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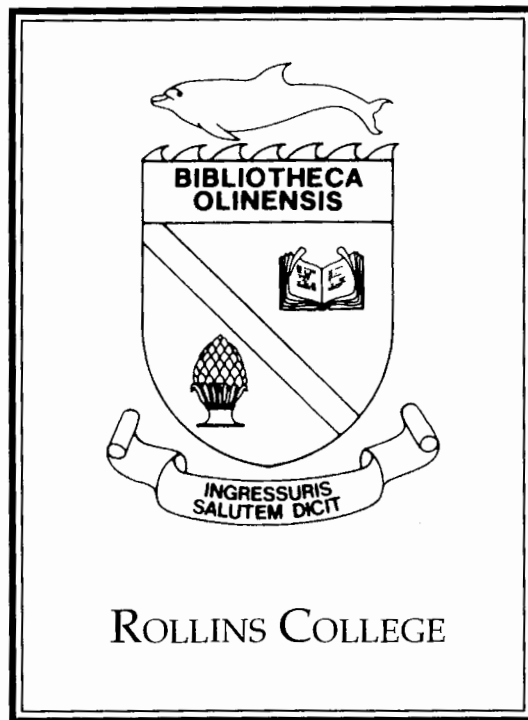
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ROLLINS COLLEGE

**Symposium on Stage:  
What's Platonic About Love?**

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Liberal Studies*

*by*

*Nichole L. Jackson*

*April 2008*

*Mentor: Dr. William Boles*

*Rollins College  
Hamilton Holt School  
Master of Liberal Studies Program*

*Winter Park, Florida*

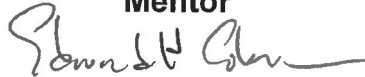
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What's Platonic About Love?**

**Project Approved:**



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**Mentor**



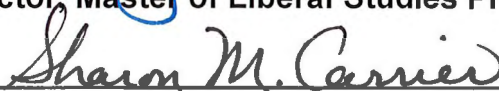
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**Seminar Director**



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**Director, Master of Liberal Studies Program**



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**Dean, Hamilton Holt School  
Rollins College**

# WHAT'S PLATONIC ABOUT LOVE?

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A Play in Two Acts

### Cast of Characters

<b>Dr. Spencer Crate:</b>	Unattractive college professor, fifties.
<b>Alec:</b>	Charming young politician, mid-thirties.
<b>Paul:</b>	Good-looking young narrator. Moves through the living room as if it is a set.
<b>Demi:</b>	Mature narrator, mid-twenties. Tells Paul about the party many years after it occurs.
<b>Diotima:</b>	A sophisticated woman, also cast as Agatha.
<b>Agatha Goodman:</b>	Beautiful young filmmaker, mid-twenties, also cast as Diotima.
<b>Paige:</b>	Agatha's committed partner, an attorney, early thirties.
<b>Frank:</b>	Attractive independent magazine editor, early twenties.
<b>Erica:</b>	Frank's new girlfriend, a naturalistic doctor, late thirties.
<b>Artie:</b>	Balding late-night television personality, forty.

### Scene

Agatha and Paige's living room with a love seat center stage, a couch adjacent on right, and a large chair with ottoman adjacent on left. There are several floor pillows and a couple of bar stools.

### Time

The party occurs late one night and runs into the next morning. Several flashbacks take place years earlier. The details of the party are told long after to Paul who retells it to the audience several years later.

ACT I

*Spencer is on the love seat and Alec on the couch.*

SPENCER

Thanks for inviting me over again, Alec.

ALEC

My pleasure.

SPENCER

Twice in one week, the pleasure is all mine. It is nice to have an uninterrupted chance to talk.

ALEC

Well, I do enjoy your company.

SPENCER

I guess I should be going.

ALEC

No, Dr. C., don't leave now when you've been showing me how to pay better attention to myself. You were just saying it was nice to talk.

SPENCER

How is it that our spending time together helps you pay closer attention to yourself?

ALEC

I learn so much from you about the type of person I need to be, and the more I know about myself, the bigger the benefit I can be to others someday, like in my political career.

SPENCER

You're mistaken. If you have noticed a change in yourself, I don't deserve credit for putting it there.

ALEC

You're the one teaching me, and for that matter asking all the questions.

SPENCER

Yes, it does seem that I ask more of the questions, but tell me... how does asking the questions teach you? I'm merely seeking information.

ALEC

But the information you seek is what teaches me.

SPENCER

Are you saying that the teacher is not the one who provides answers?

ALEC

No, that's not what I meant.

SPENCER

Then does the one providing the answers ask the questions also?

ALEC

Not usually.



SPENCER

So the one who answers is not usually the one who asks?

ALEC

Yep.

SPENCER

Then if I am usually asking the questions, you must be the one usually answering.

ALEC

I suppose so.

SPENCER

And is that not what we decided the teacher did?

ALEC

But if I am the teacher, who am I teaching?

SPENCER

Ah.

*(Pause)*

Well, I'm afraid we'll have to leave that line of questioning for another day. It is already late and I have an eight o'clock class tomorrow.

ALEC

Then you should stay here tonight to save travel time. You'll be more rested to teach your early class.

SPENCER

Alec, you know that I often go without sleep.

ALEC

True, your stamina is undeniable... but the temperature might have dropped considerably while you were here and I wouldn't want you to be uncomfortable all the way home.

SPENCER

And you should also have noticed that I'm hardly affected by the cold.

ALEC

Time, sleep, inclement weather. They have nothing on you Dr. C. You're impenetrable. There is no reason to keep you here... but let me try one more. I'm not sure the city streets are safe at this hour.

SPENCER

Nonsense, I'm not the least bit worried about ending up in a risky situation.

ALEC

You may not be afraid, but, Dr. C., I'd be devastated if anything were to happen to you on the way home.

SPENCER

It seems your concern for others is growing exponentially now.

ALEC

Yes, yes it is and it is simply too hard for me to let you leave now. I'd be too nervous about putting you in such a dangerous position. Stay here, you can rest on this couch.

SPENCER

I really think this is unnecessary, but you are obviously hardened against me leaving.

*Alec rises, hands Spencer a blanket and helps him onto the couch.*

ALEC

And I remain firm. You're better-off here tonight.

*Spencer settles onto the couch.*

Can I do anything else for you?

*Paul enters and speaks to the audience.*

PAUL

Wait, maybe you're getting the wrong idea here. I could have started with a different scene. It's just that you're not the first ones to ask me to tell the story. You tell something so often it gets redundant, you know. I like to spice it up a bit, get creative.

*(Pause)*

Oh, I know I wasn't being very subtle there. Maybe I really should leave the bit about Alec and Dr. Crate 'til the end. Right now you're thinking... Well, who knows what you're thinking. You asked me to talk about Agatha's party, right? Well, Alec was the one who crashed the party, so maybe that's why I started with him. I don't think the story would be something to ask about if he hadn't burst in and exposed himself...

*(Pause)*

No, not literally. I mean he came in drunk and started telling all.

*(Pause)*

Me? No I wasn't there. How could I have been? I was just a kid when Agatha lived in New York. I heard it from Demi, one of Dr. Crate's former students. She was, at one point, his most dedicated, if not infatuated, student. Even more infatuated than Alec there. However, I think I can claim the title now. Dedicated that is, not infatuated. Anyway, when I told her I was planning to work with Dr. Crate on my dissertation, there were some things she thought I should know about his teaching style.

DEMI

With Dr. Crate it's all or nothing. You have to admit you know nothing and then you can be ready, prepared, aware enough to see glimpses of what might truly be. He would say that everything I learned I taught myself.

PAUL

Okay. So I tell him I don't know anything. I'll come humbly to the task. That's what every professor expects, isn't it?

DEMI

If you think admitting you don't know anything is easy, then you haven't really tried it yet. When you study with him, there is no way of determining what you are trying to learn. You're supposed to know nothing, so you're really trying to learn everything. It's even harder to tell what he is trying to teach you.

PAUL

Well, whatever it is I'm happy to hear it. I just love hearing philosophical insights. As long as he's teaching me I won't even want a chance to respond.

DEMI

That's the problem. He doesn't see it, teaching, as a one way street. It can't be because he claims to know nothing.

PAUL

What? Wait a minute. He actually says that?

DEMI

Yes, all the time. Well, actually that's not entirely true. The only thing he claims to know anything about is love.

PAUL

Love?

DEMI

Yes, love. I went to a party with him once at the filmmaker Agatha Goodman's house. She had just won her first film festival award. Her film was a tragic love story so the discussion at the party kept coming back around to love. Like I said, I was there with Dr. Crate and by the end of the night he was going on and on about how he learned everything he knows about love from some woman he met in grad school. He was so captivated by this woman that thirty years later he was still talking about her.

PAUL

Impressive. So, what did she teach him?

DEMI

Now Paul, after everything I've told you up to now do you really think I'd be a good student of Dr. Crate's if I just answered a question like that?

I'll tell you the story about that night and you can come to your own conclusions. Let's start with how I ended up there in the first place. I tried to spend as much time with Dr. Crate as possible. You know, to learn as much as I could. One evening I was looking for him on campus and I found him much more dressed up than usual.

DEMI

(To Spencer)

Dr. C.! What's the occasion?

SPENCER

I'm headed to the house of a beautiful woman.

DEMI

Oh, who's that?

SPENCER

Haven't you heard? Agatha just won best narrative feature at the film festival. I've already avoided the crowded victory party. She should be home soon and I hope she's in the mood to continue celebrating with friends.

*Demi turns to leave.*

Do you think you might like to go? Well? It will be an intimate gathering.

DEMI

She wouldn't have invited me, but you seem to think I should go?

SPENCER

There is always the possibility of valuable conversation. You should come.

DEMI

*(To Paul)*

And so I did.

PAUL

*(To audience)*

When Demi told me the story she went right on about their arrival, but I think you'll agree it would be good to know something about that woman he met in grad school right? Demi says that Dr. Crate couldn't say enough about everything she taught him about love. He must have been really impressionable back then, not quite the same guy that we just saw with Alec.

SPENCER

So love is that ache for something beautiful and everlasting. I can feel it now. Tell me, Diotima, how does this ache, love, satisfy me? It doesn't sound like it helps me get what I want?

DIOTIMA

Spencer, if I promise we'll get there, can you wait until I've finished the point I am making?

SPENCER

You take pleasure in making me wait.

DIOTIMA

Since you think love is wanting beautiful things, how would you respond to someone if they asked us, “Spencer. Diotima, why do you love beautiful things?” Or what if they ask you, “When you love something beautiful, what do you really want?”

SPECNER

To have it. To have that beautiful thing.

DIOTIMA

But, when you possess it, what exactly do you have?

*(Silence)*

Well?

What if we replace the word beautiful with good? What does a man who loves good things want?

SPENCER

To have those good things for himself.

DIOTIMA

And, when he possesses those good things, what exactly does he have?

SPENCER

Happiness, it seems. Yes, contentment.

DIOTIMA

Ah so that’s it, right? Good things make people happy and we don’t have to ask why someone would want to be happy.

Do you think everyone wants to be happy?



SPENCER

Of course.

DIOTIMA

So everyone is in love in the sense that everyone wants to possess good in order to be happy. But we don't talk like this. We only think some people are in love, mainly those who want someone else who makes them happy.

SPENCER

Correct.

DIOTIMA

It's unfortunate that we forget that everyone is in love because everyone wants good things. We call one tiny portion of desire 'love' and forget that love is really the term for wanting anything. Love is one thing, but we let the word be defined much more specifically. Then we're left trying to find different words for other kinds of desire.

SPENCER

What do you mean we've changed the meaning of love?

DIOTIMA

Here, let me give you another example. 'Poetry' is a word that also seems to have lost its broad definition. Isn't poetry using words to make something present that is otherwise intangible? Then isn't every song, novel, and film a type of poetry? Even college lectures and priest's homilies are in the broad sense poetry, and yet we do not call those writers poets. We allow the term to be used for Bob Dylan,

and maybe even The Beatles, but we don't call Gene Roddenberry or Michael Crichton poets.

This is what has happened to the word love. We use it to label those who seek what they desire through a relationship, but isn't love the same desire for wealth, health, or wisdom. Why don't we call those people lovers?

PAUL

*(To audience)*

So there we have young Dr. Crate with his older, wiser lover. Now that we have a sense for how she influenced him, we can continue with Demi's story.

*Agatha and Paige enter arm in arm. Erica enters with drunken Frank at her heels. Artie lags behind, mocking Frank's smitten look. Agatha releases Paige.*

AGATHA

Well, Demi! Did you miss the party?

PAIGE

You're usually with Spencer right? Where is he?

DEMI

I started out with him. He's just back there at the corner.

*Demi is jostled forward with the group as they enter the mainstage. Paige exits toward the bedrooms.*

AGATHA

Demi, you and Frank probably know each other through Spencer, right?

DEMI

Yes, those of us who have studied with Dr. Crate tend to hear about each other.

*(To Frank)*

How's the movie magazine going?

