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## Plato the Poet

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“Plato the Poet”

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## Precis

Plato's dialogue genre contains within it literary elements not normally associated with a philosophical work. In the creation of his dialogue, Plato combined the literary aspects of drama—specifically setting and characterization—and rhetoric with the Socratic Method to create a genre that was new to philosophy. An examination of the usage of these elements in a Platonic dialogue, specifically *Symposium*, in comparison to Xenophon's *Symposium* reveals the unique nature of Plato's dialogue.

## Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Socratic Problem

*“Plato is the only author who can write simultaneously  
on various levels of meaning as if a dialogue were  
a symphony of various instruments”*  
--G.E. Mueller

An influential area of Platonic and Socratic scholarship revolves around the question of whether one can construct an accurate view of the historic Socrates. This study has largely become known as the “Socratic Problem”, and although the study has been attempted many times over the past centuries, no study has been able to discover properly who the historic Socrates was or to establish a scholarly consensus on the matter. Modern scholarship concerning the identity of a historical Socrates has come to a stalemate. As a result, there are other areas of research concerning Plato and Socrates that have begun to be explored; the stalemate has forced scholars to investigate the dialogues themselves as pieces of literary works rather than as representations of Socrates. One of those areas of research concerns the literary genre of Platonic philosophy, specifically the dramatic dialogue. Plato’s use of the dialogue exemplifies his literary skill as well as his philosophical skill by bringing elements of drama—setting, characterization—and rhetoric together with the Socratic method. Plato’s aim with the dialogue was not to portray the historic Socrates, but rather to present an accurate portrayal of Socrates’ method of oral discussion. Although studies on the historic Socrates have resulted in disagreement, it is useful to consider how scholarship has arrived at the present state.

A brief examination of the Socratic Problem, though moribund, will prove beneficial for a couple of different reasons. First, several studies have been formative of scholarship on Plato and Socrates. Another reason, which will be shown throughout the paper, is that the problem has

highlighted important aspects about Plato's character of Socrates. And finally, the realization that the problem cannot be solved forces students to explore different questions to further the understanding of Platonic works.

The earliest study published on the Socratic Problem was by Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1818 entitled "The Worth of Socrates as Philosopher."<sup>1</sup> Before Schleiermacher, most of what was believed to have been known about Socrates was taken from Xenophon's works on Socrates.<sup>2</sup> Schleiermacher was the first scholar to reject the "principal characteristics that constituted the traditional representation of Socrates the 'philosopher'"<sup>3</sup> which were largely believed at the start of the nineteenth century. The subsequent neglect that Xenophon and the *Memorabilia* faced over the next century can rightly be attributed to Schleiermacher.<sup>4</sup> He begins his essay by making two critiques about the *Memorabilia*: the first concerning Xenophon's position as a philosopher; the second concerning aspects of his writing.

The first point of Schleiermacher's criticisms is that Xenophon was a statesman, not a philosopher. Although Xenophon possessed "purity in his character" and had a "good sense of his political principles"<sup>5</sup> Xenophon would not have been able to adequately represent Socrates' way of exciting thought and checking presumptions because, Schleiermacher says, Xenophon was incapable of completing such a philosophical undertaking.<sup>6</sup> Because Xenophon was not a philosopher, he was unable to reproduce the philosophical method that was essential to Socrates in the same way that Socrates was able to practice it. The second point of his criticism is concerned with the way in which Xenophon wrote and portrayed Socrates himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in the German "Ueber den Werth des Sokrates als Philosophen"

<sup>2</sup> Dorion, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 2

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 5.

<sup>5</sup> Schleiermacher, cxxxviii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

Schleiermacher calls him an “apologetic narrator”<sup>7</sup> saying that he only showed Socrates in social settings that responded to the allegations that caused his death. Xenophon’s Socrates only defends conservative positions, the most traditional values that are not as thought provoking as some of the other ancient authors’ portrayals of Socrates.<sup>8</sup> Schleiermacher concludes that not only could Socrates be different, “he *must* have been more, and there must have been more in the background of the speeches, than Xenophon represents.”<sup>9</sup> The Socrates that Xenophon represents cannot be the Socrates that actually lived, so there must be another way to determine who that Socrates was. For Schleiermacher, his solution was to turn to Plato. Schleiermacher’s essay provides one with a few aspects about Xenophon that will remain important throughout this paper. Since Xenophon was not a philosopher, he had a different motive for writing his Socratic dialogues compared to Plato. Schleiermacher’s essay shows that Xenophon’s writings were meant to be a defense of the allegations made against Socrates and added little to the literary aspects of his work.

Following Schleiermacher, numerous other scholars produced works based on the rejection of Xenophon’s Socrates for the Platonic Socrates.<sup>10</sup> Among those scholars, the most influential on the subject has been Gregory Vlastos. In particular, Vlastos argues that the Socrates portrayed in Plato’s *Apology* is the Socrates from history. Vlastos has two main arguments for choosing Plato over Xenophon: the first concerning Xenophon’s portrayal of Socrates; the second concerning Xenophon’s account in his *Apology*. The former argument is that Xenophon portrayed a Socrates that would have been inconsistent with the characters that he

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> Dorion, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher, cxxxix.

<sup>10</sup> See Burnet, 150 “It is really impossible to preserve Xenophon’s Sokrates, even if he were worth preserving.” Kahn, 319 “As far as we are concerned, the Socrates of the dialogues *is* the historical Socrates. He is certainly the only one who counts for the history of philosophy.” Vlastos, 2, Plato’s Socrates is “in fact the only Socrates worth talking about.”

was normally associated with, i.e. Critias, Alcibiades and Plato. The Socrates in Xenophon was a “pious reciter of moral commonplaces”,<sup>11</sup> while Critias and Alcibiades were aristocrats who were just as intelligent as they were immoral; Xenophon’s Socrates would not have received as much attention from them as Plato’s. Plato’s Socrates was the one that would have been able to elicit a response from men of such characteristics. On his second point, Vlastos argues that the Socrates that Xenophon portrays in his *Apology* and the refutations that Xenophon assigns to him are so “apologetic from beginning to end”<sup>12</sup> that there would have been no way that the jurors would have been able to indict Socrates on the charges. Plato’s Socrates, again, would be the only Socrates that could have been indicted on the charges of faith and morals; Xenophon’s Socrates was too much a model of moral excellence.

Here one notices almost the same argument that Schleiermacher made against Xenophon namely that he was too apologetic of a writer to provide the reader with an accurate portrayal of the historic Socrates. This is an argument one can use to separate the works of Plato and Xenophon, namely that Plato and Xenophon had different purposes for writing their Socratic works. Further, the person who Vlastos, and Schleiermacher, have said to be the historic Socrates seems only to be a character based on a once real person that Plato adapted for the purpose of his dialogue.

