

**David MURPHY**

**"And so, this is just what happened." Mimesis and Diegesis at *Charmides* 155c-e**

From a formal standpoint, the *Charmides* is not a dialogue. It is Socrates' recounting of a dialogue. Plato represents the conversation through the "reported" form, as distinct from the "direct" form of the *Laches* or *Gorgias*. Aristotle's grouping (*Poetics* 1.1.7) of the "*Sokratikoi logoi*" with mime as prose "imitation," mimesis, covers both forms, for even the reported dialogues imitate a named narrator. Although the direct form may embed narrative, or diegesis, the reported form consists of it. Socrates as narrator can shape the conversation and action he recounts. When he quotes interlocutors' "lines" exactly, they form part of his own direct speech. We thus have a mimesis of a diegesis, into which in turn are enfolded long mimetic stretches of dialogue (mimesis is explicitly opposed to diegesis in *Rep.* 3). Between mimetic stretches in the *Charmides* we encounter diegetic tissue. Into it Socrates packs narrative elements that create verisimilitude and set up expectations for the next section of dialogue. Nowhere in the corpus does the "time of telling" of the narrative create the illusion of its actuality so powerfully as at 155c-e, where Socrates recounts his erotic response to Charmides.

Socrates there introduces problems of central importance for the work (thematic prolepsis), which will be "taken up" (analepsis) during the ensuing portions of dialogue. Almost all the key philosophical problems of the *Charmides* lie *in nuce* in 155c-e. In particular, as narrator of his own erotic response to Charmides, Socrates shows the workings of his self-knowledge and knowledge of his own knowledge, the definientia that Critias will offer of *sophrosyne*. His self-awareness models the dimension of external intentionality that self-knowledge must bring with it if it is not to turn out empty, as it will in Critias' formulation, "knowledge of knowledge." We recognize prolepsis when we later reach analepsis. This relationship of narrative moments is an index of the text's demand for its own rereading.

The diegetic nature of 155c-e calls attention to itself in Socrates' comic detail of the men who push each other on the bench (c1-4). As the erotic tension builds, diegesis in turn is broken by what Genette calls discursive "cysts"--in this case, Socrates' apostrophes to the unnamed interlocutor and his quotation of Cydias. Among purely reported dialogues, only in *Charmides* does the narrator directly address the interlocutor. There follow a series of moments that anticipate philosophical problems that recur in the text: false conceit of knowledge dispelled, replaced by aporia, c5-7 (the elenchus); the drug and "charm" for headache, c8, e3 (philosophical method); the narrator's strong self-consciousness, d2-4, (self-knowledge); Cydias' wisdom, d4-5 (expert knowledge and linkage of self-knowledge to knowledge of realities); Socrates' thrill at Charmides's beauty (*to kalon* as object of eros, eros as madness); dialectic of erotic pursuit and role reversal (erotic pursuit within philosophy); Socrates' self-control (*sophrosyne* as volitive and cognitive restraint); Socrates' withholding of a cure (philosophical withholding).

When Charmides asks to follow Socrates (176a-c), the "charm" and the seduction topoi remind us of the diegetic intrusion of 155c-e. The text invites reflection on its own structure. Northrop Frye said that the primary intentions of Plato's dialogues are not

literary, for they urge philosophical engagement. Their narrative form, however, led Aristotle to say that they are literary in ways that, say, lyric is not. The creation of verisimilitude through diegesis puts the problems of the arguments into the actions, thoughts, and emotions of the characters, thus particularizing the universal. As we perceive their relevance to our experience, we, like Charmides, open ourselves to philosophical seduction.