

# Echoes from Plato's *Phaedrus* in Aristides' Smyrna Corpus

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**Abstract** This paper is concerned with allusions to Plato's *Phaedrus* in Aelius Aristides' first and last orations dedicated to Smyrna before and after the destructive earthquake of 177-178 CE (Orr. 17 and 21 Keil). It focuses on the intertextual connection between Plato's description of the *Phaedrus* setting and its role in stimulating philosophical reflection and Aristides' use of these passages in order to praise Smyrna. It is argued that the landscape of Smyrna inspires Aristides with oratorical creativity, in the same way that the landscape of the *Phaedrus* is presented as an inspiration to both oratory and philosophical conversation.

**Keywords** Aelius Aristides. Smyrna. *Phaedrus*. Praise. Landscape.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Landscape of the *Phaedrus* and the Description of Smyrna. – 3 Aristides and Socrates Possessed by the Nymphs. – 4 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

The relationship of Aelius Aristides and Plato is usually discussed in respect to the debate between rhetoric and philosophy, which revives throughout the first three centuries CE within the wider intellectual trend of the Second Sophistic.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Greek-speaking authors study classical texts and they are interested in adapting them to their own literary standards. Creative imitation, sophistication and allusiveness are highly appreciated aesthetic values which confirm one's education and skill.<sup>2</sup> During this period, Plato's dialogues are a popular reading not only for their content but also for their literary and stylistic qualities.<sup>3</sup> For both reasons, Aristides seems to be keen on studying and quoting Plato.<sup>4</sup> He criticises the philosopher's views on rhetoric mainly expressed in the *Gorgias* and rebuts Plato's argumentation with his three 'Platonic' treatises (*To Plato: In Defence of Oratory*, *To Plato: In Defence of the Four*, *To Capito*).<sup>5</sup> These works are not the only ones in which Aristides consistently engages with Plato. For instance, in *Or.* 28 (*On an Incidental Remark*), Aristides defends himself against an alleged accusation that he inserted lines of self-praise into his prose hymn about goddess Athena. In order to build his argumentation, Aristides understands the *Phaedrus* as Plato's own self-praise, thus providing justification for his own rhetorical talent, which is divinely inspired.<sup>6</sup> Another example of creative Platonic reminiscence outside the Platonic treatises is *Or.* 26 (*To Rome*), a lengthy praise of the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> Aristides presents the Roman Empire as a prosperous, inclusive and harmonious world; with his speech he crafts an ideal state. In his study of this oration, Oliver (1953) argues for a firm Platonic background in Aristides' conception of the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> Mainly based on the *Timaeus*, the *Critias* and the *Laws*, Aristides seems to adapt Plato's cosmology into the foundation and operation of the Roman universe. Oliver's interpretation

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1 On this conflict see Vickers 1988; Michel 1993; Karadimas 1996, 162-241; Milazzo 2002.

2 See Whitmarsh 2001.

3 On Plato's popularity during the Second Sophistic see De Lacy 1974; Dillon 1977; Fowler 2010, 100-14; 2018. On the reception of the *Phaedrus* from Antiquity to the Renaissance see the recent collective work by Delcomminette, d'Hoine, Gavray 2020.

4 Behr 1968, 11 recounts 410 citations of Plato in Aristides' works.

5 *Orr.* 2-4 Keil, see Pernot 1993b; Flinterman 2001; Dittadi 2008; Dittadi 2016; Karadimas 2016; Milazzo 2016; Fowler 2018, 232-6; Trapp 2020.

6 Trapp 1990, 166-7; Fields 2008.

7 Translations and commentaries by Oliver 1953; Klein 1981-83; Pernot 1997; Fontanella 2007.

8 Oliver 1953, 874-8.

has faced criticism,<sup>9</sup> nevertheless it offers an insightful reading of Aristides' oration, which adds to our understanding of his literary methods and purposes.

This paper focuses on the reception of Plato's *Phaedrus* in Aristides' first and last orations of the Smyrna corpus (Orr. 17 & 21). At first, it will be demonstrated how the Athenian landscape of the *Phaedrus* is reflected into Aristides' description and praise of Smyrna. The connection of the landscape to rhetorical inspiration and skill will further be explained by clarifying the term *νυμφόληπτος*, which both Socrates and Aristides attribute to themselves.

