

It is not so much statuary as an artistic form, as sculpture, but rather as a representational object within a particular economy of signs with which I concern myself in this paper. Specifically, I would like to look at the way in which statues, images and idols show themselves within the narrative of Plato's Phaedrus as signposts and waymarkers of a particular form of representation and rhetorical structure, one that is associated with mythurgy, or the making of myths, and with writing rather than discourse in its logocentric form.

Plato's dialogue contains a number of mythological digressions, and anything which is other than dialectic is a digression from the Platonic viewpoint, the most striking of which is the myth of Theuth which recounts the creation of writing, arguably the signifying structure par excellence. In the myth, Thamus, or Ammon, passes judgment on the various gifts which Theuth or Thoth has created. When it comes to his crowning achievement, writing, the Ibis headed one is scolded by the king of the gods: "you have invented an elixir not of memory (μνήμη) but of reminding (ὑπομνήσεως)." (Plato, c370 BCE: 275A) This dichotomy, between memory and reminding, is essential to the various hierarchized pairs that appear throughout the text, which are marked by repeated references to images, idols and statues. In much the same way that writing is an image (εἶδωλον) of living speech (Plato, c370 BCE: 276A), statues stand in for their referents, having the appearance, and the appearance only, of the things that they represent. Clearly, when we speak of statuary in this way, we are confining ourselves to the figurative statuary that was predominant prior to the 20th century and which characterizes the vast majority of religious and sacrificial sculpture. Often, statuary of this sort is found at the site of graves, and the statues we see here act as grave markers. They are monuments that serve as reminders of past living speech that has now come to rest, as a corpse of speech: that is, as writing. It seems that given the implicit and explicit criticism of writing as such within the Phaedrus, these monuments are in

fact cenotaphs, which commemorate the speech which is now dead, without preserving it within. These cenotaphs serve as reminders and representations, marking the distinction between mythology and discourse; the first having a primarily sacramental and sacred function and the latter a secular or philosophical.

The distinction we introduced before, between memory and reminding, cuts to the heart of Platonic thinking. Whereas the two may seem synonymous in our everyday speech, within the Platonic text they form a hierarchized propositional structure such as is essential to Platonism as a system. Memory, as anamnesis, is specifically that which leads us back to the realm of ideas, the forms, while reminding is a *τεχνή*, a skill dependent on the use of some tool. Reminding is therefore squarely in the domain that Socrates stakes out for rhetoric as opposed to philosophy, for mythology rather than dialectic. Reminding is essentially instrumental, whereas memory is organic.

When we first encounter this distinction between memory and reminding in the dialogue, it is presented by Phaedrus in reverse form. In response to Socrates' request, Phaedrus declines to recite their friend Lysias' speech, claiming that he cannot relate from memory what took Lysias a great deal of time and leisure to write. Writing appears here as studied and considered speech, as opposed to the haphazard nature of extemporaneous speech. Memory, on the other hand, appears as faulty without the structure of writing on which to lean. Over the course of the whole dialogue, Socrates will studiously invert this relationship, which does nevertheless seem to coincide with our everyday understanding of the role of writing. However, the written text, the scripture, is not absent from the dialogue, but rather merely hidden underneath the cloak of Phaedrus. Phaedrus suffers Socrates' scorn for carrying around this text, treating it as a sort of

idol or talisman, an object of worship. The appearance of the written text will dramatically set the stage for the reversal of the privileging between writing and speech.

When Phaedrus and Socrates arrive at the place that is appropriate, not for the pursuit of discourse, that is the conversation which will lead to our apprehension of the highest forms, but for the recitation of a written text, it is specifically marked as a place of statuary. Sculptures dedicated to nymphs and to Achelous frame the site. This is the first, but hardly the last time when we will see the reading of the written text and sculptural idols related explicitly in the text. In fact, it seems that the mention of sculptural representation generally heralds the appearance of the written word or of its counterpart with the Platonic system, myth. Even the first story in the text, that of the abduction of Oreithria by Boreas, is marked by an altar, thus cementing the association between the sacrificial, sacred function of sculpture and the mythological and graphological. The term that Plato uses to describe the altar is Βωμός, which can also mean the base or pediment of a statue. The altar of sacrifice would never be without a sculptural reminder of the god to whom offerings were to be made. At this altar it seems that it is the written word itself which will be sacrificed. Thus, even this seemingly insignificant mythic reference is shown to be consistent with the relationship to statuary. Just as myth is being explicitly dismissed by Socrates in their conversation (Plato, c370 BCE: 230A), we arrive at a place of reading staked out by the two speakers. Socrates describes it by noting not only the natural surroundings, but also the statues (ἄγαλμα). The place must be specifically sacred to the nymphs and to Achelous, he notes, *due to the statues*. As the two situate themselves among the figures, Phaedrus begins to read the text of Lysias. This ostensible interpolation of the written text into the dialogue is peculiar enough to attract attention, but it is further marked by two references to statuary which frame it, and set it off from the dialogue, which is represented as living speech,

