato's use of double entendres is truly an unexplored field. These words point scholarship on "punster Plato" (Arieti, pp. 35 and 105), indeed on all ancient Greco-Roman literature, in the direction of much exciting, fruitful, and overripe work. In this dissertation, then, I explore the central garden of Plato's double entendres, namely the puns on his own name in the *Republic*. I interpret these in terms of both literary art and philosophical thought, and seek to divine the implications for our understanding of his life, his attitude(s), and his intellectual and aesthetic legacy. I shall do this by first presenting a general survey of ancient scholarly criticism and rhetorical theory so as to establish a theoretical framework for my reading of the *Republic*. This reading will in turn facilitate a new interpretation of the work and a reassessment of "Plato" and our tradition of constructing him as an author, thinker, and person.

---

[8]The *Republic*'s definition of the just citizen, τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττων ("minding one's own business"), comes from a joke in a much earlier dialogue, the *Charmides*, where Plato had used the same idea to define temperance, and then had Socrates call it an enigma (αἰνίγματι γάρ τινι ἔοικεν 161c).

10

There are at least five different categories of scholarship contributing in various ways to the study of Plato's use of double entendres, and in my work I seek to tie together various strands of these. The first of these categories is that of traditional literary history, criticism, and interpretation, where philosophy has been warring on --largely by neglecting-- literary art for millennia. Plato's own idea of "the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (*Rep.* 607b5-6) is in fact a contemporary dilemma lamented by particularly inspired scholars: "Why, in the second half of our century, literature has become ever more the handmaiden of philosophy is a question that future historians of culture will have to ponder" (Johnson, p. ix). Recent work has, however, begun reverse this trend: the issue has been addressed directly and the need for much more literary interpretation (as opposed to analytical philosophy) regarding Plato has been expressed (Brumbaugh 1989, pp. 215-225). In addition, more than a dozen treatments of Plato's literary art have appeared (See Rutherford 1988, 1995) and, as a result, literary studies have reclaimed much territory and prestige.[9] David M. Halperin (1992) recently wrote,

> When it comes to taking sides...in what Socrates calls 'the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (*Rep.* 607b5-6), Plato turns out to be a double agent--and to be such an extraordinarily skillful and devious one that it may ultimately prove impossible to determine where his primary loyalties lie (p. 121).

Despite Halperin's uncertainties, the consensus in contemporary philology and literary study is that Plato's reader "will enter a poet's imagined world, strange and unfamiliar in some respects, yet inviting and accessible and full of delight" (Sandbach, *CHCL* Vol. 1, Pt. 3; p. 85), and philosophy has made gestures (e.g.

---

[9]Clay 1975; Bacon 1990; Brumbaugh 1992; Carson 1992; Asmis 1992; P. Murray, 1996.

11

Nussbaum 1986) toward accommodating literature and history. But even literary critics need to come to better terms with Plato's punning: they still exhibit ambivalence toward it,[10] and I hope to relieve some of this ambivalence in my study of the *Republic*. Mainstream philosophy enthusiasts, in addition, might gain a deeper appreciation of Plato's literary art. But a study of Plato's use of double entendres needs a category with a wider range of vision than the traditional 'philosophy vs. literature' debacle.

The second category of scholarship in which this study could be rooted is the recent phenomenon of Derridean 'deconstruction', which arises from modern European studies of language and communication. Derrida takes for granted an extensive amount of play at the level of the signifier, and bases much of his treatment of Plato thereon.[11] His most influential and controversial work has dealt with Plato's attitude toward writing as expressed ambiguously in the *Phaedrus* (274ff), and he has caused reassessment of the 'philosophical' tradition's general treatment of Plato[12] while also affecting broader studies of ancient Greek culture (particularly the anthropology of sex and gender *vis à vis* duBois) and intellectual history.[13] One of the primary Derridean contributions has been to raise awareness of what a Chinese scholar has called "Western discomfort with the play of the signifier" (Tang). While Derrida's work strikes a modernist pose,

---

[10]J.D. Denniston's entry in the OCD enshrines this ambivalence: "Plato's style shows **traces of mannerism** — a **trick** of interlacing the order of words, and some **affectations** of assonance (*Leg.* 657d ἡμῖν ἡμᾶς, cf. 659c; *figura etymologiae, Leg.* 868c), including the pun, which **fascinated** Plato, **though he laughed at it in others**" (cf. *CHCL* Vol. 1 Pt. 3, p. 83: "he plays with words for the sake of the game"; boldface mine).

[11]Derrida 1978, 1981.

[12]duBois 1985, Farness 1988 and 1991.

12

his general principles, as applied to Greek literature, were treated several decades ago in W.B. Stanford's work on the general cultivation of ambiguity among ancient Greek writers (Stanford 1939 and 1967).[14] Stanford's work seems, unfortunately, to have had little influence in general, but work inspired by Derrida has attempted to fill this lack (e.g. Calame, Svenbro). More specifically, the Derridean concentration on the *Phaedrus* (1) overlooks extensive ambiguity and ambivalence about writing and language in general elsewhere in Plato's corpus (e.g. *Epistles* 7's reference to "the weakness inherent in language," τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές, 342e; cf. *Cratylus* 438d-e), with the result that it (2) passes up the opportunity to draw out many connections between Plato's thought and style and the immediate historical and cultural contexts on which he was commenting;[15] finally and most importantly, it (3) fails to frame its treatment of Plato in the context of the widespread phenomena of double entendres and puns as the stylistic benchmark and communicative tool that they were in ancient Greek literature and culture in general. So while Deconstruction will benefit greatly from a historically-contextualized, systematic study of Plato's double entendres, it is still arguable that Derrida may have contributed to Plato scholarship more valuable insight in twenty years than did a hundred years of

---

[13]Spariosu 1991, pp. 92ff.

[14]cf. Bury 1890, where the following general principle is stated: "to the Greeks similarity in sound meant far more than to modern ears, for they (except a few rationalists) regarded language as a divine invention and of this view it was a corollary that behind a likeness in sound lay some hidden likeness in fact. And this theory, in combination with a belief in omens, suggested especially significances in proper names; ὄνομα ὄρνις, a name is a bird."

[15]Derrida's treatment of the pharmacological aspects of Plato's *logos* (Dissemination) gets dutiful citation in secondary literature but, in addition to being challenging reading in itself, fails to explain Plato's own artistic irony and evaluative ambivalence with respect to the technology of writing. To augment Burger 1980, the tools for modifying Derrida have been provided by Rutherford 1990 and Gellrich 1994.

13

positivistic analytical 'philosophy'.[16] But a wider frame of reference is needed to contain a study of Plato's use of double entendres.

The Derridean/Deconstructionist interest in Plato's attitude toward the phenomenology and value of writing needs closer attention to the historical realities of the gradual transformation from oral to literate culture and society in which Eric Havelock situated Plato's critique of 'poetry' (Preface to Plato, 1963); this interest constitutes the third category of scholarship in which a study of Plato's double entendres could be rooted. Havelock anticipated broad conceptual expansions in western scholarship (see Goody and Watt, 27-68) and has since written that "high classical Greek literature is to be viewed as composed in a condition of increasing tension between the modes of oral and documented speech" (Havelock 1982, 187-8; cf. 1986). The study of "the literate revolution" has blossomed into a field that incorporates many of the traditional disciplines of classics, like epigraphy and political science (see RThomas and Steiner), and communes with other less traditionally 'classical' disciplines as well, like cultural anthropology and intellectual history.[17] Scholarship has already positioned the essence of Plato's philosophical enterprise in this context:

> ...Plato latched on to the representational structure of writing and built a whole metaphysics around it. In representing verbal material in a fixed and decontextualized form, writing established new standards of ideality, repeatability, and sameness for words, abstract qualities that spoken language, tied as it is to particular instances of utterance and engagement with unique constellations of perceptual data, never attains. ...the existence of these new decontextualized standards made it possible for Plato to conceive

---

[16]The last great western scholar on Plato was the Renaissance Italian Marsilio Ficino, who was heavily influenced by the Greek Platonist George Gemistos, who wrote under the pseudonym "Plethon," and was known as "a second Plato" himself; see Allen 1984 and Woodhouse 1986.
[17]Ong 1982 and Svenbro; Robb, CThomas and Webb.

14

of, and then privilege, the single, repeatable entities of thought we know as the 'forms'" (Wise p.6).

This would be a fitting category in which to root a study of Plato's use of double entendres, because literary double entendres and puns often allude to the simultaneous overlapping and estrangement between oral and literary communication. As Arieti has shown in detail, Plato was heavily influenced by comedy, with respect to theatrical and dramatic sensibility and especially linguistic play (*op. cit.* see also Brock, Keller); Aristophanes' interest in the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the literate revolution was part of this influence.[18] More importantly, the comic poet's position as a writer composing for an oral performance format was essential to his understanding of the power of puns and wordplay, and this contributed much to his artistic and popular success.[19] Plato's writing has been explained in terms of a similar dramatic consciousness:

> ...many of Plato's dialogues were addressed at the same time to an initiated and a less initiated audience. ...the literarily refined and particularly elaborated works had a double audience.
> Plato must have thought of his friends around him, and their friends abroad, as his primary audience. Even if the

[18]Many Aristophanic jokes depend on audience understanding of "the fact that an individual...was always seen with a book marked him out...as a member of the 'reading set'" (Denniston 1927, p. 118; cf. Slater 1996). In this sense Plato's opening scene in the *Phaedrus*, wherein Socrates sniffs out the concealed *logos/biblion*, has highly comic overtones; cf. the depiction of the *pais* reading at *Theaetetus* 143c.

[19]Plato's wordplay exhibits instinctive appreciation for what one scholar has called "the demiurgic property of the Aristophanean pun: the *polos* literally becomes a *polis*; *nomos*, 'law,' and *nomos*, 'melody,' merge into each other, to form a symbol of the new dispensation of Nephelococcygia. The mind at first forms classes and gives them names; the names then further aid and abet the process through their own propensity for connotation, combination, and ambiguity. By this process, which might be called 'treading on air,' the intelligible world is extended to astonishing imaginative heights which could never be meaningful were it not for the fact that the verbal, poetic extension of reality is parallel to, and part of, the mind's formation of reality for itself. We may leave aside the extreme relativistic possibility that every mind forms only its own reality, which is therefore incommunicable — though this may have been the view of Gorgias — and assume that poetic structures are, by whatever way, communicative" (Whitman 1964, 260-261).

Academy was not 'institutionalized' as early as the 380s, ...it was the Academics in the first place who were responsible for the 'publication' of the dialogues to a wider public.

Plato, for all we know, never wrote for an impersonal, general public, as other writers, and notably dramatists and orators, normally did. ... Obviously no coherent Platonic philosophy did ever reach a general public. And Plato himself even pointed out rather explicitly that his central thoughts could not be propagated publicly; one need not be an 'esotericist' to admit that. ...the notorious public lecture Περὶ τἀγαθοῦ was a single occasion when Plato wanted to shock and mock the curious Athenians, making it plain to them that the question of what is 'good' is altogether too difficult for a couple of hour's [sic] treatment in public. ...the digression in the *Seventh Epistle* serves a similar purpose...

In short, the dialogues were intended to be read with a living commentary at hand, as it were. But unfortunately, and to posterity's bewilderment, the authentic commentaries were lost in the course of the fourth century B.C. ...the dialogues must, in the first place, be seen as a complement to the oral συνουσία which, according to Plato, is an essential part of philosophical education (Thesleff pp. 39-41).

This explains much about Plato's writing and his use of dramatic dialogue in terms of the social, cultural, and political tension between the modes of oral and documented speech as well as in terms of his personal situation in the Academy outside Athens, and his use of double entendres has been implicitly contextualized in this category of scholarship:

> ...two audiences were often in Plato's mind: an inner group who at one level appreciated and relished the rich allusions and (often) the humor and irony behind the manipulation of traditional vocabulary or ideas, and a more popular audience, some of whom at least may have accepted the same words pretty much at face value (Robb p. 233; cf. Lebeck, 288-9).

The observation about the dual character of his audience suggests that Plato's use of double entendres addresses but transcends the orality/literacy issue. This study needs to be rooted in a larger category of scholarship which takes into account Plato's relationship to the different audiences he was addressing, and

such a category is approachable via a seemingly simple truth about Plato's writing that has been understood for a long time and stated in many ways: "Plato wrote in a way that allowed him both to present unorthodox points of view and to escape the fate of Socrates" (Griswold 143). Simple as it may seem, the details of how Plato wrote in such a way are rooted in the complex nature of the historical and cultural environment in which he wrote; this environment is what needs to be understood.

The fourth category of scholarship in which a study of Plato's use of double entendres could be rooted is that of rhetorical politics, or the politics of rhetoric. Plato's concentration on language in general expresses his own recognition that "late fifth-century Athens was experiencing a period of political and speculative turmoil centering in many respects on speech" (O'Regan p. 9; cf. CThomas and Webb), and his voluminous comments on rhetoric and poetry have long been a standard topic of scholarly analysis.[20] But the most sophisticated and pertinent treatment of ancient rhetoric in its political contexts was presented in 1984 by Frederick Ahl, whose article "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome" explores the strategies ancient rhetoricians considered useful in advising and reproaching rulers and politicians when necessary and, as we shall see, Plato confronted such problems in his relationship with the tyranny in Syracuse. In focusing on ancient orators' and writers' frequent and purposeful use of ambiguity and *emphasis* (ἔμφασις, i.e. artfully figured speech, or 'meaning lurking for the audience/reader to search out'; cf. Quintilian 9.2.64) in tense political atmospheres, Ahl showed that ancient critics listed Plato among the

---

[20]Plato's arguments about rhetoric have received their best analysis only recently; see North 1981. These, unfortunately, have not yet taken into account the irony inherent in his dramatic frames.

practitioners of safe criticism by means of 'covert allusion' (ἐσχηματισμένου ἐν λόγῳ), as Demetrius called it:

> The orators of our day employ this to a ridiculous extent, coupling it with low, and (so to say) suggestive, innuendo (μετὰ ἐμφάσεως). The true 'covert allusion' depends on two conditions, good taste and circumspection. Good taste is shown in the *Phaedo*, where Plato desires to reproach Aristippus and Cleombrotus because they were feasting at Aegina when Socrates was lying for many days imprisoned at Athens, and did not cross to visit their friend and master, although they were less than twenty-five miles from Athens. He has not said all this in express terms (since that would have been an open reproach), but with fitting tact as follows. Phaedo is asked who were with Socrates. He enumerates the men one by one. Next he is asked whether Aristippus too and Cleombrotus were present. 'No,' he answers; 'they were in Aegina.' Everything that precedes owes its point to the words 'they were in Aegina.' The passage seems far more effective (δεινότερος) because its effect is produced by the fact itself and not by an explicit statement. So, although he might no doubt have openly reproached Aristippus and his companions without incurring any risk, Plato has done so indirectly" (*On Style* 287-8).

Demetrius read between the lines of Plato's text, supplied the background understanding from his own knowledge of the contemporary events, and thus recognized Plato's oblique commentary on his acquaintances' conduct; Ahl evaluated the 'effectiveness' of the *Phaedo* passage by observing that Cleombrotus apparently committed suicide because of it (Ahl 1984, 178-9, note 8). But Plato practiced this kind of covert reference to his contemporary environment with a frequency and force that have gone unappreciated in scholarship, and again, he stated explicitly in his *Epistles* that he practiced indirect communication by means of enigmas (δι' αἰνιγμῶν, αἰνιττόμενοι).

Plato's own attestations to his practice of indirect communication make some sense in the context of the widespread practice of covert allusion in oratory

and rhetoric that Demetrius observed in the general cultural atmosphere. But proper understanding of his relations with Dionysius the Younger (tyrant of Syracuse 367-357) and his uncle Dion brings the reasoning for his practice into sharp focus. It was in fact himself and Dion to whom Plato referred in *Epistles 7* as "making veiled suggestions" (αἰνιττόμενοι) to Dionysius concerning policy and philosophy. Diodorus Siculus described the atmosphere of guarded communications at the Syracusan court that Dionysius, Plato's nemesis, inherited from his father, Dionysius the Elder. In this atmosphere, intellectuals and artists were forced to develop and master the art of ambiguity in order to converse safely with the ruler. After the Carthaginian War, Dionysius I

devoted himself in a very serious attitude to writing poetry, summoned people with reputations for this, and, honoring them, he engaged them as advisors and editors of his poetry. Elevated by these men, on account of their benefactions in words suggesting favor, he bragged far more about his poetry than about his military successes. Among the poets in his company was the dithyrambist Philoxenus, who had the greatest prestige grounded in the composition of his individual poetic style. At a symposium when the tyrant's poetry --which was awful-- was read, Philoxenus was asked what his judgment of the poetry was. When he answered a little too honestly (παρρησιωδέστερον), the tyrant was offended by what he said and, accusing him of jealous blasphemy, commanded his servants to drag him straight to the stone-quarry. The next day, with Philoxenus' friends urging Dionysius to pardon him, he made up with him, and invited the same people back to a symposium. But as the drinking went on, Dionysius was again boasting about his poetry, quoting lines he considered really successful and asking, "How does that strike you as poetry?" Philoxenus said nothing more but, calling Dionysius's attendants he ordered them to take him off to the stone-quarry. This time, because of the verbal wit, Dionysius smiled and bore with his outspokenness (παρρησίαν), since laughter had blunted the offense. But later, when his friends along with Dionysius were requesting a less untimely outspokenness (ἄκαιρον παρρησίαν), Philoxenus announced a certain paradoxical announcement. He said that his answer would both preserve the truth and favor Dionysius' reputation; and he

19

wasn't lying. Because when the tyrant recited some lines containing feelings of pity and asked "What kind of poetry does that seem like?", Philoxenus said "pathetic" (οἰκτρά), and by this **ambiguity** (ἀμφιβολίας) preserved both announcements. Because Dionysius took the word "pathetic" in the sense of representing pity and full of emotion (ἐλεεινὰ καὶ συμπαθείας πλήρη), the kinds of things good poets aim at, whereby he received it as praise. But the others there, receiving the true meaning, understood the "totally pitiful" (πᾶν τὸ οἰκτρὸν) nature of the attempt.

The same basic thing happened in the case of Plato the philosopher. Dionysius summoned the man and showed him great respect at first, when he saw that he had the outspokenness (παρρησίαν) worthy of philosophy. But later, when he was offended by some statements and became completely alienated from him, he led him to the market as a slave and sold him for twenty minas. But the philosophers got together, purchased him, and sent him back to Greece, advising him in a friendly manner that a wise man should associate with tyrants either never or as cleverly as possible (Dio. Sic. 15.6.1-7.2).

Plato, it seems, had not fully learned his lesson when a generation later Dionysius I's enthusiasm for poetry was practically reincarnated in the enthusiasm for philosophy his son Dionysius II professed. Plato and Dion, Dionysius II's uncle, attempted to advise (ξυνεβουλεύομεν, *Epist.* 7.332c) and exhort (παρακαλευόμενα, 333a) the monarch toward intellectual enlightenment, but even their 'enigmatic' caution —αἰνιττόμενοι— was no match for Dionysius' distrust of everyone (πιστεύων οὐδενί, 332c) except his official counselors, whom Plato considered slanderers (τοῖς διαβάλλουσιν, 333c): Dion was murdered and Plato imprisoned; he barely escaped with his life, was sold into slavery, and his freedom was bought by friends.

Plato's use of double entendres, then, could be framed and studied in terms of rhetorical politics: the need for rhetorical ambiguity in a tense political atmosphere (since the 'coast' in post-war Athens was in no way 'clear' for

outspoken dissidents,[21] especially the die-hard Socratics, and this is why Plato

had "turned his back on Athens"), but this would not take into account the most

important issue involved, namely his personal predilections and aspirations as a

literary artist and intellectual in general. Plato was well-known for preferring

ambiguity and obscure allusion in rhetoric: when Antimachus of Colophon was

> reading that long and well-known poem [*Thebais*] of his
> before an assembled audience, in the very midst of his
> reading all his listeners left him but Plato: "I shall go on
> reading just the same," he said. "For me Plato alone is as
> good as a hundred thousand." And quite right, since a poem
> full of obscure allusions (*reconditum*) can by nature only win
> the approval of a few; an oration meant for a general public
> must aim to win the assent of the crowd (Cicero,*Brut.* 191).

Only Plato could appreciate Antimachus' obscurity, and this appreciation was

rooted in an equally serious and playful attitude toward language, thought, the

search for meaning, and communication. The earliest clear statement of this

attitude can be found, predictably, in Aristophanes, who made a chorus pray

> Demeter, ruler of holy orgies, / stand by me, save your chorus./
> Grant me to play on and do my dances/ in safety throughout
> the day/ To say many things in fun and many in earnest (πολλὰ
> μὲν γέλοια...πολλὰ δὲ σπουδαία); and/ after playing (*paisanta*)
> and joking in a manner worthy of your festival/ grant me the
> victor's garland (*Frogs* 384-95).

Plato echoed this sentiment many times in his writing. In the *Cratylus* he had

Socrates preface his answer to a question about the meaning of certain divine

names by saying "...there is both a serious (*spoudaiôs*) and a facetious (*paidikôs*)

account of the form of these deities' names. You will have to ask others for the

serious one; but there is nothing to hinder my giving you the facetious account,

---

[21]The transformation in comedy after the Decree of Syrakosios bears witness to this: Aristotle wrote that after the death of Aristophanes, obscene abuse (*aischrologia*) gave way to allegorical innuendo (*hyponoia*, *EN* 4.8.6). Plato himself was famous for *hyponoia* (Riginos).

since the gods also have a sense of humor" (φιλοπαίσμονες γὰρ καὶ οἱ θεοί, 406b-c). While this passage seems to privilege the playful aspect of the endeavor (cf. *Laws* 4.712b and *Phaedrus* 277e-278a), it sets up the frame and prefigures the famous statement in the *Symposium* about the same poet writing tragedy and comedy.

We must assume Plato's influence in the development of the *spoudogeloia* genre as represented by Menippus of Gadara among others as well as that of *paradoxagraphia;* as such a proper study of Plato's own use of double entendres needs rooting in the category of rhetorical style and literary taste, and with particular regard for the 'seriously playful' sensibility that permeated it. This category might unite all the categories previously mentioned because it weighs anchor in the central theoretical and practical issue of Plato's long literary 'career,' namely the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy: while this issue has been belabored by scholars, Plato's explicit but often ironic polemic against rhetoric in the dialogues has been taken at face value (see Gagarin), to the near fatal neglect of his own energetic cultivation of rhetorical style. In fact recent scholarship has produced a somewhat shocking but highly enlightening articulation of his artistic affinity for the rhetoric of sophistry. Helen F. North has pointed out that his style is

> the result of Plato's upbringing in the Athenian world of the
> last quarter of the fifth century, dominated intellectually by
> the Sophists and incurably infected by sophistic rhetoric.
> The ancient critics recognized Plato as a product of this
> revolutionary movement, and this is why ...the *Dialogues* are
> richly, endlessly rhetorical, owing so much of their form to
> the strategies perfected by the Sophists that it may even be
> said that without rhetoric there would have been no
> *Dialogues*, as we know them, no Plato, in fact -- certainly no
> Platonic Socrates (North 1991).

North's understanding of Plato's sophistic style is unique in its use of the later ancient critical tradition's commentary on him, but a closer look at that tradition will reveal that his literary engagement with sophistry[22] explains his use of double entendres with depth and clarity, and particularly in support of Ahl's recognition that puns and wordplay are not ornaments, but in fact the very fiber, of most ancient literary art (Ahl 1988). Framing Plato's punning with sophistic rhetoric will allow for holistic exposition of its relevance to the other five categories of scholarship mentioned --the 'philosophy/poetry quarrel', the debate on Plato's attitude toward language and signification, the orality/literacy tension, the politics of rhetoric, and the question of artistic taste-- and provide access to a clearer and more vigorous portrait of the artist than anything that has yet been proposed; that portrait will be framed by what we know about his inspiration at the oracular mouth of the Delphic god and his own construction of the literary tradition that he inherited.

---

[22]Throughout this dissertation I use the traditionally volatile word 'sophistry' in reference primarily to a rhetorical style which I describe below on the basis of ancient critical discussions, but also in cognizance of the general conclusion reached in Plato's *Sophist*, namely that any attempt to define the 'sophist' in contrast to the 'philosopher' ends in futility (see Zuckert pp. 37ff). Hugh Lawson-Tancred recently argued that Plato's "entire conception of the art of philosophical writing was sophistic" (Lawson-Tancred p. 54).

23

CHAPTER TWO

ENIGMAS: Sophistic rhetoric, the "typical poetic riddle," and Plato's literary ποικιλία

> And I think those men who established the mysteries were
> not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning
> (*ainittesthai*) when they said long ago that whoever goes
> uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the
> mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will
> dwell with the gods (*Phaedo* 69c).
>
> ...each lover's soul is clearly desiring something it can't say,
> but it 'prophesies' what it wants and suggests it obliquely
> (*ainittetai, Symposium* 192c-d).

In this chapter I shall present a general discussion of the role played by enigmatic speech, both as a historical idea and a contemporary reality, in Plato's thought and writing. This will proceed in three stages, beginning with an examination of the degree to which Plato's style was "infected by Sophistic rhetoric." This examination will incorporate a brief revision of the Sophistic movement in the Greek intellectual and literary tradition, which began more than a century before Plato and is generally recognized as a dominating factor in the cultural revolution that transformed Athens and affected much of the Greek world in the course of the 5th century BC. Most importantly, it will articulate Plato's own observation of the connection between the enigmatic quality of sophistic expression and the cryptic style of oracular discourse as propagated by the powerful religious institution at Delphi. Plato saw his predecessors in the Greek intellectual and literary tradition as sophists, poets, prophets, and cultural critics, more generally as creative artists using language to express ideas and emotions that transcended the mainstream culture's dominant patterns of thought and behavior —the ways of the proverbial *hoi polloi*, 'most people'-- and often contradicted the ideologies of powerful institutions like Delphi and the

24

other established religious traditions in Greek society. In his analysis, these artists, by disguising their opinions in allusive, figurative, allegorical, and inscrutable speech, were protecting themselves from the jealousy their popularity among the youth caused and from the general censure and prejudice concomitant with such jealousy.

The second stage will present Plato's formulation of a principle for the appropriation of enigmatic expression, as represented by sophistic style and oracular discourse, in his own writing. This stage will stress the point that Plato incorporated sophistic thought and style into a larger aesthetic which was heavily influenced, if not structured entirely, by poetry. While the poetic aspect of Plato's thought and writing has generally gone underrated in the Western tradition, recent publications continue to explore and reassert a basic tenet of interpretation that was expressed powerfully by one of the primary ancient authorities on style and has survived in the shadows through two millennia. Quintilian, who was awarded the imperial chair of oratory and rhetoric at Rome in the 1st century, wrote

> ...shall we call Plato an Asiatic [i.e. a sophistic stylist], Plato who
> as a rule deserves comparison with poets whose instinct is the
> divine fire of inspiration? (*The Education of an Orator*, 12.10.24).

Quintilian's recognition of the connection between sophistic style –called 'Asiatic' rhetoric in his day– and poetic inspiration in Plato's writing has its roots in the Athenian writer's own discussions of literary aesthetics, wherein he stressed the principle of *poikilia*, or decorative variety, in composition. Plato adopted the term *poikilia* from Pindar, who used the term to describe his own aesthetic, and Plato discussed its application from the point of view of a literary critic while at the same time employing it as a creative writer. The examination

25

of this principle will facilitate an approach to his masterpiece dialogue, the

Republic, wherein he fully applied his sense of reverence for the intellectual

tradition, his own critical observations of contemporary Greek culture, his

inspired poetic talent, and his understanding of the power and importance of

enigmatic expression.

Finally, this chapter will expose the framework within which Plato set the

primary concern of the *Republic*, which can be articulated as a dilemma regarding

the language of wisdom in relation to the power structures of human culture.

What is the language of wisdom and what is its place in human society? What

part does wisdom play in artistic entertainment (particularly poetry), religious

symbol and ritual, and political debate? In turn, what contributions do artistic

entertainment, religion, and political debate make toward wisdom? The

discussion of justice in the *Republic* begins with a quotation of the late archaic

poet Simonides, which Plato has Socrates dismiss as a "typical poetic riddle".

This represents the fundamental conflict in the entire scope of the dialogue's

implications: how important is poetry in the formation of cultural ideology and

human thought? Is there an appropriate process for discussing that question,

and if so, what is it?

Sophistic rhetoric

The degree to which Plato's style was "infected by Sophistic rhetoric" was

an enduring topic in the rhetorical tradition: Aristotle, Dionysius of

Halicarnassus, Plutarch, and the 2d-3d century CE sophist Philostratus all

provide information and commentary that enrich our understanding of this issue

in various ways. Prior to setting out the evidence provided by this tradition,

however, I would like to point out the connection between the sophistic aspects

26

of Plato's thought and writing and his analysis, imitation, and appropriation of enigmatic oracular discourse. Much has been written recently on various aspects of the sophistic age (e.g. de Romilly, Gagarin/Woodruff, Jarratt, Poulakos), but what tends to get overlooked is the crucial role played by the rise of literary criticism. It has been written that "Plato is the first Greek writer who really graduated in literary criticism" (Fyfe, p. xiv), but this is an overstatement: he was deeply influenced by an almost 200-year tradition that preceded him. The early 6th-century thinkers Xenophanes of Colophon and Theagenes of Rhegium offered radical reactions to Homer that inspired and framed the intellectual, moral, and political dilemmas propounded by Plato's immediate sophistic predecessors Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, and Democritus; this tradition shaped his own reception of the literature, especially Homer, and in turn his own writing. Xenophanes' muted objections to the militaristic and athletic value systems[1] championed in the growing rhapsodic performance culture is echoed in Socrates' denunciation of poetry and popular performance as degenerative influences in the *Republic*. More importantly, Plato's recognition of and interest in the enigmatic aspects of Homer's style seems rooted in, or at least compatible with, Theagenes's defense of Homer, against Xenophanes, on the grounds of allegorical interpretation.

Plato's analysis, imitation, and appropriation of the enigmatic style of oracular discourse complement his reception of and interaction with the literary

---

[1] Diels, fr. 1 and 2: let no symposiast "sing of Titans and Giants — those fictions of the men of old -- nor of turbulent civil broils in which there's nothing good at all", and "even if there arise a mighty boxer among a people, or one great in the pentathlon or at wrestling, or one excelling in swiftness of foot —and that stands in honor before all tasks of men at the games — the city would be none the better governed for that. It is but little joy a city gets of it if a man conquers at the games by Pisa's banks; it is not this that makes fat the store-houses of a city."

27

tradition going back to Homer, but a brief overview of his use of Homer will clarify the creative nature of his approach to literary criticism as well as the critical aesthetic in which his literary creativity is grounded. The *Cratylus* features Socrates being invited to interpret the sophist Cratylus' 'prophecy' (*manteia*, 384a) and then, after having engaged in highly sophisticated analysis of Homer's use of names and recondite interpretation of many names in Greek mythology and religion, he himself is described as uttering oracles, like an inspired prophet, several times (396d, 428c). In a similar manner the *Ion* depicts him skewering a rhapsode regarding his knowledge of various subjects discussed in the poems of Homer, such as chariot-driving, medicine, fishing, divination, navigation, animal husbandry, wool-spinning, horsemanship, lyre-playing, and military strategy, with the effect that the ornamental costuming and emotional excesses of his performance come off as indulgent, bombastic, and fraudulent. In the *Lesser Hippias*, Socrates engages Hippias in debate on whether Homer depicted Achilles as ethically superior to Odysseus, being "true and simple" while the latter was "wily and false" (365b). Hippias' argument that Achilles is better rests on the idea that Achilles speaks the plain truth while Odysseus deliberately schemes and deceives, the underlying assumption being that people who lie involuntarily are better than those who lie voluntarily. But Socrates, after exploring the personal vanities and prejudices that construct Hippias's viewpoint (368-9), shows that Achilles is the liar, inasmuch as he, answering Odysseus during the embassy, threatens to abandon the war, load his ships, and sail home, but never backs up his threats (370b-e, on *Iliad* 9.357ff); in fact, he immediately contradicts himself when he tells Ajax that he refuses to fight until Hector has slaughtered the Argives, burned their ships, and

28

approached the tents and ships of the Myrmidons. The debate ends in disagreement over the moral difference between voluntary and involuntary lying, but the astute critic perceives how much fun Plato was having in demonstrating his detailed knowledge of a literary text, (over-) dramatizing its intellectual and moral implications and, most importantly, exercising his powers of critical thought and rhetorical expression through the character of Socrates.

All this seems to betray the 'sophistic' nature of his thought and writing, and while scholars have made various arguments based on studies of Plato's hyper-analytical (see Carson) and enthusiastic (see Brown) modes of expression, a holistic perspective sees that Plato's representation of both extremes constitutes not only a deep sensitivity to the wide range of emotional effects that literature can have on readers and audience, but also an expansive dramatization of the relationship between literature or linguistic creativity and 'real life'. Socrates' somewhat ironic admission, in the *Lesser Hippias*, of ongoing ignorance and confusion (375e, 376c) constitutes an allusion to Plato's own experience of the complex, constantly shifting, enigmatic nature of reality. He articulated this in the *Cratylus* by subtly comparing Heraclitus' theory of the universe as an eternally-flowing river (402a) with the attempt to establish clear and fixed meaning in language. Socrates says

> I think I have a fine intuition which has just come to me, that the
> very ancient men who invented names were quite like most of
> the present philosophers who always get dizzy as they turn
> around and around in their search for the nature of things, and
> then the things seem to them to turn around and around and be
> in motion. They think the cause of this belief is not an affection
> within themselves, but that the nature of things really is such
> that nothing is at rest or stable, but everything is flowing and
> moving and always full of constant motion and generation. I
> say this because I thought of it with reference to all these words
> we are now considering (411b-c).