## 2 The Landscape of the *Phaedrus* and the Description of Smyrna

Within a period of nearly twenty years (157-179 CE), Aelius Aristides composed, among others, five texts about his beloved city Smyrna. As a prominent citizen of Smyrna,<sup>10</sup> Aristides wrote and delivered his first speech (Σμυρναϊκὸς Πολιτικὸς) in 157 CE before the visiting authorities. The *proconsul* of Asia<sup>11</sup> travelled regularly around the cities of the province in order to carry out his administrative duties, mainly to deliver justice.<sup>12</sup> On the occasion of the dignitaries' arrival, a welcome speech – and even more than one – was mandatory.<sup>13</sup>

No more than twenty years later, in 177-178 CE, an earthquake destroyed Smyrna completely.<sup>14</sup> Aristides, who meanwhile had withdrawn at his Laneion estate in Mysia because of health issues, was overwhelmed by the sad news and thus composed a group of four texts: *Μονωδία* (Or. 18), *Ἐπιστολή* (Or. 19), *Παλινωδία* (Or. 20), and the *Σμυρναϊκὸς Προσφωνητικὸς* (Or. 21). The unexpected natural disaster dictated this new sequence of texts, which otherwise might

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<sup>9</sup> See Pernot 1997, 49 fn. 133 and Swain 1996, 275 fn. 82, with further references.

<sup>10</sup> On his citizenship see Or. 50 (= *Sacred Tales* 4), 73-103.

<sup>11</sup> Either P. Cluvius Maximus Paullinus, according to Behr 1968, 91-2; 1981, 356 fn. 1; Franco 2005, 388, or possibly C. Pompeius Sosius Priscus, according to more recent data provided by Burton 1992, 446-7 and Jones 2013. It is rather unlikely that the addressee of this speech was the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, see the argumentation by Burton 1992. The date of this speech is also speculative, see Behr 1968, 91-2; 1981, 356 fn. 1.

<sup>12</sup> At the time Smyrna was an assize-centre, so the governor could be on an assize-tour, according to Behr 1981, 356 fn. 1; Burton 1992, 446. On the Roman assizes system (*conventus*) see Burton 1975; in particular about the assizes in Asia see Habicht 1975; Mitchell 1999, 22-9.

<sup>13</sup> This type of ceremony is known as ἀπάντησις (*adventus*) and is mainly addressed to the Emperor or incidentally to provincial governors; more on this ritual in MacCormack 1981; Halfmann 1986, 112-17; Dufraigne 1994. The welcome speech is referred to as ἐπιβατήριος, see Pernot 1993a, 95-7.

<sup>14</sup> On dating this earthquake see Ambraseys 2009, 133-5.

have not been produced.<sup>15</sup> Through this unparalleled hypertext the reader is able to trace an image of Smyrna before and after an unpredictable disastrous event. The main part of the first speech (17.8-22) is a laudatory description of the landscape of Smyrna. It is remarkable that Aristides here differentiates himself from the traditional *topoi* that are essential to city-praise (site and situation, origins, education and achievements, actions and virtues, buildings) by concentrating on the physical landmarks and the beauty of Smyrna, rather than its origins in history or people's virtues.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he articulates his disregard for the city's past in favour of its present view (17.7). Aristides presents its geography and sights, focusing on specific parts of the city (harbours, theatres, baths, temples etc.), which function like ornaments (κόσμοι) that embellish it (17.10-11). The orator marvels at Smyrna and calls it superior to any masterpiece of art (17.12). The first sentence in this paragraph makes a direct allusion to the Athenian landscape of the *Phaedrus* as follows:

Aristid. 17.12 αὔραι δὲ ἡριναί τε καὶ θεριναὶ λιγυρώτεραι τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖς ἀηδόνων καὶ τεττίγων, ἄλλαι δι' ἄλλων διαίττουσαι τόπων ἅπασαν τὴν πόλιν ἀντὶ ἄλλους καθιστᾶσιν.

