

The Frame of the *Phaedo*

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IN THE 1990S Diskin Clay and William Johnson made a new case for the significance of the frame or dramatic setting, in Phlius and Athens, of the philosophical discussion represented in the *Phaedo*.¹ They showed that it is one of four “complex” frames in the Platonic corpus; that it prefigures and reflects aspects of the philosophical debate (so Clay); and (in Johnson’s case) that it marks a gap between the “actual experience of dialectic [...] and our experience as readers,” a gap which figures the significant (for Plato/Socrates) gap “between the act of understanding in the material world and the true Understanding of the Ideal world” (591).² This, Johnson added, does not invalidate previous readings of the frame as a means to suggest temporal distance, to underline the fictive aspects of the *Phaedo*, or as an expression of Plato’s “playfulness”; but it makes them seem (at least) “unsatisfactory.”³

Since the turn of the century, there has been a turn to ritual.

¹ Following Friedländer, D. Clay, “Plato’s First Words,” *YCS* 29 (1992) 113–129, at 119–120 n.16, notes that the frames of certain dialogues have been seen as integral to their ‘philosophy’ (i.e., as more than scene-setting) since at least the time of Proclus (fifth cent.). W. A. Johnson, “Dramatic Frame and Philosophic Idea in Plato,” *AJP* 119 (1998) 577–598.

² The other “complex” frames are those of *Symp.*, *Pm.*, and *Th.* For Clay, the frame anticipates the dialectic of opposites (but see n.24 below) and sets the scene for the claim that death is a purification and release from the contagion of the body. For Johnson, the main purpose of the frame is to undermine the authority of the text and thus prevent the reader from regarding it as definitive (historically or philosophically).

³ See Johnson, *AJP* 119 (1998) 588–589 with n.14, for references to earlier readings.

Stephen White has argued, and Robin Waterfield has implied, that the frame establishes a relationship between the *Phaedo* and the festival of the Thargelia.⁴ The Thargelia, they believe, is the “present feast” of Apollo mentioned at *Phaedo* 61B2–3;⁵ and an association, actual or subsequently constructed, between the festival and Socrates’ death is indicated by the fact that later Platonists commemorated its first day, 6 Thargelion, as Socrates’ ‘birthday’ (Plut. *Quaest.conv.* 717B, cf. Diog. Laert. 2.44).⁶ It was on that day that, as part of the purification for the festival, two *pharmakoi* were expelled from Athens; and it is in relation to that ritual that White and Waterfield think Socrates’ willing death is to be interpreted. For Waterfield, Socrates is depicted as a votary of the god who accepts death for the good of the city, albeit in

⁴ S. A. White, “Socrates at Colonus,” in N. D. Smith et al. (eds.), *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy* (Oxford 2000) 151–175; R. Waterfield, “Xenophon on Socrates’ Trial and Death,” in F. Hobden et al. (eds.), *Xenophon: Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry* (Leiden 2012) 269–305.

⁵ White, in *Reason and Religion* 156–168. The reference to a “present feast” (ἡ παρούσα θυσία) is generally compared with *Ti.* 27E3 and taken to refer to the sacred embassy—i.e., regarded as a variation on the way it is described a few lines earlier (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἑορτή, 61A5). But as Plato appears to distinguish between ἑορτή and θυσία (cf. *Resp.* 459E6–460A1; *Leg.* 809D1–4, 816C1–D2, 828A1–4, 835D6–E2, 829B7–C1; *Ion* 535D1–5; *Symp.* 197D1–3), it may refer to a separate sacrifice to, or rite for, Apollo celebrated on the day of Socrates’ death. For reasons which will become clear, I am tempted to suggest that it could be the Pyanopsia, held on 7 Pyanopsion (*IG II²* 1363.7, Harp. s.v.), which may also have been the date of the Oschophoria (but I should emphasize that my wider argument does not depend on the actual date either of the Oschophoria or of Socrates’ death).

⁶ White, in *Reason and Religion* 155, claims that Socrates’ trial took place on 7 Mounichion, and suggests that 6 Thargelion may have been the day on which he died. His view that the Delphinia (the commemoration of Theseus’ departure for Crete, held on 6 Mounichion) coincided with the dispatch of the sacred embassy to Delos is open to question: see R. Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford 2005) 82 n.11. To put Socrates’ death at or around 6 Thargelion, White also depends heavily on Xenophon’s claim that it was 30 days before the embassy returned to Athens (*Mem.* 4.8.2).

despair at the irretrievable collapse of his political aspirations.⁷ For White, Socrates' acquiescence in his 'expulsion' serves as an aetiological myth for Plato's retreat from the city and the establishment of the Academy in the suburbs. In addition, he suggests that at the close of the *Phaedo* Socrates, like Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, figures as the future recipient of quasi-heroic honours that were (by the date of the *Phaedo*) part of an annual commemoration observed by his surviving companions and philosophical heirs.⁸

I share the view that, through the frame, Plato represents Socrates' decision to accept the sentence of the court as beneficial for Athens. I am also convinced that it aligns Socrates' death with the ritual calendar of the city. And my aim here is to draw attention to another aspect of this nexus by suggesting that the frame also recalls the distinctive ritual practices of the *Oschophoria*; and that it is in terms of that festival's emotional ambivalence that the reader is invited to interpret the *Phaedo*'s unusual atmosphere. In what follows, I shall show that elements of the *Oschophoria* are reflected in the language and imagery of the frame, which, like Clay and Johnson, I take to have an important bearing on the philosophical discussion. I conclude by reviewing the advantages an implied association with the *Oschophoria* may have had from Plato's perspective.⁹

The Oschophoria

I begin with a summary of the main elements of the *Oschophoria* that relies heavily on Robert Parker and Katharina Waldner.¹⁰ The festival may have been celebrated on 6 or 7

⁷ Waterfield, in *Xenophon: Ethical Principles* 300–301.

⁸ White, in *Reason and Religion* 161–168.

⁹ All quotations from, and references to, Plato are taken from the OCT series. Except in one instance (detailed below), all translations from the *Phaedo* are taken from D. Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford 1975).

¹⁰ Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 211–217; K. Waldner, *Geburt und Hochzeit des Kriegers: Geschlechterdifferenz und Initiation im Mythos und Ritual der griechischen Polis* (Berlin/New York 2000) 102–116. Most of what we know about the *Oschophoria* is derived from Plutarch (*Thes.* 22.1–4, 23.2–5) and Proclus *Chrest.* ap.