Vlastos argues in “The Paradox of Socrates” that Plato was obligated to present the Socrates in *Apology* as closely as possible to the real Socrates. Even Vlastos admits that *Apology* is not historically true in the sense that everything that Plato wrote down is a verbatim rendering of the actual speeches Socrates gave. Rather through Plato’s artistic genius, he recreated the trial and Socrates’ speeches in such a way that the reader would easily recognize what was being said

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<sup>11</sup> Vlastos, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Vlastos, 3.

as normal Socratic diction. Plato was not simply reporting the events as they happened; he was not writing a history. He was able to employ literary skills to develop a work that would both memorialize and apologize for Socrates. Through this, Plato could use aspects of the real Socrates to create the character of Socrates allowing for poetic license in his writing while still portraying a recognizable figure.

However, as Dorion says, such research into the Socratic Problem has “caused an impoverishment of exegesis because a direct consequence of limiting the scope of Socratic studies to only the Socratic problem was the exclusion of entire sections of accounts relating to Socrates”<sup>13</sup> because those parts were not considered to be relevant to the arguments. Dorion argues that the Socratic problem is unsolvable and even impossible to fully understand, though surely he means only as of now. Near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, another scholar, K. Joël, argued the existence of the fictional nature of the *logoi sokratikoi*, or “literary works in which the author can give his imagination free reign.”<sup>14</sup> Joël argues that all of the characters in the dialogues are *logoi sokratikoi* and thus it is impossible to understand the historical Socrates and his philosophies. The characters in the dialogues are no more than Plato’s creations to use in a literary sense.

Considering the arguments of Schleiermacher, Vlastos, and Joël, one has to concede that the dialogues were not written to be historical documents giving an accurate representation of fifth century BCE Socrates. If they were not meant to be historical, then the question comes to mind: why did Plato choose the genre of dialogue for his philosophy rather than poetry or a philosophic treatise? The next section of this paper aims to identify some of the factors that influenced Plato to choose the dialogue.

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<sup>13</sup> Dorion, 19.

<sup>14</sup> As cited in Dorion, 8.

## Chapter 2: Dramatic, Rhetorical, & Philosophic Influences

Plato's main genre of writing was the dialogue. Plato rarely strayed from using dialogues to write his philosophies, as only a small portion of his corpus is not formatted in dialogue, *Letters*, and these are often considered spurious.<sup>15</sup> Being the literary artist that he is, Plato could have written in any genre that he wanted. An examination of what a dialogue is, and then particularly what a Platonic dialogue is, will begin to reveal the importance of the genre of dialogue for Platonic philosophy.

In the most basic sense of the word, a dialogue is simply a conversation between two or more people. A dialogue occurs between any two people that converse and exchange ideas; it also involves a build-up of ideas. There are a few different components that go into a written dialogue as opposed to a "real dialogue,"<sup>16</sup> or a conversation. In a written dialogue, there is an author writing for an audience; it also contains a setting, and characters. The setting includes theme,<sup>17</sup> where the dialogue takes place and in what time frame. The better the setting is known, the more one will generally understand the dialogue. Characterization also is an important part of the dialogues. An author carefully chooses which characters he will use in a dialogue to represent different ideas. By using different types of characters, Plato is able to simulate for the reader various personalities which one might encounter. Dialogue was traditionally used for tragedy and comedy but Plato decided to use it to discuss philosophy.

Although Plato was writing philosophy, he uses a literary genre previously unused for philosophical works, leading to the question: why the dialogue? Although it is impossible to say with certainty why Plato chose the dialogue, one can speculate considering his influences. Before

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<sup>15</sup> Blondell, 37. See *Letters*, especially the 7<sup>th</sup> letter.

<sup>16</sup> Rowe, 9.

<sup>17</sup> In the sense of emotional tone of the characters and atmosphere (cf. McCabe 90.)

Plato, Anaximander wrote books which had “somewhat poetical language.”<sup>18</sup> Parmenides wrote in hexameter and prose.<sup>19</sup> At the same time as Plato there were other authors that were beginning to write down some of Socrates’ teachings; Diogenes Laertius attributes two dialogues to Phaedo,(D.L. 2.9) and to Crito (D.L.2.12) he attributes a single volume of seventeen dialogues.<sup>20</sup> Plato had some brilliant predecessors before him in philosophy; he even had competition in his own age yet Plato’s dialogues were nothing like the writings of the pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides—all of them writing poetry. The dialogues differ from the works of the Pre-Socratics in that, while Plato is philosophically very serious, the tone of the dialogues can vary from hearty celebration at a jocular dinner party to morbid topics in Socrates’ prison cell. In contrast, Anaximenes is writing prose about the underlying nature of things being air.<sup>21</sup> Philosophers like Anaximenes was concerned more with pure philosophic topics, while Plato drew his topics from a range of situations and conversations.

When the dialogue is used in philosophy, Diogenes Laertius defines it as “a discourse consisting of question and answer on some political or philosophical subject, with due regard to the character of the persons (*ethopoiia*) and the choice of diction.”(D.L. 3.48) Diogenes Laertius has developed this definition based specifically on the Platonic dialogues. There are aspects of philosophical meaning that reveal important information about the characters and setting, as in a play. Diogenes is equally weighing the back and forth discourses with the aspects of character and speech, showing the topic of discussion is as important as the characters and their diction.

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<sup>18</sup> Robinson qt. Simplicius, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Clay, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, 41.

When elements of drama are introduced to dialogue, it elevates the dialogue and dramatizes the dialectic so that it is shown to be either effective or not.<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to determine exactly what Plato's dialogue form is but there is loose a structure that it can follow.<sup>23</sup> It involves interlocutor 1 stating a position while interlocutor 2 questions interlocutor 1 on that position, ultimately leading 1 to restate the original position in another way.<sup>24</sup> The method is used in *Symposium* and is one recognizable from other Platonic dialogues, such examples as book I of *Republic* between Socrates and Thrasymachus,<sup>25</sup> as well as in *Meno*<sup>26</sup> between Socrates and the slave.

In his introduction to his translation of *Symposium*, Rowe defines a Platonic dialogue as “a fiction controlled by its author, in which the various elements tend to be shaped to fit their context.”<sup>27</sup> Rowe is arguing that an aspect of a Platonic dialogue is poetic license, which would allow Plato to manipulate certain aspects of the story to make them relevant to his purpose of writing. While this is a rough outline for the Platonic dialogue, it is missing a key aspect that gives the dialogue most of its content. The interlocutors will be people whose identities help shape the scope of the conversation and prolong the dialogue.