AGATHA

*(To Demi before Frank can answer)*

Frank was sort of hopping between parties tonight, but as you can see he seems to have chosen to hang with us tonight. I'm hoping that means we fare well in whatever wild stories he writes about the evening.

*Agatha and Demi walk out of Frank's earshot.*

*Frank settles onto the floor pillows downstage left of the large chair.*

Do you know Erica?

*Agatha points to Erica who has made herself comfortable on the love seat.*

She and Frank are an item of sorts, we're all trying to figure out if it's genuine or some sort of negotiated bargain. She does have a somewhat legitimate reason to be hanging around at the film festival. Ask her about the skin care products she's developing, there are samples in all of the festival gift bags. Be careful if you ask though because you'll hear about it all night.

Have you been drinking?

DEMI

Not yet.

AGATHA

Then maybe you should go sit with her. She's a bit obsessed with healthy living and the rest of us are too far gone for her standards.

*Artie has helped himself to a glass of wine and walks up behind Agatha.*

ARTIE

*(To Agatha, sarcastically)*

Wait, let me put down my glass. Got any coffee so I can sober up? I wouldn't want to miss out on the chance to improve my lovely complexion. Does she make hair products too?

*Demi heads to the love seat.*

DEMI

*(To Paul)*

So Agatha explained why Frank and Erica were there, but she didn't even try to explain why Artie was there. I'm not sure she intended him to join them. I guess she could have asked him to leave or maybe left him outside with Dr. Crate, but he did sort of bring life to the party. There always seems to be room at a party for someone who thinks he's funny, especially when everyone's been drinking.

PAUL

Wait, you're talking about the Artie, from late-night television? At Agatha's house? He was merciless to her. What's that sketch he used to do...?

DEMI

But remember, this was her first big break so maybe he hadn't offended her yet. Actually, having been there that night, I can't say for sure that he ever has. He may seem merciless in his comedy, but then again it's satire. Provoking for a purpose, you know. For example, on the way in to Agatha's he was making fun of the way Frank was seemingly in awe of Erica. At least he was being straightforward. Agatha leans over to tell me about how she and Paige can't figure out if Frank's just using this older woman, or if she's using him for his good looks. Who's more tactless, the blatant comic or the one putting up a façade?

PAUL

Okay so there you are with two couples and Artie? And Dr. Crate's still outside? That's a bit awkward for you.

*(To audience)*

Let's see what's happening here. Dr. Crate's on his way to celebrate Agatha's film. It's a birthday party of sorts, right? I mean, that film is like Agatha's child. All the time and effort she put into making it is like the pregnancy, and the film festival was the labor and delivery. So he's on his way to her party and remembers how, all those years ago, he learned that love isn't always what it seems.

DIOTIMA

What do people do to keep what they love, forever?

SPENCER

I don't know what others do, but isn't that what I'm trying to do? I'm trying to keep getting what I want.

DIOTIMA

Loving isn't getting something. It's participating in something. It's the creation of something beautiful.

SPENCER

Hmm, Diotima, I'm not sure I understand. Why don't we try making something beautiful again, maybe then I'll see.

DIOTIMA

It's not something you can see, yet.

Spencer, we're pregnant.

*(Pause)*

We all are!

SPENCER

Oh, I thought....

DIOTIMA

Every person is filled with the insatiable need to give birth. As we mature that need becomes incessant. Love is not the desire to possess beauty, but to create something beautiful. Why? Because that is participating in immortality. We are limited to one lifetime by our flesh, but by creation we take part in the eternal. This is how we go on forever. Some people ache more to create than others. For

some, pregnancy in the flesh is the ultimate goal. Their children are supposed to bring them happiness and an immortal bloodline.

Others are much more prepared to give birth to wisdom which is produced by language, or the arts, or technical skills or social policies. Someone waiting to give birth to these sorts of things has to find collaborators who are not just physically beautiful, but, more importantly, are in possession of a beautiful soul. In this way the ideas and attitudes which the pregnant one desires to give birth to will have the most chance of conception and growth. These children, works of art and the like, are a much more definite route to immortality. They are immortal in and of themselves without having to reproduce to remain for the next generation. So, it is much more desirable to have that type of child than biological offspring. Even you, Spencer, with enough practice, could master the type of love that produces immortal offspring.

PAUL

*(To audience)*

I like to think that that's what was on his mind when he finally got to the party. Demi says that as soon as Dr. Crate came in, Agatha immediately focused her attention on him. The way she tells it, you get the sense that she was a little bit jealous. But hey, it worked out well for her that Agatha was so eager to have Dr. Crate join them, otherwise she never would have invited Demi up in the first place.

*Agatha is on the couch. Artie is in the chair  
with ottoman. Spencer saunters in.*

AGATHA

Glad you could join us. Come sit close. Now, with you here beside me maybe I can speak eloquently to you, my friends, this evening.

SPENCER

Are you flattering me? After all, aren't we celebrating the prize for putting your writing on the screen? Surely you don't think you need my help finding words.

AGATHA

You can't think one award will have confused me about the difference between a few wise people and a crowd of moviegoers.

SPENCER

Oh, I don't doubt that you would watch what you say in the presence of a wise person, but aren't we all present moviegoers? Then you must not think we are very wise. So are you saying if you come across someone wise you will guard your comments?

AGATHA

Yes, clearly.

SPENCER

Then shouldn't you also guard what you're willing to put on the screen when there might be someone wise in the crowd?

*Paige enters having let down her hair. She pulls a bar stool over to sit between Frank and Artie.*



FRANK

Agatha, don't answer. He's just going to lead us through an endless stream of unanswerable questions that will make us all feel clueless.

PAIGE

Oh Frank, are you going on about feeling belittled again?

FRANK

No. It's just... I could see that we'd all be here listening to the two of them going on and on about nothing.

ERICA

It's okay, Frank. We all know you like everyone to just get along. You like the happy ending, right? You want to see everyone being nice to each other. Agatha, you should have seen him during your film. He was so adorable; I think he was actually swaying during the love is this and love is that.

AGATHA

"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth."

DEMI

"It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

PAUL

She put Corinthians in her film? I bet it was a wedding scene, wasn't it? Ugh, doesn't anyone understand that the love he's talking about is charity? It's agape, not eros. And everyone wonders at what point marriages start to go wrong. I know, it's right there at the second reading which they think says here is the one person I'm going to try to be patient and kind to. What about the rest of society? Oh yeah, you don't love them so you can be as rude or arrogant as you want. And don't forget to boast, just so long as you don't do it in front of your wife. Envious? Be as envious as you want of those other women out there who have better husbands than you.

DEMI

Okay Paul, I get the point. I think I should stop you here and point out that if you go on a rant like that with Dr. Crate, you can expect to spend hours breaking it apart. He'll stop you the minute you throw in a word like eros and expect you to spend the rest of the day trying to define it. That's what Frank was trying to help Agatha avoid, but he ended up having to defend himself instead.

FRANK

It's not that I like happy endings in and of themselves, but there's usually a lot of breathtaking self-sacrifice to get to that happiness. I really like it when a film shows us how love makes us the best we can be. Love is the only reason that we ever become good people. There is nothing better for a girl than having someone to adore and there is nothing better for a guy than having someone to impress. When you desperately want someone to continue loving you, it's like you're in

training to be all that you can be. We do the most honorable things when we're seeking our loved one's attention and admiration, and love is the source of the best kind of shame. The fear of being publically found out is nothing compared to being shamed in front of your lover.

If only governments could be made up of lovers, no one would dare be caught idling or cheating.

ARTIE

I think you should leave the political jokes to me, Frank.

FRANK

No really, Artie. Imagine our most celebrated office shared by a couple.

ARTIE

Oh, our imaginations really do need you to clarify, what kind of couple?

FRANK

A married couple, of course. Wouldn't their commitment to each other keep them from ever doing anything that is disgraceful?

ARTIE

That depends on what the meaning of "is" is.

ERICA

Okay, that's enough.

FRANK

Well, what I mean is that continued admiration is so much more valuable than the promise of future success.

ERICA

Really, Frank, you should stop there. You've made enough grand assumptions about love for one night.

FRANK

I know you think I'm exaggerating, but think about it. When you're in love, you'll give anything for your lover. The best moments in film are when there's a self-sacrifice made on account of love. That seems so real to us. Take for example, the mermaid.

ARTIE

Mermaids? Oh I get it. He's talking about how hard it is to get between their thighs.

ERICA

Stop, he's just trying to use the image as a metaphor.

ARTIE

Oh, well excuse me then for being so seriously mistaken.

PAIGE

Artie, it's after one. You're usually off-air by now. Let him say what he wants to say.

FRANK

It's just that the mermaid gives her voice, her major source of identity, just to have a chance to be with the prince. In the end she's rewarded because she gave so willingly.

PAIGE

Okay Frank, I got him quiet for you, but you can't just take bits and pieces of the plot and put them together like that. What about Flotsam and Jetsam?

FRANK

They just help her see how unfortunate she is. She still has to make the sacrifice to get the prince in the end.

PAIGE

No, the sea witch makes her do that. And it's her Dad who ends up risking his life to save her. Isn't she just a rebellious teenager?

AGATHA

Now Paige, you know you don't have anything against rebellious teenagers fighting for their one true love.

FRANK

Well, I still think it's a good example, but maybe you want something less animated? There's so many to choose. Pretty much anytime someone risks his life he gets a lover in return.

AGATHA

Okay, Frank. How do you explain Frodo? Doesn't he risk his life more than Sam, and yet Sam ends up with the girl?

FRANK

Aha, see you think you've found a flaw, but instead you've helped make my point. He didn't sacrifice enough.

AGATHA

What, not enough?

FRANK

He wasn't actually willing to give his life to fulfill his quest and so in the end he didn't get rewarded with a lover.

AGATHA

But was he actually trying for that kind of reward?

FRANK

You're not following my argument very well. Let me just tell you with a better example: Luke risks his life to rescue his lover. His was extra special since he was the beloved and Solo the lover. It's a fine thing for a lover to sacrifice for their beloved, but there is no more honorable gesture than for the younger more beautiful one to risk himself for his older lover.

PAUL

Oh stop. Stop. Don't just run on with that nonsense?

DEMI

Well, since Han is actually better looking you could probably argue that he's the beloved and Luke is actually the lover, or erastes. Er-ahs-tees. Did you ever notice that erastes ends in tease?

PAUL

Stop Demi, it doesn't matter who's in love with who. The whole idea is absurd.

You know it, and everyone there knew it too. I bet Artie had a field day with that

one. Did he use the thing Luke had for his sister as a line? Like, oh so that was just his cover so no one would think he's gay.

DEMI

Hmmm...I actually don't know. At that point Dr. Crate was making himself quite comfortable on Agatha's couch and I was completely distracted. I couldn't help thinking he was intentionally ignoring me. I mean, I knew better than that, but it's still incredibly frustrating feeling like you are not worthy of his attention. Once he convinces you that you want to improve yourself, you can't help but seek his attention. It's not that I didn't know I was unworthy, but there I was tagging along, for what reason? He had invited me, right? So I wasn't completely wrong in assuming he wanted to teach me something. I entertained the thought that he might be testing my ability to remain composed, but actually I knew he was just genuinely interested in understanding beauty. And that night, Agatha happened to be the beauty.

When a person is so eager to learn does it have to be such a game? Can't it be a straightforward exchange of knowledge?

PAUL

How should I know? Hey, Demi, how's that for pretending to not know anything? Seriously though, aren't you the one who's supposed to be explaining Dr. Crate to me?

DEMI

You know, Paul, I never did find a way to stop longing for his approval. He was always so seemingly contradictory and that just made me want to figure him out

all the more. He knew Agatha and Paige had been committed partners since their teenage years. What was he doing over there on that couch with her? And I couldn't help asking what he was doing to me. Not Paige, but me? There it is. I wasn't even thinking about her in her own house, and neither was he. What could possibly have been going through his mind?

PAUL

*(To audience)*

Let's see. If we stick to the idea we worked out before, maybe he's blurred the lines. Now he's on the couch with Agatha and still remembering what he learned from that woman back in grad school. Let's try that.

Now, he was just listening to Frank talk about heroic love, so how can we work that in.

SPENCER

I never thought of it that way, Diotima. You are so wise.

DIOTIMA

If you'd just consider all the heroic deeds of men you would see that you are ignorant for not having come to the conclusion on your own.

SPENCER

The conclusion that they aren't trying to impress the one they love?

DIOTIMA

Well, yes that. That's the first piece of the larger conclusion. The real reason anyone acts heroic is for the fame that it brings. Access to immortal fame is the real thing worth risking your life for, right?



SPENCER

I guess so. How did I misunderstand glory so completely?

DIOTIMA

You just mistook men giving their lives for themselves as men giving their lives for their loves. They want to be talked about for generations, and we do tend to talk most about the ones who died for love. That's why it seems like love calls forth more heroic deeds.

PAUL

*(To audience)*

Could be, right?