29

Plato's description of this phenomenon probably stems from both personal experience and observation of others, though not necessarily in that order. It was this experience that attracted him to Homer's employment of enigmatic discourse: in *Alcibiades* 2 he had Socrates say of Homer "he, like almost every other poet, speaks in riddles (*ainittetai*), since poetry as a whole is by nature inclined to riddling (*ainigmatôdes*), and not everyone can understand it" (147b).[2] Socrates goes on to call Homer "the most godly and wisest of poets", asserts that he was riddling or hinting at something (*ainittetai*) in a particular phrase at hand, and offers an interpretation that calls for a slightly unorthodox turn of phrase while suggesting a truth about the dark side of human nature.

Plato was participating in and in many ways exposing the existence of a tradition that he traced back to Homer: in addition to the reference in *Alcibiades* 2, he suggests that the meaning of Homer's phrases and art were always a subject of inquiry (*Lesser Hippias* 365c-d, *Cratylus* 398-407), as if there were a hidden message or agenda. Moreover, the tradition of interpreting Homer allegorically stretched back two hundred years to Theagenes, and the Socratic generation considered Homer underappreciated in this respect: Xenophon depicted Socrates making a joke about the stupidity of the popular performers called rhapsodes who, though they recite Homer from memory, "don't know the hidden meanings" or allegories (τὰς ὑπονοίας, *Symposium* 3.6) of the poems. One instance of Plato's use of Homer fully exemplifies the thoroughgoing connection

---

[2]Even if he did not write the *Alcibiades* 2, its statement of this principle is only an explication, made by an enthusiastic and learned imitator, of what is implicit everywhere else in Plato's writing.

30

between his general reading of Homer and his use of enigmatic discourse in his own writing.

Plato imputed to Homer himself the enigmatic style of communication, and took from what he interpreted as a Homeric pun the association between wax and the human psyche which constitutes the basis for his ὁ θεὸς πλάττων pun and the theoretical core of his entire practice as a philosopher, poet, and teacher. In the *Theaetetus* he wrote

> When the wax in a person's psyche is deep and abundant and smooth and properly kneaded, the images that come through the perceptions are imprinted upon this psyche's heart (τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς κέαρ) —as **Homer calls it, alluding** (αἰνιττόμενος) **to its similarity to wax** (κηροῦ)--; when this is the case, and in such people, the imprints, being clear and of sufficient depth, are also lasting. And such people are first of all quick to learn, and secondly they have retentive memories, and moreover they do not interchange the imprints of their perceptions, but they have true opinions. Because the imprints are clear and have plenty of room, so that such people quickly assign them to their different molds, which are called realities; and such people, then, are called wise (194c-d).

Fowler commented on this passage, "The similarity is in the Greek words κέαρ or κῆρ, heart, and κηρός, wax... The citation of Homer [cf. *Il.* 2.851, 16.554]...is probably sarcastic--in reference to the practice of some of the sophists who used and perverted his words in support of their doctrines" (p. 197). I prefer to argue that the interpretation of Homer expressed here is far from sarcastic. If Plato was imitating popular 'sophistic' appropriation of Homer for his own idealistic purposes, sophisticated critics will understand how excitingly plausible and valuable his interpretations of Homer's allusive style (αἰνιττόμενος) actually were. They are based, first of all, on deep insight into the realities of Homeric language

31

and textuality,[3] and second, on his own brilliance as both an observer of

connections and similarities in reality and as a forger of innovative means for

communicating those connections and similarities linguistically. The insight into

the similarity between the words κέαρ or κῆρ, heart, and κηρός, wax, is validated

by the physical similarity between the material substances of human flesh and

muscle tissue and warm, flexible wax; such speculation on the nature of human

physicality in relation to other substances in the material world motivates the

Timaeus. The accuracy is uncanny, and Plato understood the radically

transformative power that contemplation of such ideas affords human beings:

this is one example of the substance of his wisdom and its fragile and

controversial nature in relation to the type of thinking (or lack thereof) that

generally controls conventional human society. Most of the puns in the *Cratylus*

and in Plato's other writings contain subtle suggestions concerning 'truths' or

ideas similar to that expressed in the interpretation of Homer's κέαρ / κῆρ-κηρός

'pun' or enigma, and this kind of appreciation of Plato's writing style and

visionary thinking helps dismiss the simplistic conception of him as a

'philosopher' and vindicate recent scholarly attacks on the limiting conception of

him as 'the father of western philosophic rationalism' (Brown 1988).

An offhand sentence in the *Protagoras* reveals much about Plato's

interpretation and use of the entire literary tradition that he inherited: he had

---

[3]While Homer's οὖτις/μῆτις joke in *Odyssey* 9 is the most obvious example of this kind of sophistry in the archaic corpus, he also attributes Odysseus' name to his grandather's rage (ὀδυσσάμενος 19.406-9); but there is much more similar wordplay in Homer and the rest of the archaic writers. Pindar referred to epinikian poets like himself as sophists (*Isth.* 5.29). This was the way Plato read Homer (as well as Hesiod: *Theaet.* 155d, discussed below) and it functioned prominently in his discussion of cultural propriety regarding poetry (*Rep.* 2.378d). His own penchant for "allegories whose frequency and length are governed by no considerations of measure or occasion" (Dion. Hal.) was part of his well-known, extensive, and energetic emulation of Homer. For an extensive study of Sophocles' 'sophistic' wordplay see Ahl 1991.

Protagoras observe therein that Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides were among many poets who practiced sophistry "in the old days, [but] fearing the prejudice it elicits, adopted a disguise and worked under cover" (φοβουμένους τὸ ἐπαχθὲς αὐτῆς, πρόσχημα ποιεῖσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι, *Prot.* 316d). While this is usually interpreted as Plato's representation of the real Protagoras' view, his own extensive development of the idea (cf. *Prot.* 347e, *Alc.* 2.147b-d) indicates that his attitude about sophistry was more complex and subtle than the standard modern assumption that he was simply railing against the amoral pedagogy of clever demagogues and enterprising gurus: in fact Plato heard and read a sophistic sensibility operative not only in the contemporary oratorical culture but in the great works that were the inherited, almost canonical, oral and literary classics of his time. Furthermore, he observed an anti-sophistic prejudice[4] in the sociocultural atmosphere in which that sensibility tried to operate, and theorized that his predecessors devised literary styles --disguises for their sophistry-- to protect themselves from social turmoil. His inclusion of Homer in this interpretation of the ancient Greek writers (see *Alc.* 2 147b) enriches our understanding of his well-attested emulation of the epic master,[5] and

---

[4]This operated in a more generally anti-intellectual culture: "Athens was a society in which philosophers were often ignored and when noticed were easily represented not as authority figures but as cranks and buffoons" (Winkler 1990 p. 19): "Ameipsias' *Konnos* had a chorus of 'thinkers'/'worriers' (*phrontistai*); Eupolis' *Flatterers* represented the wealthy Kallias and his household of philosophers; Epikrates frag. 10 PCG (frag. 11 Kock)." The legend about Thales falling into a ditch and being mocked by a slavegirl established the conventional view of intellectuals as awkward weirdos in ancient Greek society; see Plato's full interpretation of it in *Theaetetus* 174-177a; cf. *Gorgias* 485. This was the cultural context in which Plato framed his glorification of 'philosophical madness' (*Phaedrus* 249d-e, discussed below; cf. *Theaet.* 173c-e). The glorification of 'philosophical madness' complements the glorification of 'poetic madness'.

[5]Longinus wrote "...above all others Plato... has irrigated his style with ten thousand runnels from the great Homeric spring... [he] would never have reared so many of these flowers to bloom among his philosophic tenets, never have wandered so often with Homer into the regions and phrases of poetry, had he not striven, yes, with heart and soul, to contest the prize with Homer

33

complements his notoriety as a 'Hyper-Gorgianizer' (ἄμεινον γοργιάζειν). In fact,

this is the proper context for understanding Dionysius' description of him as a

'mystic,' a cultic initiate (τελέτης),[6] in these matters. To reiterate, Dionysius

observed that Plato "revels inappropriately and in a juvenile manner in the

conceits of artificial expression, and especially in the Gorgianic figures."

Many ancient authorities besides Dionysius attest to the sophistic quality

of Plato's writing, and a review of these will establish a framework for

approaching the *Republic*. Philostratus included in his *Letters* an assertion that

Plato emulated Gorgias and the Sophists and employed Gorgianic figures in his

writing; while this fact itself is not new knowledge, what is noteworthy about

Philostratus is that he, unlike some ancients preceding (and many moderns

following) him, praised Plato on this particular account. His letter is worth

quoting at length:

> ...the divine Plato did not envy the sophists, though some
> people believe firmly that he did; but he was emulous
> (φιλοτίμως) of them, since they travelled around, charming
> cities small and large after the manner of Orpheus and
> Thamyras; no, he was as far removed from envy as
> emulation is from jealousy... Now Plato eagerly aims at the
> tropes (ἐς τὰς ἰδέας... ἴεται) of the sophists; he 'out-Gorgiases'
> Gorgias himself (ἄμεινον γοργιάζειν), and he words phrase
> after phrase in the sonorous manner of Hippias and
> Protagoras (*Love Letters* 73 [13]).[7]

Philostratus' claim that Plato not only imitated but in fact surpassed Gorgias

(ἄμεινον γοργιάζειν) at his own literary devices states the case about Plato's style

---

like a young antagonist with one who had already won his spurs, maybe in too keen emulation,
longing as it were to break a spear, and yet always to good purpose" (*On the Sublime*, 13. 4).

[6]Plato himself referred to sophistry as a kind of mystery cult; in the *Symposium* he had Socrates
liken Diotima to οἱ τέλεοι σοφισταί (208c), and in the *Euthydemus* he depicted a teenager being
'initiated' in 'the sophistic ritual' as if by Corybantes (277d).
[7]Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates showcases a similar emulation of sophistic style (*Symp.* 2.26;
6.7; 8.30-31; cf. Plato *Euthyd.* 303cff.).

34

much more strongly than modern scholarship has ever even suggested it. His favorable attitude toward the sophists and Plato's emulation of them, while suitable to his own historical and cultural milieu (i.e. the Second Sophistic), gestures toward a coherent ideology much more complex and valuable than our traditional conceptions of 'sophism' and 'sophistry'. Although (or perhaps 'because') much ancient as well as modern misconception of and prejudice against 'the sophists' comes, in fact, from Plato's own multifarious representation of and reference to them (e.g. Gagarin),[8] we need a new assessment of Plato's frequent and forceful use, under the influence of Gorgias, of 'sophistic' devices. Even a superficial treatment would show that he used them not only for humorous allusion but for the purpose of foregrounding the logocentric nature of entire dialectical and dramatic enterprises, circumscribing their primary conceptual themes, and dictating the intellectual and emotional frames of reference within which his readers were to understand and interpret his writing.[9] For instance, the name of the main character in the *Meno* indicates his basic problem and the dialogue's overarching theme: the word *meno* signifies rigidity, and Plato offers Meno's notion of piety, indeed of knowledge and life in general, as a model of excessive rigidity and superficiality. Obscurer examples of this

---

[8]Gagarin's approach exemplifies the excesses of literal historicism in scholarship on Plato. This approach generally assumes that the various arguments in Plato's dialogues represent Plato's own biased opinions rather than refractions and imitations of the biases and absurdities Plato was observing in the popular contemporary debates about rhetoric. Literal historicism generally misses the fact that Plato's dialogues are highly entertaining spoofs of the somewhat pretentious intellectual culture that flourished in 5th-century Athens and endured for several generations. Flinterman offers a much more 'sophisticated' study of 'sophism'.

[9]Ford's treatment of a play on words and its implications in the *Protagoras* represents phenomenal progress in this direction because it shows how Plato intertwined serious wordplay with humorous philosophical argumentation.

35

abound, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus had pinpointed one from the *Phaedrus* centuries before Philostratus.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Augustan 'Atticist' rhetorician, was not blessed with Philostratus' appreciation of Plato's sophistic tendencies:

> Plato's style purports to be a mixture of the grand and the plain style...but his nature did not render him equally effective in both styles... when, as often, he launches unrestrainedly into impressive and decorated language, he does himself far less than full justice, since this style is less pleasing than the other: it lacks its purity of dialect and transparency of texture. It darkens what is clear and reduces it almost to obscurity. It conveys its meaning in a long-drawn-out way when concision and brevity are called for. It abandons itself to tasteless circumlocutions and an empty show of verbal exuberance and, in defiance of correct usage and standard vocabulary, seeks artificial, exotic and archaic forms of expression. It is in figurative speech that it founders decisively: it abounds in appositions, is inopportune in its metonymies and harsh and inaccurate in its metaphors. It also admits allegories whose frequency and length are governed by no considerations of measure or occasion, and revels inappropriately and in a juvenile manner in the conceits of artificial expression, and especially in the Gorgianic figures, which can arouse the utmost displeasure. Indeed, he is quite the mystic (τελέτης) in these matters, as Demetrius of Phalerum and several of his predecessors said (*On Demosthenes*, 5).

Two centuries before Philostratus, then, Dionysius had recognized (in the process of denouncing it) Plato's heavy debt to Gorgias, and he stated it more succinctly by writing elsewhere that Plato "fell in love with the artificial styles of Gorgias and Thucydides, so that it was predictable that he should absorb some of the faults of these authors' styles along with their virtues"; he demonstrated this with an example from the *Phaedrus* (238b-c; cf. *Crat.* 419e-420a):

> He explained how the word 'eros' came to be used to denote 'passion' (ἔρως ἐτίθη τῷ πάθει τοὔνομα), in the following words: "When irrational desire has conquered the belief that impels us towards virtue, and leads us, like the force it is, towards the enjoyment of beauty and of desires which are

36

akin to itself, this force, in drawing us strongly (ἐρρωμένως ῥωσθεῖσα) towards physical beauty, gains strength from its own power (ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ῥώμης), and so acquires its name, ἔρως" (*On Demosthenes*, 7).

In attacking this style, what Dionysius failed (or simply refused)[10] to appreciate is that Plato's creative derivation of the word ἔρως is not only appropriate to the erotic theme of the *Phaedrus*, but in fact is essential to its ideological program: the dialogue has been called an educational manifesto because of its unique concentration on combining erotic and rhetorical subject matter and critique (Tanner 1992), and the derivation condemned by Dionysius is accompanied by several similar fabrications elsewhere therein.[11] These fabrications enshrine the emotive, experimental, playful aspects of Plato's linguistic creativity in the precinct of the god Eros: he strove to produce a proper form of address and hymn to Eros (265b-c) in correspondence with the altar built at the Academy in special homage to the god, and he posed Socrates as a grammarian/poet in order to establish the ideological and theoretical framework for such a project. Socrates' invocation of the poet Stesichorus (244a), his explanations of contemporary linguistics and poetic madness (244-245c), his subsequent performance of literary criticism on Lysias' and his own speeches (257a, 262d, 265b-c), and his general proclamations about literary composition (276b-d) represent the deep self-consciousness that characterized Plato's use of tradition, particularly poetic tradition, in his innovative writing. But Plato was also deeply

---

[10]Dionysius's claim that Gorgias was the first to write a treatise on rhetoric and "achieved nothing worth mentioning" (*Lit. Comp.* 12.35) exemplifies the absurdity of his prejudice against the sophistic style.

[11]Similar derivations are presented at 251c and 255c (cf. the derivation of 'Erato,' 259d), and Plato makes up two ametrical lines about Eros purporting to be from the spurious poems of Homer (252b-c).

37

aware of the theoretical debates over style that flourished in contemporary critical circles, and these informed his use of the rhetorical device that his pupil Aristotle classifies as sophistic,[12] namely equivocation, or homonymy.

The false derivation of the word *eros* in Plato's *Phaedrus* which Dionysius condemned as an imitation of the sophistic style of Gorgias and Thucydides, is an example of an argumentative strategy Aristotle called 'homonymy' (ὁμονυμία). In book three of his *Rhetoric* he wrote "homonyms are most useful to the sophist (τῷ σοφιστῇ), since it's by these means that he commits all his crimes" (πάντα κακουργεῖ, 3.2.7). This formulation suggests a pejorative judgment on Aristotle's part, and the question of how this was meant and what relation it has to his teacher Plato merits more consideration, especially given the fact that Aristotle's terminology seems to come from Plato: in the *Republic*, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of 'criminal activity' (κακουργεῖ 341b) in his rhetorical postures. But Aristotle's further treatment of homonymy helps establish a contemporary framework within which to evaluate Plato's sophistic tendencies.

In another passage Aristotle gives examples of homonymy and classified it as a fallacy of diction:

> The second [kind of fallacy of diction] is homonymy. For instance, if one were to say that the mouse [μῦς] is an important animal, since from it is derived the most honored of all religious festivals, namely, the mysteries [μυστήρια]; or if, in praising the dog, one were to include the dog in heaven (Sirius), or **Pan**, because Pindar said, "O blessed one, whom the Olympians call dog of the Great Mother, taking every form" (ὦ μάκαρ, ὅν τε μεγάλας θεοῦ κύνα παντοδαπὸν

---

[12]Aristotle treated sophistic style more generally and thoroughly in *On Sophistical Refutations*, but see particularly the sections on homonymy (ὁμονυμία), ambiguity (ἀμφιβολία), word combination (σύνθεσις), word division (διαίρεσις), accent (προσωδία), and form of expression (τὸ σχῆμα τῆς λέξεως, 165b-166b).

καλέουσιν 'Ολύμπιοι),[13] and to say that Hermes is the most sociable [κοινωνικόν] of the gods, because he alone is called common [κοινός]; and that words [τὸν λόγον] are most excellent, since good men are considered worthy, not of riches but of consideration [λόγου εἰσὶν ἄξιοι]; because λόγου ἄξιος has a double meaning (*Rhetoric* 2.24.2).[14]

Aristotle's examples of homonymy[15] resemble the kind of 'false etymological punning' that Dionysius pointed out in Plato, and modern scholarly treatment of this issue,[16] suggests that the self-conscious cultivation of sophistry attributed to Plato by ancient critics operates in the larger sphere of his highly sophisticated critical analysis of the process by and attitude in which the contemporary culture was assimilating the 'sophisticated' literary tradition he prized.

Several of Plato's dialogues introduce the use of sophistic rhetoric along with commentary that not only alludes to the cultural prejudice against sophistry but characterizes his own use of it as programmatic in relation to both his general interest in the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric (or critical thought and the technical art of linguistic expression) as well as to specific dialogues'

---

[13]"A fragment from the Parthenia (songs sung by maidens to the accompaniment of the flute). Pan is called 'the dog of Cybele,' the great nature-goddess of the Greeks, as being always in attendance on her, being himself a nature-god. The fact that Pindar calls Pan 'dog' is taken as a glorification of that animal" (Freese, p. 326). Freese includes nothing about the syllable 'pan' in κύνα παντοδαπὸν with respect to the god Pan, but this is why Aristotle presents this quote as an instance of homonymy.

[14]Aristotle goes into detail about clever sayings and jokes that employ wordplay in 3.11.6-10.

[15]More general treatment of this and its counterpart, paronymy (παρονυμία), is undertaken by Janko 1981.

[16]"E. Norden, *Antike Kunstprose* i (1909), pp. 106-112, believes that Plato uses sophistic figures (a) in parody, (b) to show his opponents that he can use the figures perfectly well if he wants to, (c) for humorous effect. Philostratus's statement of the case against Plato shows a sense of humor that Dionysius of Halicarnassus and some other ancient critics lacked" (Allen Rogers Benner and Francis H. Forbes, The Letters of Alciphron, Aelian and Philostratus (Loeb Classical Library, 1949), p. 540. Plato's aestheticization of 'madness' forms itself in direct rejection of his contemporary culture's compulsive obsession with 'sanity' (see North, Sophrosyne), and his philosophical enthusiasm and literary style express that rejection: the philosopher's intellectual rapture is represented as madness (*Phaedrus* 249d-e).

39

dominant themes. A passage in the *Symposium*, for instance, implicitly

corroborates (maybe anticipates or dictates) Aristotle's assignment of homonomy

to sophistry. Just after Pausanias' speech, Apollodorus the narrator says

Παυσανίου δὲ παυσαμένου, διδάσκουσι γάρ με ἴσα λέγειν οὑτωσὶ οἱ σοφοί: "When

Pausanias finally 'paused' (since these kinds of wise men are teaching me

'balanced oratory')..." (185c). There is a multilayered joke here that refers to the

role of sophistic thought as well as style in the conceptualization and

composition of the dialogue: Plato's work in crafting plausible speeches on the

same topic from the perspectives of several different types of characters is an

almost Herculean exercise in logic and rhetoric that takes its inspiration at least

in part from sophistic pieces --early exercises in paradoxography-- like Gorgias'

controversial *Defense of Helen* and the *Dissoi Logoi*. It is the flexibility in thought

and linguistic expression necessary for this task which Plato exonerates --against

the conventional categorization that critics tend to perform on writers-- by

ending the dialogue with the reference to Socrates arguing that the same poet can

compose both tragedy and comedy. This dialogue, maybe more than all others,

embodies Plato's notion of *logos* as "something more flexible (*euplastoteron*) than

wax", which is derivative of Gorgias' description of *logos* in *Helen* as an agent of

peitho which, combined with *logos*, molds even the soul however it wants.[17] Here

the pun on Pausanias' name imitates Gorgianic symmetry of syllables,[18] and this

---

[17] ἡ πειθὼ προσιοῦσα τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐτυπώσατο ὅπως ἐβούλετο, frag. 11.13 D-K (cf. ψευδῆ λόγου πλάσαντες, frag. II 291,5 D-K and Isocrates, ψευδεῖς πλάττειν, *Antidosis* 138; Isocrates had used the wax-molding metaphor in the educational context, but in Gorgias' language [ἐκτυπωθέντας, *Against the Sophists* 18]).

[18] "ἴσα λέγειν 'to speak in equal units', involving in this case (Παυσανίου παυσαμένου) assonance as well as symmetry; the phenomenon is obtrusive in Gorgias, and its influence on the epideictic oratory of the late fifth and early fourth centuries is obvious" (Dover p. 104).

40

allusion to Gorgias brings out the underlying meaning of the phrase οὕτωσὶ οἱ σοφοί, "these kinds of wise men", which is simply another way of writing 'sophists'. More importantly, Plato's development of the παύω pun[19] advertises its function as a programmatic statement of the *Symposium*'s rhetorical and philosophical methods:[20] he referred back to it later, at another strategic point in the dialogue, by placing there a similar pun on the name of his primary stylistic mentor (according, again, to Dionysius and Philostratus), Gorgias the quintessential sophist himself.[21] Much of the *Symposium*'s meaning develops, in fact, by way of Plato's concentration on sophistry as both rhetorical style and cultural phenomenon.

Plato's *Republic* announces its own sophistic programming with a pun similar to --but even more centrally related to this dialogue's conceptual content than-- the 'Pausanias/pause' joke in the *Symposium*. A brief look at this programming will help situate Plato's exploration of sophistic style within the wider literary sensibility he developed obliquely throughout the dialogue and illuminate the degree to which the *Republic* represents Plato's engagement with

---

[19]The play between Παυσανίου and παυσαμένου is carried out by the repetitions of παύω (four in the next 20 lines), all in reference to the question of how Aristophanes' hiccups will be 'stopped'.

[20]Pausanias' speech begins by criticquing the one that preceded it on the grounds that "Eros isn't that simple"; the pun expresses Plato's conceptual agenda at that point in the dialogue, since in the 'Pausanias' speech he 'puts a stop' to the trend of simplistic eulogy that inaugurated the symposium in order to undertake a more sophisticated critical examination of the complex function of eros in Greek society and culture which will consist in descriptions of social behavior that can be categorized as erotic and in observations of how those types of behavior fare in the cultural value system.

[21] "His speech so reminded me of Gorgias that I was exactly in the plight described by Homer: I feared that Agathon in his final phrases would confront me with the eloquent Gorgias' head, and by opposing his speech to mine would turn me thus dumbfounded into stone" (*Symp.* 198c). The obvious pun here uses the resonance between the name Gorgias and gorgon, the mythical creature whose head could turn an onlooker to stone. The joke is a subtle reference to the spellbinding power of Gorgias' rhetoric.

41

the sociocultural and political status to which poetry aspired through its use of 'sophistry' (or vice-versa, i.e. the status to which 'sophistry' aspired through its use of poetry). This kind of ideological and stylistic engagement with his contemporary culture has been recognized as the impetus for Plato's writing of other dialogues, and Plato's combination of literary artistry and cultural commentary, his creation of a new 'philosophical' language, was as playful, individualistic, and intellectually anarchic as the creativities of Homer, Hesiod, Xenophanes, Solon, Simonides, Heraclitus, Pindar, Herodotus, Gorgias, Euripides, Thucydides, and Aristophanes before him. He, however, was the first to enshrine, to the degree that he did, his ironic self-consciousness concerning that process of intellectual and linguistic creation,[22] especially in relation to the "increasing tension between modes of oral and documented speech" recognized by Havelock. The formal tension between oral and literary modes of linguistic expression that gripped Greek culture structured Plato's perception of the emotional tension between what Aristophanes described as the serious and playful aspects of creative linguistic expression: in the *Frogs*, the comic poet depicted the chorus preparing for a dramatic festival by praying to the goddess Demeter,

> ruler of sacred orgies, ruler of holy orgies / stand by me, save
> your chorus. / Grant me to play on and do my dances / in
> safety throughout the day. / To say many things in fun and
> many in earnest [πολλὰ μὲν γέλοια...πολλὰ δὲ σπουδαία]; and /
> after playing [παίσαντα] and joking worthily of your festival /
> grant me the victor's garland (*Frogs* 384-95).[23]

---

[22] Plato represented his own self-consciousness in *Phaedrus* by depicting Socrates imagining a hypothetical critic interrogating him and his pupil concerning their attitude toward rhetoric and the various capabilities of people who seek to practice and/or understand it (269b, 272b).

[23] On further connections between Aristophanes and Plato see Zuckert p. 146.

Plato echoed this conception in the *Phaedrus* (278b-d) by having Socrates end the discussion with the statement "we've played (*pepaisthô...hêmin*) with words long enough" and then suggest that a true philosopher is someone who

> has composed writings with knowledge of the truth, and is able
> to support them by discussion of what s/he has written, and
> has the power to show by her/his own speech that the written
> words are of little value.

This activity constitutes the "serious pursuit" that underlies the technical act of writing.

It has been suggested to me that my vision of Plato presents him as a romantic artist, and I would like to take advantage of this suggestion by fleshing out that vision in relatively 'romantic' terms. Plato seems to have idealized the individual creative writer as an anti-establishment figure, and has appropriately been called "the patron of the scholar on holiday" (Anderson p. 173), the last two words being of key importance: he rejects the professional exploitation of intellect and writing, asserts and cultivates his own idiosyncratic sensitivity and sensibility, and refuses to eradicate from his art the contradictions and ambiguities that are essential to his humanity. He himself is, in his literature, the archetypal iconoclastic intellectual as he saw in predecessors like Thales, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Simonides, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Parmenides, Gorgias, and especially Socrates. The contemporary conventional 'scholastic' simplification of his literary predecessors' many rich contradictions and ambiguities was a source of frustration to him,[24] and the *Republic* is motivated by this frustration: it is, in fact, enshrined as the starting-point of the conversation,

---

[24]This prompts the exhibition of Theognis' self-contradiction in *Meno* 95d-96a; cf. the 'unreading' of Simonides in *Protagoras*, on which see Carson.

43

namely the critique of the definition of justice attributed to Simonides by Cephalus and his cronies.

Plato's ποικιλία

Diogenes Laertius understood the sophistic disguises in Plato's writing as embodying the artistic principle of ποικιλία, meaning both decorative variety and ambiguity: "Plato employed variable terminology (ὀνόμασι... ποικίλοις) so as to make his system less intelligible to the ignorant" (3.63); this is probably the sense in which Quintilian called him "inspired...by the oracles of the god of Delphi." Plato's dialogues betray a self-consciousness concerning ποικιλία, his 'variegated' or 'decorative style,' and this self-consciousness is worth exploring in brief by way of introducing an analysis of the politics of style in ancient Greek rhetorical culture and Plato's preference for the sophistic style therein. Plato seems to have inherited the use of the word ποικιλία as a self-conscious literary aesthetic primarily from Pindar, who called his own poems ὕμνων ποικίλων (O 6.87).[25] He applied it to his own writing in the Phaedrus by having Socrates disclaim his ability to make a speech "more decorative [ποικιλώτερον] than Lysias's" (236b), and the irony there is that Plato wrote the speech in the name of Lysias and then had Socrates advertise its ποικιλία only as a promise of his own ability to outdo it (see Adkins). More importantly, Plato used ποικιλία as a guiding principle in the definition of good speaking and writing near the end of the same dialogue:

> A man must know the truth about all the particular things of
> which he speaks or writes, and must be able to define
> everything separately; then when he has defined them, he

---

[25]cf. N.4.14; N.5.42; N.8.15; frs. 179 and 194.2; also Race 1983; for general treatment of Pindar's extensive punning see Bury (note 25 above).

44

must know how to divide them by classes until further division is impossible; and in the same way he must understand the nature of the soul, must find out the class of speech adapted to each nature, and must arrange and adorn his discourse accordingly, offering to the complex soul elaborate and harmonious discourses (ποικίλη μὲν ποικίλους ψυχῇ καὶ παναρμονίους διδοὺς λόγους), and simple discourses to the simple soul (277b-c, cf. *Theaet.* 146d).

This passage advertises the importance of ποικιλία in Plato's theoretical and practical synthesis of rhetoric and philosophy,[26] and later stylists ranked it among the primary virtues to be imitated: Cicero called it *varietas* (*De Or.* 1.218), and Pliny the Younger called it *Platonicam illam latitudinem* (*Epistles* 1.10.5).

Plato's use of double entendres was a primary element in his cultivation of literary ποικιλία, both in the sense of decoration and in the sense of the strategic ambiguity --the Straussian term 'esotericism' has inappropriate connotations-- Diogenes observed, and it appears most frequently and functions most forcefully in his well-known penchant for punning on names.[27] In fact play with and punning on names was synonymous with Plato's idea of ποικιλία, and he laid out in the *Cratylus* a theory for making names (ὀνοματοῦργειν) and interpreting and altering their meanings which was based on the verb ποικίλλειν. In the process of making names,

---

[26]Other indications of this term's function in harmonizing the literary and philosophical principles of Plato's creativity are available in *Hippias Maior*, 298a; *Epinomis*, 975d; *Republic*, X.605a; *Cratylus*, 394a-c (which I discuss in detail below).

[27]His pastime of play with names was demonstrated by Paul Shorey in the notes to his translation of the *Republic* (see on 580b: "Plato puns on the name Ariston. For other such puns cf. *Gorg.* 463e, 481d, 513b, *Rep.* 600b, 614b, *Symp.* 174b, 185c, 198c"; cf. p. 369, note d; cf. p. 275 note b, to 406b). "Plato has a particular fondness for puns on names: Agathon (*Symp.* 174b), Gorgias (*Symp.* 198c), Meletus (*Ap.* 25c), Bias (*Hp. Ma.* 281d), Demos (*Grg.* 481d, 513b), Ariston (*Rep.* 580b), and the complex one on Phaedrus' and Stesichorus' full names (*Phdr.* 244a). Puns gradually shade through philosophic playfulness (on harmony *Phd.* 92c, 95a, *Lg.* 802c; Hades *Phd.* 80d; play and education *Lg.* 803d) into seriously meant etymology" (Brock, p. 44); cf. "peerless Polus" (*Gorg.* 467c) and the epigrams to Aster ("the Star"), *Gk. Anth.* 7.669-70.

45

variety in the syllables is admissible (ποικίλλειν δὲ ἔξεστι ταῖς συλλαβαῖς), so that **names which are the same appear different from one another,** just as the physicians' drugs, when prepared with various colors and perfumes (πεποικιλμένα), seem different to us, though they are the same, but to the physician, who considers only their medicinal value, they seem the same, and he is not put off by the additions. **So maybe the man who knows about names considers their force and is not put off if some letter is added, transposed, or subtracted, or even if the force of the name is expressed in entirely different letters.** So, for instance, in the names...Astyanax and Hector, none of the letters is the same except t, but nevertheless they have the same meaning (394a-c).

Plato had Socrates explain this theory of name-composition by observing the 'appropriateness' and equivalency of many aristocratic Greek names "which mean simply 'king'": Archepolis (ruler of the city), Agis (leader), Polemarchus (war-lord), and Eupolemus (good warrior); Socrates concludes by saying "we might find many other [names] which differ in syllables and letters, but express the same meaning." The rest of the dialogue applies this theory to the Greek language at large by offering variously outlandish etymologies for dozens of words in such a way as to make it obvious that the otherwise mysterious "man who knows about names" alluded to in this definition --who is later called ὁ ὀνομαστικός (423e)-- is no one but Plato himself. This 'metatextual' meaning revamps the meaning of the entire passage, or at least provides an insight to its construction: Plato, the man who knows about names, allows variety (ποικίλλειν) in the composition of names and so is in no way 'put off' --in fact prefers it-- "if some letter is added, transposed, or subtracted, or even if the force of [his own] name is expressed in entirely different letters," since he himself is the one who does the adding, transposing, and subtracting of letters.