Pyanopsion, and its central act was a procession from an unspecified shrine of Dionysus to the shrine of Athena Skiras at Phalerum.¹¹ This was led by two boys dressed (or at least, by Plutarch's time, taken to be dressed) as girls, who carried vine-boughs heavy with grapes from which their formal title—*Oschophoroi*—derived.¹² At Phalerum, the *Oschophoroi*, the *Deiphophoroi* (“Dinner-bearers”), and a herald assisted at a sacrifice at which the libations were greeted with an unusual cry that mixed mourning with celebration, and for which the herald's staff (rather than his head) was crowned.¹³ At some point, the *Deiphophoroi* told “stories” (*muthoi*) and there was also—almost certainly at Phalerum—a race between ephebes. According to Proclus, they competed as representatives of their tribes, and the winner of the race was awarded a drink composed of five ingredients known as the *pentaploa*.¹⁴ Either in the course of the procession

Phot. *Bibl.* cod. 239 (322a). For discussions see L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 142–147; H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London 1977) 77–81; E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary* (Madison 1983) 89–92; N. Robertson, *Festivals and Legends: The Formation of Greek Cities in the Light of Public Ritual* (Toronto 1992) 120–133.

¹¹ For scepticism about the date of the festival see R. Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford 1996) 315–316 with n.85.

¹² Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 209–210 and 217, largely accepts the view that the transvestism reflects the “law of symmetrical inversion” associated with the *ephebeia*. Contrast O. Pilz, “The Performative Aspect of Greek Ritual: The Case of the Athenian Oschophoria,” in M. Haysom et al. (eds.), *Current Approaches to Religion in Ancient Greece* (Stockholm 2011) 151–167, at 162; Waldner, *Geburt und Hochzeit des Kriegers* 142–145.

¹³ Confirmation of these key participants and details of some others, for the most part provided by the *genos* of the Salaminioi, are provided by an arbitration between two branches of the clan: Rhodes/Osborne, *GHI* 37.

¹⁴ Procl. ap. Phot. cod. 239 (322a.27–30). For the race and the *pentaploa*, which was mixed from olive oil, wine, honey, cheese, and barley, see also Aristodemus (*FGrHist* 383 F 9) and Heliodorus (A. Hilgard, *Scholia in Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam*, *GG* I.3 450.21–24). Schol. Nic. *Alex.* 109a almost certainly in error makes the *Oschophoroi* participants in a race run along what appears to be the same route as the procession. Though it is not known

or in the aftermath of the race, when there may have been a *kōmos* as the victor was escorted back to Athens, special songs known as *oschophorika* were performed. There is also evidence to suggest that there may have been some (naked) dancing.¹⁵

For Plutarch, who discusses the festival in his *Life of Theseus*, many of its distinctive features can be traced back to the events of the hero's expedition to Crete (*Thes.* 22.1–4).¹⁶ The unusual dress of the *Oschophoroi* is said to be due to Theseus' decision to include two young men disguised as girls among the “twice seven” (*Phd.* 58A11),¹⁷ and the tales told by the *Deipnophoroi* recall the *muthoi* with which the youngsters' mothers sought to reassure them as they waited to depart. At the sacrifice at Phalerum, the ambivalent tone of the libations is said to derive from the citizens' mixed emotions at the return from Crete, joy at Theseus' success tempered by grief for the death of Aegeus.¹⁸

whether ephebes competed as individuals or in teams, the *pentaploa* was apparently awarded to a single victor: Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 213 with n.95.

¹⁵ Evidence for the songs includes a fragmentary papyrus which reveals that Pindar composed as least one *oschophorikon* (*P.Oxy.* XXVI 2451.B fr.17.6 = Pind. fr.6c S.-M.). *Contra* I. Rutherford and J. Irvine, “The Race in the Athenian Oschophoria and an Oschophoricon by Pindar,” *ZPE* 72 (1988) 43–51, whose *oschophorikon* is an epinician for the ephebic victor, Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 212, sees it as a song for the chorus which accompanied the procession to Phalerum. For the dances see Athen. 631B.

¹⁶ C. B. R. Pelling, “Making Myth Look like History: Plato in Plutarch's *Theseus-Romulus*,” in A. Pérez Jiménez et al. (eds.), *Plutarcho, Platón y Aristóteles* (Madrid 1999) 431–443, shows that there is an engagement with the *Phd.* in the *Thes.-Rom.* and its *synkrisis*, and notes a verbal reminiscence in the chapter which contains the bulk of the information on the Oschophoria (Plut. *Thes.* 23.1, Pl. *Phd.* 58A10–B1). This may imply that Plutarch (and other Platonists?) felt that the Theseus myth had a particular significance for, or link with, Plato's representation of Socrates' death.

¹⁷ For δὶς ἑπτὰ Gallop prefers “seven pairs.”

¹⁸ Emotional ambivalence is not unique to the Oschophoria. It is also associated with the Anthesteria: Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 312–313. But it is only at the Oschophoria that this ambivalence is associated with “story-telling”; and as Parker notes, the “story-telling” of the Oschophoria is perhaps unique in Greek heortology.

Theseus and the Phaedo

Few would dispute that Plato hints at a connection between Socrates' death and the Theseus myth as it was known and commemorated in Athens. In the *Crito* (43C4–44B6) and the *Phaedo* (58A1–C5), Socrates' death is delayed by the departure of the sacred embassy to Delos, an annual event supposed to honour a vow Theseus made to Apollo in return for the success of the Cretan expedition.¹⁹ Irrespective of the actual dates on which the embassy set out and returned in 399, its role in delaying and then determining the point at which Socrates died ensures that the expedition and, I believe, its place in Athenian religious practice are firmly in mind as the dialogue gets underway. This has, of course, encouraged readings of the *Phaedo* in terms of Theseus' clash with the Minotaur.²⁰ In contrast, I suggest that the association is with the wider ritual commemoration of the expedition, and that Socrates is aligned with actors in the ritual (as well as figures in the myth) rather than with Theseus in particular.

The libations

In Plutarch's narrative, on their return from Crete Theseus and his pilot forget to change their black sails for white. Aegeus, mistakenly believing his son is dead, throws himself to his death from the height from which he sights the ship (*Thes.* 22.1). Theseus arrives and, in ignorance of his father's fate, sets about the sacrifices he had promised to "the gods at Phalerum" on his departure. A herald, sent to report the expedition's safe return, finds the citizens torn between joy and grief. He accepts garlands from them, which he twines about his staff, and returns to the seashore. After waiting for Theseus to complete the libations for

¹⁹ Socrates' death is delayed because to ensure the city's purity all state executions were suspended during the period of the embassy (*Phd.* 58B4–C2).