despite its, for us, written form. We have just mentioned the initial reference, but at the conclusion of the recitation, when Phaedrus attempts to induce Socrates to produce his own speech, Phaedrus promises to set up (ἀναθήσειν) an icon (εἰκόνα) of both himself and Socrates as a reward. (Plato, c370 BCE: 235D) As if to mark another writing, Phaedrus repeats his promise to erect "a statue of beaten metal" (ἀνάθημα σφυρήλατος) to Socrates, if he can produce a superior discourse. (Plato, c370 BCE: 236B) It may be noted here that the use of "anathema" here designates the lifting up or setting apart in a positive sense, rather than the disciplinary usage introduced in the Christian era. "Anathema" here rather represents that which is lifted up in offering to the gods; a sacrifice.

It seems at this point that the promised statue is announcing Socrates' speech, and extemporaneous living word. This would seem to contradict the thesis that the occurrence of statuary within the narrative marks writing or mythology. Extraordinarily, however, as Socrates begins his own speech on the subject, he characterizes it explicitly as μῦθος. (Plato, c370 BCE: 237A) This, combined with Socrates' peculiar gesture of covering his head during the tale indicates some nascent negativity in the consideration of the speech. There is something problematic about this speech for Socrates. It is not securely located at the positive pole of the oppositional structure that we have indicated; the valence of this speech is at the very least questionable, if not decidedly negative. This is confirmed when Socrates later makes his recantation of the speech. Further, when Socrates abruptly breaks off his speech, it is because he claims to have left the domain of dialectic, and entered into poetry under the influence of the Muses. He states that he is already speaking in hexameters, and if he proceeds, he will be possessed by the nymphs to which Phaedrus has exposed him in the form of the statues that litter the grove. Socrates' outburst of poetry is directly attributable to the surrounding sculptures; his

lapse into poetic forms of expression, forms more appropriate to mythurgy and rhetoric, is directly related to the sculptural presence that has invaded the site of speech.

To introduce the mythic segment of his palinode, specifically the myth outlining the tripartite structure of the soul, Socrates specifically names it as a "figure," (Plato, c370 BCE: 246A) again giving us a reference to imagery and representation, which by this time should be a clear harbinger of that pole of the Platonic opposition to which is associated myth, writing, rhetoric, and sculpture. It is during Socrates' recantation, and the myth of the winged horses and charioteer (Plato, c370 BCE: 246A) which he offers up as a substitute for the failed sacrifice of his original speech, that the most notable references to statuary are to be found. They are perhaps all the more striking because of their explicit relation to memory. Recall, that memory and reminding are sharply distinguished within the context of the dialogue: reminding is characterized as a kind of danger, a risk to our access to the philosophical realm.

Memory, in the discourse on the soul, is very much associated with the positive pole of the dichotomy, and with the realm of "real being" which is accessed by virtue of "communion through memory." (Plato, c370 BCE: 249C) For Plato, all learning is structured as memory of the eidetic realm, a memory preserved in the soul. Memory is the key to the realm of ideas, but reminding, in the form of the objects and entities which we think of as "real," is relegated to the position of image and simulacrum. The relationship of the realm of the absolute to what we perceive as reality is that of an original to its "namesake." (Plato, c370 BCE: 250E) The clearest example of this relationship is the recognition of beauty in the beloved, who becomes a representation of the beautiful worthy of worship and sacrifice. The term Plato uses here is "idol," (ἰδὼλατι, obviously connected with the ἄγαλμα noted above) a term which even today would not seem out of place in describing the object of one's affections. This idol is a reminder

of the divine, of the god, in much the same way that a statue is a reminder of its model, or that which it seeks to depict. This relationship is emphasized by repetition at 252D where the beloved is again an ἄγαλμα, a representation of the god in whose company the soul traveled in the realm of the ideas. The relationship of imagery and sculpture to reminding is cemented when the "narcissistic circuit" is formed, and the beloved perceives his own beauty in the image (εἶδωλον) formed in the mirror of the lover. (Plato, c370 BCE: 255D) The reflected image is a direct parallel to the function of writing in relation to living speech as denoted in the myth of Theuth.

Before that final myth is introduced, there is again a reference to the Lysian text, the written character of which is emphasized by the exact repetition of the opening as it was imparted to us earlier on. One of the qualities that typifies writing is its infinite repeatability. Because it is fixed in time, it can be ritually or scripturally reproduced, and thereby introduce into language the religious notions of purity and fidelity. The reproduction of the text is marked by yet another reference to the nymphs and to Achelous, whose sacred statues define the horizon of the grassy place where Phaedrus and Socrates sit and demark and enclose it as a site of writing. Achelous himself is, according to Pseudo-Apollodorus, the father of the Sirens. Their mother, interestingly, is one of the Muses that drives Socrates to poetry; specifically Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy. (Apollodorus, c100: 1:21)

Socrates' criticism of the rhetorical structure and the discourse is highlighted by his reference to the tomb of "Midas the Phrygian", on which, ostensibly, there is an inscription or epigram which may be rearranged without making any difference in its meaning. This betrays the polarization of writing and speech, granting to speech the priority of ownership over meaning. Meaning is communicated only in the living word, not in the symbolic representation of writing. Like other

statues or grave markers, this team specifically encloses and marks off speech, designating its passage. The inscription itself, however, is doubly encoded, in that it itself refers to a statue, to the "bronze maiden" (Plato, c370 BCE: 264D) which immediately calls to mind the statue of beaten metal promised by Phaedrus much earlier in the text.

