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Stop Making Me Laugh, Can't You See I'm Dying Here?

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With failing eyes my grandma sat reading her newspaper, putting up with the bickering and antagonistic dialogue that composes the majority of the exchanges between my grandpa and myself. In no tone in particular, and yet quite matter-of-factly, she mentioned that the last time she had seen a living bluebird in her elaborate garden—or anywhere—was in 1968. It flew straight into her picture window and died on the spot. Instinct?

Grandma has a cat who is a very good hunter. This cat regularly brings many small-game prizes into the house for grandma—including birds. This is a cat's instinct. These war-torn offerings are disposed of regularly and without ceremony.

Without thinking much about it, however, grandma gave this particular kamikaze bluebird of 1968 to her neighbor lady the school teacher, thinking the bird might make an fun subject for the teacher's grade school class to draw or paint. “Yes!” the school teacher agreed, “What a wonderful idea!” She promptly put the bluebird into her kitchen freezer for safe keeping. Instinct?

The discovery of this icy memorial later caused general disease and agitation among the school teacher's own already-grown children who doubted the propriety of such preserving practices. The school teacher had lost the nerve to dispose of the bluebird entirely; her children insisted that, short of complete disposal, at the very least and in the name of decency, the existence of the tiny frozen corpse must be kept secret from the school teacher's aging mother. Yes, discretion is required if one is compelled to keep a bluebird next to a chicken in a freezer.
Some twenty-odd years later my grandma came across a photograph of a bluebird which reminded her of how long it had been since she herself had seen one, recalling of course that last kamikaze bluebird of 1968. Using the photograph as a model, grandma made a small oil painting of a bluebird, saying she did not want to forget what a bluebird looked like. She hung the painting in one of her two spare bedrooms—the one that has always been yellow, as opposed to the one that has always been blue.

Since my sisters and I were kids, the yellow bedroom has always been free of all monsters, specters, or ghouls of any sort—within the yellow walls we could safely read the tales of the brothers Grimm, the hair raising Reader's Digest "Dramas in Real Life," even the Children's Bible without losing a moment to thoughts of mortal danger.

It was the blue room that held all of the evil predators of childhood—anything that could cause you to die before you should wake was there, hidden—conveniently, under-the-bed. In particular, there were multitudes of skeletons under there: skeletons of brides, of Jesus, Hitler, of the still-living, yet very bony, Johnny Cash, and of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indians. These skeletons could strike even during the daylight hours, as the blue bedroom was also a sewing room and often hid needles and pins primed to target little feet as victims—the blue room always stayed cooler than the rest of the house as it's windows rested in shade. If we needed to torture grandpa we would either put Red Hots in his dinner salad or put him in the blue room.

In our late teens we discovered that our 'boy' cousins, whom we rarely saw, had developed the same theories regarding the blue room quite independently of our influence. Instinct.

The bluebird-in-oils got the yellow room.
It goes without saying that sleeping in the blue room was a ludicrous proposal. Only under an extreme circumstance of duress or a gripping craving for an adrenaline fix would such reckless behavior ever be elicited. Supreme initiation rites would of course be held in the blue room—I was given a mohawk in the blue room. Instinct.

For sleeping and dreaming I still choose the yellow room today. Instinct. I like looking at the painting of the bluebird. My instinct tells me to memorize its contours. It is hard to remember something which you don’t recall ever having had actually seen in conscious memory. It wasn’t until I saw the painting of the bluebird that I realized I had never actually seen one. I thought I had. After all, I myself dressed as a Bluebird once a week for three years of my life. My mother was a Bluebird leader. I chose Bluebirds over Brownies solely on the basis of the uniform aesthetic—I was into it, I knew what a Bluebird was to look like.

So yes, I was a Bluebird without knowing what a bluebird was, and then I became a Campfire…when all of the smoke settled at the end of many circling roads, I astonishingly hit the front door of the Honors Building. I was looking for a way around the BK Broiler general requirement Blue Room of higher education. I followed my instincts against training and probability. I found within a Yellow Room made of ancient tableaux, of voices which have escaped escaping the collective memory.