*(Pause)*

Okay, okay. I'll just keep going with the story. Demi couldn't recall what else was said about Hollywood's most suicidal lovers or whatever, but she made a point of paying attention when Paige took over the conversation.

PAIGE

Forget the heroic effects of relationships. You're overlooking the most important factor. That is, whether or not love is always virtuous. There are two kinds of love. There are those who love for the sake of physical pleasure and then there are those who are interested in sharing thoughts or feelings.

The first type of lover looks for anyone who can fill his needs. They are not concerned about anything other than getting laid. Make a note, now, that men act like this much more often than women.

The other type of lover looks for someone who can benefit from her assistance. They want a relationship that provides the opportunity for personal growth. This is the less visible kind of love: the purest use of your senses to become better alongside a partner.

It seems that women pay more attention to other people's goals. Notice that they are less directed by urges and more interested in self-fulfillment. So the greatest chance of a virtuous relationship is between two women.

*Paige tenderly kisses Agatha on the forehead.*

Since we can't always see which type of love binds a couple, we, as a society, have tried to identify which relationships are wrong, or not virtuous, according to obvious characteristics. The relationships that have traditionally been considered virtuous are those between a man and woman who have entered into a legal contract, and thus we have this romanticized notion of courtship and weddings and babies. We have mistakenly linked marriage with virtuous love and all other relationships are assumed to be purely physical. This, it's said, makes sense because married couples supposedly don't ever use each other.

What a nice lie! The divorce rate's at 50% and still climbing! And I don't care if it's less if the couple is churchgoing. The point is that we have a false standard for determining the two kinds of love. There is no simple standard because we can never be sure that both partners are as equally interested in commitment.

Take, for example, the middle-aged divorced guy in search of a younger, less experienced girl whom he can impress.

AGATHA

Or the young lovers who believe in the feeling they have in each other's arms and falsely promise to give it forever.

PAIGE

Yes, and there's the resourceful girls who can play the wide-eyed part of an enamored lover in exchange for social stature.

AGATHA

What about the one-night stand turned long-term attempt at making up for the shame of their spontaneity.

PAIGE

There will always be affairs, and annulments.

AGATHA

And date-rape, free-loading, and the casting couch.

PAIGE

And yet there are people in this country who think the biggest threat to marriage as an institution is legalizing same-sex marriages. Absurd!

Let's take a look at what's really wrong. We enable less virtuous lovers. When a man is supposedly in love he is allowed, no encouraged, to grovel at the woman's feet bringing flowers and begging for the chance, the privilege, to take her out. He can stand below her window waiting for a glance from her eyes. He can compose flowery verse to flatter her. When he prepares a candlelight dinner he acts like her waiter and falls all over himself trying to meet all of her requests. If he does these

things because he is in love he is praised and called a gentleman. Are these signs of a strong character?

What if he was not in pursuit of love but, instead, a financial investment or a promotion or some other tangible reward? Would this attitude be acceptable? Imagine what people would say about the guy who goes to his banker with flowers and promises chocolates if only his loan is approved. And what about when he stands outside his boss' door regaling him with a poem he wrote about all the ways he could benefit the company if given the promotion.

*Artie who has been visibly mocking this entire tirade bursts into laughter.*

You laugh but these are the same actions that are seen as selfless and noble in a lover. In reality they are just manipulative ways to get what one wants. We all recognize them except when they appear in the guise of love. We have created a society where anyone who seeks their heart's desire is given license to make fools of themselves and avoid all other commitments. In the name of love we can be despicable and somehow that's okay.

I'm not the only one who sees this though. The power love can have to destroy lives is a known danger to the parents and friends of anyone on the verge of falling. Fathers warn their daughters about the same antics that they once used. Friends taunt the one in the group who has the newest crush hoping that their mockery will inspire some common sense. Everyone knows that love can cause

people more shame than joy and more pain than pleasure, and yet when it comes our way we fall prey to its charms and become convinced that this time it is pure.

This, Frank, is why we need to categorize the two kinds of love based on the way it affects our character. You can give yourself to the wrong woman for the wrong reasons and there is no honor in that. On the other hand, you can give yourself to the right woman, in an attempt to become better yourself and there is no shame in that. You see! The lover motivated by the body is scornful since his commitments will be as fleeting as the body's beauty. The lover motivated by a connection to one's soul is pure and good. Even if she's abandoned she will have become a better person by allowing her soul to lead.

Mutuality can never be guaranteed, but the pursuit of virtuous love will never be shameful. If someone races head over heels

*Artie is now uncontrollably laughing.*

after love because she wants to learn how to be virtuous then she cannot have gone wrong. Even if the man she was after turns out to be corrupt or not interested in her, she's not ashamed because she was after the honorable task of self-improvement. If, instead, she falls into love out of the need for sensation and caresses, then when the relationship dissipates she will feel nothing but guilt and shame.

*Agatha has made her way to the bar. She stands close to Paige as they share a glass of wine.*

So we find that love is complex and cannot be easily ranked. The best we can do is be careful of situations when we might be less virtuous because our body is more in control than our soul.

*Paige walks over to Artie who has been dying of laughter and for the last few minutes has been overtaken by hiccups. Artie looks at Paige, shakes his head, and while still hiccupping patronizes Erica.*

ARTIE

Dr.! Do you think you could tell me how to fix this?

ERICA

Fix what, your obnoxious attitude?

ARTIE

*(More hiccups)*

No, I think I'll keep that. Do you have a cure for hiccups?

ERICA

You can start by holding your breath or gulping water.

*Artie starts holding his breath.*

I find standing on your head works well.

Or you could try.... Well, there's probably no one here willing to do it to you.

Frank has this way of forcefully blowing air down my throat.

If you haven't completely insulted our host this evening, maybe she'll give you some pepper and you can at least trade them in for sneezes.

*Artie is about to pass out.*

(END OF ACT)

ACT II

*Artie is dramatically testing the hiccup remedies and continues throughout Erica's speech. Spencer has moved closer to Agatha and as the speech progresses it is obvious that his self-restraint has weakened.*

ERICA

Now, Paige, I think you have the right idea about love being divided in two, but you stopped short of the greatest part. Love is not only manifested in humans. Love is all over the world, in all the creatures of the earth and every living thing. In all aspects of the universe love abounds.

PAIGE

Okay, but how is this universal love connected to what I was saying?

ERICA

Your dual nature of love, Paige, that's what balances all things. I know this because it's at the heart of the health profession. Within the human body the two extremes of love are at odds and it is my job to distinguish between the two so that the higher love, what Paige calls virtuous and I would call healing, excels and the lower, disease, diminishes. Any successful therapy will raise the occurrences of the higher and attempt to rid the patient of the other. The naturalistic goal is to



make sure the body is in balance, using love to maintain compromises between opposing forces in the body.

*Artie is doing a head stand by now.*

This duality is also apparent in exercise, gardening, pottery and playing the saxophone. Every endeavor of the mind or body in partnership with the two divisions of love is nowhere more apparent than in the harmony of music. Even an untrained ear like mine can pick up the pleasantness in a melody and hear it dissipate when discordant notes are introduced.

We should seek to recognize a healthy balance of love in all things, including the seasons and weather changes. When love enters and properly maintains a balance we find beauty and splendor and health. Extreme climate changes are a result of that spontaneous, instinctual lower love working on the environment such that things are no longer in balance. Environmentalists seek to increase the presence of higher love in nature paralleling the way those of us in medicine work on the body. Likewise, religious leaders seek to draw upon the higher love in connections between human and the divine so that the lesser love does not inspire evil in the souls of man.

Both loves are powerful and thus we must seek the invasion of the higher and the negation of the lower. Our health and happiness in mind and body depend on it.

*Spencer is standing leaning over Agatha on the couch. Stop action.*

PAUL

*(To audience)*

Okay, it's time for you to confess. How many of you were distracted by Dr. Crate over there with Agatha?

*(Pause)*

No? You mean you were listening to all that poppycock?

*(Pause)*

Then what were you paying attention to?

*(Pause)*

Oh, Artie. Yeah, he was pretty amusing. Well, if you missed what was going on on the couch I simply have to take you back.

We had fun with our little thought exercise before, right? About what Dr. Crate was thinking while Frank talked about heroes? Let's see what memories Erica's speech about love in all creatures might have stirred. What if Dr. Crate was reminded about how natural, how instinctual, love felt with that woman?

*Spencer repeats the same obvious weakening of self-restraint, but this time Diotima acts first to cause each movement acting out what she says about the animals.*

DIOTIMA

No, Spencer, really. It's a genuine question. What makes animals so excited? Some pounce and are gone and some go to great efforts to have a whole harem. Whatever it is they are turned on, right? One arches its back this way, and another

has that low growl that says it's time. That's it isn't it? Weren't you the one who kept saying that beauty causes desire? And isn't there an urgency about it?

Animals do seem intense about the whole process. So, what do you think it is, what do you call it when they want to reproduce?

*Spencer is too flustered to answer.*

How do you ever expect to be a consummate lover if you can't even explain it?

SPENCER

I guess I thought I'd figure it out as we go along, isn't that what the animals do?

DIOTIMA

Remember what we decided love is? Desiring the good forever, right? This is true for animals too. Everything in nature wants to continue and participates in immortality by the existence of pieces of itself in future generations. All products of love are cherished and protected by their makers.

PAUL

See how she controls him? Now, where were we?

*(Pause)*

Oh, right. The hiccups. Demi was right about there being a benefit to having such a trickster at the party. We had so much fun revisiting that little scene and we wouldn't have needed to if it weren't for his charade. So we're back to him trying to get rid of the hiccups.

*Artie makes one fake sneeze, then speaks sardonically.*

ARTIE

The forceful thrust of a sneeze through the nose must be a product of the higher love because it just won out over the hiccups.

ERICA

Ever the comic. Must you always prod us with your profession? Be careful or we may find that you have nothing serious to say.

ARTIE

Oh no, I don't want you to think me unserious. I take back my joke.

*Artie pretends the hiccups are trying to come back.*

But really I can never concern myself too much with being funny, that's my gift.

*Artie laughs then looks at Erica.*

Sounding ridiculous is what I worry about.

ERICA

It's snide remarks like that cause you to lose respect.

ARTIE

Well, Erica, let's see if I can make up for it by coming up with something a bit more original than "Love is All Around."

*Artie prances around the room humming "Love is all Around."*

You see, love really is the greatest help to our generation. We should all praise love since it is our greatest source of comfort. It pulls us toward fulfillment. It guards us against the worst loneliness and brings us the most happiness.

Oh no. How can you know that I'm truly praising love? You might think I'm mocking it unless I tell you the story of what love is and how it came to be.

Long ago, when television first started gaining popularity, people were not confused by romantic desires. They knew how things should be. Men took their choice of the women and all was in order. As the Hollywood studios grew they tried to find new ways to occupy more of people's time. Some people strayed, seeking adventure in books and others continued to seek profound insights in the theatre. This independent confidence frightened the studios. When the general public started producing competitive writers that challenged the norm, they had to do something. They had to think of some way to make people feel weaker, and create human frailty in such a way that profits would increase.

They devised a plan to create media that would crush the human capacity to stand on one's own. With a few bursts of their magnificent power on the big screen, they split the human soul. The split made each person ache to be with another, and at first they went frolicking toward each other. They were no longer orderly and composed about their relationships but they thrust themselves toward the other at full speed: draping arms and grabbing waists and gasping for air as they tumbled to the ground.

The search for one's soul mate became so intense that many stopped coupling at the movies and went straight to bed. This of course affected profits and the

studios managed to tweak the motivation embedded in the films so that it was a bit less urgent.

So, then, love is that thing. It's the motivator that they put in films that leaves us wanting to find our one and only, our true love, the one who will "never let go". Through the years this search has become more and more difficult. Some people hold onto the idea for years sipping coffee with friends while waiting for their other half. Others traipse around the city in a frenzy trying to see if anyone they meet is the right fit. Some do find the one they believe "completes them" and then they parade their compatibility around as if in partnership with the studios to reenact the best phrases in real time:

*Artie acts out the movie quotes.*

"When you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible."

"I knew it the first time I touched her."

No, Erica, that's not me taking a jab at Agatha and Paige. It is this way, with all people.

*(Sings)*

"People who need people, are the luckiest"

DEMI

*(Sings)*

"people in the world. With one person..."

PAUL

You're making this up. The straightest guy in the room singing Streisand?

DEMI

What's wrong, can't you picture Artie breaking into song? Just think of it as me creating a sketch for him. But, wait.... You just called him the straightest guy in the room. Where does that leave Dr. Crate?

PAUL

Oh come on. You didn't think I was that uninformed about him did you?

DEMI

Well, here I am telling you about Diotima, and how he's all over Agatha. I know there isn't much to say about his interest in me, but once in awhile he seemed a bit flirtatious. So I'm not sure how you could think otherwise.

PAUL

Everyone knows Dr. Crate likes guys or girls, just so long as they're beautiful.

DEMI

But what the rumor mill won't tell you is that that's the extent of it. He just likes beauty, and he doesn't cross any lines.