The proliferation of sophistic etymologies in the same dialogue --which pays homage to Cratylus, the famous sophist-- demonstrates this principle of

46

'word-play,' and the theory partly explains Plato's general practice of punning on names, not to mention his general conception of language: in the course of discussing the natures of several gods, Plato had Socrates conjecture that Pan is the double-natured son of Hermes because "ὁ λόγος signifies everything (τὸ πᾶν σημαίνει) and makes it circulate and move around and is twofold (διπλοῦς), true and false" (408c). This dualistic concept of language, enshrined in the tradition by Hesiod[28] and passed down by others, informs Plato's elemental approach to literary composition and is fundamental to the relationship between form and content in the *Republic*: the dialogue, as pointed out generally above, has (at least) a dual nature and function, in that it both dramatizes the mythic ethos of Socratic philosophy, particularly in regard to the theoretical and practical formation of governmental constitutions, and also embodies, even advertises, the ambiguities of the creative process otherwise hidden behind the monolithic, authoritative facades of the institutions and industries alluded to in the allegory of the cave, i.e. oracular/mystery religion and dramatic entertainment, where the art of poetry is enshrined and venerated (if not exploited).

The *Republic*'s deeper engagement with sophistry manifests itself in poetic wordplay with the interlocutors' names, which involves the *Cratylus*' theory of name-making-ποικιλία (ὀνοματοῦργειν-ποικίλλειν). The belabored dramatic portrayal of Thrasymachus' violent demeanor and behavior[29] and the fear it

---

[28] The Muses tell Hesiod "Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things" (*Theogony* 25).

[29]"Now Thrasymachus, even while we were conversing, had been trying several times to break in and seize (ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι) the discussion but he was restrained (διεκωλύετο) by those who sat by him and wished to hear the argument out. But when we came to a pause...he couldn't hold his peace anymore, and gathering himself up like a wild beast he hurled himself upon us as if he would tear us to pieces (συστρέψας ἑαυτὸν ὥσπερ θηρίον ἧκεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ὡς διαρπασόμενος, 336b).

47

causes Socrates (336b-338c) is calculated in correspondence with the meaning of his name, since Plato is in fact reported to have elsewhere said Thrasymachus was "'like his name.'"[30] The elaborate characterization of him and Polemarchus as men of violent temper (both 'break into' the conversation, 331d4)[31] complements Plato's careful development of the dialogue's combative atmosphere, which the Byzantine critic Proclus called a 'logomachy'. This atmosphere mimics post-classical Athens' general atmosphere of war, suspicion, and volatility, and Plato, putting his Cratylan treatment of the meanings of names into action, took advantage of the names of Polem-archus ("warlord") and Thrasy-machus ("daring in battle") to allude to this atmosphere and to depict the politically aggressive if not totally militaristic energy he saw possessing the house of Cephalus.[32] So in 332e, when Socrates reduces the Simonidean definition of

---

[30]Athenaeus 11.505d; cf. Riginos 1976 p. 95, 162-3, 41n., and 178, 130n.

[31]The problem of Thrasymachus is discussed explicitly in 9.520ff.

[32]"[Cephalus] the Syracusan was invited to Athens by Pericles: he owned a large shield factory clearly fulfilling government contracts; his house in the Piraeus is the scene of Plato's *Republic*, and the dialogue begins with a discussion between him and Socrates on his attitude to his enormous wealth. His sons Polemarchus and Lysias were strong supporters of the radical democracy; Polemarchus was executed and they lost their property under the pro-Spartan oligarchy of 404 BC" (O. Murray p. 163). Plato's choice of Cephalus' house as the setting and Cephalus' sons as the initial interlocutors cannot be used as simplistic evidence of his attitude toward the 'democracy' one way or another, nor can any of his writings elsewhere which seem to address that topic directly. By the time of the Spartan invasion the notion of the real presence and practical function of pure forms of government as Aristotle discusses them was probably operative only in political rhetoric if even that; the real issue was Spartan military occupation of Athens and degrees of capitulation, cooperation, and resistance among the Athenian rich and powerful (like Cephalus). Plato's discussion in the *Seventh Letter* of the Thirty and their overthrow illustrates his recognition and experience of the city's complete confusion and says more about his relationship to the political atmosphere than anything he wrote anywhere else: "although at first I was filled with an ardent desire to engage in public affairs, when I considered all [the rapid changes in the structure and culture of the State] and saw how things were shifting about anyhow in all directions, I finally became dizzy" (325e). The *Republic* is Plato's own implicit '*Apology*' (to his brother Glaucon) for not participating in public affairs and instead pursuing intellectual learning among the Egyptian priests. Socrates' descent to Peiraeus represents the enlightened intellectual's descent into the underworld of conventional society where ordinary people like Cephalus and his clan are trapped by materialism (see Lysias *Against Eratosthenes* 10-24) and the conventional discourse and popular rhetoric of Hades, "the most powerful sophist of

48

justice to the homonymystic jingle φίλους ὠφελεῖν καὶ ἐχθροὺς βλάπτειν, he does so in the very question he asks Polemarchus, namely to what specific activity that definition refers; Polemarchus, true to his name, answers 'In waging war and fighting as comrades, I would say', 'Εν τῷ προσπολεμεῖν καὶ ἐν τῷ ξυμμαχεῖν, ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ. Plato's inclusion of ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ draws focus toward the joke, which centers on the idea of Polemarchus' mentality and personality being tied up in his name and vice-versa: it is appropriate that Polemarchus would think the phrase "helping friends and harming enemies" refers to waging and conducting war (προσπολεμεῖν ... ξυμμαχεῖν). The salient elements of his name, πολεμ...μαχ, are embedded in his words, and Plato stressed the anagrammatic paronymy by having Socrates repeat the name with the dainty pleasantry ὦ φίλε Πολέμαρχε (cf. 7.521d7 and 539e4-5). This phrase compresses the root syllable of the Simonidean jingle (φίλ) and the name that speaks of war (Polemarchus) into a unit that encodes the complex ideology —'friendly militarism' (i.e. honor among thieves) -- against which Socrates is battling. Plato's text shows that this is in fact what he meant to communicate when, two sentences later, Polemarchus agrees that the Simonidean definition implies that "to those not at war the just man is useless": τοῖς μὴ πολεμοῦσιν ὁ δίκαιος ἄχρηστος.

The citation of Simonides' 'poetic' definition of justice as the background of the *Republic*'s examination of justice is Plato's highly compressed representation of his engagement with the poetic and sophistic legacies he inherited in classical Athens' logocentric culture (see O'Regan), and he founded his own program of redefining justice on his recognition of the pervasive

---

all" (*Cratylus* 403e-404a), which keep them engaged in 'political' affairs like war, whereby they lose their minds and lives to militarism.

persuasive power of 'sophistic' logic operative in the poetic tradition that Athenian culture fetishized: the Simonidean definition of justice, φίλοις... ὀφείλειν τοὺς φίλους, etc., which Socrates turns into the simplistic φίλους ὠφελεῖν καὶ ἐχθροὺς βλάπτειν, held sway --it gets repeated like a mantra by Polemarchus at 334b8-9-- with people like Cephalus and Co. precisely because of the arbitrary authority granted its sonic neatness.[33] With an uncritical audience/readership the sound of Simonides' phrase argues for itself and the 'logical connection' goes unexamined into the recesses of memory.[34] Even while they were still alive, the conservative element of Greek society had assimilated Plato's literary predecessors to its ideology and agenda. While he set Socrates up as the 'inner

---

[33]In order to frame the Simonidean definition's reception in these terms, Plato had made Cephalus (the pretentiously aristocratic weapons-manufacturer) quote Pindar and praise the saying as "charming" (χαριέντως) and "extremely amazing" (θαυμαστῶς ὡς σφόδρα, 331a). The Pindar quote itself (Fragment 214) intimates, with γηροτρόφος and πολύστροφον, the kind of wordplay targeted later; for a similar use of Pindar see *Gorgias* 484b. Plato's use of Simonides and Pindar stages the militaristic patriarchy's simplistic and exploitative glorification of archaic poetry, and his qualification of their definition of justice responds to his attack, in the *Apology*, on the hypocrisy in the Athenian justice system: he had Socrates call Meletus' prosecution a joke (αἴνιγμα, *Ap*. 27a; cf. 27d and 24c), and the implication here is that Socrates, obviously 'the just man,' --Plato called him "the most just man of his time", *Epist*. 7.324e-- does not belong, and indeed is in danger, among these war-mongering buddies. Nevertheless, Plato had great fun showing him use sophistry to deconstruct the mentality behind the 'mantra' from 333 to 336a, where he finally voices clearly Plato's socio-political and -economic contextualization of the 'value' and 'force' in the militaristic ideology: "I think the saying 'justice is τοὺς μὲν φίλους ὠφελεῖν, τοὺς δ' ἐχθροὺς βλάπτειν' [comes from] Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban or some other rich man who had great power in his own conceit." Polemarchus' acceptance of this complete dismissal of the Simonidean definition of justice is what provokes Thrasymachus' invasion of the conversation.

[34]This is what Plato means when he has Phaedrus say rhetoric is "a very forceful power when it's a question of large public crowds" (*Phdr*. 268a); this traditional mode of 'thoughtless' education or 'propagation of culture' --see Havelock's circumscription of Plato's attitude toward traditional education in <u>Preface to Plato</u>, which attitude is basically derivative of the judgment attributed to Socrates by Xenophon about the stupidity of the rhapsodes who, though they memorize Homer, "don't know the inner meanings" (τὰς ὑπονοίας, *Symposium* 3.6) of the poems-- is the root problem Plato deals with explicitly in the *Cratylus* dialogue and implicitly in this dialogue; he shows how it operates by presenting the Simonides example and has Socrates combat it in dialogue by means of a different procedure, but incorporates it into his own writing by imitating it (and thus appropriating its power) in the esoteric program of puns on his own name which I shall expose. The implications of this with respect to our entire traditional imaginative and conceptual construction of 'Plato' are staggering.

dialogue's' Herculean combatant[35] against the overwhelming self-regenerative power of conventional pseudo-aristocratic (i.e. nouveau riche) appropriation of the radical intellectual element in the sophistic-poetic tradition, Plato used the very same sophistic sensibility in a program of punning on his own name in the *Republic* as a way of advertising and defining his own position, outside the dialogue (symbolic of his rejection of professional poetic competition and other aspects of conventional oral culture), as one of transcendence and power over this tradition. This dissertation, then, analyzes the overarching, multidimensional thematic development Plato carried out in the *Republic* by means of puns on his own name.

The "typical poetic enigma"

While scholars have recognized the general presence of puns in the *Republic*,[36] what still needs recognition is the fact that the *Republic*'s philosophical discussion is framed by Plato's insight into and attitude toward the sophistic-style wordplay disguised in the archaic Greek literary tradition and operative in his own contemporary culture. This contextualization is accomplished by means of the fact that the definition of justice attributed to Simonides and touted by the interlocutors Polemarchus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus, is patently sophistic. In fact Plato had Socrates identify it as such by calling the supposedly Simonidean definition of justice --"friends owe it to friends to do them some good and no evil (φίλοις οἴεται ὀφείλειν τοὺς φίλους ἀγαθὸν μέν τι δρᾶν, κακὸν δὲ μηδέν, 332a6-8)

---

[35]S. describes himself in such terms at *Apology* 22a; cf. *Euthydemus* 297cff.

[36]See Shorey's notes to 337d (Vol. I, p. 42, n. a), 344e (Vol I, p. 71, n. f), 406b (Vol. I, p. 275, n. b), 509d (Vol. II, p. 108, n. a), 540c (Vol. II, p. 231, n. h), 551e (Vol. II, p. 266, n. e), 600b (Vol. II, p. 439, notes f and g), and 614b (Vol. II, p. 491, n. g); see also notes on 504e (Vol. II, p. 86, n. a) and 569c (Vol. II, p. 333, n. d).

51

...and there is due and owing from an enemy to an enemy what also is proper for him, some evil" (332b6-8)-- a "typical poetic enigma": Ἠινίξατο ἄρα...ὡς ἔοικεν, ὁ Σιμωνίδης ποιητικῶς ("Look, he was speaking enigmatically...so it seems, Simonides was, in the typical poetic manner", 332b9-10). The apparent reason for this diagnosis is the fact that Socrates will later show that justice does not involve harming personal enemies, but its importance is richer than that: it touches upon the primary subtext of the dialogue, namely the question of the degree to which 'poetic' logic influences and often produces social opinion and cultural mentality. Plato, via Socrates, is calling attention to the world of difference between poetic and philosophical concepts of wisdom and alluding to the untold depths of speculation on that issue in which he engaged.

Socrates' proclamation is an enigma in itself, and Plato has thus introduced the primary theme of the dialogue with an enigma inside an enigma. The answer to Socrates' enigma --"How is Simonides' definition of justice a 'typical poetic enigma'?"-- is accessible via what Plato had Socrates say about the popular poetic tradition elsewhere in his oeuvre, for instance in the *Apology*:

> in the case of the poets...I soon recognized that what they composed they composed not by wisdom, but by nature and because they were inspired, like the prophets and givers of oracles, since these also say many fine things, but don't know any of the things they say; it was evident to me that the poets too had experienced something of this same sort. And at the same time I perceived that they, on account of their poetry, thought that they were the wisest of men in other things as well, in which they were not. So I went away from them also thinking that I was superior to them... (*Ap.* 7 [22b-c]; cf. *Ion*).

Plato's recognition of a discrepancy between notions of knowledge and wisdom in popular culture figured into his own practice of indirect communication --δι'

52

αἰνιγμῶν and αἰνιττόμενοι– in an age when that style was not only common and

often necessary, but even popular and influential: "Heraclitus (fr. 93,

Diels)...finds a parallel for his obscure and symbolic style in the practice of the

oracle of Delphi [not to mention] Pindar, the Muse's prophet (fr. 150), whose

arrows are only for the wise (*Ol.* II.83)" (Tate, p. 149 note 8). Heraclitus,

furthermore, became especially famous for his cryptic manner of expression

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1407b14-18), and this was a primary reason for his popularity

among the Socratic generation:

> Euripides gave [Socrates] a copy of Heraclitus' book and asked
> him what he thought of it. Socrates replied: "I like what I
> understand as well as what I don't understand -- it's so deep
> only a Delian diver could get it" (Diogenes Laertius, 2.22).

The degree to which this mentality prevailed in popular consciousness at Athens

is indicated by the joke in Aristophanes' *Birds* involving the fortune-teller who

has to explain that the oracle he's delivering was composed by the ancient

prophet Bakis as a cryptic message: "Bakis is speaking enigmatically" (ἠνίξαθ' ὁ

Βάκις, 970). The anecdote about Plato's attendance of the reading by Antimachus

of Colophon (presented above) probably voices general recognition of his

enthusiasm for the obscure style, but I have already pointed out how ancient

critics also recognized his cultivation of it in his own writing. This is the proper

framework for approaching his introduction of the problem of defining justice

and his description of the Simonides verses as a 'typical poetic enigma': it has a

decidedly oracular ring reminiscent of the riddling proclamations of Delphi. The

Simonidean phrase's poetic 'enigmatic' quality is observable in its flirtation with

the false etymologyical punning that constituted Aristotle's notion of

homonymy: the alliterative sonic and visual similarity in φίλοις...ὀφείλειν τοὺς

53

φίλους suggests a conceptual connection, i.e. an authoritative etymology, in the relationship between the words φίλος and ὀφείλειν in the same way that one of Simonides' own epigrams playfully suggests a conceptual connection between the name Sosos and the verb meaning "to save": Σῶσος καὶ Σωσοῦ σωτήρια τόνδ' ἀνέθηκαν· / Σῶσος μὲν σωθείς, Σωσοῦ δ' ὅτι Σῶσος ἐσώθη ("Sosos and Sosos' safety dedicated this; the one being Sosos saved, the other because Sosos' Sosos was saved", *Greek Anthology* 6.216).[37]

Plato had Socrates take issue with the definition of justice attributed to Simonides[38] because it exemplified the sophistic style and/or spirit disguised by him and others in the Greek poetic tradition (as pointed out in the *Protagoras*), and Plato made sure his audience/reader was prepared to recognize this as the underlying issue by making Socrates preface his interrogation of the definition with the ironic concession that "it's not easy to disbelieve (ἀπιστεῖν) Simonides, since he's a wise and Godly man" (σοφὸς γὰρ καὶ θεῖος, 331e).[39] Plato elsewhere

---

[37]For other 'sophistic' precedent in Simonides' fragments see the scholia on Aristophanes *Clouds* 507 and Julian, *Letters* 24 (both quoted in Campbell, p. 371 and 459).

[38]Socrates explains that Simonides seems to have meant to say justice "is rendering to each what befits him" (τὸ προσῆκον ἑκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι, 332c1-2), but that he "named it 'what is owed'", ὠνόμασεν ὀφειλόμενον; the use of ὠνόμασεν implies an analysis of diction similar to the theoretical and practical exploration of naming in *Cratylus*, and the implication here is that Simonides chose the word ὀφείλειν not for its 'specific' or 'correct' meaning (since, Socrates argues, he meant — διενοεῖτο— something else) but for its sound quality, which Socrates soon intensifies by simplifying the entire idea to the jingle φίλους ὠφελεῖν καὶ ἐχθροὺς βλάπτειν (332e3-4). The extent to which Plato shaped the saying to fit his purposes is demonstrated by the fact that the doctrine was traditional (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 351; Pindar *Pyth.* 2.83; cf. Theognis 869-72) and there were other ways of phrasing it in contemporary usage (τετάχθαι τοὺς μὲν ἐχθροὺς κακῶς ποιεῖν, τοὺς δὲ φίλους εὖ, Lysias, *For the Soldier* 20).

[39]"The Platonic Socrates ironically treats the poets as inspired but not wise because they cannot explain their fine sayings. *Apol.* 22 a-b, *Ion* 542a. He always assumes that the utterances of 'wise' men must be true. *Theaetet.* 152b, *Phaedr.* 260a, *Laws* 888e, *Euthydem.* 280a. But they are often obscure, and he reserves for himself the right of interpretation (335e). Since the poets contradict one another and cannot be cross-examined they are not to be taken seriously as authorities. *Protag.* 347e, *Meno* 71d, *Lysis* 214-215, *Hipp. Minor* 365d" (Shorey, Rep. I, p. 21).

54

referred to Simonides as "ambitious to get a name for wisdom" (*Prot.* 343c), and the ironic use of σοφὸς here alludes to the sophistry barely disguised in Simonides' style. The irony indicates the fundamental issue according to which the traditional definition of justice is problematized, namely the persuasive power that sophistic rhetoric has over literalistic audiences and/or readers like Cephalus and his clan.[40] But Plato's own irony envelops this scenario, because the issue of sophistry, though obviously of central concern, is never treated explicitly in the dialogue's Socratic discussion. It is irony that bifurcates the Platonic dialogues into two realms meant for different audiences, the literal and the allusive or the explicit and the implicit,[41] and it was probably on this basis that Cicero judged the *Republic* to be, if not ironic, then of dubious practical value: he warned his orator not to quote Plato when speaking of justice and righteousness "because when [Plato] judged it necessary to work these things out in words, he fabricated (*finxit*)[42] in his books some kind of strange (*novam quandam*) 'republic', the things he considered it necessary to say about justice being just so completely abhorrent to everyday life and the customs of human

---

[40]Plato earlier had Cephalus quote and praise a Pindaric passage as pleasant, amazing, and admirable (χαριέντως. θαυμαστῶς. σφόδρα, 331a). He later has Socrates dissociate Simonides from the φίλους ὠφελεῖν definition, after it has been shown to be advantageous to the rich and powerful, and attributes it to "Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban or some other rich man who had great power in his own conceit" (336a). The purpose of this is to separate Simonides' sophistic art from the political implications drawn from it by eagerly biased interpreters; the aristocracy (or the rich and powerful) interpreted Simonides' highly ambiguous poetry in its own ideological framework and contextualized it (and him) for its own ends.

[41]"...every Platonic dialogue has two levels of reality, is a play within a play. The inner circle is the dialogue between Socrates and his companion; the outer circle the dialogue between Plato and the reader, that is, the reader's experience of the 'inner circle' dialogue, an experience formed and guided by the author. (Dialogues with frame conversations actualize the relationship between Plato and his reader and incorporate it into the dialogue itself.) To a large extent the reader remains unaware of this duality, because the two circles are kept congruent" (Lebeck 1972 pp. 288-9; cf. Thesleff and Robb above).

[42]*Fingo* translates πλάττω and gives us *fictio*, 'fiction;' surely Cicero was thinking of this.

communities" (*De Or.* 1.51.224).[43] Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, the most

serious classicists in the American Revolution (Bailyn, 23-6), considered the

Republic a satire (Cappon 437-8),[44] and even among modern scholars it has been

---

[43] Athenaeus seems to corroborate Cicero: "even supposing that this *politeia* is better than all others, if he fails to convince us of it, what good is it?" (*Deip.* 11.508b).

[44] Regarding Plato's general reputation in antiquity as a satirist, Athenaeus reports that Gorgias, upon reading Plato's Gorgias, said "What nice satire Plato knows how to write" (*iambizein*, Ath. *Deip.* 11.505d; cf. Diog. Laert. 3.35). Athenaeus also reports ancient sources on the fabricatory nature of Plato's writing as well as the inimical (*dusmenês*), malicious (*kakoêtheias*), jealous (*phthoneros*), and fame-hungry (*philodoxos*) character of his personality and his penchant for abuse (*kakologei*), reproach (*oneidizei*), stigmatization (*apokalei*), invective (*periekhei katadromên*), and mockery (*eskôpten*) toward contemporaries (11.506a-507d). The truth concerning the satirical aspects of the *Republic* is deeper and more complex than what the generic label seems to signify; there is certainly a generous portion of sardonic humor mixed into —indeed motivating— the composition, but this needs to be recognized and understood in relation to the overall recipe: the dialogue is Plato's response to Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, and it constitutes his own fantasy regarding the educations of his own brother Glaucon and the brother of Lysias, Polemarchus. The questions it poses are 'What if Glaucon the aristocrat, associated with the oligarchic movement and inclined toward politics rather than the poetry his brother Plato was dabbling with, and Polemarchus the son of Cephalus the weapons manufacturer whose business was booming under democracy and who was doomed to die with his father under the rule of the Thirty Tyrants, had been educated by Socrates regarding politics and everything that pertains to the composition of an ideal governmental constitution? How would Socrates have dealt with such experientially and ideologically different young men in terms of both doctrine (or philosophy) and psychagogy (or rhetoric), i.e. what would he have said to them and how would he have spoken? How would such an encounter have affected the lives of the three men not to mention the course of events that would be played out on the stage of the city thereafter?' There was no way for Plato to answer these questions definitively and that wasn't the point anyway: the text, at least regarding the dramatic proposition, is an imaginary journey back in time to a gathering of personalities that represents Plato's construction and projection of a pivotal point, a resonant crossroads of the vital energies operative, in the political, cultural, and spiritual trajectory of Athens near the end of the Peloponnesian War: Glaucon and Polemarchus represent the youth of the two opposing political parties, embroiled in conflict and lacking the perspective or character that could save them, and Socrates represents the almost irrelevant wisdom of the older, liberally educated and yet more practical, generation, demonstrating a dazzling and engaging harmony of authoritative poise and interactive flexibility as it reaches out and performs a ritual of initiation into the mysteries of knowledge and power (or enlightenment and responsibility). Intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, this is a much richer and subtler treatment of the kinds of issues Xenophon was dealing with in his bombastic depiction of Cyrus as the heroic personification of the Spartan military ideal. The idealism voiced by Socrates in the dialogue is framed and contrasted by the despair and bitterness that affected Plato in the years of the Spartan occupation of Athens and the post-execution Socratic diaspora. The details of Socrates' discussion of government, culture and social life in the ideal *politeia* resonate with ironic criticism of the realities of contemporary life and values as Plato saw them, and his statements about the proper pursuit of philosophy, the practice of education, and the formation of character allude to the residual idealism that prompted Plato to found the academy and launch his own cultural enterprise in competition with the Spartan propaganda of Xenophon, the irreverent excess of the popular entertainment industry (particularly comedy, which had contributed to Socrates' unpopularity), and the rhetorical school of Isocrates.

analyzed with a penetrating view to the overarching irony that informs as well as forms it.[45]

Plato's orchestration of the *Republic*'s philosophical discussion is in fact highly sarcastic, but his deadpan style betrays nothing on the literal level of his discourse (cf. Arieti). It is his own disguised sophistry that tips a knowing listener/reader off to his mischief: Simonides' "typical poetic enigma," Ἠινίξατο...ποιητικῶς, is a mirror for Plato's own professed style of indirect communication, αἰνιττόμενοι and δι' αἰνιγμῶν, and Plato cultivated it in imitation of his sophistic, enigmatic, self-protecting predecessors. Simonides himself was known for his awareness of this 'deceptive' element in poetry,[46] and Plato's concentration on (or construction of) contemporary aristocratic appropriation and approbation of Simonides' ambiguous definition of justice was framed in reference to this paradox.[47] The truly 'philosophic mind' was too 'sophisticated' to be tricked in this way, and this attitude is basic to Plato's whole intellectual project:

> Plato's two-level artistry is probably involved with the fact that, although he had a profound sense of the ambiguity of

---

[45]L. Cosgriff 1993 shows how the Socratic argument is facetiously tailored to the interests of the interlocutors and demonstrates the socio-political and -cultural domestication and exploitation of 'philosophy' rather than the philosophical purification or edification of politics and statecraft. Plato designed the literal level of the text as an illustration of the public facade of Classical Athenian intellectualism and engineered the allusive level as his own private sphere of expression: the disguised sophistic discourse in Plato's writing functions as his mode of alluding to himself through the text's public facade and laying tracks for the reader to follow toward his own implied views (for the analogy of tracking see *Sophist* 226b and *Phaedrus* 266b, 276d); cf. the traditional question about the relation between the *Republic* and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*.

[46]"...the deceptive element in [poetry] makes no impression on complete fools and idiots. That explains Simonides' answer to the man who asked why the Thessalians were the only people he did not deceive: 'They're too ignorant to be deceived by me'" (Plutarch, *How the young man should study poetry* 15c).

[47]Compare *Rep.* 6.489c, where Plato quotes an epigram traditionally attributed to Simonides and, without naming Simonides, writes "the author of that epigram was a liar." Plato's knowledge and use of Simonides was extensive and ideologically very complex; cf. the scholion to *Rep.* 1.337a.

57

things (beside a profound sense of humor), he saw a way of escape from this ambiguity, from the sophistic dilemma. He saw this in his φιλοσοφία meaning 'orientation toward' real knowledge and stable truth, rather than reaching it: φιλο-σοφία, never σοφία. Hence...his two-level artistry embodies a basic sort of distinction relevant to the understanding of his written oeuvre.

...The distinction...is not primarily one between seriousness and play! Plato's playfulness does in fact operate on both main levels, though 'upper level' play seems on the whole to be more subtle.

Two-level artistry or not, Plato's dialogues, at least before the late period, appear to have a literary and a philosophic aspect or, in other words and with slightly different implications, an exoteric and an esoteric aspect. The emphasis varies from one group of works to another, and from work to work, as it does within each work. But the difference between the two aspects is there, and does again suggest the distinction between the two ontological levels (Thesleff p. 37).

Ironic as it may seem, the *Republic*'s demonstration of φιλοσοφία consists in equal portions of imitation and interrogation of σοφία, the popular password in contemporary intellectual pretension.[48] While Plato had Socrates 'philosophically' interrogate the sophistic discourse disguised in the contemporary culture's ideology of justice, he used it in the composition of the dialogue in order to hint 'poetically' at or allude to ('Hινίξατο, αἰνιττόμενοι, δι' αἰνιγμῶν) his own criticism of that ideology. Plato's wordplay, then, operates in the sphere of enigmatic discourse that is essential to his 'sophistic' style. The next chapter will demonstrate in detail how that wordplay works in the *Republic*.

---

[48]"Plato...subjected contemporary sophistic rationalism to analysis and critique through his dramatization of Socrates' conversations" (Race 2000 p. 101).

58

CHAPTER THREE

ὁ θεὸς πλάττων

> By exploring the depths of Plato you have uprooted
> the passions that disturb reasoning
> (*Greek Anthology*, 15.39a).

> Many things may be said of Plato from which one
> may show that he trumped up (*eplatte*) his dialogues
> (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 11.506a).

The previous chapter demonstrated the depth and intensity of influence

that the primary icon of the sophistic age, namely Gorgias, had on Plato's writing

style and thought, his rhetoric and philosophy. The primary example of that

influence in regard to his thought or philosophy was the manner in which the

central question of the *Republic*, namely the definition of justice, was framed by

Plato's awareness of and interest in the enigmatic expression characteristic of

Simonides and other poetic predecessors. In this chapter I shall expose and

discuss the crystallization of Plato's interest in sophistic thought and expression

as embodied in the system of puns on his own name in the *Republic*. I seek to

articulate a vision of Plato as a radical thinker whose idea of writing generated a

new concept of self. As the basis for this discussion I use a passage from one of

the convivial vignettes in Plutarch's *Dinner Conversations* which features a

sophist's interpretation of a passage from Plato. This interpretation not only

corresponds to the traditional recognition of Plato's own sophistic tendencies but

in fact illuminates in detail the way his stylistic sensibility worked in harmony

with his ideas. The passage in question exhibits allusion to important themes by

way of puns, and the sophistic reading provides a basis and guideline for

interpreting the vast system of wordplay in the *Republic*.

59

Plutarch portrayed a sophist named Lamprias beginning his interpretation

of the *Republic's* Myth of Er with the following theoretical statement about Plato's

literary and philosophical methods:

> Plato often uses wordplay (προσπαίζειν διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων),
> but it has the most significance in passages where he
> combines myth with an argument about the soul. Thus he
> calls the intelligible nature of the heavens a "winged chariot"
> (ἅρμα), because of the harmonious (ἐναρμόνιον) revolution of
> the universe. Similarly in this passage [*Rep.* 10.614ff.] he
> names the man who reports his own experience of Hades 'Er
> the son of **Harmonius**, a Pamphylian by race,' in a riddling
> allusion (αἰνιττόμενον) to the fact that souls are birthed in
> harmony (καθ' ἁρμονίαν) and 'harmonized'
> (συναρμόττονται) to bodies, and when they're released they
> come together from everywhere into the air (ἀέρα), and from
> there they go off again to their second births (*Dinner
> Conversations*, 9.740b-c).

Plutarch's recognition and detailed explanation (via 'Lamprias') of this extensive

use of wordplay, particularly regarding its thematic relevance, demonstrates the

sophistic way of understanding and interpreting Plato's ποικιλία. It establishes

the connections between his literary style and 'philosophy,' inasmuch as the

'forms' of Plato's writing, i.e. the actual turns of phrase, words, syllables, and

letters, are sonic and visual representations of his 'ideas.' Lamprias' close reading

of the Myth of Er reveals the 'harmony' between Plato's linguistic 'forms' --e.g. **Er**

the son of **Harmonius**-- and conceptual 'ideas' --καθ' ἁρμονίαν,[1] and shows that

Plato often uses personal names with such intent. This ancient sophistic model

of reading helps illuminate the general creative mentality at work in Plato's

oeuvre and the reception afforded it by sympathetic critics.

---

[1]Harmony is an important theme in the description of the Spindle of Necessity (*Rep.* 10.616d,
617b-c), and Plato punned on this word elsewhere (*Phd.* 92c, 95a, *Lg.* 802c).

The 'noble lie' episode in the *Republic* contains an example of this aspect of

Platonic creativity and communication: this is the central place where Plato's

puns on his own name function as enigmatic allusions —αἰνίγματα— to a vast

system of ideas or messages that is not presented explicitly. A reading of the

'noble lie' episode in these terms will reveal far-reaching implications not only

for the meaning of the episode itself and the *Republic* as a dialogue but for the

meaning, in several senses, of Plato's literary art as a personal endeavor and as a

cultural and historical phenomenon. This episode showcases what Plutarch

described as Plato's practice of combining myth with an argument about the soul

and using wordplay to convey his meaning; the passage embodies, moreover,

what Dionysius of Halicarnassus called Plato's 'mystical' engagement (i.e. as a

τελέτης) with the Gorgianic figures and what Philostratus recognized as Plato's

propensity toward outplaying Gorgias at his own games (ἄμεινον γοργιάζειν).

Near the end of *Republic* 3 Socrates proposes to tell the city's rulers,

soldiers, and the rest of the city that their nurture and education

> were things that, just like dreams, they only seemed to go
> through and that seemed to happen to them; but at that time
> in reality they were down within the earth being molded
> (πλαττόμενοι, 414d) and nurtured while their weapons and
> the rest of their equipment was being crafted ....and all of you
> in the city are siblings (so we will say to them,
> mythologizing), but the god molding you (ὁ θεὸς πλάττων,
> 415a) has mixed gold in the origin of those among you who
> are competent to rule...[2]

Lamprias' sophistic manner of analysis suggests the following interpretation: in

light of his well-known penchant for punning on names, Plato used the words

---

[2]*Platonis Res Publica*, Scrip. Class. Bibl. Oxon., 3.414d-415a.

61

πλαττόμενοι and πλάττων in allusion first to his own name ὁ Πλάτων[3] and thus

his personal authorship of the dialogue and second to the act of 'imaginatively

inventing' the city's rulers, soldiers, and citizens. While Plato took his cue from

the use of πλάττειν demonstrated by several predecessors,[4] he is the first writer

cited for the figurative meanings of the verb, i.e. "*to mold and form* by education,

training' and *to form in the mind, form a notion of a thing*" (LSJ).

