The *Phaedrus* Polyphonic Structure

1. *A paradoxical situation*

The question that arises in the attentive reader who has finished reading the *Phaedrus* for the first time is: "What have we talked about?". In fact, the question is so legitimate that it is also proposed by those who, after several readings, try to have an organic vision of the dialogue.

The subtitle with which it was transmitted to us, *Phaedrus*, *On Beauty*, does not seem to tell us much, because there were already several other subtitles (*eros*, rhetoric, the good, etc.),¹ as evidence of how the ancients already found themselves in difficulty in defining the exact content of the text. Therefore, the multiplicity of interpretations² that have been given in recent times is not a surprising novelty.

A first block of scholars (Taylor, Thompson, Robin, Kucharski, Jaeger) come to indicate in *eros* simply an occasion theme, chosen for rhetorical reasons: «that as subject of the speech is chosen *Eros* is well explained by the frequency of the theme in school exercises of this type».³ In essence, a substantial part of this Platonic text would be philosophically insignificant, with little respect for the god and the reader. This hypothesis conflicts paradoxically with the conviction, shared by many authors, that the *Phaedrus* represents «the quickest synthesis of Plato’s ideas on the relationship of writing, word and thought».⁴ In fact, as we shall see, if the philosopher had written a work letting himself be so conditioned by the rhetorical tradition, he would have contradicted what he himself says in this text on the correct way of communicating.

A second group of scholars (Stefanini, Wilamowitz Moellendorff) considers the eros as the central theme, understood as an irrational force highlighted in poetry, divine madness (*mania*) that allows the ascent to a higher world. With this hypothesis we come to affirm that here Plato re-

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¹ On the various titles given at work since antiquity, cf. Thompson 1868, p. XIII.
² See for a review of various interpretations, Bonetti 1963.
evaluates the poem after the harsh condemnation received in the Republic.

A third group (Bonetti, Reale, Friedländer) believes that this theme of love goes intrinsically connected, as in the Symposium, with philosophy: «the ascent to the ideal world is therefore not accomplished for Plato first in love and then in the philosophy, or now in love and now in philosophy, but in love that has its actuality in philosophy».

Leaving aside other particular interpretative frameworks, it seems to us that these proposals have in common a double flaw. First of all they suffer too much the charm of the Symposium. The relationship between the two dialogues is undeniable, since the treatment of beauty in the Phaedrus is a sort of summary of the much more articulated discourse of Diotima. Now, eros is certainly a central theme in the discussion of the Symposium. In fact, if we ask ourselves what it is for Plato "eros", we find in that dialogue a series of precious indications, conceptually rich and articulated precisely on the nature of this desire. The same thing does not seem to be able to be said of the Phaedrus, which revolves around an erotic situation, though the question «what is "eros"» almost never arises. In fact, the answer we find in the text is extremely short and inadequate to the complexity of the topic.

Secondly, all these scholars seem to start from the conviction that there is one (and only one) interpretation that gives meaning to the Platonic dialogue. This observation immediately refers to another question. If a dialogue deals with so many subjects, and so different from each other, the problem of its unity inevitably arises, precisely at the level of the structure of the work. In fact, the Phaedrus was very criticized also from this point of view: there is no lack of those who found it «disordered and rhapsodic» or even ill-structured, a sign of senility. The situation becomes paradoxical if one thinks that in this dialogue Plato expresses his convictions on the correct drafting of a written and oral discourse, giving us a very strong indication in this regard:

5 Wilamowitz Moellendorff 1959, p. 384.
6 Bonetti 1964, p. 576.
7 Of course there is no lack of interpreters who strongly emphasize the multiplicity of aspects of dialogue (see for example Smith 1991, p. 233, Pinnoy 1983, p. 64, Plebe 1964, p. V).
9 Raeder 1905, p. 267.
Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work (Phaedrus 264C2–5).

A similar phrase can be interpreted according to two coordinates: on the technical level (each speech must have an introduction, a conclusion and an appropriate central part, so as to constitute a harmonic complex) or on the structural plane (the whole determines the value of the parts that must also be well crafted). The two interpretations are not in principle opposed but make a chaotic writing of this dialogue highly unlikely. Instead, any discovery of great complexity in the text will not disprove, but will confirm this Platonic indication, since the correct subdivision of a body into three or more parts does not hide the elementary truth that each of these is, in turn, further structured. It is a "complexity" on which the dialectical references of the Phaedrus draw attention.

We therefore propose to verify if and how it is possible to reconstruct the unity of the dialogue on the conceptual plane as on the structural one. Also in this case, as in previous studies, we intend to distinguish three elements:

a) the dominant motif, the unitary axis of text which Plato continually reminds;

b) the thematic centre of the work, the philosophically decisive question, the one that "judges" the dominant motive itself and/or gives it the appropriate meaning;

c) the most important issue, the highest element which, in all cases, can’t ignore.

We will see if the application of this model to our dialogue will be able to produce some clarifying effect on the basic question: the unity of the dialogue.
2. Introductory elements for reading the dialogue

The Phaedrus is generally considered to be written in dramatic form. Strangely, the three long speeches that are found there, that of Lysias read by Phaedrus and the two pronounced by Socrates, have led some scholars to suppose that the form is mixed: it plays in this judgment a probable confusion. As we know, there are indirect and "narrated" dialogues and dialogues in dramatic, theatrical form. The "read" discourses, like that of Lysias, do not change this scheme: the form is and remains direct, completely devoid of the intercalations typical of the narrative one.

The significant fact is that the dialogues in narrative form are all close to the Republic and come after a long series of dialogues written in an imitative form. This "evolution" can not be underestimated: Plato imposes a very clear ethical bond to imitative art (cf. Republic III, 392D-398B). But, in the last dialogues, which are very difficult to understand, the author returns to dramatic dialogue. All this is important to place the Phaedrus after the works written in a narrative form, together with the "dialectical" writings. This is also confirmed by the stylometric studies, which showed an affinity between Theaetetus, Parmenides and Phaedrus. We will see that also the philosophical content, in particular the clear references to dialectics, confirm this collocation.

However, we will also have to put, so to speak, this dialogue "out of list", as it is a work that is in some ways unique, in terms of style, character, and content.