The characters in the dialogue are just as important as what is going on in the dialogue. While the actual identities of the characters are important, the type of character is also important to the dialogue. Rowe uses the examples of Ion and Laches, saying that Plato is not interested in specifically either one of these two, rather, Plato is interested in the types of people that these

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<sup>22</sup> Gill, 146.

<sup>23</sup> Rowe, 10 n 27 says his model is based on passages from *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and Socrates' practice from other dialogues.

<sup>24</sup> Rowe, 10. Rowe refers to this as the “basic, stripped-down version of Socratic dialectic”

<sup>25</sup> Beginning around 341a

<sup>26</sup> Beginning at 82c.

<sup>27</sup> Rowe in Plato's *Symposium* 1998, 1.

two are and the types of people that they represent.<sup>28</sup> One must be able to identify the types characters used by Plato in his dialogue in order to gain the full knowledge of the work. In the types of characters he uses, Plato is attempting to show the different ideas and opinions that each may have. Who the character is determines what arguments are assigned to that character and in what direction the argument moves.<sup>29</sup> Depending on what characters Plato employs, he controls what each interlocutor is arguing. When Plato uses Socrates as the an interlocutor, he is able to control the subject matter from the start. Any number of people can be assigned to the other interlocutor position: generals, rhapsodes, sophists, friends, or family. A dialogue between Socrates and a general is going to be different from an argument between Socrates and a sophist. In this way, Plato is able to present different people that have a range of personalities and differing opinions; the reading is more interesting as well. This allows the student of Plato to experience different types of people, and see the different types of arguing that they use.

Plato also carefully treats the settings in his dialogues. Plato does not entirely make up the settings in his dialogue; rather he draws from places known around Athens and Greece.<sup>30</sup> For most of the dialogues he establishes a scenario at the beginning of the dialogue, by saying where interlocutors are, or where they are going; he also incorporates the dramatic date.<sup>31</sup> For example, at the beginning of the *Republic* he writes “I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon...I wanted to say a prayer to the goddess, and I was also curious to see how they would manage the festival...”(*Republic* 327a).<sup>32</sup> Plato is creating a scenario from the very first sentence. In Plato mentioning the Piraeus, one knows that Socrates is down at the harbor participating in what would be the normal religious practices. Although the mention of the

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<sup>28</sup> Rowe, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Rowe, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Kraut, under “dialogue, setting, character”

<sup>31</sup> Time referring to the dramatic date of the work.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve, *Plato Complete Works*

festival may not mean much to the modern reader, Plato's contemporary would be able to understand the relevance of the setting. The tone of the scene is also an important aspect that Plato includes. The tone could either be serious, as in *Apology* or *Crito*, jocular as in *Symposium*, or even emotional as in *Phaedrus*. Although it may be not established from the start, it is not difficult to pick up the mood of the dialogue.

Not only could other philosophers have influenced Plato, but also tragedians and comedians. The dialogue can be compared closely with either comedy or tragedy. Both are dramatic and have the same aspects of character, setting, and conversation as the dialogues do. Arieti argues that the dialogues are more like comedies than tragedies because in comedies, particularly Old Comedy, the characters are historically real, subject matter was relevant to the time, and "the discussions contain commentaries, parodies, and critiques."<sup>33</sup> In terms of literary style, Athenian drama had more influence on Plato than the pre-Socratic philosophers did

Two contemporaries of Plato's, Isocrates and Alcidamas, might have also influenced his use of rhetoric in the dialogue.<sup>34</sup> Isocrates opened a school of rhetoric and wrote eulogies to show off his literary skills in order to attract students. With the rise of rhetoric and the opening of Isocrates' school, Plato was conscious to write in a way that incorporated aspects of rhetoric within his philosophy. Alcidamas wrote on the value of extemporaneous speeches saying that they alone showed the test of a speaker's skill. Plato uses such speeches in a few different dialogues, one being *Symposium* and another being *Phaedrus*. Agathon's speech in *Symposium* is one that will be looked at further for its rhetorical content.

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<sup>33</sup>Arieti, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Arieti, 7.

Another reason Plato chose the dialogue involves the Socratic Method. Rutherford says that the dialogue form “is intended to mimic Socratic conversation, to recapture something of the freshness and openness of oral discussion.”<sup>35</sup> Plato captures the key aspect of Socrates and “exalts oral exchange into method, *the* method: it is by argument and mutual criticism that one must arrive at the truth.”<sup>36</sup> The Socratic Method includes argument, in the sense of debate, and correction that allows one to “arrive at the truth.” Ryle says that what is referred to as the Socratic Method should be “the rule-governed concatenation of questions, answerable by ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ which are intended to drive the answerer into self-contradiction...”<sup>37</sup> Plato’s Socrates seems to have believed that the best way to gain knowledge was by questioning people about their views then critiquing their answers. Plato actually attributed his character Socrates to denouncing writing, for example, in the *Phaedrus* (257e) saying that a written work cannot be questioned; the book cannot be asked questions nor clear up any difficulties the reader may have. The only answer for Socrates was oral discussion.<sup>38</sup> This would be a good reason for Plato to write in a dialogue form: it would allow him to write exactly how Socrates conducted his philosophy. More than anything else, dialogue allows Plato to “recreate the living exchange of ideas and the ingenious workings of Socrates’ inquisitive mind.”<sup>39</sup>

Diogenes Laertius describes this aspect of Platonic philosophy when he discusses dialectic saying “dialectic is the art of discourse by which we either refute or establish some proposition by means of question and answer on the part of the interlocutors.” (D.L. 3.48) The dialogue is the conversation that interlocutor 1 and 2 are having, they debate through dialectic and build up their positions or deconstruct them. Dialectic is most famously seen in the *aporetic*

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<sup>35</sup> Rutherford, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Rutherford, 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ryle, 119.

<sup>38</sup> Rowe, 14; Rutherford, 9.

<sup>39</sup> Rutherford, 15.

dialogues,<sup>40</sup> such as *Euthyphro*, but can also be identified in *Symposium*<sup>41</sup> as well as in book I of *Republic*. Dialectic can be a powerful philosophical tool that when used correctly “enables [one] to consider not only the consequences that flow from a given hypothesis...” but it also allows one to consider the consequences from its denial.<sup>42</sup> What is important about dialectic is how Plato uses it in different ways to present “alternative visions of the way we, and the world, are, and from presenting those visions in contrast to more familiar ones.”<sup>43</sup> Plato does this through the dialogue by using it to create various scenarios.

One last aspect of the dialogue that could have appealed to Plato allows him to avoid a dogmatic doctrine while encouraging independent thought. Unlike Plato, many of the pre-Socratics’ philosophies contain an authoritative tone. The fact that Plato never speaks in his own voice keeps him from establishing any dogmatism concerning his philosophy.<sup>44</sup> Plato portrays his interlocutors arguing different views that conflict with one another. Often Plato allows the dialogue to end in confusion. This allows the reader to actively engage with the dialogue by thinking about both sides of the argument. Whether the dialogue ends in *aporia* or not, one must consider the philosophical argument beyond what is discussed in the dialogue in order to begin to understand the aim of Plato.