²⁰ Those who see an association with Theseus suggest that Socrates is treated as an heroic figure engaged in slaying the Minotaur that is the "fear of death": so K. Dorter, *Plato's Phaedo: An Interpretation* (Toronto 1982) 9; R. Burger, *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth* (New Haven 1984) 20.

the sacrifice, the herald breaks the news of Aegeus' death (22.2–4):²¹

And it is because of this, they say, that even today it is not the herald that is crowned at the Oschophoria, but his staff, and that those who attend the libations make the response: “Eleleu! Iou! Iou!” the first part of which is the cry usually made by those making libations and by the triumphant, while the second is that of shock and consternation.

The paradox expressed in this ritual cry, and the ambivalent atmosphere of the commemoration as a whole, are invoked by Plato as emblematic of the spirit in which the debate reported in the *Phaedo* was conducted.²² It is what lies behind the repeated emphasis, in the frame, on the close relationship between pleasure and pain. It informs the rapid alternation between confidence and consternation in the course of the philosophical debate. And it is echoed in the emotions depicted in the concluding scene, where Plato, through the companions' reactions, models the ideal response to the moment when Socrates drinks the hemlock.²³

But as pleasure, pain, and their inter-relationship also feature in other dialogues, it is important, first, to establish that the *Phaedo*'s paradox is not merely an echo of ideas developed elsewhere. In the context of the rest of the dialogue, this is implied by its discrepancy with Socrates' anti-hedonism (stronger here than in any other dialogue: e.g., 64D2–69E4) and with the argument from opposites (70C4–72E1).²⁴ And from a wider

²¹ All translations of Plut. *Thes.* are mine, but based on B. Perrin (Loeb).

²² On the festival's ambivalence see P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter* (Baltimore 1986) 114; cf. P. Roussel, “Les chlamydes noires des éphèbes athéniens,” *REA* 43 (1941) 163–165.

²³ The audience in Phlius, anonymous save for Echeocrates, play an important role in this respect. They constitute an accommodating second circle of ‘spectators’ which, over the course of the dialogue, increasingly echoes and overlaps with the first circle in the prison. The reader who starts from a position equivalent to that of the second circle can thus be encouraged to move ever closer (in imagination) to that of the first.

²⁴ D. Frede, “Disintegration and Restoration: Pleasure and Pain in Plato's

perspective, it appears not—at least, as initially stated—to raise the issue of good and bad (or a hierarchy of) pleasures addressed in the *Gorgias* (495E1–499B8), *Republic* (580D2–587A2), and *Philebus* (44A1–50E2);²⁵ or of pleasure and pain as “mindless” advisors, as in *Laws* (644C4–D3).²⁶ Furthermore, even where, as here, mingled or shared pleasure and pain are regarded primarily as emotions, they are not featured so prominently, or in a way so evidently programmatic.²⁷

The pleasure-pain paradox is, from the start, associated with the experience of witnessing Socrates’ final hours. Phaedo takes care to explain that what he felt was not the normal pity at the death of a close friend (since he was confident that Socrates would fare well after death), nor pleasure at being occupied in the normal business (for Socrates’ circle) of philosophy (58E1–59A5).²⁸ Rather (59A5–7):

Philebus,” in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge 1992) 425–463, at 435. It clearly also differs from the hedonism of *Prt.* (351B3–356C3, 358A5–C3). Socrates’ comments on pleasure-pain (60B3–C7) can, but need not (Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* ad 59A1–4), be logically reconciled with Phaedo’s at 59A1–8. Following J. Burnet, *Plato’s Phaedo* (Oxford 1911) ad 60B7, attempts are sometimes made to link Socrates’ comments on pleasure-pain (loosely) with the argument from opposites. But see C. J. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* (Cambridge 1993) ad 60B5; R. Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon* (Gembloux 1969–75) I 32–33; Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* 75–78.

²⁵ Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* ad 60B4, suggests that ideas of this kind *almost* explain Socrates’ comments on pleasure-pain.

²⁶ S. S. Meyer, “Pleasure, Pain, and ‘Anticipation’ in Plato’s *Laws*, Book I,” in R. Patterson et al. (eds.), *Presocratics and Plato: Festschrift in Honor of Charles Kahn* (Las Vegas 2012) 311–328, argues that the *Laws* passage is, in fact, close to the position in the *Republic*.

²⁷ Contrast, e.g., *Resp.* 462B4–7, *Leg.* 793A2–4, *Ti.* 42A6–7.

²⁸ καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος. οὔτε γὰρ ὡς θανάτω παρόντα με ἀνδρὸς ἐπιτηδείου ἔλεος εἰσήει· εὐδαίμων γὰρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου καὶ τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα, ὥστε μοι ἐκεῖνον παρίστασθαι μὴδ’ εἰς Ἄιδου ἰόντα ἄνευ θείας μοίρας ἰέναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκεῖσε ἀφικόμενον εὖ πράξειν εἴπερ τις πώποτε καὶ ἄλλος. διὰ δὴ ταῦτα οὐδὲν πάνυ μοι ἔλεινόν εἰσήει, ὡς εἰκὸς ἂν δόξειεν εἶναι

ἀτεχνῶς ἄτοπόν τί μοι πάθος παρῆν καὶ τις ἀήθης κρᾶσις ἀπὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς συγκεκραμένη ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς λύπης [...]

a simply extraordinary feeling was upon me, a sort of strange mixture of pleasure and pain combined [...]²⁹

Everyone, Phaedo says, was similarly affected, laughing and weeping alternately (59A8–B1). Soon afterwards, almost as soon as the internal narrative gets underway, Socrates himself invokes the pleasure-pain paradox, pondering the intimate connection between the two emotions and suggesting the kind of fable (*muthos*, 60C2) Aesop might have made of it (60B1–C5). He links it firmly with his own situation by explaining that his thoughts are prompted by the relief of having his leg released from its fetter (60C5–7), and thus confirms that pleasure-pain is the key in which his final discussion is conducted and should be construed.

