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PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS* AND THE PROBLEM OF UNITY

DANIEL WERNER

1. Introduction

PLATO'S *Phaedrus* is a protean text. In terms of subject-matter, it spans a very wide area, touching upon nearly all of Plato's major areas of interest: rhetoric, *erōs*, the soul, the theory of Forms, dialectic, sophistry, myth, the gods, and philosophy itself. In terms of literary style and tone, the dialogue is equally far-reaching, as Plato employs the resources of epideictic rhetoric, mythical narrative, dialogical conversation, and dialectical analysis—not to mention the variety of styles and motifs which he appropriates from Greek religion, literature, and culture. Indeed, as we read through the *Phaedrus*—particularly for the first time—the structure of the dialogue seems expressly designed to emphasize this thematic and stylistic diversity. Simply consider the basic action and sequence of events in the dialogue: Socrates and Phaedrus are taking a stroll through the countryside on a hot afternoon, and they begin to converse about various topics. After a brief introductory section, the dialogue proceeds with three monological speeches, each of which ostensibly deals with the topic of *erōs*. The third of these speeches—the so-called 'palinode', which is undoubtedly the most famous part of the *Phaedrus*—presents a truly cosmic vision, as it describes the nature of the soul, the fall and reincarnation of the soul, the prenatal vision of the Forms, as well as the nature of *erōs*. As soon as the palinode is over, however, we leave the rhetorical heights of myth and find ourselves immersed once again in the expected mode of Platonic philosophizing—one-on-one dialogue and elenctic cross-examination. This dialogical portion of the *Phaedrus* deals with the nature of rhetoric (in both its spoken and written forms), and in

particular, the way in which rhetoric *ought* to be practised in order to qualify as a true ‘art’ (*technē*).

With all of this thematic, stylistic, and structural diversity, the question naturally arises: just what is it that holds the *Phaedrus* together? Is this dialogue merely a hotchpotch of various ideas and themes, or is there some overriding concern or issue that binds it all together? How are we to read the dialogue, and what is its main focus—rhetoric, *erōs*, or something else altogether? These questions are the basis of the so-called ‘problem of unity’ of the *Phaedrus*: whether (and how) the dialogue has a unified coherence as a philosophical text. The problem of unity has in fact been voiced ever since antiquity;¹ and indeed it is made all the more pressing in so far as *within the dialogue itself* Plato explicitly makes structural unity and organic composition a *sine qua non* of good rhetoric (see 264 A ff.). The main difficulty involved in the issue of unity is essentially twofold. First, in terms of theme and subject-matter, the *Phaedrus* seems to be patently incoherent. Whereas the first half of the dialogue (the three speeches) deals explicitly and primarily with *erōs*, the second half seems to deal only with rhetoric; moreover, the two halves seem to have little or nothing to do with one another, as they have very little cross-referencing or cross-commentary. In particular, the soaring and cosmic vision of the palinode seems to drop completely out of sight at the end of the first half—it is hard to see how concerns regarding the Forms, the soul, reincarnation, and *erōs* fit into the more narrow concerns regarding rhetoric as a *technē*. Second, the problem of unity exists on a stylistic and methodological level: whereas the first half relies on set speeches and myth to make its point, the second half uses elenctic dialogue. There is, then, a rather abrupt change in tone, register, and intensity halfway through the dialogue.² Moreover, no attempt seems to

¹ This can be seen in the discussion of the issue by Hermeias (a Neoplatonist commentator on Plato), as well as in the plurality of subtitles that were given to the *Phaedrus* in ancient times; it was debated as to whether rhetoric, *erōs*, the soul, the Good, or Beauty was the main ‘aim’ or ‘object’ (*σκοπός*) of the dialogue. See G. J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* [*Commentary*] (Amsterdam, 1969), 22, for the references.

² In keeping with contemporary literature on the *Phaedrus*, I speak as if there is an exact ‘midpoint’ in the text which neatly divides the dialogue into two equal ‘halves’. Yet such terminology is misleading: the first ‘half’ (the introduction plus the three set speeches) actually constitutes some 58% of the total Greek text (30 Stephanus pages), whereas the second ‘half’ constitutes some 42% of the text (22 Stephanus pages). The palinode alone constitutes a full one-quarter of the text (13

be made to reconcile these two divergent approaches; Plato simply seems to have switched gears, but without explaining *why* he felt it necessary to do so.

In this article I shall examine the problem of unity, and consider some of the ways in which it might be solved. Indeed, scholars' attempted solutions to the *Phaedrus*'s unity have been as varied and multi-coloured as the dialogue which is the object of their discussion; not only is there disagreement as to textual and substantive issues in the dialogue, but there is disagreement as to just what 'unity' is supposed to mean—and consequently, just what the 'problem' of unity is supposed to entail. Accordingly, one of my aims in this article is classificatory: viz. to distinguish the *kinds* of approach that one can take towards the problem of unity. Broadly speaking, there are four such approaches:

- (1) *The thematic approach*. Interpreters who take this view focus on the level of theme or subject-matter, and argue for one or more of the following claims: (a) there is a single, primary theme which encompasses the dialogue as a whole; (b) strong thematic links *do* exist between the first half and the second half, perhaps on a more implicit or subtle level; and (c) the thematic disunity of the dialogue is only superficial.
- (2) *The non-thematic approach*. According to this approach, we must look *beyond* the level of theme and subject-matter in order to find the unity of the dialogue. There is, it is claimed, a variety of other levels on which Plato unifies the text: e.g. drama, form or structure, tone, verbal texture and imagery, and the interplay between word and deed.
- (3) *The debunking approach* ('*questioning the question*'). The first two approaches accept the problem of unity on its own terms as a genuine difficulty, and suggest ways to resolve it. Interpreters in this third approach, however, deny the force of the 'problem' itself. They claim that strict unity is a requirement which modern commentators wrongly impose on Plato's text. The type of unity we are seeking is simply not to be found in the *Phaedrus*; instead, we must admit that the disunity of the text is real and ineluctable—though there are historical reasons as to *why* that is the case.

Stephanus pages). From the point of view of the dichotomous division, then, the *Phaedrus* is rather lopsided.

- (4) *The strategic approach* ('*deliberate contrasts*'). Some commentators, though accepting the genuine force of the problem (in contrast to the third approach), do not attempt to resolve it by arguing for a deeper type of unity. Rather, they concede that the text *does* have disunity—or at least that it *appears* to be disunified. However, they see this not as a flaw of Plato's writing but as a *deliberate* manoeuvre on his part: a philosophical and literary strategy designed to achieve certain ends (in particular, a certain response in the reader).

In what follows I shall examine each of these four approaches, and I shall consider some of the main arguments in support of each. I shall also discuss what I take to be helpful and/or problematic in each approach. I shall ultimately advocate a hybrid approach to the question of unity which combines important elements of the thematic, non-thematic, and strategic approaches (I shall not have anything to say in support of the debunking approach). I shall argue that, contrary to appearances—and to some extent *because of* those appearances—the *Phaedrus* is a deeply coherent and carefully organized text, and indeed that it well exemplifies the 'logographic necessity' of which Socrates speaks at 264 c. Hence the problem of unity *is* soluble—though a satisfactory solution requires a response that is as complex and multi-layered as the text at hand.

2. The thematic approach

(a) *Thematic monism*

As I noted above, there is disagreement among interpreters as to just what constitutes the 'problem' of unity. The most common approach, however, is to construe the question of unity as a *thematic* one—i.e. whether (and how) the *Phaedrus* is unified on the level of theme and subject-matter. Indeed, the majority of commentators on the *Phaedrus* simply tend to assume from the outset that the problem of unity is *entirely* soluble on a thematic level.³ Accordingly, the issue is most frequently posed as follows: what is the main theme (or purpose, or subject) of the *Phaedrus*? Is it *erōs*, rhetoric, or something else altogether? Note the assumption

³ As I shall argue later, this is an unwarranted assumption, in so far as it unfairly privileges the 'content' of Plato's dialogues over their 'form'.

underlying this formulation of the question: that it is proper for us to expect a Platonic dialogue to have a 'main theme', i.e. that there is *one* (and only one) main subject within each dialogue that will be 'primary' or 'most important' (with all other themes being 'subordinate' to that main theme).⁴ I shall refer to this assumption as *thematic monism*, and later I shall question its correctness; for the moment, however, I wish to consider the ways in which it has been developed.

When posed as a question regarding the 'main subject', the task of solving the problem of unity thereby becomes that of identifying the focus of the dialogue—what is it all about? This is no simple question in the case of the *Phaedrus*. The first half seems to be about *erōs*, whereas the second half seems to be about rhetoric; moreover, the palinode seems to be about a great many other things: the soul, the Forms, the gods, and philosophy (just to name a few of its themes). Those who take the thematic approach to unity, therefore, must not only identify what they see as the main theme, but must also argue for its primacy over the other contenders.

Those who adhere to thematic monism in the case of the *Phaedrus* have tended to argue for one of several positions: viz. that either (i) rhetoric, (ii) *erōs*, (iii) philosophy, or (iv) some other theme is the main subject of the dialogue. I shall now consider each of these proposals in turn.

(i) *Rhetoric*. By far the most common proposal among commentators is that rhetoric is the main theme of the dialogue, and indeed support for this view runs quite wide.⁵ Some commentators have also suggested that the main *purpose* of the *Phaedrus*—as dis-

⁴ For a clear statement of this view, see R. Waterfield (trans.), *Plato: Phaedrus* (Oxford, 2002), xi.

⁵ See W. H. Thompson, *The Phaedrus of Plato* (London, 1868), xiv; H. N. Fowler (trans.), *Plato*, i. *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1914), 407; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, 'The Unity of the *Phaedrus*' ['Unity'], inaugural lecture delivered at King's College, University of London, 1953, *Dialogos (Hellenic Studies Review)*, 1 (1994), 6–20 at 12; De Vries, *Commentary*, 23; A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Indianapolis, 1995), xxviii, xxxviii; J. H. Nichols, Jr., *Plato: Phaedrus* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 15, 18; J. V. Curran, 'The Rhetorical Technique of Plato's *Phaedrus*' ['Rhetorical Technique'], *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 19 (1986), 66–72 at 71; D. C. Stewart, 'The Continuing Relevance of Plato's *Phaedrus*', in R. J. Connors, L. S. Ede, and A. A. Lunsford (eds.), *Essays on Classical Rhetoric and Modern Discourse* (Carbondale, Ill., 1984), 115–26 at 116–17; R. M. Weaver, 'The *Phaedrus* and the Nature of Rhetoric', in R. L. Johannesen, R. Strickland, and R. T. Eubanks (eds.), *Language is Sermonic* (Baton Rouge, La., 1970), 57–83 at 58; P. Friedländer, *Plato*, iii. *The Dialogues: Second and Third*

tinguished from the main theme—is to discuss and establish the principles of true rhetoric.⁶ The only variation among all of these interpreters is the terminology which they employ: i.e. whether rhetoric is the ‘central thema’ (De Vries), the ‘chief theme’ (Fowler), the ‘main subject’ (Nehamas and Woodruff), the ‘central theme’ (Nichols), or the ‘main purpose’ (Taylor, Hamilton).

Notice that these views need not imply—rather implausibly—that rhetoric is the *only* theme of the dialogue. More broadly, thematic monism does not require that there be only *one* theme, but rather that there be only one *primary* theme. Indeed, it is a central feature of thematic monism that there be a hierarchy within a Platonic dialogue: a main subject on top, to which all the other subjects are subordinate in importance. In the case of the rhetoric-oriented view of the *Phaedrus*, this would mean that the discussions of *erōs*, the soul, the Forms, etc. would all be subordinate to the discussion of rhetoric.⁷

How sound is the rhetoric-oriented approach to the *Phaedrus*? That rhetoric is *a* central theme of the dialogue—as well as *a* unifying theme—is undeniable. The most compelling evidence for this is the simple fact that rhetoric truly is omnipresent throughout the *entire* dialogue—and not simply in the second half. That rhetoric is important in the second half of the dialogue is obvious, for in that half Socrates and Phaedrus examine the nature of the true *technē* of rhetoric. But what about the first half of the dialogue, which ostensibly deals with *erōs*? A careful reading of the text in fact reveals that the issue of rhetoric and *logoi* is central to that half of the text as well. Within the dramatic fiction of the *Phaedrus*, after all,

Periods, trans. H. Meyerhoff, 2nd edn. (Princeton, 1969), 241; P. Plass, ‘The Unity of the *Phaedrus*’ [‘Unity’], *Symbolae Osloenses*, 43 (1968), 7–38 at 27, 33, 37.