The reader is placed directly in the presence of Phaedrus and Socrates on the banks of the Ilisus: «We are alone, in a deserted place» (236C8). It may seem that there is also Lysias, seeing that Socrates speaking to the rhetorician says to Phaedrus: «It may seem that there is also Lysias, seeing that Socrates says to Phaedrus: «If Lysias himself is present, I'll never be willing to offer me for your oratory exercise» (228E1–2). However, Lysias is not there and in fact a) can not defend his speech from the attacks of Socrates; b) at the end (278B) Phaedrus is instructed to bring him a message to inform him of the outcome of the discussion.

10 Cf. the fourth essay in this text, Are there any “youthful” and/or Socratic dialogues? Some reflections on the Apology of Socrates, pp. 50-69.
Now, the fact that they are only two in discussion is not particularly strange,\(^\text{11}\) while the characters, especially this Socrates, and the location are extraordinary, as the *Phaedrus* is the only dialogue that takes place outside the city.

Phaedrus, the interlocutor of Socrates who gives the name to the dialogue, is also present in the *Protagoras* and the *Symposium*. In the first text it is little more than an adolescent, one of the auditors of sophist Hippias; in the *Symposium* (the action is imagined in 416 B.C., he must have surpassed the thirty years) he confirms his passion for the speeches that was, evidently, his characteristic trait. This repeated presence probably involves an implicit political-social judgment that we are not able to fully understand. Phaedrus, whom Plato always presents as an excellent person, has been a controversial figure,\(^\text{12}\) but in the *Phaedrus* Socrates treats him with affection, with paternal expressions that underline the difference of years, as if he were a boy (*νεανία*, 257C8; *παῖ*, 267C6), while he is an adult (242A-B).

This relationship has two explicit consecrations, in recognition of their great friendship, first by the mouth of Socrates: «Oh, Phaedrus, if I don't know Phaedrus I forgot who I am myself!».\(^\text{13}\) Then, in the end, after the old philosopher's prayer, in the last words that Phaedrus says in the dialogue: «Make it a prayer for me as well. Friends have everything in common» (279C6–7).

\(^{11}\) There are other examples of dialogues in which Socrates has only one interlocutor: *Euthyphro*, *Critone*, *Ion*, *Chitophon*, *Menesenus*, *Alcibiades I*, *Alcibiades II*, *Hipparchus*, *Minos*, *Hippias Major*.

\(^{12}\) He was accused of having profaned the Eleusinian Mysteries and of taking part in the mutilation of the Hermes on the eve of the departure of the Athenian expedition to Sicily. All the goods were confiscated, he was sent into exile; on his return he found himself living in a state of poverty. Of all this nothing transpires in the dialogues that give us an image that is always positive, not so much on the level of its "scientific" abilities as on that of the personal attitude. His limits of lover of discourses are evident, and yet it is not possible to see a negative judgment, which would also contrast with the tone of the dialogues. Moreover, as in the *Symposium* he is the one who provokes the oratory *competition* in honour of *Eros*, so in the *Phaedrus* it is he who shows himself ready to do anything, in order to keep Socrates talking (236C-D).

\(^{13}\) 228A5–6. In turn, shortly after Phaedrus: «Socrates, if I don't know Socrates, I forgot who I am myself!» (236C4–6).
But Socrates is the real surprise of dialogue: on the one hand he retains all his characteristic traits: he walks barefoot (229A), proves his argumentative ability, shows experience in matters of love (227C), invokes the Delphic maxim «Know yourself» (229E), even feels his "divine sign", his daimonion (242B); on the other he is invaded as it does not happen in any other dialogue: he invokes the Muses (237A), speaks in metric (238D, 242E), uses those long speeches that has always declared not to appreciate, suffers the charm of the place (238C-D), just him who does not like being outdoors (230D).

3. The structure of the dialogue

The dialogue is divided into five major parts, three minor and four interludes, two of which are placed in sequence to signal the passage from a first part to the second (in the scheme the major parts are indicated by a capital letter, the minor parts are indicated by a lowercase letter, the interludes are reported as such):

a) The prologue (227A-230E)
   A) The speech of Lysias (230E-234C)
   Interlude: the judgment on the speech of Lysias (234C-237A)
   B) First speech of Socrates (237A-242B)
   Interlude: Socrates must be purified through a palinode (242B-243E)
   C) Second speech of Socrates (243E-257B)
      Theoretical interlude (257B-258E)
      Poetical interlude (258E-259D)
   D) Analysis of the discourses and identification of the criteria for the correct formulation of the speeches (259E-274B)
   E) The problem of communication and the superiority of orality over writing (274B-278E)

b) Evaluation of the rhetoric of time and final message to Isocrates (278E-279B)

c) Prayer to Pan (279B-C).

A good interpretation must account for all these steps and their connection, however, as a first approximation, we must recognize that the scheme appears logical and well thought out: three speeches (A, B, C:
first part) on the basis of which it is possible to face concretely the judgment on rhetoric and communication (D, E: second part).

Indeed, this is certainly the common thread that holds together the whole dialogue, which constitutes its skeleton: the reflection on rhetoric, which, however, must be understood in the broadest sense, as a science of effective communication.

4. The dominant motif: the technique of oral and written communication and the responsibility of the teacher

We now have to verify the extent of what has just been said, to see how this "dominant motive" actually works and thus to check if it really can be understood in this way, that is, it constitutes the backbone of the dialogue architecture.

That the motif is the art of communicating is already clear from the Prologue, which presents Phaedrus and Socrates as two lovers of discourses. Everything revolves around Lysias, who set up a banquet of his orations (227B), and to the underlined passion of Socrates for the discourses. The philosopher, in fact, a) quotes Pindar (The Isthmian Odes, I, 2) to say that he prefers to any other commitment to feel what Phaedrus and Lysias have said (227B); b) he is arranged for this to follow Phaedrus up to Megara (227D); c) he is sick of the passion to listen to discourses (228B); d) he will not let Phaedrus go before he has listened to him (228C).