### Chapter 3: Symposia as Dialogue

Up to this point, this paper has dealt with some influences, such as drama, rhetoric, and the Socratic method, that are apparent in the dialogues of Plato. The next step to better understanding a Platonic dialogue is to analyze a dialogue written not only by Plato but also by

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<sup>40</sup> Rutherford, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. 198-201c, Socrates’ response to Agathon’s speech.

<sup>42</sup> Mueller, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Rowe, 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> Blondell, 39.

Xenophon: *Symposium*. Although the two works differ from author to author, they can provide analysis useful for establishing what a Platonic dialogue is. This section of the paper will use examples from *Symposium* to address how Plato and Xenophon each differently deal with matters of rhetoric, drama, and the Socratic method.

## Drama

Within the dialogue, Plato includes several aspects that reinforce the dramatic and complex nature of the dialogue. Some of the aspects that he includes are setting, characterization, and speech content. In order to fully appreciate the dialogue and the artistry of Plato's piece of work, one must be able to identify these dramatic elements and commit them to memory because "Plato is careful to give his dialogues a setting in place and in time, when this serves his purpose."<sup>45</sup> This, as Clay says, is what distinguishes Plato from other writers of Socratic dialogue, such as Xenophon.

As has been mentioned above, characters and characterization are important aspects of Plato's dialogue. On the one hand, he uses them philosophically to portray different types of thought that come with different types of people. On the other hand, he uses different people, especially known people, to help the dialogue progress. While a sketch of each separate character could be given here, it would be useless, as Rowe says, because that would imply "that the work was in some strong sense historical" and meant to provide the reader with a historical biography of each character.<sup>46</sup> Instead, it would be more beneficial to highlight the major dramatic elements that each character provides to the dialogue since "the characters interest Plato just to the extent that they serve his purpose in writing: he *uses* them, no doubt leaving them recognizable as who

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<sup>45</sup> Clay, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Rowe, 1.

they are, but building in just so much of them as suits him, and suppressing or inventing the rest.”<sup>47</sup>

The best way to determine the dramatic worth of each character would be to inspect their speeches while considering the type of person each is. From each speech, one is able to construct a rough sketch of their characterization and how it is important to the rest of the dialogue. When reading each speech, it is important not only to focus on the content of each speech, but also what one knows about each character in general. This will allow one to fully understand the elements of the dramatic character presenting the speech. For example, Phaedrus’ speech contains several different references to poetry and mythology, specifically to Hesiod and Acusilanus, about the origins of Eros. Phaedrus’ theological devotion is apparent through his “adherence to religious traditions”<sup>48</sup> which is evidenced through his citation of traditional poems, since they are the main sources of religious traditions. Plato’s character Phaedrus is playing the role of the devoted man, using theology to help explain what Eros is.

Pausanias comments on love between a man and boy, saying that as long as the relationship is for the sake of virtue then the relationship is allowed. Pausanias’ speech is at spots a defense of pederasty, arguing that it is acceptable when the intention is right. Pausanias is the lover of Agathon<sup>49</sup> and thus his speech becomes an apology for his way of life. His speech has both expanded on Phaedrus’ account on the origins of Eros, discussing the two Aphrodites, and used his argument to help prove that pederasty is acceptable.

The next to speak is Eryximachus who speaks out of turn because Aristophanes has a case of the hiccups and cannot give his speech. Here, the reader is reminded that Eryximachus is

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<sup>47</sup> Rowe, 1, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Arieti, 100.

<sup>49</sup> Arieti, 100.

a physician, which was introduced earlier at 176d when discussing whether they should drink heavily or moderately. Eryximachus argues that “medicine is simply the science of the effects of Love on repletion and depletion of the body” (186d) and says that a physician is the one to establish mutual love among the bodily elements. Eryximachus is arguing that love is similar to medicine and the true lover is a physician. As can be seen from his speech as well as the events that surround it, Eryximachus is portrayed as a “pedant who likes the sounds of his own voice” and is overly proud of his medical profession.<sup>50</sup>

Before Eryximachus’ speech, he tells Aristophanes to try a couple of remedies to get rid of the hiccups. Eryximachus told Aristophanes “you should hold your breath for as long as you possibly can. This may well eliminate your hiccups. If it fails the best remedy is a thorough gargle. And if even this has no effect, then tickle your nose with a feather” (185e). This means that throughout Eryximachus’ speech, Aristophanes is being quite loud and distracting. He is holding his breath until he cannot any longer, and then probably gasping for air. Since that does not work he turns to gargling, another disruptive activity which also does not work. Aristophanes has to use the sneeze technique which, he says at 189a, finally cures his case of hiccups. All the while he is attempting to cure his case of hiccups, he is more than likely hiccupping in between each try. Not only does Plato portray the physician as hubristic about his medical skills, but there are disruptions all throughout the speech which would have been it difficult for the other guests to pay attention to what he is saying.

Aristophanes’ behavior here is indicative of the type of character that he is: a comedian. Here, one finds a character that is acting in a very comedic way, possibly drunk and full, hiccupping, gargling, and sneezing throughout a man’s speech who takes himself and his

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<sup>50</sup> Rowe in commentary, 147, 1998.

occupation very serious. Plato is utilizing Aristophanes' character to the full by extent having a character act in a way that would have elicited a few laughs from readers, or the other guests. Aristophanes has added a comedic element to their dinner party, which is otherwise about a serious topic.

Aristophanes' account contains in it a comical tone about love. He claims that when humans were first formed they were androgynous, being both male and female, and "the shape of each human being was completely round, with back and sides in a circle...[and] there were two sets of sexual organs" (189e-190a). Zeus split all of the humans in half because "they tried to make an ascent to heaven so as to attack the gods" (190c). Love then is the desire to be united with one's former half. Aristophanes says that Love should be praised as that which draws one to what belongs to him. This is another speech that has contained within it the nature of the character that presented the speech. Plato uses the character of Aristophanes to his full extent by employing him to mock Eryximachus as well as creating a speech that includes such a fantastical version of the history of man and of Eros. Aristophanes is the one guest that did not follow the rule of moderation they put forth in 176e getting hiccups because "he'd probably over stuffed himself again, though, of course, it could have been anything" (185c). This is also consistent with what has previously been said in the dialogue about him both at 176b5 and at 177e, the former concerning the amount he drank the night before, the latter listing his main interests as Dionysius and Aphrodite.<sup>51</sup> Before his speech, Aristophanes mocks Eryximachus' speech when he says that he wonders if the orderly sort of love Eryximachus just mentioned needs the types of conditions that elicit a sneeze, since it worked to cure his hiccups.