On the literal level of the myth the forms of πλάττειν function in their

primary sense, i.e. "*to form, mold, shape* (Lat. *fingere*) ...properly of the artist who

works in soft substances, such as earth, clay, or wax" (LSJ). The name-punning

program consists of a cluster of different 'philosophical' ideas all expressed with

some form of the verb πλάττω by way of allusion to 'Plato': e.g. the design of an

ideal city, the physical as well as psychological formation and development of its

citizens, the fabrication of a foundation myth, the education of the intellect, the

divine creation of a world, the outline of happiness in egalitarian terms, the

idealistic shaping of individual character, the mental production of an image, the

artistic producer of that image, a description of the medium (λόγος) in which that

artist works. These allusions to Plato himself as the author evoke a metaphorical

---

[3]Zaslavsky's notice that the plane-tree in *Phaedrus* (ὁ πλάτανος, 229a) is a pun on 'Plato' reinforces
common interpretation of the tree as a symbol of his literary style and pedagogy. In the same
dialogue Plato refers to the kind of imaginative thought (specifically his own) needed to
comprehend a god: "we imagine (πλάττομεν) an immortal being which has both a soul and a
body which are united for all time" (246d). Plato's compressed definition of his own literary
creativity follows the precedent of Stesichorus, who was originally named Teisias but was called
Stesichorus because he 'first set up a lyric chorus' (πρῶτος κιθαρωδίας χορὸν ἔστησεν, Suda; see
Plato's own puns on Stesichorus' names, *Phaedrus* 244a). Similar to Stesichorus are Meleager,
who puns on his own name (*Gk. Anth.* 12.165), and Theophrastus, according to Quintilian: "In
Theophrastus we find such a superhuman brilliance that his name is said to be derived
therefrom" (10.1.83; Aristotle named him as such).

[4]Sophocles, Gorgias, and Euripides used it metaphorically with language as the object: *make up,
fabricate, forge* λόγους ψιθύρους πλάσσων (Soph. *Aj.* 148); ψευδῆ λόγου πλάσαντες (Gorg. *Frag.* 11.11
D-K); τοὔνομ' ἀνὰ χρόνον πεπλασμένον (Eur. *Ion* 830).

62

sense, meaning that the mythic god's act of 'molding' (πλαττόμενοι, πλάττων) the

rulers, soldiers, and the rest of the city is a metaphor for Plato's own act of

'imaginatively inventing' (πλαττόμενοι, πλάττων) them.

Plato was not alone in thinking about and discussing statecraft and

politics in these terms: Demosthenes, when criticizing Athenian military policy

in his first *Philippic*, told the assembly "You're like the men who model the clay

puppets (ὥσπερ γὰρ οἱ πλάττοντες τοὺς πηλίνους); you choose your brigadiers and

commanders for the marketplace, not for the field" (26).[5] Some sources (e.g.

Aulus Gellius) say Demosthenes studied with Plato, and the two certainly shared

a humanistic idealism and zeal for effective linguistic expression; it is no surprise

that they should think about political theory in similarly 'graphic' terms. The

difference is that Plato employed his insight for a very different purpose: he

gave it free rein in the realm of imaginative art and shared it with a mostly

private audience of his own composition. The *Republic* is his personal, partly

satirical endeavor at the politicians' practice of 'modeling clay puppets', i.e.

---

[5]Demosthenes was pointing out the incongruity behind the use of foreign mercenaries in real warfare and the use of good-looking 'models' in domestic parades: "Just as the terra-cotta figurines were manufactured not for practical use, but for the toy-market, so the generals were elected, not to fight, but to make a brave show in the public processions" (Vince p. 82, note a). This attack on official and traditional policy, and more importantly the exposition of what could be called deception, or at least the dedicated maintenance of appearances that had little to do with the reality of war, shares the impulse that prompted Plato's allegory of the cave and the notion of the noble lie (as we call it): Plato and Demosthenes understood the mechanisms of governmental public relations and large-scale cultural 'direction' if not manipulation, and both expressed their disapproval and idealism in different ways. Demosthenes, of course, participated in the political system, but critiqued various aspects of that system from within, in order to get his points across (e.g. *Olynthiacs* 2.29-30); when making general statements about truth and justice, he seemed to voice Plato's own essential idealism. Plato avoided the official political system and set up his own educational institution where he sought to affect politics indirectly by providing the kind of education he thought politicians should have. His notions of moral virtue were formed largely in opposition to what he saw happening in politics, and if Demosthenes spent any time studying at the Academy or even breathed the air in Athens, he was influenced by Plato; he may have been exhibiting that influence in his diction here as well as when describing people who circulate rumors as λόγους πλάττοντες (*Ph.* 1.48).

63

statecraft: *politeia*.[6] In a wider sense, the allusion applies to the Phoenician Myth itself, since as "an invented version of the type of 'charter' or 'foundation' myths which give the validation of tradition to the character of a given society",[7] it is an example of what Plato has Socrates elsewhere in the *Republic* call μύθους πλασθέντας, "invented myths" (2.377b). But the allusion has even wider significance; it applies to the dialogue's entire project of 'imaginatively inventing' the city, since the same pun was used even earlier in the dialogue to characterize that project: ἐπλάττομεν τὴν πόλιν (374a6). This pun fulfills an earlier allusion to the same idea and specifies Plato himself as the poet who "composes a city from scratch in language", τῷ λόγῳ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ποιῶμεν πόλιν (2.368c).[8]

Plutarch's observation appears to be vindicated by this passage: Plato used forms of the verb πλάττω as wordplay (προσπαίζειν διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων) in

---

[6]In writing (*graphein*) the *Republic* (*politeia*), Plato was also responding to --probably satirizing-- the trend of constitution-writing among both 'philosophers' and tyrants; Demosthenes described Philip as "dictating to the Thessalians how they had to conduct public policy" (γράφει δὲ Θετταλοῖς ὃν χρὴ τρόπον πολιτεύεσθαι, *Phil.* 3.33).

[7]Gill p. 65.

[8]Literally, like a poem (see Halperin quote, p. 2 above): when Socrates first proposed the idea of creating the ideal city he used the verb ποιεῖν ("let's compose a city from scratch in language", τῷ λόγῳ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ποιῶμεν πόλιν, 368c). This suggests that Plato defined his 'philosophical' project as invention (ποίησις), which he reinforced by alluding to ποίησις in the very next sentence: "It appears as if our own needs will create it" (ποιήσει δὲ αὐτήν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡ ἡμετέρα χρεία). Socrates' ironic statement to the opposite effect intensifies this suggestion by differentiating the characters in the dialogue from their creator, its writer: "'Adeimantus, we are not poets, you and I at present, but founders of a state. And to founders it pertains to know the patterns on which poets must compose their fables and from which their poems must not be allowed to deviate; but the founders are not required themselves to compose fables" (378e-379a). Plato's indirect definition of his own composition as *poiesis* makes perfect sense in terms of his general concern with it as a cultural phenomenon. This probably motivated his sophistic redefinition of it as 'creativity': "There is more than one kind of poetry (ποίησις) in the true sense of the word -- that is to say, calling something into existence that was not there before (ἡ γάρ τοι ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ ὂν ἰόντι ὁτῳοῦν αἰτία), so that every kind of artistic creation is poetry (αἱ ὑπὸ πάσαις ταῖς τέχναις ἐργασίαι ποιήσεις εἰσί), and every creative artist is a 'poet' (οἱ τούτων δημιουργοὶ πάντες ποιηταί, *Symposium* 205b; cf. *Charmides* 163 and *Republic* II.378e-379a)." His influence on Aristotle in this vein is visible at *Poetics* 1.9-12 (cf. 9.9-10).

64

alluding (αἰνιττόμενον) not only to his own identity as the author of the dialogue (ὁ Πλάτων), but to the imaginative and inventive character of his authorship (πλάττων), and in turn to the imaginative and inventive character of the dialogue's 'philosophical' project of designing a city (ἐπλάττομεν τὴν πόλιν) with imaginary inhabitants (πλαττόμενοι) and an invented foundation myth (i.e. the myth of ὁ θεὸς πλάττων). The allusion also operates in theoretical discussions of education and philosophical life within the city: education is articulated as a process of using "fabricated myths" (μύθους πλασθέντας, 2.377b) to "mold souls" (πλάττειν τάς ψυχάς, 377c). Very shortly after presenting the myth of ὁ θεὸς πλάττων, Plato had Socrates say "our first task then, ... is to mold happiness" (τὴν εὐδαίμονα πλάττομεν, 4.420c), and Plato expressed the egalitarian ideal according to which that imaginary happiness was molded in a similar pun, having Socrates say "we were making our guardians guardians and the city as a whole as happy as possible, and...we were not modelling our ideal of happiness (τοῦτο τὸ εὔδαιμον ἐπλάττομεν, 5.466a) with reference to any one tribe" (ἔθνος). Later, Plato had Socrates say the philosopher fashioning his way of life 'molds himself' (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν, 8.500d), and when a different mode of persuasion is needed for use with an interlocutor who refuses to agree that justice is profitable, the strategy adopted is that of 'crafting' (πλάσαντες, 9.588c) in words an image that represents the unjust person's soul; such a task is said to require a "cunning artist" (δεινοῦ πλάστου, 9.588d), but it is considered possible because "language (λόγος) is something more flexible (εὐπλαστότερον) than wax."

Almost half a millenium later Plutarch, referring to the *Republic* (377e) in his own essay *On the Education of Children* , harnessed Plato's implications in a passage which is part exegesis and part imitation:

> Just as it is necessary, immediately after birth, to begin to mold (πλάττειν) the limbs of children's bodies in order that these may grow straight and without deformity, so, in the same fashion, it is fitting from the beginning to regulate the characters of children, since youth is flexible (εὔπλαστον) and soft, and while such minds are still tender, lessons are infused deeply into them; but anything which has become hard is difficult to soften. Because just as seals leave their impression in soft wax, so are lessons impressed upon the minds of children while they are young. And, as it seems to me, divine Plato (Πλάτων ὁ δαιμόνιος) quite properly advises nurses, even in telling stories to children, not to choose at random, lest by chance their minds be filled (ἀναπίμπλασθαι) at the outset with foolishness and corruption (3e-f).

In addition to explaining the theory behind Plato's concept of education as molding souls, Plutarch imitated the style of Plato's own writing by reproducing the wordplay (πλάττειν... εὔπλαστον... Πλάτων... ἀναπίμπλασθαι) and making the allusion to divinity explicit (δαιμόνιος). While the given examples from the *Republic* do not even remotely sum up the extensive, systematically allusive, and variegated wordplay on his name, they demonstrate the fact that in composing this dialogue Plato was deeply and persistently concerned with inscribing the text with numerous indirect references to himself as a kind of personal signature or seal (σφραγίς) of ownership and authorship[9] without ever announcing his name explicitly.

The punning is a form of persistent indirect communication, and while its primary function appears to be the repeated reminder that the *Republic* is a work of literary 'fiction' (πλάττω =*fingere, fictio*), i.e. it is not to be considered a report

66

of any real conversation that Socrates may have had or even ideas that he may have expressed, still the relentless repetition conveys a more immediate, amorphous message, which amounts simply to the insistent suggestion —not overt proclamation— of Plato's own name. This secondary effect produces a high level of tension between the 'philosophical content' or conversational plot of the dialogue and its rhetorical form: there is a connection made in the reader's and/or listener's mind between almost every one of the most important aspects of the dialogue —from its most abstract overarching project to its various idiosyncratic ideas— and their author's name, which distracts the reader from the otherwise *in vacuo* experience of receiving the text literally. All these different aspects of the *Republic* converge in the unexpressed idea of the word πλάττω (this form is never used), with the intended result that the various operations lose their differentiation from each other and are subsumed under the name, image, being, and idea of Plato the author outside the text.[10]

---

[9] On this concept in poetry see Cerri 1991.

[10] In book 10 Socrates states a general principle of intellectual inquiry that is paradigmatic for what Plato does with the forms of the word πλάττω in the text: "An image (εἶδος), I guess, a certain single one in each case, is what we usually set up (τίθεσθαι) regarding many individual instances to which we are giving the same name" (10.596). An understanding of how the text facilitates contact with the author's essence will demand further interpretation in terms of Svenbro's anthropology of reading in ancient Greece: "From the Greeks' point of view, [reading] is the act in which the reader's vocal apparatus is controlled not by his own *psukhé* (except in an intermediary fashion) but by the written inscription that he sees before him, so as to produce a particular sequence of sounds that will be intelligible to the ear. To be read is to take control of somebody else's vocal apparatus, to exercise power over the body of the reader, even from a distance, possibly a great distance both in space and in time. **The writer who is successful in getting himself read makes use of the internal organs of someone else, even from beyond the grave, making him serve him as an** *órganon émpsukhon* **or an** *instrumentum vocale,* **so as to broadcast his own name and his own words.** The reader is, as it were, teleprogrammed: his breath is programmed when he makes the mute *grámmata* sound forth. He puts his vocal apparatus into action as he is programmed to do by the writer. He is the servant of the writing just as Plato's magistrates are 'the slaves of the law'" (p. 142); the reading aloud of a name in a funerary inscription constitutes the 'possession' of the reader by the spirit of the deceased who returns to life by animating the reader's voice (pp. 8-43). The puns on Plato's name, then, playfully imitate this cultural conception of the function of writing by surreptitiously forcing the reader to utter the name of Plato in various forms.

67

Plato's name-punning program in the *Republic* and its function in the dialogue's overall design dictate a conception of the work as a whole that has yet to be articulated in scholarship, and the prevalent understanding, particularly of the context in which the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων appears, represents a primary obstacle. The episode containing the idea of the 'Noble Lie', as labeled in Jowett's 19th-century translation, deserves some reappraisal specifically in terms of Plato's rhetoric and literary craftsmanship. Traditional translation of and commentary on the 'noble lie' passage is fraught with confusion and disagreement,[11] and this turmoil serves to obscure the subtlety of Plato's rhetoric and characterization. The passage reads

> Τίς ἂν οὖν ἡμῖν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, μηχανὴ γένοιτο τῶν ψευδῶν τῶν ἐν
> δέοντι γιγνομένων, ὧν δὴ νῦν ἐλέγομεν, γενναῖόν τι ἓν
> ψευδομένους πεῖσαι μάλιστα μὲν καὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἄρχοντας, εἰ δὲ
> μή, τὴν ἄλλην πόλιν;
> How, then, said I, might we contrive one of those opportune
> falsehoods of which we were just now speaking, so as by one
> noble lie to persuade if possible the rulers themselves, but
> failing that the rest of the city? (Jowett)

The subtleties of tone in this passage have been generally underestimated, especially the irony in the word 'noble' which, as Paul Shorey noted, "is

---

[11]Several scholars have recognized that Benjamin Jowett's translation of the phrase γενναῖόν τι ἓν ψευδομένους (*Rep.* 3.414c) as "just one noble lie" —in 1894, which Shorey followed 35 years later; their lasting influence is visible in Waterfield 1993 p. 118-- creates misleading implications about Plato's moral attitude toward and conceptual definition of falsehood. Cornford, for example, translated the phrase "a single bold flight of invention" and defended it as follows: "This phrase is commonly rendered by 'noble lie,' a self-contradictory expression no more applicable to Plato's harmless allegory than to a New Testament parable or the Pilgrim's Progress, and liable to suggest that he would countenance the lies, for the most part ignoble, now called propaganda" (Cornford p. 103). Lindsay-Bambrough found Cornford "intolerably contentious" and wrote "Most modern philosophers and commentators condemn Plato's use of false propaganda, but on the other side one may quote C.D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, p. 511: 'I wholly agree with Plato in thinking that human society requires to be founded on certain "myths" which are not self-evident and cannot be proved; and that the State is within its rights in forbidding all public discussion of the truth of these "myths"'" (Lindsay p. 332).

frequently the tone of γενναῖος in Plato."[12] Plato's irony is informed by the

recognition of the ideological pose operative in aristocratic thought and

discourse, which Aristotle articulated:

> ...our nobles (εὐγενὲς) think they are such not only in their own country but everywhere, while they think barbarians are only noble in their own country -- which implies that there are two kinds of nobility and of freedom, one absolute and the other relative, as Helen says in Theodectes: "But who would dare to call me menial, / the offspring of a doubly-divine stock?" Yet in so speaking they make nothing but virtue and vice the distinction between slave and free, the noble and the base-born, since they assume that just as a human springs from humans and a beast from beasts, so also from good parents comes a good son; but as a matter of fact nature, while intending to do this, is frequently unable to make it happen (*Politics* 1.1255a34-b).

Plato's use of γενναῖον in the 'noble lie' passage complements the non-partisan (if

not egalitarian) --i.e. anti-aristocratic *and* anti-democratic-- frame in which he

represented Socrates and co. enacting the imaginative construction of a city: "we

were not modelling our ideal of happiness (τοῦτο τὸ εὔδαιμον επλάττομεν, 5.466a)

with reference to any one tribe" (ἔθνος). Plato's ironies and ideals were formed in

observation of the class struggle that gripped his contemporary world, and his

use of γενναῖον here is a typically ironic reference to the dubitable aristocratic

eth(n)os of 'nobility', which really amounts to the self-justification and

---

[12]Shorey's note to 6.488c cross-references multiple other "ironical" instances of this word --*Polit.* 297e, *Rep.* 454a, 363a, 544c, 348c, *Hipp. Min.* 370d, *Soph.* 231b, *Hipp. Maj.* 290e, *Polit.* 274e (*ibid.*, Republic II, p. 20); to his list I add *Phdr.* 227c-- and several of the *Republic* instances are noted individually as such; I find it highly 'ironic' that Shorey so assiduously noted Plato's frequent "ironical" use of γενναῖος --sometimes with polemic (e.g. on 4.440d, Rep. I pp. 402-3, note c)-- yet totally glossed it in this episode. A brief glance at the notes to Shorey's Loeb translation will reveal the eclectic range of contexts he invoked for his interpretations (e.g. Elizabethan and Romantic poetry, Enlightenment political philosophy), but the presence of numerous references to various aspects of Christianity are especially striking and problematic.

69

glorification of calculated breeding ('eugenics') accomplished with money and power.

This aspect of the irony is, however, only half the picture. The other important point is that the phrase γενναῖόν τι ἓν ψευδομένους, "concocting one noble lie," has an effect that translators and commentators have generally ignored: it is a particularly elegant instance of Plato's artistic ability to render subtle irony and character portrayal in phraseology. Plato sculpted this phrase with a particular dramatic effect in mind, namely to express with sound as well as word order the hesitation with which Glaucon shortly accuses Socrates: "It seems as if you're hesitating to tell the story" (Ὡς ἔοικας... ὀκνοῦντι λέγειν, 414c). Socrates not only doesn't deny this charge but he amplifies it: "You'll think it's pretty 'seemly' that I hesitate when I finally narrate it" (Δόξω δέ σοι...καὶ μάλ' εἰκότως ὀκνεῖν, ἐπειδὰν εἴπω).[13] Plato thus prepared his readers for the bizarre content and style[14] --namely the punning and mythological implications-- of the "Phoenician thing" (Φοινικικόν τι, 414c) which is later understood to be a story (μύθου... μυθολογοῦντες, 415a2-3): it is sculpted to initiate the wily Socrates' expression of hesitation by means of its awkward phrasing, spondaic rhythm, and emphatic hiatus in τι ἓν.

---

[13] I quote Shorey's note to this phrase as a sign of the times in which he wrote and in substantiation of my earlier invectives: "καὶ μάλ' here as often adds a touch of humorous colloquial emphasis, which our conception of the dignity of Plato does not allow a translator to reproduce." This omnipresent misconception of 'the dignity of Plato' still hampers our enjoyment of Plato's rhetorical flamboyance and Aristophanean irony and seemingly 'improper' --in fact anti-aristocratic-- interest in and direct articulation of the presence and function (if not value) of deliberate falsehood in human society, politics and culture. Plato's development of this theme is detailed and poignant to his commentary on imperial statecraft as well as his composition and presentation of the Phoenician myth.

[14] cf. the *Second Letter*'s general description of Plato's teachings as "absurd to most people" (πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς καταγελαστότερα, *Epis.* 2.314a).

70

Plato sealed up this little drama by having Glaucon say, after Socrates has

begun the story, "you were right to be ashamed about telling that lie" (414e).

Socrates' hesitation, and particularly his warning about the bizarre content and

style of the incipient myth —"You'll think it's pretty 'seemly' that I hesitate when I

finally narrate it"— and Glaucon's affirmation of that strange quality (414e), is

designed to prepare Plato's reader/audience for the fact that the outstanding

feature of the invented myth is the concentrated wordplay on the author's own

name, and that the 'Phoenician thing' includes Plato's own myth of himself as ὁ

θεὸς Πλάτ(τ)ων, the divine creator of the cosmic work of philosophic/literary art,

the *Republic*.[15] He alludes back to this idea in book 10 when Socrates speaks of

the hypothetical arch-craftsman, a metaphor for the writer,[16] who "fixes his eyes

on an image...and makes (ποιεῖ)" the things we use:

> Now consider what you call this craftsman.
> Which?
> Who makes (ποιεῖ) everything, as much as each one of the
>   handcraftsmen.
> Some amazingly cunning person (δεινόν... θαυμαστὸν)
>   you're talking about.
> Oh yes, and you'll say even more so: because this same
>   handcraftsman is not only capable of making all
>   implements (σκεύη ποιῆσαι), but he makes everything
>   growing out of the earth (τὰ ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυόμενα ἅπ αυτα
>   ποιεῖ) and works out all animals, including himself,

---

[15] "The dialogue is a cosmos and the cosmos a dialogue", goes the famous comment, and the
Republic seems to have been composed on the mosaic-like model of an elliptical cosmos, with ὁ
θεὸς πλάττων situated slightly off-center (book 3) and the objects of his creation —signified by the
various, numerous forms of his epithet πλάττων— orbiting, like stars in the sky (ποικίλματα!,
7.529c), at various distances and in various states of consubstantiality and similarity, around him.
This overall design harnesses the 'mystical' (τελέτης) quality of Plato's 'hyper–Gorgianic' (ἄμεινον
γοργιάζειν) writing style, his ποικιλία: the 'decorative' puns on his own name, ὁ θεὸς πλάττων, are
connected on the level of their implications, and these connected implications, accessible only by
means of the proper interpretive divination, represent the 'mysteries' of his own personal
religious cult.

[16] For Aristophanean "metaphors from carpentry and metal-working ...to describe the processes
of literary composition" see Denniston.

and in addition to these earth and sky and the Gods
and everything in the sky and in the house of Hades
under the earth.
You're talking about an amazing technician (θαυμαστόν
σοφιστήν, 10.596b-d).

The phrase θαυμαστόν σοφιστήν (which subtly echoes δεινόν...θαυμαστὸν),[17]

clearly has overtones of sophistry, and this passage recasts ὁ θεὸς πλάττων as "an

amazing (sophistic) technician" by reusing details from book 3's punning

allusions to Plato's own literary energies. The emphasis on craftsmanship in this

passage (cf. δημιουργὸς, δημιουργεῖ, δημιουργῶν, δημιουργόν 596b) links the phrase

σκεύη ποιῆσαι back to the Phoenician myth's phrase σκευὴ δημιουργουμένη

(3.414e), and the claim that the arch-craftsman "makes everything growing out of

the earth" (τὰ ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυόμενα ἅπαντα ποιεῖ) brings out the subtler detail that

the fabricated foundation myth is actually a creation or genesis myth (γενέσει,

415a). The striking repeated reference to chthonic generation (γῆς, 414d; γῆ,

γηγενῶν, 414e; γηγενεῖς, 415d!), combined with numerous unmistakable sonic

echoes (ξυγγενεῖς, γεννῷτε, 415a; γεννηθείη, ἔκγονον, ἐκγόνους, ἔκγονος, γένηται,

415b) is the clue to the otherwise puzzling fact that the lie is characterized as

being told "nobly, in a certain sense" (γενναῖόν τι, 414c): the word γενναῖόν is

used ironically in punning allusion to the idea of 'genesis' that surrounds it in

words like γένοιτο, γιγνομένων (414b), γεγονός, γεγονός, γενόμενον (414c).

---

[17]This refers back to the pun δεινοῦ πλάστου (9.588d; p. 38 above) as well. The word δεινός was
closely associated with 'sophistry': see again the pun on Gorgias' name (*Symp.* 198c, note 52
above); in the same dialogue Plato called Eros a δεινὸς... σοφιστής (203d). The ancient Greek
critical bibliography on δεινότης in speech is immense. It is important in the poetic tradition since
Homer (*Od.* 8.409; 21.169), but gets presented as a dangerous political-oratorical phenomenon in
Sophocles' *Oedipus* (e.g. 806-7) and Euripides' *Bacchae* (*passim*); cf. Aristophanes' joke in *Clouds*
about Zeus being replaced by "vortex" (δῖνος, a pun on δεινὸς, 379; the joke refers to the growing
political power of 'sophists' in many aspects of Athenian culture, including litigation, education,
and politics). Plato centralized and appropriated it in *Phaedrus* (calling Lysias "the cleverest
writer alive," δεινότατος ὢν τῶν νῦν γράφειν, 228a1), and Demetrius devoted a full section of *On
Style* to it (240-304).

72

'Genesis', then, is another sense in which Plato had Socrates call his myth 'γενναῖου'. The punning allusion to procreation invokes his notion of literary creativity as a procreative power, which he recorded in his muted praise of "Homer and Hesiod and all the other good poets, ...and the fine 'offspring' (ἔκγονα) they leave behind... [and] the 'children' (παῖδας) of Lycurgus... [and] Solon's 'procreation' (γέννησιν) of laws" (*Symp.* 209d) as well as his suggestion that, while most literature deserves little attention, being 'clear, complete, and worthy of seriousness' pertain only to those teachings that are taught and spoken for the sake of learning and in fact written in the soul regarding justice, beauty, and honor. These kinds of discourses should be spoken of as the author's procreative sons (υἱεῖς γνησίους, *Phdr.* 278a). The γενναῖου pun and the extended metaphor based on it show the "wonder of a sophist" (θαυμαστόν σοφιστήν) at work, and the extent to which its thematic relevance and coherence are visibly and carefully worked out in the repetitions of and variations on the syllable *gen* - demonstrates how Plato earned his reputation as a 'mystical' (τελέτης) 'hyper-Gorgianizer' (ἄμεινον γοργιάζειν) among later rhetoricians. The proliferation of γίγνομαι-variations and -puns functions as a microcosm of the dialogue as a whole: metatextually, the 'gen(n)esis' myth, featuring the creator ὁ θεὸς Πλάτ(τ)ων, images the dialogue's vital core, its center of being and becoming, where the truth and falsehood of *logos* --which "signifies everything and makes it circulate and move around and is twofold (διπλοῦς), true and false" (Cratylus 408c)-- mix in an almost chaotic state. The saturation of γίγνομαι-forms embodies the fecundity and abundance of Plato's intellectual energy and literary talent; this mimics the abundant variety of πλάττω puns that populate the rest of the

dialogue and refer back to the creator god. The passage thus enacts in form what the semantics describe, namely the primordial generation of a race —of readers and students— at the hands of a divine molder of clay or wax, and the metaphorical meaning of πλάττω applies here as well: it is Plato's imagination (πλάττειν) that is the creative force at work, and the literary work in question is the product of that force. Its readers are the people molded or sculpted (*plattomenoi*) to be inhabitants of the city.

The highly poetic composition of the "Phoenician thing" clearly militates against the traditional approach to Plato's writing as largely transparent, an empty representation of what scholars have hastily assumed to be his 'ideas'. Platonic language suggests many things that it does not 'say,' and this highly suggestive quality is what he learned not only from Gorgias and the sophists but from the whole preceding tradition of Greek literature, including Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides (the few exemplars named in the *Protagoras*), in which sophistry was disguised for the sake of protection. The rhetoric of 'sophistry' is of first and foremost communicative importance in Plato's literary style, and his extensive 'analytical' treatments of it in dialogues like *Gorgias*, *Sophist*, and *Euthydemus* need detailed philological analysis that is based on an understanding of his wildly suggestive diction, playful self-representation, and profoundly ironic cultural criticism.[18] This will demand a redefinition of his 'philosophical' interests, and this redefinition begins with the phrase θαυμαστόν σοφιστήν which, while literally meaning "an amazing sophist," suggests Plato's self-definition as

---

[18]The near impossibility of differentiating between a 'real philosopher' and a 'sophist' is spelled out at the beginning of the *Sophist* (216c-d), and Plato's ironic investment in this debate is

74

"a sophist with a sense of amazement."

A sense of amazement (or traditionally 'wonder') was the primary element in *philosophia*, "the love of wisdom," and Plato expressed this idea with a punning allusion to Hesiod in the *Theaetetus*: when Theaetetus exclaims "By the gods, Socrates, my sense of amazement is overgrown (ὑπερφυῶς ὡς θαυμάζω) in all these things, and sometimes, in truth, looking at them, I'm spinning in darkness" (σκοτοδινιῶ), Socrates replies

> Well, my friend, Theodorus seems to be a pretty good guesser
> about your nature (φυσέως), because this is the feeling of a
> philosopher, namely amazement (τὸ θαυμάζειν), since there's no
> other beginning of philosophy than this. And it seems that
> whoever said Iris was the offspring of **Thaumas** made a pretty
> good genealogy (155d).

Hesiod called Iris, the messenger of the gods and communicator between two worlds, the offspring of Thaumas (*Theog*. 780),[19] and Plato structured the θαυμάζειν/Thaumas pun on this basis. This pun links the 'divine' quality of Theaetetus' experience —expressed in the oath "by the gods"--[20] with the authoritative weight Hesiod's divine genealogies wield in the Greek literary tradition and popular culture. It is an allegorical interpretation of Hesiod that substantiates Plato's vision of the early poets as sophists in disguise,[21] and it

---

expressed therein with the hilarious pun on his own name in the reference to "those who aren't fake but real philosophers" (οἱ μὴ πλαστῶς ἀλλ' ὄντως φιλόσοφοι).

[19]"Iris is the messenger of heaven, and Plato interprets the name of her father as 'Amazement' (θαῦμα)" (Fowler p. 55).

[20]The joke about Theaetetus' nature, enshrined in the ὑπερφυῶς-φυσέως echo, depends on the significance of his name: it is 'natural' that Theaetetus experience philosophic amazement, which comes from the gods, because his name is The-aetetus, 'the god-seeker.' Likewise Theo-dorus, 'the gift of god,' is a good guesser at The-aetetus' nature. Later in the dialogue Plato substantiated this on the literal level by introducing the exhortation toward godliness, ὁμοίωσις θεῷ (discussed below).

75

illustrates not only his sophistic approach to 'philosophy' but the configuration of

sophistry, 'philosophy', and divinity that informs his mythological representation

of himself as ὁ θεὸς πλάττων: sophistic wordplay is the human link between the

divine sense of wonder and the divine power of creativity.

Traditional post-Enlightenment interpretation of the 'noble lie' passage

(γενναῖόν τι ἓν ψευδομένους) has slightly scandalized the element of deception in

Platonic writing, but the power of creativity that Plato claims as ὁ θεὸς πλάττων

flaunts the connotations of falsehood in the 'Phoenician myth.' Plato alludes to

the proverbial ψεῦσμα Φοινικικόν (Strabo 259b) as the model according to which

he composed and presented his own "invented version of the...'charter' or

'foundation' myth" (see note 7 above) for his imaginary *politeia*, his "city in

words." The word Φοινικικόν provides the conceptual framework for the idea of

falsehood and its socio-political function in culture. For Plato the generic

Phoenician myth exemplified the way in which falsehood could be —and, in his

view, generally was— employed successfully in a cultural and political agenda:

in reference to the "unbelievable" legend of Cadmus he wrote elsewhere that "the

example is striking proof for a lawgiver that the youthful mind will be

persuaded of anything, if one will take the trouble to persuade it" (*Laws* 2.663e-

664a).[22] The persuasion of the youthful mind by means of "fabricated myths,"

---

[21]see chapter 1, p. 9, note 2; for a similarly inventive appropriation of Homer see *Symp.* 179a-b, whose line about 'some god breathing strength into heroes' —ὁ ἔφη Ὅμηρος, μένος ἐμπνεῦσαι [cf. Il. 10.482, 15.262] ἐνίοις τῶν ἡρώων τὸν θεόν— is explained as the power of Eros: τοῦτο ὁ Ἔρως τοῖς ἐρῶσι παρέχει γιγνόμενον παρ' αὐτοῦ. This relies for its logic on the specious etymology of 'hero' presented in the *Cratylus* (398c-e).

[22]This is the critical mentality Aristophanes had exhibited and exploited for rich comic effect in the *Birds* when Peisthetairus tells the outrageous story of the lark who, born before the earth existed, resorted to burying her father in her own head (471-5). As this episode progresses, A. subtly inverts the world-view served by Greek mythology, so that the birds end up ruling over the gods and being addressed as 'god', 'life', 'Chronos', and 'Earth' (586-7); cf 693-736. This

76

μύθους πλασθέντας,[23] functions as the foundation of education in book 3 of the *Republic*, and Plato's several puns on his own name in that context establish the conceptual and ideological register in which his own fabricated "Phoenician myth" operates. This register is the self-consciousness of creativity and the question of its practical function in a 'real' social world.