⁶ W. Hamilton (trans.), *Plato: Phaedrus and the Seventh and Eighth Letters* (Harmondsworth, 1973), 9; A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work [Plato]*, 6th edn. (New York, 1956), 300. Cf. also G. Ryle’s claim that the *Phaedrus* is intended as a kind of announcement or advertisement for the ‘Academy’s entry into the teaching of rhetoric’ (cited in W. K. C. Guthrie, ‘Rhetoric and Philosophy: The Unity of the *Phaedrus*’ [‘Rhetoric and Philosophy’], *Paideia* (1976), 117–24 at 117).

⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, almost none of the commentators noted above have been sufficiently self-consistent as to state this implication explicitly; after all, when we first read the dialogue most of us intuitively regard the *palinode* as ‘primary’, and not the discussion of rhetoric. Nehamas and Woodruff are one exception: they bite the bullet and flatly declare that ‘Plato is more interested in what the speeches show about the practice of rhetoric than in what they reveal about the nature of love’ (*Plato: Phaedrus*, xxviii).

the genesis for the entire conversation is the fact that Phaedrus has just come from Epicrates' house, where the famous orator Lysias gave a public performance of speeches. Having departed from that performance, Phaedrus is now carrying with him a written transcript of one of Lysias' speeches. The entire drama of the *Phaedrus*, then, is indirectly instigated by Lysias, the master of rhetoric—and in this sense Socrates' reference to Lysias as the 'father' of a *logos* (257 B 3) is more than just a piece of irony. Other references to *logoi* abound in the opening scene. Socrates, for instance, describes himself as being 'sick for the hearing of words' (*νοσοῦντι περὶ λόγων ἀκοήν*, 228 B 6–7) and as a 'lover of words' (*τοῦ τῶν λόγων ἔραστοῦ*, 228 C 1–2). A passion for words has in fact gripped both Socrates and Phaedrus—though for different reasons. Whereas Phaedrus' interest in *logoi* and speeches is almost entirely aesthetic—he takes delight in hearing new and strange things—Socrates approaches *logoi* as an opportunity to learn and to engage in enquiry. (In this way, the senses of *logos* as 'thing said' and as 'reason' merge in Socrates' case.) A passion for words, then—the stuff of rhetoric—has brought these two characters together in the first place, and has brought us the dialogue which we are now reading.

Hence the dialogue begins with a distinctly rhetorical orientation—and in truth it never really leaves this origin behind. After all, the first half of the dialogue consists of three *speeches*, that is to say, three *examples* of rhetoric. Moreover, the issue of rhetoric is present *within* the three speeches that Phaedrus and Socrates recite, both explicitly and implicitly. Simply consider the entire situation of the first two speeches: in each case, we have an older man attempting to *persuade* a younger boy that it is better to yield to a non-lover than to a lover. The imagined narrators of these two speeches, then, are *using* rhetoric to achieve their ends (just as Phaedrus and Socrates are using rhetoric to compete with one another). This suggests a more general point (to which I shall return later): all lovers are a kind of rhetorician, in so far as they necessarily engage in verbal 'intercourse' with one another.⁸ The content of the speeches bears out this point as well. In Lysias' speech, for instance, the mere fact that two lovers are seen in *conversation* (*διαλεγόμενοι ἀλλήλοις*, 232 A

⁸ Or as C. L. Griswold, Jr., nicely put the point, 'the desire to seduce requires rhetoric, whether one's purpose is to lead one's beloved into philosophy or into a sexual relationship' (*Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* [*Self-Knowledge*], rev. edn. (University Park, Pa., 1996), 159).

8-B 1) is taken to be a sign of recently consummated (or soon-to-be consummated) sexual passion. Rhetoric and *erōs* are therefore fused from the very beginning of the *Phaedrus*.

Within the palinode too *logos* plays a pivotal role, particularly in the account of the philosophical lovers. On the one side of the erotic relationship, the lover seeks a kindred soulmate; and when he finds that soulmate, he then attempts to mould the beloved into a specific way of life—attempting, among other things, to *persuade* the beloved (*πείθοντες*, 253 B 6, presumably implying the use of verbal persuasion). On the other side, the beloved gradually comes to welcome the company and the *conversation* (*λόγον*, 255 B 3) of the lover, at least when such a relationship is fated to be. On both sides, the highest kind of *erōs* flourishes when the rational element of the soul (the charioteer) predominates, enlisting the help of the good horse and strictly controlling the bad horse. And part of what distinguishes the good horse is that it obeys the *verbal* command alone (*κελεύσαντι μόνον καὶ λόγῳ ἡμιοχεῖται*, 253 D 7–E 1). In the erotic vision of the palinode, then, *logos* is important within the relationship *between* the two lovers, as well as *within* the soul of each lover.

Finally, there seems to be an important connection between *logos* and the metaphysics of the palinode. In a crucial (and cryptic) passage Socrates states that the prenatal vision of the Forms is necessary prior to our incarnation as humans, in so far as ‘a human being must understand speech in terms of general forms’ (*δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον*, 249 B 6–7). Although the exact meaning of this passage is unclear, Socrates seems to be saying that the human capacity for language—and by extension, rhetoric—is dependent upon the metaphysical vision depicted in the mythical narrative.

The above evidence is enough to indicate, I think, that rhetoric and the issue of *logos* are by no means confined to the second half of the dialogue; in fact they are prominent in the first half as well, and are intertwined with the entire discussion from the beginning. This proves quite clearly that rhetoric is *a* recurring theme—and indeed *a* unifying theme—in the dialogue. But the above evidence proves no more than that. In particular, it does not yet prove that rhetoric is the *main* theme of the dialogue. On what basis, then, have so many commentators maintained the latter claim?

There are two arguments that are typically given in support of

this stronger claim. First, there is a formal or structural argument: viz. that rhetoric is the primary theme of the dialogue in so far as it is both *expounded* (in the second half) and *enacted* (in the first half). That is to say, in the second half of the dialogue Plato talks *about* rhetoric, and in the first half he provides three *examples* of rhetoric. In particular, it is frequently argued that the palinode is precisely an example of the 'true *technē* of rhetoric' which Plato delineates in the second half of the dialogue.⁹ This kind of argument, however, does not prove all that it needs to prove. That rhetoric is both expounded and enacted—which is undeniably true—proves (once again) only that rhetoric is *a* central theme in the dialogue, and not that it is the *main* theme. To prove the latter, one would need to show that *no other theme* is as prominent or important in the dialogue, and that no other theme is treated both in word and in deed. Yet (as I shall later show) both of these claims are clearly incorrect.¹⁰

The second argument anticipates some of these difficulties, and attempts to provide a more clear-cut exclusion of alternative views. The argument essentially amounts to a disjunctive syllogism: either the main theme is *erōs* or it is rhetoric; but it cannot be *erōs*; hence it is rhetoric. The second premiss is generally supported on the (alleged) grounds that *erōs* plays little or no role in the second half of

⁹ For the view that the palinode is the true *technē* of rhetoric, see Thompson, *The Phaedrus of Plato*, xvii ff.; Guthrie, 'Rhetoric and Philosophy', 121; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, iv. *Plato, the Man and his Dialogues: Earlier Period* (Cambridge, 1975), 415; C. J. Rowe, 'The Argument and Structure of Plato's *Phaedrus*' ['Argument and Structure'], *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 212 (1986), 106–25 at 108–10; id., 'Public and Private Speaking in Plato's Later Dialogues', in C. Eggers Lan (ed.), *Platón: los diálogos tardíos* (Sankt Augustin: 1994), 125–37 at 133–4; Nehamas and Woodruff, *Plato: Phaedrus*, xxviii–xxix, xxxviii; J. E. Smith, 'Plato's Myths as "Likely Accounts", Worthy of Belief', *Apeiron*, 19 (1985), 24–42 at 37–8; Curran, 'Rhetorical Technique', 69–70; E. Asmis, 'Psychagogia in Plato's *Phaedrus*' ['Psychagogia'], *Illinois Classical Studies*, 11 (1986), 153–72.

¹⁰ I discuss the other recurring themes in the remainder of this section, and I also return to the notion of word–deed interplay in sect. 3. There is in fact an even deeper problem with this style of argument: namely, that there is good reason to doubt whether the palinode is in fact an example of the true *technē* of rhetoric. According to Plato, the true rhetorician must have knowledge of the subject-matter of his speech (260 A–262 C) as well as knowledge of the nature of the soul (270 B–272 B). But Socrates conspicuously *lacks* these two kinds of knowledge in the *Phaedrus*: with regard to the former, because neither he nor any other incarnate human could possibly have knowledge of the afterlife (the subject-matter of the speech); and with regard to the latter, because he explicitly disavows possessing psychological knowledge in the palinode itself (see 246 A). So by Plato's own standards, the palinode *cannot* be an example of the true rhetoric. (I say much more to develop this line of argument in my 'Rhetoric and Philosophy in Plato's *Phaedrus*' (forthcoming)).

the *Phaedrus*, and hence could not possibly be the main or unifying theme of the dialogue.¹¹ Consequently (it is claimed) we are left with rhetoric as the only reasonable option for the main theme of the dialogue as a whole. There are, however, some serious problems with this argument as well. For one thing, the first premiss—which tends to be assumed more often than it is argued for—seems to be a blatant case of a false dichotomy: why, after all, *must* we choose between *erōs* and rhetoric as the *only* possible options? Such a posing of the options immediately ignores the fact, for instance, that philosophy and myth (to take two examples) are also recurring themes in the dialogue as a whole. Moreover, no explanation is given as to why we must choose only *one* of the options.¹²

Yet even if we agree with the dichotomous posing of the available options, a deeper problem remains with the second major premiss of the argument. To appreciate this point, we must now take a closer look at the role of *erōs* in the *Phaedrus*.

(ii) *Erōs*. The above argument rejects the possibility that *erōs* is the main theme of the dialogue, on the grounds that *erōs* is ‘forgotten’ or ‘disappears’ in the second half. Yet this claim is clearly false. We may simply notice, for instance, the fact that love-related motifs, language, and imagery occur frequently throughout the second half of the dialogue. To cite a few examples: in discussing the cicadas, Socrates makes reference to Erato (the Muse pertaining to love (259 D 1)); certain politicians are said to be those who are most in love (ἐρώσι) with speech-writing and a leaving-behind of compositions (257 E 1–4); and Socrates calls himself a ‘lover’ (ἐραστής,

¹¹ See e.g. Nehamas and Woodruff, who claim that *erōs* is ‘forgotten’ (*Plato: Phaedrus*, xxvii) and is ‘simply not discussed’ (xxxviii) in the second half of the dialogue; R. B. Rutherford, who claims that ‘love fades out of the limelight with surprising finality after the first half of the work’ (*The Art of Plato: Ten Essays in Platonic Interpretation* [*Art of Plato*] (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 262); Waterfield, who claims that ‘there is evidently little about love in the second half of the dialogue’ (*Plato: Phaedrus*, xlv); C. J. Rowe, who claims that ‘there is nothing directly on the topic of love in the second half at all’ (*Plato: Phaedrus*, rev. edn. (Warminster, 2000), 7); and F. E. D. Schleiermacher, who argues that if *erōs* were chosen as the main theme, the *Phaedrus* ‘would appear deformed in a most revolting manner’, with the second half appearing as ‘an appendage strangely tacked on’, since in the second half ‘no return whatever is again made to the subject treated of in the speeches’ (*Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* [*Introductions*], trans. W. Dobson (New York, 1973), 49).

¹² That is to say, thematic monism is assumed but not argued for. I shall return to this issue below.

266 B 3) of collections and divisions.¹³ In addition to these explicit references, there are several subtler allusions: for example, Socrates defines rhetoric as a 'leading of the soul' in both public courtrooms and private associations; however, the Greek term for 'associations' (σύλλογοι, 261 A 9) is a reference to the 'small intellectual meetings' with a 'more or less erotic character'.¹⁴

In addition to the recurrence of love-related motifs and language in the text, there are deeper ways in which Plato draws love into the discussion of the second half. Most prominent, perhaps, is the image of dialectical education which Plato describes in the course of the critique of writing (276 E–277 A, 278 A–B). The written word, according to Plato, is inherently flawed in so far as it can offer neither clarity nor certainty; more important is the living, oral word—in particular, the living word as it is spoken among dialectician-philosophers. Plato then describes philosophical education with an agricultural metaphor: the dialectician chooses a proper soul and 'plants' (φυτεύη) and 'sows' (σπείρη) discourse within that soul; such discourse, in turn, is not 'barren' (ἄκαρποι) but contains 'seeds' (σπέρμα) from which new λόγοι 'grow' (φύομενοι), the seeds thereby becoming immortal. Plato also calls such seeds the 'legitimate sons' (ύεῖς γνησίους) of the teacher. The sexual and erotic overtones of this passage are striking. On the one hand, the passage is a deliberate recall of the palinode, where the ideas of nourishment and growth are prominent—in particular, it recalls the graphic phallic imagery which Plato uses to characterize the psychological experience of *erōs* (see 251 B ff.). Yet it also points to something deeper: in the best of circumstances, the practice of philosophy involves intense interpersonal relationships (the type of relationship first described in the palinode). Hence the practice of dialectic is not passionless, and Socrates was not being ironic when he described himself as a 'lover' (ἐραστής, 266 B 3) of collections and divisions. As Helmbold and Holther nicely put the point, 'Philosophy is what the lover should be whispering to his beloved; and the conversation should

¹³ In addition, if—as I am inclined to believe—*φιλία* can properly be taken to denote certain kinds of 'love', then the following evidence from the second half of the dialogue can also be adduced: the quality of 'love of honour' (*φιλοτιμίας*, 257 C 7) is discussed in connection with politics; Socrates refers to Phaedrus as a 'lover of the Muses' (*φιλόμουσον*, 259 B 5); and in the prayer which concludes the dialogue Socrates asks that his internal qualities be 'in friendly accord' with his external possessions (*ἐξωθεν δὲ ὅσα ἔχω, τοῖς ἐντὸς εἶναι μοι φιλία*, 279 B 9).