PAUL

How do you know? I mean, I guess I can take your word for it in your case. So he never slept with you, but you don't know what else has been going on.

DEMI

See, this is why I wanted to talk to you about his style of education. It's almost impossible to see through what seems like attraction. Well, it actually is

attraction, but he's attracted to beauty and ideas and knowledge and perfection.

You don't have to believe me, but you should suspend your judgment until you've heard what he says about love.

PAUL

I asked that question, remember? That's how we got into this long story in the first place. If you would have just answered when I asked, you wouldn't have had to correct my wandering thoughts.

DEMI

Well I'm still not going to just tell you, I'm showing you. We're getting there, though. Let me get back to what Artie had to say. I don't remember exactly which movies Artie quoted. I know you don't like the song bit, but just bear with it because the next line in that song is "the feeling deep in your soul, says you were half now you're whole" and that was his whole point. Love makes you feel like you're not quite whole. Love makes you need other people.

PAUL

So that's what he said, but does he really buy that? I mean how is it that the one person in the room who's not flirting, or even getting along, with anyone at the party is the one talking about how much people need each other?

DEMI

Maybe because he does believe it. Granted he makes it into a silly analogy, but I think he believed in true love so much so that he passed up all the superficial opportunities to wait for his perfect match.



## ARTIE

Erica, you talked about musical harmony, what about people harmonizing with each other? Some people are so driven by love that they seek their virtual soul mate all across the globe. We have to honor this power love has over us. The best we can do is diligently search for, and settle down with, our other half, or someone with a reasonable level of compatibility, before we are struck and split again. If that happens we'll be in constant search for our soul-trio, chasing after our other quarters, our three true loves. No! We must avoid that fatal ecstasy by continuing to praise love, making it a celebrity so that it is absolutely clear that we all know we're broken. Our constant search for our other half will make us all hopeless romantics. Then the studios won't be forced to once again strike a chord further removing us from our wholeness.

*Everyone laughs.*

Don't think I'm kidding, I want you to seriously consider the danger we're in.

## PAUL

*(To audience)*

What do you think about playing our game again? Just one more time? Let's see what Dr. Crate could have been thinking about this time. Something about being whole, or being broken. What would that have reminded him of?

Maybe she caught him once doing what guys do. If she came in, startled him, and then made him feel stupid, he wouldn't forget that.

DIOTIMA

“Isn’t it said that you’re better off cutting off the hand that does wicked deeds than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna?”

SPENCER

Oh, Diotima. What, what are you getting at?

DIOTIMA

Some people think love is supposed to make a man complete or whole. Since when is being whole a standard for being good?

SPENCER

Evidently not when Gehenna is close by.

DIOTIMA

Think seriously about it. There is no reason to desire things that are not good, even when they seem to belong to you. Don’t we cut out entire organs when cancer strikes? And isn’t that a good thing? Love is not the desire for wholeness, but goodness.

PAUL

If she really did speak to him like that he would have felt inferior right? If he was still so captivated by her thirty years later, like Demi said, then she must have been on his mind when he was with Alec too. Are you still waiting to hear what came of Dr. Crate that night on Alec’s couch?

ALEC

Dr. C., Dr. C.! Were you asleep?

Spencer *stirs*.

SPENCER

No. No I was just. No, not yet.

ALEC

Can you tell what I'm thinking?

SPENCER

I can honestly say, no.

ALEC

I'm in love with you. No one else will do. And I know you probably feel the same. We're meant to be together.

But you're worried about how it will look, right? Think about it from my perspective. I have always been passionate about being the best. I would have to be completely foolish to pass up the chance to become that with you. Would anyone really think you were exercising inappropriate power over me? I'm the one who needs you.

SPENCER

Now Alec, if you really do think you have seen some beauty in me so lovely that it can truly affect your character, then I'm not sure the relationship would be mutual. What you have to offer is the outward image of beauty and while that gives me some pleasure, what you want in return is much more valuable.

You say you want me more than anything else, but consider the possibility that you are wrong. What if I'm not at all what you need to become a better person?

You have to be very careful because the ability to recognize true beauty improves with age and you're still so full of youth.

ALEC

How am I supposed to respond? I've told you how I feel and now you'll have to decide if it's best for us both or not.

SPENCER

No, Alec. It's not up to me to decide. We should decide together as we go along.

*Alec settles in under the blanket to lie behind*

*Spencer on the couch and puts his arms around  
him.*

PAUL

Sorry that's as far as we'll get for now. I told you you would have to wait until the end. That wasn't entirely true though. I think some of you have put the pieces together by now. I've given you some things about Diotima so you should at least be able to see that she probably influenced how he dealt with all of his students?

*(Pause)*

No, let's not get off track. You don't need to know what I've learned with him these past three years. Agatha's party makes a much better story, and I haven't even gotten to what Agatha had to say about love, yet.

AGATHA

If I'm not mistaken, Artie, I think you might actually have been complimenting independent filmmakers for challenging the bigwigs.

## ARTIE

I told you I was being completely serious.

## AGATHA

And wouldn't it be nice if you actually were for once. Well, I want to say more about the happiness that love brings. Love can't simply be defined as the ache to be whole. That only explains contentment without explaining the accompanying delight. Love abounds in the presence of youth and when love abounds all things beautiful are possible. Remember the joy that you had as a child? That feeling of enchanted amazement is the product of love. It makes its way into every soft heart and settles there to affect the spirit. This is why when love is present all struggles cease and people go on living happily ever after.

Love is what brings out the best in everyone. Love instigates justice since the heart enlivened by love never does wrong and always maintains impartiality. Love initiates temperance by controlling the passions and eliminating an excess of pleasure. Love is the root of all valor since it diminishes fear. And finally, love is the source of all wisdom. This is true because love is what causes anyone to create.

Since Erica talked about her profession, I don't think I'd be boasting to take an example from my own. I make films because inside of me there is a love for stories, especially tragic ones. The inspiration of love is responsible for the success of many untrained filmmakers. Once love strikes a chord inside, they gain insight that needs no direction. And so it goes for all wisdom. Love inspires

scientists' creativity and musician's sentimentality. it informs prophecy and enlivens comedy, it generates literature and philosophy, and it initiates progress in technology.

This is what I have to say about love. that it is the best thing in the world and everything else worth praising finds its source of excellence in love.

*Everyone applauds*

DEMI

And now, Paul, we get to what Spencer had to say. He had listened to everyone else...

PAUL

*(To audience)*

If that's what you call listening.

DEMI

and something Agatha said had struck a chord because it sounded so familiar to him. It sounded like what he believed about love before Diotima.

PAUL

*(To audience)*

See where I've been going with this? Diotima took away Dr. Crate's childlike belief in love.

DEMI

*(To Paul)*

Diotima told Dr. Crate that love isn't good. So he questioned her.

SPENCER

What are you saying, Diotima? Is love a source of evil?

DIOTIMA

Must everything be either one or the other?

SPENCER

It seems so.

DIOTIMA

Then do you think there is only wisdom or ignorance? Couldn't there be something in-between?

SPENCER

Like what?

DIOTIMA

Opinion or speculation. These things can't be called wisdom if they're not backed by some experience or reasonable proof, and yet they are not necessarily ignorant if they approach the truth. So philosophers spend their lives somewhere between wisdom and ignorance. It's the same with love. It doesn't have to be judged good or bad. It is less distinct. It's something in-between.

SPENCER

In-between. Diotima, I never thought of it that way.

DIOTIMA

Don't be too disappointed by your misunderstanding because you thought the feeling of love was that of being loved rather than the action of loving. One loves

the things that one lacks, and so love is not beautiful or perfect, but rather love aches for what is beautiful or perfect.

DEMI

*(To Paul)*

So with that one revelation, Diotima taught Dr. Crate what he tries to share with all of his students.

PAUL

And that is?

DEMI

That we're all trying to climb a ladder of love. Diotima showed him how to reach for the highest levels of perfection and he, in turn, wants to show us.

Before he talked about Diotima that night, though, he warned us that he was not just going to highlight the good aspects of love.

SPENCER

It seems like you all decided that when you talk about love you should only say what is best, even if that is not always how love works. Rather than speak the truth, you prefer to focus on everything great and attribute it to love. I've been sitting here thinking I would weigh in on love since it is the only thing I claim to know anything about, but I won't if it can't be an honest account of what I think love is.

FRANK

We're all waiting to hear.



SPENCER

Really Frank? Didn't you cut me off earlier when I was trying to talk to Agatha?

FRANK

You were going to badger her, but I really do want to hear what you have to say about love.

SPENCER

Then you'll have to stay quiet this time because I need to start by asking Agatha a few more questions. What I have to say may not be as worthy of the big screen as the happily ever after version we just got from Agatha.

PAIGE

Well, try anyway. I'm eager to hear what you think love is.

ARTIE

And while you're at it, do you mind telling us just how you know so much about love anyhow?

SPENCER

Agatha, let me ask you. Is love the love of something or nothing? What I'm asking is the same question as this: is a father the father of something or nothing?

AGATHA

He's the father of his son or daughter.

SPENCER

And a mother?

AGATHA

Yes, of course she is the mother of her child.

SPENCER

Brothers and sisters, are they of something or nothing?

AGATHA

Something. I get the point.

SPENCER

Then, isn't love of a similar nature?

AGATHA

Right, love is the love of something.

SPENCER

Now Agatha, if love is the love of something, what is that something?

AGATHA

Whichever object of desire caused the love.

SPENCER

Okay, and does the lover have what he desires?

AGATHA

Presumably not, that's what he's seeking.

SPENCER

I'm not asking you to presume, but to think about how it must be. If a lover desires something then he must not already have it, otherwise his desire ceases. So someone who is overweight might want to be thin, but it doesn't make sense for someone already thin to say that what they desire is to be thin, right?

AGATHA

Right.

SPENCER

But there are cases where someone is healthy and says they want to be healthy, or is wealthy and desires wealth. In these cases we must assume what they are really saying is that they like being healthy or wealthy and thus want to continue being healthy or wealthy. The desire here is for the future possession of such good fortune. So whatever is loved is that which the lover lacks or wants to continue possessing forever.

AGATHA

Okay.

SPENCER

But you said love is the best thing in the world and that it causes all good things.

AGATHA

Uh-huh.

SPENCER

How can something that is best want something? By the nature of being best it wants for nothing. So love can't possibly be best. Love doesn't cause good things because it is in fact the desire for good things.

DEMI

*(To Paul)*

And then he stopped short of harassing Agatha any further. Instead, he told her that once upon a time he too had been confused about such things. That's when he brought up Diotima.

PAUL

*(To audience)*

Aren't you glad I told you about Diotima earlier? Think about it, this could be the first you heard about Dr. Crate's inspiration. It would go something like this....

SPENCER

When I was a graduate student, I thought that love was a source of goodness until I encountered a remarkable

PAUL

No.

SPENCER

extraordinary

PAUL

No.

SPENCER

wonderful woman known as Diotima. I was, at the time, a novice with regard to love. She revealed herself to me and became my teacher.

PAUL

Blah, blah, blah. Since I've already told you about her we can skip the introductions and get on with what Demi says Dr. Crate learned from Diotima.

SPENCER

*(To Agatha)*

Diotima examined me the same way I questioned you just now.

*(To guests)*

I was shocked at first by what she taught me because I was still seeing the world in black and white. It was hard to tell the different levels of right and wrong.

Everything I know about love grew from my experience of her. She helped me master the art of love, though she was not always patient with me along the way.

She thought I might have eventually mastered the practice of love without her, but the ultimate goal of love would have remained a mystery to me unless she unraveled it for me. She promised to expose me to higher truths and asked in return for my complete attention.

I learned that when someone wants to devote themselves to love, they should start by loving in the flesh. First enamored by one person's beauty they eventually realize that truly beautiful physical characteristics are shared by all people.

Having recognized this, the lover starts looking for beauty beneath the surface and finds that interior beauty is superior. The lover then begins caring for others' souls and makes every effort to cultivate beauty there. In order to do this, the lover contemplates the perfection of ideas by focusing on behavior and the laws that modify it. Then the lover teaches these ideas to others and becomes caught up in the beauty of the transfer of knowledge. The lover becomes fond of the liberal arts and encourages others to seek wisdom outside their chosen discipline. This open-mindedness eventually allows the lover to catch a glimpse of the beauty of knowledge in all its grandeur.

When she had carried me that far she warned me that I needed to do much more than listen. She urged me to participate fully as we were at the part when I would

find out what everything had been building up to. She described a sudden indication of beauty so intense that the lover recognizes it as the culmination of all earlier efforts. This beauty is not something created or destroyed but feels as if it has always been there. It is not better or worse or in any way comparable to any other thing. This beauty is not material and is an entity in and of itself. Everything of this earth that we call beautiful has a small share in this ideal beauty.