It is also emphasized that it is better to read the written discourse rather than relying on the memory of Phaedrus to hear what Lysias claims (228E). So the text immediately points out the importance of the writing and its irreplaceable: Phaedrus himself was practicing on the text that he would gradually learn by heart, but he could do it precisely because the author gave him a roll. In fact, Plato is aware of the fact that only the reflection on writing has allowed the birth and development of rhetoric: to elaborate rules it is necessary to analyze something stable and "analyzable", as it is only a written text.
It follows the reading of the speech of Lysias\textsuperscript{14} which is obviously paradoxical. This speech deals exclusively with "vulgar" love and does not present any argumentative growth. In short, the central element, or in any case the one of greatest importance, which should lead one to feel compassion towards lovers rather than admiration (233B), is their state of illness.

The judgment on the speech of Lysias is absolutely positive regarding the beauty of the text. The scholars, convinced that Socrates always judges only on the level of truth, are practically unanimous in arguing that here there is "irony", but there is no trace of it in the text. The fact is that we move on a legitimate terrain, that of a beauty, to which the Greek spirit was particularly sensitive, made of sounds and images, typical of a culture still soaked in orality. On this (certainly partial) level Socrates shares the judgement of the youngest friend. The philosopher himself says it repeatedly:

\textsuperscript{14} Is this an authentic composition of Lysias or a reconstruction made by Plato reproducing the methodical procedure and style of the rhetorician? It is a thorny problem that has divided the criticism into two opposing camps (for example, Blass, Wilamowitz, Taylor, Robin, Rowe are in favour of authenticity, while Reale, De Vries, Bollack are contrary). Although it is not possible to say a definitive word, I propose for authenticity on the basis of the following topics. A) the ancient sources are for the authenticity of the speech; Diogenes Laertius (III, 25) states that Lysias’ speech was reported in the \textit{Phaedrus} word by word; also according to Hermia (35, 19 ff.) the speech should be considered authentic; he even adds that, in the collection of the \textit{Letters} of the Rhetorician, the discourse was a well-known piece. B) twice Socrates stresses that Lysias is present (228E 1–2, 263E 5); this would be a excessive forcing if the text was "apocryphal". C) if the work were not from Lysias, the criticisms made in the dialogue by Plato would be almost insulting. D) if Plato wanted to legitimately criticize a speech done "in the lisyan manner" he could easily make it repeat by \textit{Phaedrus}, thus granting himself an area of freedom that, with the reading of the text, is denied. E) a comparison with the \textit{Symposium} does not stand for this reason: there the talks are referred to on the basis of a series of transfers, which justifies any inaccuracy; moreover, the speeches of the \textit{Symposium} all have an essentially content and non-formal value, so it was enough to respect the general approach of each individual guest, without problems of "literal" respect; F) there would be no justification for such an invention, since Plato could certainly choose in the enormous Lysian production various discourses suited to his purposes.
I paid attention only to the speech's style. As to the other part, I wouldn't even think that Lysias himself could be satisfied with it (235A1–3).

In short, the disregard with which Lysias developed his considerations led Socrates to believe that it was only an aesthetic-rhetorical operation. In fact, about the content he even manifests wonder:

What? Must we praise the speech even on the ground that its author has said what the situation demanded, and not instead simply on the ground that he has spoken in a clear and concise manner, with a precise turn of phrase? (234E5–8)

The two positions appear irreconcilable, because the judgment of Phaedrus is opposite:

That is in fact the best thing about the speech: He has omitted nothing worth mentioning about the subject, so that no one will ever be able to add anything of value to complete what he has already said himself. (235B1–5).

So we have a contrast on the meaning of "beautiful": here for Socrates "beautiful" can only be said of the form, while for Phaedrus the speech is beautiful because it is appropriate to the subject. Socrates knows that it is not, for having heard him (that is, to have read it) from men or women of ancient times. As we can see, Plato tells us that 1) you also listen to the voice of the ancients, even if not really, as it is possible to read them; 2) that a philosopher can learn from (great) poets or even from unidentified prose writers; 3) that we are talking about rhetoric in the broad sense.

At this point the figure of the lover of discourses returns: Socrates is not driven to speak either by the promise of a golden statue to Delphi nor by the threat of the use of force; when, however, Phaedrus swears he will no longer hear him the speeches that only he, rich, could bring him, Socrates yields to blackmail:

Oh horrible man, you've really found the way to force a lover of speeches to do just as you say! (236E4–5).

From the speech of Lysias we pass to the speech of Socrates because of a judgment on the discourses through a threat that concerns the speeches!
The first speech of Socrates seems to retrace the same path of Lysias, but in reality it radically changes the subject: we no longer have the unlikely act of a non-lover, but on the contrary a cunning individual who tries to seduce the other by pretending not to be in love and arguing accordingly. So the theme is the same, but the situation is not paradoxical: we are faced with a deception. In fact, Socrates speaks with a veiled head.

It is necessary to agree on the nature of the object in order not to fall into contradiction. Therefore, three issues are identified: what is love, what is its power, whether it brings benefit or harm. But since Socrates accepted the rhetorical challenge and therefore the imposition of the theme, *eros* has only a negative value, it is the unreasoning desire, that overpowers the opinion that leads to do right, drawn towards the pleasure of beauty (238B7-C1).

Socrates feels more and more invaded and speaks by dithyrambs: in this state he deals with the description of the advantages and disadvantages that the choice determines, organized according to the classic tripartition: soul, body, and heritage. The text emphasizes that the inspiration is not

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15 These are the points of the Socratic treatment: 1. it is necessary to agree on the nature of the object before starting a discussion, to avoid falling into contradiction, so it is necessary to define love. 2. Love is a desire, which manifests itself according to two fundamental tendencies that guide men: the acquired opinion that tends towards the greater good, supported by reasoning, and the desire for pleasures, which is innate. If the first tendency dominates we have the "temperance", if the second the "debauchery". 3. Irrational desire, achieved the victory over reasoning, led to the pleasure of beauty and, vigorously reinforced by desires, takes its name from its strength (ῥόμης) and is called "eros"; 4. The disadvantages that derive from those who rely on the lover.