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<sup>51</sup> Rowe, n. on 185c7-8, 146 1998.

Alcibiades' character is one that can be seen to be in strong contrast to the rest of the characters, especially that of Socrates. Socrates has just finished retelling the speech of Diotima, discussing how "all of a sudden he will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature" (210e) when shortly after, "all of a sudden, there was even more noise. A large drunken party had arrived at the courtyard door" (212c). After they have been discussing ways to transcend the realm of sense perception, the symposium guests are quickly brought back down to reality with the introduction of Alcibiades.<sup>52</sup> Alcibiades enters the party "crowned with a beautiful wreath of violets and ivy" (212e) which would have trailed behind him a sweet scent of flowers mixed with wine. Up until this point in the dialogue, the men have moderately drunk, taken turns in speech, and have had a rather peaceful night. Once Alcibiades arrives, the tone of the party changes completely. The guests hear Alcibiades shouting "very drunk and very loud" (212d) and when he takes his seat, the first words he speaks are "Good evening, gentlemen. I'm plastered." (212e) Then before he gives his speech he says to Socrates "I'll only tell the truth—please, let me!" (214e) Plato here has described a character known for his beauty to be a drunken, uninvited guest that is going to tell the truth about the nature of Eros and in praise of Socrates.

Xenophon does not include the level of characterization that Plato includes within his *Symposium*. First, it seems that Xenophon does not put as much emphasis on the characters in the dialogue as Plato does; Xenophon's characters are not as important to the overall message of the dialogue as Plato's are. Plato developed his dialogue with specific characters in mind because he was concerned about the other characters involved rather than just Socrates. With each of those characters comes a specific speech revealing significant details about the character. In

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<sup>52</sup> Nussbaum, 185.

Xenophon, dramatically speaking, there is nothing that is comparable to Plato. Each character is given something to be proud of, but what each is proud of seems to have little if anything to do with a broader characterization revealing some important aspects of the character. One way to look at Xenophon's characters is that they are just interlocutors in a dialogue who serve no other purpose but to give someone for Socrates to argue with.

Xenophon's presentation of the characters is much different as well. Plato has a slower introduction to his characters, not getting to all of them until around 176a while the dialogue starts at 172a. On the other hand, Xenophon has all of his dinner guests introduced within the first three paragraphs, with only the exception of the tardy Philippus who shows up in I.11. Plato takes his time by slowly allowing the characters to introduce themselves through the dialogue. He does this by beginning conversations between the characters within the dialogue. While Xenophon hastily introduces all of his characters, he does so by just naming them off. He begins by introducing three characters right away Callias, Autolycus, and Lycon and does so by simply saying "Callias the son of Hipponicus happened to be in love with the boy Autolycus" (I.2), then "when the race ended, he started off for his house in the Piraeus with Autolycus and the boy's father; Niceratus too was accompanying. But when Callias saw Socrates, Critoboulus, Hermogenes, Antisthenes, and Charmides standing together..." (I.3.) Without much in between the introductions, Xenophon has already introduced the main group of guests that will be attending the party; the only guest left is Philippus a jester who shows up in I.11. Here is more evidence that Xenophon does not worry about his dramatic content as much as Plato. He hurries to get through the introductory scene, introducing all the characters in a short span of writing, in order that he can get to his main concern for writing: his presentation of Socrates.

Plato begins setting his dramatic scene from the very beginning of his dialogue. In fact, the main reason for the introductory scene between Apollodorus and his unnamed Friend<sup>53</sup> is simply that: to provide the reader with an understanding of the time, place, and circumstances under which the dialogue was meant to be read. The dialogue begins, it seems, in the middle of Apollodorus' conversation with Friend having just asked to relate the story of Agathon's dinner party. He tells Friend that just the other day Glaucon had asked him a similar question wishing to hear the story of the dinner party because he had heard "a version from a man who had it from Phoenix, Philip's son, but it was badly garbled" (172b). Glaucon also wished to know whether Apollodorus was there, to which Apollodorus responds "Glaucon, how could you [think that I was there]? You know very well Agathon hasn't lived in Athens for many years..."(172c) This is the first indication the reader receives for the time of the dinner party. Apollodorus goes on to say that the party took place when they were children and the day after Agathon had won a prize for his first tragedy. Thus far the reader is able to determine a couple of things about the dialogue: first, the location of the dinner party is Agathon's home; second, the dramatic date<sup>54</sup> of the dinner party was many years prior, after Agathon won his tragedian prize, and based on the ages of Apollodorus and Glaucon; also, the time of year is the beginning of winter as the first award Agathon won occurred at the Lenaea, a lesser Dionysian festival.

Once Apollodorus begins telling the story to Friend, the next four Stephanus pages are also dedicated to setting the scene for the dialogue. Apollodorus begins with Aristodemus noticing some peculiarities about Socrates: he "had just bathed and put on his fancy sandals—both very unusual events"(174a). As Apollodorus mentions, these occurrences were unusual for Socrates, as he was known to be commonly unkempt and to not worry about his appearance.

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<sup>53</sup> Throughout the rest of my paper, I will refer to the unknown character as Friend for convenience purposes.

<sup>54</sup> i.e. the time when the dinner party took place compared to the conversation between Apollodorus and Friend.

Then as Aristodemus and Socrates are walking to Agathon's house, Socrates begins to fall behind him, stopping lost in thought. By the time that Aristodemus arrives at Agathon's house, Socrates has become lost, standing on the neighbor's porch preoccupied by something else. Once Socrates has arrived, Agathon tells him to share his couch with him and the party begins. After they have eaten, they decide to drink moderately because several of them are still suffering the consequences of the previous night's drinking. They then decide to each give a speech in praise of Eros, which then is the conversation for the rest of the night. While Plato dedicates the first six pages<sup>55</sup> of *Symposium* to establishing the dramatic scene, Xenophon does not provide the reader with as extensive of an introduction. Xenophon does not go into much detail besides saying "[Callias] took him to the spectacle on the occasion of [Autolykus'] having won the pancratium"(I.2) or saying that they are heading to Callias' house in the Piraeus.

The main difference between Plato and Xenophon's establishment of setting is the amount of the dialogue that each dedicates to creating the scene. As Plato begins with Apollodorus in the middle of a conversation, Xenophon also seems to begin in the middle of a conversation,<sup>56</sup> but the speaker is not a character rather, probably Xenophon.<sup>57</sup> In I.2, the reader then is told about the setting for the rest of the dialogue. Xenophon is not artistic in his presentation of the setting to the reader; he simply states where the characters were, where they are going, and what they are planning to do. He then explains that the reason for the party was in honor of Autolykus' victory in the pancratium. Already in lacking characters such as Apollodorus or Friend, Xenophon is deficient in the dramatic portion of his dialogue. The brevity

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<sup>55</sup> By pages I am referring to the Stephanus pages that organize Plato's dialogues. Here, I specifically mean 172-173.