The experience of this ecstasy is the climax of all the stages of love. It is like ascending a staircase either by one's own virtue or under the guidance of another. The steps are noticing the beauty of one person, then many; one idea, then many; one form of knowledge, then many; and then finally contemplating all this beauty to catch a glimpse of perfection. Diotima portrayed the one who ascends as capable of immortality by actually experiencing in himself a perfect beauty that lasts forever.

She taught me that the best life is one spent in perpetual contemplation of this beauty, and she pointed out that if I ever encountered this state of ecstasy I would learn to forgo all need for material things: all desire for food or drink or anyone or anything would vanish.

She was so persuasive that I have never forgotten her lessons. I've been trying to reveal them to everyone I meet. This is why I praise love and claim it as the only thing I know, Artie. I'm content to admit ignorance about everything else, but I am devoted to being as familiar as possible with love.

*Everyone except Artie applauds.*

DEMI

There you go. I think that pretty much answers your question about what she taught him.

PAUL

That's it? I thought you weren't going to just tell me. I thought the whole point of describing the entire evening was so that I would have to figure it out. Isn't that what you wanted me to know? That to be a good student of Dr. Crate you have to be willing to do that work?

DEMI

Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to share with you, and since you figured that out I think you'll be very successful working with him.

PAUL

Now wait right there. You can't just drag me into this whole party at Agatha's and then leave my thoughts suspended.

DEMI

Why not? That's what Dr. Crate does. That's what happened to me that night and, I'm telling you, I learned from that.

PAUL

Well, I don't like it. I want to know what happens next. Everyone else gave their version of love and then Dr. Crate goes and tells what Diotima thinks about love. Didn't anyone object?

DEMI

What do you mean? They all asked him to go ahead and tell what he thought.

PAUL

Exactly, what he thought. Not what she thought.

DEMI

But he learned it from her, and so it's one in the same.

PAUL

I'm sorry, I disagree. He told us what she persuaded him to believe. He didn't even tell where he actually was on her supposed ladder of love. I thought he promised an honest account. So I want to know if anyone challenged him to leave Diotima aside and answer for himself.

DEMI

I think Artie started to say something, but then the party took a whole different direction.

ARTIE

But what about your first love or that one true love? Do you really leave all your lovers behind?

*Alec bangs on the door.*

AGATHA

Paige, see who is there.

*Paige opens the door. Drunken Alec stands in the doorway wearing a tiara crooked over his eyes and holding flowers.*



ALEC

Hello all! I'm terribly drunk but ready for more if you'll allow me to join you.

Agatha, I came to present you this prize for your win, and your beauty.

*Laughter from the guests as Paige steps aside  
and Alec stumbles in.*

PAIGE

I'm sure you'll take the party to a whole other level.

ALEC

So Agatha, you were the talk of the evening tonight.

*(Sings)*

Here she is... Miss beautiful young filmmaker.

*Alec hands Agatha the flowers.*

AGATHA

Thank you Alec, thanks. If you could just.... Thanks, I'll they're lovely. Let me just move this way a bit so that there's room for the three of us on the couch.

ALEC

Three, but who?

*Alec takes off the tiara and notices Spencer.*

Dear Lord! Are you stalking me? Whenever I least expect it, you show up. Why are you here, at Agatha's, and why are you here on this couch? You couldn't go lie with Artie or anyone else? No, as usual you have manipulated the situation so that you're next to the most beautiful person in the room.

## SPENCER

Agatha. Paige. Tell him it's not what he thinks. Ever since I noticed him he has attempted to keep me all to himself. I recognize his potential for greatness, but he flies into a jealous rage if I attempt to look for it in anyone else. I really don't know how to head off such a response from him.

## ALEC

You're right, I won't let you forget that I found you here fawning over Agatha, but for now I'll avoid thinking about it. Instead I'll try to appease you.

I'm just going to take a few of these, Agatha, as a prize for this guy. We wouldn't want him to be upset that I commended you for your film but didn't praise him for his never-ending commentary on life.

Now, I thought this was a party but you all seem to have sobered up! Agatha do you have any bigger wine glasses? Never mind. That vase, Paige, that will do.

*Alec takes the vase Paige was bringing to  
Agatha and pours wine in it, drinks it empty  
then takes another bottle and fills it for  
Spencer.*

Watch this! There is no way I can ever drink him under the table. He'll drink all this and more and never be affected.

## ERICA

Are we really going to just sit around and get drunk?

ALEC

What's with the...? Paige, who is this wet blanket?

PAIGE

Alec, meet Erica. Frank's girlfriend. She's a naturalistic doctor.

ALEC

Well, Dr. Erica. What's the matter? Are grapes not natural enough for you?

Perhaps we're not sure what we've got here was organically grown? What would you like us to do instead?

ERICA

Before you stumbled in here we were having an enchanting discussion about love and how it animates life. Why don't you tell us how it affects you?

ALEC

I'm not sure I could do love justice with slurred words. Besides I'm sure none of you were fooled just now when he pretended that I am the jealous one. You should know that no matter how much he ignores me, if I spend time on anything but him he is severely wounded.

SPENCER

Now Alec.

ALEC

Stop. In your presence I'll do nothing other than pay tribute to you.

FRANK

Okay then let's hear the good things you have to say about him.

SPENCER

I think he might try to expose me, or worse make me seem insincere.

ALEC

I think it's pretty clear that I am in no condition to invent false tales. This will be my truth serum.

*Alec fills and lifts a wine glass.*

*(To Spencer)*

If you think I'm in any way misleading you can join in and repair the story.

*(To guests)*

First, let me explain. Here's Dr. C.: old and unattractive, he drapes himself on others and makes out as if he's interested in appearances. He pretends to enjoy drinking and other pleasures and claims ignorance about everything, but then you find out that he is always intentional. His words are mesmerizing and you can't help but take him seriously. He has such internal charm that you are captivated into submission.

Listening to him I lose control. I promise this is not just the wine talking. When he speaks, I feel my pulse in my chest and my hands start to shake. It's as if my soul wants to escape my body. No one else can make me feel so entirely hopeless. Whatever he says makes me hate myself. Whenever he's near....

*(To Spencer)*

No, you cannot tell me I'm lying. If you started speaking right now you could humiliate me by telling me how fucked up my political goals are and how worthless I am because I don't spend enough time assessing my goddam faults.

And you'd say all of that without ever muttering an unkind word. You're too hard to impress.

*(To guests)*

That's why I run away covering my ears like a child.

*(To Spencer)*

It's all your fault.

*(To guests)*

As upsetting as his words are, I am drawn to them. When I try to pull away, I am constantly followed by the shame he taught me. I try to please others, but the fame I find is no consolation when I'm reminded that I have done nothing to improve my integrity.

I am disgraced. At times I've wished him dead. But I know that if he were gone, I would be distraught.

All of you Frank, Paige, Agatha, Demi, and even Artie know the feeling I'm talking about. It's the realization that most of what you do is useless and unimportant.

*(To Spencer)*

You, too, were once disorientated by the acute pain.

*(To guests)*

The love of wisdom hurts. Philosophy is madness. It's absolute insanity to try to be so intentional.

But he doesn't just try. He really is that steady. There isn't anyone as brave in the face of danger or as resistant to pain, or as able to avoid temptation as he. I should know. I tried so hard to seduce him.

It seemed like he was attracted to me. My looks made it so that I could have anyone, so I thought for sure he would take me. He resisted all of my attempts at first. Eventually, he started joining me at the gym, but he made no advances. Finally, I decided to take the lead and I invited him to dinner. Even then he finished and politely excused himself. The next time he came I kept him talking late into the evening and managed to make him stay. Once he was resting I took the opportunity to tell him how I felt. I could see he was equally as interested so I went right ahead and pressed the issue. I lay down beside him. Oh yes, I crawled under his blanket and slept with him. But that's all we did is sleep. Just like two college roommates sharing a hotel bed on a road trip or something. Nothing more. He spent the night right there next to me and never made a move. He is steadfast, unswerving.

*(To Spencer)*

There. I hope I have not failed in honoring you.

*(To Agatha)*

Agatha, you're not the first to get admiration from him. Beware, he is deceiving you. He acts as if he is enamored by your beauty only to reverse it in the end so that you are in love with him instead, which we all know would be a major reversal for you.

*(To guests)*

The life of an unrequited lover is an irreversible fate that you should avoid at all costs

*Laughter from some guests.*

SPENCER

Alec. I think you might actually be the one we'll end up trying to out-drink. You couldn't possibly have concocted such a deliberate speech while drunk. All of that flattery was not to appease me. After all these years, you're still trying to seduce me. You practically admitted it just now when you tried to scare Agatha away. I know it's because you want my full attention. Isn't that right?

AGATHA

That does explain why he came between us on the couch.

ALEC

So that's how it is. When Spencer is around he gets what he wants and no one else gets noticed.

PAUL

*(To audience)*

See, I knew there was more to the story. She was so convinced that the thing to focus on was Diotima's supposed ladder of love that she wasn't even going to talk about Alec. Would you have asked about the party if Alec hadn't been there?

*(To Demi)*

I thought you said the rest of the evening took a different direction? Okay, so the drinking started back up, but everything still revolves around love. You really did

learn a lot from Dr. Crate because you were trying to deceive me just now when you wanted to end the story. Don't stop now. What happens next?

DEMI

Nothing really. Several of Agatha's film crew arrived. Having partied all night they were more drunk than Alec and they wanted the rest of us to be in as much of a stupor. Things got out of hand pretty quickly.

PAUL

No, there has to be more. Think.

DEMI

I really don't remember. I think Erica and Frank left, maybe with Alec.

PAUL

That's an odd group.

*(To audience)*

I wonder what kind of mischief they got into. Maybe we can play with that story some other day.

DEMI

I must have fallen asleep shortly thereafter because the next thing I remember is the sun waking me up. Agatha and Artie were on the couch with Dr. Crate. They must have stayed up all night because they looked exhausted.

*Spencer is wide awake. Agatha and Artie yawn, blink and rub their eyes making extreme efforts to resist sleep. Demi drifts in and out of sleep in time with the words.*



SPENCER

So are you ... possibly... heartbreaking and funny?

ARTIE

Oh no, ... funny.

SPENCER

Really ...anybody ever? ...benefit from the mess...

AGATHA

If you tell..., but ... nothing tragic.

SPENCER

Can't ... similarities are ...

ARTIE

Yes, yes...

AGATHA

... a try

*Agatha and Artie exit.*

PAUL

*(To audience)*

Since Demi wasn't quite the eye-witness, I figured I would eventually have to go to the source. Once I had been working with Dr. Crate for awhile I invited him over for dinner.

*(Pause)*

Yes. I have been avoiding telling you about my relationship with him. You need to come to your own conclusions. I'll tell you this much. We talked late into the evening about his concept of love, and I checked some of the details of the story.

PAUL

*(To Spencer)*

Demi said that the next morning she left with you and that you went about your business as usual.

SPENCER

That seems right.

PAUL

But just before you left you were having a discussion with Artie and Agatha. From what I can tell from Demi's fuzzy details you might have been talking about comedy and tragedy?

SPENCER

That seems plausible sitting there with a comedian and a filmmaker.

PAUL

So what were you trying to convince them?

SPENCER

Well, I'm afraid we'll have to leave that for another day. It is already very late.

THE END

### Postscript: An Invitation to Conversation

In its intricate conversations on love, Plato's *Symposium* does not instigate movement in one clear direction. Plato does not allow his audience<sup>1</sup> to enter into unwavering commitment to any one of the ideas entertained at his drinking party. He does not privilege reason without warning about the danger of certainty; he does not license sensational emotion without warning about the danger of physicality. The *Symposium* is an invitation to continue a fictional conversation that was imagined and constructed in order to involve its audience in the act of philosophizing. This thesis project accepts that invitation by acknowledging Plato's intentional commitment to creative fiction as the best—if not the only—way to train others to think without indoctrinating them and to encourage continued progress without authoritative linearity. A creative response is not only acceptable but necessary. The re-imagining of Plato's *Symposium* for the twenty-first-century stage invites continued discussion of ideas in an atmosphere that does not seek a definite answer or precise path. This project becomes a means by which the conversation continues by mimicking Plato's ingenious balance between welcoming the audience to the discussion and reminding them that they are distanced and the events are unclear.

Plato's *Symposium* tells the story of a fictional, ancient dinner party at the house of Agathon, a tragic poet, in celebration of his first win at the dramatic festival in 416

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'audience' is used throughout this paper as an appropriate reference that includes Plato's readers and hearers (those who commonly heard it read aloud) from fourth-century Athens, those who have read him from then until now, and the readers and implied spectators of this author's twenty-first-century stage adaptation.