Much later, as Socrates concludes his proof that the soul exists after death, pleasure and pain (along with desire and fear) are recalled when they are described as the “rivets” that pin the soul to the body (83B4–84A6, with the image at 83D4–7).³⁰ Almost immediately—i.e., as soon as Simmias and Cebes have stated their objections—the narrative depicts a collapse of confidence in the preliminary conclusions of the discussion. Everyone present, Phaedo reports, now doubted what had been agreed

παρόντι πένθει, οὔτε αὖ ἡδονῆ ὡς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἡμῶν ὄντων ὡςπερ εἰώθειμεν—καὶ γὰρ οἱ λόγοι τοιοῦτοί τινες ἦσαν— [...]

²⁹ At *Phlb.* 44A1–50E2 too (especially 47C3–5 and 50B1–4) Plato emphasizes a mixture of pleasure and pain. But *pace* M. Dixsaut, *Platon: Phédon* (Paris 1991) 72–73 and 317, the focus there (ultimately, true/pure philosophical pleasures and their relation to the highest good) is very different: see Frede, in *The Cambridge Companion* 425–463.

³⁰ At 85B6–7 the OCT prints: ἀπέχεται τῶν ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ λυπῶν καὶ φόβων καθ’ ὅσον δύναται. In other recent editions καὶ φόβων is often bracketed, in some cases along with the phrase ἢ λυπηθῆ in the following clause (83B7–9), on the grounds that their inclusion reflects editorial or scholiastic concern that the two clauses should be absolutely symmetrical. Where καὶ φόβων is retained as well as (or instead of) ἢ λυπηθῆ, the pleasure/desire – pain/fear polarity is a little more evident, and an *abab* sequence (pleasure, desire, pain, fear) in the first clause seems as plausibly intended as the chiasmus generated in the second clause if ἢ λυπηθῆ is retained.

and even questioned their own capacity to assess the arguments (88C1–7). In Phlius too, Echecrates adds, the situation in the ‘real’ time of the narrative is the same (88C8–D8).

With the description of Socrates’ response to this sudden reversal, it emerges that the vocabulary of pleasure and pain has been invoked in order to prepare the reader for an echo and transformation of the account Phaedo gave of his emotions at the start (88E5–89A6, and cf. n.28 above):

καὶ μὴν, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες, πολλάκις θαυμάσας Σωκράτη οὐ πάποτε μᾶλλον ἠγάσθην ἢ τότε παραγενόμενος. τὸ μὲν οὖν ἔχειν ὅτι λέγοι ἐκεῖνος ἴσως οὐδὲν ἄτοπον· ἀλλὰ ἔγωγε μάλιστα ἐθαύμασα αὐτοῦ πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτο, ὡς ἠδέως καὶ εὐμενῶς καὶ ἀγαμένως τῶν νεανίσκων τὸν λόγον ἀπεδέξατο, ἔπειτα ἡμῶν ὡς ὀξέως ἦσθετο ὁ πεπόνθεμεν ὑπὸ τῶν λόγων [...]

Well, Echecrates, often as I’ve admired Socrates, I never found him more wonderful than when with him then. That he should have had an answer to give isn’t perhaps surprising; but what I specially admired was, first, the pleasure, kindness and approval with which he received the young men’s argument; next his acuteness in perceiving how their speeches had affected us [...]

The opening echoes καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε θαυμάσια ἔπαθον παραγενόμενος (58E1), but makes Socrates, rather than Phaedo’s emotions, the object of wonder. The ἄτοπὸν τί [...] πάθος Phaedo experienced (59A5) is transformed in the assertion that it was οὐδὲν ἄτοπον that Socrates had a counter-argument. And the manner in which Socrates welcomes Simmias’ and Cebes’ objections recalls the claim, at the start of the dialogue, that Socrates “seemed to me happy [...] both in his manner and his words, so fearlessly and nobly was he meeting his end” (ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα, 58E3–5). Socrates, Phaedo insists, experiences no *pathos* as a result of the objections, indeed is in no way perturbed; but remains fully sensitive to the pain, soon to be figured as the equivalent of being routed in battle, that his companions experience (89a5–8). He demonstrates in miniature that he has moved beyond the pleasure-pain-desire-fear nexus, whilst acknowledging that his audience, internal and external, continue to struggle with the vicissitudes of extreme emotion, as yet only aspiring to follow his example.

In the final scene of the narrative, as he takes the cup of hemlock, Socrates is again entirely composed, immune it seems to pleasure or pain (117B3–6), and keen to pray only that his move to another world will be “happy” (117C1–3). As he drinks, his companions with varying intensity give way to tears (117C5–D6). But in the intervening moment Socrates asks the man who has prepared the poison if it is permitted to use some of it to make a libation (117B6–7). The request is rejected, and the god or gods to whom it would have been made are not named (117B8–C1).³¹ Nevertheless, the aborted libation reminds the reader, at the critical moment, of the atmosphere invoked at the beginning of the dialogue; and emphasizes the association with the festival from which it is derived. It is no accident that immediately afterwards, as he confesses to weeping, Phaedo again recalls his opening statement, insisting that he wept not for Socrates but for himself (117C7–D1).³²

The muthoi

The tales (*muthoi*) told by the *Deipnophoroi* are the second element of the Oschophoria reflected in the *Phaedo*. According to Plutarch, the *Deipnophoroi* accompanied the procession to

³¹ If the libations at the Oschophoria were made in honour of Athena and Dionysus (and perhaps also Apollo and/or Ariadne), they may have been the implied recipients. Interestingly, Waldner, *Geburt und Hochzeit* 174, suspects that the winner of the race at the Oschophoria may have made a libation with part of the *pentaploa*.

³² The prominence of the servant of the Eleven, who conveys the order that Socrates is to drink the hemlock, might in some way reflect the role of the herald at the Oschophoria (in the myth, the bearer both of both good and bad news). Two verbs the servant uses—*παραγγεῖλω* and *ἀγγέλλων* (116C3, 116D1, and cf. 116E3–4)—might hint at the parallel, and the first certainly links back to the formal pronouncement made by the Eleven, which is reported by the “doorkeeper” (who may or may not be the same man): “Λούσι γάρ,” ἔφη, “οἱ ἕνδεκα Σωκράτη καὶ παραγγέλλουσιν ὅπως ἂν τῆδε τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τελευτῶ” (59E6–7). The business of transmitting/announcing important news is in fact emphasized in the opening frame, especially in relation to what has or has not been reported to those in Phlius (57B1, 58A3, and cf. 59E2–3); and this might also give a special resonance to Phaedo’s role in relation to the second circle of spectators (and the *Phaedo*’s readers).