As Socrates prepares to relate this final myth, he begins by noting the ornithological representation of the god Theuth, or, as he is more commonly known, Thoth: the ibis. This reference to the theriomorphic representation of the god seems to be an oblique statuary reference that announces the myth, which will so explicitly deal with the idea of an ossified reminder, a gravesite marker of the living word. That writing occupies a place on the negative pole of our Platonic opposition is clear, even to the point of being a commonplace, and this is marked in similar ways to earlier references to writing that were not so explicit about its negativity, and which even, in the first instance, seem to privilege writing as more considered and disciplined. It is in this myth that the distinction with which we began this discussion is explicitly drawn, that between memory and reminding. The written word is relegated by Thamus, or Ammon, to the realm of the purely instrumental, and its effects are ultimately detrimental to the function of memory which is the key to the eidetic realm. Because writing prevents people from practicing the memory, that organ of our consciousness begins to atrophy, and access to the sphere of the forms becomes diminished. The usefulness of letters, each of which may be understood within this particular economy of signs as an individual sculpted form, is consigned to the "forgetfulness of old age", and relates to the living, breathing word only as image (εἶδωλον). (Plato, c370 BCE: 276A-D) The εἶδωλον can be an image reflected in water, or a mirror, or a two-dimensional representation, but I do not think that we are stretching too far

to include in that category sculptural representations, especially given the close association with figural sculpture that the term has had throughout the dialogue.

Much of the Platonic critique of mythology depends on the opposition of being and seeming, of truth and appearance. The extended use of the trope of sculptural representation would indicate that this is very much in operation in the *Phaedrus*, as the idol is understood as only a copy of that which it represents, and an imperfect one at that. To think that this is the limit of how an idol can possibly function clearly fails to recognize the power of representation in its material form, and especially its relationship to the sacred. Plato's denigration of writing seems to be, at the very least shortsighted, especially considering his frequent deployment of sculpture's discursive counterpart, mythology. However, within the realm of purely representational sculpture, the relationship of image to original is similarly powerful. The statue or idol stands, like the brazen maiden on the tomb of Midas, as a herald, or a signpost, to be read, and to remind us as we pass by. The myths in the *Phaedrus* are also explicitly likenesses or figures, reminders of some other, more original object. However, it is entirely through myth, through sacrifice, and through the material representation of the god in the idol that we have access to the realm of the sacred. We should also not overlook the importance of the written tradition, the scriptural tradition, in this connection.

While it is easy enough to say that images, idols, writing, and mythology all have ostensible negative polarities within the system of Platonism, it seems that there is something more complicated happening in the *Phaedrus* that is announced by the prevalence of statuary references. The polarity that simply relegates these related modes to inferiority to the philosophical discipline of living speech in the practice of dialectic is itself undermined by the extensive use of myth by Socrates himself within the text, and the undeniable fact that this all



occurs within the textual artifact which is itself written. Jane Curran's claim that the Platonic text defies the critique of writing because of its dialectical methodology (Curran, 1986: 70) is never fully satisfactory. The text itself stands as a kind of counter argument in its very materiality. The dialogue's status as a sort of meta-writing, both in the sense that it is a writing that contains an embedded text, and that it is a writing on the subject of writing is too concrete and striking to be simply argued away.

When first examining the text, the occurrences of references to statues and idols within the narrative may seem to be sporadic and marginal, but from the repeated reference both in the mythic and in the dialectic moments of the text, it can be seen that this is a functional element which seeks to set up a particular economy of signification and which is an integral part of the performative dimension of the text. These statues, which initially stood only around the perimeter of the site of the Phaedrus, begin themselves to take on life, and to move toward the center, while still retaining their primary function as identified by the text itself, which is to remind: in this case, they remind us of the technological and material structure of the written word in the Platonic text, while at the same time opening up the possibilities for the written and scriptural tradition and the sacerdotal deployment of idols as a means to participate in the sacred. It is not that Plato's warning about writing should go unheeded, but rather as we pass by it should recognize that it is precisely through these material representations, writing and sculpture, that discourse retains its living quality and ceases to become a purely temporally defined, ephemeral and limited performance. While the statues that litter the site of the Phaedrus give, from a distance, the impression of a graveyard, filled with row after row of monuments to dead speech, we should see also that it is in and through these monuments which have a life of their own that language in all its richness comes to have meaning at all.