¹⁴ Plass, 'Unity', 10.

be conducted in dialectic, so to speak.¹⁵ In this way, we again see that *erōs* is very much an integral part of the second half of the *Phaedrus*, for when Plato discusses dialectic and the philosophical way of life, so too does he indicate the role of *erōs* within that life.

Quite clearly, then, love—just as much as rhetoric—is a theme that recurs throughout the *Phaedrus* as a whole. One cannot therefore claim that rhetoric is the main theme of the dialogue on the grounds that *erōs* is ‘forgotten’ or that it ‘disappears’ in the second half. In fact there would seem to be just as much evidence to recommend *erōs* as there is to recommend rhetoric as the main theme. Strangely enough, however, I know of no modern interpreter who has argued that *erōs* is the main theme of the dialogue. Perhaps this is because the pre-emptive criticisms of such a view have already been put forward with great forcefulness, and with an apparent air of settling the matter.¹⁶ Yet those criticisms—aside from being textually inaccurate—rest on a problematic charge that an *erōs*-oriented approach would render the *Phaedrus* blatantly ‘deformed’ or ‘lopsided’. In fact the claim regarding lopsidedness or deformity applies with equal force to *both* the *erōs*-oriented *and* the rhetoric-oriented approaches: if *erōs* is chosen as the main theme, then one must ‘explain’ why rhetoric is so central to the dialogue; and if rhetoric is chosen as the main theme, then one must ‘explain’ why *erōs* is so central—and indeed, why it is chosen as the topic of the speeches at all.¹⁷ (After all, if the purpose of the speeches

¹⁵ W. C. Helmbold and W. B. Holther, ‘The Unity of the “Phaedrus”’ [‘Unity’], *University of California Publications in Classical Philology*, 14 (1952), 387–417 at 407.

¹⁶ See references in n. 11 above.

¹⁷ Several commentators have attempted to address the latter question, but I find their proposals to be inadequate. J. I. Beare, for instance, argues that in order for Plato to explain how recollection works—which Beare sees as being one of the purposes of the palinode—he *had to* illustrate it with reference to Beauty, in so far as that is the only Form whose images are directly visible to the eye (and in so far as recollection begins from some perception). The *erōs*–Beauty theme, then, was necessary in order for Plato to give an intelligible account of recollection (‘The *Phaedrus*: Its Structure; The *ἔρως* Theme: Notes’ [‘*Phaedrus*’], *Hermathena*, 17 (1913), 312–34 at 320–2). Yet Beare’s argument founders given that images of the other Forms *are* visible to the eye as well—for example, we can see two equal sticks, and we can see an unjust man. So it is certainly open to Plato to use something *other than erōs*–Beauty in order to explicate recollection—which is precisely what he does in the *Phaedo* with the Form of the Equal.

Nehamas and Woodruff offer a different explanation for Plato’s choice of *erōs* as the subject-matter of the speeches: Plato (they claim) has altered the view of *erōs* as it appeared in the *Symposium*, and thus wishes to announce that fact in the *Phaedrus* (Nehamas and Woodruff, *Plato: Phaedrus*, xxxix). Moreover, the use

were merely to provide an example of rhetoric, then presumably *any* subject-matter would suffice.)

Of course—and as I have already discussed in the case of the rhetoric-oriented approach—the fact that *erōs* is a recurrent and unifying theme of the text does not by itself prove that *erōs* is the *main* theme of the text. To prove the latter, one would need to exclude the other possible alternatives. Now it would be implausible to support an *erōs*-oriented approach merely on the grounds of the *frequency* of the theme; for as I argued earlier, rhetoric too—just as much as *erōs*—is important in *both* halves of the dialogue. So a rhetoric-oriented approach cannot be rejected on those grounds. Nor is it sufficient to argue that *erōs* is both discussed and enacted in the dialogue, since that (again) proves only that *erōs* is *an* important theme. (And, in any case, rhetoric *too* is both discussed and enacted.) Are there any remaining arguments, then, which might support an *erōs*-oriented approach to the dialogue?

One possible approach concerns the status of the palinode as a text-within-a-text. Most readers of the *Phaedrus* undoubtedly remember the dialogue for the brilliance of the palinode. And justifiably so: for within these thirteen or so Stephanus pages we have one of the truly unforgettable moments in all of classical literature. The language is gorgeous and the imagery is deeply moving; and in terms of subject-matter, the palinode treats of the highest of all human aspirations. It is very tempting, therefore, to view the palinode as being the ‘most important’ part of the *Phaedrus*, and as containing the ‘main Platonic doctrines’ of the dialogue—and a

of *erōs* has an instrumental role, in so far as it allows Plato ‘to introduce various philosophical views that might otherwise not easily have found a place within the dialogue’ (Nehamas and Woodruff, xl). Yet this kind of approach, by appealing to some extra-textual agenda or purported larger purpose, seems to me grossly to underestimate the *intrinsic* (and not merely instrumental) importance of *erōs* in the *Phaedrus*. Indeed part of Plato’s point in the dialogue seems to be to suggest the importance of *erōs* in the life of the philosopher. It seems to me, then, that *erōs* is not merely ‘an entry into the heart of Plato’s philosophy’ (as Nehamas and Woodruff claim, xl), but lies within that heart as well. (Similar remarks apply to G. R. F. Ferrari, who also sees *erōs* as playing an instrumental role in the dialogue: he argues that Plato selected *erōs* as the subject-matter of the palinode so as to be able to produce an epideictic speech that would have seemed maximally ‘shocking’ to the audience, and hence would show that Plato had beaten the professional orators at their own game. See Ferrari, “‘The Unity of the *Phaedrus*’: A Response” [‘Unity’], *Dialogos (Hellenic Studies Review)*, 1 (1994), 21–5 at 24–5.)

All of this is a sign, I think, that the rhetoric-oriented approach—with its consequence that the presence of *erōs* is something that needs to be ‘explained’—is problematic.

number of commentators have argued precisely that.¹⁸ The sheer size and scope of the palinode only seem to reinforce this view, as does what many readers regard as the disappointing transition to the second half. In reading the palinode we are apt to feel as if we are gaining entry into a special world, and that by penetrating into the imagery we can somehow 'get at' the very truth of all Platonic philosophy. Notice that, if this line of thinking is correct, we have some justification for regarding *erōs* as the main theme of the dialogue: for if the palinode is the 'real' heart of the *Phaedrus*, and if the palinode itself is 'about' *erōs*, then Plato's entire purpose in writing this dialogue could very well be to say something about *erōs* and its value in human life.

Unfortunately, viewing the palinode as the 'most important' part of the text does great violence to the *Phaedrus* as a whole, and also contradicts some key evidence. For one thing, there is the rather obvious fact that Plato goes on to say a great deal in the second half of the dialogue, and that he handles topics (e.g. rhetoric and dialectic) which can hardly be said to be 'secondary' in importance. In particular, the second half of the dialogue introduces two topics which have *never* appeared previously in the earlier Platonic dialogues: the method of collection and division, and the status and value of the written word. If the palinode were truly intended to be the 'most important' part of the dialogue, then it seems unlikely that Plato would go out of his way to *avoid* talking about collection and division and writing within the speech. Moreover, there is evidence within the *Phaedrus* itself which suggests that, far from being the *raison d'être* of the dialogue or a wholly serious expression of philosophical truth, the palinode is in fact *limited* in what it can offer us. Socrates begins his description of the chariot image with a stern caveat: he will describe only what the soul is *like* (ὡς δὲ εἴοικεν), and will not attempt to describe the sort of thing that it *is* (οἷον μὲν ἐστὶ), in so far as the latter is attainable only by a god (246 A 3–6).

¹⁸ The Renaissance Platonist commentator Marsilio Ficino saw the palinode as containing the 'principal mysteries' of the *Phaedrus* (as cited in Rowe, *Plato: Phaedrus*, 7). In a similar vein, J. Pieper declares that the first half is 'the most important', and that the palinode is 'the real content of the dialogue; it is also what makes reading the rest worth while' (*Enthusiasm and Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue Phaedrus*, trans. R. Winston and C. Winston (New York, 1964), xiv, 42). Cf. also A. Lebeck, who claims that 'the myth forms a central point to which every idea in *Phaedrus* is related and should be referred' ('The Central Myth of Plato's *Phaedrus*' ['Central Myth'], *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 13 (1972), 267–90 at 268).

The implication, then, is that we ought not to view the palinode as providing the literal Truth, and that we should be cautious about attaching *too* much importance to it. The status of the palinode is further demoted at 265 B–C, where Socrates declares:

We used a certain sort of image to describe love's passion; perhaps it had a measure of truth in it, though it may also have led us astray. And having whipped up a not altogether implausible speech, we sang playfully, but also appropriately and respectfully, a storylike hymn to my master and yours, Phaedrus—to Love, who watches over beautiful boys.¹⁹

Several aspects of this passage are noteworthy. First, Socrates says only that *perhaps* the palinode contained truth; and far from calling it a philosophical pearl of wisdom, here he merely describes it as 'a not altogether implausible speech' and a 'storylike hymn'. Second, he says that the speech was *playfully* done—and in a statement immediately after this passage, he declares that 'everything else' in the speech was 'spoken in play' (265 c 8–9). The motif of play vs. seriousness runs throughout the *Phaedrus*, culminating in the discussion of the written word. Like a written text, the palinode is a self-contained entity which seems to offer us great insight and certainty; yet such an appearance is spurious. We can gain philosophical knowledge only through the practice of dialectic, and not through the reading of a text (such as the *Phaedrus* itself) or the hearing of a set speech (such as the palinode). Those who view the palinode as the 'most important' part of the dialogue, then, have much explaining to do; for it now seems that in fact the palinode is itself placed—and places itself—in something of a *subordinate* role.

(iii) *Philosophy*. Thus far I have considered the possibility of either rhetoric or *erōs* being the main theme of the *Phaedrus*. Although there is good reason to regard each of these as *a* recurring theme in the text, there is (as of yet) no good argument which has emerged to show that either of these is the *main* theme of the dialogue. But perhaps the way in which the debate has been framed is misleading: perhaps there are other possibilities besides these two. Towards that end, philosophy has occasionally emerged in the scholarly literature as a 'third option' for the main theme.²⁰ Some commentators have also seen the unity of the dialogue as residing

¹⁹ Translation taken from Nehamas and Woodruff, *Plato: Phaedrus*. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article will be taken from this version.

²⁰ Such a suggestion goes back at least as far as Schleiermacher, who claimed that

in its *purpose*—namely, that Plato’s purpose was to affirm the value of philosophy and vindicate the philosophical life.²¹

As in the case of rhetoric and *erōs*, I think it is undeniable that philosophy is *a* recurring and unifying theme of the *Phaedrus*. In fact philosophy is a unifying element of the dialogue in at least two respects: on the level of theme or subject-matter, and on the level of the structure or form. On a thematic level, philosophy is omnipresent throughout the text—in both an explicit and implicit sense—and it appears under multiple guises. Right at the start of the dialogue, for instance, philosophy is central to the discussion when Socrates suddenly reorients the conversation towards the issue of *self-knowledge*. He asks: ‘I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself . . . am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typho, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?’ (230 A). This question—particularly the reference to Delphi—reminds us of the *Apology*, in which the issue of self-knowledge, construed in that text as an awareness of one’s ignorance, is presented in connection with the philosophical way of life (as exemplified in the figure of Socrates). In the *Phaedrus* Socrates is again an exemplary figurehead for philosophy—someone who in Plato’s view holds the appropriate values and priorities. The imperative towards self-knowledge, then, turns out to be an imperative towards the life of philosophy as a whole, for self-knowledge is a central part of that life.