B.C.E. The imagined event involves a variety of historical characters—most notably Socrates. The evening’s discussion about love is guided by a contest among the guests to see who gives love the best praise. The speeches, setting, and temperaments of the characters are all described by Aristodemus who was present at the party when he was a young follower of Socrates. Aristodemus reports the evening’s proceedings to Apollodorus who, years later, retells the story to an unnamed friend. The reader is a spectator of this conversation between Apollodorus and his friend. Plato “is replaced by a series of narrators, and a party from long ago begins to unfold” (Corrigan 20). Plato’s intentional narrative framework must be considered integral to the interpretation of the dialogue. The framework allows for a variety of voices to be heard within a system of removal of which the reader remains consciously aware; the intention is to develop, through story, the experiential capacity to live well by showing the difficulties involved in responding to love or desire (*eros*) while attempting a life of excellence (*arête*). Plato’s narrated story displays the necessity of human interdependence in the search for wisdom and the resulting elusiveness of any definitive philosophy.

Aristodemus and Apollodorus are collectively the narrators with Aristodemus playing the role of eye-witness reporter and Apollodorus the role of story-re-teller. Both followers of Socrates are infatuated with him and have committed to seeking the best that the philosophical life has to offer. Apollodorus has been a friend of Socrates for less than three years and proudly professes that he makes it his job “to know exactly what [Socrates] says and does each day” (Plato 172C). Apollodorus comments on Aristodemus, saying he went to Agathon’s party with Socrates because “he was obsessed with Socrates—one of the worst cases at that time” (Plato 173B). Aristodemus is

comfortable “as a reflection of Socrates” (Corrigan 11); he goes barefoot in Socrates’ fashion. Apollodorus is anxious about his own “lack of true philosophical insight” (Corrigan 11); the friend who asks Apollodorus to tell the story scolds him: “I do believe you think everybody—yourself first of all—is totally worthless, except, of course, Socrates” (Plato 173D). The intensity with which the reporter and the story-re-teller concern themselves over the evening’s events influences the story.

Though these two disciples are the most obvious structural apparatus, the complex narrative structure is revealed in subtle ways throughout the *Symposium*. Socrates’ retelling of the instruction about love which he claims to have received from a Mantinean priestess named Diotima is actually a triple narration: Apollodorus narrates the story that Aristodemus narrated to him about the story Socrates narrated to Agathon’s guests. In fact, each speech about love involves retellings of, or allusions to, stories from myth, epic, experience, or imagination (with the exception of Eryximachus’ which seeks a comprehensive theory not wholly unexpected from a practitioner of his medical profession). The narrative structure is enhanced by a final addition to the evenings’ speeches with the arrival of a drunken Alcibiades, the young and successful Athenian general who was an intimate associate of Socrates even before Aristodemus. Alcibiades represents an excess of desire and points out that the guests who have been discoursing all night about desire have all been “struck and bitten by philosophy” (Plato 218A): “All you people here, Phaedrus, Agathon, Eryximachus, Pausanias, Aristodemus, Aristophanes—I need not mention Socrates himself—and all the rest, have all shared in the madness, the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy” (Plato 218B). Their speeches are attempts to philosophize about love when philosophy is what they love. This circular

structure is Plato's best expression of the parallel between narrative and *eros*: attempts to attain an understanding of either must avoid, or at least be cautious of, linearity. The *Symposium*'s complex narrative about Agathon's symposium—which literally means a drinking together—exposes the inevitably social consequences that arise in any pursuit of desire, most notably the desire for philosophy.

Alcibiades has known Socrates longer than the other two devoted followers of Socrates in the *Symposium*, Apollodorus and Aristodemus. He claims to be passionately in love with Socrates' beauty or excellence, and tells stories of the times he witnessed Socrates' bravery and self-control. He describes the intense desire he discovers in himself when in the midst of Socrates: "The moment he starts to speak, I am beside myself: my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming down my face.... Like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die" (Plato 216B). Alcibiades praises and criticizes Socrates, and bemoans the desire and shame that Socrates elicits in him: "I can't live with him, and I can't live without him!" (Plato 216C). His historical reputation at the time of the party, and his worsened reputation at the time of Apollodorus' retelling, influences the reception of the stories he tells about Socrates. Alcibiades crashes Agathon's celebratory party in 416 B.C.E.—the same year he is accused of plotting against the Athenian democracy. Shortly thereafter he defects to Sparta, claiming, "I do not consider that I am now attacking a country that is still mine; I am rather trying to recover one that is mine no longer" (Thucydides 6.92). Later, he leaves Sparta and sides with Persia before returning to Athens where a failed battle puts him at odds with the city again. The Athenians believed so much in his capabilities that, as recorded by Plutarch, "when he failed in anything, men suspected his inclination (35.2). Alcibiades' tumultuous

relationship with Athens would have been at the forefront of Athenian thought at the end of the Peloponnesian war which coincides with the date of Apollodorus' retelling around 404 B.C.E. (Nussbaum 170). The portrayal of Socrates as presented by Alcibiades is meant to be weighed against Alcibiades' reputation, and the reader must acknowledge Alcibiades' passionate perspective on love while questioning its viability.

Apollodorus knows the reputations of more than just Alcibiades at the time of retelling. He knows that "Agathon hasn't lived in Athens for many years" (Plato 172C). The reader should consider not only the actual circumstances of the historical characters' lives, but also Apollodorus' perception about the importance of these details. Plato's "literary device of a framed conversation about an event set back in the past disconnects the event and the retelling of it both from the present... and from the past" (Gold 1358). This removal requires that the reader remain aware of the design of the story, *Symposium*, in which Apollodorus is a character with specific devotion to Socrates, while becoming more desirous of the story Apollodorus narrates about the night of the dinner party. As David Halperin points out, "the *Symposium* is not only about *eros*, then: rather, its complex narrative structure is itself designed to manifest and to dramatize the workings of *eros*" (50). The reader's desire to have the story told increases with each narrative remove as the hope that some concreteness can be located in the inner story seems to slip away. William Johnson labels the narrative construction "elaborately indirect, distant, and distancing" (583); this distance allows space for the reader to consider all the potential ways the guests' personalities, professions, reputations, and sentiments affect the philosophic discourse.

Aristodemus, who attends Agathon's party uninvited and with hesitation, does not recount much of his own interaction throughout the evening. Instead, he focuses on the varied perspectives delivered in the contest in praise of love. His narration is most notably affected by his attendance at the party as a companion of Socrates. They break company before either is admitted to Agathon's house since Socrates gets lost in contemplation on a neighbor's doorstep (Plato 175A). Aristodemus is assigned a couch separate from the one Socrates and Agathon occupy and thus he gives his firsthand report of the events as if an observer, eager to learn from Socrates and the others, rather than a fellow guest. The reader is reminded of the second hand nature of the report by dramatic asides in which Apollodorus reiterates what Aristodemus said (i.e. Plato 180C, 185C, and 199B). Aristodemus' report is intentionally incomplete since there were "several other speeches which he couldn't remember very well. So he skipped them" (Plato 180C). At the end of the evening he even falls asleep and his account of the daybreak discussion between Socrates, Aristophanes, and Agathon is hazy since "he was half-asleep anyway" (Plato 223D). Aristodemus' memory of the speeches should be considered relative to his capacity on the night of the party, hindered by fatigue and potentially influenced by drink. The search for Aristodemus' motive for preserving and repeating the events of the evening's contest about love must take into account his dedication to Socrates.

Socrates' speech is reported by Aristodemus and is itself a retelling of Socrates' encounter with the priestess Diotima who taught him "the art of love" (Plato 201D). Throughout the speech Diotima addresses comments made earlier in the evening which would seem improbable since Socrates presumably relates a conversation he had years earlier (Corrigan 5). This is one of many reminders Plato includes to alert the reader to



the importance of what David Halperin labels a “meta-philosophical or a meta-dramatic level of interpretation (it’s not immediately clear which term would be more appropriate)” (63). While Diotima develops the concept of eros as an intermediary that can be engaged for a time to assist in the ultimate pursuit of Beauty, she points out the difficulty of the any ascent to actual Beauty by remarking to Socrates, “I don’t know if you are capable of it” (210A). Later she insists that Socrates focus, saying, “Try to pay attention to me” (210E). The intention of these remarks must be considered from the perspectives of Socrates, Aristodemus, Apollodorus, and Diotima herself. This type of peeling away of the layers of each comment is integral to Plato’s philosophy; there are three different characters who choose to include Diotima’s warnings to Socrates in their retellings. Diotima explains the ladder of ascent to Socrates who becomes convinced that love is the only thing he understands (177E); he makes this clear when he describes what she taught him to Agathon after pointing out Agathon’s own misconceptions about love. If Plato wants Diotima’s teaching to be considered the best, and only, way to engage eros, why does he develop such an intricate narrative structure and only allow the reader indirect instruction?

If one subscribes to the theory that Plato proposed his own philosophies in his dialogues through Socrates’ voice—referring to Socrates as Plato’s mouthpiece—then Socrates’ portrayal of the ascent taught to him by Diotima is received as the first piece of what becomes Plato’s elaborate theory of the Forms. While Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium* provides a description of beauty and its usefulness for the lover of philosophy or seeker of the good life, the narrative structure and the setting in which Diotima is presented cannot be dismissed as having little bearing on the way her theory ought to be

applied to one's life. If Plato's purpose was to convince his readers that the ladder of ascent should immediately be taken up in the pursuit of the good, then why did he cloud that view with a variety of other speeches and spend so much time developing the interplay amongst the characters delivering those speeches? Any philosophical intent gleaned from the re-told stories of the *Symposium* requires attention to the narrative structure. Emphasis on the importance of the narrative framework for interpretation of Plato's dialogues is increasing, but as early as the beginning of the twentieth century Louis Dyer wrote that Plato's philosophy is "woven into the narrated conversations so that we cannot attribute a monopoly of truth to any of the conversing personages" (Dyer 171). That Plato intended to confound his readers through story rather than offer specific instruction is a less startling claim when one considers the poetic atmosphere of fourth century Athens.

It is reasonable to expect that a majority of the Athenian population understood the use of narrative devices. The tradition of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the progressive tragedies of Euripides, and the cutting-edge comedies of Aristophanes prepared them to follow a story as it was told and retold with various narrative removals, surprising incidents, and references back to itself and other stories from a larger tradition. The expectation that Plato's readers would recognize the value of the embedded stories and utilize them as an experience of the multi-faceted face of *eros* is not implausible. This view of antiquity allows one to recognize the stories Plato tells as his philosophy instead of seeing the stories as creative packaging for his philosophical treatises. Michael Frede claims Plato knows "that the only responsible way to put forth such views and arguments in writing is in the form of a fictional dialogue" (202). The *Symposium* is one example of

the philosophical literature that Plato created because he was acutely aware of the inability to live well amongst others while aligning oneself with any too linear approach to philosophy, or the pursuit of truth.

Those who object to this understanding of Plato argue that Plato was in fact interested in presenting a privileged philosophy and claim those philosophies are given by Socrates. The claim that Plato uses Socrates as his mouthpiece is problematic in that it requires responding to Plato's writings as if they are not creative fictions. The problem becomes compounded by the search for the moment when Plato supposedly hijacks his authentic Socrates' voice. The character Socrates developed by Plato in his dialogues is a distinct figure from the historical Socrates. While Plato's dialogues are a means of soliciting evidence about the life and thoughts of an authentic historical Socrates, they are only a portion of the work containing information about, or commentary on, Socrates. The body of accounts of Socrates from Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes, Aristotle, and the later Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius provides a less than complete, and often contradictory, picture of Socrates. One must keep this in mind when considering Plato's character Socrates and his purpose within each dialogue; acknowledging the distinction guards against assuming Plato was either representing an authentic picture of his teacher or putting his own views into Socrates' mouth.

Consider Socrates as a character in Plato's dialogues. 'Psocrates' will refer to the character Socrates who is a literary element of the dialogues, or a textual device that need not be historically realistic. Recognizing that Plato likely knew and understood more than he wrote about Socrates' authentic life and lifestyle, one must consider the role Psocrates plays within the dialogues. Accepting the creation of this character, scholars often assume

Plato has created a character to portray his own views. This theory, developed extensively by Gregory Vlastos, is often challenged by the lack of participation by Psocrates in what are called the later dialogues. Debra Nails remarks that it falls apart even earlier in *Parmenides* and *Symposium* where Parmenides and Diotima present the supposed main views (Nails, "Mouthpiece," 23). Richard Kraut, who accepts as "dogma" that Psocrates is Plato's mouthpiece, adjusts his assumption assuming by saying Plato speaks through the "principal interlocutor" (Nails, "Mouthpiece," 23). This problem becomes even more complex when considering the chronology of the dialogues and whether or not to accept stylometry as reasonably accurate for the purpose of describing Plato's development over time.

Even though scholars continually invent solutions to the problem of when Psocrates speaks for Plato, and Aristotle and Diogenes Laertius both claim Psocrates represents Plato's view, the assumption unnecessary assumption may lead to misinterpretations of the meaning of each dialogue. Assuming Psocrates speaks for Plato transforms the dialogue into a treatise (Press 6). Instead of accepting the theory that Plato proposed his own philosophies in his dialogues through Psocrates' voice, one must realize that it is only necessary to accept that Psocrates as characterized in a particular way. Even more accurately, Psocrates is a character with a particular characterization within each dialogue (say some  $P_q$ socrates where  $q$  represents a particular dialogue) without expecting that same characterization to be continuous throughout the corpus of dialogues. Of the characters in a dialogue, Gerald A. Press says they "speak from their own well grounded point of view rather than being controlled by the ... author" (5-6).

