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### The Mythic Journey of a Changeling

Lawrence Kimmel

Trinity University, [lkimmel@trinity.edu](mailto:lkimmel@trinity.edu)

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Lawrence Kimmel

*The Mythic Journey of a Changeling*

Once upon a time, there was a creature that crawled out of the sea and...

Once upon a time, there was a creature made perfect who met a serpent in a garden and...

Once upon a time, there were heroic creatures on earth that strove against the gods and...

There are many such tales in the archaic moorings of our collective memory, but one in particular that seems inclusive if indeterminate: Once upon a time there was a creature that came out of the darkness with only a faint memory of water, and sand, and cold, and fear to discover that its very life depended on telling a story about its origins—of which it had no clear memory, and its destiny—of which it had no certain knowledge. What more fabulous to conceive than this creature which, having lost its tail, dreams of growing wings? It is a being whose nature transforms itself and the world it inhabits but, for all this, keeps running up against its own limits: neither Ape nor Angel, it remains a creature caught between, looking through a fractured mirror at possibilities always just beyond reach. It is a changeling creature, a child seeming stolen from the gods.

I

Historical fantasies in language and life: The nature and reach of language has been variously construed by philosophers with only a common acknowledgement that it is the single instrument we have toward a comprehensive critical discernment of life and world. It remains a critical issue, however, whether the entire range of meaning can and should be used in comprehending truth and reality. It may be well to clarify at the outset the difference in these two questions. Truth has many forms, indeed truth is a matter of form. Reality, on the other hand, however and wherever manifest, is a matter of flow rather than form. Its modality is one of continual transformation. If the limits of our

world are the limits of our language, then it makes a world of difference if we confine our language to facts. Even the most fundamental forms of knowledge in science are discontinuous and subject to paradigm shifts, but reality is itself formless and suffers no such fixations. Inquiries concerning truth invariably require a calculus of language with an abridgment of meaning, but if we move from the question of what is true to what is real there can be no final abridgment of language and no abstractions into a calculus. The world of reality unlike the world of truth refers to the whole of what is possible—that is, to whatever is meaningful within the range and sense of language.

In ancient classical philosophy the long standing ‘quarrel’ that Plato alludes to between literature and philosophy is framed in many different ways, most particularly as that between *mythos* and *logos*. It has an historical sequel in the divide between Plato’s rejection of the value of rhetorical discourse and its reinstatement by Aristotle. Two philosophers in the modern period have similarly commented on a kind of conceptual schism in the relation of language and world: With regard to Nietzsche’s rhetorical claim that there are no facts, only interpretations, Wittgenstein offered the logical corrective that not everything can be an interpretation.

While these seem to be contradictory claims (as Wittgenstein so intended in his reminder to Nietzsche) they can also be regarded as compatible remarks about and within the world of sense and meaning. Interpretations can only be interpretations *of* something, of course, but that something can be other than a fact—e.g. it may be an assumption or postulate, or else be grounded in a social or existential commitment unrelated to a factual claim. The point here is that to call something a fact whether in common sense or science, is to give it a value, or accept it as constituted by a value. The world is not

reducible to facts in the absence of some determining structure of agreement as to what will count as a fact. In scientific discourse and practice this is commonly expressed as ‘all observations are theory laden’ with the general implication that all seeing is ‘seeing as...’ To put it differently, no intelligible world—including that of physics—consists in a totality of facts. The world in which we live is not made up simply of things, nor is it comprehended by facts: facts are not the building blocks of meaning, only one of its potential attributes which in turn requires interpretation. To put the matter in terms other than interpretation and as it will be addressed in this essay: the world in which we live is meaningful in terms of the stories that we tell, stories that we share, stories we remember and stories that we live. Stories and the lives they embrace are neither constituted nor limited by an independent description of facts. They are formed and edited in terms of the perspectives and interpretations we bring to the experiences we share.