The *Phaedrus* thus begins with a reference to the entire philosophical way of life—and that very way of life lies in the foreground of

in the *Phaedrus* it is philosophy that Plato ‘extols, independently and wholly, as the highest of all objects, and as the foundation of every thing estimable and beautiful’; and hence that it is the focus on philosophy that gives the dialogue its coherence (Schleiermacher, *Introductions*, 58; see 57 ff. generally). For a more recent view, cf. G. E. Mueller, ‘Unity of the *Phaedrus*’, *Classical Bulletin*, 33 (1957), 50–3, 60–5 at 50–1.

²¹ For instance, R. Hackforth claims that the ‘dominant’ and ‘most important’ purpose of the *Phaedrus* is ‘to vindicate the pursuit of philosophy’ (*Plato’s Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952), 9), and Winnington-Ingram similarly remarks that Plato’s purpose is ‘to re-affirm what he had always taught; that philosophy, not rhetoric, was the true culture of the soul’ (‘Unity’, 14). Cf. also Guthrie: ‘The *Phaedrus* is not a manual of instruction in rhetoric . . . but a plea to abandon it for philosophy’ (‘Rhetoric and Philosophy’, 123); and G. R. F. Ferrari, who identifies the ‘major philosophic concern’ of the *Phaedrus* as ‘the vindication of the philosophic life against a life that seeks only its effects’ (*Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato’s Phaedrus [Cicadas]* (Cambridge, 1987), 222–3). Ferrari’s claim regarding the ‘major philosophic concern’ seems to undergird the entirety of his interpretation in *Cicadas*.

discussion throughout the remainder of the dialogue. The palinode, for instance, explicitly deals with the philosophical life. In a cosmic sense, the palinode describes the nature of the philosopher in relation to the soul's prenatal vision of the Forms; of all mortals, we are told, the philosopher has seen the most of the Forms, and has the highest type of soul. In a more earthly sense too the palinode draws a clear link between *erōs* and philosophy: the highest kind of love is a philosophical one, which brings to its possessors the possibility of a release from incarnation. The palinode, then, clearly valorizes philosophy as a way of life. The second half of the dialogue also continues to emphasize the importance of philosophy. Plato's description of true rhetoric, for instance, makes it clear that the best oratory has a philosophical basis, since a knowledge of truth and a knowledge of psychology are both prerequisites for such oratory. Moreover, the method which the orator is to use to attain truth is none other than philosophical dialectic (collection and division). Finally, the end of the *Phaedrus* again stresses the importance of philosophy as a way of life: what matters most, Plato says, is not the written word, which has only a specious appearance of clarity and certainty. Rather, true seriousness ought to be devoted to—and true fulfilment is to be derived from—the intimate relation between student and teacher in the practice of dialectical enquiry. Philosophy again stands on top.

In addition to these thematic linkages, philosophy is also present in the *Phaedrus vis-à-vis* the *structure* or *form* of the dialogue. A strong indication that this is so can be seen in Plato's use of the setting, and in particular, in his use of the cicadas (which are singing overhead during Socrates' and Phaedrus' conversation). At several crucial junctures in the dialogue—the opening scene (229 A–230 E), the midpoint (259 A–D), and the conclusion (279 B–C)—Socrates makes mention of the setting and the cicadas. Yet the cicadas, in turn, are explicitly associated with Calliope and Urania, the Muses that pertain to *philosophy*. Plato thus seems to be using the structure and setting of the dialogue to provide a distinctly philosophical orientation, reminding us, perhaps, of the ever-present need for philosophy (as symbolized by the ever-present cicadas in the background).²²

Once again, however, we must ask whether there is any com-

²² Ferrari provides an interesting discussion of 'background' vs. 'foreground' in the *Phaedrus*; see his *Cicadas*, *passim*.

pellent evidence for regarding philosophy as the *main* theme of the dialogue (and not merely *a* theme). Some interpreters have argued that the discussion of dialectical collection and division—which, as I noted earlier, had not appeared in any of Plato's previous dialogues—is the most important part of the *Phaedrus*;²³ and consequently, that dialectic—and by extension, philosophy—is the main theme of the dialogue. Yet this sort of view commits the same basic error as the view that the palinode is the 'most important' part of the dialogue. In both cases we wind up unfairly privileging one part of the *Phaedrus* at the expense of the other parts. And in both cases the result is still the same: a reading of the *Phaedrus* that is patently imbalanced. As a result, the very unity that we are seeking is compromised.²⁴

(iv) *Other key themes in the dialogue.* Although the point is often lost in discussions of the unity of the *Phaedrus*, there are in fact a number of other themes—beyond the three that I have examined thus far—which recur throughout the dialogue as a whole and which help to unify the text. Most notable, perhaps, is *myth*. Indeed, the *Phaedrus* is the most 'mythical' of all of Plato's dialogues: not only are there four presented myths in the dialogue (Boreas–Oreithuia, the palinode, the cicadas, and Theuth–Thamus),²⁵ but there is also a good deal of discussion *about* myth (see e.g. 229 C ff., 265 B–C, 276 E). Moreover, far from being an adjunct to the dialogue, the mythical material is closely interrelated to its other themes. For instance, in so far as it is a form of speech or *logos*, myth is closely related the question of rhetoric; and in so far as it is an imagistic *logos* that makes a certain truth-claim—illegitimately, in Plato's eyes—myth is closely related to the question of philosophy.

²³ For an expression of this view, see Schleiermacher, who claims that the experience of reading the *Phaedrus* is one in which we reach progressively deeper levels of Plato's thought. Having moved through several speeches and other material, we finally reach the discussion of dialectic, which for Schleiermacher is 'the innermost soul of the whole work . . . for which all else in this dialogue is but preparation' (*Introductions*, 58). Hackforth makes the same claim, stating that 'the plan of the whole dialogue is centred upon' the discussion of dialectic, and that 'it is in the formulation of the new τέχνη that the formal relevance of the three discourses . . . is alone to be discovered' (*Plato's Phaedrus*, 136).

²⁴ I also take it that it is *prima facie* implausible that the entirety of the palinode is no more than 'preparation' (Schleiermacher's phrase) for the discussion of dialectic.

²⁵ Note that the myths are strategically placed at the beginning, middle, and end of the dialogue. I shall say more about this in sect. 3 below.

There are a variety of other themes—including self-knowledge,²⁶ politics,²⁷ education,²⁸ *psychagogia*,²⁹ and writing³⁰—which have also been suggested as the ‘main theme’ of the *Phaedrus*. Space prohibits me from examining each of these views here, but I do think that a good case can be made to show that these themes genuinely recur throughout the whole dialogue. This then leaves us with the very question with which we began: just what is the *main* theme of the dialogue?

(b) *Thematic pluralism*

The assumption under which I have been operating thus far—the view which I have called thematic monism—equates unity with thematic unity; specifically, it requires that there be *one*, and only one, ‘main theme’ in the *Phaedrus* for the dialogue to be considered unified. I have argued that rhetoric, *erōs*, and philosophy—and other themes as well (such as myth)—are all recurring themes in the dialogue. If thematic monism is correct, then, the inevitable conclusion thus seems to be the following: *either* we must choose *one* of these available themes as ‘primary’ and regard the other themes as ‘subordinate’, *or* we must frankly admit that the plurality of good options is an indication that the entire problem of unity is insoluble. The problem with the first option is that (as I have suggested) none of the arguments advanced in favour of a ‘pro-*erōs*’ or ‘pro-rhetoric’ or ‘pro-philosophy’ view actually proves that the theme in question is ‘primary’; and the problem with the second option is that it forces us to concede that the *Phaedrus* is disunified. Do we therefore have an unresolvable dilemma?

I think not. What we have here is a false dichotomy—a dichotomy, moreover, that is forced upon us by the assumption of the correctness of thematic monism. But why make that assumption in the first place? What if there is no such thing as a ‘main’ theme in a Platonic dialogue? What if Plato is *equally* interested in a *plurality* of themes in the *Phaedrus*, none of which can be said to be more

²⁶ See Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, *passim*.

²⁷ Winnington-Ingram, ‘Unity’, 18.

²⁸ Waterfield, *Plato: Phaedrus*, xlvi ff.; H. Ll. Hudson-Williams, *Three Systems of Education: Some Reflections on the Implications of Plato's Phaedrus* (Oxford: 1954), II.

²⁹ Asmis, ‘*Psychagogia*’, 154.

³⁰ R. Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of a Philosophic Art of Writing* (University, Ala., 1980), *passim*.

important than or subordinate to another? What if, in other words, the question of unity—as I have been considering it thus far—has been falsely posed?

I now wish to advocate an alternative approach to the issue of thematic unity in the *Phaedrus*, which I shall call *thematic pluralism* (in contrast to thematic monism). Rather than seek out *one* overriding theme in the dialogue, we should begin from the very fact of the *Phaedrus*'s thematic diversity, and treat that diversity not as a 'defect' to be smoothed over—through a hierarchy of subjects—but as an intentional feature of the text. This is not to say that we are thereby denying that the text has unity; quite the contrary, I maintain that the dialogue *does* possess a strict internal unity—and a strict thematic unity as well. I take it that *erōs*, rhetoric, and philosophy—and other themes as well³¹—are *all* unifying themes of the text, in so far as each of them recurs throughout the entire text (i.e. in *both* halves) and each of them helps us to comprehend the dialogue as a whole. Plato uses the entirety of the dialogue, in other words, to comment on each of these subjects and to suggest their interrelations, but without thereby 'subordinating' one to another. What I am suggesting, then, is that we revise our notion of what 'thematic unity' itself means. The traditional assumption has been to equate 'unity' with monism. By contrast, I would like to offer a broader definition of thematic unity: a text possesses thematic unity if it contains one *or more* themes which are an occasion for discussion throughout the entire text, and which the author uses to tie together other (perhaps disparate) elements of the text. Thematic unity, therefore, depends on whether a given theme effectively does the job of knitting a text together—it does *not* depend on *how many* such themes do the job.

There are several compelling reasons for adopting thematic pluralism as an approach to the *Phaedrus* (or for that matter, as an approach to any Platonic dialogue). The first is that it is a more appropriate approach for the *dialogue form* than is thematic monism. Indeed, the inordinate influence of thematic monism stems (at least in part) from a failure to appreciate the uniqueness of the dialogue form. When we read someone such as Aristotle or Kant, what we are

³¹ Some of the other unifying themes are myth, the divine (or 'religion'), self-knowledge, and writing. Space prohibits me from examining each of these; suffice it to say that a close reading of the *Phaedrus* will clearly show that all of these themes are present throughout the dialogue as a whole, and play more than an incidental role.

dealing with is fairly transparent: a treatise or essay that explicitly deals with a given subject in a systematic and sequential manner. Plato's dialogues do not function in this manner. Though the dialogues contain arguments and ideas that are just as sophisticated as anything in Aristotle or Kant, the *manner of presentation* of those arguments and ideas is utterly unique. The question of the dialogue form and the issues that form presents are too complex to examine here in any detail; suffice it to say that character, setting, irony, imagery, and other dramatic-literary elements are all integral to our understanding of a Platonic text. Moreover, such features of the form of Plato's writing cannot be divorced from the content of that writing. The upshot of all of this is that it is blatantly inappropriate to expect a Platonic dialogue to act like a Kantian treatise. Yet when we ask for a 'main theme' or 'primary purpose', we are doing just that—seeking black-and-white answers from a multi-coloured text. To seek a 'main' theme is to expect a tidy compartmentalization and hierarchization of ideas which do not exist in the dialogues; indeed, as Guthrie noted, the beauty of the dialogue form is that it enables Plato to *intertwine* several ideas which may be *equally* important to him.³² (Just as, similarly, the dialogue form enables him to intertwine form and content.) Presumably Plato could have written treatises if he had wanted to; the fact that he did not do so compels us to ask why. It also compels us to read his texts in a manner that is appropriate to their genre.

In advocating thematic pluralism, I am in no way suggesting that the dialogues are somehow a jumbled hotchpotch of multiple ideas. Rather, it is part of Plato's genius that he is able to create multi-coloured and multi-thematic texts that *also* have a strictly controlled internal structure. In fact, the *Phaedrus* is by no means unique in being thematically pluralistic (and, hence, superficially 'disunified'); strict thematic unity, of the sort demanded by thematic monists, does not exist in *any* of Plato's dialogues.³³ For example, what could we possibly cite as the 'main theme' of the *Republic*—justice? politics? the soul? education? the philosopher? Selecting any one of these, to the exclusion and subordination of the others, would clearly give a skewed sense of the dialogue as a whole. Even the early aporetic dialogues can be said to be as much about

³² Guthrie, 'Rhetoric and Philosophy', 117.

³³ Cf. De Vries, *Commentary*, 22–3. He well notes that 'Plato's thought is not departmental; but it is organized.'

method—proper definition—as about piety, courage, and so forth. We may grant that the *Phaedrus* is pluralistic to an extreme degree, and that it presents a much greater challenge to the reader. Yet it remains only a matter of degree and not of kind—for *no* Platonic dialogue has the strict thematic unity of a treatise.