Sometimes events manifest themselves in a certain order, causing extraordinary actions outside of our daily compounded existence—new possibilities present themselves and old boundaries can be negotiated, adapted, to accommodate and to facilitate a changing form. Maybe it takes time. The contours of time felt by instinct. What will I do with my education? I don’t know how to tell now when it will be over, done, and ready.

I would like to pass through the window and keep on flying. I’d like to avoid the secret deception of the freezer.
Stop Making Me Laugh,  
Can't You See I'm Dying Here?

The *Phaedo* comprises one speech. This speech is delivered in the form of a war; a war that wonders about and is fought over the existence of the soul after the death of the body. Does the soul here perish, or is it truly immortal? The life or death of the soul becomes in this sense the prize of the war—the underlying cause, the quest for knowledge of the Truth. Thus, the side that presents the prevailing theory of the soul receives, not only the honor of possessing the answer to this long and much-sought after question, but also the further honour of possessing the truth about reality, and therefore, an overall hold on Truth itself.

The war is fashioned in two parts, as a remake in form of the Homeric epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, respectively.¹ Both of these poems themselves comprise what is described by Beye as the base structure of tragedy, which follows a three-part format beginning with the *hamartia*, (human frailty), followed by the *metabole*, (reversal) and finally, the *anagnorisis*, (realization) (Beye, 138). Although the two poems—as well as the two corresponding halves of the speech in the *Phaedo*—do share this structure that has been named tragic, it would be wrong to carry this to mean that the *Odyssey* shares the same tragic tone as the *Iliad*.

For the purposes of this explication, the distinction between the tragic tone of the *Iliad* contrasted to the comic tone of the *Odyssey* is a crucial one to make. That this distinction does indeed exist is demonstrated by an ancient author, who used the

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¹ From a lecture by Lawrence Wheeler, winter of 1995.
Greek word _komikos_, comedy, to differentiate the _Odyssey_ from the _Iliad_ (Beye, 174). Beye sees early elements of comedy emerging in Euripides’ late works, including the _Ion_. He compares the distinctive comedic features of the narrative of the _Ion_ to those of the _Odyssey_, and finds them to be parallel, stating that this parallelism, “…lends support to the view that the Homeric epics derive from two entirely different sensibilities, tragic and comic. Into the second of these categories fall[s] the _Odyssey_” (Beye, 189).

The _Phaedo_ opens with Phaedo himself describing an absolutely incomprehensible emotion on the day of Socrates’ execution; a sort of curious blend of pleasure and pain combined, between laughing and crying (59). Socrates’ first lines in the dialogue are in reference to the queer, close relationship that exists between pleasure and pain; a theme he goes on to develop and repeat (60b–c), forming a strong portent of things to come.

Deepening the insight into the integral relationship between tragedy and comedy, as is useful here, Beye offers that a philosopher might describe a tragedy as a verbal construct of the reality that surrounds us (132). He later asserts that tragedies were a thoroughly political institution in the Classical period, and that the comic theater, having an equal political status, served to discuss those tragedies (175). In this light, the comedy functions not only to reiterate the events of history, but it attempts to give applicable meaning and purpose to them—comedy becomes at once a reworking, a mirror, and a conscience for past events, which have been depicted in the form of tragedy.

These combined notions form an integral element in looking at the _Phaedo_. Firstly, the self-conscious relationship of tragedy and comedy serves to accurately illustrate the commonly held view of the function of the _Odyssey_ as an absorption of, and an answer to, the overwhelming anxieties inherent
in the relationship between man and the gods in the *Iliad*—a relationship that left man inextricably vulnerable to the apathetic and often malevolent whimsy of the gods and the unbending wills of fate. The *Odyssey* offered refuge and hope to a man in this predicament: by use of his intellect, and by controlling his emotions, he could escape the crushing contrivances of the gods and lend a hand in shaping his own destiny.