16 These are the points of the Socratic development: 1. The slave man of pleasures, being sick, can not bear what he opposes, that is, who is superior or equal. The beloved sought by the lover will therefore always be inferior. 1.1. Therefore the lover feels pleasure in the ills present in the soul of the beloved, indeed he even tends to increase them; 1.2. He will be jealous and will keep his beloved away from all the companies, even those that could benefit him. 1.3. Above all he will want to distance him from that divine company which is philosophy, even at the cost of making him remain ignorant. 2. As far as caring for the body is concerned, there can be no advantage in following pleasure instead of good; 3. As for possessions, the lover wants his loved one to be deprived of it: 3.1. if it...
subjected to the control of the subject: now there is, but suddenly it can go away, because it is a gift from the Muses.

But the speech of Socrates is interrupted abruptly even if the inspiration is not lacking (the philosopher claims to have passed from the dithyrambs to the epic verses). Yet, at the beginning he himself had correctly set the speech:

now we have said what it really is; so let us keep that in view as we complete our discussion. What benefit or harm is likely to come from the lover or the non-lover to the boy who gives him favours (238E1–2)?

Instead, the discussion has concerned only the disadvantages that involves going with one who is in love and not the benefits that are obtained from one who is not in love.

For this reason, in the interlude, Phaedrus objects and emphasizes this evident incompleteness, but Socrates responds hastily: it is enough to overturn the previous argument. We said enough, he does not want to do something too big.

We must anticipate the profound meaning of this interruption. In fact, Plato cannot make his teacher utter an objectively false speech. The made speech, in fact, is not true, but neither is it false: it is one-sided and therefore deforms reality. In the moment in which it will be possible to show that it is only a part of a more complex discourse, the truth will be re-established, keeping those affirmations in their (partial) truth. Instead, the situation would have become irreparable if the philosopher had also developed the other aspect of the speech, making the praises of the deceiving seducer presenting himself as not in love. This is why Socrates tries to escape. But the deity calls him to his duty: the truth must be restored.

4. The dominant motif

has riches, it will not be easy to conquer, 3.2. if he has loved ones, like parents, relatives or friends, they will take time away from their love. 4. In addition, the lover is both ruinous and unpleasant, also imposing the different age of the two. 4.1. At the end of the relationship the situation becomes hateful from various points of view: the ex-lover, no longer dominated by madness, gives way to escape; only at that point the beloved young man understands the mistake and discovers that it is better to grant his favours to those who are not in love and have good judgement, since the friendship of those who are in love is born only as a desire for food, in order to satiate.
So Socrates must also stay because of insistence of Phaedrus, young "divine" (242A7) for his ability to provoke speeches. In this way the philosopher can understand, reflecting, that his speech has offended the god. This is his fault, but also the fault of Phaedrus! The danger of the situation could not be clearer: the same character, Phaedrus, can be called divine and be judged guilty of terrible effects on the same ground, that of production and dissemination of discourses.

We are therefore at the second speech of Socrates, which will be completely true and will also recover the first, clarifying the limits. The intent is clear from the premise: it is not true that they should be granted their favours to those who are not in love, because those in love are in a state of mania, which is a multifaceted gift of the gods. We have in fact various types of mania, among which the one caused by the Muses, which take possession of a sensitive soul to create hatreds and poems, instructing posterity; only the poetry of those who are invaded by the Muse must be considered valid and it obscures that of those who believe they can make poetry without having the inspiration. There is therefore an inspired poem, gift of the gods, which has a truth that must be communicated and learned, and a poetic technique, which has none of these qualities.

To confirm, we examine what is one of the most beautiful myths of Plato, long and complex, a masterpiece of platonic poetry. Inside we find a sort of classification of reincarnations (248D-E): the soul that has contemplated the greatest number of beings will be transplanted into a man who must become a friend of knowledge or friend of the beautiful or friend of the Muses and eager to love. So the friend of the muses, the inspired poet, and the friend of beauty are placed on the same level as the lover of knowledge, the philosopher, while the unpowered versifier is on the sixth, immediately before the workers and the couple sophist – tyrant.

17 The second is a king or a man destined for leadership, the third a politician or an expert in finance; the fourth is this who practices gymnastics or takes care of the healing of bodies; the fifth is who makes the fortune-teller or deals with mysteries; the sixth this who practice imitation, like the poets; the seventh is a farmer or a craftsman. The souls who come by eighth and ninth will incarnate respectively in a sophist and a tyrant.
The theoretical interlude that follows rotates on the logographic name given to Lysias to blame it. According to Phaedrus, in fact, those who enjoy a certain reputation within the city are ashamed to write, either for fear of the opinion of posterity, or for fear of being called a sophist. But, as usual, he is wrong: the opposite is true: Those who have great political power in the city love to write also because they hope for judgment of posterity. The truth is that, in itself, it is not bad to write speeches, but to do it in a bad and ugly way. This confirms A) that Plato recognizes the importance of writing, both for rhetoric and for diachronic communication, B) that rhetoric and poetry are polyvalent terms, if not equivocal, for which reason rhetoric is not condemned a priori.

It is then necessary to see how a good discourse can be written, analyzing the statements of Lysias or political or private writings, in prose or verse. And Phaedrus, enthusiastically accepting this proposal, emphasizes the nature of spiritual pleasure, as opposed to material ones:

You ask if we need to? Why else should one live, I say, if e not for pleasures of this sort? Certainly not for those you cannot feel unless you are first in pain, like most of the pleasures of the body, and which for this reason we call the pleasures of slaves (258E1–5).

The poetic interlude is, from our point of view, less relevant, but in all cases shows how using a mythical figure we can conclude that we must continue to discuss.

We proceed to the analysis of the discourses and the identification of the criteria for a correct rhetoric, immediately clarifying that it can never be just a problem of form: who composes the speeches, besides worrying about writing them well, must know the truth about what he writes. However, Lysias is not criticized for this, which is obvious given that his speech has already been falsified by the second intervention of Socrates. This time he moves technical remarks: he seems to have proceeded without any order, putting things in writing as they came to mind (264B).

Those who, like Lysias, make speeches and are wise in speaking and make others wise to the young Phaedrus appear to be royal individuals but Socrates can not call them dialectical. However, the rhetorical art without dialectics should not be despised, rather we must remember the parts that constitute it and of which we have news through the manuals written on these topics. Then follows a quick discussion of the parts of the speeches and the various contributions of rhetoricians and sophists.
Immediately thereafter the weakness is reiterated due to philosophical shortcomings. However, we must be indulgent towards them that they are sure to know an art while they know only the initial part. This knowledge should not be rejected, but one must be aware that it is only a preliminary knowledge. True rhetoric, however, is another thing: one must have an innate predisposition strengthened by science and exercise (269D). It is then necessary to have theoretical experiences that are not necessarily philosophical, but similar.