Aristotle’s indelible inscription in the bedrock of western thought—that Man is a creature with *Logos*—is a point of departure and a point directly in question concerning the issue historical fabulation. In the specific context and currency of his time Aristotle’s definition focused on the rational discourse of self governance so that his original claim split into the memorialized definition that as a possessor of *Logos* or speech, Man is a rational and a political animal. These two features of *Logos* are of course the result of an interpretation of a founding claim that intellectual history has since adopted as the defining capacity of human-being. So understood it has the effect of restricting the cognitive limits of language to discursive reason.

But another interpretation can and has been given to ‘Man is a creature with *Logos*’ (words/ speech/ language) that does not center in logic nor serve the narrow limits

of control in reason and rule. As a creature with *Logos*, Man is understood as having the capacity to tell stories—that is, as an alternative to Aristotle’s governing definition, Man is a story-telling animal. Man is a creature graced not only in a faculty needed to reason and govern, but able to put her life and experience into stories. The stories we live by are legion—collectively they comprise the different human concerns investigated by religion, history, philosophy, biology, economics... Within each of these collective accounts the dominant interpretation in western intellectual and political history has been that of rule and reason, logic and legislation—that is, it has biased Aristotle’s interpretation of *Logos*. This bias has tended to establish and direct the central use of language to that of control—of the environment, of the world, of others, of ourselves. Such a bias in philosophical terms represents an ambition to reduce meaningful discourse to the category of facts and so use language (*Logos*) to constrain the myriad possibilities of imagination toward a matrix of control. This project was made explicit in logical positivism but it is residual as well in the general culture.

It is instructive to consider what a shared life-world would become if it were reduced to a discourse of facts, in which no stories are told, or rather, just one story, the recounting of facts according to the master narrative in which all facts are given or from which they are derived. As a case in point, and reflective of a dominant male culture still in keeping with the Classical Greek bias, the traditional form of autobiography has been that of factual summary. In Lionel Trilling’s wonderful story about college teaching, *Of This Time, Of that Place...*, a class of first year students is assigned to write an initial essay about who they are and why they have come to the college. The responses all take the form: ‘My name is James Bierbower III. I was born on...in...and went to school

at...my father, James Bierbower II and his father... were born and raised...' –a series of related facts and events that frame the endowed life of an entitled class at a small liberal arts college. The one exception to this litany of sameness is a student who begins his essay by seeming to reject the essay question: 'Of this time, of that place, of some heritage... what does that matter to those of us now engaged in the creative adventure of learning...?' It turns out, of course, that it *does* matter, and throughout the term, the teacher is hard pressed and finally unable to locate this student on any spectrum of acceptable discourse and decides that he cannot pass his work. However brilliant in other ways, the boy simply does not fit in, nor fit the mold of common sensibility grounded in the factual discourse of learning and life. His work is eventually consigned to a discard pile of student failures. There is a tragic context in the telling of this story which would take us aside from the limited point of our interest here which is to note the standard of autobiography in the listing of facts and events in standard categories of social accountability.

In contrast to this factual encasement the emerging literature of the feminine movement has produced new voices that have found a different way to shape the possibilities of autobiography more in keeping with the complexities of our changing life stories. In this literature a life-story can well begin at any point that constitutes a significant sense of its coherence and importance, nor is one limited to a single starting point or narrative. One might begin a story of her life: 'I was abandoned by my parents...' and so a life narrative unfolds in terms of that critical perception and experience. But at another juncture, or just as well, this autobiography may be transformed along with the life of its telling: 'I first met my birth mother on my

graduation from middle school...’ Where one starts is critical for the narrative, obviously, and also critical for the life of its telling, but that place is not assigned by any objective order in terms of its importance or the coherence of the narrative. Language is a tool for many purposes, and the meaning of a life cannot be determined independently of the story in which it is framed; to the extent that there are optional narratives, there exist also different life possibilities. No one is stuck with one set of determining facts, no matter how hard the circumstances of her life.