This pattern is profoundly realized in the movement of the *Phaedo*: in the first half of the speech, the conflict is clearly delineated between the ideals of the true philosopher and anyone who is not a philosopher: namely, the “Sophist”—a term that comes to be used in Greek history as a sort of catch-all which could expand to include the city, its politics, and the irrational thought that Socrates believed to be the plague of mankind. The second half of the speech cradles this conflict; soothing, insisting, and lamenting that the two sensibilities cannot coexist without contaminating and destroying one or the other and that the only moral and ‘soul-saving’ choice one has is to follow the life of philosophy—in other words, to use the intellect to save the individual body, as well as that of the city, from its own Sophist thought. Of course the self-conscious nature of the dialogue is readily apparent: Socrates, the philosopher, has been condemned to death by the city of Athens—which, by extension of those who control its politics, he considers to be the embodiment of Sophist thought in operation. The irony at work here is that the city has rejected Socrates and his philosophy for their combined attacks on its belief system; he has been charged and sentenced to execution for impieties committed toward the city. Socrates’ only recourse at this point is to re-apply the old formula of comedic assessment—he must now rely on his philosophical intellect to save the life of his soul.
The relationship between tragedy and comedy thus elicits an evolution in cultural beliefs; by first recounting an event, and then analyzing its outcome. The outcome of this analysis is then dumped into the cultural belief system. Each time this 'comedic' process repeats itself, it chooses only the beliefs and the factual references that are essential to continuing the present level of thought. If an idea is no longer congruent with the current shift of belief, the idea is stripped of its truth value, ridiculed, and deemed myth; thus, deleted from the working belief system. In this way, the cultural corpus evolves—veering ever farther from the initial premise, or belief system, and correlating directly to large-scale cultural shifts: as the Odyssey reworked the Iliadic relationship of man and the gods, so evolved the real-life emergence of the Greek individual from the family. Later Greek culture applied those same Homeric lessons: first, to the new 'family' of the emerging city, and next, to the emerging individual within that city—forever furthering the ideas of the tragic reality and the comedic solution, as well as furthering man from his initial roots.

Here rests the paradox of the Phaedo: any historical event or belief system that enters into this cycle of cultural evolution, itself becomes myth. Rational thought was discrediting myth's legitimacy, by degrees changing the shape of the cultural corpus. This meant that the future was being formed on a rationale that completely discredited the past; rendering obsolete the very foundation on which the rationale itself was based. Beye illustrates this in saying, "Myth's suggestiveness also clashed with the prevailing intellectual temper, which was moving toward logic, categories, and all other tools of the practicing philosopher. Myth allows for illogicalities to be resolved in a way impossible to the intellectual mind" (167). This culmination provides a strong beginning account of Socrates' complete antipathy for the
cultural corpus during the course of the dialogue: at each and every turn he refutes, belittles, and vehemently denies its legitimacy.

It is extremely ironic then, that the speech of the *Phaedo*—whose content intrinsically condemns the cultural corpus in all of its manifestations—presents itself in the literary mythic format which defines that system. In this way, the speech at once illustrates the problem, is the problem, and refutes that problem: the paradox of history realized. The image of Socrates at the opening of the dialogue: daybreak in the center of the city, Socrates lay, imprisoned there, like his figurative soul within his body (59d). Socrates began, saying that any man would be quite willing to die if he were properly grounded in philosophy. As he spoke he lowered his feet to the ground, remaining in this position for the rest of the discussion (61d). Man is still the puny figure at the mercy of uncontrollable forces, only now, with the aid of the intellect, and its manifest philosophy, the *direct* conflict between man and god is several times removed. What was the price paid for this pseudo-security blanket? Man abandoned the exposed environs of the countryside, man denied bewildering consort with the flesh, Socrates drank the hemlock: this is the point at which the mythic war of the *Phaedo* begins.

The war of this speech is divided into individual battles of question and debate. It is within this construct that the individual points of the argument are made and fought. The first Iliadic half of the war features Socrates the Philosopher in the role of the epic hero Achilles. The Thebans — Simmias and Cebes — provide the opposing Trojan faction, representing the Sophists—hence the city—in this case Athens.