In virtue of the dialogue form, then, I see good reason to abandon thematic monism in favour of a more nuanced and multi-coloured approach. There are also considerations arising specifically from the *Phaedrus* which favour such an approach. For example, one of the messages of the dialogue is that interpersonal relationships, persuasive speech, myth, and the written word all have a place within the philosophical life—although that place is also provisional, and subordinate to the practice of dialectic. It makes sense, then, for Plato to discuss a *plurality* of themes within a philosophical dialogue, given the plurality of activities and modes of discourse which he sees as part of the philosophical life itself.³⁴

Moreover, Plato has good *philosophical* reasons for treating a plurality of themes—and not any one—as equally important. To wit: throughout the *Phaedrus* he draws numerous conceptual connections *between erōs*, rhetoric, and philosophy, thereby linking them in a most intimate manner. *Erōs* and rhetoric, for example, are closely interrelated in a number of respects. On the one hand, a lover—*qua* being a seducer who uses *words* to attempt to persuade the beloved—is necessarily a kind of rhetorician.³⁵ On the other hand, the converse is true as well: the rhetorician is a kind of lover. This is because Plato broadly defines rhetoric as a ‘leading of the soul through words’ (*ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων*, 261 A 8); consequently, all rhetoric involves intimate interpsychic contact, and an attempt to move—and indeed, to woo and to seduce—someone else’s soul. (Rhetoric does so, moreover, in part by appealing to our *desires*.)

³⁴ I am *not* claiming, as some have, that the *Phaedrus* shows us a more ‘tolerant’ Plato who has become more accepting of erotic attachment and non-dialectic modes of discourse, and that in this dialogue he has moved away from the ‘asceticism’ and ‘Socratism’ of earlier dialogues. (For examples of this view, see G. Nicholson, *Plato’s Phaedrus: The Philosophy of Love [Plato’s Phaedrus]* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1999), 13–14; and M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, 2001), ch. 7.) I do not take the earlier Plato to be as ‘ascetic’ as is sometimes claimed, nor do I take the *Phaedrus* Plato to be as ‘tolerant’ as is sometimes claimed.

³⁵ As Nicholson eloquently asks, ‘If we think of love, can we suppose that it would never be given expression in speech? Can we love without speaking to the one we love, and without speaking about love? Could we even experience love in the absence of language?’ (*Plato’s Phaedrus*, 124).

There are other connections between *erōs* and rhetoric as well: both have a connection to the divine, and require the divine in order to be fulfilled (*erōs* reminds us of the soul's discarnate 'divine banquet', and according to Plato the orator's true audience is not men but the gods (273 E)); both arouse all of the soul's powers and can powerfully lead the soul; both have higher and lower forms, depending on the *telos* which motivates the individual; and both are implicit in the activity of Socratic dialogue.³⁶

Erōs and rhetoric, in turn, are both related to philosophy in a clear way: the best kind of *erōs* is the philosophical kind, as is the best kind of rhetoric. This is a perfect example of what we might call Plato's 'assimilation strategy': his consistent strategy of using commonly understood concepts and terms, but transforming their meaning so as to arrive at an opposite point; specifically, his strategy of assimilating all ordinary practices and activities into *philosophy*.³⁷ In the *Phaedrus* this assimilation strategy becomes fully clear at the end of the dialogue, where we find that philosophical *erōs* and philosophical rhetoric are to be found in the process of philosophical education and the practice of dialectic (wherein the dialectician 'plants' the appropriate *logos* within the soul of the student). The *Phaedrus* itself is only an imitation of such a process—not only because the dialogue is written (and hence falls short of the interactive nature of live dialectic), but also because the fictive conversation, even if it *were* live, does not rise to true dialectic (in large part due to the inadequacies of Phaedrus as a conversation partner).

So not only do *erōs*, rhetoric, and philosophy all recur throughout the text as a whole, but they are also conceptually and philosophically linked to one another; by no means are they unrelated themes which Plato has coincidentally discussed together in one dialogue. What we have, then, are no fewer than *three* main themes in the *Phaedrus*, and in my view the best way to accommodate

³⁶ I am indebted to Plass ('Unity') for these and other connections.

³⁷ As Guthrie insightfully puts the point, 'the fact is that, as many of the dialogues make plain, what Plato calls the "true" representative of every human art, science or practice turns into the philosopher and bears little resemblance to his counterpart in everyday life, be he called statesman, scientist, lover, poet, or rhetorician' ('Rhetoric and Philosophy', 120). On Plato's practice of 'assimilation', cf. also R. G. Edmonds III, *Myths of the Underworld Journey: Plato, Aristophanes, and the 'Orphic' Gold Tablets* (Cambridge, 2004), 167–9; and J. M. Redfield, who notes that 'for Socrates (as Plato represents him) all valid activities are one with dialectical philosophy and therefore can be included within it' (*Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago, 1975), 44).

that fact is to adopt thematic pluralism as an approach to this dialogue. Such an approach is also more consistent with the reality of the dialogue form. Let us not feel compelled to choose *one* 'primary theme' from among the options; instead, it is more fruitful to think that a cluster of interrelated themes lies at the heart of the *Phaedrus*. The dialogue *does* indeed have strong thematic unity—we simply need a broader notion of 'thematic unity' to recognize that fact.³⁸

3. Non-thematic approaches to unity

Thus far in this article I have been considering the thematic approach to unity—the approach which attempts to resolve the issue on the level of subject-matter (or what the dialogue is 'about'). Yet as I have been at pains to emphasize, the *Phaedrus* is a complex and multi-layered text. Consequently, in addressing the problem of unity, it is important to address a prior question: what, exactly, do we mean by 'unity' in the first place? Interpreters of the *Phaedrus* have not always asked this question, or have passed it over in silence;³⁹ the most common assumption is to equate 'unity' with 'thematic unity'. But such an assumption is unwarranted. The genre of the dialogue form compels us to employ multi-faceted and nuanced ways of reading; although theme and subject-matter are one element of a Platonic dialogue, there are a variety of other elements—such as structural, stylistic, and dramatic—which warrant our attention. Moreover, it would be a mistake to privilege theme or subject-matter as the 'most important' aspects of the text, for it is the entire *complex* of elements that provides meaning to a given dialogue. Accordingly, I now wish to look beyond the level of theme, and suggest some of the other levels on which the *Phaedrus*

³⁸ I take the above considerations to provide good grounds for adopting thematic pluralism. But I should also add, as further support, that I have not yet encountered any actual *arguments* in favour of thematic monism; it tends to be assumed as somehow self-evident. But (again) *why* make such an assumption? E. Black puts the point well: 'there is no binding fiat of literary activity nor any logical necessity demanding that a piece of writing, even a great piece of writing, and especially a dialectical enquiry, must have one and only one paraphrasable theme' ('Plato's View of Rhetoric', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 44 (1958), 361–74 at 363).

³⁹ Nehamas and Woodruff are one exception (see *Plato: Phaedrus*, xxxvii); Rutherford also pauses to give thoughtful consideration to the matter (*Art of Plato*, 261).

is unified. Doing so will provide a deeper understanding of the text at hand.⁴⁰

(a) *Dramatic-literary unity*

Plass has made a very simple but important observation: the entire 'problem' of unity arises only when it is posed in philosophical terms, and not when it is posed in literary terms.⁴¹ That is to say, it is largely because we expect an unbroken, tightly knit philosophical argument from Plato that we feel 'offended' by the *Phaedrus*'s apparent incoherence; yet if we view the dialogue purely as a literary text, there is nothing incoherent or disunified about it. Of course the *Phaedrus* is not *merely* a literary text, and we can no more treat it as such than we can treat it as a Kantian treatise with a bit of poetic adornment. None the less, the observation still stands: the dialogue *is* a unified literary work. Let me pursue this observation in greater detail.⁴²

The dialogue has unity of *time*: it takes place on a single afternoon, and depicts a single conversation from beginning to end without any interruptions. It has unity of *place*: apart from some initial strolling, Phaedrus and Socrates remain immobile in one location throughout the entire conversation. The dialogue also has unity of *character*: Socrates and Phaedrus remain with us throughout the entire afternoon, and we learn a great deal about each man in the process. It also has unity of *action* or *plot*: we have a continuous, uninterrupted sequence of events, and each scene follows logically from the previous one. There is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Finally, the dialogue has unity of *tone* and *mood*: the tone is one of 'light irony', which is appropriate to 'a warm afternoon to be spent by the banks of a stream in pleasant company and delightful discourse'.⁴³ Taken together, all of this shows that the *Phaedrus* is a unified literary document. Now it may very well be that such literary unity is 'trivially' present, and that it does not do much to alleviate the general *feeling* or *impression* of dis-

⁴⁰ Note that—since neither form nor content can be privileged as 'primary' in a dialogue—there is no need to 'choose' between a thematic and a non-thematic approach to the problem of unity. Accordingly, I shall advocate a hybrid approach to the question which incorporates both thematic *and* non-thematic considerations.

⁴¹ Plass, 'Unity', 7–8.

⁴² I am indebted to Rutherford (*Art of Plato*, 261) for the following observations.

⁴³ Helmbold and Holther, 'Unity', 389.

unity. None the less, it is a dimension of unity which should not be ignored.

In fact, however, a good many of the dramatic and literary elements are by no means 'trivial', but afford us deeper insights into the dialogue as a whole. For example, the *setting* provides unity on a variety of levels. The fact that the dialogue takes place outside of the city is itself significant—and in fact this is the only Platonic dialogue that is set in the countryside. Socrates is literally *ἄτοπος*, 'out of place'—this Greek term recurs multiple times in the dialogue (see 251 D 8, 229 E 1, 229 C 6, 230 C 6)—since he rarely leaves the city walls. The entire dialogue is also figuratively *ἄτοπος*, since it leaves behind the 'civilizing' influence of the *polis*. And 'extraordinary' (another meaning of *ἄτοπος*) things do indeed happen on this afternoon, most notably the 'inspired' palinode of Socrates, which offers a supra-rational account from the most rational of men. (And let us not forget all the references to nymphs, potions, abduction, gods, and madness.) The 'inspirational' and 'mad' aspects of the setting are further reflected in the heat of the day: it is already quite warm when Phaedrus and Socrates begin their conversation (cf. 229 A ff.), and Socrates' recitation of the palinode coincides with the *hottest* part of the day, high noon.⁴⁴ Both the weather and the speech-making, therefore, reach an overwhelming climax at one crucial point, and the second half of the dialogue subsequently traces the gradual decline of the sun. With all of their energy spent, perhaps it is then inevitable that Socrates and Phaedrus return to the *polis* at the end of the dialogue. And this carries a philosophical implication: the extraordinary experience in the countryside cannot become a permanent condition; what is better is to lead the extraordinary life of the philosopher—a life which requires social interaction within the *polis*.

One further literary aspect also deserves comment: Plato's use of dramatic interludes. Each of the three speeches is bookended by a brief transitional moment; and far from being unimportant, these moments constitute one of the main structural techniques which Plato uses to cement together the overall dialogue. The introductory scene (227 A–230 E), for example, is not merely 'stage-setting'

⁴⁴ At 242 A, which occurs in the interlude between the first and second speeches of Socrates, Phaedrus states that it is *almost* (*σχεδόν*) high noon; this means that high noon—the climax or apex of the sun's reach—occurs *during* the recitation of the palinode.

but in fact encapsulates all of the major philosophical concerns of the dialogue as a whole: *rhetoric* (Phaedrus' arrival from listening to Lysias), *writing* (Phaedrus' written manuscript of Lysias' speech), *philosophy* (Socrates' reference to self-knowledge and the Delphic oracle), *memory* (Phaedrus' attempt to memorize the speech), *erōs* (the coy interplay between Socrates and Phaedrus, and Socrates' self-description as an ἐραστής of words), *myth* (the discussion of allegorization and Boreas), and *religion* (the mention of the altar of Boreas and the sacredness of the spot) are all broached in this scene. Similarly, the other interludes are not merely literary devices but are also structurally and philosophically significant. It is in the dramatic interludes, for instance, that the cicadas make their appearance: Plato first mentions them in the introductory scene (230c), and then mentions them a second time in the transitional interlude from the palinode to the second half (259a–e). On the one hand these dramatic references again help to cement together the dialogue as a whole; at the same time, they also provide crucial cues to the reader. Like Socrates and Phaedrus, we too (as readers) ought not to be negligent—lulled to sleep by the cicadas' song—but ought to remain vigilant in our approach to the text. Plato strategically returns to the cicadas just after we have heard the overwhelming palinode—alerting us, perhaps, not to be awed into submission by the soaring rhetoric but to remain keen philosophers.

