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### The Use of Mimetic Irony in Plato's *Phaedrus*

The most beautiful thing when it comes to Socrates and Plato's portrayal of him is that he is the most humble philosopher and never claimed to know all of the facts of life as most other philosophers at the time did, and still do to this day. In Mitchell Miller's chapter, "Problems with Interpretation," from his book *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman*, Miller starts by saying that Plato's dialogues can be largely misinterpreted, and have been, especially when comparing Plato's older works to his more recent and the way in which they are written differently. Miller points out that Plato's later works have been said to be less dramatic than his previous dialogues, what Miller tries to prove in this paper is that Plato's writings can be seen in many forms, which is why Plato has been largely misinterpreted. In Miller's analysis, he wants to show that all Plato's works can be seen as dramatic and full of symbolism.

In the Platonic dialogues, Plato writes as if he were Socrates or his scribe who follows him around and writes down what he says, or as his more devout student. In this, we can already take from the fact that the dialogues run through speeches that are not by the author of the book itself, Plato, and say that both Plato and Socrates were unconventional writers, speakers, and teachers in their own right. Miller says that one reason why Plato's later works seem different is that Socrates is much more silent and the writings are all-around more positive. A running theme of

Plato's writings is the presence of 'mimetic irony,' which is a strategy in which philosophers open their speech up to the thoughts and views of who he is talking to – in a large way, they are putting on a facade in order to better reach his audience both emotionally and mentally.

What Miller highlights especially is that Plato writes in a way that is anonymous and unconcluding in his works, this is because Plato/Socrates adjusts himself to his audience and thusly says things that the audience would want to here—meaning that Socrates some times said things that would otherwise seem odd. Miller points out that analysts have called early Plato as “negative” and later Plato as more “positive” but Miller argues that this cannot be judged to any actuality because of the use of mimetic irony.

One thing that I often say as a truth to life to that “art is referential” and this premise is something that Miller tries to show with his “mimetic irony.” What Socrates does in his form of speaking is something that all artists largely do: he references what his audience wants to hear. In the case of art, artists refer to what people want to see. This is one reason why everyone considers art to be “never original” and this is the same reason why people think Socrates may be saying things that he actually is not. For instance, if a reader were to take Socrates' speeches in Phaedrus out of context, they would be incredibly confused as to why Socrates is speaking of love between a teacher and student. And even in some cases, when reading the book, all of its contexts, and notes from an editor, a reader can still not completely understand what Socrates' mimetic irony is trying to prove. This is because his audience is thousands of years older than his current readers, this is why we have to take into consideration the contexts of Greek life from the time and realize that he is spewing nonsense. This nonsense is what attracted his audience and without this, they would not have been able to fully understand what he was trying to say, or

possibly listen in the first place. Similarly to current artists of today, they have to refer to other popular artists in order to attract an audience.

In the paper “Not an ‘Exact Grasp’ But Not a ‘Complete Falsehood’: The Truth Status and Rhetorical Function of the Tripartite Model of City and Soul in the Republic,” written by Mark Moes, and in the section titled “How Plato’s Use of Mimetic Irony and Dialogue Structure Explains His Depiction of Socrates’ Use of the Tripartite Soul Model in the Republic,” Moes covers Mitchell Miller’s meaning more carefully as to what “mimetic irony” is as well as its compositional structure. Moes writes that Plato uses the aid of mimetic irony in order to achieve a discussion with those who generally carry a “hostility to philosophy” and because of this hostility, it becomes necessary for Socrates to allude himself to odd and different themes, topics, and arguments. The four-part compositional structure of Socrates’/Plato’s mimetic irony starts with the philosopher (Socrates) asking for a thesis from an interlocutor. Next, he listens to the speech and thesis with the guise that it is nearly true, in this step he shows both empathy and like-mindedness while also giving heed to the issues of the speech.