Phalerum and there took part in the sacrifice (*Thest.* 23.4). When or to whom their tales were related is not known. But according to at least one Atthidographer (and more than one source), they played the part of the mothers of the youths and maidens chosen by lot to be offered to the Minotaur. These mothers, it was said, had brought food to sustain their children as they waited to depart (23.4–5):

καὶ μῦθοι λέγονται διὰ τὸ κακέϊνας εὐθυμίας ἕνεκα καὶ παρηγορίας μύθους διεξιέναι τοῖς παισὶ. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν καὶ Δήμων ἰστόρηκεν.

And tales are told because those women also told their children a series of stories to keep their spirits up and to encourage them. Which, moreover, is the explanation that Demon also gives [*FGrHist* 327 F 6].

Like the “tales” told by the *Deipnophoroi*, the *Phaedo*’s extended myth on the nature of the afterlife is intended to reassure. It is a “tale” (*muthos*, 114D8) in which, though not literally true, it is “fitting” to believe, a “spell” that one must repeat to oneself (καὶ χρῆ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὡσπερ ἐπάδειν ἑαυτῷ, 114D6–7) when confronting one’s own mortality (114D1–8, and cf. 115D5–6). But there are other Platonic myths, of course, and further evidence is required if we are to be confident that this one relates to the ritual of the Oschophoria, and that the story-telling of the festival is of wider significance for the dialogue.

Muthoi, “charms” (ἐπωδαί), and children are associated with each other elsewhere in Plato. But they are not elsewhere related to managing the fear of death. Indeed, in the *Republic* “tales” about what happens in Hades induce child-like fear in the dying (330D7–331A1).³³ “Charms” certainly overlap with “tales” in being suitable for teaching children and inspiring them to master “pleasure” (*Leg.* 664B3–7, 840B5–C6):³⁴ i.e., for pre-rational

³³ At *Euthyd.* 289E4–290A4 forensic oratory is negatively characterized as a kind of charm.

³⁴ See also *Leg.* 659D4–E5, 665C2–7, 670E4–671A4, 812C5–7. The *Phaedo* clearly deploys a variation on this theme. Such training can, of course, be

training for adult life.³⁵ But elsewhere, when a “charm” wards off a threat (*Resp.* 608A2–5; here, note, *from* poetry) or is of particular benefit to the soul (*Chrm.* 157A3–5, B1–4), it assists an adolescent or adult, and is aligned with rationality: a situation quite different from the context projected by the imagery of the *Phaedo*, where fear of death is equated with infant terror at τὰ μορμολύκεια (*Phd.* 77E6–8; cf. *Cri.* 46C2–6);³⁶ Socrates’ interlocutors are assimilated to his soon-to-be-orphaned children (*Phd.* 116A7–8; cf. *Cri.* 45C10–d4); and the “charm” seems to retain much of its irrational, magical force.³⁷

The special role of *muthoi* is first signalled in the frame within the frame, immediately after the second treatment of pleasure-pain. Evenus and others, Cebes says, have been enquiring about the tales of Aesop (τοὺς τοῦ Αἰσώπου λόγους, 60D1) that Socrates has been putting into verse, and the hymn he has written to Apollo—literary forms he has never previously attempted. It is “because I was trying to find out the meaning of certain dreams and fulfil a sacred duty” (ἀφοσιούμενος, 60E2), Socrates explains, “in case perhaps it was that kind of art they were ordering me to make” (60E1–3). A recurring dream, we learn, has instructed Socrates to “make art (μουσική) and practise it.” And

ignored: *Grg.* 483E4–484B1.

³⁵ Adults, too, can be persuaded (*Leg.* 837E5–6, and cf. 903A7–B2 and *Phdr.* 267C7–D1), reassured (*Leg.* 944B2–3), and encouraged to pursue particular behaviours (*Leg.* 773D5–E4) by “charms,” which also have quasi-magical curative powers (*Chrm.* 155E5–8, 156D3–6, *Resp.* 426B1–2, *Tht.* 149C9–D3, and cf. 157C7–D2).

³⁶ As M. Patera, “Comment effrayer les enfants: le cas de Mormô/Mormolukê et du *mormolukeion*,” *Kernos* 18 (2005) 371–390, at 374, observes, an adult scared of Mormo is normally a prey to unreal fears; see too her *Figures grecques de l'épouvante de l'antiquité au présent: peurs enfantines et adultes* (Leiden/Boston 2015) 106–144. Plato’s only other reference to the terrors induced by Mormo is at *Grg.* 473D3. [Pl.] *Ax.* 364B4–C1 is, of course, likely to have been modelled on *Cri.* and/or *Phd.*

³⁷ Though charms can be positively positioned between gods and men (*Symp.* 202E7–203A1), they are more often regarded as a means to inflict harm on others (*Leg.* 933A2–5 and D7–E2), sometimes with the gods’ help (*Resp.* 364B6–C5), or as a means to bend the living, the dead, and even the gods to one’s will (*Leg.* 906B3–C2).

though he previously took this as encouragement to engage in philosophy (60E4–61A4), his imprisonment and the delay to his execution have made him wonder if “popular music” (δημώδη μουσικήν, 61A7) is, in fact, intended. Whence his experiments: “as it was safer not to go off before I’d fulfilled a sacred duty” (ἀφοσιώσασθαι, 61A4–B2). “A poet should, if he were really going to be a poet,” Socrates adds, “make tales rather than true stories (μύθους ἀλλ’ οὐ λόγους, 61B4); and being no teller of tales (μυθολογικός, 61B5) myself, I therefore used some I had ready to hand; I knew the tales of Aesop (μύθους [...] τοὺς Αἰσώπου) by heart, and I made verses from the first of these I came across” (61B3–7).