A second fact is then brought to light: whoever creates a discourse must know the soul of the person to whom the discourse directs itself, that is, one must know its nature: if the soul is one or multiform, if it has the capacity to act and on what is it if it suffers and from what; from what discourses it is persuaded and from which it is not (271A-272A).

At this point we understand why Socrates has so insisted on the myth about the different destinies of souls. Precisely because the souls are of different kinds, different are the men who possess them and different are also the discourses that are addressed to them in order to persuade them. Every good speaker must therefore take into account these rules and above all use them in practice, knowing even when it is appropriate to speak or to be silent, when the time has come to pronounce a speech capable of moving or a concise or indignant speech. Therefore, a theoretical knowledge and a practical attitude are needed.

According to the rhetoricians like Tisias, one must stick to "the likely" to speak with art. This is born in most people for resemblance to the truth, so those who know the truth find it easily. Only on the basis of all this knowledge can know the art of discourse, that requires a long application and a long process.

Now we can tackle the problem of communication and the superiority of orality over writing. Renouncing to face the many problems that the discussions of the last twenty years have highlighted, we can say in summary that for Plato: 1. writing does not strengthen the memory, but serves to recall the things already known on which the writing; 2. the writing does not answer the questions; 3. the writings roll into anyone’s hands and do not know when to speak and when to be silent; 4. the writing does not know how to defend itself, but it always needs the help of the father, the author. There is, however, another discourse, legitimate brother of written speech but more powerful than this: it is the discourse that is written in the soul of those who learn, who knows how to defend
themselves and who knows who to talk and with whom to be silent; it is the living and animated speech, of which the written one is only an image.

Therefore, there is no contraposition, but a difference, profound and meaningful, between "two brothers", one of whom is alive and capable of operating correctly, what the other is not able to do. Therefore, those who want to make speeches that know how to defend themselves and who can bring relief to themselves and those who have planted them, speeches that can generate others, like a seed that generates immortal fruits, will not write them, but will sow them directly into the soul of disciple. To write speeches is certainly a very nice game, made for old age or for those who follow our footsteps, but the other is much more beautiful.

So we have three types of relationship: a) the game worthless, the pure fun; b) the writing, which is a serious game; c) the direct relationship with the soul of the disciple. Therefore, one can and must write, as a reminder and also for those who follow our steps, that is, that come after us: posterity.¹⁸ Socrates recapitulates the discourses made before: we need to know the truth about the things we are talking about or writing; we must define everything in itself and then divide it into its species, until it is no longer divisible;¹⁹ it is necessary to know the nature of the soul and then to address it a corresponding discourse, simple for a simple soul, complex for a complex one (277B-C).

In written discourses there is, in reality, much of the game and the best of them are written to exercise the memory of those who already know; true clarity, completeness and seriousness in synthesis, is only in discourses written directly in the soul, which focus on right, beautiful and good. That man who will realize that the speeches pronounced in this way are like his legitimate children and that, after being aware of it, he will send all the other talks for a walk, that man is exactly the one who Phaedrus and Socrates wish to become. On the speeches, Socrates concludes, it was joking enough; now it is simply necessary to say that whoever wrote a speech (be it Lysias, Solon or Homer, i.e. a speaker, a legislator or a poet)

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¹⁸ Thus the interlude on the "logographer" Lysias and on posterity acquires all of its meaning: you can write for friends who are far away in space and time.
¹⁹ The reference to dialectics, even in this brief summary, is very clear.
if he has composed these things with a knowledge of the truth, if he can defend his writing when is challenged, and if he can orally demonstrate the weakness of the writings, then he must be called by a name derived not from these writings but rather from those things that he is seriously pursuing... To call him wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom's lover – a philosopher – or something similar would fit him better and be more suitable to him (278C4-D6).

On the contrary, he who does not possess things of greater value than what he writes can not be called otherwise than a poet, a composer of discourses or a writer of laws.

In short, it being understood that man is always and only a philosopher, he will write knowing the limits of the operation he performs, no matter if it is poetic, political, oratory or technically philosophical. Therefore, the link between those who express the truth by their own merit or by the gift of the gods, as opposed to those who make beautiful speeches, is reaffirmed.

The evaluation of the rhetoric of time and the final message to Isocrates is therefore obvious. For this one, who is still young, Socrates foresees a great success: in fact, he shows a noble character. Because of these characteristics, therefore, it is wholly superior to Lysias; it wouldn't even be surprising that one day he devoted himself to greater things, since there is a certain philosophy in his thought. Socrates wants to let know these things to his beloved Isocrates through the gods of the place, while Phaedrus will tell Lysias the others. So, with a post-factum prophecy Plato expresses a true appreciation for Isocrates and nothing leads us to suppose that there is irony: in fact Isocrates seems to embody what has been said because he is a teacher, spiritually rich and endowed with a "certain philosophy".

Then there is the beautiful prayer to Pan, which, however, tells nothing about our subject.

As I hope to have shown, the whole arc of dialogue carries out the reflection on communication: it classifies two different kinds of rhetoric/poetic and specifies the two grounds that must be respected, the soul of the interlocutor and the true. In all cases without knowledge it is not possible that there is true rhetoric.
5. The central theme of the dialogue: the true between philosophy and mania

Let’s now go over the entire dialogue to see if this is the philosophically strong element, which judges rhetoric and therefore supports the entire construction, without however having the compactness and continuity of the dominant motif, which defines its architecture.

Already in the Prologue we find a strong philosophical underlining. Against the "scholars" who lose time to reflect rationalistically on the myths, Socrates confirms his philosophical approach: he is much more concerned with knowing himself than with adapting the myths to human reason. This conviction is emphatically underlined by recalling the inscription on the facade of the temple of Apollo in Delphi: γνῶθι σαυτόν, know yourself.20 So we immediately meet a central theme of the Socratic philosophy, which in the Platonic re-elaboration gives rise to the question of the soul and the anamnesis.21

Obviously, there is nothing philosophical in the speech of Lysias, while in the judgment on the speech of Lysias we see that, if beauty conquers Socrates, however, he remains a philosopher and therefore able to objectively judge a content that is inadequate and wrong; at the same time, he claims to have learned from the ancient poets (235C), proving that there is a wisdom that is not only of philosophers.