Their characterization can be attributed to the author, and therefore one can ask what role the author, Plato, has created for the character,  $P_Q$ socrates, in each dialogue.

There are some generally accepted characteristics based on all of the extant works referencing Socrates that can be reasonably attributed to an authentic Socrates, herein 'Asocrates,' with the consideration that these may also be part of any specific  $P_Q$ socrates. First, Asocrates claims to teach for free, or rather enter into discourse with any interested person by "beginning from the opinions held by the man he is talking to and drawing out their implications" (West 30). Second, Asocrates worked within an oral tradition and did not intend to record individual discourse for generalized use. Finally, Asocrates' pursued "improvement of his contemporaries" through philosophical knowledge (Nehamas xxx), and claimed any lack of improvement was not a result of ill-intentions but of a lack of wisdom: his or theirs. These limited considerations are the basis for much of the characterization of  $P_Q$ socrates, but it is helpful to delineate actual claims from mere interpretation. The three characteristics are put forward as true of Asocrates. Any interpretation of  $P_Q$ socrates in a given dialogue needn't be compared to the original assumption: as defined above Asocrates does not have to possess characteristics of any  $P_Q$ socrates; likewise, each  $P_Q$ socrates may not reflect the characteristics of Asocrates.

Since Plato was 40 years Socrates' junior,  $P_Q$ socrates can have an awareness, created by Plato post-Socrates-mortem, of concepts and concerns that would not have been raised in the same way during Socrates' lifetime; Louis Dyer explains this as Socrates "introduced into a different world from that in which he actually lived—into the world of Plato and Aristotle" (174-6). That Socrates is dead when Plato writes many of the dialogues does not necessitate the conclusion that Plato write histories of actual

events or records Socrates' persona for posterity. Plato presumably writes with admiration for his teacher, but Frede points out that Plato, while admiring Socrates, may also have been able to stand back and form a critical opinion as well (204). Consideration of Plato's relationship with Socrates as a devotion between disciple and master must necessarily be weighed against the admiration and or condemnation Plato had for aspects of Greek society in general: the polis, the tragic and comic theater, religion, and philosophy.

The argument thus far concludes that Plato purposely created an altogether apparent variety of characters, including narrators, to display lifestyles, philosophies, opinions, sentiments and beliefs within a literary structure that we refer to as dialogue. He understood the power of dramatic literature rooted in myth, politics, and fable and he was able to criticize this form. Since Plato writes about characters performing "literary criticism on the poets" in dialogues like *Protagoras* and *Republic* (Nails, Agora 24-5), it is reasonable to assume he makes conscious choices about what he writes. Plato wrote creative fictions and he was aware of the elements that he included in those writings (either fictional, authentic or some fictional extension of the authentic). Unlike Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine who wrote dialogues in which they clearly define their position, Plato removed himself so that it is not apparent whether he agrees or disagrees with any particular position (Frede 204). By characterizing reasoned argument within narrative contexts Plato creates an experience that exposes the inability of logic and linear reasoning to produce exhaustive accounts of how to discern one's actions.

If Plato intended to so easily desecrate the pursuit of reason, why include such convincing arguments in his dialogues? The suggestion that Plato understood the

limitations, or even danger, of following a too linear method of reasoning does not necessitate a jump to the decision that Plato must want to convince the reader that reasoning is irrelevant. Plato was aware of the irony inherent in any linear method of reasoning expected to be practiced always. Contradictions and ironies between dialogues must be considered important clues that Plato was not writing straight philosophy, and especially not dogma. If Plato recognized both the value and danger of reason, then it seems likely that he created philosophical literature that exposed both the necessity and the insufficiency of the examined life; Socrates' famous remark "the unexamined life is not worth living" does not transform to the examined life is worth living without adding further assumptions to the initial intent.

The examined life, as represented in Plato's dialogues, is not disregarded or expected to be laughable; it is quite esteemed for its continuity and ability to inform, and this has captivated philosophical audiences for millennia. Nonetheless, in Plato's dialogues there exists an apparent call to action that the search for knowledge or understanding does not address. Terry Penner describes this as the difference between the Socratic and the Platonic method: Socrates' believes virtuous activity will result from an understanding of the good whereas Plato's concerns are not just about understanding, but also practice and training in acting rightly (127-130). The abrupt ending of many dialogues without any resolution or conclusion about what one can or should do, and oftentimes without a more clearly defined example of the good, informs as much as, if not more than, the developed arguments. Living well requires more than a commitment to living within prohibitive standards that have been reasoned to be good; living well

amongst others requires awareness of the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual concerns of the people or society one encounters.

If one always does what one believes best, then concerns about acting in such a way that one does not harm others are irrelevant. Though Aristotle pairs Plato with Socrates who “believes that we always do what we think is best,” (Nehamas xviii) Plato does not necessarily agree with Socrates. Since this pairing follows from the belief that Plato spoke through Socrates in his dialogues, the connection lacks necessity here. The Platonic concern about action resembles what Euripides’ *Phaedra* describes in *Hippolytus*: “what we know and understand to be noble we fail to carry out, some from laziness, others because they give precedence to some other pleasure than honor” (380-83). That *Phaedra* deals with a passion forced on her by the gods is not irrelevant. Since Socrates rejected opinions of all kinds whether they were “grounded in venerable tradition, poetic inspiration, or sincere personal convictions about ‘one’s own concept of existence,’” (West 10) he was not willing to acknowledge any influences on one’s actions other than reason alone. Even if Socrates admitted that these other influences could overtake reason, he wanted to expunge them prior to, or at least in the course of, reasoning about right action.

Though Socrates held that “no one errs willingly,” Plato allowed for error even in the absence of ignorance (Penner 127-130). His dialogues “show in an unsurpassable way how philosophy is tied to real life, to forms of life, to character and behavior” (Frede 216). It seems Plato understood the insurmountable difficulties one encounters in any attempt to reject opinions, especially those most “interwoven with the fabric of our life” (Frede 215). Recognizing this, Plato realized right action would require more than



knowledge of what was right. If a person cannot easily dismiss prior opinions or beliefs, then deciding to act in accord with a new understanding, or refutation of their old understanding, can present overwhelming conflicts. These conflicts are compounded when one considers the way their opinions affect their day to day interactions. With no resolution in sight, the most effective philosophy seems to be to expose the faults of opinions and beliefs alongside the incomplete or contradictory refutations of these sentiments for the purpose of encouraging broad assessments of one's actions.

Plato's dual purpose of exposing the benefits and limits of the examined life becomes clear when one accepts the purposefulness of the dramatic structure of each dialogue. Philosophical arguments within each dialogue have too often been attributed to Plato without reservation and misconceived as Plato's didactic intentions. The *Symposium* is potentially the largest source of these historical misinterpretations: first in the early Christian writers who "read the dialogue's 'ascent passage' as a thinly veiled description of the soul's ascent to heaven" (Leshner, Nails, and Sheffield 1), and secondly in Plotinus' misinterpretation of Diotima's account which was carried into the Renaissance by Ficino and resulted in the notion of "Platonic Love" as an almost ascetic abstinence encouraged by Plato (Allen 53).

Misinterpretations of Plato have not been limited to individual dialogues, but are often caused by claims about the chronology of the dialogues and a presumed philosophical development over time. Scholars make a variety of claims about the progression of a developed Platonic voice, including the intentional dissemination of a complete program of ideas over time. The ordering of the dialogues is often considered integral to the search for Plato's fully-Formed theories. Those who insist upon Plato's

philosophical development and rely on his progressive intellectual maturation to locate his perspective, philosophy, and truth do not admit the possibility that Plato was concerned about the danger of any too-linear philosophical project. Neither the assumption that Plato has a mouthpiece in each dialogue, nor that Plato incrementally increased his exposition of his own theories in his dialogues is fundamentally necessary; in fact, both perspectives create interpretive difficulties by increasing the amount of choices an interpreter has to make with each successive exception to their rules. The alternative requires only the assumption that Plato's prose belongs somewhere in the interdisciplinary space between poetry—epic, lyric, tragic, and comic—and history. Thus, Plato was creating a new genre, dialogue, which combined poetry and history.

Attempting to interpret Plato without accepting any preconceived notions about his purpose is problematic due to the unlimited possibilities. This lack of focus can be minimized by considering his place in antiquity; Plato's dialogues must be considered within their historical context: written after the Peloponnesian War in an Athens already versed in Euripides' tragedy and Aristophanes' comedy. One can begin to interpret and accept the artistry in Plato's dialogues by considering Thucydides and the tragic and comic poets. Factual representations were not developed nor necessarily desired and, as Debra Nails points out, "realism" was not yet a realm sought after ("Mouthpiece," 15). The Athenian population and a wider Greek audience would not have been as confused as later philosophers by Plato's use of irony, myth, and inconsistent characterizations.

In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides attempts to claim superiority over poets and chroniclers on account of his attempts at unadulterated authenticity: "We can rest satisfied with having proceeded upon the clearest data, and

having arrived at conclusions as exact as can be expected in matters of such antiquity” (1.21.1). Even with his commitment to historical evidence, Thucydides confirms the argument that antiquity had a reasonably relaxed attitude towards the re-creation of events in his explanation of how he records speeches in his history:

Some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one’s memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said. (1.22.1)

Unlike Thucydides, Plato does not give an explanation about how he creates or re-creates the speeches of Socrates and others—at the Symposium: Aristophanes, Agathon, et al.

The double-narration and comments made by Appollodorus (172C, 178A) and Aristodemus (178A, 180C, 223D) about the questionable reliability of the details make it clear within the story that he does not claim the historical accuracy that Thucydides attempts in his history. In Plato’s time the intention to provide accurate texts was still an elusive goal that could not be attained without drawing the eventual line between what we refer to as “objective” or “subjective” (Hanson xvi). By remaining elusive in his dialogues, Plato avoids making any statement about how much authenticity he attempts to uphold in each of the conversations he creates.

When even history writers create what seems likely within the story they are telling, Plato’s willingness to make up speeches for historical characters is not surprising. Even when his characters claim accuracy—like when Apollodorus claims he “checked part of [the] story with Socrates” (173B)—they can more readily be compared to those of Tragedy and Comedy. Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides developed characters from epic and myth who were sometimes consistent with and other times contradictions of

their traditional characterizations. The dramatic poets in fifth-century Athens did not always remain faithful to Homer or any one version of a myth, and each play became a new opportunity to explore the story from a different angle or with an added piece of information. In Comedy, Aristophanes exposed these new angles of the myths, particularly Euripides' tragedies, through parody. He and other comedians like Eupolis and Kratinos also caricatured actual persons; these people were given the name *komodoumenoi*, "those made fun of in comedy" (Storey and Allen 193) and the most famous of them include Cleon, Euripides, and Socrates. The theater's use of historical and mythical characters with changing persona was not unfamiliar to Plato who references and quotes both tragedy and comedy throughout his dialogues, including Eupolis (174B; Woodruff 3 n.2) and Aristophanes in *Symposium* (221B).

Plato's allusions to *Clouds* in *Symposium* and *Apology* (19C) considered together provide an occasion for analyzing him as a literary artist whose characters can have changing persona controlled by the time, place, and circumstance of each specific literary creation. P<sub>a</sub>socrates (the character Socrates in *Apology*) brings up Aristophanes' *Clouds* in Plato's *Apology* whereas Alcibiades makes the reference in Plato's *Symposium*. P<sub>a</sub>socrates' reference to Aristophanes is defensive; he claims he has to clear up the false accusations against him because Aristophanes and other comic poets convinced audiences that P<sub>a</sub>socrates studied and taught others about "things in the sky and below the earth" (19C). P<sub>a</sub>socrates address the jurors: "You have seen this yourself in the comedy of Aristophanes, a Socrates swinging about there, saying he was walking on air and talking a lot of other nonsense about things of which I know nothing at all" (19C).

Yet, on his deathbed in Plato's *Phaedo* P<sub>d</sub>socrates (the character Socrates in *Phaedo*)

does claim to have studied these things:

When I was a young man I was wonderfully keen on that wisdom which they call natural science, for I thought it splendid to know the causes of everything.... As I investigated how these things perish and what happens to things in the sky and on the earth, finally I became convinced that I have no natural aptitude at all for that kind of investigation. (96A-C)

P<sub>a</sub>socrates' claim in *Apology* that he knows nothing about these things seems consistent with P<sub>d</sub>socrates claim in *Phaedo* that he left that type of thinking because it was so confusing, but Psocrates accepts and discusses the subject in each dialogue in a distinct way. The developmentalist approach proposes that *Phaedo* was written much later, and considers *Apology* a more accurate account of Asocrates' own words since it was written much earlier. This approach concludes that Plato elaborates his own views through P<sub>d</sub>socrates in *Phaedo*. Without making any claims about which dialogue was written first or which contains a more accurate account of Asocrates' voice, the difference can instead be allotted to the setting of each dialogue and the characters to whom Psocrates speaks.