What is important here is the emphasis on religious obligation in combination with the suggestion that the composition of *muthoi*, in particular, may be a sacred duty. Socrates’ attempts at this genre are presented as a new departure, and perhaps even as a new way of understanding the mission entrusted to him by Apollo (cf. *Ap.* 37E3–38A8). The reference to Aesop and his fables ensures that these recent compositions are immediately associated with the pleasure-pain paradox that will inform the ensuing narrative. And we should notice that they are introduced as *logoi* which become *muthoi* when recast in verse.³⁸ For

³⁸ In the second pleasure-pain passage (60C2), and again at the end of this exchange (61B6), Aesop’s “fables” are *muthoi*, though in wider usage (i.e., beyond Plato) they are generally *logoi* (e.g., *Ar. Av.* 651, Hdt. 2.134). This suggests that the preference for *logoi* in this instance (and at 60D1) is significant, that Plato emphasizes that Socrates is engaged with something that goes beyond *logoi*, and that *muthoi* are of particular importance for the *Phd.* As the *muthoi* related by the *Deipnophoroi* might (as ritual elements) have been in verse, the emphasis on poetry (cf. Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* 78; Rowe, *Plato: Phaedo* 120) could be another aspect of the parallel with the Oschophoria. The association would be even stronger if their tales were, or could be regarded as, protective charms: cf. the *muthoi* related in the manner of “charms” by mothers and/or nurses from which babies learn about the gods (*Leg.* 887D2–5). C. Faraone, “Hexametrical Incantations as Oral and Written Phenomena,” in A. H. M. Lardinois et al. (eds.), *Sacred Words: Orality, Literacy and Religion* (Leiden 2011) 191–204, notes that hexametrical ἐπωδαί are regularly associated with midwives and wet-nurses.

this shift prepares the way for some or all of the philosophical *logoi* to follow (i.e., not just the final myth) to be assimilated to *muthoi* with sacred connotations.

Indeed, the wider portrayal of Socrates, quite as much as the dramatic frame, suggests that the entire philosophical debate can be interpreted as a sustained attempt to reassure his companions about death and what will follow it. And this effort is tellingly (for my argument) represented in terms of parental care for children, and ascribed to the exceptional capacity of the unique “charmer” (ἐπωδός), a term closely linked with Socrates (78A1–2, and cf. 114D6–7). The first aspect is clearest at the break in the first half of the philosophical debate, when Simmias and Cebes doubt whether the Recollection Argument proves that the soul will exist after death (77B1–C5). Socrates recognizes that they “seem afraid, like children,” and Cebes takes up the image, asking him to reassure them as if there were “a child inside us, who has fears of that sort. Try to persuade him, then, to stop being afraid of death, as if it were a bogey-man” (τὰ μορμολύκεια, 77D5–E8). The solution, Socrates says, is “to sing spells (ἐπᾶδειν) to him every day [...], till you’ve charmed (ἐξέπῳσητε) him out of it” (77E9–10). And the parent-child context for such encouragement is recalled, at the very end of the narrative, when Socrates’ companions lament their situation “as if we were deprived of a father and would lead the rest of our lives as orphans” (116A7–8).

It will already be clear that the nature of Socrates’ wider philosophical reassurance is linked by the vocabulary of the “charm” to the nature and purpose of the final myth. But the interplay between reassurance, persuasion, and *muthos* extends further. In the same break after the Recollection Argument, Simmias insists that “one needs no little reassuring and convincing (οὐκ ὀλίγησ παραμυθίας δεῖται καὶ πίστεως), that when the man has died, his soul exists, and that it possesses some

power and wisdom.” “Would you like us to speculate (διαμυθολογῶμεν)³⁹ on these very questions...?” is Socrates’ response (70B2–7). And again, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates ruefully suspects that he has not succeeded in convincing Crito that his dead body will not be “Socrates”: “this, I think, I’m putting to him in vain, while comforting (παραμυθούμενος) you and myself alike” (115C6–D6). The philosophy, then, quite as much as the final myth, is presented as a not inevitably successful attempt at reassurance and encouragement, one that is assimilated to the soothing tales told to frightened and sometimes irrational children.

In the final scene, the parallel with the *muthoi* of the *Deipnophoroi* is (as with the aborted libation) signalled by a gap or absence. After Socrates has made his farewells to the servant of the Eleven (his gaoler, it seems), Crito urges him to delay: “I know of others who’ve taken the draught long after the order had been given them, and after dining well and eating plenty” (δειπνήσαντάς τε καὶ πίνοντας εὖ μάλα, 116E1–6). Socrates, now free from bodily appetites and desires, rejects the suggestion (116E7–117A4). But we should note that it is only made *after* the reader has been reminded of the women who might provide such a meal. For straight after the image of the companions as “orphans,” we learn that the women of Socrates’ household—absent, in the person of Xanthippe, since the start of the discussion (60A1–B1)—came to see him after he had bathed, and have just been sent away (116A8–B5). It is Socrates alone, it is implied, who is capable of providing the reassurance and encouragement required.

The race

The third aspect of the Oschophoria recalled in the *Phaedo* is the race, and in this case the implied association centres on the climactic moment in which Socrates drinks the hemlock. It is presented as the equivalent of the ephobic victor’s draining of

³⁹ Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon* I 115–116, sees that παραμυθία and διαμυθολογέω both point to something less rigorous (perhaps more emotional?) than “proof,” but nevertheless believes that with διασκοπεῖσθαι (70C2) Socrates signals that he will, in fact, provide a more philosophically rigorous response.

the *pentaploa*. And as with the elements already discussed, the parallel is prepared from the start of the narrative and sustained by a series of references to racing, competition, and the prize.

The prominence and prestige of athletics and competitive sport in wider Greek culture means that references to athletics, and images or metaphors from training and competition, are common in Plato.⁴⁰ However, the majority are taken from wrestling, and a distaste for extreme competitiveness (*philonikia*) tempers his enthusiasm for physical exercise and has a bearing on the ultimate goal of the intellectual exercise often regarded as equivalent training for the mind/soul.⁴¹ Running as exercise or contest is, in fact, rare.⁴² And elsewhere Socrates implies that old men (as he is in the *Phaedo*: cf. *Cri.* 53D8–E2) do not excel at running (*Resp.* 536C9–D2) and that he is not a good runner (*Prt.* 335E2–336A5; though this claim is primarily metaphorical and ironic). His proposal, in the *Apology*, that he be awarded the privileges of an Olympic victor (36D4–37A2) is therefore as surprising as it is provocative, and conceivably prepares the way for the ‘victory’ I discuss here.⁴³

The first intimation of the ‘race’ comes in Socrates’ account of his initial attempts to comply with the injunction to practise

⁴⁰ See H. L. Reid, *Athletics and Philosophy in the Ancient World* (Abingdon/New York 2011) 43–68.

⁴¹ For metaphors from wrestling see Reid, *Athletics and Philosophy* 43–55; on *philonikia* 51, and H. Tarrant, “Athletics, Competition and the Intellectual,” in D. J. Phillips et al. (eds.), *Sport and Festival in the Ancient World* (Swansea 2003) 351–363, at 356 and 358. The philosopher does not aim to win at all costs.