As for Socrates’ first speech, the philosopher has accepted to make the rhetorician, not to be himself: and yet he lets himself go to the mania that pervades the place. In fact, invokes the Muses, with a beginning which is the classic formula of the dithyramb.22 But it must not be overlooked that this "inspired" Socrates retains his lucidity: in fact his progress is constantly accompanied by a sort of counterpoint with which he himself comments on this mania, this his talk for dithyrambs before, with an almost epic style then, this inspiration that exists but could at any moment end (238C-D, 241E).

20 This motto is quoted by Plato in other dialogues (Alcibiades I 124B, Charmides 164D, Protagoras 343B, Philebus 48C, Laws XI, 923A) and commonly becomes a symbol of the Socratic philosophy.
21 «It is a prelude to two concepts that will soon assume an essential role in the Phaedrus and around which most of the others will gravitate: that of reminiscence and that of the immortality of the soul» (Plebe 1964, p. 9).
22 De Vries 1969, p. 82.
Soon after, we find another typical Platonic movement, in the relationship between multiplicity of names and functions: debauchery has as many names as the forms it takes, in eating it will be called greed, in drinking drunkenness, and so in all other cases (238A-B). All this shows how even Socrates’ discourse remains a philosophical act. But the most evident confirmation is found in the setting of the discourse and above all in the premise of the need to define the essence of what we must speak about.

The importance of philosophy is confirmed by the greater guilt of the "sick" lover: he will keep the beloved from the divine company that is philosophy (239B).

Nothing significant seems directly to emerge in the interlude, but cannot be underestimated the fact that, if the daimon’s voice put Socrates on the warning, is his reflection that makes him discover the nature of the error.

Then, in the Second speech of Socrates, we find a broad philosophical reflection, starting from the etymological game, which in this case links mania to the “mantica”; then there is even a sort of diairesis to distinguish three different aspects of mania: the erotic one, that of all those who, using the mantica of divine inspiration, predict many useful things, that which derives from the Muses.

In order to prove that the gods send love to the soul of lovers, not to benefit themselves, but to us, follows the beautiful myth of the chariot. The treatment of the soul begins with the demonstration of immortality, based on the distinction between what moves by itself and what is moved by something else (245C-246A). This is one of the main Platonic arguments to support the immortality of the soul. 23

In the myth emerge a series of relevant statements, first of all the need to recognize that the human being is called mortal, as a synthesis, and immortal as a soul. This cannot be defined solely on the basis of a rational discourse since it belongs to a sphere we do not know sufficiently (246B-C). Therefore, on the same man a duplicity of judgment is always possible, since every individual from a certain point of view is his soul, on the other is the synthesis of soul and body, an important key to understand Plato’s many alleged aporias.

As for the soul, everything seems done to underline the multiplicity that characterizes the human condition: different chariots, different ascent and different vision of the higher reality; the existence of twelve processions, one of Zeus and other eleven of gods and demons, determines different temperamental structures of the subjects; then there are struggles that can ruin the chariot; finally the events of life further complicate the situation.

The metaphysical vision that emerges from the myth is clear: the higher reality is the being that truly is, devoid of form and not visible, which can be contemplated only by the intellect, as the object of true knowledge. God knows all of this perfectly, having pure intelligence and knowledge, not so the souls of human beings. A hiatus is then established which has a partial exception: to the philosophers, those who have managed to approach the divine condition, the wings come back after only three thousand years (if they have chosen this life three consecutive times), and after this period they can fly away.

It remains therefore their primacy, which however is also connected to a *mania*, the fourth form of *mania*, the phenomenon for which an individual, seeing the beauty and remembering the true beauty already seen, he becomes eager to put his wings so far as to be laughed at by others. Only a few souls, with a sufficient memory of the Ideas, when they see something that is the image of those beings, are affected.

Since Wisdom and supreme realities arouse love in themselves, if they were all seen, they would raise too great loves. For this reason, only Beauty, among these realities, is visible and lovable. Beauty, therefore, is of great importance, but it is only one aspect of the higher realities and is by no means the most relevant idea.

This "erotic" state determined by the Beautiful has nothing to do with the carnal and vulgar love of the first speech of Socrates, which at this point, however, is true as the description of a partial and negative condition. Eros is, therefore, this twofold result provoked by the same beauty: who is already corrupted does not rise to the higher sphere when he contemplates beauty in our world. On the contrary, he who has long contemplated the higher realities, at the appearance of a face that embodies the idea of beauty, feels the chills and venerates this individual as a god.

The palinode is accomplished: if they made disrespectful speeches about Eros, the fault must be attributed to Lysias who was the father of the speech. But this sort of condemnation is followed immediately by a
subdued prayer to Eros, because he converts him to philosophy so that Phaedrus can simply devote his life to Love through philosophical discussions (257B). Eros is therefore, also in this case as in Symposium 204A-B, a philosopher, and philosophy is the form of redemption to which the rhetorician can aspire.

We pass over the theoretical interlude and the poetic interlude. In analyzing the discourses and identifying the criteria for correct rhetoric, the question of truth is the first criterion that must be kept in mind by those who write speeches. Phaedrus recalls that some rhetoricians consider important to know not so much the true as the likely, because it is from this and not from the truth that comes the persuasion (259E-260A). Socrates moves two objections: a) if an orator does not know the truth, he can not get good results; b) oratory would be a practice without art, because there can not be an art that does not know the truth.

To persuade, you need to know the truth and know how to speak. In fact, in the tribunals and in the popular assembly, the same things are now called good and now bad, as Zeno, the Eleatic Palamedes, did when he made the same things appear both one and many, both similar and dissimilar, both at rest and also in motion. More generally, to identify the likely and even to deceive without being deceived one must know the truth.