The question of the Phoenician myth's believability arises immediately after it is delivered in the *Republic*: Socrates asks Glaucon, "Do you have any scheme for getting this myth believed (μῦθον ὅπως ἂν πεισθεῖεν)?" "No, not [by] these themselves, but their sons and the rest of the people after them, yes" (415c-d). The actual strategy is never articulated, and the manner in which it is alluded to and then dismissed adds to the mysterious quality of the whole episode: Socrates simply says "I almost somehow understand what you're saying, and this will go wherever popular speech takes it" (ἡ φήμη ἀγάγῃ). This implies that simple repetition, as suggested in the *Laws* passage discussing the Cadmus legend, is the proper method: "Plato repeats the thought that since the mass of men can be brought to believe anything by repetition, myths framed for edification are a useful instrument of education and government. *Cf. Laws* 663e-664a" (Shorey vol. 1, p. 307). The text of Plato's πολιτεία embodies his concept of an artificial society, founded primarily on literary invention.

There is reason to infer from this kind of writing that Plato celebrates the

---

playful and pointed reversal of the traditional story of Athena's birth from Zeus' head represents typical Aristophanean playfulness, but to some critics (like the hypercritical Plato), it may have suggested instructive ridicule of the imperial ideology dominating Athenian politics and culture. Plato, in designing and developing Socrates' discussion of political mythology, may have been picking up where Aristophanes had left off while turning the comic impulse to a more complex effect.

[23]cf. the irony at *Tim.* 26e.

ambiguity inherent in the technology of literacy and literary communication[24]

qua language itself: again, the epistolary reference to "the weakness inherent in

language," τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές (*Epistles* 7.342e), corresponds to the Cratylan

proclamation that "ὁ λόγος signifies everything (τὸ **πᾶν** σημαίνει) and makes it

circulate and move around and is twofold (διπλοῦς), true and false." Plato seems

to have taken this principle as the foundation for his literary endeavors in order

to explore "the impossibilities and possibilities in his art" (τά τε ἀδύνατα ἐν τῇ

τέχνῃ καὶ τὰ δυνατά, *Rep.* 360e-361a).[25] This exploration centers on the question of

his artistic effect on the reader/ audience in the spirit of Gorgias' observation

about the power of *logos*:

> The power of *logos* has the same effect on the disposition of the soul as
> the disposition of drugs on the nature of bodies. Just as different drugs
> draw forth different humors from the body --some putting a stop to
> disease, others to life-- so too with words: some cause pain, others joy,
> some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and
> bewitch the soul with evil persuasion (D-K 11.8).

Plato's use of this power is generative and self-reproductive in the Aristotelian

sense:[26] the race of humans being 'molded' by him (πλαττόμενοι) on the literal

level of the Phoenician myth is indeed to be viewed as a horde of little clay 'Plato

people', and this 'race' is, metaphorically, 'imagined' (πλαττόμενοι) as a horde of

---

[24]On Plato's much-commented-on personal engagement with the cultural phenomenon of
writing, see Havelock, Derrida, Ong, and especially Burger 1980. Most of what drove Plato and
Aristotle to attack popular (mis)conceptions of literary art was the fact that they practiced it --
with seemingly unprecedented and highly self-conscious relish: Plato called Aristotle ὁ
Ἀναγνώστης, "the Reader" (Riginos p. 132), and he himself spent extravagant amounts of money
on books (Aulus Gellius, 17.3)-- as subversives in a volatile socio-economic, -political, and -
cultural atmosphere (see Fortunoff 1993), where "the fact that an individual...was always seen
with a book marked him out...as a member of the 'reading set'" (Denniston 1927, p. 118).

[25]cf. 375d, 394eff., 458a, 471e and Quintilian 3.8.25 and 4.5.17.

[26] "The most natural act of any living thing ... is to beget another like itself.., in order that, as far its
nature permits, it may participate in what is eternal and divine. That is the goal to which all

78

Platonic readers who 'consume' his writings. The word 'Phoenician' assimilates

the Cadmus myth's chthonic imagery by means of his own emphasis on chthonic

generation (γῆς, 414d; γῆ, γηγενῶν, 414e; γηγενεῖς, 415d),[27] and this means of

mythologizing himself as a creator-god of literature is rooted in the spirit of the

age: Atomistic philosophers had already endeavored to

> explain the combinations of *stoikheîa* ['elements'] in the physical
> world with the aid of an alphabetical model, in which words are
> formed from various combinations of the twenty-four stoikheîa
> of writing. *Stoikheîa* means both 'elements' and 'alphabetical
> signs' [cf. Lucretius De rerum natura I.823-829]. Leucippus
> remarks, 'One writes tragedy and comedy using the same
> letters' [cf. Plato, Symposium 223d and Republic 395a].
> Similarly, in the physical world, the same elements are
> combined and recombined so as to change things. The word
> 'ontography' has, justifiably enough, been used in connection
> with the Atomists. Indeed, Democritus is the author of a
> treatise on 'physics' titled Kosmographie.[28]

Plato himself has been recognized as a pioneer in this visionary movement:

> Plato's move of using the Greek word for a letter of the
> alphabet, στοιχεῖον, first as a metaphor (τὰ πρῶτα οἰουπερεὶ
> στοιχεῖα, *Theaetetus* 201e) and then as a regular word both for
> the elements of the material universe and for the letters as
> elements of speech...had for ancient readers a magical resonance
> we can only recapture by historical thinking. It makes the
> writer that arranges and combines these elements into coherent

---

things direct their activities, that for the sake of which they do whatever their natures makes possible" *(On the Soul* 2.4.416a26-415b3).

[27]Plato may also be alluding here to the Phoenician origin of the alphabet as a comment on the anti-conventional nature of creative writing, particularly philosophical writing, in Greek society: "The Greeks were clear that their own system in fact derived from Phoenicia: the old word for letters was 'Phoenician objects' *(phoinikeia)*, and an inscription from Crete has produced also a verb *poinikazein* 'to write', and a title *poinikastas* for a hereditary scribe. Herodotus indeed tells how the Phoenicians under Kadmos settled in Thebes, and 'introduced skills into Greece, in particular writing, which I believe did not exist before among the Greeks' (5.58ff) (O. Murray p. 93)." On further Greek interest in the Phoenician origin of the alphabet see also Philostratus, *Love Letters* 8 [40]. For more detailed treatment of Herodotus' somewhat Democritean approach to language usage, see Chamberlain pp. 266-7.

[28] Svenbro 1993 pp. 175-6.

speech a godlike figure, an analogue of the Demiurge (Armstrong 1995 p. 211).

The grounding reality of the allegory in Plato's act of mythologizing himself as ὁ θεὸς πλάττων is the fundamental material referent of the wax-molding image (πλάττων) itself, namely the wax tablet. While tablets were not his medium of publication, the famous story of his multiple rearrangements of the first lines of the *Republic* found on wax tablets after his death provides a vivid and stirring testimony to the manner in which the material substances, the tools he worked with and the physical experience of writing, shaped his imagination and thought:

> Even at the age of eighty, [he] never let off combing and curling his dialogues and re-plaiting them in every way. Of course, every scholar is familiar with the stories told about Plato's industry (φιλοπονίας), especially the one about the writing-tablet which they say was found after his death, with the opening words of the *Republic* arranged in various orders (Di. Hal., *On Literary Composition* 25).

Plato's use of wax tablets for drafting --Cicero thought he died 'pen in hand' (*scribens ille mortuus*)-- figured immediately into his contemplation of his art, himself as an artist, and the relation between life and art in general. Just as the distinction between 'life' and 'art' was in question among his contemporaries, -- Menander wondered if Euripides imitated life or vice-versa-- so for Plato, an aggressively liminal figure himself (i.e. both poet and philosopher, artist and intellectual critic) with extremely fine-tuned sensibilities wherever he applied them, Plato saw the conventional distinctions between various artistic genres (see again the reference to Socrates, at the end of the *Symposium*, arguing that the same poet could write tragedy and comedy), including the respective activities involved in them, as questionable if not specious. His interest in comparing the

80

various arts or skills (*technai*, as in Gorgias) ultimately serves to underline their similarities, and this kind of analogical analysis was surely at work in any of Plato's attempts to define his own artform. This aspect of his literature has been examined in detail by scholars,[29] but his extensive use of the πλάττων pun, with its inherent double-entendre, invites consideration of his materials and technique in the same vein.

The practice of 'writing' was, for Plato, literally a process of carving letters in wax, i.e. applying pressure with a metallic knife to the wax on a slab of wood, and at the elemental level this act could be described as scratching, molding, shaping, and fashioning simultaneously. Given the fact that Plato 'stretched' the meaning of *plattein* beyond the reference to tactile molding in order to make it refer to the intangible exercise of imagination, we must infer that Plato considered various other innovative meanings and contexts for this word. In this sense the word πλάττων is not entirely metaphorical when used of writing: πλάττειν in both senses, namely shaping wax (with a stylus) and exercising the imagination, was the primary activity in the life of ὁ Πλάτων, such that he should 'writely' have dubbed himself Πλάττων. This vision of himself was clear even by the time he wrote the *Apology*, where his depiction of Socrates referring to himself as "crafting speeches (πλάττοντι λόγους) like an adolescent" (17d) could easily refer to Plato's own activity of imaginative writing. But by the time he wrote *Laws* he was joking therein about πλάττειν τῷ λόγῳ τοὺς νόμους (4.712b), and referring back to the *Republic* as his personal exercise in σχεδὸν οἷον ὀνείρατα λέγων, ἦ πλάττων καθάπερ ἐκ κηροῦ τινα πόλιν καὶ πολίτας (5.746a: "speaking almost dreamlike things, or fabricating, exactly like from wax, some city and

---

[29] See Nightingale 1995, <u>Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy</u>.

81

citizens")![30] Athenaeus wrote that "Plato did not write his laws for actually

existent men, but for those who are conceived in his imagination"

(διαπλαττομένοις, *Deipnosophistae* 11.508b), and this observation, imitating Plato's

own punning, helps illuminate the playful, allusive attitude that pervades his

thinking and writing: Πειρώμεθα προσαρμόττοντες τῇ πόλει σοι, **καθάπερ παῖδες**

πρεσβῦται, πλάττειν τῷ λόγῳ τοὺς νόμους...Θεὸν δὴ πρὸς τὴν τῆς πόλεως

κατασκευὴν ἐπικαλώμεθα (712b).[31]

Wax also played an important role in Plato's conception, formulation, and

solution of abstract 'philosophical' problems (*Theaet.* 191c8-193d2), and in more

profound territory it is predictable that he compared the psyche to a book (ἡ

ψυχὴ βιβλίῳ τινὶ προσεοικέναι, *Philebus* 38e):

> Memory unites with the senses, and they and the feelings
> which are connected with them seem to me almost to write
> words in our souls; and when the feeling in question writes
> the truth, true opinions and true statements are produced in
> us; but when the writer (γραμματεὺς) within us writes
> falsehoods, the resulting opinions and statements are
> opposite of true (39a).

This passage embodies the mystical aspects of Plato's thought and writing: he

was attempting to subordinate the technology of writing, with all its historical

and cultural consequences and implications, to an emotional sensibility and

---

[30]This suggests a common aspect of Plato's project in both the *Laws* and the *Republic*: they elaborate on Aristophanes' parodic treatment of political legislation (*Birds* 1035ff, 1661ff) and religious liturgy (*Thesmophoriazusae* 295). Most of Plato is deadpan sociopolitical satire: when, immediately following the καθάπερ παῖδες πρεσβῦται, **πλάττειν** τῷ λόγῳ τοὺς νόμους joke, the Athenian asks his interlocutors what kind of constitution they want, they're puzzled by the question and say "Surely you're not thinking of an autocracy" (!); cf. 7.789e ("Shall we risk ridicule and lay down a law that the pregnant woman shall walk, and that the child, while still soft, shall be molded like wax [πλάττειν τε οἷον κήρινου], and be kept in swaddling clothes till it is two years old?").

[31]Other such puns abound: *Phdo.* 82d, *Crat.* 414d, 415d, *Soph.* 235e, *Phdr.* 246d, *Charm.* 175d, *Gorg.* 483e, *Tim.* 42d, 50a, 92b, *Laws* 671c, 889a, 903e, *Epin.* 981b-c, 984b-c.

82

conceptual, ideological, and ethical framework that was sensitive, responsive, and loyal to a much wider range of individual experience than he saw being addressed anywhere in the cultures of commerce (the world of the 'moneymakers', as he referred to the democratic nouveau-riche), political bureaucracy (the world of the lawyers/orators and legislators), and popular entertainment (the world of the 'poets' and performers [i.e. rhapsodists, actors, etc.]), the three primary realms where writing was being used in his contemporary society.

The use of the image and idea of a book for purposes of understanding the soul would have seemed bizarre even to his more radical contemporaries, and while Plato was already pioneering a revolutionary concept of the individual psyche[32] and searching out an ideology of therapy and nurture for it,[33] his use of writing as a metaphor for the manner in which memory, the senses, and the

---

[32]"...the *psukhê* was transformed by Plato from being the phantom and double of the deceased into 'a power that exists at the very heart of the living man...both an objective reality and a subjective inner experience...'" (Zaidman and Pantel p. 232); this was part of his contribution to the already circulating notion of the soul's immortality (cf. *Phdr.* 245c). The other aspect of this contribution is articulated in *Laws* 5.727a: "No man among us...honors his soul properly, though he dreams he does. Honor, I take it, is a thing divinely good, and can be conferred by nothing that is evil. He who thinks he's advancing his soul by speech, gifts, or compliances, and all the while makes it no better than it was before, may dream that he shows it honor, but in truth does is none." The emphasis on speech here brings out the double meaning of *psyche*, 'breath', which on one level signifies public oratory as opposed to the private reading and writing that was Plato's solace, pleasure, and divination.

[33]In the *Protagoras* Socrates asks Hippocrates if he is "going to entrust [his] soul to the care of a man who is, in [his] own words, a sophist" (312c) and elaborates on the implications of the dilemma (313-314c). In the *Phaedrus* Socrates assigns the rhetorician the task of articulating an understanding of and therapy for the individual soul. This study of soul has three parts: first, the rhetorician will "write with complete accuracy and enable us to see whether soul is something which is one and uniform in nature or complex like the form of the body"; "and in the second place, he will make clear with which of its forms it is its nature to do what, or to have what done to it by what"; "and then, thirdly, having classified the kinds of speeches and of soul, and the ways in which these are affected, he will go through all the causes, fitting each to each and explaining what sort of soul's being subjected to what sorts of speeches necessarily results in one being convinced and another not, giving the cause in each case" (*Phdr.* 271a4-b5). His assignment of this task to the rhetorician comes from Gorgias' theory of the *logos* as an enchanter of souls in the *Encomium of Helen*; cf. Entralgo, pp. 109-138.

emotions act upon the psyche was almost immeasurably prescient; only Sappho before him had explicitly employed writing as a metaphor for something else,[34] but Plato's poetic/philosophical vision of the world and literary format found a way to contain and critique writing the way hers --at least what survives to us-- had not. Plato's image of "the writer within us" is an epochal moment in the evolution of Greek literary expression of the intellectual endeavor to form a concept of self. This metaphorical concept of the writer within us assimilates writing itself into the larger reality of the individual soul, subordinates it to "the only beginning of philosophy" (*Theaet.* 155d), i.e. the sense of amazement (*thauma*) about physiological and psychological phenomena like the relationship between memory, the senses, and the emotions, and elevates the poetic imagination --the supreme tool of which is metaphor itself[35]-- to this state of intellectual transcendence.

Plato's use of writing as a metaphor for the mysterious operation of the soul, the mysterious relation between various elements of individual psychic experience, betrays the ultimate radicality of his vision and spirit and the threshold that he presented to the evolution of literacy in Greek society and culture. His idea of a writer writing in the soul-book is even more radical than Euripides' famous fracturing of human personality in the line "my tongue swore,

---

[34]Athenaeus 10.450e attributes the following riddle to her: what female has voiceless children that speak to people far away? an epistle (ἡ ἐπιστολή). Svenbro uses this as context for an allegorical reading of the famous fragment 31 wherein the voice of the poem is the poem itself in the process of being read aloud from the page, and the sense of approaching death is the anticipation of the end of the reading; cf. frags. 55 and 56.

[35]"It is a great thing to make a proper use of each of the elements mentioned, and of double words and rare words too, but by far the greatest thing is the use of metaphor. That alone cannot be learnt; it is the token of genius, since the right use of metaphor means an eye for resemblances" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 22.16-17).

84

not my psyche" (*Hippolytus* 612) --which Plato himself quoted ironically (*Theaet.*

154d)-- and it captured an understanding of the relationship between writing (τὰ

γράμματα) and consciousness[36] that no other writer in the Greco-Roman literary

tradition, as it survives to us,[37] would ever pursue with such clarity and intensity.

Plato dared to acknowledge the thoroughgoing symbiosis between

communications technologies and human consciousness: the image of the

γραμματεὺς writing in the soul-book and dictating whether memory, the senses,

and the emotions produce true or false opinion envisions the new technology --

its 'invasion' and transformation of Greek culture was a very slow and

complicated process (see Steiner and Robb)-- as the defining and controlling

element of the relation between human perception and knowledge.

This ambivalence about the nature and identity of humanity, particularly

in relation to technology, rejected the bombastic confidence of Protagoras'

anthropocentric maxims for the age, "the human being measures all reality, both

what exists and what doesn't" (*Theaet.* 152a, *Crat.* 386a) and "perception can't be

false" (*Theaet.* 152c, *Euthyd.* 286c). Plato treated this Protagorean confidence as

---

[36]See Ong 1982 chapters 4 and 5, titled 'Writing restructures consciousness' and 'Print, space, and closure', pp. 78-151; see also Svenbro: "the mere reading of large quantities of texts is insufficient as a factor to explain why silent reading appeared in fifth-century Greece. Extensive reading seems, rather, to have been the *outcome* of a qualitative innovation in the attitude to the written word, the outcome of a whole new and powerful mental framework, capable of restructuring the categories of traditional reading" (p. 168). This qualitative innovation affected the fact that "the opposition that we of the twentieth century are accustomed to draw between the oral and the written was not yet established. It was, if anything, discreet, invisible, possibly masked, in Plato's case perhaps already *deconstructed*, that is if it ever had been constructed before him (for example, by the sophists). Whatever the case may be, in Plato there is no *lógos/graphé* opposition, simply *lógoi* of different levels" (p. 213). Plato did, in fact, deconstruct Socrates' own construction -- witnessed by his refusal to write-- of the opposition between the oral and the written (see *Epistles* 7.341-345a). This issue is absolutely central to Plato's art form and thought, i.e. that it characterized his choice of medium, method, and subject matter (in that order of importance) on the basis of his understanding of the relation between the oral and graphic dimensions of linguistic perception, composition, expression, and communication.

[37]*Pace* Varro, whose books were burned.

the problematic product of a complacent middle-class conceit with the conventionally diluted and homogenized literacy training that passed for sophistication and virtue; he referred to these conventional pretensions in book 6 of the *Republic*:

> At present, those who do take it up are youths, just out of boyhood, who in the interval before they engage in business and moneymaking approach the most difficult part of it, and then drop it--and these are regarded forsooth as the best exemplars of philosophy. By the most difficult part I mean discussion. In later life they think they have done much if, when invited, they deign to listen to the philosophic discussions of others (6.498a; cf. 5.475d).

Plato thus confronted both extremes of the Athenian culture of bourgeois pseudo-intellectualism, situating himself ideologically somewhere between 1) the reactionary establishment that was slow to embrace and often content to suppress the spread of literacy and educational as well as extracurricular literary pursuits[38] and 2) the opportunists who profited from the 'trade school' market in 'communications' and the 'social self-improvement' lecture circuit.[39] He argued forcefully that divinity, not humanity, measures all things (*Laws* 4.716c), mocked Protagoras with having raised ordinary humans to the status of gods (*Theaet.*

---

[38]The extreme representative of this faction is Callicles in the *Gorgias*, who would have anyone pursuing philosophy after the age of twenty-five beaten with a stick (484c-486d). Plato's resistance to this is the gist of his several discussions of literary training in mainstream Greek education; he composed critiques of the conventional emphasis on moral formation through memorization and imitation (*Protag.* 325e), arguments for more extensive and flexible use of reading and writing (*Republic* 7.536d; *Laws* 7.809eff), and fantastic descriptions of Egyptian literary culture as a haven of creative freedom for poets, where "men of poetic gifts [are] free to take whatever in the way of rhythm, melody, or diction tickles the composer's fancy in the act of composition and teach it through the choirs to the children and teenagers of a law-respecting society, leaving it to chance whether the result prove virtue or vice" (*Laws* 2.656c).

[39]In the *Sophist* Plato called the sophist's art one which "is paid in cash, claims to give education, and is a hunt after rich and promising youths" (223b) and "the money-making class of the disputatious, argumentative, controversial, pugnacious, combative, acquisitive art" (226a). The notorious sophists in Plato's mind were the famous Protagoras (*Meno* 91d-e; *Theaet.* 161c-e; *Protag.* 313d-314c), Gorgias, Prodicus, and Hippias (*Gr. Hipp.* 282b-e; *Apol.* 19e-20a).

86

162c), and portrayed Socrates mimicking him in precious, specious, and solemn defense of his writings (τὰ συγγράμματά...ὡς γέγραφα, *Theaet.* 166c-d). This ambitious, satiric treatment of Protagoras illuminates Plato's mythical construction of his own divinity as a literary artist.

87

CHAPTER FOUR

DIVINITIES

A. ἐκ θεῶν δόσις

> And so, men of Athens, I now make my defense not for my own
> sake, as one might imagine, but far more for yours, that you
> may not by condemning me err in your treatment of the god's
> gift to you (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δόσιν ὑμῖν, *Apology* 30d).

> Plato, teaching the mind to walk in the aether,
> utters words concerning things beyond comprehension
> (*Greek Anthology, Planudean Appendix*, 328).

The previous chapter exposed the way Plato wove his personal interest in the idea of divinity into the text of the *Republic*; this chapter will explore the personal, historical, cultural, and socio-political background of that interest. The primary inspiration for Plato's interest in the idea of divinity was probably the secondary charge upon which Socrates was tried: not believing in the gods the city-state believed in (*theous*), but in new spiritual beings (*daimonia kaina*). In the *Apology* Plato scripted Socrates' response to this charge as an exposition and mockery of the absurd logic underlying the charge. That logic consisted of a simplistic opposition between the ideas represented by the words *theos* and *daimon*; Socrates says

> But don't we think the spirits (*daimonas*) are gods or
> children of gods?... Then if I believe in spirits, as you say, if
> spirits are a kind of gods, that would be the puzzle and joke
> which I say you are uttering, saying that I, while I don't
> believe in gods, do believe in gods again, since I believe in
> spirits; but if, on the other hand, spirits are a kind of bastard
> children of gods, by nymphs or any others, whoever their
> mothers are said to be, what human being would believe that
> there are children of gods, but no gods? ...there is no way for
> you to persuade any human being who has even a little sense
> that it's possible for the same person to believe in spiritual

88

and godly beings (*daimonia kai theia*) and again for the same person not to believe in spirits or gods or heroes (27c-28a).

Plato had Socrates point out that the absurdity of this situation generated partly from the fact that this kind of charge could even be taken seriously by an Athenian court when the atheistic views of Anaxagoras were well-known and publicly available, on top of which Plato himself was surely familiar with the entire atheistic and agnostic tradition going back to Xenophanes and including Protagoras and Diagoras of Melos. In one of his tragedies Plato's own uncle Critias described the gods as human inventions in the interests of law (*Sisyphus*, fr. 23 D), and the plays of Euripides were notorious for harping on such controversial themes. Even if his understanding of this intellectual tradition was only rudimentary (it was probably deep and exacting), the investigation of the nature of divinity from various points of view was a major theme throughout Plato's entire writing career: the arguments of Euthyphro, which attempt to define piety, examine various theories about what the gods like and dislike, the myths of *Phaedo* (106d-115a), *Phaedrus* (245c-257b), *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, and *Critias* combine rationalism with traditional piety, and the *Ion* presents the theory that poetry is a product of divine inspiration (534b-3). Plato's commitment to intellectual inquiry on the subject of divinity fueled his representation of an indignant, exasperated Socrates, and his construction of the logical argument needed to refute the charge indicates the intensity of its effect on him.

Plato's own idea of divinity, heavily influenced by the traditions of atheistic and agnostic debate, was closely associated with the ambiguous

89

nature and value of writing as both a cultural tool and a personal experience.[1] His concept of a *grammateus* writing truth and falsehood in the psyche, as articulated in *Philebus*, is easily amenable to an indwelling divinity if not a universal 'God'. He associated the Aeschylean figure of Prometheus, who "invented for humanity the combining of letters as an aid to memory" (*Prometheus Bound* 460; cf. Plato, *Philebus* 17, discussed below), with the myth of the *daimon* Theuth (*Phdr.* 274c, *Philebus* 18b), which he is purported to have picked up during his time of travel and study in Egypt. He developed this association into a mythology of the divinity of writing in order to comment on Greek culture's use of the technology as he observed it. While predecessors like Democritus had considered Homer "divinely inspired" (θεαζούσης, Armstrong p. 212), this kind of reverence was not articulated in direct reference to literacy and alphabetic technology, and indeed Homer was never conceived of as a 'writer.'

Plato, however, represented Socrates attempting to introduce this radical association between divinity and writing to Greek intellectual society. In the same dialogue where the psyche is compared to a book (*Philebus*), Socrates ridicules the excitement that young men express when they discover disputation and assault listeners with their arguments. When his young interlocutors threaten to attack him[2] unless he removes their confusion (since they understand what he means about them but don't know what to do

---

[1] See Havelock, Ong, Svenbro, Steiner, Wise, et al.

9 0

about it), he offers them a road "which is easy to point out, but very difficult to follow, because it's through this that all the possessions of science/art (τέχνης) have been discovered and illuminated" (*Phil.* 16c). He is referring, as his subsequent statements show, to Prometheus, the legendary inventor of writing (and many other crafts) and benefactor of humanity. But as usual Socrates' listeners don't know what he's talking about, and when they ask him what this 'road' is, he says

> The Gods' gift to human beings (ἐκ θεῶν δόσις), as it appears to me, tossed out from the Gods on account of some 'Prometheus' together with gleaming fire; and the ancients, who were better than we and lived nearer the Gods, handed down the tradition that all the things which are ever said to exist are sprung from one and many and have inherent in them the finite and the infinite. This being the way in which these things are arranged, we must always assume that there is in every case one idea of everything and must look for it --since we'll find that it's there-- and if we get a grasp of this, we must look next for two, if there be two, and if not, for three or some other number; and again we must treat each of those units in the same way, until we can see not only that the original unit is one and many and infinite, but just how many it is. And we must not apply the idea of infinity to plurality until we have a view of its whole number between infinity and one; then, and not before, we may let each unit of everything pass on unhindered into infinity. The Gods, then, as I said, handed down to us this mode of investigating, learning, and teaching one another; but the wise men of the present day make the one and the many too quickly or too slowly, in haphazard fashion, and they put infinity immediately after unity; they disregard all that lies between them, and it is this which distinguishes between the dialectic and the disputatious methods of discussion.

---

[2]Another instance of Plato's constant, subtle characterization of Greek society as violently anti-intellectual.

When Protarchus asks for clarification, Socrates refers him to the

physiological and epistemological dynamics of alphabetic education:

> Surely, Protarchus, the letters of the alphabet (γράμμασιν)
> clarify what I'm saying, so find the meaning in what you
> were educated with.
> How?
> Sound is one thing going through our mouth, and yet it's
> boundless and full of everything and anything.
> For sure.
> And one of us is no wiser than the other merely for
> knowing that it's infinite or that it's one; but that which
> makes each of us a grammarian (γραμματικὸν) is the
> knowledge of the number and nature of sounds.

After a short discourse on the epistemology of sound in the art of music (17b-

18b), Socrates returns to the alphabet, ostensibly to illustrate a delicate point

about navigation of the relationship between the infinite and the definite, but

he then gratuitously refers to the divine and Egyptian origins of the alphabet

letters:

> When someone, whether a God or some Godlike human
> —as the saying in Egypt says, some 'Theuth'— observed
> that sound was infinite, he was the first to notice that the
> vowel sounds in that infinity were not one, but many,
> and again that there were other elements which were not
> vowels but did have a sonant quality, and that these also
> had a definite number; and he distinguished a third kind
> of letters which we now call mutes. Then he divided the
> mutes until he distinguished each individual one, and he
> treated the vowels and semi-vowels in the same way,
> until he knew the number of them and named them
> individually and all together 'letter' (στοιχεῖον). But
> perceiving that none of us could learn any one of them
> alone by itself without learning them all, and considering
> that this was a common bond which made them in a way
> all one, he assigned to them all a single science/art and
> called it 'writing' (γραμματικὴν τέχνην, 18b-d).

92

Plato's attribution of divine origin --from "some 'Theuth'"-- to the science/art of writing subtly associates itself with the previously mentioned divine gift --on account of "some 'Prometheus'"-- through which "all the possessions and discoveries of art have been illuminated," and suggests an apotheosis of the writer as a precursor to 'the *grammateus* inside us.' The combination of Plato's insistence on divine agency in human access to writing and his intense scrutiny of the technology's meatiest details (cf. *Crat.* 423e-425b, discussed below) contrast harshly with the anthropocentric view of Protagoras. It is obvious from Plato's writing that he was a technician and critic with no peer, and his enthusiasm for the subtleties of the science were outstripped only by his inspired creativity in the art of composition, his reverence for the mysteries of knowledge and ontology toward which these gesture, and his commitment to education that delivered real engagement with the search for knowledge, using the new technologies and 'sciences.'[3]

Plato's barely disguised myth of himself as ὁ θεὸς Πλάτ(τ)ων, the god of literary creativity, took shape in the conflict between his personal experience of the pleasure in artistic creativity and his almost naive exasperation with the contemporary popular culture. His personal struggle reached a climax in

---

[3]Plato's Socratic dialogues advertised his own educational reforms, for which Xenophon took him to task by asserting **"Socrates never discussed the causes and laws of the heavens and of nature,** and that he never touched upon or approved the other sciences, called by the Greeks μαθήματα, which did not contribute to a good and happy life; accordingly, he says that **those who have attributed discourses of that kind to Socrates are guilty of a base falsehood.** 'But when Xenophon wrote this,' they say, '**he of course refers to Plato,** in whose works Socrates discourses on physics, music and geometry'" (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 14.3; cf. Riginos, Platonica pp. 108ff). Xenophon's "homespun picture of Socrates in the *Memorabilia* never fails

9 3

his ordeal with Dionysius of Syracuse, whose own claims to have mastered

and explained in writing Plato's 'secret doctrines' forced his most

straightforward articulation of his somewhat mysterious intellectual passion

and his view of it as a fundamental psychic transformation. This is the

experience referred to in the famous seventh letter:

> There is no treatise (*suggramma*) of mine, anyway,
> dealing with these matters, nor will one ever come into
> existence, because there is no way it can be expressed
> verbally (ῥητὸν)[4] like other subjects of learning, but
> generating suddenly from a lot of intimacy and
> cohabitation with the practice itself, like a spark
> discharged from a leaping fire and generated in the
> psyche, it nurtures itself from then on (341c-d).

Plato had other metaphors for this transformative experience: the growth of

wings in the mind is one, and it perfectly complements the image of the spark

both in its fidelity to the emotional vitality of the experience and its

accompanying qualification of the value and function of written words,

which Plato called 'reminders': "Only the philosopher's thought process has

---

to inspire surprise, because it is so very different from Plato's version; but the one account is
probably as unauthentic [*sic*] as the other" (Grant p. 81).

[4] The concept behind this statement is accessible by means of etymology: ῥητὸν comes from ῥέω,
'flow', and Plato's attitude toward 'rhetoric' stems from the uni-directional river-like 'flow' of
traditional authoritative oratory and verbal discourse in general as the Greeks perceived it.
Plato's commitment to dialogue was a rejection of what he considered the artificial hubristic
pose of authority that motivated traditional political oratory as well contemporary rhapsodic
performance with its mystique of archaic wisdom, and the power structure underlying the one-
dimensionality of their socio-political materializations (for a good example of how Plato's
Socrates is "always deriding the orators", see *Menexenus* 234c-235b). The very form of dialogue
was itself 99% of Plato's 'philosophy' or 'dogma', and any expository treatise he might have
written would have at least contradicted and maybe nullified, in form, the value of its content:
the value of an enigma is in the fact that 'figuring it out' demands intellectual work, and the
futility probability is high. The only way for him to stick to the principle was to write
conversations that embraced the real, organic difficulties inherent in the process of human
communication: imperfect expression, interruption, misinterpretation, disagreement, and plain
arbitrary resistance to persuasion.