In a world fast losing its tether to religious conviction, moral objectivity, universal reason, political solvency, ecological sensibility...it may be that all we have left are stories to replace the once endowed gods, the enshrined templates of True, Good, Beautiful, Sacred...except of course that the gods and these various testaments were all and in themselves stories and the products of stories. Hopefully we can avoid succumbing to any insistence that there is only one way to see the world (e.g. physics), one way to consider life (biology), as once people were persuaded or forced to think there was but one God—their own (theology.) I trust it is not necessary to note here that this is in no way to dismiss the importance of any particular story—e.g. physics or biology—or to debunk any efforts to assess truth, goodness, or the sacred. This is only to suggest that the meaning and value of any discourse is related to the context of the stories being told.

Our lives individually and collectively are comprised of stories in which events are recorded, interpreted, evaluated, edited, but also in which possibilities, disappointments, alternatives, dreams, regrets, hopes are woven into the narrative; occasionally, our experiences may be sufficiently shaken by joy or sorrow such that a whole paradigm shifts in the narrative. It is in this sense that historical fabulations

surround our most ordinary lives, extend and inform the range of our possibilities as human beings.

We are in fact not bound by facts. If we have a nature, it is one that we have given to ourselves in some accepted story or other and which remains ever a work in progress. Does this mean there are no facts that form the boundaries of life and world? No, only that the facts in our lives are first of all dependent on the meaning of our experience—individually and collectively, existentially and historically—in its myriad forms and flaws; it is only in this flexible and variable way that the meaning of our lives is ever ‘determined by the facts.’

What I am arguing for, then, is more a plea for the centrality of metaphor in language (*Logos*) and of imagination in life—for the possibilities embedded in a living language that is addressed to the comprehensive if indeterminate richness and complexity of human existence. To put it in another way the division of *Logos* from *Mythos* and the related genders of language that estrange and hermetically seal facts from the reach of fiction and fantasy must be reconciled in order to create the life stories in which we find meaning.

## II

True stories: some say that in the beginning there was a great void and out of Chaos came Desire and Destiny and the ensuing generation of first things. Others say that in the beginning darkness covered the earth but the creator brought forth light and knelt down in its early mist to breathe life into the clay. Still others say that in the first three seconds of the universe there was a cosmic mix of mass and energy that generated life. Like most autobiographies, the self-life-writing of human-being can begin at any



particular moment that is memorable or that the retrospective mind finds especially compelling. Some picture human life to be that of a naked ape whose existence in the world of his own making is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Others imagine that of one race are gods and men. The story seems to depend on where and when the teller, and what the point of telling or taleing. But no story holds title to truth for, of course, the story itself is in process, the subject in transit, the end in question.

We attribute to the writers in the age of Classical Greece, particularly the critical historians and philosophers, the intuition that it was important to *get things right*, to give reasons and argue for perspectives about the name and nature of Man. It is not uncommon to suppose that in the gradual transformation of *mythos* into *logos*—of emergent sense into manifest truth—that we have left well behind as vestigial myth the primal energy and spiritual core of generative stories. But to think so is a mistake. History is still a story, allegory survives at the heart of philosophical discourse and metaphor generates invention at the base and boundaries of scientific inquiry. *Mythos* remains subliminally operative and functionally transformative in the living culture of the storytelling animal whose very life blood is possibility.

Still, we *would* like to get it right; indeed the literal bias of the modern temper rather insists on it, but we must trace back this particular obsession to its archaic source in wonder if we are to understand its nature and risk. Arguably, the first point of critical separation of the mythic and historical, the factive from the fictive, is found in the development of ‘the Socratic Method.’ The Platonic Dialogues mark the distinctive turn to an insistence on rational discourse as the touchstone of value and this also allegedly marks the fatal fracturing of reason and passion in philosophical inquiry. However, we

will try to discern in this most enigmatic of the triumvirate of Classical Greek philosophers the more fundamental and sustaining resource of mythic energy that keeps open the possibilities of human imagination. Further developing the counsel of Socrates and framing the *paidaieic* project of Aristotle, Plato's poetic dialogues contain countervailing and contrapuntal elements of both *mythos* and *logos*. It is the philosophical convergence of discursive logistics and dramatic erotics which make his work such a compelling study of Man as a changeling creature caught-between.