There are three ascending instances of question and debate in this Iliadic representation, in keeping with the three-part base structure of tragedy. There is the *hamartia* (60c-78), in which
Socrates is taunted into battle by both Thebans, then urged on by his fellow Athenian Crito. Socrates plunges in, taking on first Simmias, then Cebe, then Simmias again; finally, he faces both Thebans at once: the battle line is drawn, culminating in a dramatic squaring off between philosophy and rhetoric. Next follows the *metabole* (78-84b): Socrates and Cebe are grappling one on one, Socrates is winning easily, then suddenly, he pauses; here Socrates—unlike his predecessor, Achilles—realizes that, in the face of these assaults on his sensibilities, the only hope for truly winning this battle lies in his ability to exercise his reason over his appetitive lust for blood. Now, the *anagnorisis* (84c-88b): Socrates quickly turns cunning, taunting his opponents playfully, making light of both Apollo and Orpheus (84d); all-the-while himself lapsing into the role of accommodating host to the bereaved—then lingering for a moment of shared doom,² amicably inviting both Thebans to stake their claims. This transformation of attitude is made complete in the unforgettable image of Socrates pretending to be dazzled by the Thebans' combined stratagems: “Socrates opened his eyes very wide—a favorite trick of his—and smiled (86d).”

The battle schemata alternate throughout from instances of quick, stichic lines of narrative employed to indicate moments of all-out, hand-to-hand combat³ to slower, intermediary intervals of Homeric battle taunting, squaring off between the opponents, and the deepening advancements of Socrates' argument for the immortality of the soul. It is here, in the lines of question and debate, that the war of words is fought.

The battles of question and debate provide the same functions in the second, Odyssean, portion of the speech. It begins

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³. “Stichomythy usually involves competition or conflict and is thus very much in keeping with the nature of tragic drama” (Beye, 133).
with the *hamartia* (89b-95e), in which the fully metamorphosed Socrates emerges as the self-composed Odysseus, man of many wiles. Phaedo bleeds out of the narrative frame and into the action as playing Iolaus to Socrates’ Heracles (89c), receiving fatherly warnings from Socrates about the dangers of becoming misologic in the same way that people become misanthropic: by believing in somebody quite uncritically (89d). This is the smoke screen and fair-warning Socrates issues as he launches into his many disguises. Quickly, Socrates reasserts his firm philosophical stance through his discourse with Phaedo and, wasting no time, he softens the Theban attack by launching into a full-fledged comic rendition: making himself seem ridiculous and harmless as one of the laughable and bumbling old *marathonioi*, saying how selfish he is, an intellectual invalid, giving into self-pity (91b), and once again, the warning: “You must not allow me, in my enthusiasm, to deceive both myself and you, and leave my sting behind when I fly away” (91c). The Thebans fall into the false sense of security; Socrates’ new, gentle tones bring them immediately wagging to his side.

At this point, Simmias’ theory quickly falls victim to Socrates’ clever and precise advancements. Next it’s Cebes’ turn: Socrates, increasing in intensity, yet maintaining his gentle ruse, enters into an account of his personal path into philosophy. As Socrates describes the disappointments and deceptions he met along the way, he slowly actualizes the experience of Odysseus: the careful compilation of lies sooner or later defines the silhouette of its counterpart; the dialogue becomes Socrates’ Odyssean.

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4. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*: Iolaus, the nephew and trusted companion of Heracles.

5. Beye discusses the *marathonioi* from Aristophanes’ *Wasps*: “Their strength and ferocity have become irascibility, petty nastiness, and grumbling, represented by the wasps’ stingers” (Beye, 183).

6. The point at which Odysseus tells his name to the Phoenicians (*Odyssey* 4.20).
identification scene (96-100b), as well as another warning to over-credulous students. Cebes complains that he does not understand.

The *metabole* (100b-101e): Socrates returns from his confession revitalized, with a renewed trust in his old principles. He invites Cebes into his brotherhood, like Odysseus to Alcinoos⁷—Socrates goes farther into his usage of comic deception, playing the simpleton, employing the Theban's own rhetorical style of argument—augmented with ludicrous repetitions of forms—nullifying the legitimacy of Protagoras, along with the canon of Sophists alike (101d-e). Ironically, taken in by their own system, Socrates elicits from both Thebans enthusiastic concessions to the previous points of causation which they had rejected when offered philosophically.