9 4

wings," because through the proper use of 'reminders' (ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος) he "stands apart from human affairs and, becoming godlike, is considered insane by most people, but in his intellectual rapture he forgets them" (*Phdr.* 249c; cf. 276c-d).[5]

This experience of intellectual rapture was the primary determinant of Plato's attitude toward written words. Plato was a writer, a coiner of words and a creator of written compositions; his reasons for and purposes in writing had more to do with creativity than dogma. His attitude toward writing, as Derrida tried to explain, was anti-positivistic: to him the notion of trying to fix meaning one-dimensionally in words was not only laughable, because interpretation is always open to question, but a travesty of the multi-dimensional possibilities in linguistic art. Similarly, any claim to one-dimensional interpretation of any written text was an exercise in intellectual hubris. This is what he meant with Socrates' condemnation of reliance on written words as a communicative medium in the *Phaedrus*:

> So anyone who thinks he's leaving behind an '*Art*' in
> writing (τέχνην...ἐν γράμμασι), and in turn anyone
> accepting it on the supposition that there will be some
> clear and fixed meaning from the writing (σαφὲς καὶ
> βέβαιον ἐκ γραμμάτων) must be full of simple-mindedness;
> he must really be ignorant of Ammon's prophecy, if he

---

[5]Divine madness causes a person to be regarded as mad "when someone sees the beauty here, is reminded of truth, becomes winged and, fluttering with eagerness to fly upwards, but unable to leave the ground, looking up toward justice like a bird, taking no heed of the things below..." (*Phaedrus* 249d-e; cf. *Theaet.* 173c-e). Plato inherited this analogy of intellectual excitement as the flight of birds from Aristophanes (*Clouds* 319, *Birds* 1437ff) and took it seriously in the same way he took seriously the intellectually educative and ethically formative powers of comic drama and sophistic rhetoric. The 'philosopher', the comic poet, and the sophistic orator all experience the same divine madness, and the primary trait their respective creativities share is an uncompromising commitment to anti-conventional art.

thinks written discourses are anything more than the process of reminding (ὑπομνῆσαι) the person who knows what the writings are about (275c).

Plato's target in this passage was the practice of publishing treatises on the art of rhetoric like that of Tisias of Syracuse, who was popularly hailed as the founder of forensic oratory, and of whom he portrayed Phaedrus in the dialogue as a devotee (273a). Plato's own mastery of grammatology and rhetoric --Cicero called him *summus orator*-- convinced him that no words could ever have clear and fixed meaning (σαφὲς καὶ βέβαιον), and he never published any instruction manual. In fact he took for granted, based on unfortunate but unavoidable repeated observation, the fact that, as the popular *Dissoi Logoi* argued, the 'meaning' of spoken and written discourse is almost always misconstrued, and often intentionally so.[6]

Miscommunication is the source of much Aristophanic humor, and Plato incorporated comedy's keen observation of human life into his Socratic dramas (see Arieti and Keller). In the *Euthydemus* he demonstrated one aspect of how meaning was often willfully miscontrued in an episode portraying the predatory nature of logistical disputation among schoolboys that relied upon the manipulative tactic of "putting a double twist on the question" (276d). This episode captures part of his vision of how the mainstream aristocratic society distorted the sophistic arts and assimilated

---

[6]As with the pleasurable flamboyance of the style, the truth of many sophistic arguments did not escape Plato; what he seems to have really disliked was a certain attitude of complacence, conceit, and greed which may or may not have been attributed to the original 'sophists' themselves, but was probably his perception of the generation that worshipped them like demigods, misinterpreted them, and imitated all their worst characteristics.

9 6

that distortion into its own systemic hierarchies. In this episode, he had

Socrates narrate how he intervened after two youths named Euthydemus and

Dionysodorus teamed up on a boy named Clinias and embarrassed him in

front of their laughing friends:

> Now Euthydemus was getting ready to give the
> teenager the third fall in this wrestling match, but I
> recognized how the kid was getting dunked
> (βαπτιζόμενον), and wanted to stop this so he wouldn't
> lose courage; so, to encourage him, I said "Clinias,
> child, don't be surprised if the arguments seem strange
> to you. Maybe you don't understand what our visitors
> are doing with you. They're doing the same as the
> Corybantes do in their initiations, when the one to be
> initiated is being enthroned. There's dancing and play
> there also, as you know if you've been initiated; and
> now these are only dancing around you in play,
> meaning to initiate you afterward. So consider now
> that you're hearing the beginnings of the sophistic
> ritual. Because the first thing you have to learn,
> according to Prodicus, is the right use of words
> (ὀρθοεπεία), and this is what the two visitors are
> showing you, since you didn't know that people use
> the word 'learn' in two senses: first, when one has no
> knowledge at the beginning about something, and
> then afterward gets the knowledge, and second, when
> one already having the knowledge uses this
> knowledge to examine this same thing done or
> spoken. The second is called understanding rather
> than learning, but sometimes it is also called learning.
> But you missed this, as these show it; they hold the
> same word as applying to people in opposite senses, to
> one who knows and one who doesn't. It was pretty
> much the same in the second question, when they
> asked you whether people learn what they know or
> what they don't. Well, all this is just a little game of
> learning, and so I say they're playing with you; I call it
> a game, because if one learned a lot of things like this
> or even all of them, one would be no nearer knowing
> what the things really are, but would be able to play
> with people because of the different sense of the words,
> tripping them up and turning them upside down, just
> as someone pulls a stool away when someone else is

97

going to sit down, and then people roar with joy when they see him lying on his back (277d-278c).

Plato's depiction of Socrates counseling Clinias represents a gestural remedy for a problem he observed in the contemporary culture, namely the intimidation and manipulation that seemed to dominate educational atmospheres and cause trauma for particularly sensitive youths like Clinias. This is what he illustrates with the interrogation episode:

> Do the learners learn what they know, or what they don't know?... Clinias answered Euthydemus that the learners learned what they did not know, and he went on in the same way as before: Okay; you know your letters don't you? Yes, said Clinias. All of 'em, right? He agreed. And when a teacher dictates anything, doesn't he dictate letters? He agreed. Then he dictates a bit of what you know, if you know them all? He agreed to this too. Okay then, he said, you don't learn what someone dictates, but only the one who doesn't know letters learns them; right? No, no, he said, I do learn them. Then you learn what you know, since you know all the letters. He agreed. Then you didn't answer right, said Euthydemus (276d-277b).

Plato drafted this episode in contrast to the somewhat fatuous optimism that he detected in popular claims about the value of rhetorical training as a process of "making men better" (*Rep.* 10.600c; *Meno* 91ff, 95ff; *Laches* 186c).[7]

Plato was very sensitive to the frequent conflict between power and intellectual enlightenment, and located the crux of this conflict in general assumptions about the certainty and fixity of knowledge which failed to

---

[7]"Literary or scientific, liberal or specialist, all our education is predominantly verbal and therefore fails to accomplish what it is supposed to do. Instead of transforming children into fully developed adults, it turns out students of the natural sciences who are completely unaware of Nature as the primary fact of experience, it inflicts upon the world students of the

9 8

acknowledge the natural confusion that accompanies not only all children's

attempts to learn letters but all human attempts to understand the world. He

compared these two types of confusion in the *Politician*:

> When young children have only just learned their
> letters... We know that they perceive individual letters in
> the shortest and simplest syllables, and they become
> capable of pointing out the truth concerning those... But
> they're confused by the same letters in other syllables and
> deceived in both opinion and reasoning... Should we
> wonder, then, if our own psyche produces the same
> confusion having suffered over the elementary 'letters' of
> all life (τὰ τῶν πάντων στοιχεῖα)? At times it's grounded by
> the truth concerning each single thing in some instances
> and then sometimes it's carried away again about
> absolutely everything in other instances, and somehow or
> other it gets a right opinion about some of these
> combinations but as for the transpositions (μετατιθέμενα)
> into the long and very difficult syllables of pragmatic
> affairs (τῶν πραγμάτων), it fails to recognize again the very
> elements it discerned a moment before (*Politician* 277e-
> 278d).

Plato's metaphor "the 'letters' of all life" (τὰ τῶν πάντων στοιχεῖα)

complements his metaphor of the writer in the psyche: it envisions the

'elements' and 'combinations' of reality as the 'letters and syllables' that the

γραμματεὺς, influenced by memory and the emotions, records in our psyche.

More importantly, Plato's superimposition of the childhood confusion in

identifying letters and syllables in different combinations onto the ongoing

confusion of the psyche trying to navigate the temporal flux of day-to-day

reality on the elemental level militates against not only the Protagorean and

Prodican confidence in human knowledge and Tisias the rhetorician's

illusion of linguistic clarity and fixity in writing, but also against the

---

Humanities who know nothing of humanity, their own or anyone else's" (Aldous Huxley, <u>The</u>

99

enthusiasm for disputation these ideologies fostered among youth aspiring to the ideal of *kalokagathia*. Plato's acknowledgement and acceptance of the uncertainty of knowledge and the openness of meaning figure prominently in his own artistic aesthetic, which consists of his compositional ideology and his literary style, and his concentration on the problem the psyche has in navigating the analogy between alphabetic letters/syllables and the elements/combinations of all reality reveals a central element of that aesthetic.

Plato's word for the transpositions (μετατιθέμενα) between the perceptive and epistemological framework of the alphabet and that of general 'pragmatic affairs' (τῶν πραγμάτων) comes from his vocabulary of technical grammatology: μετατιθέμενα conjures up the poetic/rhetorical phenomenon of metathesis, the transposition of letters and syllables, which Plato described as "turning words up and down over time, and adding them and taking them away" (*Phdr.* 278e). His use of this word intensifies the superimposition of the grammatical framework onto the general worldly one, and in fact attributes to the psyche the performance of poetic/rhetorical criticism on the changing elements, the 'text' of the world, in its ongoing attempt to 'read', correctly label, and interpret its changing experience. This 'metathesis', the arrangement and rearrangement of letters, is the fundamental activity of writing, and Plato discussed its function in his own theory and practice of

---

Doors of Perception).

100

composition, particularly with reference to the making of names, in the

Cratylus:

> Since the imitation of the essential nature is made with letters and syllables, wouldn't the most correct way be for us to separate the letters first, just as those who undertake the practice of rhythms separate first the qualities of the letters, then those of the syllables, and then, but not till then, come to the study of rhythms?... Must not we, too, separate first the vowels, then in their several classes the consonants or mutes, as they are called by those who specialize in phonetics, and also the letters which are neither vowels nor mutes, as well as the various classes that exist among the vowels themselves? And when we have made all these divisions properly, we must in turn give names to the things which ought to have them, if there are any names to which they can all, like the letters, be referred, from which it is possible to see what their nature is and whether there are any classes among them, as there are among letters. When we have properly examined all these points, we must know how to apply each letter with reference to its fitness, whether one letter is to be applied to one thing or many are to be combined; just as painters, when they wish to produce an imitation, sometimes use only red, sometimes some other color, and sometimes mix many colors, as when they are making a picture of a man or something of that sort, employing each color, I suppose, as they think the particular picture demands it. In just this way we, too, shall apply letters to things, using one letter for one thing, when that seems to be required, or many letters together, forming syllables, as they are called, and in turn combining syllables, and by their combination forming nouns and verbs. And from nouns and verbs again we shall finally construct something great and fair and complete. Just as in our comparision we made the picture by the art of painting, so now we shall make language by the art of naming, or of rhetoric, or whatever it be. No, not we; I said that too hastily. For the ancients gave language its existing composite character; and we, if we are to examine all these matters with scientific ability, must take it to pieces as they put it together and see whether the words, both the earliest and the later, are given systematically or not; because if they are strung together at haphazard, it is a poor, unmethodical performance (423e-425b).

101

This is the level of detail at which Plato worked in composition, and the transposition of a single letter had enormous --indeed 'cosmic'-- implications. The transposition of one letter implies a world of difference in meaning, i.e. it represents the transposition of a conceptual framework for labeling and interpreting the elements of experience. His combinations were designed to communicate in ways much more complex and exciting than modern 'philosophical' analysis has appreciated.

The inter-transposition of the grammatical conceptual framework and that of pragmatic experience is theoretically paradigmatic for both the overall literary design of the *Republic*, where the text imitates an elliptical cosmos with its creator-God represented at the center of a vortex of material generation, and at its elemental level, where the letters of the God's epithet, π-λ-α-τ-τ-ω-ν, are the primary focus of attention in the reader's journey through the evolving world of the text. While in the 'normal' framework of grammatical reality they constitute one meaning (i.e. πλάττων means "molding"), the transposition of that framework --with the suggested elimination of one letter, πλάττων becomes Πλάτων-- changes the meaning not only of the word but of the entire passage. After the reader meets ὁ θεὸς Πλάτ(τ)ων face-to-face in the genesis myth of book 3 in the *Republic*, the journey becomes an ongoing search for God in the atoms of the book's elemental substance. This search for God is the search for the meaning of the life of the text, the sense of its saturation in sophistic discourse, and it is meant to replace the Protagorean confidence in human knowledge, the Tisian

102

fantasy of clear and fixed meaning in language, and the general pseudo-aristocratic enthusiasm for competitive disputation.

B. ὁμοίωσις θεῷ

> Why should I speak of Pythagoras, or of Plato, or Democritus, since they, we are told, in their passion for learning travelled through the remotest parts of the earth! Those who are blind to these facts have never loved anything great and worthy of intellectual understanding (Cicero, *De Fin.* 5.19.50)

> And there stood God-like Plato, the first to show Athens the secret pathways of the divinely-taught virtues (Christodorus of Thebes, *Greek Anthology* 2).

While Plato's mythology of self was conceived, designed, and executed in broad (and detailed) contemplation of the aesthetics of literature, the mythics of cosmology, the psychic aspects of communications technology, the ethics of disputation, and the mechanics of grammatology, the motivation behind that mythology is an even richer and more detailed weave of influences from his contemporary culture than I have thus far illuminated. The most immediate implication of the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων is that it flirts with a breach of Plato's rigid compositional practice of total authorial anonymity.[8] His practice of anonymity was a choice made in direct rejection of a very popular trend in literary self-representation which indicated to Plato the ideological status quo dominating the mainstream public culture's use of literary technology: this trend is visible in (among other places) the opening

---

[8]Plato mentioned his own name explicitly only once in the entire corpus and this was in the *Apology's* catalogue of Socrates' friends; its purpose is in no way to draw attention to Plato's authorial function or presence in dialogue.

103

sentences of his sophistic prose-writing predecessors Hecataeus, Herodotus,

and Thucydides, all of whom announced themselves directly, indeed

ostentatiously, at the beginnings of their works.

The popular geographers, ethnographers, and historiographers were

not, however, the primary background against which Plato adopted his policy

of anonymity. Plato's authorial anonymity is connected to his antipathy

toward the hubris that characterized the conventional use of writing in

popular politics. In the *Phaedrus*, he exposed the vanity of politicians who

placed their own names at the beginnings of decrees precisely because they

were aspiring to be gods:

> ...the proudest politicians are most in love with speech-
> writing (ἐρῶσι λογογραφίας) and of leaving compositions
> (συγγραμμάτων) behind them, since they care so much
> about praise (ἀγαπῶσι τοὺς ἐπαινέτας) that when they write
> a speech they add at the beginning the names of those
> who praise them in each instance... the name of the
> approver is written first in the writings of politicians...
> There the writer says "it was voted by the *boule* (or the
> *demos*, or both), and so-and-so moved," mentioning his
> own name with great solemnity (σεμνῶς) and praise, then
> after that he goes on, displaying his own wisdom to his
> approvers, and sometimes making a very long
> document... Then if this speech is approved, the writer
> leaves the theater exhilarated; but if it is not recorded and
> he is not granted the privilege of speech-writing
> (λογογραφίας) and is not considered worthy to be a prose
> author (συγγράφειν), he and his faction (ἑταῖροι) are
> disappointed... Well then, when an orator or a king is able
> to rival the greatness of Lycurgus or Solon or Darius and
> attain immortality (ἀθάνατος) as a speechwriter in the
> state, doesn't he think he's equal to the gods (ἰσόθεον)
> while he's still alive, and doesn't posterity have the same
> opinion of him, when they see his compositions?
> (συγγράμματα, *Phdr.* 257e-258c).

This antipathy toward the use of writing as a tool for gaining name-recognition, power, and immortality in popular politics is paraphrased and generalized in the *Symposium*, where Plato wrote "only glance at the ambition (φιλοτιμίαν) of the human beings around you, and... consider how frighteningly possessed they are by the desire of getting name-recognition (ὡς δεινῶς διάκεινται ἔρωτι τοῦ ὀνομαστοὶ γενέσθαι) and laying up fame immortal for all time to come" (κλέος εἰς τὸν ἀεὶ[9] χρόνου ἀθάνατον, *Symp.* 208c).

Plato's disdain for the use of writing as a vehicle for publicizing individual names in the culture of fame, *philotimia*, was part of the motivation behind his program of punning extensively on his own name throughout the *Republic*: its playful indirectness ridicules the explicit self-promotion practiced by politicians and oratorical celebrities, and the explicit deification of the 'wax-molding' craftsman/writer (πλάττων) hyperbolizes the often duplicitous arrogance that characterizes the conventional quest for temporal power as well as immortality through legislative literature. Plato, in fact, thus outdid his popular contemporaries by doing for himself what they were trying to get the assembly and their faction (*hetairoi*) to do for them: he implicitly deified himself, courted the blasphemy a reputation-conscious politician would never risk, and proclaimed his discrete irreverence while demonstrating his superb literary talent.

---

[9]This might consciously echo Thucydides' contentious κτῆμα εἰς αἰεί and reinforces the earlier references to Thucydides' ξυνέγραψε (συγγραμμάτων, συγγράφειν). Plato's interpretation Thucydides was parodying the spirit of the age as witnessed on the one hand in the authoritative imperial discourse of public decrees and on the other hand in the sophistic flair for flamboyance and elaborate falsehood.

105

While the punning self-inscription is partly motivated, then, by disdain for the popular use of writing in the culture of *philotimia* as well as by witty irreverence toward the obsequious pose of piety that barely masks the conventional ambition for deification and immortality, there is a third component to Plato's attitude referenced by the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων, namely the earnest concern of the lover of wisdom for imitating and aspiring to divinity through astronomical, mathematical, and literary learning, self-knowledge, and self-control. This idea permeates Plato's writing and is articulated succinctly in the *Theaetetus*:

> we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the Gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like a God (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), so far as this is possible; and to become like a God is to become just and holy and sensible (*Theaet.* 176a-b).

ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is a key aspect of the *Republic*'s definition of the just man: the idea is introduced in book 2 where Socrates concludes the parable of Gyges' ring with an interpretation that characterizes the truly just man as one who, despite the temptation, would not abuse the power the ring gave him, but would, rather, "conduct himself (πράττειν)[10] among humanity as the equal of a god" (ἰσόθεον, 360c). Equality to the Gods here means sensible temperance and humility, not the self-serving, hubristic *philotimia* that characterizes

---

[10]The use of πράττειν in this context is a pun similar to the ὁ θεὸς πλάττων pun (the consonants *rho* and *lambda* being easily confused in Greek phonics); see the similar allusion at 391e6 (πράττουσί τε καὶ ἔπραττον). I shall treat Plato's use of πράττω in future development of this dissertation.

popular politicians, and this theme remains an important one through to the end of the dialogue.

By book 10 Plato's literal treatment of this issue has reached an abstract and depersonalized level, so that he approaches the association between philosophy and divinity by arguing that in order to understand the true nature of the psyche

> we must look...to its love of wisdom (φιλοσοφίαν). And
> we must note the things of which it has perceptions, and
> the associations for which it yearns, as being itself akin to
> the divine and the immortal and eternal being (θείῳ καὶ
> ἀθανάτῳ καὶ τῷ ἀεὶ ὄντι, 611e).

Plato treats the love of wisdom, *philosophia*, as the pinnacle of human association with divinity, and this association presumes a conception of and aspiration to divinity different from that which governs the culture of *philotimia*. The trajectory of this association between *philosophia* and divinity is fulfilled shortly thereafter in the description of the archetypal just citizen in these very terms:

> the Gods will never neglect the person who is willing and
> eager to be just and, by the practice of virtue, to be made as
> similar to a God (ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ) as is possible for a
> human being (613a).

Plato equates the aspiration toward divinity with the just citizen's love of wisdom, *philosophia*, and it is clear from the tone and content of the passages from the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* quoted earlier that this opposes the conventional pretension toward godhood and immortality that dominates the behavior of politicians (and *hoi polloi*) in the culture of *philotimia*.

107

Plato, in fact, directly contrasts *philosophia* and *philotimia* elsewhere in the *Republic* (581d) as well as the *Phaedrus* (256c), but the key aspect of the behavior identified in the passage quoted above (257e-258c) relates specifically to writing: politicians strive toward deification and immortality by proclaiming their own names at the beginnings of their writings. Philosophers, on the other hand, "when it comes to laws and decrees, neither hear the debates nor look at the written texts" (*Theaet.* 273d). So Plato, the sophistic philosopher, wrote a dialogue that advertised the cultivation of *philosophia* which was, in his own terms, inherently expressive of the association with divinity, and its counterpart rejection of *philotimia*,[11] and therein did not advertise his own name explicitly or proclaim the importance of his work but alluded, indirectly, to his own authorial status and 'philosophical' divinity by means of a highly artistic rhetorical device, namely the pun, in a passage that is earmarked as highly self-conscious of its own literary quality. Plato thus introduced a typically disguised polemic focused on the ideological and ethical implications of the use of writing: the unstated background of this pun is his attitude toward the conventional use of writing in human affairs, which he considered self-serving, hubristic, and

---

[11] οἱ φιλότιμοι, "if they can't get themselves elected generals, are captains of a trittys. And if they can't be honored by great men and dignitaries, are satisfied with honor from little men and nobodies. But honor they desire and must have" (475b). *Philotimia* is a characteristic of the timocratic (549a) and oligarchic (553d) citizens, sycophancy is associated with politics in general (426c), and the definition of justice as "doing your own thing" implies resisting the temptation to pursue honors (τιμάς, 4.434b) inappropriate or unnatural to one's personality and station in life. In fact, "people who mind their own affairs (τοὺς μὲν τὰ αὐτῶν πράττοντας) in the city are spoken of as simpletons and are held in slight esteem, while meddlers who mind

108

blasphemous because of its unabashed *philotimia*, and he differentiated

himself from such convention by referring indirectly to himself (ὁ Πλάτων) as

a private artist (πλάττων wax tablets) whose inherent divinity is constituted by

his use of writing in service of *philosophia*. His use of the phrase at this early

point in the dialogue establishes a trajectory for the implicit level of the

discourse which is gradually fulfilled over the course of the dialogue by

means of many more similar puns. One of these, occurring in book 6,

captures the harmony of literary art for art's sake and devotional

intellectualism that is the essence of Plato's spirit.

Book 6 characterizes the quest to become godlike on the personal,

tangible level as a philosophical enterprise: "the lover of wisdom (φιλοσοφὸς)

associating with the divine order will himself become orderly/cosmopolitan

and divine (κόσμιός τε καὶ θεῖος) as much as a human being can" (6.500d). In

this context he goes on to describe the philosopher's practice of fashioning

himself in contrast to the pettiness of general human affairs and uses the

πλάττω pun with special poignancy:

> the lover of wisdom associating with the divine order will
> himself become cosmopolitan and divine (κόσμιός τε καὶ
> θεῖος) in the measure permitted to humanity. But slander
> (διαβολή) is plentiful everywhere... If, then...some
> compulsion is laid upon him to practice stamping on the
> plastic matter of human nature in public and private the
> patterns that he visions there,[12] and not merely to mold
> and fashion himself (ἑαυτὸν **πλάττειν**), do you think he

other people's affairs are honored and praised" (τιμωμένους τε καὶ ἐπαινουμένους, 8.550a).
Plato stressed this as the primary fault of Dionysius of Syracuse (*Epistles* 7.338d-e, 344e).

[12]This is Shorey's translation of ἃ ἐκεῖ ὁρᾷ μελετῆσαι εἰς ἀνθρώπων ἤθη καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ
τιθέναι.

will prove a poor craftsman (δημιουργὸν) of sobriety and justice and all forms of ordinary civic virtue? (500d).

This pun underlines Plato's personal investment in the idea of the philosopher's association with and participation in the divine, by means of self-fashioning (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν[13]), but it also reinforces the association between divinity and the Platonic literary craft at which the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων hints. It suggests, in fact, in view of Plato's general rejection of the way writing is used in the public culture of *philotimia*, that private creative writing (symbolized by the wax-tablets[14]-- repeatedly alluded to with πλάττω) is itself a process of self-fashioning. The conditional question about a philosopher's compulsion to change society with his visions of divinity captures Plato's personal dilemma concerning his own life after Socrates, and the image of stamping those visions "on the plastic matter of human nature in private and public" complements the κόσμιός τε καὶ θεῖος rubric. The text mediates between Plato's private and public lives and expresses, in its own terms, the balance between human worldliness and divinity. His use of the alphabetical model of the cosmos in designing the text makes it κόσμιός in two senses: it resembles a cosmos[15] and it is harmoniously and attractively

---

[13]cf. *Tim.* 88c: "...the student of mathematics, or of any other subject, who works very hard intellectually must also exercise physically, practicing gymnastics; and the person molding her/his body (σῶμα...πλάττοντα) carefully must also exercise the psyche by cultivating music and all philosophy, if either is to deserve being properly called both beautiful and good."

[14]Pliny the Elder wrote that before the widespread availability of paper, wax tablets were used for private documents (*Nat. Hist.* 13.21.69). Because they were so easy to 'erase', tablets were the best medium to use for creative drafts/revisions.

110

designed. Likewise his mythology of self as ὁ θεὸς πλάττων is iconic of the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ theme and thus makes the text θεῖος. This pattern is a multi-dimensional rendering of "the creator god of the *Timaeus* confronted with an original chaos which he wishes to make as much like himself as possible (*Tim.* 30a)" (Bing p. 128).

The overall tone of this passage is made somber by the concentration on the philosopher's awkwardness and vulnerability in the often sordid world of human affairs,[16] where slander (διαβολή) often seems to reign supreme,[17] and in fact the mention of slander indicts the litigious nature of the Athenian culture of *philotimia*, where *logos* and *graphe* are used as weapons to destroy idealistic and charismatic iconoclasts like (Plato's) Socrates.[18] Plato was known for his general hatred of litigation, but is quoted as phrasing it in direct reference to the public writing of laws:

---

[15] Plato's description of the mechanistic structure of the universe in Book 10 suggests a similar diagram for the overall layout of the dialogue. Taking the name-punning system as the primary 'stuff' of the textual 'cosmos' (like Thales' water or Anaximenes' air), we see the unmistakable center of the 'cosmos' in the striking ὁ θεὸς πλάττων phrase. Its position, in Book 3, situates it off-center and the gives the 'cosmos' an appropriately elliptical shape, from which the multitude of other puns, like stars (*poikilmata*), emanate.

[16] cf. *Gorgias* 486.

[17] Antiphon *On the Murder of Herodes* 71, 79, 87, 94; *On the Choreutes* 7, 9; Andocides *On the Mysteries* 30; *On His Return* 3, 24; *Against Alcibiades* 37; Lysias *On the Olive-Stump* 27, *Accusation of Calumny* 4, 7, 13; *For the Soldier* 1-3, 18-19; *Against Eratosthenes* 93; *Against Agoratus* 17; *Against Alcibiades* 26, 31; *For Mantitheus* 1; *On the Confiscation of Nicias' Brother's Property* 9; *On the Property of Aristophanes* 3, 6, 13, 34, 50-1, 53; *For Polystratus* 30; *Against a Charge of Subverting the Democracy* 5-6, 24; *On the Scrutiny of Evander* 14-15; *Against Nicomachus* 7-8; Thucydides 6.87.1, 8.91.3.

[18] The theme of διαβολή dominates Plato's *Apology* (18d, 19a-b, 20d-e, 23a, 23e-24a, 28a, 33a, 37b), and his concentration on it hints at the unspeakable rage and despair Socrates' trial and execution provoked in him. This feeling remained with Plato all his life, so much that he depicted its fearsome presence at *Meno* 95a and stressed the role that slander played in his relations with Dionysius (*Epistles* 7.324e-325c, 333d, 334a, 350a, 350c).

111

> Plato has said...that where there are very many laws, there are also very many law-suits and corrupt practices, just as where there are many physicians, there are also likely to be many diseases (Strabo, *Geography* 6.1.8; cf. Rep. 404e-405a).

The expression of this attitude brings the spectre of private imaginative writing itself into the dynamics of Plato's personal dilemma: Socrates, his role model, rejected writing and, either literally or figuratively, turned Plato himself away --in a sense saved him-- from a public career in it.[19] His effect in society, both privately and publicly,[20] apparently got him killed. Plato was left to his own resources, designs, and intuition to fashion himself (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν) without a living role model, but by writing about Socrates the reluctantly self-made philosopher, who was so much closer to the divine now that he was dead, Plato struggled toward saving himself. The 'power to save' --Σώ-κρατες-- was in fact Socrates' divine gift,[21] and by cherishing and cultivating it in private creative writing Plato remade himself into ὁ θεὸς πλάττων. The implication of this passage is Plato's way of articulating the fusion between his vision of himself as a divinely inspired literary artist if not truly a God of literary art (ὁ θεὸς πλάττων) and his function in human

---

[19]Aulus Gellius reports that Plato wrote tragedies and erotic verse in his youth (*Attic Nights* 19.11); Diogenes Laertius writes "he applied himself to painting and wrote poems, first dithyrambs, afterwards lyric poems and tragedies," and "when he was about to compete for the prize with a tragedy, he listened to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysus, and then consigned his poems to the flames" (3.5). For detailed criticism of the biographical/anecdotal sources, as well as another scholar's different opinion on the issue of Plato's name, see Riginos, <u>Platonica</u>, pp. 35-8).

[20]See Plato's description of Socrates' following, *Apology* 23c, 33b-c, and 37d; cf. Nehamas 1992.

[21]"No human will be saved (σωθήσεται) who nobly opposes you or any other populace and prevents many unjust and illegal things from happening in the state. A person who really

112

society: he molded his own being (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν) in his literary text —i.e. he represented his ideas and feelings by arranging individual letters on a wax tablet— by dramatizing therein the struggle to love wisdom amid the moral squalor and danger of conventional human society, i.e. to be a just, Godlike man in this world (κόσμιός τε καὶ θεῖος).

Plato's dislike for the public debasement of writing and his compacted demonstration of his own literary talent and intellectual and emotional aspiration toward divinity were recognized by some contemporaries and especially by his devotees in the subsequent Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition. His devotees deified him in part as a way of avenging his frustrated polemic against the moral disorder he perceived (and probably overestimated) in his contemporary culture. Already in the fourth century a poet named Simias wrote an epitaph calling him "the divine man Aristocles" (ἀνὴρ θεῖος Ἀριστοκλέης, *Greek Anthology* 7.60),[22] and two-and-a-half centuries later the poet Meleager recognized Plato as the deity that he strove to become, calling him "eternally divine" (ἀεὶ θείοιο Πλάτωνος, *GA* 4.1.47). Shortly thereafter Cicero corroborated by labelling Plato, in reference to both character and style respectively, *deus ille noster* (*Letters to Atticus* 4.16) and *divinus auctor Plato* (*De Opt. Gen. Orat.* 6.17). Cicero also wrote that "Plato spoke with the voice of a God about things far removed from political debate"

---

fights for the right, if it is to be saved (σωθήσεσθαι) for even a little while, must be a private citizen, not a public celebrity" (*Apology* 31e-32a; cf. Mbae).

[22]This 'epitaph' offers proper homage by imitating Plato's punning on his own name: a phrase using the word πλεῖστον is tacked onto the last line in amplification of a previous statement.

(*De Oratore* 1.49), and "the philosophers say Jove would speak like [Plato] if he spoke Greek" (*Brutus* 31.121; cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Demosthenes*, 23). Dionysius of Halicarnassus, despite his vilification of Plato's 'grand style', admitted that he had "a supernatural gift (δαιμονιώτατος) for observing at once true melody and fine rhythm" (*On Lit. Comp.* 18), as well as profound interpretive ability, in reference to which he called him ὁ δαιμόνιος ἑρμηνεῦσαι Πλάτων (*Dem.* 26).[23] Quintilian wrote "Plato is supreme whether in acuteness of perception or in virtue of his divine gift of style" (*eloquendi facultate divina*, 10.1.81), Plutarch called him Πλάτων ὁ δαιμόνιος, and a scholar in his *Table-Talk* says "It is fitting to celebrate Plato with the line 'He seemed the scion not of mortal man, but of a God' [Homer, *Iliad* 24.258]" (8.1.717e). Athenaeus wrote Πλάτων δὲ ὁ θεῖος (6.233a), Philostratus, in the essay on his emulation of Gorgias and the Sophistic stylists (*Love Letters*, 73 [13]), called him ὁ θεσπέσιος Πλάτων, Longinus called him 'the otherwise divine Plato' (ὁ τἆλλα θεῖος Πλάτων) when (ironically enough) faulting him for 'frigid' wordplay (*On the Sublime* 4.6), and an anonymous epigram from the *Greek Anthology* expounds upon the insights of this tradition:

> Most exquisite utterer of the eloquent Attic tongue, the whole volume of Greek literature contains no voice greater than yours. You first, divine Plato (θεῖε Πλάτων), contemplated human character and conduct, directing your gaze toward divinity and heaven. Mingling [Pythagoras] the Samian with

---

[23]I owe this reference to North (see note 29 above). There is, in fact, a rich anecdotal tradition, apart from literary criticism *per se*, that refers to Plato as divine from birth, namely the son of Apollo (Riginos, pp. 9-32).

114

Socrates,[24] you were the most beautiful monument of their solemn struggle (*Greek Anthology* 9.188).

The modern perception of a distinction between the literal and the figurative sense of 'divinity' with regard to writing does not apply in the study of ancient Greco-Roman literary culture: in the case of Plato it was applied to his character --Simias writes that he "outstripped humanity in just character" (ἤθει τε δικαίῳ)-- as well as his literary style. But more importantly, the *logos* was itself considered a God or a divine power, at least among mystical poets of legend like Orpheus,[25] 'philosophers' like Zeno (Frags. 162, 152) and Democritus[26] and zealous initiates like Plato. Plato's deep devotion to private reading and writing and anti-conventional teaching (probably consisting in the cultivation of civilized dialectic alongside if not in preference to technical training) was conceived and practiced as an intimacy with the divine *logos* that released (λύσις, *Rep.* 7.515cff; cf. 532b) and purified (κάθαρσις) his psyche and immersed him in divine fire (*Epis.* 7.341c-d).