⁴² At *Leg.* 832D9–833A2 contests for prizes in running are suitable training for war. Contrast *Soph.* 262B5–7, *Cra.* 426D6–E4, *Lach.* 192A1–6, *Grg.* 467E6–468A3, *Resp.* 327B2–4. Plato may also invoke a traditional association between running, death, and the tragic hero: G. Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer* (Baltimore 1990) 123–125 and 136–145; A. C. Purves, “Homer and the Art of Over-taking,” *AJP* 132 (2011) 523–551, at 525–533 and 547–548.

⁴³ If the imagery of Socrates as victor (in a metaphorical foot-race) is sustained across the dialogues relating to his trial, imprisonment, and death, it may be relevant that in *Cri.* Socrates is a potential ‘runaway’ (e.g., 50A6–8, 52C8–D3, 53D3–7, and cf. *Phd.* 62B2–6).

μουσική (60E7–61A4):⁴⁴

Now in earlier times I used to assume that the dream was urging and telling me to do exactly what I was doing: as people shout encouragement to runners (ὥσπερ οἱ τοῖς θεούσι διακελευόμενοι), so the dream was telling me to do the very thing that I was doing, to make art, since philosophy is a very high art form, and that was what I was making.

The metaphor of the race is recalled at the end of the dialogue, during the exchange in which Crito asks Socrates how he wishes to be buried. “However you wish,” says Socrates, “provided you catch me (λάβητέ), that is, and I don’t get away (ἐκφύγω) from you” (115C4–5).⁴⁵ Though it is stressed, in the subsequent explanation, that it will not be “Socrates” who is buried (115D6–116A1), in the moment that the reader first encounters this gentle joke it generates the image of Socrates literally outstripping his companions as he moves purposefully toward death and (it is implied) the reward that awaits him beyond it.

Indeed, only shortly beforehand the notion of a “reward” or “prize” has been carefully introduced. As he concludes the final myth, and immediately before referring to it as a “charm,”

⁴⁴ Not least because it will be required if Socrates becomes “overheated” in discussion (as if by exercise), I wonder if the doubling or trebling of the dose of hemlock (δὺς καὶ τρις πίνειν) mentioned in the scene that precedes the philosophical discussion (63D4–E5), and perhaps indirectly recalled at the end of the dialogue (117B8–9), prompts readers to recall the *pentaploa*—literally the “five-fold [cup].” But contrast Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon* I 73–74.

⁴⁵ Particularly important for my claim here is the chase at *Ar. Ach.* 203–210, but ἐκφύγω meaning “outstrip physical pursuit” or “escape” features in many other (particularly military) passages: e.g., *Thuc.* 2.4.3; *Hdt.* 5.95.3, 9.119.2; *Xen. Hell.* 1.5.14; *Aeschin.* 3.123. Its use here is also ironic, since in other contexts it regularly means “get away from” or “escape” death: e.g., *Hom. Il.* 11.362; *Hes. fr.* 35.9, 76.22; *Pind. Ol.* 10.41–42; *Eur. Andr.* 381; *Pl. Cra.* 403C5–6; or “recover” from a disease: e.g., *Hippoc. Morb.* 2.20, 2.47, 3.15; *Mul.* 63.45, 118.44. It is perhaps also related to Socrates’ suggestion, in the opening frame, that Cebes should tell Evenus “if he’s sensible, to come after (δῶκεν) me [i.e., die] as quickly as he can” (61B8–9, and cf. 115B8–C1).

Socrates urges Simmias (and his various audiences) to consider engagement in the philosophical life in terms of a contest for an ultimate prize (114C6–9):

But it is for the sake of just the things we have related, Simmias, that one must do everything possible to have part in goodness and wisdom during life; for fair is the prize (τὸ ἄθλον) and great the hope.

As it happens, “the prize” in the singular is almost unparalleled in Plato, though he uses the word frequently in the plural to mean both “prizes” (literal and metaphorical) and “games,” “contests,” or “sports.”⁴⁶ Here it presumably marks the extraordinary nature of the reward that awaits the few who have lived “exceptionally holy lives” (114B6–C6). And as elsewhere in the dialogues virtue and/or philosophy *always* win plural “prizes,” it is perhaps also another way in which the reader is prompted to think of a particular contest, and a specific prize (that only one can win), with which the cup of hemlock resonates.

Our sense of the specific connotations of this resonance is, to an extent, bound to depend on our assessment of the competing interpretations of the significance and symbolism of the *pentaploia* in the wider context of the Oschophoria.⁴⁷ However, the festival’s place in the agricultural cycle, and its association with the vintage (i.e., the maturity of a cultivated crop), make it reasonably uncontentious to suggest that the *pentaploia* in some way

⁴⁶ For “prizes” (ἄθλα) see *Resp.* 460B2, 503A7, 608C2–3, 613C4, C7, 614A1, 621C7–8, *Ti.* 54B2, *Leg.* 832E3, 833A9, 834C1, *Hp. mai.* 304B2, *Ion* 530B1. For “games/contests” see *Amat.* 135E4, *Resp.* 504A1, *Ti.* 21B3–4, *Leg.* 865A3–4, C7, 868A7, 935B6–7, 949A3, [*Ax.*] 365B1. If we disregard the singular at [*Def.*] 415A7, the *only* instance of the singular outside the *Phd.* comes at *Phdr.* 256D5–6, where its use contrasts (significantly for my argument) with its function here: it denotes the “prize” awarded to *philotimoi* lovers who occasionally submit to sexual passion, which is *inferior* to the incomparable *agathon* of becoming winged and light enjoyed by philosophical lovers who triumph in the “real Olympic games” (*Phdr.* 256B3–7).

⁴⁷ The most influential recent interpretations are Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 211–217; Waldner, *Geburt und Hochzeit* 102–175; C. Calame, *Thésée et l’imaginaire athénien*² (Lausanne 1996), esp. 128–129 and 143–148.

represents maturity/fruiting, or a current or eventual transition to maturity, or a new phase of life (perhaps for the ephebes who competed in the race, and/or the young boys who served as *Oschophoroi*, as much as for the crops of Attica).⁴⁸ Philosophical maturity, or the transition to complete philosophical maturity, figured as purification, is of course a key theme in the *Phaedo* (see especially 66B1–67D3),⁴⁹ and it is not hard to imagine why Plato might have considered the likely symbolism of the *pentaploa* an attractive way of amplifying the repeated intimations (from as early as the frame: 60B1–3 and C5–7) that Socrates has reached the stage at which he is ready to effect the final separation from the body, that the time for him to die has come, and that his death is divinely sanctioned (62C6–8).