I take it, then, that the *Phaedrus* has dramatic and literary unity in at least two senses. First, it possesses such unity on the most basic level of plot, character, mood, and so forth—i.e. in virtue of the fact that Plato creates a single 'story' that is self-contained. Second, the dialogue is unified through Plato's structural and philosophical *use* of those dramatic and literary elements. Both the setting and the transitional moments function in this manner, providing a global frame for the dialogue as a whole, and helping to join together disparate themes and concerns. That setting, in short, does not lie silently in the background; it permeates the action of the dialogue, fluctuates over time, and relates to the philosophical themes.

(b) *Verbal texture*

One particularly fruitful (though frequently ignored) approach to the question of unity is the examination of the recurrent motifs, imagery, and symbols of the *Phaedrus*—what Rutherford calls the

verbal texture of the dialogue.⁴⁵ This approach is different from the thematic approach to unity, in so far as it does not focus on the main subject-matter or ‘topics’ of the dialogue, but rather on the *language* through which that subject-matter is expressed and the enquiry is framed. After all, Plato is a master craftsman, and there is very little in the dialogues that can be attributed to mere whim or accident. And it is part of his craft of writing to use specific kinds of language and imagery to draw subtler connections, to reinforce the enquiry of a given dialogue, and to provoke the reader to engage in that enquiry in a more nuanced way.

Verbal and imagistic echoing and cross-referencing occur throughout the *Phaedrus*. Indeed, if we look at the dialogue as a whole, we find that certain motifs, words, images, and symbols are recurrent. These include:⁴⁶

light vs. darkness, brightness
 enthusiasm, possession, madness
 eyes, sight, blindness
 food, nourishment, feasting
 growth, reproduction, agricultural-organic metaphors, sowing, planting
 heat, warmth
 animals, animal-like behaviour, monsters
 simplicity vs. complexity
 health vs. sickness, medicine
 leading, guiding, path, way, route, track
 movement, motion
 leisure vs. work
 liquid, water
 memory, forgetfulness
 cure, potion, *φάρμακον*
 play vs. seriousness

⁴⁵ Rutherford, *Art of Plato*, 266. Rutherford takes her cue from Lebeck, whose seminal article ‘The Central Myth of Plato’s *Phaedrus*’ showed how fruitful—and philosophically significant—results could be derived from an examination of the verbal texture of Plato’s dialogues.

⁴⁶ Again, the seminal discussion for many of these motifs and images is Lebeck. For a comparison of Plato’s use of some of these images with the ancient poet Theocritus, see C. Murley, ‘Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the Theocritean Pastoral’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 71 (1940), 281–95. W. W. Fortenbaugh has discussed the indebtedness of Plato’s imagery to Sappho and Anacreon (‘Plato *Phaedrus* 235C3’, *Classical Philology*, 61 (1966), 108–9).

self-knowledge
 wisdom
 gold, statuary, votive offerings
 freedom vs. slavery
 victory, contest, honour
 whip, goad
 initiation, mysteries, sacred vision.

It is important to note that none of the motifs and images listed here occurs only in one isolated passage; rather, they are all genuinely *recurring* motifs, and arise in at least several different passages throughout the dialogue as a whole.

Plato's use of these recurring motifs and images in the *Phaedrus* is what we might call a technique of *verbal reminiscence*.⁴⁷ And this technique shows a further sense in which the *Phaedrus* is unified. For simply on a surface level, the repetition of language and imagery provides a kind of continuous thread that runs through the entirety of the dialogue. But there is more to the dialogue's unity than just a surface-level repetition of words. For Plato also uses the verbal texture to make a *philosophical* point. Plato has offered us a dialogue which has a plurality of philosophical topics (*erōs*, rhetoric, myth, dialectic, and so on) and a sequence of (seemingly) disjointed parts; but by simultaneously using a common verbal texture, he is implicitly encouraging us to seek out the *interconnections* among those various topics and parts of the dialogue, and to consider the philosophical implications of those interconnections.

As an example, consider Plato's use of the nourishment, agricultural, and organic motifs. In the palinode we are told that the soul's vision of the Forms is what nourishes the wings, and that—in this life—one way in which to regrow the wings is through an appropriate erotic relationship. Such is one use of these motifs. But the motifs recur again at the end of the dialogue, in the Theuth

⁴⁷ Such is Lebeck's phrase ('Central Myth', 289). She describes the technique well: 'As words and images recur they call up whole passages, major ideas. A network of association is created which continually expands the reader's consciousness' (289). As she notes, this technique is in perfect keeping with the dialogue's emphasis on *recollection*. Further levels of complexity and networks of interrelationship are created through the fact that Plato will often use the same word (such as 'perfect' or 'healthy') in more than one sense. Again, Lebeck makes a valuable insight: 'Plato, in a manner similar to the dramatists, uses thematic repetition as a means of keeping certain ideas before the reader . . . Since the word is employed in more than one sense, its repetition takes on a paronomasiac quality. That is, the theme meaning and the meaning uppermost in the context are not always identical' (272 n. 12).

myth and the critique of writing: we are told that dialectic is the true means of ‘planting’ a *logos* in an appropriate soul, that such a *logos* is one’s true ‘offspring’, and that such a *logos*—by being ‘sown’ in other souls and by growing on its own—can give a kind of immortality. What we thus have is a single set of motifs being used in two different contexts, and in two different parts of the dialogue. Because the imagery is the same, however, the implication is that there is some sort of *connection* between the two contexts—in this case, between the palinode and the critique of writing. And such a connection indeed exists: the critique of writing is pointing us towards the practice of live, interactive dialectic as the means of attaining true ‘growth’ in the soul; but the content of that activity is fully appreciated only when we reflect back on the palinode, and in particular on the discussion of the philosophical lovers and the discussion of the divine banquet. The philosophical implication, then, is that dialectical activity is both social and Form-directed. So what at first seems to be a mere repetition of language in fact turns out to be a sophisticated means of suggesting thematic and structural connections among diverse parts of the text.⁴⁸

The use of verbal texture, then, is another important way in which the *Phaedrus* is unified. Such a texture provides both a continuous thread as well as a provocation to seek out deeper connections among diverse topics and ideas—and hence is anything but ‘superficial’.

(c) *Formal-structural unity*

When discussed in connection with the Platonic dialogues, ‘structural unity’ refers to a formal feature of a given text, i.e. some pattern or principle of organization among the various parts of a dialogue. In fact, as I noted earlier, in the *Phaedrus* Plato explicitly makes structural organization a *sine qua non* of good rhetoric. He insists that a good *logos* must possess ‘logographic necessity’ (*ἀνάγκην λογογραφικήν*, 264 B 7), i.e. a logical and consistent internal organization such that each part *necessarily* follows from the previous part. As Socrates famously puts the point:

Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its

⁴⁸ And it may be that Plato thinks that we do not fully *understand* the nature of *erōs*, rhetoric, etc. until we have grasped their interconnections. (Cf. M. M. McCabe, ‘Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato’, *Apeiron*, 25 (1992), 47–67 at 53–5.)

own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work. (264 c)

There is no reason to think that this statement is not perfectly general: that is, the requirement of logographic necessity would seem to apply not only to oral speech-making but to any kind of *logos*, Platonic dialogues included. Yet this is precisely what has troubled so many readers of the *Phaedrus*; for given the thematic and stylistic diversity of the dialogue—and in particular the two seemingly ‘disjointed’ halves—it seems difficult if not impossible to discern any sense in which the *Phaedrus* is in fact an ‘organic’ *logos* whose parts are ‘fitting’ to one another and to the whole. So we must therefore ask: does the *Phaedrus* in fact possess the logographic necessity which it requires of other writers?

I think that it does.⁴⁹ Specifically, the dialogue has what we might call a *palinodic structure* (or *palinodic development*): that is to say, ‘various points of view are presented as though they were final and are then purposely undercut to reveal a further, unanticipated meaning’.⁵⁰ In other words, Socrates’ second speech (the ‘backwards-ode’ or *παλινωδία*) is not the only instance of a *logos* which recants or moves beyond an earlier *logos*; there are in fact *multiple* palinodic discourses in the *Phaedrus*. Consider the basic sequence of events in the dialogue: we begin with Lysias’ speech, which Phaedrus thinks supersedes all other Greek speeches on *erōs* (he considers it to be the greatest and most complete speech, 234 E); Lysias’ speech is then superseded by Socrates’ first speech (which Socrates offers in an attempt to ‘outdo’ Lysias); both of the earlier speeches—with their inadequate conception of *erōs*—are then superseded by Socrates’ second speech, which is officially a ‘recantation’; the palinode itself is superseded by the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic (in so far as *logos* and *technē* would seem to be superior to *muthos*); and that discussion—in so far as it is contained within a written dialogue—is superseded by oral, live dialectic. In each case, what initially appears to be a final and complete statement of the truth—a speech about *erōs*, a speech about the soul and the Forms, a discussion about rhetoric—is soon revealed to be *incomplete*; and

⁴⁹ The account which I offer in this section is only a sketch; I present a much more extensive discussion of the structure of the dialogue in my *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus* (manuscript in preparation).

⁵⁰ Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 218.

so the *Phaedrus* as a whole takes on an onion-like structure, with a series of layers built upon one another.⁵¹ Put somewhat differently, we might say that the *Phaedrus* has a kind of outward movement or progression, as a series of retrospective and self-referential analyses broaden our awareness of the limitations of what has come before.⁵² In the end, the ultimate *telos* towards which the *Phaedrus* points—the continual ‘other’ or ‘beyond’—is none other than philosophy itself.

Notice that the myths of the *Phaedrus* play a central role in this palinodic structure and development. It is a myth (Boreas) that begins the dialogue, orienting us towards its major concerns; it is a myth (the palinode) that moves us beyond the harmful ethos of the first two speeches, and towards a broader conception of human existence; it is a myth (the cicadas) that moves us beyond the palinode, and towards the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic; and it is a myth (Theuth) that moves us beyond the *Phaedrus* itself, and towards live, interactive dialectic. We thus see that, far from being accidentally or randomly placed, the myths of the *Phaedrus* are quite carefully and strategically located so as to help achieve a palinodic effect in the dialogue as a whole. In other words, the myths work together both *co-ordinately* (reflecting back on a previous λόγος) and *cumulatively* (building upon one another within the overall progression of the dialogue), and play an essential role in guiding our reading of the dialogue.

A variety of other proposals regarding the structure of the *Phaedrus* have been put forward, and I do not claim that my schematization is the only possible one.⁵³ If we accept, however, that the *Phaedrus* has a palinodic structure—and I think that that is undeniable—

⁵¹ Note, however, that in the *Phaedrus* we do *not* peel back various layers to arrive at an inner ‘core’ (i.e. some final bedrock); if anything, the layers of the *Phaedrus* are constructed so as to move us ever *outward*.

⁵² In this sense I disagree with Ferrari, who suggests that—in so far as *both* myth *and* argument are limited (and hence share a ‘kinship of limitation’)—each half of the *Phaedrus* leads to the other (*Cicadas*, 34). Instead I am suggesting that the first half leads to the second half, and that the second half leads to something else entirely.

⁵³ See e.g. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 161–3; D. A. White, *Rhetoric and Reality in Plato’s Phaedrus [Rhetoric]* (Albany, NY, 1993), 172–3; Lebeck, ‘Central Myth’, 268; Hackforth, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, 136–7. Clearly we can reject Taylor’s claim that ‘in structure the dialogue is of the simplest type’ (*Plato*, 300). Some commentators claim that ‘mere’ formal features are not enough to constitute unity (see e.g. Waterfield, *Plato: Phaedrus*, xi; and Nehamas and Woodruff, *Plato: Phaedrus*, xxxvii). Such a view, however, rests on the assumption of the correctness of thematic monism (against which I have already argued).

then it is clear that the dialogue has a carefully planned and tightly controlled internal organization. More to the point, it also becomes clear that the dialogue does in fact possess logographic necessity.

(d) *Word vs. deed*

In addition to the verbal, dramatic, and formal kinds of unity, I wish to consider one final non-thematic approach: what I shall call (broadly speaking) the interplay between word and deed. I have already remarked that the uniqueness of the dialogue form—the fact that it functions on many levels—compels us to adopt appropriate reading strategies. Part of what this means is that content and form are inseparable in Plato, and hence that we will be unable to achieve a faithful interpretation of a dialogue if we focus solely on what is explicitly *said* in that dialogue. For in addition to the level of explicit *logos* or argument, we must also pay attention to the level of *action* or *deed* (*ergon*)—be it the action of a particular character, the dramatic context of a given argument, or the unspoken cues from Plato himself directly to the reader. In any given dialogue, then, there arises an interplay of word and deed, and it is through that interplay that (in part) the dialogue expresses meaning. In the case of the *Phaedrus*, this word–deed interplay is so prevalent throughout the dialogue as a whole—and is so important for the philosophical content—that it offers one more level of unity. For want of a better term, I shall call this ‘unity of technique’, since the word–deed interplay is essentially a device which Plato uses to make his point.⁵⁴ Let us consider some of the ways in which such unity is present.