These implications of Plato's spiritual and artistic quest in relation to the dominant culture's value system were the chief inspiration for the subordination of the icon to the word, which in turn produced the Christian notion of Jesus Christ as the personification of the Divine Logos, and the connections between this and Plato's life were finally articulated in the 6th

---

[24]The Loeb translator writes "mingling the loftiness of Pythagoras with the irony of Socrates."

[25]Orpheus, Frag. 5 Abel bids 'Musaeus' to gaze upon the λόγον θεῖον.

[26]cf. Heraclitus Frags. 1, 2, 31, 50.

century CE, when Agathias Scholasticus of Myrina wrote the following

epigram:

> Decree-slabs and pictures and inscribed pillars (Στῆλαι καὶ
> γραφίδες καὶ κύρβιες) are a source of great delight to those who
> possess them, but only during their life; because the empty
> glory of humanity does not much benefit the spirits of the
> dead. But virtue and grace of wisdom both accompany us
> there and survive here attracting memory. **So neither Plato
> nor Homer takes pride in pictures or monuments, but in
> wisdom alone. Blessed are they whose memory is enshrined
> in wise volumes and not in empty images** (*GA* 4.4).

While the phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων defines Plato himself, then, in antithesis to

the political values that governed the public use of writing in his

contemporary culture and in sympathy with the philosophical aspiration

toward divinity in human life, it was also calculated as a representation of his

deep contemplation of and indeed immersion in, in technical terms, writing

as his own personal craft, τέχνη; but even this level of contemplation was

framed in reference to the contemporary culture's inescapable influence.

Observation of his monumental productivity and meticulous craft

necessitates the observation, against the traditionally specious interpretations

of the famous critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, that for Plato writing was,

for the most part, a private activity with its own value in and of itself, because

it demanded and facilitated privacy, solitude, independent creativity,

enlightenment, and the inspiration to teach. In and through his creative

writing, 'Plato' literally and figuratively 'molded himself' (*plattein heauton*).

The punning reveals and in fact exonerates the synthetic quality of his literary

identity: 'Plato' is a pseudonym and an alter ego for Aristocles, and this

gesture embodies the union of his ethical, intellectual, and artistic aspirations. Nietzsche, without recognizing the particular details of Plato's literary genius as I have outlined them, articulated the essence of the Platonic endeavor thus:

> "I, Plato, *am* the truth." Plato did not really teach the existence of another world, so much as he affirmed his own existence. "The true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, *he is it*" (Zuckert, p. 25; Nietzsche, Götzen-Dämmerung II, 963).

This pose was structured to some degree by his perceptions of and reactions to his contemporary cultural surroundings.

Like the allusive inscription of his pen-name, his candid representation of his own writing technology, i.e. wax-tablet molding (πλάττων), militates against the public industry of writing, where *graphike*, stone-carving, was the dominant operative technology, terminology, and measure of success. This contrast between media, namely private wax-molding and public stone-carving, harmonizes with Plato's private self-deification in antithesis to the *philotimia* that governs public politics by imaging, in conceptual resonance with his abiding interest in the analogous figure of the δημιουργός, the craftsman *cum* 'imagineer' at work with those materials as a God specifically by virtue of his imaginative, artistic, private, idiosyncratic use of the technology. But while he foregrounded and examined it more straightforwardly and zealously than any Greek writer before him (known to us), the idea of the craftsman as divine was not an original insight on Plato's part.

117

Homer and Hesiod had attended to Greek culture's ambivalence toward the individual craftworker, who "possessed skills which were highly valued by the aristocracy, without being aristocratic: an artist was in some sense both divinely inspired and less than mortal."[27] Many others saw this ambivalence as pervasive: Herodotus had written that

> the Thracians, the Scyths, the Persians, the Lydians, and almost all other barbarians, hold the citizens who practice crafts, and their children, in less repute than the rest, while they esteem as noble those who keep aloof from handicrafts, and especially honor such as are given wholly to war. **These ideas prevail throughout the whole of Greece, particularly among the Lacedaimonians.** Corinth is the place where mechanics are least despised (2.167).

Plato --whose home city and culture was overrun by the Lacedaimonians-- inherited from Homer (along with his love of poetry), Hesiod, and Herodotus this insight into the socio-political, -economic, and -cultural tension surrounding the creative artist, and he focused on its particular effect in the case of the creative writer.

But his vision of the creative writer was formed by more than just his love of literature and his experience of creative writing: it was developed in conjunction with a deeply felt socio-cultural, -economic, and -political sensibility that found the creative writer analogous to the craftworker, the δημιουργός. This became and remained among the primary themes of Plato's entire literary and pedagogical enterprise:

---

[27] O. Murray p. 55; cf. p. 82. See Homer's depiction of Hephaestus, *Iliad* 2.426; 9.468; 14.176, 339; 18.369; *Odyssey* 6.233; 23.160; Hesiod *Works and Days* 60.

118

Plato in his own time, as the invention of the Academy proves well, was the West's greatest and most engaged educational *technician*. From his writings we can see that he noticed and enjoyed the authenticity and action of the world of fine and useful arts (Brumbaugh, p. 204).

Plato associated the technical aspects of literary creativity with other forms of craftsmanship in several theoretical passages. In fact in the *Symposium* he redefined the word 'poetry' in terms of craftsmanship:

> There is more than one kind of 'poetry' (ποίησις) in the true sense of the word [i.e. 'creativity'] — that is to say, calling something into existence that was not there before, so that all kinds of artistic accomplishment are poetry (αἱ ὑπὸ πάσαις ταῖς τέχναις ἐργασίαι ποιήσεις εἰσὶ), and all craftworkers as such are creators (οἱ τούτων **δημιουργοὶ** πάντες ποιηταί, 205b; cf. *Charmides* 163 and *Republic* 2.378e-379a).

This equation of literary creativity with craftsmanship was fundamental to Plato's literal arguments about the function of poetry in the ideal city of the *Republic*, and his diction emphasizes this association:

> Is it, then, only the poets (ποιηταῖς) that we must supervise and compel to embody in their poems (ἐμποιεῖν τοῖς ποιήμασιν) the semblance of the good character or else not write poetry among us (παρ' ἡμῖν ποιεῖν), or must we also keep watch over the other craftsmen (τοῖς ἄλλοῖς δημιουργοῖς), and forbid them to represent [anything improper]...in any product of their art (δημιουργουμένῳ ἐμποιεῖν, 3.401b).[28]

This description underlines the creativity that the ποιητής and the δημιουργός have in common (ἐμποιεῖν τοῖς ποιήμασιν...δημιουργουμένῳ ἐμποιεῖν), and the

---

[28]In the same passage poetry is subsumed under craftsmanship: "we must look for those craftsmen who by the happy gift of nature are capable of following the trail of true beauty and grace, that our young men, dwelling as it were in a salubrious region, may receive benefit from all things about them, whence the influence that emanates from works of beauty may waft itself to eye or ear like a breeze that brings health from wholesome places, and so from earliest childhood insensibly guide them to likeness, to friendship, to harmony with beautiful reason."

119

association between poetry and craftsmanship on the literal, theoretical level of the dialogue anticipates Plato's symbolic, mythical representation of himself as ὁ θεὸς πλάττων. The wax-molding god's creative activity is articulated in terms of craftsmanship (πλαττόμενοι... δημιουργουμένη, 414d-e), and the simple implication is that Plato's image of himself as a creative writer was that of the archetypal δημιουργός.

This "analogy between the macrocosmic Demiurge and the microcosmic literary artisan" was recognized by the Neoplatonists (Coulter p. 30), and Plato elaborated the image in book 10 of the *Republic* while attempting to define imitation: repetitions of the word (δημιουργὸς, δημιουργεῖ, δημιουργῶν, δημιουργόν 596b) lead to a more intimate focus on the artist's hands (χειροτέχνων, χειροτέχνης 596c) as sacred symbols of her/his creativity, which is equated with cosmic power: "it makes everything growing out of the earth (τὰ ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυόμενα ἅπαντα ποιεῖ) and works out all animals, including itself." The craftsman's creation of himself is the Platonic writer/philosopher's self-fashioning:

> If...some compulsion is laid upon him to practice stamping
> on the plastic matter of human nature in public and private
> the patterns that he visions there, and not merely to mold
> and fashion himself (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν), do you think he will
> prove a poor craftsman (δημιουργὸν) of sobriety and justice
> and all forms of ordinary civic virtue? (*Rep.* 6.500d).

Plato combined his name-punning with the craftsman-analogy elsewhere; in the *Epinomis* it marks his attempt to recreate the genre of theogony:

This description could serve as a compacted statement of Plato's own aesthetic and ideological principles in the crafting of his entire corpus of dramatic Socratic dialogues.

120

since the men of old gave such a bad version of the generation of Gods and creatures, my first business, I presume, must be to imagine the process better, on the lines of my former discourse, and to embody the points which I tried to make against unbelievers, when I argued that there are Gods, that their care extends to all things great or small, and that no entreaties can win them to depart from the path of justice... we will take it as settled that psyche is older than body. But since this is so, it follows that the starting point of our story of creation is more credible than the starting point of theirs. We may take it, then, that our beginning is more seemly than the other, and that we are taking the right path to the great branch of wisdom which treats of the creation of the Gods... May we say that the name 'living creature' is most properly used in the case when a single complex of psyche and body gives birth to a single form?... And solid bodies from which one can best mold things (πλάττοι) are, by the most probable account, of five sorts, while the whole of being of the other kind has one single type. Because nothing can be incorporeal and wholly and always devoid of color, unless it is the most godly type, psyche, and to this practically alone do molding and crafting (πλάττειν καὶ δημιουργεῖν) belong. To body it pertains, as I say, to be molded (πλάττεσθαι), to come into being, to be seen --we repeat it, since it needs to be said more than once-- to be unseen, to know, to be apprehended by thought, and to have its part in memory and computation of the interchanges of odd and even (980c-981c).

This passage expresses the centrality of craftsmanship (δημιουργεῖν) to the identity of ὁ θεὸς πλάττων the divine literary artist and his mission of recreating divinity in literature via the genre of theogony. His style of theogony is the argument about the divinity of the psyche underlined with wordplay on his own name. This is worth repeating, but to demonstrate his linguistic versatility and ontological multiformity, he does it in different words.

Plato's incorporation of the δημιουργός into his own idealization of literary creativity and consistently favorable representation of and

121

theorization about the δημιουργός represents ideological polemic against the pseudo-aristocratic code of socioeconomic snobbery toward individual craftspeople and merchants. This snobbery is referenced on the satirical level of the *Republic,* where Socrates voices descriptions and arguments that ambiguously address his interlocutors' socio-economic and -political positions as powerbrokers in Cephalus' weapons-manufacturing business. Plato rejected the bourgeois fetishization (cf. Svenbro p. 214) of literary, musical, performative and representative arts that depended on organized socio-cultural, -political, and -economic alienation of the creative artist,[29] and his own knowledge of the arts of reading and writing was, again, that of a "technician." On top of this he practiced them as a craft with the added benefit of a great leader's charisma (acquired to an extent from Socrates by osmosis). He saw --or perhaps idealized-- in the δημιουργός, in fact, an innate, unpretentious love of wisdom: "in a general sense all experience is also termed by him wisdom, when he calls a craftsman wise" (Diog. L. 3.63), and the *locus classicus* for his apotheosis of the craftsman is the *Timaeus.* This compression of aesthetics and ideology is duplicated, clarified, and magnified by the *Republic*'s constant references to comparable art forms like painting, sculpture, and writing itself. The intellectual activity is often imagined in terms of such artwork,[30] and Plato incorporated his inherited socio-political, -

---

[29]Plato's own experience at the court of Dionysius (where he was imprisoned for a time and endangered with sale into slavery), probably among other intellectuals, poets, musicians, performers, and artists bespeaks his personal understanding of this phenomenon.

122

economic, and -cultural sensibility into his creative conceptualization of the private artist as a divine forger of culture and performed this role in his public activities as founder, teacher, and administrator of the Academy.

---

[30]e.g. 500e-501a: "If the multitude become aware that what we are saying of the philosopher is true, will they still be harsh with philosophers, and will they distrust our statement that no city could ever be blessed unless its lineaments were traced (διαγράψειαν) by artists who used the heavenly model (οἱ τῷ θείῳ παραδείγματι χρώμενοι ζωγράφοι)?...What is the manner of that sketch (διαγραφῆς) you have in mind? They will take the city and the characters of men, as they might a tablet (ὥσπερ πίνακα), and first wipe it clean (καθαρὰν ποιήσειαν)." Similarly, "the unjust man must act as clever craftsmen do (ὥσπερ οἱ δεινοὶ δημιουργοὶ ποιείτω): a first-rate pilot or physician, for example, feels the difference between impossibilities and possibilities in his art (τά τε ἀδύνατα ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ καὶ τὰ δυνατά, cf. 375d, 394eff., 458a, 471e and Quintilian 3.8.25 and 4.5.17) and attempts the one and lets the others go; and then, too, if he does happen to trip, he is equal to correcting his error" (360e-361a). By attending thus to these omnipresent figures of thought (cf. 583b6 and 586b9) —e.g. a study of Plato's use of the word παράδειγμα, 'pattern', would be helpful here; see 484c (with Shorey's note, Loeb Vol. II, p. 4, note c), 540a8 (Shorey II, p. 231, note a), 548bff, 557e1, 559a7, 561e7, 592b2, 617d7-- we begin to see already, as Havelock argued in 1963, that the dialogue is more explicitly concerned with artistic, representational, and communicative theory, ideology, technique, and tradition than with political philosophy. In my opinion it is a detailed exploration and exposition of the new art/craft of creative writing for private purposes which Plato explored, citing the etymology ποιεῖν for ποίησις, in response to the ideologies dominating the popular culture of representative art.

123

CHAPTER FIVE

NAMES

A. Patriarchal onomatothesis in Greek culture

> Being asked whether there would be any memoirs of him as of his predecessors, [Plato] replied, "A man must first hit upon a name (ὀνόματος δεῖ τυχεῖν πρῶτον), and he will have no lack of memoirs" (Diogenes Laertius 3.38).

> Then in your opinion he who gave the names, though he was a spirit or a god, would have given names which made him contradict himself? (*Cratylus* 438c).

Barry Strauss' recent book *Fathers and Sons in Athens* outlines the familialization of politics (or the politicization of the familial model) that dominated traditional Greek cultural ideology and public discourse and especially that of Peloponnesian War-era Athens. Strauss uses much material from Plato as evidence for the awareness of and concern about this issue that fifth- and fourth-century writers demonstrate.[1] Plato's multifaceted interest in the social realities and ideological implications of generational relations in the patriarchal culture may have achieved its sharpest expression in his rendering of the fabled speech Socrates supposedly delivered at his trial. As Strauss observes, "familial themes are woven throughout Plato's *Apology*, sometimes subtly, sometimes not: fathers and sons, age and youth, children and childhood, and the education and corruption of young men" (B. Strauss p. 203). In fact the relationships between fathers and sons were central to Plato's construction of the Socratic controversy. In the 1940s Leo Strauss (as referenced here by Zuckert) pointed out that

---

[1] See *Ap.* 31b, 45d; *Euthyph.* 4a-e; *Meno* 93a-95a; *Lach.* 179a-e, 180b; *Prt.* 325c-d, 327c; *Phdr.* 178d; *Rep.* 562e-563b; *Tim.* 21b; *Laws* 694c-695b, 804d, 881d, 886c, 930-932.

124

> In his first speech or defense proper in the *Apology*, Socrates shows that the official charges were trumped up by angry fathers. Unable to answer questions raised by youths imitating Socrates and seeking someone to blame for their own incapacity, his accusers reiterated the old charges against philosophers (Zuckert p. 174).

In the *Apology* Plato represented Socrates as an icon of the turmoil that characterized contemporary changes in traditional paternal authority, but in other writings he focused considerable attention on the ways in which the issue of naming functioned in the culture's underlying psychological struggles. It has been written that "it would be hard to exaggerate the power of names and the emphasis placed on the 'true meaning' of appellatives in Greek and Roman culture. Nomen truly equalled omen" (Bain p. 337). Scholars have long attended to the fact that ancient authors played with names in various ways and for various purposes,[2] and Plato made ironic use of the general cultural preoccupation with naming in order to establish a thematic background for the subtle dramas of personality that populate many of his dialogues.[3] One of the speeches in the *Symposium* includes the following general observation on this issue: human beings are so frighteningly obsessed with getting name-recognition (ὀνομαστοὶ) and storing up *kleos* immortal for all time that "for this, **even more than for their children,** they are ready to run all risks, to expend money, perform any kind of task, and sacrifice their lives" (*Symp.* 208c). A brief exploration of the issue of naming in Greek culture will reveal its fundamental

---

[2] See McCartney, Fordyce, and Chamberlain.

[3] "The young men of Plato's dialogues are often flattered with references to the greatness and fame of their families. Hippothales, for example, lover of Lysis, wrote verses about Lysis's father, grandfather, and ancestors, playing up their horses, wealth, victories at the Panhellenic games, and kinship with Herakles himself (Pl. *Lys.* 205c)" (BStrauss p. 72).

125

importance in the rationale of Plato's pseudonymous literary authorship, the punning on this pseudonym in the *Republic,* and the general design of his philosophical and pedagogical ideology and practice.

Recent scholarship has contemplated the issues of naming and language in ancient Greece from anthropological, sociological, and psychological perspectives, and one study in particular has examined the convention of patriarchal onomatothesis. Jesper Svenbro explains that in this convention "the name of the son is an *epithet* for the father or the grandfather" (Svenbro p. 69). This practice is represented in literature as early as the *Odyssey,* where Homer explains that Odysseus' grandfather was angry (ὀδυσσάμενος) and so dictated that the newborn child would be named "child of rage" (ʾΟδυσεύς, *Od.* 19.406-9) in memory of himself. This convention was practiced widely in reality, and more ambitious families brought to it a touch of pretension by crafting names obviously designed to preserve the memory and propagate the fame of their achievements: Themistocles named children of his own Archetepolis ("who governs the city"), Mnesiptolema ("who remembers the war"), Nicomache ("victorious in battle"), and Asia ("Asia"), all of which "are names that could well have been epithets for Themistokles himself, charting the various stages of his career, including his exile" (*ibid.* p. 77). Svenbro provides a valuable summary of the logic operative in this convention:

> ...a name functioned as a memorial to a parent or an ancestor, indeed, as an "inscription," proclaiming the ancestral *kleos,* in particular that of fathers and grandfathers. The newborn child was a blank space "for writing," where the epithet or name of a relative could be engraved. When asked "What is your name?" the child would always produce the same answer; and those who called for him would also always use the same name, as if they were reading it from this child who had become a memorial. Later the dramatic poets were to manipulate that

126

"inscriptional" space for the duration of a performance, wiping out the name of the actor in order to inscribe other (fictitious) names upon his memory... Everyone needs a name: the name-giver made the most of that fact and thereby satisfied his "desire for immortality," leaving behind him a name—either an epithet that commemmorated him or his own name—borne not by a funerary stone but by a descendant (Svenbro, p. 79).

This cultural institution came into crisis in the 5th century when, amidst the increasing popularity of such 'aristocratic' naming (i.e. with compounds and/or mythological names), greater awareness of the complexities and contradictions in social values and practices was uncovering widespread confusion with respect to lineage and identity. This situation functions as the background for a joke in Andocides' *On the Mysteries*. After describing the almost comical chaos that constituted a certain child's family life, he asked

> What name should be put on this child? I, personally, don't think anyone can be imagined 'noble' (*agathon*) enough to figure the right one out. There are three women with whom his father will have lived, and people say he is the son of one of them, the brother of another, and the uncle of the third. So who is he? Oedipus, Aegisthus, or what should he be named? (Andocides, *On the Mysteries*, 128-9).

Andocides' humor betrays a slight ridicule of the whole pseudo-aristocratic culture's preoccupation with 'meaningful' naming, but what is slight in Andocides is monumental in Plato.

Plato's situation in and emotional disposition toward this system is accessible through his disdain for the use to which writing was put in the culture of *philotimia* as discussed in the previous chapter. Inasmuch as the patriarchal convention of onomatothesis, i.e. inscribing on the psyche of a newborn child one's own name or a name signifying oneself, was a means of immortalizing one's own *kleos*, it represents the fundamental disease of which the culture of public politics, for Plato, was a symptom: his judgment of the use of writing

127

there as hubristic and blasphemous represents microcosmically his disposition toward the more loathsome use of 'writing' in the naming of children. In fact the statement from the *Symposium* quoted above in the context of *philotimia* proceeds to bring the issue of parent-child relations into its matrix of evaluation: again, human beings are so frighteningly obsessed with getting name-recognition (ὀνομαστοὶ) and storing up *kleos* immortal for all time that "for this, **even more than for their children**, they are ready to run all risks, to expend money, perform any kind of task, and sacrifice their lives" (*Symp.* 208c).

Plato's recognition of the tension between these operative priorities and the supposed nourishing function of the family in Greek society refers to the cultural convention of patriarchal onomatothesis as Svenbro describes it: one of the speeches in the *Symposium* expresses the opinion that men marry women in order that "by biological procreation (παιδογονίας) they acquire an immortality, a memorial (μνήμην), and a state of bliss," which they think they "'procure for all succeeding time'" (*Symp.* 208e, quoting Homer). The μνήμη to which Plato refers here is that idealized in patriarchal onomatothesis: men get married and beget children in order to carry on the family name and especially their own name, i.e. to become ὀνομαστοὶ and thereby immortalize their familial and personal *kleos*. Their personal relations with their children are often reflections of this value system:

> The Athenian's desire to have legitimate male offspring sprang from several motivations. The one most often cited in modern studies of Greek family life is the need of sons to preserve the clan and to continue the cult of the ancestors and household divinities. But the feeling evidently went deeper: Thucydides makes it clear that, in the Athenian conception, citizens without legitimate sons are not full-fledged members of the community, because no lives of children are at stake when they pass on important decisions (2, 44, 3). It is even possible that a man

128

> without male issue was denied a voice in the Senate (Din. 71).
> An affectionate desire for children was probably furthest from
> his mind when an Athenian married. In fact, the family
> structure of his society was designed so as to deprive him of a
> rewarding relationship with his sons as well as with his
> daughters..." (Keuls 1985 p. 100; cf. Winkler 1990 pp. 55-6).

This type of scholarly overstatement echoes Plato's own disturbing suggestion — based on a slight exaggeration of truth— that people do more for their own fame than for the welfare of their children, to the point of risking their lives (*Symp.* 208c). Plato's acknowledgement of this potentially disastrous cultural construction of desire, procreation, and family relations partly prompted his satiric vision of utopian political design, consisting primarily in the abolition of the nuclear family structure, in the *Republic* (7.541).

B. ὄνομα/οὐσία

We have thus sketched out the cultural background against which Plato staged his extensive play with names in many dialogues, but no dialogue exemplifies this better than the *Cratylus*. A brief overview of Socrates' reading of the meanings of names in the *Cratylus* will further illuminate the phenomenon of Plato's play with his own name in the *Republic*. The *Cratylus* begins as an analysis of the relationship between the name and personal identity of Socrates' interlocutor Hermogenes, which Cratylus the sophist has recently problematized by saying the name 'Hermogenes' "is not the name for you, even if the whole world calls you that" (383b). Socrates tries to interpet this perplexing 'oracle' (μαντείαν, 384a) for Hermogenes by saying "I suspect he's making fun of you (σκώπτειν), since he probably thinks that though you want to make money you fail all the time" (384c). Socrates' interpretation is based on his intuitive understanding of the cultural phenomenon of aristocratic name-composition as a

129

mode of signifying familial and cultural identity (Svenbro, pp. 64-79[4] and Calame pp. 174-185), in which framework Hermogenes' name, which literally means "offspring of Hermes," suggests that he is a good businessman: "Hermes was the patron deity of traders, bankers, and the like," but Socrates thinks Cratylus' joke refers to the fact that "Hermogenes...was not successful as a money-maker."[5] Socrates later offers another explanation which invokes Hermes' cultural status as the god who contrived speech (εἴρειν ἐμήσατο) and so was called Eiremes, to which Hermogenes responds, "I think Cratylus was right in saying I'm not Hermogenes [i.e. the son of Hermes]; I'm certainly no good contriver of speech" (408b). Plato thus dramatizes Hermogenes' personal identity crisis: his name is supposed to fit his personality (or vice-versa), but it doesn't.

One recent scholarly interpretation of the *Cratylus* suggests a link between Plato's critical appraisal of the general concern with name-recognition in Greek culture and the kind of analysis of patriarchal onomatothesis undertaken by scholars like Svenbro. Bruce Rosenstock treats the dialogue as an ironic drama staging the tension between the literal meaning of a man's name and his personality, wherein Hermogenes is "a disinherited and illegitimate son searching both for his patrimony and his legitimate name" (Rosenstock, p. 415). In that dialogue, the initially pathetic Hermogenes turns out to be better off for having been estranged from his family --namely his brother Kallias who inherited the family fortune and spent it by entertaining prestigious sophists like Prodicus-- and instead acquainted with the ironists Cratylus and Socrates, who

---

[4] The chapter titled "The Child as Signifier: The 'Inscription' of the Proper Name".

[5] Fowler, p. 7.

130

take him on a dizzying tour of the unresolvable ambiguity and manipulability of language. The ironic result of this acquaintance is that Hermogenes

> has special claim to being 'child of Hermes' because he has the good luck (*hermaion*) to have come upon Socrates and to have been unable to go to the sophists like his brother Kallias who, though he has inherited the patrimony, has lost his *phronesis*, his divine patrimony... In the *Cratylus*, it is really the legitimate brother who is in trouble and the illegitimate one who is on the path to being able to save himself, precisely because of his neediness (*ibid.* 414).

Rosenstock's final observation about the *Cratylus* is that Plato

> calls into question the very possibility of mastering the ambiguity of language, of turning it to one's own private gain, as Kallias hopes to do when he replaces the property in the storeroom of his house [i.e. his patrimony or οὐσία][6] with the couch of the sophist Prodicus, the man whose skill was precisely to disambiguate terms... Philosophy's task as it is embodied in the *Cratylus* is not to master the ambiguity of our discourse, but to let its uncanniness unsettle our assumptions about who we are and what is "proper" to us (p. 415).

Plato's embrace of ambiguity in the *Cratylus* concurs with his rejection of the clarity and certainty (σαφὲς καὶ βέβαιον, Phdr. 275c; cf. 277d) championed in the culture of rhetorical training for political oratory and *philotimia*. In fact, the richness of the ironies in the *Cratylus* and the tightness with which they are organized owe themselves mostly to the fact that basic usage as well as sophisticated mastery of language in Periclean-age and Peloponnesian War-era Greek society, the pinnacle of which is familial onomatothesis, were embedded in the patriarchal order. Plato's ironies provide clues to the rationale behind his general authorial anonymity in his dialogues as well as his adoption and use of the nickname or pseudonym 'Plato', whatever its 'true' source, in substitution for

---

[6]Much of the irony of the dialogue is based on the double meaning of οὐσία, 'patrimony' and 'identity'.

131

his "proper" patronymic 'Aristocles': the use of the pseudonym represents a rejection of the system of patriarchal onomatothesis and its logic of amplifying familial *kleos*. This is the principle behind his use of the parental model in the controversial (but ultimately perfunctory) evaluation of writing: in the same way that the written text is an orphan or bastard son whose father has left it defenseless (*Phdr.* 275d), 'Plat(t)o' is a self-created identity and creative entity that stands independent of the matrix of social values governed by patriarchal naming.

Postmodern readers of Plato have paid special attention to the tension between philosophic thought and traditional social norms that lies at the heart of his literary works. In her recent summary of these interpretations, Catherine H. Zuckert observes that

> Plato understood the dangerous character of philosophy. He saw that it threatened the psychic balance of the philosopher himself as well as the established conventions of the community. To have sufficient faith in oneself, to destroy the old order with confidence that one can replace it with a better, a philosopher needs to be, or at least needs to appear to be, a little mad. ...Perceiving the necessary tension between philosophy and the established society..., Plato recognized the need for the philosopher to disguise the radical nature of his activity... [Plato and Aristotle saw that] living according to the dominant opinions of their time and place (*polis*), ...most human beings live most of the time far from the truth. Beings disclose themselves only to those who pursue a certain way of life, to those who use *logos* to seek the truth, that is, to philosophers... Left to themselves, Plato indicated, human beings will remain in the cave or, as Heidegger described it, the fallacious, essentially empty realm of everyday opinion. Following others and accepting what was given is easier, safer and more reassuring than raising painful, alienating and unsettling questions (Zuckert pp. 21-49).

I undertook my treatment of the name-punning program in the *Republic* in recognition of the dual nature of the disguising or concealing element in Plato's

132

writing. I have used observations from ancient critics to demonstrate what guided Leo Strauss in his interpretations of Plato, namely that "ancient authors used...hints to entice readers to think for themselves and to educate them" (Zuckert 125). What I proposed was an exposition and exploration of the coherent personalized ideology regarding intellectualism, literary creativity, pedagogy, and sociopolitical culture that Plato concealed but hinted at in the form of puns on his own name, and the core of that ideology can, I believe, be articulated on the basis of Friedrich Nietzsche's discussion of Platonic philosophy and its pursuit of an ascetic ideal in opposition to the sensual indulgence that characterizes the established conventions of human society.

With his customary flair, Nietzsche proposed that "[the philosopher] sees in [the ascetic ideal] an optimum condition for the highest and boldest spirituality and smiles — he does *not* deny 'existence,' he rather affirms his existence and *only* his existence" (quoted by Zuckert, p. 28). The small dose of hyperbole in Nietzsche's formulation need not invalidate the basic truth of his statement and its implications, namely that the life of philosophic thought, creative writing, and teaching involves a fundamental act of self-affirmation, and that this can be observed in the enigmatic name-punning on which Plato built the *Republic*: "Even if Plato recognized the creative, self-affirming character of his own philosophical activity, he had proceeded covertly" (Zuckert p. 29). The reasoning for his covert operation has been articulated as follows:

> To persuade the public that philosophy was not inimical to morality, Plato saw, he had to persuade philosophers themselves to moderate their speech. By dramatizing not only the speeches but also the life and death of Socrates, Plato reminded would-be philosophers of the reasons they should not pose certain questions--questions regarding the gods and the soul, that is, questions regarding not only the basis and

133

> intelligibility of the cosmos but also the sources of support for
> justice, both natural and supernatural—too publicly or directly.
> By keeping himself and his own opinions always hidden, like
> his teacher Socrates, Plato taught his students, first and
> foremost, the need for self-restraint (Zucker p. 164).

Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology* is partially framed by his ambivalent attitude toward the traditional pride Athenians took in 'freedom of speech.' He considered this freedom excessive and responsible for Socrates' death, and the *Apology* is in fact an extremely humorous piece of writing, a tragicomic parody, because of its unbelievable portrayal of Socrates as addressing the court with παρρησία, "frank criticism." The bittersweet joke in it all turns on the fact that Plato was a very young man at the time of the trial, and this was the focus of a dramatic moment (as one anecdote reports) when he attempted to speak on Socrates' behalf: "...in the course of the trial Plato mounted the platform and began: 'Though I am the youngest, men of Athens, of all who ever rose to address you' — whereupon the judges shouted out, 'Get down! Get down!'" (Κατάβα, κατάβα, Diogenes L. 2.41; cf. Aulus Gellius 14.3). The young Plato was apparently determined to refute the charge that Socrates corrupted the young (!), and he might have won his mentor 30 votes. The famous Athenian 'freedom of speech' was denied him because of his youth, and the emotional impact of this moment on him must have been devastating.[7] It was probably among his reasons for leaving Greece, though not officially exiled, to travel and study in Egypt, where many later writers say he learned the mathematics and astronomy

---

[7]The traces of what he did with it artistically are available in the *Apology* as well as many other dialogues; they are begging for closer scholarly analysis. This anecdote records the memory Plato may have enshrined in the first line of the *Republic*, Κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ. The theme of 'going down' is important to the social aspect of Plato's intellectual ideology (see *Rep.* 328c,

that constituted much of his 'philosophical' pedagogy. The representation of

Hermogenes' identity crisis in the *Cratylus* and his use of Socrates and Cratylus

as helpers in solving that crisis is one of many good examples of Plato's

engagement with that tension. His reflections on *philotimia* are another good

example. The name-punning program in the *Republic* constitutes the balance

Plato struck between self-restraint and affirmation of his own existence. The

fundamental reality of that existence was the creative character of his

philosophical activity in the face of the tension he experienced in conventional

society (which in contemporary Athens was still dominated by postwar

upheaval), and the *Republic*'s pseudonymic name-punning program serves as a

paradigm for students and readers to use in striking this balance for themselves.

The anecdote which tells of Plato saying "A man must first hit upon a name

(ὀνόματος δεῖ τυχεῖν πρῶτον), and he will have no lack of memoirs" (Diogenes

Laertius 3.38) approximates the otherwise unexpressed wisdom in Aristocles'

intellectual and social enterprise: one might need to change one's identity in

order to survive and flourish.

C. ὀνοματοῦργειν as Platonic ποικιλία in the *Cratylus*

It was his own search for wisdom and balance in his contemporary

cultural climate —the kind Homer, the other poets, and the pre-Socratic

intellectuals offered in their writings— that led Plato to read into the conventions

of patriarchal naming and form a set of principles according to which he could

contextualize and conduct his idealistic meditation on and semantic play with

the letters of his own name. This is the formula stated in the *Cratylus*:

359d, 445ce, 449b, 519d, 614d), and his use of Κατέβην as the opening word of the dialogue
invites rumination on its compacted significance.