The *anagnorisis* (102b-107d): Socrates brings in Phaedo again, this time as Telemachos, to join in the parodying of the Theban suitors, who are now gushing and fawning over any ridiculous fodder Socrates feels is fitting to serve up—and Socrates sees it fitting to continually ridicule them by their own Sophist foolishness—disguising, but never veering from, his own philosophical standpoint. Reveling in his ironical work, Socrates adds with a smile, “I seem to be developing an artificial style, but the facts are surely as I say” (102d). As Socrates proceeds deeper under the cover of explicit, antic tom-foolery, his implicit tone becomes ever more stern, exacting: he is dangerously enraged, looking into the face of the weak-minded system that has destined him to execution. It is in this tone, that he enters into the figurative and literal telling of the great, explicit myth of the speech, which functions as the ending bracket of narrative frame, marking the completion of this present battle.

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⁷ Odysseus left Alcinoos and his people in fear and jeopardy, beholden to an angry god, Poseidon (*Odyssey*, 8.170).
The narrative frame serves multiple purposes within the speech. Firstly, it serves to provide a skeletal structure on which the flesh of the arguments can rest, as illustrated in the accounts of question and debate. In this skeletal capacity, it also serves to highlight important actions in the dialogue: it performs the function of the chorus in a theatrical production, providing an impetus to communicate nuances of the dialogue to the reader, reiterate important points, and perhaps most importantly, to furnish a strand of psychological reality to the abstracted events of the dialogue, much like the operations of the simile worlds of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The simileic strand flows through the narrative frame, both explicitly and implicitly. It forms and maintains the sense of time that is so important to the unconscious and universal effects of the dialogue, which at lengths culminate, and then disperse, into the inevitable finale of the explicit storytelling of the myth.\(^8\)

In the large, opening narrative frame (57-60) of the *Phaedo*, the time surrounding Socrates' execution and leading up to Echecrates' conversation with Phaedo, is shrouded in mystery, as if in a deep slumber, or ensconced in a sordid past... visitors and definitive information are hard to come by: everything is delayed, on hold. In the last lines of the opening narrative frame, "The commissioners are taking off Socrates' chains... and warning him that he is to die today" (59e), time seems to be awakened, as if invoked by the telling of the myth—and true to the mythic form, this line indicates at once where the story is, and where it is going; in the telling, all is anticipated.\(^9\) From this

\(^8\) The myth of the *Phaedo* performs the same function in this dialogue, as does the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*: it acts as a sort of sub-story; one that serves to paraphrase the action of the dialogue in a more 'psychologically-real'—yet mythic—way (*Iliad*, 18.557-18.710).

\(^9\) Beye's description of the mythic form includes the audience's foreknowledge of the story's outcome (162).
point, to the end of the first Iliadic portion of the speech (88b),
time is a predatory element: it can be felt moving stealthfully,
picking up momentum and power, coming up on Socrates from
behind, and spurring him on, by the very nature of its being—
forcing Socrates into the Iliadic metabole (78). It is this element
that adds to the fighting frenzy of the battles, providing the
quintessential backdrop for emoting the sensation of nameless
and impending doom that is everywhere in man's tentative world
within the confines of the *Iliad.*

As Socrates reintroduces the image of the imprisoned aspect
of the soul in the body (82e-83), he unwittingly brings the
predatory time factor into the present—suddenly Socrates is
describing his current situation, his aristeia is suspended. As
Socrates clarifies in his resolve the imperative separation of the
philosopher's soul from the appetitive body, a shift happens
(94b-c): Socrates' fate is still as certain as Achilles', but as he lays
down his association with knowledge of "wild things," and
moves fully into the realm of reason, he transforms himself from
the hero fighting for truth to the embodiment of truth moving
into realization, which in this case, is death. "After such a train-
ing [in philosophy] my dear Simmias and Cebes, the soul can
have no grounds for fearing that upon its separation from the
body it will be blown away and scattered to the winds, and so
disappear into thin air, and cease to exist altogether" (84b). This
moment marks the beginning of the Achillean-Socrates' *anagnorisis,*
leading up to the official episode of central narrative frame (88c-89b).