Throughout the Platonic *corpus* there are countless instances and uses of myth, allegory, and extended metaphor imbedded within the discursive logic of his *Dialogues*. A long history of scholarship has argued the point and import of Plato's wide and effective use of what otherwise and in the context of his valuations he seems to dismiss as nonsense or insidious. Should we believe what he says against what he does? The rhetorical, dramatic, and figurative uses of myth are so obviously deliberate and intentionally integrated such that they cannot be dismissed as incidental accessories. So what then are we to make of the fabulations of Plato in the midst of the serious business of a search for truth? It is one thing to credit the great tragic dramatists with imaginative license and emotive excesses in the search for the darker reaches of the pathological in human perversions, marking the territory of *That Way Be Dragons*. But *et tu Plato?* How and why myth and to what end in the larger body of his work?

I want to look briefly at one of Plato's *Dialogues*, more precisely at two sections of the *Symposium*, which I take to be a crucial index of what the thinker was about in his task of truth-telling concerning the nature and destiny of human kind. I suspect it is more usual to think of the *Symposium* as a derivative, supplemental, or even incidental relief

text in the Platonic corpus, rather than generative for the whole of his systematic inquiry into Truth, Wisdom, and the Form of the Good. But the erotic genesis of inquiry is the whole point of the text of this dialogue and as such marks the conceptual beginning of Plato's central project of achieving a synoptic vision of reality.

Of the two myths to be discussed in Plato's *Symposium* one is familiar and oft-cited (the speech of Aristophanes), the other is more complex and variously interpreted (the dialectical teaching of Diotima). Both occur in the context of a gathering of friends to celebrate the victory of a tragic dramatist during the festival of Dionysos. The evening is given to drinking and conversation, and an invitation is given to each person to address an encomium to Love. In Aristophanes' speech, Plato has the great comic dramatist relate a fabulous myth which depicts the human condition as one driven by desire resulting from a radically divided soul in which the separate parts are condemned to search the world for completion and fulfillment by reuniting with its other half. Characteristically, the effect of Aristophanes' myth is a deep mix of comic *pathos*. The original rotund creatures possessed of two heads, four arms, four legs, etc., were so aggressive, obnoxious, and threatening that the god split them in half—creating a vast community of half-life beings whose plaintive existence is driven by an obsession to recover their whole identity through the other. Given the great plurality of people and expanse of the world, and given the complexities of ordinary human association along with the risk and pain of experimental intimacy, the prospect of reconciliation is not optimal. At root this fabulation has the telling truth and compelling reality of common human experience. If Socratic wisdom consists in striving the whole of our lives so that the end of all our striving will be to return to where we began and know the place for the first time—that is,

if the journey of the intellect is for the mind to come to understand what in some important and archaic sense it already knows, then this myth represents an important parallel with respect to the journey of the heart. There is in each person a life-long striving to arrive whence we began, and there is the hope that if we are fully alive, sensitive and open to the risks of desire, then we may finally come to ourselves in simple fulfillment of the nature of our existence. However poignant the human situation seems under Aristophanes' comic tale, there is promise as well—a further analogue to the myth of human discord that placed hope in the bottom of Pandora's Box.

The series of *encomia* to love in the *Symposium* predictably reflect the character of each speaker and further index the relation each has to this most intimate and binding phenomenon of social existence. Recall that the series begins with a speech in praise of that first impulse of desire in the journey toward beauty and truth: the physical attraction to the body of the 'other.' But in terms of Aristophanes' interpretive myth this means that we are drawn out of ourselves toward ourselves. Each speech expands the domain and level of this impulse, in which Love, Desire, *Eros*, is depicted variously as a young playful and vigorous god, as a great benevolent god of age and wisdom, as the most beautiful of gods...until it is the turn of the old satyr Socrates. Subsequent to Aristophanes' account, and leading up to Socrates' interrogatories, the host and honoree of the symposium, the new and victorious playwright Agathon, flushed with victory, pictures the god in his own image, as if he were looking into a mirror for a likeness. One is reminded of Nietzsche's remark about one loving that in which they find their own strength. It remains for Socrates to lift the discourse to embrace the whole of humanity.