<sup>56</sup> The first word of the Greek is *αλλα*.

<sup>57</sup> His use of first person verbs has brought me to this conclusion. In I.1 he uses *εομοι\ δοκει=*, *parageno/menov*, *γγνω/σκω*, and *βου/λομαι*.

and frankness of the introduction<sup>58</sup> is evidence for the lack of dramatic consideration put into the writing of the dialogue. While Plato created a dramatic scene within the dialogue to establish the setting for the rest of it, Xenophon lacks this aspect of his writing and instead heads straight for the conversations to follow proving that Plato was more concerned with the dramatic elements of his writing.

## Rhetoric

*Symposium* is a unique dialogue for Plato in that it is constructed mainly of five characters offering speeches in praise of Eros, as best as they are capable.<sup>59</sup> This dialogue is not like the rough outline of Platonic form that has two, or more, participants responding back and forth to one another. The dialogue form Plato uses in *Symposium* contains a dialectical progression among the speeches. For something to be a dialectical progression “all that is necessary is that the second [speech] stand in essential opposition to the first, with the remaining steps progressively mediating the tension between them.”<sup>60</sup> This progression could be clearly evinced in *Symposium* through two examples. One example of dialectical progression occurs between the presentations of Phaedrus’ and Pausanias’ speeches, while another is evident through Socrates’ responses to Agathon’s and Eryximachus’ speeches during Diotima’s speech. The difference between Phaedrus’ and Pausanias’ speech stems from each man’s notion of the good that he presents in his speech. For Phaedrus, the good is “a sense of shame at acting shamefully, and a sense of pride in acting well” (178d) which is taken in respect to being seen by one’s beloved. As Dorter says, Phaedrus’ speech contains in it a sense of self-sacrificing gestures

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<sup>58</sup> Introduction in the sense that it is the beginning of the dialogue meant to set the scene.

<sup>59</sup> Plato’s *Symp.* 177d.

<sup>60</sup> Dorter, 256.

that would show the beloved the lover's feelings.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, Pausanias' speech is concerned more with a self-satisfying view that "conquest is deemed noble, and failure shameful" (182d). Pausanias argues that it does not matter how one succeeds in his pursuit of his beloved just as long as he does succeed; there is no action considered to be too shameful when pursuing a beloved. Here, one can see the dialectical progression between the two speeches of Phaedrus and Pausanias. First, Phaedrus argued that the good involves a sense of self-sacrifice demonstrating, possibly, courageous acts. This is then opposed by Pausanias who argues that the good involves self-gratification.

The second example of dialectical progression occurs through Socrates' responses to the previous speeches. Dorter argues that when Socrates is responding to the speeches, his focus is more on the nature of Eros and what each man said about it. When Eryximachus had initially given his speech on Eros, he said that it involved Eros being the love of opposites which would bring them together in mediation. This is the opposite of Agathon who argues that Eros is love of like to like. This is another clear example of how dialectical progression is used in Plato's *Symposium*.

Benitez argues that the rhetorical themes of a work refer to topics "originating with the characters, actions, and affections of those present in a dialogue."<sup>62</sup> The themes that are used in the dialogues to represent rhetorical themes come from the characters themselves and are independent of the arguments that are being used. This means that Plato could have written the speeches in a dialectical progression, incorporating within them blatant, to Socrates, refutations that could be made. This allows Socrates to be able to respond to each speech within his own speech, while still progressing himself towards some higher understanding of Eros.

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<sup>61</sup> Dorter, 258.

<sup>62</sup> Benitez, 223.

Xenophon uses a different form of rhetoric in his *Symposium* than Plato does. While Plato's characters deliver speeches meant to progress from one another, Xenophon's characters have more of an open debate on their subject of what one prides himself on the most. Plato seems to have written the speeches of his characters taking into account the dialogue as a whole. The speeches of the characters dialectically progress from one to the next leading up to Socrates who is then able to reference the other speeches in making his own speech about Eros. Xenophon's characters do not give progressive speeches rather the men seem to aid each other in helping prove each one is best at what each said. Rather than allowing the characters to give speeches, as Plato does, Xenophon has another character aid whoever is speaking in their argument. For example, at IV.1 Callias begins by saying that:

‘I’d like you to listen to me first,’ said Callias. ‘For all the while I hear you being at a loss as to what the just is, I’m actually making humans beings more just.’  
 ‘How, best one?’ [Socrates said].  
 ‘By giving them money, by Zeus!’  
 And Antisthenes stood up and in a very refutative manner asked, ‘Callias, in your opinion, do human beings possess justice in their souls or in their wallets?’ (IV.1-2)

After this exchange Callias and Antisthenes go back and forth about whether giving money to people makes them more just. This is an example of how Xenophon's character is not able to present an entire speech, as Plato, without another character butting in and guiding the argument in a certain direction. This causes Xenophon to lack a definitive rhetorical structure as Plato has created in his *Symposium*.

A broader example of the influence of rhetoric on Plato can be seen in how rhetorical Agathon's speech is in Plato's *Symposium*. His speech begins by critiquing all the speakers that went before him by saying that they did not describe the true nature of the god but merely commented on the pleasant things that humans were awarded from the god. Agathon first says “I wish first to speak of how I ought to speak, and only then to speak” (195a). Plato has begun

Agathon's speech by deciding that he is going to be the one to tell everyone else how they should be speaking. The highly rhetorical nature of Agathon's speech is again evinced through the last section of his speech from 197c5 to 197e5. As Nehamas and Woodruff point out in their commentary on this section of *Symposium*, Plato is displaying here a rich variety of lyric meters with internal rhymes, balanced phrases, and other poetic devices that would have been taught in a rhetorical school.<sup>63</sup> This allows Plato to give examples of how rhetoric was used to elevate the topic of discussion by making it seem like the speaker knew the topic. What Socrates says to Agathon immediately following his speech shows that Agathon was simply being rhetorical.

Immediately following Agathon's speech from 198b to 199b, Plato has Socrates make a few remarks about the speech and about its style. At the beginning of his speech Agathon said "now, only one method is correct for every praise, no matter whose: you must explain what qualities in the subject of your speech enable him to give the benefits for which we praise him" (195a). But Socrates says after Agathon has given his speech that he believed Agathon would tell the truth about what he praised and this would be the basis for speech. Rather, Socrates has realized that "this is not what it is to praise anything whatever; rather, it is to apply to the object the grandest and the most beautiful qualities, whether he actually has them or not" (198e). Socrates is saying that rather than tell the truth about the qualities of the subject of praise, Agathon, and the rest of the speakers, have attempted to make the rest believe that he was praising Eros. Plato is commenting on the style of rhetoric that was made popular at this time by Gorgias, which allowed the speaker to use his speech to serve any cause, whether good or bad.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Nehamas Woodruff, 36 n 45.