From this point on, simileic time remains as wily as
Odyssean-Socrates, proving repeatedly at turns how elusive it
can be, forever darting in and out of covers, such as the cover of
the static time frame of Socrates' personal identification scene

10. Dodds associated this knowledge with Achilles (195).

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This scene operates as the narrative frame separating the Odyssean hamartia from its metabole. Back into deep disguise—purified and refreshed—Socrates finds new inspiration in his old storehouse of cunning. As his antics grow more lunatic, his edge ever-sharpening, his eyes gleam with sparks reflected off the frontal time he has averted. When the end of the metabole meets the narrative frame (102-102b), everyone present feels victorious. Time billows and gushes and bubbles oblivious—until someone realizes that no one knows the reason for the sudden giddy merriment. Something is very wrong. Socrates here is razor-sharp; the sheep grow jittery, then apathetic—it's dead air, time is not answering the door because he is hiding in one's pocket—and the flocks want a bed-time story. Socrates delivers. Upon completing the coup of the explicit myth, feeling the combined effects of his wily triumph and the ever-loosening reality of physical time, Socrates quips that he can be buried, "Anyway you like...that is, if you can catch me and I don't slip through your fingers" (115b).

The explicit, individual myth of this dialogue lies within the confines of the narrative frame, representing the stomping grounds of histories past, and the unavoidable shackle of days to come. It occupies the lines of (107d-114c), and in its telling describes scenes of fire and of pain, treading murky flood waters through endless pits of cavernous fear; the uncontrollable and ridiculous tides of which feed relentlessly back into themselves, gaining power and shaping the reality of the minds of men. This is the sort of fantastical description employed by Socrates in his rendition of the culturally-pleasing explanation of the afterlife, but the idea was: INSERT ANY bag-of-guts-Cretan-dog-face pile of words you wish, even if they might be true—because philosophy is not attainable for everyone, and without it, people will believe anything. And while this is the case, all that remains
are these distorted memories, that spawn and contort, and create lives of their own. They are this dialogue. They are our mediocre reality: past, present, and future. They are the implicit Myth that is the only standing representation of Truth in the collective-conscience element of time. The Myth that is a myth unto itself.

Finally, in the divinely comedic close of narrative frame (116b-118), time has completed its projection into the future. Socrates goes to take a bath at the hour of doom (116)—with Crito in tow—meanwhile, his disciples are already lamenting their feelings of being left orphaned for the rest of their lives. This sentiment is magnified by the ring composition appearance of Socrates' wife and children at the opening of the dialogue (59e-60), and again here, at the close (116b); the children's loss of a blood father, as well as the symbolism of matrimony, are dismissed as irrelevant compared to the loss of Socrates as the figurative father of philosophy to the people and to the city. Time, along with Socrates, has transcended into the realm of forever—in this sense, all future generations are left orphaned, hopeless.

When Socrates returns, fresh from his bath, he is presently greeted by the prison officer—the future of Athens (116c-d). The prison officer is guilty, and awkward in his new position, time is in flux. Within the vertigo of the moment, the scene breaks forth helter-skelter: the prison officer bursts into tears, Socrates breaks into a mock cordiality, bidding the officer a fond adieu, wondering if his poison might come "ready-prepared." Crito is desperate for some last-minute sensual pleasures, which of course Socrates denies him, in lieu of a last indulgence in a bit of philosophy, combined with a demonstration of Socrates' own, renowned drinking style—drinking, in this case, poison.

The chaotic smattering of time sobers a little when the prison officer returns: he produces the poison in a ready-pre-
pared cup; he has wasted no time in orienting himself to his new position as keeper of Athens: he is unsympathetic, remorseless, and mechanical (117a-b). Here Socrates attributes to the prison officer—"the man"—the role of straight-man in this increasingly vicious comedic transgression. Socrates requests permission to pour a libation from his drink, supposing that he was probably "bound" to pray to the gods that he may be "prosperous" in his "removal" from the world.