### III

The love and pursuit of wisdom in its most general as opposed to professionally philosophical sense is a journey without a destination. As such the journey itself a fabulation of human sensibility—desire in search of its ground, the soul in search of its sense and limits. Its object is the subject itself. The Greeks analyzed desire as a lack, as an immediate and compelling sense of incompleteness, and as such at the heart and impulse of all movement. It is significant that Plato places the mythic account of desire at the root of human endeavor in the character and voice of the comic poet, who begins in a playful and vulgar style in keeping with his reputation. The burlesque gives way however to a more somber rendition of desire in human longing for a soul mate that will reconcile the divided self. Recalling why Zeus split in two the strident creatures of the originating species, there is reason to question the wisdom of any reunion. However poignant the plight of the human being so divided, this reminder of what a permanent reconciliation would restore in the form of the two headed many armed monster suggests the human being is a finer and nobler creature when caught up in the infinite and insistent space of desire. This sense of the incompleteness of human endeavor is familiar characteristic of the eristic activity and *aporetic* discourse of the early ‘Socratic’ dialogues, but it is true also in the more ambitious epistemic extensions of the later dialogues. There is, for example, a characteristic lack of closure even in the *Republic* when the question is put at the end of the long discussion, looking back on the constructed ideal system of rational order of human community ‘But how and when will all this come to pass...?’ To which Plato has Socrates respond ‘Not until philosophers

become kings and kings philosophers.” In both conceptual and historical terms, this must mean something like ‘When hell freezes over.’ A reconciliation of ideas and the framing of ideals is one thing, but human life fraught with desire is something quite other, and Plato again counters the idyllic rationality of the *Republic* as well as the exacting epistemic but still incomplete efforts at birthing knowledge in the *Theaetetus* with the great dialogue and dialectic of desire in the *Symposium*.

The lesson of the *Symposium* in the larger body of Plato’s work suggests that the rational framing of the instrumentality and power of *Logos* requires an associated discourse of *Mythos*, and a generative base of *Eros*. Reason and passion, inference and inclination, deduction and desire are always in play if not in concert. Aristotle confirms this same point in his founding insight that wisdom begins in wonder. He includes what amounts to a cosmic addendum that acknowledges desire at the root of all things—that the principle of all motion is attraction. In the different context and concern of the *Symposium*, the teaching of Diotima is that only the gods remain unchanged: in mortals attributes pass away and age, but they leave behind a new generation of possibilities that enable mortal life a share in immortality.

Plato’s efforts to circumscribe the limits of desire on the positive side, that is, at the highest reach of intelligence and imagination, invariably meet with a discursive *aporia* at which point he resorts to the dramatic figuration of myth, metaphor and allegory. Although Plato was patently hostile to the use of fabulation and provided extended critiques of differing orders against the various arts and their disfiguring conceits, he nonetheless found it necessary to supplement and contextualize his vision of human aspiration and achievement in figurative terms. Many of these dramatic vignettes

have made their way into the canon of world literature quite apart from the abstract corpus of Plato's philosophical work. The most famous is likely the 'Allegory of the Cave', from the *Republic*, which is sufficiently well known not to require detailed description here. The fabulation of this allegory is first of all a portrait of the human condition as an imprisonment of the senses. The world into which we awaken is a life buried in the deep cave of a shadowland in which phenomena play across a dimly lit cavern and knowledge is limited to guessing the sequence of their occurrence. Shackled to this world of shadows in a flickering and false light of enfeebled perception, the ambitions of relational desire is limited to cleverness, where prizes are awarded to those who provide the most persuasive story of sequencing. This allegory is usually read in epistemic terms as a figurative framing of Plato's theory of knowledge, one that requires the transcendence of phenomenal appearance toward an ideal world of enlightenment independent of the senses. So considered, it serves as a dramatic analogue to Plato's discursive explication of ascendance to the realm of intelligibility in the equally famous theory of the divided line. Our interest in this essay, however, will remain with the developmental issue of desire and with the apparently necessary discourse of fabulations through which the nature of desire finds adequate expression.