<sup>64</sup> Nehamas, Woodruff 37-38, n 45&50.

## Philosophy: Socratic Method

Another area that these two authors differ on is their presentation and usage of philosophy, particularly the Socratic method. The manner in which Plato and Xenophon handle their philosophy highlights key differences between the two of them. A clear presentation of the Socratic method begins after Agathon has given his speech, starting at 199d, and before Socrates begins his speeches from Diotima. The form that Plato employs is the all too familiar structure mentioned above between interlocutor 1 and 2<sup>65</sup> with Agathon playing the role of interlocutor 1 and Socrates interlocutor 2. After Agathon is finished giving his speech, Socrates questions him on some of the qualities Agathon attributed to Eros. Socrates begins his response using a dialectic method that is characteristic of Platonic writing. Socrates uses a series of questions that build upon each other to ultimately lead the interlocutor to admit to something that is contrary to what he first asserted.<sup>66</sup> Through this method of dialectical questioning, Socrates is able to convince Agathon to admit that first, “Love is the love of something, and, second, that he loves things of which he has present need” (201a). Continuing further, Socrates ultimately leads Agathon to admit at 201b that Eros is not beautiful because if Eros is the love of something and that which it loves is something that one is presently lacking, love could not be beautiful. Based on what was previously determined about Eros, it is not beautiful but rather it desires beauty because it does not have it. By the end of Socrates’ questioning of Agathon, Socrates is able to persuade Agathon that when he gave his speech in praise of Eros, Agathon did not know what he was talking about.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> cf. pg 11, n. 37 for Ryle’s definition of the Socratic Method.

The difference between the two authors in terms of method of philosophy is determined by a couple of different factors. The first is the manner in which each author decided to structure their dialogue. Plato's *Symposium* has six characters taking turns giving speeches, each one containing some sort of response to the previous speaker. For most of the speakers, they first disagree on the origins of Eros, and then they disagree on what Eros is. Though throughout, the speakers are given a turn to present what one thinks about Eros and to explain his reasoning without interruption. This allows for a dialectical progression with each speech meant to build upon the other until they reach their keynote speaker in Socrates. Xenophon, on the other hand, handles his *Symposium* a little differently from Plato. Xenophon's characters engage in conversation as well but the conversation that they have is less of a progression dialectically and more eristic in that Xenophon's characters seem to be arguing just for the sake of arguing. Starting at IV.1, the men begin to take turns explaining why each one is proud of what they had previously mentioned. Callias begins but is allowed only a couple of lines before Antisthenes "stood up and in a very refutative manner" (IV.2) questions Callias before he has even had a chance to explain himself. Antisthenes is not the only one who does this; throughout the rest of the chapter, the men take turns interrupting each other and refuting each other as they go along. At IV.19 Socrates begins to question Critoboulus based on the content of his speech; at IV.33 Callias begins to question Charmides on his speech. Xenophon portrays his *Symposium* characters as argumentative, wanting to go back and forth with each man's case to determine whether or not he can be proud of what he says that he is proud of. On the other hand, Plato's characters are much more amicable and, with the exception of Aristophanes, they rarely interrupt one another, until Socrates' response to Agathon's speech.

This allows Plato to clearly present his characters arguments without having to worry about the sporadic nature of Xenophon's characters' conversations. In this way, Plato has a system that allows for the dialectic progression of the speeches, while Xenophon is lacking.

Another way to view the differences between Plato and Xenophon's philosophy is to look at how each author uses the character of Socrates. Socrates is the only character in both dialogues and he is portrayed in two different ways. In Xenophon's, Socrates is very outspoken, speaking almost after every person has said something, or every other person. Socrates is the character that gets the rest of them at II.24-26 to drink less than they usually would, arguing that moderation is better than an excess of alcohol. Socrates is also the character that begins the discussion on what each man prides himself at III.2; he thinks it would be shameful to come together and not benefit or delight one another. Here one should remember Vlastos' argument about Xenophon, especially the way that he portrayed Socrates as a model of moral excellence.<sup>67</sup> In Plato's version, Socrates shows up later than everyone, lost in thought, and after he takes his seat next to Agathon, he says little compared to the garrulous Socrates in Xenophon. While in Xenophon, Socrates was the main speaker, the other characters in Plato assume the role that Socrates serves in Xenophon. The difference in characterization between the two authors is important because how each chooses to present his character of Socrates shapes the views and arguments that are attributed to him. With Socrates being less talkative in Plato, it makes the reader feel that Plato is reserving Socrates for an important argument, or a well thought out proposal. In Xenophon, a lot of the dialogue comes from Socrates, giving the reader a steady stream of eristic Socratic argumentation.

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<sup>67</sup> See above p. 4

Xenophon had a much different reason for writing his dialogues than Plato did. According to Melling, Xenophon's main concern was "to describe and defend Socrates' way of life, to extol and exemplify his virtues"<sup>68</sup> in order that he could defend Socrates against the accusations that led to his death. This is similar to the argument that Schleiermacher used for the Socratic problem saying that Xenophon is only an apologetic writer and only presented Socrates in a social setting. Xenophon was not concerned as much with Socrates' philosophical method as it was too complicated for him to be able to recreate it in an appropriate form. On the other hand, considering the dramatic elements that are woven into his dialogues, Plato seems to have a different purpose for writing in the way that he did. The dramatic dialogue allows Plato to create different scenes and scenarios that allow readers to be able to experience what a Socratic conversation would have been like, as well as providing the reader with the tools to philosophize beyond the dialogue.

## Chapter 4: Conclusions

The beginning of this paper dealt with the Socratic problem which was argued to be at a stalemate, leading modern scholarship to seek elsewhere for fresh material. This paper has focused on the dramatic dialogue of Plato and the aspects of it: drama, rhetoric, and method. In examining these aspects, one could begin to form an idea about why Plato decided to use a genre previously unused.

There are elements of drama including setting and characterization that Plato considered when writing his dialogue. Plato takes particular care to present the reader with a setting without being too overt about it. *Republic* begins with "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday..." (327a)

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<sup>68</sup> Melling, 13.

to pray and to see how the festival was being handled. In just one sentence Plato is giving his reader a lot of information about where Socrates is, what were the circumstances for his being there, and also some aspect of a dramatic date for the dialogue. *Symposium* involves the introductory sequence between Apollodorus and Friend that presents the reader with all of the relevant information about the setting for the rest of the dialogue.