I have already noted that Plato uses the opening scene of the dialogue to present—and indeed, to enact—all of its major themes. This kind of dramatic enactment occurs over and over again in the *Phaedrus* in relation to each of the central themes:

Erōs. While the three speeches talk *about erōs*, the interaction between Phaedrus and Socrates clearly has erotic overtones—and hence is an *instantiation* of the subject-matter. There is, for ex-

⁵⁴ It should be noted that the contrast of word vs. deed is also a *theme* of the text. As Ferrari notes, one of Plato's main claims in the *Phaedrus* is that explicit knowledge—i.e. a propositional knowledge of a set of codified rules—is not always sufficient for complete *understanding*. (This applies, for example, to both rhetorical and dialectical practice.) In addition to propositional knowledge, personal recognition or insight is often required. See *Cicadas*, 21–5.

ample, the coy interplay between the interlocutors in the opening scene and interludes; in addition, the dialogue can plausibly be read as an attempt by Socrates to 'seduce' Phaedrus into the philosophical life.⁵⁵

Rhetoric. Whereas the second half is a discussion *about* rhetoric, the first half contains three *examples* of rhetoric (in *deed*).⁵⁶

Myth. At several places Plato talks *about* myth (most notably in the opening scene), but he also provides us with several *examples* of myth (the palinode, the cicadas, and Theuth).

Psychagogia. The second half contains a discussion *about* 'the leading of the soul', but the dialogue also contains several *examples* of it: within each of the speeches, a lover leads a beloved; within the drama of the dialogue, Socrates attempts to lead Phaedrus; and through a self-reflexive myth about writing, Plato attempts to lead us (his readers) beyond his own dialogues.

Madness. In the palinode Socrates talks *about* madness—and identifies four kinds of madness (poetic, prophetic, telestic, and erotic)—but in the dialogue as a whole he is made to appear as if he *exemplifies* all four kinds.⁵⁷

Dialectic. Whereas the second half offers a discussion *about* dialectic, Socrates' two speeches—at least according to his own self-analysis at 266 A–B—contain *examples* of collection and division. More broadly, the very act of opposing one speech to another is itself a 'dialectical' manoeuvre.⁵⁸

Philosophy. The dialogue is very much *about* philosophy, but so

⁵⁵ Some read the relationship between Socrates and Phaedrus as an instantiation of the *philosophical erōs* depicted in the palinode. (See e.g. J. Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 3rd edn. (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 112–13.) I think this is unlikely, given that (among other things) they do not actually engage in dialectic, and given that Phaedrus seems very far from exemplifying the philosophically self-aware beloved of the palinode.

⁵⁶ Again, some view the palinode as an instantiation of the philosophical (ideal) *technē* of rhetoric; but as I have already noted, such a view seems to me to be implausible.

⁵⁷ (1) *Poetic*: before his first speech he invokes the Muses (237 A) and during the speech he nearly speaks in verse (241 E); (2) *prophetic*: at one point he calls himself a 'seer' (242 C), and at the end of the dialogue he 'prophesies' what will happen to Isocrates; (3) *telestic*: the act of recantation via the palinode is symbolic of telestic expiation; (4) *erotic*: he himself is a lover (of speeches, of wisdom), and speaks at length about *erōs*. (I am indebted to Rutherford for these references (*Art of Plato*, 262); cf. also White, *Rhetoric*, 61–2.) I emphasize that Socrates is only made to *appear* to exemplify madness, since there is probably a good deal of irony involved in all of this and since it is unlikely that he is literally 'out of his mind'.

⁵⁸ W. C. Helmbold and W. G. Rabinowitz, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Indianapolis, 1956),

too does it *depict* philosophy in action—for instance, in Socrates' actions (such as his recantations), as well as in the drama of back-and-forth conversation. It may be that, precisely because philosophy is fundamentally an *activity*, it can be learnt only through practice: hence the need to portray it (and not merely describe it).⁵⁹

Writing. Socrates and Phaedrus talk *about* the written word, but of course the *Phaedrus* itself (not to mention the speech of Lysias which Phaedrus is carrying) is an inescapably written text.

Clearly, then, there is an interplay between *logos* and *ergon* which runs through the entirety of the *Phaedrus*. This provides yet another level of textual and philosophical unity to the dialogue.

4. The debunking approach

Thus far I have argued that the *Phaedrus* possesses unity in at least two ways: first, on the level of theme or subject-matter; and second, through a variety of non-thematic elements, including verbal texture, drama, form, and word-deed interplay. In making this argument, I have been assuming that the *Phaedrus* confronts us with a genuine textual problem—'the problem of unity'—that is (more or less) capable of solution. Yet not all commentators on the dialogue share this assumption. Rather, some question the very question itself, and claim that the alleged 'problem' of unity is unreal. On this view, strict unity is a demand which modern commentators wrongly impose on Plato's text, when in reality such unity is simply not to be found there. Instead, we must frankly admit that the disunity of the *Phaedrus* is real and ineluctable—though there are historical reasons as to *why* that is the case. I shall call this view the 'debunking approach', for its central claim is that we have been falsely conceiving of the scope and seriousness of the supposed 'problem' of unity. Rather than 'solve' the problem, then, we should dissolve it.

M. Heath has been the primary voice in support of the debunking approach.⁶⁰ The central assumption underlying Heath's argument is that 'there is a significant difference between Greek and our own

xii. Whether the speeches *actually* exemplify technical dialectic seems unlikely, and is perhaps just a convenient way for Socrates to analyse his own earlier *logoi*.

⁵⁹ Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 223.

⁶⁰ 'The Unity of Plato's *Phaedrus*' ['Unity'], *OSAP* 7 (1989), 151–73.

literary aesthetics' (162); specifically, there is a difference between the type of unity that a Greek audience would expect from a text and the type of unity that modern interpreters expect. We moderns, according to Heath, expect a literary or philosophical text to possess strong thematic unity; and it is the apparent failure of the *Phaedrus* to possess such a feature that generates the entire 'problem' of unity. That 'problem', however, exists only for *us*—it is non-existent for a Greek audience. The criterion of unity which a Greek audience assumes is not theme-based, but what Heath calls 'functional appropriateness' (163). That is to say, each genre of writing—be it tragedy, comedy, or philosophy—has a *function* or *end* that is appropriate to it; and (from the ancient Greek point of view) a given text possesses unity if the content of that text is appropriate to the relevant end or function. In the case of a philosophical text, the underlying function is that of 'instilling virtue or promoting philosophical understanding' (172); thus, so long as the content of the text serves that broader function—which is the case in the *Phaedrus*—the text is thereby unified.⁶¹ The upshot of Heath's argument is that the supposed 'problem' of unity is merely a result of anachronistic interpretation; in other words, we are guilty of imposing inappropriate and unreasonable demands upon Plato's text. From a *Greek* point of view, the dialogue *is* unified (in so far as the content of the dialogue serves the function of the genre); but we must also admit that, according to *our* (modern-day) criteria, the *Phaedrus* *does* lack unity. Yet such disunity is almost irrelevant, given the intentions and aesthetic sensibilities of the author.⁶²

Ferrari has also advocated a version of the debunking approach.⁶³ Ferrari first addresses the issue of the abrupt 'change in register', i.e. the shift in tone, language, and style from the first half to the

⁶¹ In this sense theme is subordinate to function, and Plato's main goal in writing dialogues is not to explore a given topic but to achieve a broader end (172).

⁶² According to Heath, the *Phaedrus* does possess a basic unity of plot (what Heath calls 'formal' unity), but no more than that. For Plato, however—and for any other Greek—such plot structure is sufficient, for it 'provides a platform on which many diverse, and perhaps divergent, material interests may be developed' (162). And so long as those interests serve the broader end, the text is unified.

⁶³ 'The Unity of the *Phaedrus*: A Response'. Although Ferrari considers the 1994 article to be a 'cooler, more historical response' (21) to the problem of unity than that espoused in his earlier book on the *Phaedrus*, *Cicadas* already seems to advocate the debunking approach. Consider the dismissive attitude of the final sentence of *Cicadas*: 'Let us not struggle too hard, then, to unify the *Phaedrus*; for the real struggle is elsewhere' (232).

second half. As we move from the soaring palinode to the drier second half, many readers are apt to feel disappointed; according to Ferrari, however, 'our sense of let-down may be a trick of time' (22). It is comparatively easy to feel moved and awed by the palinode—its language still speaks directly to us. By contrast, the discussion of rhetoric and the rivalry between Plato and Isocrates are far from our modern-day concerns; but for Plato's audience that rivalry *was* fresh and exciting, and so (according to Ferrari) they may not have felt any sense of 'let-down' at all when coming to the second half of the dialogue. The accusation of a 'change in register' is therefore anachronistic: what seems to be a change in excitement level to us was not so to a Greek audience.⁶⁴ Ferrari then addresses the question of thematic unity in a similarly historical manner. According to him, Plato's purpose in writing the *Phaedrus* was to 'outdo the rhetoricians (and especially Isocrates) at their own game' (24). The *Phaedrus* is therefore an epideictic piece (at least in part)—something which is intended to 'shock' its audience—and so must be disjointed in order to achieve that effect.⁶⁵ Ferrari concludes: 'The thematic disunity of the dialogue is a necessity of its genre. We must stop trying to explain it away' (25).

Although there is a certain cleverness in the debunking approach, I do not find the responses of Heath and Ferrari to be helpful as a means of actually *understanding* the text that lies before us. More to the point, their arguments face several key problems. For one thing, I am not yet convinced that there *is* a deep schism between Greek and modern aesthetic sensibilities; at the very least, much more needs to be done to *prove* that such a schism exists.⁶⁶ And even if there are *some* differences between Greek and modern aesthetics—which is trivially true—Heath and Ferrari then need to prove that the *extent* of those differences is as great as they claim. My own sense is that *any* reader of the *Phaedrus* would be struck by the thematic and stylistic contrast between the two halves. The debate

⁶⁴ One obvious problem with this argument is that it addresses only the question of intellectual 'excitement', and *not* the abrupt change in style, tone, and language. The latter would still have been noticeable to a Greek audience; why it occurs, however, is still unaccounted for in Ferrari's article.

⁶⁵ I have trouble following Ferrari's argument on this point.

⁶⁶ Ferrari merely *assumes* that the *Phaedrus* is intended to be epideictic ('Unity', 24), and without any evidence compares the Plato–Isocrates rivalry to our contemporary debate concerning political correctness (22). For his part, Heath tries to offer some evidence from Greek tragedy ('Unity', 161–2), but without stopping to consider the great disanalogy between philosophy and tragedy.

regarding the 'main theme', after all, goes back to antiquity: as I noted earlier, ancient commentators gave the *Phaedrus* a variety of subtitles.⁶⁷ At least some of the ancients, then, were deeply puzzled as to how to read the dialogue.

There is also good textual evidence which counts against the debunking approach. Both Heath and Ferrari claim that the dialogue *is* thematically disunified, and that we should simply accept that fact. If my earlier argument is correct, however, such a claim is false: the *Phaedrus* *does* possess strong thematic unity, albeit a unity of a complex and pluralistic type. Indeed, the underlying assumption in both Heath and Ferrari—and in most interpreters, for that matter—is that the sheer plurality of themes is proof positive of thematic disunity. If what I have been arguing is correct, however, thematic plurality is perfectly consistent with thematic unity. All we need is for one or more themes to recur throughout a text as a whole and to link together other (perhaps disparate) elements of that text. This is precisely what Plato does in the *Phaedrus*, and then goes on to show the interrelations *among* his chosen themes.

Finally, I consider the debunking approach to be unsound on broad methodological grounds. In this respect I find myself in wide agreement with Griswold, who in the introduction to his book lays out a helpful set of hermeneutical principles for reading Plato's dialogues. He suggests one central interpretative 'maxim': in approaching any text, we ought to assume that the author 'means to write both what and how he does write'.⁶⁸ He then justifies this assumption:

The point concerns . . . the logical precondition of the thesis that a text is coherent and possesses a unified meaning. The assumption is warranted at the very least on heuristic grounds, that is, relative to the reader's desire to be instructed. To deny the assumption is to begin study of the text with the prejudice that from a philosophical standpoint it is not worth the most serious study. (Ibid.)

But note what follows when we make this assumption: as a matter of charitable reading, we must begin by assuming that any textual 'problem'—e.g. a logical fallacy, an inconsistency, or (more to the point) apparent disunity—is *intentional* on the part of the author. By contrast, any appeals to external considerations—the chronology of the dialogues, Plato's intellectual development, Greekness

⁶⁷ See n. 1 above.