In *Phaedo*, P<sub>d</sub>socrates makes the reference in an attempt to help Cebes find a way to prove that the soul's immortality; this proof makes up part of P<sub>d</sub>socrates' deathbed conversations about why he has taken up transcribing fables and writing poetry in his last days. The reader gets the story through Phaedo who heard the conversation and repeats it to a group of people who eagerly ask for an account of P<sub>d</sub>socrates' last moments. In *Apology* the discourse is not narrated, but recorded as if the reader were a spectator on the date of P<sub>a</sub>socrates' trial; P<sub>a</sub>socrates makes the comment in defense of himself against the charges he says the comedians would have written up "if they were my actual prosecutors" (19B). The comedians, though not the actual prosecutors, had created a

strong suggestion that influenced Meletus and the rest who charged Asocrates. The story-like voice (“When I was young”) in *Phaedo* represents what can be expected of a narrated story about a last conversation among friends and differs from the defensive voice in *Apology* (“You have seen this yourself”). When juxtaposed, there is an apparent difference between these two voices of Psocrates, but the shift does not have to be attributed to Plato’s development. Rather, the different settings and themes are enough to account for the slightly different characterizations.

With this capacity for different perspectives in mind, consider Alcibiades’ use of a line from *Clouds* in *Symposium*. Plato writes one character, Alcibiades, quoting another character’s, Aristophanes’, description of a third character, Psocrates. Plato’s drunken Alcibiades describes Psocrates’ retreat from battle amidst frantically dispersing soldiers: “But when I looked again I couldn’t get your words, Aristophanes, out of my mind: in the midst of battle he was making his way exactly as he does around town, ‘...with swagg’ring gait and roving eye.’ He was observing everything quite calmly” (221B). Alcibiades quotes Aristophanes’ words as written in *Clouds* when the cloud chorus of deities addresses Socrates asking to be told what to do: “For we wouldn’t listen to anyone else of those who are now sophists-of-the-things-aloft except for Prodicus: to him because of his wisdom and judgment, to you because you swagger in the streets and cast your eyes from side to side, and barefooted you endure many evils” (362). Plato admits quoting Aristophanes since Alcibiades credits Aristophanes. By quoting Aristophanes, or any other comic or tragic poet, within his own literary creations, Plato shows his understanding of how characterizations within the theater work.

Aristophanes used some specific attributes and activities of Socrates in a caricature of sophists in general. Socrates is not the only historical character he used for representation of a type or group in order to make comic commentary on both the general mindset and the specific individual. His attacks on Kleon (*Acharnians* and *Wasps*) were personal and part of a stronger political statement; his attacks on Euripides (*Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazousai*, and *Frogs*) were specific parodies of scenes from Euripides' tragedies and part of a larger comment about Tragedy; his attacks on Cratinus' were specific to Cratinus' lifestyle and part of comic references to Comedy (*Knights* and *Frogs*), or meta-Comedy. Cratinus's *Pytine* is a self-referential comic response to Aristophanes' attack. As evidenced by Plato's use of specific lines from Aristophanes' early plays, he was aware of Aristophanes' early works. Since Aristophanic comedies continue until after Socrates' death, and Plato includes Aristophanes in *Symposium*, Plato was in conversation with Comedy's use of specific characterizations and understood the power of caricature.

Tragedy also told specific stories in order for the audience to assess larger concerns, but with re-imagined mythical characterizations instead of caricatures of current leadership. Produced just after the Athenians destroyed Milos around the same time as the dramatic date of *Symposium*, Euripides' *Trojan Women* tells the sorrows of women and children after the fall of Troy. In tragedy, the mythical characters take on different persona and the entire myth can be rewritten to elicit different sympathies. This variance from text to text is exemplified by a comparison of the character Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Women* and his *Helen*, both of 412. In *Helen*, there was a ghost-Helen in Troy and thus Helen, who lived the entire time in Egypt, could not be blamed for the

Trojan War; in *Trojan Women* Helen actually remains in Troy during the war. The tragic poets are not consistent in their characterizations; therefore, the audience is not always convinced by the same characters in a corpus of works. Plato follows this tradition and does not require consistency among his characters. P\_socrates' arguments are sometimes solid and sometimes fallacious. P\_socrates sometimes enters into a genuine dialogue, sometimes speaks to or within a group, and sometimes hears others speaking to him; these changes in scenario must be considered in any attempt to interpret Plato's purpose in each dialogue.

In the *Symposium*, P\_socrates attends a party. He is one of many historical characters present who are all given voices for the evening by Plato. The potential that a somewhat similar celebration of Agathon's victory at the Lenaia actually occurred does not detract from the claim that Plato's creation is a fiction. Plato was in his youth when Agathon celebrated his first win and would have, at the very least, had to re-create speeches in the way that Thucydides admits doing in order to record the evening's events. The *Symposium* is not only a re-telling or imaginative telling of events. The Dionysian festivities that contextualize Plato's narrated story about love are evidence that Plato attempted to do more than recreate an historical event. Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, and P\_socrates give speeches in a competition, or series of *agons*, in praise of love. Alcibiades' speech turns the competition into praise of P\_socrates in a mix of genuine and antagonistic flattery about which P\_socrates says, "we've seen through your little satyr play" (222D). The speeches are all given in the context of a drinking party at which Agathon tells P\_socrates, "Dionysus will soon enough be the judge of our claims to wisdom" (176A). References to Dionysus, the god



of wine and drunkenness and patron god of drama who was celebrated at the theatrical festivals (the Lenaia and City Dionysia) heightens the theatrical atmosphere begun by Apollodorus in his narrated prologue and continued by Aristodemus' description of how he ended up with P<sub>s</sub>ocrates for the evening. Laughter and applause occur at the symposium within Plato's *Symposium* such that one cannot avoid the correlation to the collective entertainment of the theater: guests applaud for the speeches of Agathon and P<sub>s</sub>ocrates (198C; 212C) and laugh at Alcibiades' entrance and his speech (213A; 222C). Plato's *Symposium* is, in Diskin Clay's words, "a tragic-comedy": "a new form of philosophical drama which, in the object of its imitation, comprehends and transcends both tragedy and comedy" (249). Plato not only imitated the techniques of drama, but used them to produce the *Symposium*.

Claims that Plato thought poets had no intellect (Ion 534B), threw them out of his Republic (Republic 607B), and ranked their souls sixth just barely above manual labor (Phaedrus 248E) do not discount Plato's potential willingness to use their techniques; on the contrary, the argument can be made that if he saw poets as lesser artists not aware of their potential to lead or mislead, he would have felt more capable than they of using their techniques and would have entered into correcting their misuse of them. It cannot be disputed that Plato wrote an array of dialogues amongst a wide variety of characters each in a unique setting consisting of both place and time; thus he engaged in activities quite similar to the poets' writing. One anecdote claims that he first aspired to be a tragic poet: "When he was about to compete for the prize with a tragedy, he listened to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysus, and then consigned his poems to the flames" (Laertius 3.5). The truth of the anecdote is not as important as its circulation long enough for

Diogenes Laertius to record it which establishes antiquity's acceptance of the idea that Plato was well-aware of the mechanics of tragedy. Plutarch's comments in his introduction to his life of Alexander expound the importance of this sort of anecdote in antiquity: "[O]ften, in fact, a casual action, the odd phrase, or a jest reveals character better than battles involving thousands upon thousands of lives, etc..." (1). The tale of Plato's rejection of his own dramatic work represents what Plato probably recognized as the disappointing, false divide between acquiring knowledge and story telling.

P\_socrates' attempt at the end of *Symposium* to convince the poets that "authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy" (223D) comments on combining theatrical genres, and with his complete works Plato makes the statement that the best seeker of wisdom, which would come to be known as a philosopher, should be capable of composing more than just both genres of theater, but also examples of rhetoric and sophistic argument, political commentary, history, legal argument, epic, and myth. Such a connoisseur would compose a variety of stories with embedded examples of several types of disciplines. These would expose his capacity for understanding the range of methods by which ideas are discovered and his awareness of the subtle ironies and clear contradictions between disciplines and within genres. The collection of works would provide an informative journey through experiences of each method while exposing the inherent contradictions in any generalized attempt to abstract a singular preferred path to truth for all time, place, and circumstance.

That Plato's dialogues are sometimes contradictory, often ironic, and always unique only perplexes those who seek some comprehensive program or linear progression, and then go about dividing them into groups and making assumptions about

how to locate the author's voice that require complicated conjectures about Plato's theories and speculation about the syntax of the dialogues. Therefore, the dialogues can be considered individually as pieces of creative literature and collectively as a group of literary works by a philosopher; this interpretation succeeds if, and only if, literature receives recognition as a philosophical means of encouraging a reader or audience to deal with the pursuit of excellence, or the pursuit of the good.

The call to active participation that initiates philosophical responses is not equally as apparent in all literature. Further, the philosophical intentions of a piece of literature are not always headed by the audience. An author who intends to encourage an active response must consider the most effective means of appealing to their audience. Luc Brisson has developed a convincing argument that Plato developed his dialogue format because it best suited the educational response he intended his writing to elicit. Arguing that Plato introduces the terms philosophy and philosopher, Brisson reiterates that Plato did not set out to write doctrines within a philosophical system. Tragedy and comedy were well-defined terms during Plato's time, as were epic and lyric poetry. There were also medical writers and those who attempted to describe events in political history or other memorable moments. Plato fused several genres by creating his literary fictions. He used the dramatic framework and development of characters from epic and theater in stories that engage reason.

The Athenian theater was not suited to Plato's purposes because of the distinct lines between tragedy and comedy. Euripides and Aristophanes were radical in their widening of the boundaries of their respective divisions, but neither forged the way for instructive stories that engaged comic and tragic notions in an expectation that the

audience's efforts to understand would enlighten them. The structure of each drama was intended to lead the audience to consensus and, though Euripides challenged the expectation that seemingly unimportant or lower class characters could present the best ideas, the dominant "teaching" of the drama was expected to be a collective response to the major action. There was little expectation that the audience be anything other than spectators. This passivity, Scott Rubarth argues, is not possible for Plato's audience because of the role of Socratic irony as a technology that Plato brings into existence (108-9). He points out that the audience cannot simply enjoy the comic or tragic effects of Socrates' claim to ignorance because it provokes the audience to ask whether or not he is being genuine or sincere at every turn. As a result, the Platonic dialogue "promotes perplexity, participation, and a tradition of active engagement and doctrinal skepticism;" it requires that the audience actively participate in philosophy (109).

What literary forms are available to the twenty-first century author who intends to inspire active participation in an audience? Arguments can be made for a variety of styles including poetry, short-stories, novels, television and films, and all of compound representatives of these like filmic poems and composite novels. The claim could even be made that written dialogues are still the most provocative philosophical texts. Surely there are unnoticed attempts to encourage discourse in much of what we read each day. In an image and experience oriented era, it is hardly surprising that the philosophical intentions of written texts are sometimes overlooked. There are a number of methods of requiring an audience to participate in interpretation; some of the best of those methods belong to contemporary theater. The playwright, like Plato, does not speak directly to the audience. The arguments and claims made in a drama are made by characters within the

story or external narrators. Theatrical audiences are expected to consider the circumstances of the events on stage when attempting to decipher what motivates any particular perspective. Plato's dialogues required the audience to ask questions and critically assess each situation, not just the ideas that were expounded within the situation. Likewise, an audience of a play must consider the motivating factors that inspire specific character's ideas. The genre distinctions of ancient tragedy and comedy no longer limit the emotional or instructional trajectory of drama, and the philosophical inquiries that can be explored on the contemporary stage are limitless.

Plato's creative fictions, his literary works that require the audience to participate in philosophical inquiry, lend themselves to the contemporary stage. By choosing to attend a play instead of a film, theater audience members intentionally enter into a more intimate experience of a story. The live performance becomes a shared experience for the audience as a whole, but particularly for those in attendance together. This shared experience instigates a continued conversation. Conversations about the ideas presented in a play are almost expected as the aftereffect of the show. Some may have this same philosophical experience after viewing a film or television show, but mass media as such is often viewed in solitude or without critical comment from a group. Novels are also places where there may be a conversation to have with the text, its author, and others who have read the text, but often people read alone and never encounter an opportunity to converse about what they read. The non-individual act of seeing a play lends itself to philosophical discourse. The event oriented format of theater requires that the audience intend to attend in the first place. Within a dedicated time and space the audience finds little reason to resist the advances of an incessant call to active participation. Plato

imbeds this incessant call throughout his work. The *Symposium*, with its polyphonic cast and collection of narrative strategies, is a Platonic dialogue intended to be discussed, and the best way to create the opportunity for discussion is to have the story and resulting philosophies portrayed to a group on stage such that no one specific character acts as the author's voice. Instead, the play as a whole, with all its confusion about the role and nature of love for human growth or perfection, suffices as the author's voice.

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