At the basic erotic level the crudity of desire demands immediate gratification in a physical object, a raw craving for the other. In the *Symposium* this level consists in an enflamed desire for the body of a beautiful youth. In the corresponding allegorical context of the Cave, however, it is clear that such an appeal leaves desire in possession of an empty husk, the faint satisfaction of an embracing shadow. Plato's cave and its shadow-world recalls the Underworld of Homer, in which the wandering Odysseus meets

the shade of great Achilles who soon disabuses him of any notion that power, authority or prestige exist among the faded creatures of Hades. Desire is empty in such regions, whether in Hades or among the idle and vacant distractions of a world devoid of transcendence. At the same time, however, Plato makes clear that it is in the visceral commonplace of craving that one discovers in oneself the base stirrings of a desire. It is through effort and direction that this primitive desire becomes the aspiration of wisdom—a desire which, taken root, transforms the self and the world it inhabits.

Plato's measured constraint in this initial position is to insist that from any level of apprehension deserving the name "humanity" it makes little difference whether the movement is that of an organism above or a shade below: fulfillment is hollow without a transcendent aspiration of desire. The life journey from out of the cave is not only toward cognitive enlightenment, but one in search of moral and emotional maturity. Once free of the shackles of immediacy, desire effects a transformation of intellect and imagination toward the soul's fulfillment. It is convenient to mark the stages of this ascendancy of desire in the lexicon of Love within classical Greek literature in terms of *libidos* (the first and sustaining movement of life energy) through *Eros* (the cathecting immediacy of desire on available objects) to *philein* (recognition of the mediating reciprocity of the desire of others) to *agape* (the fulfillment of desire in realization of human possibility.) This characterization of the growth and maturation of desire which is developed in the *Symposium* is a moral and emotional analogue to the wisdom of human aspiration that begins in the movement out of the cave into the light in Plato's *Republic*.

So who and what is this creature that struggles out of the cocoon of the senses, who emerges from a primitive encapsulation and begins its journey to overcome the



remnants of its birthing? Plato's answer is to describe a philosophical animal, one whose realization of desire gradually transforms a world of contingency and necessity into a realm of freedom and beauty—a creature that in transforming its environment transforms itself.

Plato's metaphor for this changeling creature is that of pregnancy: a human being is a creature of desire whose manifest destiny in wisdom is to give birth in beauty. The characteristic figure in this process is Socrates as midwife as described in the *Theaetetus*. This self-description and model of the teacher is confirmed throughout the Platonic corpus, in which we discover Socrates assisting others both in finding a source of the beautiful and of assisting in the birthing and examination of the created offspring. In the *Theaetetus*, it is argued that while all men are pregnant, not all are ready for the labor that will bring forth promising offspring. Even the most earnest among those who labor bring forth wind-eggs and become discouraged in their passion.

The *Symposium* gives an account of the origin and development of this idea of birthing, and this once again requires the figuration of the fabulous: males are pregnant and laboring to give birth, seeking a transcendence not only of the prison of the senses but of the time of their tenure in the world. The point of all pregnancy, as explained in the concluding wisdom of Diotima, is immortality—either through the natural physical begetting of children, or through the intellectual and imaginative creation of immortal thoughts, deeds, or works.

#### IV

That Plato was ever in search of truth and reality is not in question, of course, but it is also the case that in order to do this he must construct a world in which his former

teacher appears throughout as a protagonist of mythic proportions. No less an authority than Shelley, who translated the *Symposium*, refers to the poetic structure of the Platonic corpus in his essay on the *Defense of Poetry* arguing that Plato was essentially a poet such that the truth and splendor of his imagery are matched by the melody of his language. Shelley claims to be following Plato in holding that the exercise of every imaginative art is poetry. His further thesis in a famous and often contested passage is that poets who imagine the indestructible order of beauty are more than authors of language, music and painting but are also founders of civil society and inventors of the arts of life. Shelley's claim that poets become teachers by drawing near to the beautiful and true reflects his general understanding of Plato's work grounded in the force of the poetics of the *Symposium*.