⁶⁸ Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 11.

or Greek culture, or carelessness of the author—ought to be made only as a last resort of interpretation, in those cases where no sense can otherwise be made of a text.⁶⁹ If this hermeneutical approach is correct, then the debunking approach to unity immediately becomes problematic. For what Heath and Ferrari do is to import historical and cultural considerations as the *basis* of their interpretation of the *Phaedrus*; it is far preferable, however, to begin by seeking reasons from *within* the text at hand. For one thing, appeals to external considerations are generally far more speculative in nature than appeals to the text itself. Moreover, it simply seems to me to be far more charitable to the author to seek a textual response to the problem of unity—looking, for example, for deeper levels of unity—rather than attributing the composition of the text to cultural or historical factors. Methodologically, then, the debunking approach seems to be a rather unsatisfactory way of reading Plato's dialogue.

5. The strategic approach

For the three above-mentioned reasons—the questionability of the supposed Greek–modern schism, the textual evidence in favour of thematic unity, and the methodological problem—I think there are serious problems with the debunking approach, and I do not find such an approach to be a fruitful way of reading the *Phaedrus*. In looking at the debunking approach, however, we have come across an important suggestion: that the apparent disunity of the dialogue and the contrasts between the two halves are *intentional* on Plato's part. This idea is the basis of the fourth and final approach to unity that I shall consider in this article, which I shall call the 'strategic approach' (since it claims that we are dealing with a strategic or intentional gesture on the part of Plato). Even if, as I have argued, the *Phaedrus* has unity on a variety of levels, it takes a certain amount of effort on the part of the reader to recognize that fact. This is because the deeper layers of meaning, interconnections, and structure can be uncovered only through successive readings of the dialogue, and because much of the *Phaedrus* can be understood only through the benefit of hindsight. One's first encounter with the dialogue, then, is likely to be a perplexing one, in which the

⁶⁹ Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 15.

text appears to be manifestly disjointed and disunified.⁷⁰ And even *after* multiple readings of the dialogue—even when we have come to recognize the deeper strata of unity—we are still likely to *feel* an abrupt change in moving from the palinode to the second half. This is where the strategic approach enters: it claims that Plato *intends* us to feel such a change. In other words (according to this view), Plato deliberately inserts the thematic and stylistic contrasts into the dialogue, using them as a means of making a philosophical point or achieving a certain end. Our puzzlement regarding the unity of the *Phaedrus*, then, is only natural—it is in fact intentionally encouraged by the author.

I think that this sort of approach is a sound one, and that it can provide another helpful perspective from which to address the problem of unity. The question that remains, then, is this: just *why* would Plato create a text which, on the surface, appears to be disjointed and disunified?⁷¹

I think that there are two general answers to this question. First, the apparent disjointedness and disconnectedness of the *Phaedrus* allow Plato to reinforce some of the philosophical themes of the dialogue. This can be seen most clearly with regard to Plato's treatment of the soul in the *Phaedrus* (a key recurring theme, to be sure). One of the main issues in the dialogue is the relation between madness and *sōphrosynē*, and between madness and philosophy; indeed, the palinode seems to extol erotic madness as a blessed and divine thing, and to suggest that philosophy itself is a form of madness.⁷² The juxtaposition of the 'mad' (or 'excessive') palinode with the 'sober' discussion of rhetoric and dialectic serves to dramatize and further engage this very issue: as we question how the palinode is to be related to the second half, we are simultaneously questioning how madness (or the 'irrational' generally) is to be related

⁷⁰ Cf. Rutherford, *Art of Plato*, 265.

⁷¹ When I refer to the 'appearance of disunity' in the *Phaedrus*, what I primarily have in mind is the (seeming) abrupt shift in *subject*, *style*, and *tone* from the first half to the second half: that is, the shift from an explicit and sustained discussion of *erōs* to an explicit and sustained discussion of rhetoric; and the shift from speech-making and mythical narrative to elenctic dialogue. In saying this, of course, I am not contradicting my earlier claims regarding the presence of *erōs* in the second half or the presence of rhetoric in the first half; rather, I am suggesting that it requires repeated and careful readings to *recognize* the presence of those themes.

⁷² Just what 'madness' really means in this context, of course, is an exceedingly complicated issue which I cannot deal with here.

to the philosophical life.⁷³ More broadly, this engages the issue of human nature—i.e. the nature of the soul—and how the rational charioteer is to be properly related to the spirited and appetitive horses. Early in the *Phaedrus*, when Socrates posed the question of self-knowledge, he asked whether he was ‘a beast more complicated and savage than Typho’ or ‘a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature’ (230 A). The palinode provides a partial answer to this question: humans have a *complex* nature with *both* bestial *and* divine elements. Strict simplicity of nature—or, we might say, ‘unity’ of nature—is therefore an impossibility for humans (though perhaps it is an ideal worth striving for). The contrasting halves of the dialogue serve to reinforce this point, and to remind us of our complex nature. Just as the *Phaedrus* itself is not a wholly perfect or uniform text, so too does human nature contain discontinuities.⁷⁴

The disjointedness of the *Phaedrus* is thus a deliberate reflection of, and commentary on, the psychology of the dialogue. Notice that it is the very abruptness of the transition between the two halves which helps make such meta-commentary possible. The apparent disjointedness of the dialogue also serves a second purpose: it provides a meta-commentary on the *dialogue itself* (and on Plato's writings more broadly). For one thing, the contrasting halves of the *Phaedrus* provide an occasion for reflection on the scope and limitations of the palinode. As we read through the dialogue for the first time, the palinode initially appears to be a complete statement of the truth—Socrates' ‘final word’, as it were (since, after all, it trumps the two earlier speeches). Yet this appearance is deceiving: the dialogue does *not* end with the palinode, as Plato soon has us move *beyond* it (in a literal sense). This manoeuvre seems to me to be deliberate. For when the palinode abruptly ends, and we return to the sober level of dialogical conversation, we begin to think consciously *about* the myth; specifically, we begin to think about whether the speech is in fact ‘the final word’.⁷⁵ Thus the abrupt transition from the first to the second half effects what the palinode alone cannot: reflection upon the very status of the palinode. The implication,

⁷³ Cf. Griswold, *Self-Knowledge*, 153.

⁷⁴ In addition to being a *reflection* of human nature, a disjointed dialogue is also *appropriate* for such a nature. For as Plato tells us, the true orator will offer a complex speech for a complex soul, and a simple speech for a simple soul (277 C).

⁷⁵ This is what Griswold calls the ‘self-qualification’ of the palinode (*Self-Knowledge*, 152 ff.).

I think, is that the palinode is conspicuously *incomplete*.⁷⁶ More broadly, the abrupt transition from palinode to dialogue provokes us to reflect on the status of myth as a form of discourse, and on the relation of *muthos* to *logos*. Here again, the implication seems to be the *limitation* of myth, both in this case and more generally.⁷⁷

In addition to provoking reflection on the status of the palinode (and of *muthos*), the seemingly disjointed structure of the *Phaedrus* also focuses our attention on the status of the dialogue as a *written* text. One of the main themes in the *Phaedrus*, after all, is the written word. For Plato, written texts are ‘dead’ *logoi* which lack the clarity and certainty of the ‘living’ *logoi* that are written in the soul; one therefore ought to be serious only with respect to dialectic, and regard writing as no more than a ‘playful’ activity. Once again, it is the seeming disjointedness of the *Phaedrus* that helps to remind us of this fact. That the *Phaedrus* appears as disunified reminds us that it, too, is an imperfect written *logos* that pales in comparison with the *logos* written in the soul. In this sense, the disunity of the *Phaedrus* could not be otherwise than it is: for Plato to have created a perfect, seamless text—which would in any case be impossible—would have been an empty achievement, and a sign that he had become one of the text-obsessed poets or speech-writers whom he condemns (278 D–E).

I conclude, then, that the contrasting halves of the dialogue are part of a strategic manoeuvre on Plato’s part to make broader points regarding the nature of the soul and the nature of the dialogue itself. One point is worth reiterating here. The strategic approach which I am here advocating is perfectly consistent with the claim that the dialogue *does* have unity. The strategic approach begins from the contrasts and diversity of the text, which are very real, and seeks to explain *why* they are present. Textual diversity, however, does not *ipso facto* imply textual disunity.⁷⁸ Indeed, it is perfectly consistent for Plato *both* to have placed certain con-

⁷⁶ This was hinted at in 246 A (in the palinode itself), but becomes fully clear in the myth of the cicadas and at 265 B–D. For a good discussion of the changing and dynamic role of the palinode in the *Phaedrus*, see C. Rowe’s work on the dialogue (to which I am much indebted): ‘Argument and Structure’, *passim*; *Plato: Phaedrus*, 7–11; and ‘The Unity of the *Phaedrus*: A Reply to Heath’, *OSAP* 7 (1989), 175–88.

⁷⁷ As Ferrari well notes, though, part of the point of the interplay between the two halves of the dialogue is to show that *both* *μῦθος* and *λόγος* are limited (what he calls a ‘kinship in limitation’: *Cicadas*, 30 ff.).

⁷⁸ Helmbold and Holther, ‘Unity’, 388.

trasts in the text *and* to have simultaneously organized that text in a coherent way. From this point of view, the *Phaedrus* is indeed unified, but is also designed to *appear* as disunified. There is no contradiction here; what is required is simply acute attentiveness on the part of the reader to recognize the appearance *as* an appearance.

6. Conclusion

As a general principle of charity, I think that we owe certain assumptions to a writer as complex as Plato. In particular, we are justified in assuming from the outset that it is unlikely—though not impossible—that a text as complicated as the *Phaedrus* would be incoherent either accidentally or through authorial ineptitude. Consequently, the burden of proof must lie with those who claim that the dialogue is irredeemably incoherent. Conversely, the responsibility lies with the rest of us to take an acute look at the text and to *seek out* the ways in which it is unified. Only if we fail in that task ought we to bring a charge of textual defectiveness. Fortunately, if we genuinely approach the dialogue as attentive readers, we find (I submit) many levels on which it is an organized whole. Such is the main upshot of the analysis which I have offered in this article.

I began by considering the thematic approach to unity, and the main options that are available for the thematic monist. Rhetoric, *erōs*, and philosophy all emerged as solid contenders, with good textual evidence in favour of each. However, as I have argued, we need not choose from among these contenders—we can have our cake and eat it too. Both for hermeneutical reasons in general and philosophical reasons in this particular dialogue, thematic pluralism is the most appropriate way of approaching the text. Yet far from undercutting thematic unity, the pluralistic approach constitutes such unity; multiple themes are omnipresent in the dialogue, each of which is interrelated with the others. For these reasons, then, the *Phaedrus* is unified on a thematic level.

At the same time, the dialogue possesses unity on a variety of non-thematic levels. Specifically, it is unified through dramatic elements, verbal texture, structure or form, and the interplay between word and deed. In general, looking beyond the level of theme has

a twofold advantage. First, it allows us to remain truer to the dialogue form and to the possibilities that are inherent in that form; and second, it puts into practice the hermeneutical assumption mentioned a moment ago—viz. that the burden lies with us to *seek out* unity. For when we begin to look at the level of drama, form, imagery, and word–deed interplay, we find a wealth of possibilities that would have been absent if we had merely dismissed the dialogue as incoherent. It is for this reason too that the debunking approach is (in my view) an unsound one. For, aside from being implausible on textual grounds, this approach underestimates the richness of the text and instead appeals to external considerations. To shoulder the burden of attentive readership, however, is to appeal to such considerations only as a last resort. Happily, in this case we need not find ourselves in such a dilemma.

I concluded, finally, by considering the strategic approach, which claims that the contrasts and changes of the dialogue are deliberately inserted so as to make a certain point or to achieve a certain end. This approach has proven to be especially fruitful, and one of its virtues is the hermeneutical discussion which it brings to the table. Again, however, we need not choose *between* the strategic approach and the thematic/non-thematic approaches. For it is perfectly consistent that Plato should give the *Phaedrus* a high degree of thematic, dramatic, and formal unity, and at the same time give it the *appearance* of disunity. One of the hallmarks of all Platonic philosophy, after all, is the distinction between appearance and reality, a distinction which applies as much to Plato's own dialogues as it does to his metaphysics. The implication is that the appearance of the *Phaedrus* is deceiving, but that if we are attentive readers—the sort of reader with an appropriately attuned philosophical soul—we need not be deceived ourselves. Though the contrasts and changes of the dialogue are real, through successive readings we can also come to recognize the deeper unity which is equally real.

On a broader level, then, we can again have our cake and eat it too—we can *simultaneously* pursue the thematic, non-thematic, and strategic approaches to unity. I conclude that a hybrid approach to the *Phaedrus* which includes all three of these methods is the soundest way to understand the text and its organization. We now have more than sufficient evidence to view the *Phaedrus* as anything

but incoherent. And we have learnt something much more general as well: Platonic authorship is a complex and multi-layered affair, and first impressions are not always to be trusted.

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