As for the two discourses, if the analysis of the text of Lysias confirms the importance of the writing that makes possible a detailed and "rhetorical" examination, based on the rereading of the work (263E-264A), that of Socrates serves to clarify the concepts. In particular, a second diairesis is formulated. Of love as a mania there are two kinds: one human and one divine.24 In this dialectic key the partial truth of the first Socrates intervention is also recovered. Since his two discourses, as noted earlier by the philosopher himself, said conflicting things, it is now a matter of understanding how we have gone from blaming to praising (265C). The two forms of speeches must be carefully considered. In the first case it is a matter of bringing everything back to the unity of an Idea, taking in an overview the things dispersed in many ways, to clarify and define what

24 The divine is divided into four parts: the divinatory inspiration (attributed to Apollo), the mystical inspiration (attributed to Dionysus), the poetical inspiration (attributed to the Muses), the amorous inspiration (attributed to Aphrodite and to Eros), which it is the best.
we want to talk about; the other way of proceeding consists in dividing according to the Ideas, trying not to break any part of them. These ways of proceeding, both in speaking and in thinking, are division and unification. So the first discourse considered the negative part of love to blame it rightly; the second discourse instead considered the other part of love, that which is divine and worthy of the greatest praise.

As we can see, decisive passages of the Platonic dialectic are mentioned, which will be taken up and analyzed in later works. Here, for example, the need to divide ideas according to ideas already emerges well.\textsuperscript{25}

The procedure is reconfirmed in the delineation of the weakness of the rhetorical technique: true knowledge implies an appropriate connection of all the parts, connected to each other and to the whole. It is therefore necessary to have theoretical experiences that are not necessarily philosophical, but of similar cut, which allow us to understand the nature of the intellect and of reason, that is, the dialectical method itself. This has a universal scope and must apply to the study of everything: one must always see if the reality to be studied is simple or complex; if it is simple enough to analyze what is its power to act and to suffer (key concepts of the ontological vision of Plato);\textsuperscript{26} if it is made up of many forms, after having enumerated them, we need to study for each of them what we see when it is a unity i.e. what it can by nature act and suffer and from what.

The theme of philosophy is also central to the problem of \textit{communication and the superiority of orality over writing}. In fact, a philosopher is one who knows the limits of writing; analogously in the \textit{evaluation of the rhetoric of time and final message to Isocrates}, it is claimed that this very young rhetorician could do great things, since in his thought there is a certain philosophy.

But also the moments of the final \textit{prayer to Pan} refer to philosophy, given that Socrates asks 1. to be beautiful "inside" and to behave in manner consistent with what he is; 2. to consider wisdom as a true wealth; 3. not to appreciate the riches. In short he wishes to practice the philosophical \textit{mania} to the end.

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. \textit{Sophist} 253B-E, \textit{Philebus} 16C-E, and above all \textit{Statesman} 262E3–263B1; see also Migliori 2013 pp. 344–347.

\textsuperscript{26} Cf. Migliori 2013 pp. 503–512.
6. **The most important theme: the soul and the relationship between man and God**

That the most important problem is that of the relationship between man and god and therefore of the soul, the divine part that exists in us, is revealed by the same “excessive” weight that this theme has with respect to the rhetoric to which it is necessarily connected.

Already in the *Prologue* are quoted (without any reason) the myth of Borea and Orizia to criticize the efforts of the rationalists who demythicize the myth by referring it to rational explanations. These “wise men” are capable of “ingenious interpretations”, but their wisdom appear to Socrates like the one of those who have time to waste in the useless attempt to bring back to a rational explanation, to the normality, the mythic tradition. To this approach Socrates contrasts his “investigation of himself”, in which the philosopher sets up an alternative, which concerns the soul, if it is a multifaceted beast,\(^27\) or a more meek and simpler living being. It is an obvious bridge thrown immediately towards the great myth that will highlight precisely what we can define the “complex simplicity” of the soul.

The subsequent detailed description of the place seems to want to stimulate all the senses:\(^28\) the sight is struck by the beauty of the place, the smell is satisfied by the chaste tree in full bloom; the touch is stimulated by the very fresh waters, felt with the foot, and by the grass; the cicadas' singing pleasantly hits the hearing. The thing is doubly relevant as this is the only dialogue set in the countryside and the thing is underlined. Phaedrus himself remembers that Socrates does not like to get out of the city and the philosopher explains:

> I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me, only the people in the city can do that (230D3–5).

But it would be wrong to read this environment as "natural" in the modern sense of the term: the place is full of gods, as is immediately underlined by the presence of images and statues, which make it look like a sa-

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\(^{27}\) Like the monster Typhon, son of Gaia and Tartarus, who had a hundred heads of dragon throwing fire.

cred environment. But the divine is everywhere, in every tree, as shown by the oath of Phaedrus on the plane tree:

I swear to you... by which god, I wonder? How about this very plane tree? I swear that, if you don’t make your speech right next to this tree here, I shall never again recite or utter another speech to you (236D10-E3).

Nothing emerges obviously in the speech of Lysias, beautiful in words but not inspired and therefore not true. In the first speech of Socrates religious elements stand out too. It is emphasized that whoever is subjected to such love is a slave to pleasures, ill, attracted to the body, while it is the soul that is the lady and the owner of the body. The importance of the soul is immediately confirmed in the identification of the damages that an old man in love procures; in fact he will be devastating to the soul, which is and will always be the most valuable thing to gods and men (241C4–6).

Moreover, Socrates claims to be inspired, that is, to find himself in a kind of divine state, almost invaded by the Nymphs, divinities of the place, which are evidently identified here with the inspiring Muses (238C-D).

In the following interlude Socrates would like to escape but stops for two reasons: a) it is noon and Phaedrus persuades him to stay and wait when it will be cooler, b) above all the divine sign, the divine voice that manifests itself in him when he must be restrained from doing something wrong. This time, in fact, he forbids him to cross the river before he had purified himself, as if he had been guilty of an offense against the divinity. The soul, which has a divination capacity, is there ready to point out the error: he has not bothered to commit a fault to the gods to receive honours from men.