There is reason to believe that the historical Socrates, as he remarks in his own words in the *Phaedo*, is not a mythologist, not a 'teller of stories'. His basic attitude was critically opposed to the fancy of poetic conceit, and the purpose of his inquiry essentially *aporetic*—to bring discourse only to the point of its limits. Not so Plato; although he burned his tragedies when he took up philosophy at the death of Socrates he retained a poetic sense for the importance of the mythic in his development of the genre of philosophical drama. The major emphasis of his work is committed to transcendence toward a synoptic vision of reality, which could not be fully developed within the logistical constraints of argumentative discourse. Plato is more than a creator of particular contextual myths. His incorporation of the mythic begins and is sustained through his depiction of Socrates—a character of mythic proportions who is a fusion of *logos* and *mythos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. Among the countless fabulations of Socrates

throughout Plato's Dialogues perhaps the most important for our purposes is found in the closing sequence of the *Symposium*. In a mock encomium to the god of love, the drunken interloper Alkibiades likens Socrates to the *Silēni*, the seduction of his words having the same effect as the flute playing of the demon Marsyas. That Socrates is here and throughout depicted as an erotic force comparable to the fabled satyr of Dionysian passion is evidence of Plato's commitment to revitalize the tradition of myth that was being displaced from the literature of his time. Euripides's dismissal of myth from the Dionysian ritual of drama in favor of common characters and ordinary life signaled an end to the tradition and depth of the tragic vision once achieved in Aeschylus and Sophocles. In its place Plato offers a new mythic genre that provides a conceptual and creative base to revitalize the possibilities inherent in the metaphysical depth of tragic drama. Although Plato no longer probes the darkness of the human soul characteristic of tragedy, his dialectical drama draws on the residual depths of the earlier drama. The Platonic Dialogue neither rivals nor replaces the great tradition of the tragic dramatists, but as evidenced in the *Symposium*, it does transform into a new key a human drama grounded in passion.

In the *Symposium* Plato constructs a variegated account of the strange creature *Eros* in such a way to mirror the various mythic images of the satyr figure of Socrates. Neither god nor man, the daemon *Eros* is the child of *Poros* and *Penia*—an offspring of the coupling of affluence and poverty; he is, in the solemn description of the priestess Diotima, rough and disheveled, without house or shoes one who sleeps in the open streets and alleys of the world. However, he was conceived during the birthday celebration of Aphrodite so he is a lover of beauty and a pursuer of good, and thus a driving force in the

relations and aspirations of human beings toward virtue and wisdom. Neither Eros, love nor Socrates, teacher *possess* the good, the true, or the beautiful, but they are so disposed in nature that they aspire to these things, and in so doing inspire others to do the same. We are thus given the condition of human-being as divided and infused with need and longing, but having manifest possibility, pregnant with the prospect of great thoughts and deeds needing only to be brought forth in beauty. The journey of man is always toward the fulfillment of this possibility—the birthing of human excellence through the love of another.

The self is divided in its very nature throughout Plato's range of mythic images. The description in the *Republic* is the familiar political myth of human soul as tripartite, composed of intellect, spirit, and appetite. Later in that same work Plato constructs a fabulation fashioned after the mythic beasts of the *Chimera*, *Scylla*, and *Cerberus*. This image of the soul is the mythic figure of a three headed beast or rather three beasts joined together 'naturally': the first a multicolored beast with a ring of man-heads that grow and change at will, the second beast that of a lion, and the last in the figure of an ordinary human being, the composite given the outward features of the latter. In the *Republic*, Plato's subject is the just soul, and his analysis here is that the manifest soul will be determined by which of the beasts are fed and nurtured—if the first two are favored and the last neglected or starved then the different parts of the beast will devour and kill one another. To achieve a harmony of soul, clearly the human intellect must make the courage and strength of the lion an ally in order to control and domesticate the many appetites of the multiform beast of the passions.