Socrates drains the cup in one breath, and time goes wild (117c): Phaedo, Crito, and Apollodorus burst out in tears, burlesquing a gang of hysterical female mourners; Phaedo is so taken away he has to cover his face (117d). Socrates, the comedic ring-leader, scolds them erstwhile consenting to the prodding and pinching of his lower extremities by the prison officer, who insists that he keep close tabs on the progress of the poison in Socrates' bloodstream. When all could see by the prison officers obvious demonstrations that Socrates was indeed becoming cold and numb, the moment sobered: all of the preceding moments now suck back, inward, reflecting into all that Socrates had embodied, directly back into his veins they flowed, joining the poison in its final ascent to Socrates heart—deceasing the moment and the man. Time holds its breath. "The coldness was spreading about as far as his waist" (118), when suddenly Socrates uncovers his face and tells Crito (who has been pleading throughout the last scene for post-mortem instructions): "Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don't forget."

11. Socrates, in a rare moment outside of the city, with Phaedrus, is swept away with the talk of love, and an interlude with Phaedrus (241.3). Socrates covered his face while delivering his speech of love, so that he shouldn't, "...be put out by catching [Phaedrus'] eye and feeling ashamed." Phaedo himself covered his face (117d)—this action seems to imply a response to loving or sensual emotions.
The always eager-to-serve Crito assured Socrates it would be done, offering himself immediately to be of more service. All that remained, however, was to close Socrates’ fixed eyes and open mouth. Phaedo delivered the mythic epithet by way of eulogy to: “...the bravest, wisest and also the most upright man” (118).

Beye suggests the Greek word *komikos* could be used as an all-inclusive term which, may define a sense of well-being. He quotes a phrase in epic poetry that suggests this: “In moments of exuberance, joy, or beauty, there often appears the epic phrase, ‘the whole earth laughed’” (174).

The dedication to Asclepius: a last minute embrace of the cultural corpus, or a final jab below its belt? If it is assumed that Socrates was sincere in his dedication to Asclepius, he would still be a man on the verge of death, thanking the good doctor with the long-fanged snake, for the very happy recovery, leading—away from him—and into death, most gratefully. More likely, this is merely the natural realization of the common comic ending, not a reversal in Socrates’ philosophical stance. A comic ending complete with parody of the cultural corpus, drinking, bathing, loving, burlesque—celebration of life and of sensuality—certainly elements that, when applied with philosophy, Socrates would not be adverse to die for. The fact that the drinking of hemlock induces erections in some men proposes an interesting consideration; one that would serve to further heighten the comedic implications of the closing dialogue.

From an overall viewpoint, the placement of Socrates’ explicit myth at the end of both the tragic and the comic Homeric portions of the speech—connected by the umbilical thread of

12. For further discussion of the qualities of comic heroes and comic theatrical endings see Beye, 181.
narrative frame—serves to bind the work in its entirety into one overall tragedy; one overall tragic war; which, in turn, forms one individual battle amidst the canon of Platonic works. The prize of war—the human soul—remains elusive: whether shackled somewhere within the confines of the flesh, dispersing into nothingness, groaning in the underworld, or blowing gaily through paradise; whatever the soul’s future or true nature is, one sure aspect of its existence is well evidenced: the bloody trail of words, corpses, and ennui which litters the history of man.

In consideration of all of these factors, and in view of Socrates’ last words here in the Phaedo—the dedication to Asclepius—it is tempting, again, to borrow from Beye, “...the phallus is an instrument of self-awareness which makes the comic hero an analogue—through the looking glass—to the tragic hero. The hero of the comedy, like his tragic counterpart, proceeds to awareness, in his case, an awareness that comes from sensuality. Like the tragic hero, he must confront inevitability, but it is in the form of an erection that has a will of its own” (184). As thus, the time of this dialogue stops, there: slipping down into the cultural corpus, forever reworked, through times, and again.
Bibliography