As for characterization, it has been shown that Plato is not merely presenting a historical biography for each character. Rather, as Rowe says,<sup>69</sup> Plato uses the characters only as far as they serve a particular purpose in his dialogue. Since the dialogues are fiction and not history, Plato is able to invent aspects of recognizable characters in order to suit his need. As evinced from *Symposium*, each character plays a certain role in the dialogue. It is important for one to be able to recognize aspects of the character that contribute to a greater understanding of the dialogue. Through the characters, Plato is able to add to the dramatic value of the dialogue; Eryximachus and Aristophanes are two examples of how Plato uses characterization to do so. While the reader is reminded of Eryximachus' profession on more than one occasion, he should also notice the way in which Aristophanes character responds to Eryximachus' speech in *Symposium* by hiccupping throughout it. Plato could be attempting to comment on both types of characters. Eryximachus is a hubristic doctor adamant that no one forget. Aristophanes then, being a comic, is the one either to over drink or overeate causing him to get hiccups and distract the guests from listening to Eryximachus' speech. Through these characters Plato has created a scene that may have been normal at a party as the one in *Symposium*. In this way, Plato has made *Symposium* something unique as a whole dialogue rather than focusing simply on Socrates and defending him as Xenophon does.

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. n. 29.

The rhetorical influence of Plato is evinced in *Symposium* in the way that he constructs the speeches of the dialogue. Plato creates speeches that are specific to each character in the dialogue. The speeches in *Symposium* are unique too in that they are concerned with a particular topic and each character is given a chance to speak without being interrupted. The speeches are almost like orations prepared for this specific occasion.

Through the Socratic method, Plato is also able to add the philosophical element to his dramatic works. Plato does this in a unique way, as in *Symposium*, implementing a dialectical progression of speeches running throughout the dialogue. Xenophon, attempting to capture Socrates' method, implements an eristic nature of conversation for the characters in his dialogue. Socrates' response to Agathon at 199d-210c is the section that allows one to see explicitly the form of the Socratic method as defined earlier.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, Xenophon has Socrates talking throughout the whole dialogue questioning and arguing with the other characters. This argumentation does not seem to draw them towards any particular truth; it seems that they are arguing simply for arguing's sake. One could speculate that one of the purposes of Xenophon's characters are just pawns for Socrates' use to either question and allow them to question.

When considering the reasons why Plato wrote the dialogue, one question to consider is why Plato wrote anything at all. A popular section of *Phaedrus*, 275-279, condemns writing for three reasons: it produces forgetfulness; once written, it may come to one who misunderstands it; and finally that written word is unable to answer questions but is dependent on the author.<sup>71</sup> In a response to the first critique, one is able to find reasoning for Plato's choosing the dialogue over the treatise. If anything, a treatise produces more forgetfulness than a dialogue. A treatise is a synthesized version of a philosophical theory to which one can refer if he ever forgets the whole

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. p 8 for Rowe's model and p 11 for Ryle's definition.

<sup>71</sup> Hyland, 39.

theory.<sup>72</sup> On another level, treatises do not allow for as much philosophizing as the dialogue does. Since the treatise allows the reader to see the doctrine at face value, it leaves little opportunity for one to be able to contemplate the philosophy for himself. On the other hand, the dialogue, and in particular the *aporia*<sup>73</sup> dialogues in particular, do not cause one to forget to philosophize, rather, they cause the reader to search beyond the dialogue itself in order to fully grasp the philosophical nature of the dialogue. The second critique of writing is concerned whether a reader would misunderstand what has been written. In the case of treatises, this could be an accurate critique, saying that someone may misinterpret the doctrine for the worse causing the author to be negatively viewed. However, the dialogues do not contain any Platonic doctrines; Plato does not speak in his dialogues so he is unable to establish a doctrine. Therefore, the dialogues do not carry the risk of misinterpretation as it would be difficult to misunderstand something that is not present in the dialogue. The last critique only gives one something to worry about if there is something that needs defending in the written work. Luckily, Plato's dialogues do not contain any explicit teachings that need to be defended. Also, as Hyland argues, there are parts of the dialogues that defend themselves. There are interlocutors that have to defend themselves against Socrates as well as Socrates defending himself to others, such as Diotima.<sup>74</sup> Plato does not present every possible objection in the dialogues, nor does he answer every objection that is presented. It is another way that Plato has used to the dialogue to force the reader to philosophize on his own.

For Plato, the dialogue was the most effective genre that he could have used to relate the Socratic method in writing. He could not have written treatises because they exemplify the

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<sup>72</sup> Hyland, 39.

<sup>73</sup> i.e. *Lysis*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, *Euthyphro*, and *Theaetetus*. Hyland, 39.

<sup>74</sup> Hyland, 41.

objections raised by Plato in *Phaedrus*; also it would have been too complicated for him to be able to synthesize the life of Socrates into formulaic explanation. By placing Socrates in a series of different situations involving several different characters and characterizations, Plato was able to mimic the life of Socrates which presumably involved conversations with different people. In this way, Plato is able to represent philosophy as constructed by real life rather than being just relevant to life.<sup>75</sup> Plato used situations from everyday life to write his philosophies. He was able to create real life scenarios with characters, setting, and the rest, to show that philosophy was shaped by circumstance and by the participants involved.

Returning finally to the Socratic problem, there may be a few things to mention here. The Socratic questioners, for lack of a better term, are convinced that by using either Plato or Xenophon they are able to create a picture of the historical Socrates. Instead, the portrait the questioners paint of the historical Socrates seems to be nothing more than a portrait of the dramatic character of Socrates that Plato, or Xenophon, created for his dialogues. The questioners attempt to pinpoint specific dialogues that would allow one to be able to construct this historical view of Socrates based on his character in the dialogue. From what has been said about characters and characterization in Plato, specifically that he uses his characters dramatically, it could be said that any portrayal of the character of Socrates in Plato would be nothing more than a fictional depiction of him made up for the very purpose of the dialogue. Indeed, the character would have been based off of a real person, as are most characters in Plato, but it should not be assumed that Plato portrays Socrates exactly how he was. This could be evinced from the fact that several of the dialogues differ in their portrayal of Socrates. The Socrates in *Republic* is much more serious and confident while the Socrates in *Euthyphro*, *Meno*

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<sup>75</sup> Blondell, 48.

or even *Symposium* can be unsure of arguments at times. As with any character in Plato, one must consider Socrates as Plato uses him in the particular dialogue. This will allow one to stop from focusing on the dialogue as a representation of the historic Socrates, and begin to appreciate the dialogues in themselves. If the questioners are able to get away from the problem of whether it is Socrates or Plato, they will be able to appreciate Plato for the literary artist that he is while also paying more attention to the overall philosophical teachings throughout the dialogues.

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