135

variety in the syllables is admissible (ποικίλλειν δὲ ἔξεστι ταῖς συλλαβαῖς), so that names which are the same appear different from one another, just as the physicians' drugs, when prepared with various colors and perfumes (πεποικιλμένα), seem different to us, though they are the same, but to the physician, who considers only their medicinal value, they seem the same, and he is not put off (ἐκπλήττεται) by the additions. So maybe the man who knows about names considers their force and is not put off (ἐκπλήττεται) if some letter is added, transposed, or subtracted, or even if the force of the name is expressed in entirely different letters. So, for instance, in the names...Astyanax and Hector, none of the letters is the same except t, but nevertheless they have the same meaning (394a-c).

This is as close as Plato comes to a written statement of method concerning the relation between interpretation and composition of names, and his interest in variety of representation, "so that names which are the same appear different from one another", is another aspect of his attitude toward the obsession with name-recognition that dominated mainstream society.

Plato's rejection of the culture of *philotimia* along with the convention of biologically-procreative marriage --he never married-- are counterpart to his embrace of *philosophia* (which he personifies, along with truth, *aletheia*, as female). Likewise, his participation in the philosophical counterculture that managed to survive in Athens is immortalized in anecdotes that showcase his cultivation of a richly personalized meaning for his pseudonym: his lively relationship with his contemporary Diogenes, the homeless "Cynic" philosopher, which became legendary for its humorous antagonism concerning issues of pride, pretense, and propriety, boasts an anecdote wherein Plato, after being invited by Diogenes to breakfast in the agora, responds with characteristically ironic and self-referential puns, saying "How charming your unpretentious (τὸ ἄπλαστον, which suggests 'un-Platolike', i.e. 'not imitating Plato') nature would be if it were not pretentious" (πλαστόν, 'Platolike' or 'in imitation of Plato'). Similarly,

136

Plato had defined the human being as a two-footed, featherless animal, and was applauded. Diogenes plucked a fowl and brought it into the lecture-room saying "This is Plato's human being.' So 'having broad nails' [τὸ πλατυώνυχον, which suggests 'Platonic'] was added to the definition" (D.L. 6.40).

But it was Timon of Phlius, well-known for his barbs against Plato,[8] who made the most condemning charge on this account by phrasing it in a hilariously parodic imitation of Plato's own puns on his name: ...ὡς ἀνέπλαττε Πλάτων ὁ πεπλασμένα θαύματα εἰδώς, "...as Plato practiced fabrication, in his understanding of amazing fabrications!"[9] The anecdotes suggest, then, that punning on his name was part of Plato's social world, to a degree that is much more intellectualized and personally focused than we would otherwise imagine, and the puns on his name in the *Republic* participate in the general opposition between *philotimia* and *philosophia*.

In book 9 Plato had Socrates conclude and dismiss the literal development of the argument about justice: "It was held that injustice is profitable to the completely unjust man who has a reputation for being just... Let us, then, have a reasonable discussion with him [who holds that view, namely someone like Thrasymachus] now that we have agreed on the essential nature of injustice and just conduct" (588b). Glaucon naturally asks "How?", and Socrates says

'By fashioning (πλάσαντες) in language a symbolic image of the psyche (εἰκόνα...τῆς ψυχῆς), so that the maintainer of that proposition may see precisely what it is that he was saying.' 'What sort of an image?' he said. 'One of those things that are mythologized as being ancient creatures,' said I, 'as that of the Chimaera or Scylla or Cerberus, and the numerous other examples that are told of many forms (ἰδέαι πολλαὶ) grown

---

[8]Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 3.17.

[9]Athenaeus 11.505e; "The verb and participle refer to things imagined, molded, trumped up" (Gulick, p. 270).

137

together into one (εἰς ἕν).' 'Yes, they do tell of them.' 'Mold (πλάττε), then, a single shape of a manifold and many-headed (ποικίλου καὶ πολυκεφάλου) beast that has a ring of heads of tame and wild beasts and can change them and cause to spring forth from itself all such growths.' 'It is the task of a cunning artist (πλάστου),' he said, 'but nevertheless, since *logos* is something more flexible (εὐπλαστότερον) than wax and other such media, assume that it has been so fashioned (πεπλάσθω).' 'Then one other form of a lion and one of a man and let the first be far the largest and the second second in size.' 'That is easier,' he said, 'and is done (πέπλασται).' 'Attach the three in one, then, so they somehow grow into one another.' 'They're attached,' he said. 'Then mold about them outside (περίπλασου) the likeness of one, that of the man, so that to anyone who is unable to look within but who can see only the external sheath it appears to be one living creature, the man.' 'The sheath is made fast about him (περιπέπλασται),' he said (588b-e).

Eight forms of πλάττω, one being the present active imperative πλάττε, appear in the space of 22 lines and dominate the sound as well as the action described and performed in the passage, making unmistakably obvious the fact that Plato claims the act of describing the image of the psyche as the province of his own divine literary art (ὁ θεὸς πλάττων).[10] The image of the particular psyche described, then, refers as much to Plato himself as it might to a Thrasymachus or to an archetypal idea of the eternal world psyche. It resembles, in fact, Plato's description of the archetypal 'sophist' in the dialogue of that name, and thus serves as an exposition of the sophistic spirit that gets disguised in much of the Greek poetic tradition as Plato sees it and especially in his own writing. Thus the writer transforms the program of self-inscription by means of implicit or disguised, i.e. sophistic, discourse into a program of explicit self-fashioning (as touched upon in 500d) by means of imagistic description. The inclusion of the word ποικίλου connects the idea of imagistic description as argumentation with

138

the general principle of ποικιλία, the literary style Plato cultivates, and the self-referentiality is intensified by the jarring theoretical generalization about *logos* included in the statement "since language/reason (λόγος) is more plastic (εὐπλαστότερον) than wax and other such media, assume that it has been so fashioned (πεπλάσθω)." This explicit mention of wax substantiates the image of wax-molding implied in the ὁ θεὸς πλάττων phrase and intensifies the focus on the specific raw materials, namely wax tablets, that Plato used in his literary art.

Plato thus defined himself first and foremost as a creative writer, a graphic artist (not a 'philosopher' befitting our stereotype) who practiced an imagistic art of speech; imagistic because he carved alphabetic letters, the (arbitrary?[11]) shapes of spoken sound, into wax tablets and with the speech that he thus transformed into something visible and tangible he painted images, like that of his own three-beast-in-one psyche. The act of transforming speech/reason into image sparks imagination, and the creativity unleashed is divine: Plato imagines himself as a god of creative writing, ὁ θεὸς Πλά(τ)των, and he fulfills his fantasy by imaging himself, making the world he creates signify (through the puns) and imitate (in its action) himself in every fiber of its being. Thus Plato's Socrates is primarily (with many entertaining variations) a literary Plato figure, a cryptic mouth or spokesperson for his creator, and he accomplishes his creator's will in the dramatic/dialectical world by many means,

---

[10]Compare the use of color-choice in painting as an analogy for letter-combination in writing (*Cratylus* 424c-425b).

[11]This is the central issue of the *Cratylus* dialogue: is the relationship between the visual letter and the sound it represents, and other signifiers and signifieds, arbitrary or does it have some inherent and accessible logic (cf. *Timaeus* 29b)? Plato, thus, was dealing with problems that modern linguistics, since Saussure, and psychoanalysis, since Freud, have rediscovered. Modern classical scholarship has yet to appreciate the depth and breadth to which these delicious problems permeate all of Plato's writing, i.e. both thought and literary expression.

one of which, as featured here, is the very direct mode of commanding his fellows to imitate and proclaim that creator; Socrates orders Glaucon πλάττε, and Glaucon obeys, in fine divine Platonic style, threefold. He utters his creator's name three times: πλάστου, εὐπλαστότερον, πεπλάσθω.[12]

Plato overloaded this passage with puns on his own name for several reasons: it serves formally as the grand finale of the dialogue's program of punning on the word πλάττω, like a flamboyant signature at the end of an important document; it also identifies as his own the idea of imagistic description as the proper means of argumentation against people like Thrasymachus, and finally it embodies the notion expressed in this very paragraph that λόγος, language/reason, "is something more flexible (εὐπλαστότερον) than wax and other such media." This notion deserves sustained attention for its relevance to my argument as well as for the profundity of intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual sensibility it reveals. It is to be compared, first of all, to a similar statement in the *Cratylus* which is also packaged with significant puns. In the course of discussing the natures of several gods, Plato writes that Pan is the double-natured son of Hermes because "ὁ λόγος signifies everything (τὸ πᾶν σημαίνει) and makes it circulate and move around and is twofold (διπλοῦς), true and false" (408c); after having Socrates align truth with divinity and falsehood with humanity and explain Pan's own double nature in these terms, he sums up the god's nature and ends the discussion with a more obscure pun on his own name:

---

[12]The style in which Socrates accomplishes Plato's will in the dialectical world is placed under scrutiny at the beginning of the dialogue in Thrasymachus' harangue against the "pettifogging" Socratic elenchus (336c-343d). The multifaceted character of Socrates' influence in Plato's dialogues has been exposed by Gellrich 1994 .

140

Pan, if he is the son of Hermes, is either *logos* or the brother of *logos*, and the fact that brother resembles brother is not at all surprising. But, as I said, my friend, let us get away from the gods (ἀπαλλαγῶμεν ἐκ τῶν θεῶν, 408b-d).

The idea that *logos* "signifies everything and makes it circulate and move around and is twofold, true and false" is counterpart to the idea that language/reason is something more flexible than wax. These are generalizations about language and reason that only the most sophisticated and insightful philosopher and poet could make, and while they are also accurate descriptions of the labyrinthine quality of Plato's own written διαλόγοι, they display, more than anything else in all of Plato's writing, the streamlined influence of Gorgias, whose pioneering theorization about and description of *logos* in the *Dissoi Logoi* and *Encomium of Helen* included profound abstraction as well as intensely vivid imagery and lively action.

The combined homage to Gorgias' thoughts about *logos* as well as his style --as represented by the personalized puns in these passages (εὐπλαστότερον, Πάν/τὸ πᾶν, ἀπαλλαγῶμεν ἐκ τῶν θεῶν)-- illustrates what Dionysius of Halicarnassus called the mystical quality (τελέτης) of Plato's engagement with the Gorgianic figures, i.e. sophistic rhetoric; and Plato employed his rhetorical mysticism in mythologizing himself as a god of literature. His Phoenician --or 'primordial literary'[13]-- myth, the *Republic*'s 'noble lie', is accessible via sophistic divination, and this model illuminates the most general artistic principle according to which Plato composed his ποικίλος λόγος: *logos* is twofold, true and false, divine and human, and Plato's idea of optimal writing involves cultivating this kind of duplicit style,

141

offering to the complex psyche elaborate and harmonious discourses (ποικίλη μὲν ποικίλους ψυχῇ καὶ παναρμονίους διδοὺς λόγους), and simple discourses to the simple psyche (*Phaedrus* 277b-c, cf. *Theaet.* 146d).

Plato's dramatic dialogue is designed according to this prescription: its "two levels of reality" are designed for two different types of readers.

The complex or ποικίλος discourse designed for the complex, ποικίλος psyche, consisting of the ideas implied by the puns and ambiguities (ὀνόμασι... ποικίλοις "unintelligible to the ignorant"), is the sophistic level,[14] and is the true and heavenly discourse: the ideas implied or hinted at (αἰνιττόμενον) are Plato's own personal thoughts and emotions he holds as eternally true; the literal level, consisting of the drama between the characters and the philosophical argumentation, is the simple discourse for the simple psyche, and embodies the false and human aspect of Plato's twofold *logos*, the opinions and attitudes that he does not hold as eternal truths. In the case of the *Republic*, the homonymystic phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων is truly the doorway to the heavenly level of the discourse: it is the face of Plato the god of literary art staring straight at the reader, the voice of Plato the god of musical language speaking straight to the listener, inviting the psyche to enjoy and understand the poetic truths indicated by the 'familial' resemblances between similar words like Πλάτων, πλάττων, and εὐπλαστότερον, etc., etc., and to proceed through (*dia*) the *logos* looking for these signs of the truth. The literal level of the text, i.e. the 'philosophical' dialogue, is the human level, where men are trapped in rationalistic thinking by the spellbinding power of Socrates, who was with Hades by the time Plato began writing.

---

[13]The Phoenicians, again, being the credited creators of the alphabet.

[14]In *Sophist* 226a Plato writes that the soul of the generic sophist is τὸ ποικίλον.

142

This conglomeration of ideas, expressed as such, crystallizes Plato's deep, abiding interest in comparing and contrasting the different forms of creativity, art, and craftsmanship popular in the Greek culture of his time. It embodies his extensive exploration and thorough understanding of the creative possibilities and powers of language, in both speech and writing: language and reason are more flexible than wax, they can be stretched, twisted, shaped into and wrapped around anything a person wants to shape them into or wrap them around; *logos* signifies everything and makes it circulate and move around. Third it captures, in the εὐπλαστότερον pun, his reflection on and cultivation of his own use of language as a creative tool in a manner that far surpassed the creative aspirations and achievements of any of his contemporaries and most of his predecessors and followers. Fourth, it manifests the intensity of his playfulness and in general the emotional and sensual vitality he poured into and cultivated in his writing. Finally it crystallizes the way he conceived of himself which is, as stated above, as a creative writer and teacher practicing both philosophy and sophistry at the same time, and aspiring toward (if not knowingly achieving) as much of divinity and immortality as human life can offer.[15] His craft involves experimenting with language and the technology of linguistic representation available to him, and that activity is a process of self-transformation. His youthful involvement with Socrates was animated as much by Socrates' unique charisma, which (as Xenophon indicated) included punning even more cryptic than Plato's, as by the 'philosophy' he taught (which, Xenophon also maintained, was rather plebeian and intolerant of the dazzling intellectual journeys in astronomy and

---

143

mathematics Plato, according to sources like Cicero and Quintilian, pursued in Egypt). Plato's fascination with language jumped at the thought of how Socrates (might have) squared off with Gorgias and Protagoras, and his fascination with the art of writing was inspired by Praxiteles the sculptor as much as by Homer, Pindar, Gorgias, and Thucydides.

In fact, the story that Socrates was originally a sculptor gains pertinent force in this light: Socrates' own approach to language was motivated by and developed according to an analogy between sculpture and language. In Socrates' method of education, the act of asking a student a question was like striking a stone block with a hammer and chisel: the flat facade gets chipped away, and, as the student thinks and formulates an answer, the inner figure begins to take shape and emerge. Plato took this analogy and adapted it to his own pedagogical situation and artistic designs. In writing, he stripped language down to its bare elements and built it back up again piece by piece in order to discover new intellectual and emotional experiences theretofore not explored (or at least not pushed to extremes) by any Greek poet (all of whom were constrained by predetermined meters, generic themes, and cultural imperatives). In doing so he discovered his own original theories about language, communication, knowledge, and emotion, many of which, as he says in the Seventh Letter, cannot be put into words. It is with these clarifications concerning Plato's personality and writing style in mind that we must continue our examination of the self-inscription program fundamental to the *Republic*.

---

[15]The problem of our ignorance about the real lives of ancient intellectuals has been addressed, to some extent, by Nehamas 1992.

The punning on his own name is to be interpreted thus as an allusion to Aristocles's contemplation, exploration, and re-creation of his identity as a human being in general, a man, a Greek, a mystic, a literary artist (i.e. both a reader and a writer), poet, sophist, philosopher, and cultural critic: he establishes a mythology of self by means of the significance of the "jesting play" (προσπαίζειν διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων) on the words πλάττων and Πλάτων and uses it to allude to a theory and sensibility of psyche that cannot be articulated (for various reasons) literally. Plato's reading, in the *Cratylus*, of the same meaning in the names 'Astyanax' and 'Hector' (see *Crat*. 392e) --despite (or 'because of'?) the fact that they share only one letter (t)-- serves as the inverse companion to the relationship between the word πλάττων and its compositional echo and mirror-image Πλάτων. The phrase ὁ θεὸς πλάττων, like the ἐκπλήττεται puns, extends the implications of the passage's literal content to Plato's otherwise hidden personal identity as the dramatic dialogue's writer and literary theorist, and that extension in turn transforms the meaning of the text's 'literal content' or 'inner dialogue'. This compositional technique, as demonstrated in the *Cratylus*, imitates, indeed embodies, that dialogue's fundamental dramatic and philosophical issue, namely the tension between the meaning of one's name and the reality of one's personal identity (οὐσία).

Aristocles's return to Greece was not a heroic return to freedom of speech and civic activity; the seventh *Epistle* preserves feeling of alienation throughout the course of the post-war restructuring:

> although at first I was filled with an ardent desire to engage in public affairs, when I considered all this and saw how things were shifting about anyhow in all directions, I finally became dizzy; and although I continued to think about how some improvement could be brought about not only in these matters

but also in the government as a whole, yet as regards to political action I kept constantly waiting for an opportune moment; until, finally, looking at all the States which now exist, I perceived that every last one of them is badly governed, since the state of their laws is such as to be almost incurable without some marvelous overhauling and good luck on top of it.

At this point Aristocles began to try to imagine –πλάττειν– a well-governed state. The next two sentences in the letter refer to the *Republic*:

So it was necessary (ἠναγκάσθην), by praising 'the right philosophy,' to say that it enables one to discern all forms of justice both political and individual, and that therefore the human races will have no relief from evils until either the race of 'right and true philosophers' attains political supremacy, or else the race of those who hold power in the States becomes, from some divine providence (ἔκ τινος μοίρας θείας), truly philosophic.

The acknowledgement of the necessity (ἠναγκάσθην) to say that "'the right philosophy' was the means by which a person could understand justice, and that human life would be evil until 'philosophers' became rulers and vice-versa" illuminates the reasoning behind Aristocles's writing in code, i.e. his development of the impersonal philosophical dialogue, in union with the persona of 'Plato', as a layered facade behind which he hid his personal messages in ambiguities, puns, and wordplay.

In this dissertation I have sought to demonstrate the practical reality of the insights postmodern thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, and Derrida have expressed concerning 'Plato's' practice of philosophy and his covert expressions of wisdom. My contribution to the postmodern tradition is the exposition and partial explanation of the name-punning system in the *Republic* and the discussion of what these puns indicate concerning the true wisdom 'Plato' communicated. In unbearably simplistic terms we shall conclude that

146

Aristocles was performing for himself and demonstrating to students and readers the possibility of refashioning one's identity and life and thereby escaping the narrow confines of conventional thinking in traditional mainstream society while enjoying the unified fruits and labors of poetry and philosophy both as a creative artist and a teacher, and with humor, seriousness, and stylistic flair. Furthermore, he not only used creative writing and teaching as his methods in recreating himself and thereby flouting the conventional thinking of his contemporary world, but used his meditations on the concept of divinity as his means for achieving literary immortality.

ABBREVIATIONS

CHCL Cambridge History of Classical Literature (Cambridge 1989).

OCD Oxford Classical Dictionary Vol. 3 (Oxford 1996).

D-K Diels-Kranz, Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker (Vaduz 1922).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adkins, Arthur W.H. "The 'Speech of Lysias' in Plato's *Phaedrus*", The Greeks and Us, Robert B. Louden and Paul Schollmeier, eds (Chicago 1996) 224-40.

Ahl, Frederick. Evidence and Self-Conviction in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (Ithaca 1991).

_____. "Ars Est Caelare Artem (Art in Puns and Anagrams Engraved)" On Puns: The Foundation of Letters, edited by Jonathan Culler (Oxford 1988).

_____. "The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome", *American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984).

Allen, Michael J.B. The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino (Berkeley 1984).

Anderson, Graham, The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire (London 1993).

Arieti, James A.. Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama (Savage, Md. 1991).

Armstrong, David. "The Impossibility of Metathesis: Philodemus and Lucretius on Form and Content in Poetry", in Philodemus and Poetry: Poetic Theory and Practice in Lucretius, Philodemus, and Horace, edited by Dirk Obbink (Oxford 1995).

Asmis, Elizabeth. "Plato on poetic creativity", in The Cambridge Companion to Plato, edited by Richard Kraut (Cambridge 1992) 338-364.

Ausland, Hayden W. "On Reading Plato Mimetically", *American Journal of Philology* 118 (1997) 371-416.

Bacon, Helen H. "The Poetry of *Phaedo*," in Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G.

148

Rosenmeyer, Mark Griffith and Donald J. Mastronarde, eds. (Atlanta, Ga. 1990) 147-162.

Bailyn, Bernard. The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass. 1967).

Bain, David. "The Magic of Names: Some Etymologies in the *Cyranides*", Papers of the Leeds International Latin Seminar 9 (London 1996) 337-356.

Baxter Timothy M.S. The *Cratylus*: Plato's Critique of Naming (Leiden 1992).

Bing, Peter. The Well-Read Muse: Present and Past in Callimachus and the Hellenistic Poets (Göttingen 1988).

Brock, Roger. "Plato and comedy" in Owls to Athens: Essays on classical subjects presented to Sir Kenneth Dover, ed. by Craik, E.M. (Oxford 1990).

Brown, Wendy. "'Supposing Truth Were a Woman...': Plato's Subversion of Masculine Discourse', *Political Theory* 16, no. 4 (November 1988) 594-616.

Brumbaugh, Robert S. "A Retracted Exile? Poetry and *Republic* 614b2", *Ancient Philosophy* 12 (1992) 172-3.

_____. "Philosophy and Literary Style: Two Paradigms of Classical Examples," Platonic Studies of Greek Philosophy: Form, Art, Gadgets, and Hemlock (Albany 1989).

Burger, Ronna. Plato's **Phaedrus**: A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing (University of Alabama, 1980).

Bury, J. B. The Nemean Odes of Pindar (London 1890).

Calame, Claude. The Craft of Poetic Speech in Ancient Greece (Ithaca 1995).

Campbell, David A. ed. Greek Lyric: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and others (Cambridge, Mass. 1991).

Cappon, Lester J. ed. The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams, Vol. II 1812-1826 (Chapel Hill 1959).

Carson, Anne. "How Not To Read a Poem: Unmixing Simonides from Protagoras", *Classical Philology* 87 (1992) 110-130.

149

Cerri, Giovanni. 'Il significato di sphregis in Teognide e la salvaguardia dell' autenticità testuale nel mondo antico', QS XVII No. 33 (1991) 21-40.

Chamberlain, David. "On Atomics: Onomastic and Metarrhythmic Translations in Herodotus," *Arethusa* 32 (1999) 263-312.

Clay, Diskin. "Plato's Atlantis: The Anatomy of a Fiction", in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* XV (1999) (Leiden 2000) 1-22.

_____. "The Tragic and Comic Poet of the Symposium", *Arion* NS 2 (1975) 238-61.

Cook, Albert. The Stance of Plato (Lanham, Md. 1996).

Cornford, Francis MacDonald. The Republic of Plato (NewYork 1947).

Cosgriff, L. "The *ethopoiia* of Plato's Republic" (Dissertations, Chapel Hill 1994).

Coulter, James A. The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists (Leiden 1976).

Denniston, J.D. "Technical Terms in Aristophanes", *Classical Quarterly* 21 (1927) 113-21.

Derrida, Jacques. Of Grammatology (Chicago 1978).

_____. Dissemination (Chicago 1981).

Desjardins, Rosemary. "Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play", in Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings, edited by Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (London 1988) 110-125.

Dover, Kenneth J. Plato: Symposium (Cambridge, Mass. 1987).

duBois, Page. "Phallocentrism and its Subversion in Plato's *Phaedrus*", *Arethusa* Vol. 18 (1985) 91-103.

Farness, Jay. "Plato's Architexture: Some Problems for Philosophical Interpretation", *Arethusa* Vol. 21 (1988) 27-46.

_____. Missing Socrates: Problems of Plato's Writing (University Park, Pa. 1991).

Ferrari, G.R.F. Listening to the Cicadas (Cambridge 1987).

Fineberg, Stephen. "Plato's *Euthyphro* and the Myth of Proteus", TAPA 112 (1982) 65-70.

Ford, Andrew. "Protagoras' Head: Interpreting Philosophic Fragments in *Theaetetus*", AJP 115 (1994) 199-218.

Fordyce, C.J. "Puns on Names in Greek," *Classical Journal* Vol. 30 (1935) 44-46.

Fortunoff, David. "Plato's Dialogues As Subversive Activity", in Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations, edited by Gerald A. Press (Lanham, Md. 1993) 61-76.

Fowler, Harold North. Plato: Theaetetus, Sophist (Cambridge, Mass. 1987).

_____. Plato: Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias (Cambridge, Mass. 1926).

Freese, John Henry. Aristotle: The 'Art' of Rhetoric (Cambridge, Mass. 1926).

Gagarin, Michael. "Probability and Persuasion: Plato and early Greek rhetoric", in Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action, Ian Worthington, ed. (London 1994) 46-68.

Gallop, D. "Plato and the Alphabet," *Philosophical Review* 72 (1968) 364-76.

Gellrich, Michele. "Socratic Magic: Enchantment, Irony, and Persuasion," *Classical World*, Vol 87 No 4 (March/April 1994) 275-307.

Gill, Christopher. "Plato on Falsehood--Not Fiction", in Gill, Christopher and Wiseman, T.P. (eds.), Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World (Austin 1993) 38-87.

Goody, J. and I. Watt. "The Consequences of Literacy" in Literacy in Traditional Societies, ed. J. Goody (Cambridge 1968) 27-68.

Grant, Michael, Greek and Roman Historians: Information and Misinformation (London 1995).

Halperin, David M. "Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity", in Innovations in Antiquity, edited by Ralph Hexter and Daniel Selden (London 1992) 158-183.

Hamilton, Edith and Huntington Cairns, eds. <u>Plato: The Collected Dialogues including the Letters</u>, with Introduction and Prefatory Notes (Princeton 1961).

Havelock, Eric. <u>Preface to Plato</u> (Cambridge 1963).

_____. <u>The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences</u> (Princeton, N.J. 1982).

_____. <u>The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present</u> (New Haven 1986).

Hexter, Ralph, and Daniel Selden, eds. <u>Innovations of Antiquity</u>, (London 1992).

Janko, Richard. <u>Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II</u> (Berkeley 1984).

Johnson, W.R. <u>Momentary Monsters: Lucan and His Heroes</u> (Ithaca 1987).

Jowett, Benjamin and Lewis Campbell, <u>Plato's Republic: The Greek Text Edited, with Notes and Essays, Vol. III</u> (Oxford 1894).

Keller, Andrew. 'Comic wisdom: Aristophanes and Plato' (Dissertations, Princeton, N.J. 1991).

Keuls, Eva. <u>The Reign of the Phallus</u> (Berkeley 1985).

Knox, B. M. W. "Silent Reading in Antiquity", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* (1968) 121-137.

Laîn Entralgo, Pedro. <u>The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity</u> (New Haven 1970).

Lawson-Tancred, Hugh. <u>Plato's Republic and the Greek Enlightenment</u> (London, 1998).

Lebeck, Anne. "The Central Myth of Plato's *Phaedrus*", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* V 13 (Autumn 1972) No. 3.

Levison, M., A. Q. Morton, and A.D. Winspear. "The Seventh Letter of Plato", *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* (Vol. LXXVII No. 307) 309-325.

Lindsay, A.D. and Renford Bambrough. <u>Plato: The Republic</u> (London 1976).

Mbae, Justus G. 'Education for salvation: Plato's conception of the soteriological role of philosophy', *Journal of Humanities* (Zomba University of Malawi) V (1991) 17-27.

Malkin, I. "What's in a name? The eponymous founders of Greek colonies", *Athenaeum* LXIII 1985 (114-130).

McCartney, E.S. "Puns and Plays on Proper Names," *Classical Journal* Vol. 14 (1921) 343-358.

Minar, Edwin L. Jr. Plutarch's Moralia in fifteen volumes, IX 697c-771e (Cambridge, Mass. 1961).

Murray, Oswyn. "Life and Society in Classical Greece", in The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World, Edited by John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray (Oxford 1986) 29-46.

_____. Early Greece, Second Edition (Cambridge, Mass. 1993).

Murray, Penelope. Plato On Poetry (Cambridge 1996).

Nehamas, Alexander. "What did Socrates teach and to whom did he teach it?", *Review of Metaphysics* 46 (December 1992) 279-306.

Nightingale, Andrea Wilson. Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy (Cambridge 1995).

Norden, E. *Die Antike Kunstprose vom VI. jahrhundert V. Chr. bis in die zeit der renaissance*, Vol. i (Leipzig 1909).

North, Helen F. "*Inutilis Sibi, Perniciosus Patriae*: A Platonic Argument Against Sophistic Rhetoric", *Illinois Classical Studies* VI.2 (Fall 1981) 242-271.

_____. "Combing and Curling: *Orator Summus Plato*", *Illinois Classical Studies* XVI (Spring 1991) 201-219.

_____. Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature (Ithaca 1966).

_____."The Dacian Walls Speak: Plato in Moldavia", in *Qui Miscuit Utile Dulci: Festschrift Essays for Paul Lachlan MacKendrick*, Gareth Schmeling & Jon D. Mikalson, eds. (Wauconda, IL: 1998) 265-286.

Nussbaum, Martha C. The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Ong, Walter J. Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London 1982).

O'Regan, Daphne Elizabeth. Rhetoric, Comedy, and the Violence of Language in Aristophanes' Clouds (New York 1992).

Paton, W. R. The Greek Anthology Vol. 5 (Cambridge, Mass. 1969).

Preuss, Sigmund. Index Demosthenicum (Hildesheim 1963).

Race, William H. "The Limitations of Rationalism: Sophocles' Oedipus and Plato's Socrates" Syllecta Classica 11 (2000) 89-105.

_____. "Negative Expressions and Pindaric Ποικιλία", TAPA 113 (1983) 95-122.

Riginos, Alice Swift. Platonica: The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato (Leiden 1976).

Robb, Kevin. Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece (New York 1994).

Rosenstock, Bruce. "Fathers and Sons: Irony in the Cratylus", Arethusa 25 (1992) 385-417.

Rutherford, Ian. "Μνήμης...Φάρμακον at Plato 'Phaedrus' 274e-275a: An Imitation of Euripides fr. 578?", Hermes, 118. Band, Heft 3 (1990) 377-9.

Rutherford, R.B. "Plato and Lit. Crit.", Phronesis Vol. XXXIII - No. 2 - (1988) 216-224.

_____. The Art of Plato (Cambridge, Mass. 1995).

Shorey, Paul. Plato: Republic, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass. 1930).

Slater, Niall. "Literacy and Old Comedy", in Voice into Text: Orality and Literacy in Ancient Greece, Ian Worthington, ed. (Leiden 1996) 99-112.

Spariosu, Mihai. God of Many Names: Play, Poetry, and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle (Durham, N.C. 1991).

Sprague, Rosamond Kent. Plato's Use of Fallacy: A Study of the Euthydemus and Some Other Dialogues (New York 1962).

154

Stanford, W.B. Ambiguity in Greek Literature: Studies in Theory and Practice (Oxford 1939).

_____, The Sound of Greek: Studies in the Greek Theory and Practice of Euphony (Berkeley 1967).

Steiner, Deborah Tarn. The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece (Princeton N.J. 1994).

Strauss, Barry S. Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War (Princeton N.J. 1993).

Svenbro, Jesper. Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece (Ithaca 1993).

Tang, Yanfang. "Language, Truth, and Literary Interpretation: A Cross-cultural Examination" (Journal of the History of Ideas 60 (1999) 1-20.

Tanner, R.G. "Plato's Phaedrus: An Educational Manifesto?", in Understanding the Phaedrus: Proceedings of the II Symposium Platonicum, edited by Livio Rossetti (Sankt Augustin 1992) 218-221.

Tate, J. "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation", Classical Quarterly 23 (1929) 142-154 and Classical Quarterly 24 (1930) 1-11.

Thesleff, Holger. "Looking for Clues: An Interpretation of Some Literary Aspects of Plato's Two-Level Model," in J. Press (ed.), Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations (Savage, Md. 1993) 17-45.

Thomas, Carol G. and Edward Kent Webb. "From orality to rhetoric: an intellectual transformation" in Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action, Ian Worthington, ed. (London 1994) 3-25.

Thomas, Rosalind. Orality and Literacy in Ancient Greece (Cambridge 1993).

Tuana, Nancy, ed. Feminist Interpretations of Plato (University Park, Pa. 1994).

Waterfield, Robin, trans. Plato: Republic (New York 1993).

Westerink, L.G. 'The Title of Plato's Republic', Illinois Classical Studies 6.1 (1981) 112-115.

Whitman, Cedric. Aristophanes and the Comic Hero (Cambridge, Mass. 1964).

Winkler, John J. The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece, (London 1990).

Wise, Jennifer. Dionysus Writes: The Invention of Theatre in Ancient Greece (Ithaca 1998).

Wohl, Victoria. 'Plato Avant La Lettre: Authenticity in Plato's Epistles,' in Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings, edited by Charles L. Griswold, Jr. (London 1988) 60-93.

Woodhouse, C. M. Gemistos Plethon: the Last of the Hellenes (Oxford 1986).

Zaidman, Louise Bruit and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, Religion in the Ancient Greek City (Cambridge 1992).

Zaslavsky, R. "A hitherto unmarked pun in the Phaedrus", Apeiron XV (1981) 115-116.

Zuckert, Catherine H. Postmodern Platos: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Strauss, Derrida (Chicago 1996).