The nature of the soul for Plato is movement; the virtue of the immortal soul is life. Prior to its incarnation the soul, as it is pictured in the *Phaedrus*, is winged and feeds on the pure forms of the true and the good, but incarnated in human form it is weighed down in visceral accessories and torn by good and bad desires. In yet another tripartite image this soul is depicted in terms of a charioteer with a team of horses, one good, one bad. The soul is attracted, as in the *Symposium* first to the sight of a beautiful youth, which brings to mind the idea and ideal of beauty itself. The soul takes wing at the aspect of beauty but there ensues a struggle between the two horses, between the base and higher impulses of passion. The task of the charioteer is to bring the team into harmony of action and aspiration. It is clear that neither love nor beauty alone will satisfy the need of the soul for fulfillment, but also that both the carnal and the spiritual impulses of the soul remain active in its journey.

The detail and stages of this journey is the subject text of the *Symposium* and the capstone of that dialectical discussion is the teaching of Diotima in which she instructs the young Socrates on love. She teaches that the object of love is not beauty, as many think, it is birth. Procreation is the closest things mortals can get to immortality. At this most basic level of generative desire, Diotima explains that its source is not reason, for animals too are seized by desire and will sacrifice everything to protect their offspring. Mortal nature itself is locked into an imperative to overcome mortality. If wisdom is to achieve birth in beauty then clearly its object is immortality

Even where the question of a *Dialogue* is more narrowly directed to epistemology—the nature of knowledge rather than love or wisdom—the imperative of desire is still present. Socrates is depicted in the *Theaetetus* as a midwife assisting in the

labor of bringing to birth the truth that is in each person, a truth through which one participates in immortality if only for the moment its realization. The sole resource for this birthing is the reproductive capacity to constantly replace the past generation with a new one. An individual is constantly renewed and constantly losing other qualities. Plato observes that no characteristics, traits, beliefs, desires, delights, troubles or fears ever remain the same. And it is the same with knowledge: it comes and goes, is manifest and is replaced. Despite Plato's modal paradigm of form, clearly he acknowledges here the more fundamental flow of reality in our perception of human life and world.

## V

The question finally is why a master dialectician like Plato who insisted that all values be rational resorts to fabulation. The simple answer is that the human creature and its world at issue is itself fabulous. Any adequate description of the changeling whose mortal nature is freedom and whose passion is immortality cannot be circumscribed in any but mythic idioms. Implicit in Nietzsche's insight that the genius of classical Greek drama was its celebration of both gods, Dionysos and Apollo, is the parallel notion that no culture can be fully alive to human possibility that has lost its sense of myth. I am suggesting, however, that Nietzsche is wrong to dismiss Plato from attending the shrines of these gods, albeit in a different way from the tragic dramatists. We have already noted Plato's engagement and extension of the mythic tradition through the various forms of metaphor and fabulation. The seminal nature of Eros in the *Symposium* that frames the rest of his work indicates Plato's broader though seldom acknowledged recognition of the tensions of *Logos* and *Mythos* at the heart of his dialectic. The extent and importance of fabulation in Plato's work makes it clear that his rational dialectic should be regarded

also as a passionate journey that embraces the creative fissions and fusions that fully constitute human reality.

If philosophy remains rooted in the pursuit of wisdom, then it must track and trace the machinations of imagination that frame the always-to-be-determined nature of the forever divided creature that would be god. The trick in discerning this fabulous beast is not to domesticate its prodigious achievements but also to celebrate the imaginative reach and the splendor of its failings. To do this, philosophy must reconnect with the mythic tradition kept alive in the poetry of the world's great literature.

To say that the human-being of the creature caught between is undetermined is in moral terms to acknowledge that its nature is freedom. In Sartre's expression it is not what it is, and is what it is not. The language of fabulation allows for the loosening of the logistical binds that traditionally have fixed the nature of this transformational enigma. The cultural convergence of the various allegedly rival discourses of ethics politics, economics, biology and theology attests to the dominant tradition that seeks to delineate the defining limits of this changeling creature. But each completed tapestry of culture includes a ghostline to the literature of fabulation. The mythic impulse in literature must continue to search for resonance with the uncanny, the surreal, and those existential fragments of imagination that bear witness to the flow of reality beneath the form of conjecture. The fictive discourse of fabulation keeps alive the Dionysian impulse that resists fixation and keeps faith with an alternative discourse in which the understanding of human being is enriched under the aspect of exception.

Trinity University  
San Antonio, Texas