The third step begins once the interlocutor finds himself in contradiction to his original speech, this is when the philosopher can offer some “reorientating insight” that can settle the contradictions. The final step of mimetic irony’s structure is the “exegesis,” which is where the philosopher attempts to say the speech back again with the newly formed insight and without the contradictions. This is the moment in which most interlocutors either find themselves perplexed or dumbfounded, or all-together at odds with Socrates. In a large way, this compositional structure was the signature on his death certificate as he did so very much enjoy annoying people

who did not want to be annoyed—telling them that they were wrong and self-contradictory in ways that they did not want to be told.

The example that Moes uses is one from a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon in the *Republic*, where Glaucon is promoting Thrasymachus's notions of an "every man for himself" type of city ruling. This is where Socrates translates this idea into how it would work within the human body, articulating a three-part soul as a "community." But as this analogy did not work for Glaucon, his audience, he verged into different formulations of the same thought with the use of his mimetic irony and carried on in a way that Glaucon would better understand, while still pointing to the same reorientated insight. Other examples can be found throughout all of Plato's works, one, in particular, is his *Phaedrus*, which consists of one long dialogue between Socrates and a student named Phaedrus, who was under another philosopher as a teacher. The single discussion in *Phaedrus* can be broken down into two parts: Eros and Rhetoric; for this paper, we will be focusing on the first half of the book: Eros. In the Eros section of *Phaedrus*, the mimetic four-part compositional structure can be seen in the way Socrates tries to lean Phaedrus away from the conceptions of his teacher Lysias.

At the beginning of *Phaedrus*, the young student approaches Socrates with a speech that Lysias wrote, the speech proposes a thesis that non-lovers are better than lovers to their beloveds because lovers care too little for the teaching aspect of Pederasty and non-lovers will be better teachers to the beloved without any of the harm that a lover would cause. What Phaedrus asks of Socrates is to give the same speech but with more sound arguments, directing Socrates to not use any of the same logic. This is something Socrates says he cannot do, as Lysias had covered nearly all of the bases of Pederasty. But what Phaedrus probably does not know, is that for

Socrates to use his mimetic irony, he must use the same logical arguments that Lysias did in order to refute them. The process between Phaedrus reading Lysias' speech and this asking Socrates to recreate the speech is the first part of the compositional structure. This moves us to the second part, in which Socrates does give the same speech with the same thesis; but after which, Socrates expresses that he feels he has displeased the gods and is required to continue on. This highlights that the "problematic character" of Lysias' speech is that it writes Eros and Loves off as something unholy, ungodly, immoral—when this is not the case, Socrates says that the god Eros would be gravely displeased from this speech.

The third part to Socrates' mimetic irony is "reorienting insight" and within Phaedrus, this is when Socrates gives his "Great Speech" that reveals Love as having four parts and Eros is but one of them, and none of which can be seen as unholy, ungodly, or immoral as they are gifts from the gods themselves, and sometimes seen personified as gods. By giving Love and Eros a more distinguished definition, Socrates highlights the contradictions in Lysias' speech where he argues that a lover that is in love is worse for the beloved than a lover that is not in love. How could a lover with love be worse than a lover without when love itself is a divine gift from the gods? The "exegesis," the fourth part of the compositional structure, can be seen when Socrates gives another speech that dictates that a lover in love is best, but only best when there is no physical interaction between the lover and the beloved, there ought to be only a mental and spiritual interaction between the lover and beloved. In this case, a lover with physical interactions with his beloved would be worse for the beloved as this can be a distraction to the soul and to reaching a cultivated self. This exegesis carries the thesis that a lover who teaches is

better than a lover who loves intimately with the beloved, which is an adjacent reflection to Lysias' speech and does agree with it to a varying degree.

Throughout the course of Eros in *Phaedrus*, Socrates pays dear attention to how a lover and beloved ought to have a relationship. What he believes Lysias' speech entails is an imitation to his structure where the philosopher does attempt to change the mind of the interlocutor, but Socrates sees this is a misuse and with the hopes that the beloved will not see through the "nonlover's" speech as a point to manipulate him into bed. What Socrates performs in his speech is a better explanation as to why a philosopher and his student ought not to sleep together but this is not because the philosopher does not love the boy, it is because he is not physically attracted to the boy.