Conclusion

Sceptical readers may, at this point, wish to object that the *Phaedo*'s relationship with the embassy to Delos is not, in itself, sufficient to prompt the reader to recall the Oschophoria. There is no record of any ancient reader making the connection (but see n.16 above), and, as I have acknowledged, each of the themes discussed is not unique to the dialogue. The latter point can, of course, be countered. It may have been precisely for the scope it offered for favorite themes and images that the parallel with the Oschophoria was attractive. And it is the *combination* of the three themes in the frame (each, as we saw, treated in an unusual way) that seems to me to point to the association.

The other objection cannot be refuted. But as the Platonic dialogues feature many prominent Athenians of the previous generation, and take for granted, e.g., the geography and the

⁴⁸ The connection with the vintage is made, tentatively, by Plutarch (*Thes.* 23.4) and is implied by the vine-boughs carried by the *Oschophoroi*. But Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 217, is surely right to suggest that a festival primarily about the vintage would have been celebrated throughout Attica, or at least in some part of Attica particularly associated with the grape.

⁴⁹ See J. Warren, "Socratic Suicide," *JHS* 121 (2001) 91–106, at 101–105; and for "purification" (*katharmos* etc.) elsewhere: 65E7, 80D6, E2, 82C1, D6, 114C1.

civic and religious institutions of Athens, some more obvious ‘key’ to the parallel need not have been required—particularly where the regrettable death of a venerable father-figure (which is the perspective Plato certainly adopts) coincides with the return of the boat famously supposed to have been the very one used by Theseus (Plut. *Thes.* 23.1). I do not, of course, suggest that every Athenian reader would automatically have seen the parallel.⁵⁰ And it must have been easily missed by Plato’s wider audiences, both ancient Greek and later, if it was an aspect that the earliest (Athens-based?) commentators saw no need to explain, and that later commentators (if aware of it) felt was not of great significance for the ‘philosophy’ and/or a general audience.

If then, as I suggest, Plato is at pains to establish an association with the Cretan expedition, and frames the *Phaedo*’s narrative as one informed by the pleasure-pain paradox that characterizes the ambivalent moment of Theseus’ return (as recalled in myth and commemorated in civic ritual); if the final myth and significant elements of the philosophical discussion are directly, or indirectly, represented as reassuring *muthoi* that can be told (and retold) to soothe frightened children, like the tales of the *Deipnophoroi*; if Socrates himself figures as the front-runner in a philosophical race where the cup of hemlock, like the *pentaploa*, comes to stand for the ultimate prize—then the question that confronts us is why Plato should have chosen to suggest this parallel, so carefully combining the various Oschophoric elements in the opening and closing sections of the frame, and using the breaks in the philosophical discussion to remind the reader of the continuing significance of the association.

Part of the answer must be the extent to which the parallel helps Plato to recuperate Socrates religiously and culturally.⁵¹ By dramatizing his death as an action imbued with the unusual

⁵⁰ Similarly, it is unlikely that every member of an Aristophanic audience would have recognized unmarked allusions/references to specific tragedies.

⁵¹ The parallel may well have further implications for the philosophical content of the *Phaedo*, which space constraints prevent me from exploring here.

atmosphere of an important civic festival, and profoundly shaped by and attuned to its distinctive ritual acts, something is done (indirectly) to counter the first of the charges of which Socrates was convicted: *asebeia* (specifically, rejecting the city's gods in favour of novel divinities: *Ap.* 24B9–C1). As for the second, corrupting the young (*Ap.* 24B8–9), it is perhaps even more helpful, because the Oschophoria's emphasis on thanksgiving for the salvation and safe return of the "twice seven," on parental nurture and concern, as represented by the *Deipnophori*, and on the strength and success of young males on the verge of adulthood, generates a series of positive images of the communal fostering, protection, and initiation of the young.⁵²

At the mythic level, the association can also be taken to imply that Socrates' death (like Aegeus') was in some sense a mistake; an accidentally self-inflicted tragedy for which the Athenians are not to blame, but which they are invited to reconsider and perhaps regret.⁵³ At the same time, it makes it possible (if the reader so chooses) to understand his death as in some way necessary for the success of Athens; a kind of (self-)sacrifice to be both

⁵² This emphasis on the positive development of the young is only strengthened if, as Parker, *Polytheism and Society* 208–210 and 216–217, suggests, the daughters of Cecrops (who were intimately concerned with the growth of children and with ephebes) may have had a place/role in the festival. His view, that the Oschophoria is an ephebic rather than a strictly initiatory rite, fits well with my interpretation of its role in the *Phaedo*.

⁵³ As White, in *Reason and Religion* 163 and *passim*, suggests, and as *Phd.* 115A5–6 albeit self-mockingly implies, Socrates is linked with tragedy. We know that both Sophocles and Euripides wrote an *Aegeus* (*TrGF IV FF* 19–25; V.1 1 *FF* 1–13), and Sophocles may also have written a *Theseus* (of which nothing is known, though cf. *TrGF IV F* 730), if separate reports of an *Aegeus* and a *Theseus* do not derive from a single play. In addition, Aegeus was almost as ritually and culturally significant for Athens as Theseus: he probably features among the tribal heroes on the Parthenon frieze; he certainly appeared on the Monument of the Eponymous Heroes in the Agora (U. Kron, "Aigeus," *LIMC I* (1981) 363, nos. 40 and 42); he had an heroön at Athens (Paus. 1.22.5), and he is well represented (often with Theseus) on vases of the fifth century: F. Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage*³ (Marburg 1973) 259; Kron, nos. 1–10, 15–18, 27–32, 36–37.

lamented and celebrated.⁵⁴ In this sense, Socrates is (as for White and Waterfield) represented as central to the health of the city, and in an even more positive way than the association with the *pharmakoi* of the Thargelia suggests. And his willingness to die implies (Plato suggests) a deeper recognition of what the moment, the wider community, and the gods demanded than was available to anyone else involved in his trial and execution.

The history of the reception of the *Phaedo* shows that it is possible to read the dialogue without making a connection with the Oschophoria. But to do so is, I suggest, to miss a dimension that connects and accounts for a number of sometimes opaque but evidently significant details in the frame, and that affects our sense of how and why Plato depicts Socrates and his death.⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ This beneficial aspect is marked in the Theseus myth by the fact that the *synoikismos* of Athens follows immediately on Aegeus' death/Theseus' return (Plut. *Thes.* 24.1–4).

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Professor Robin Osborne and my anonymous readers for advice, suggestions, and criticism that have considerably improved this article.