His error is therefore a religious fault: Socrates affirms for four times, in these few lines, the fact of having been guilty of a fault, twice underlining that it was towards the gods (242C3; C6; C9; D2). The fault must be really serious, if Socrates points out a sentence that involves both speeches:

Phaedrus, that speech you carried with you here...it was horrible, as horrible as the speech you made me give! (242D4–5).
In fact, the philosopher has made a speech that he defines as “foolish and close to being impious” (242D7). Foolish because he, philosopher, accepted a rhetorical engagement, impious because Eros, denigrated in the two speeches, being the son of Aphrodite, is a god, or at least something divine. This is why Socrates feels the need to purify himself with a palinode. We remain therefore in a strongly religious context.

And religious is also the first statement in the second speech of Socrates, which recognizes the divine origin of mania given to prophets and prophetesses, which, thanks to their state of delirium, have predict many useful things. But also the other form of mania comes from the Muses, who take possession of a sensitive soul to create odes and poems, instructing posterity. It is therefore a positive activity, a real gift. So the mania can not be considered something negative, since the greatest goods are granted to us precisely for this divine way. In fact, Plato specifies that the divine mania is superior to the wisdom of men (244B-E).

The same discourse evidently applies to eros, when the human soul, mindful of the vision of Ideas, is able to use its gifts. This is another reason why the theme of the soul must be dealt with in depth, immediately highlighting its "supernatural" nature: the soul as the principle of movement is immortal. But Plato immediately states that speaking of the idea of soul would be a very long and divine one; it is therefore better to say, with a brief human exposure, what it resembles (246A). We therefore have the myth, in which it emerges that the soul itself is composite, with two different natures, represented by man and horses. The thing had been announced since the beginning of the theme:

We must first understand the truth about the nature of the soul, divine or human, by examining what it does and what is done to it (245C2-4).

Furthermore, it is emphasized that the horses and the charioteers of the gods are all good and deriving from good, while those of men are mixed. In fact there are two horses, one of which is beautiful and good, while the other is opposite. Consequently, the guide of the chariot can only be difficult and uncomfortable.

The whole narration wants to show this connection, of closeness and distance, with the gods, this participation in the divine, which is beautiful, wise and good. And in the description of the processions, the nature
of God is emphasized: Zeus puts all things in order and takes care of them (246E4–6).

If we have to skip the theoretical interlude, the poetic interlude confirms that the gods watch over the lives of men: the human beings are watched over by the cicadas, who refer to the Muses.

But it is the analysis of the discourses that clarifies how the entire commitment identified in the dialogue has a “divine function”. At the end of the theoretical discussion on rhetoric, Socrates argues that the goal is not social, but religious: a sensible man will make this laborious effort not in order to speak among human beings, but so as to be able to speak in a way that pleases the gods as much as possible. A reasonable man must try to being pleasant not to his fellow slaves but to his masters, who are wholly good. (273E-274A).

Then, in dealing with the problem of communication, the link and distinction are confirmed: the human beings are only philosophers, that is to say lovers of wisdom, while they can not be called wise, because this word competes only to the gods.

Finally, of course, the prayer to Pan constitutes the almost necessary accomplishment in a dialogue full of God. Socrates presents very human requests to Pan and to all the other gods of that place. The three requests reproduce the order of values: the soul that guides the body, the choice of life of a wise man, the sufficient external goods for a virtuous man.

7. Conclusion

The Phaedrus is a dialogue on rhetoric, that is, on all forms of communication, on prose and poetry, rhetorical and poetic too, and lives on three great discourses and a beautiful myth to highlight an articulated series of judgments on the correct form of both written and oral communication.

Poetry inspired by the divine mania is exalted. The condition of the true poets is comparable to that of the philosopher. The situation is quite different in the case of the versifiers, who devote themselves to an imitative activity of little value. We have therefore no substantial modification of judgment with respect to the Republic or to other works, because "po-
"etry" is an equivocal term to which two Ideas correspond, and two human conditions radically different.29

In this context, Plato does not at all despise the written form that allows us to know and learn by heart. However, the author stresses its limits with concern. It is certainly necessary to write, especially for the posterity, but using with all the necessary cautions a rigid structure, which prevents a true dialogue, which can give illusions about knowledge, which can not defend itself from any misunderstandings.

But to be good rhetoricians it is above all necessary to know. Knowing the technical rules, certainly, is a necessary but not sufficient premise for this technique. We must therefore distinguish: a speech can be beautiful from the point of view of sounds, but ugly from the point of view of the structure and very bad from the point of view of the content. It is necessary to know that the same technique must have a development articulated according to the rules of dialectics. Philosophy is the main way for a rhetorician who wants to build a technique and not an empirical practice, more or less effective.

Then we need the knowledge of the object treated, but even more of the soul, both in its binary, human and divine nature, and in the complex destiny that then sees it associated with the human body. It is a theoretical-practical knowledge, which must be concretized in the argumentative choices that the true rhetorician makes on the basis of the nature of the interlocutor in front of him. This reaffirms with even greater force the limits of written communication.

But the theme of the soul itself necessarily refers to a reflection on the sphere of the divine, which is already imposed by the poetical mania. The immortal soul binds human destiny to that of a divinity that follows the vicissitudes of men, to whom it reserves care and gifts. The philosopher himself is conditioned by eros, a divine gift that makes him sensitive to the charm of beauty, and from the otherworldly story, preserved and witnessed by the anamnesis. But divinity appears omnipresent in this dialogue and explains its tone and the setting. Everything happens under a

29 Even in the Gorgias, often cited as a dialogue hostile to rhetoric, Plato strongly affirms the duplicity of this technique, a tense to pleasure and the other to good (Gorgias 503A-B). The continuity between the two works is perfect: the Phaedrus completes the Gorgias, as it indicates what good rhetoric must do and what distinguishes it from the bad one.

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plane tree, but this tree is a god. Here two friends, both lovers of discourses and of beauty and therefore of eros, intertwine their souls and conclude the day with a common prayer, which reaffirms the choice of philosophy:

SOCRATES: O dear Pan and all the other gods of this place, grant that I may be beautiful inside and that all my external actions are in harmony with what I have insides. That I consider the wise man rich. As for gold, let me have a quantity of money which no one could take or take away, except a temperate man. Do we need anything else, Phaedrus? For me, I prayed in the right measure.

PHAEDRUS: Also associate me with these prayers, because the things of friends are common.

SOCRATES: Let’s be off. (279B8-C8).