Pl. *Phdr.* 230c2-3 θερινόν τε καὶ λιγυρόν ὑπηχεῖ τῷ τῶν τεττίγων χορῷ.

Apart from the verbal resemblance of Aristides' quotation with its Platonic model, the context in which both passages are positioned should also be considered. In the first Smyrna oration, Aristides prepares his audience to listen to his praise of the city by assuming role of a guide, who will take his listeners on a tour around Smyrna (17.7): τί δεῖ ταύτην σεμνύνειν ἀπὸ τῶν παρελθόντων, ἀλλ' οὐ περιηγεῖσθαι {καθάπερ οἱ τῆς χειρὸς ἔχοντες} μάρτυρα τὸν θεατὴν

<sup>15</sup> Wilamowitz 1925, 352 was the first one to suggest that these five orations might have been published together by the orator. Boulanger 1923, 384-91 and Pernot 1993a, 295-9 give a brief study of these five texts as a corpus; also, Pernot 1993a, 770 describes them as "a tragedy in five acts", in which Smyrna is the leading figure. Franco 2005, 352 notes that the pervasive reference of the five orations to the city, their chronological order and Aristides' personality argue for their unity and therefore sees them as an expression of the same discourse ("è legittimo tentare di analizzare questi testi come espressione di uno stesso 'discorso' sulla città"). Downie 2017, 56 refers to these works as "a suite of orations" and explains how Aristides focuses on the beauties of Smyrna in order to establish a "romance" between the emperors and the earthquake-stricken city in favour of its reconstruction.

<sup>16</sup> On the background and formulation of the *topoi* required for city-praise see Pernot 1993a, 178-216. Downie 2017, 59-60 insists on Aristides' unconventional interest in presenting Smyrna as an attractive female body.

τῶν λόγων ποιούμενον;<sup>17</sup> This statement marks the transition from the previous section about the past of Smyrna (17.2-7) to its present state (17.8-22). The course of the tour is structured on juxtapositions (general view-details, upper parts-lower parts) which compose an attractive, harmonious urban site. This guidance through Smyrna is carried out through rhetoric. The power of words and essentially the mastery of the orator is able to construct the city in the listeners' imagination and to take modern readers to Smyrna before the earthquake. At the same time, Aristides confirms that Smyrna is an ideal place to practice and perform rhetoric.<sup>18</sup> This is even more clearly articulated when he laments for the loss of spots closely connected to rhetoric as a result of the earthquake (18.8): ποῦ γῆς νυνὶ μονωδῶ; ποῦ μοι τὸ βουλευτήριον; ποῦ νέων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων σύνοδοι καὶ θόρυβοι διδόντων ἅπαντα;

Closely related to this concept of a guided tour through the surroundings is the introduction of the *Phaedrus*. Although most Platonic dialogues take place in an urban setting, mainly in Athenian residences, the *Phaedrus* marks a significant exception, as it is the only work where Socrates is so emphatically presented in a non-urban setting, right outside the city walls. In the opening scene, Socrates encounters young Phaedrus and asks him where he is coming from and where he is going to (227a-230e). Phaedrus brings with him a speech about love composed by Lysias. It is a summer noon in unbearable heat, so Socrates suggests to Phaedrus to head together towards river Ilissus in order to find a cool and refreshing place, where they could sit and read the speech (229a). In his turn, Phaedrus seems to comply with the assigned role of a guide while pointing out Socrates' reluctance to leave Athens in any case.<sup>19</sup> Phaedrus thus becomes the guide of Socrates, who ironically pretends to be unfamiliar with the place where the two Athenians rest. But, in fact, it is Socrates who describes it in full detail, involving all of the senses into his presentation (230b-d):

<sup>17</sup> This is not the only time that Aristides acts like a guide, cf. Εἰς τὸ φρέαρ τὸ ἐν Ἀσκληπιοῦ (*Or.* 39.2): ἀλλ' ἐάν τινα ἡμῶν ἀπολαβὼν τις ἐρωτᾷ, παραλαβόντες ἂν αὐτὸν ἄγειν ἀξιοίημεν ἐπ' αὐτὸ καὶ δεικνύοιμεν.

<sup>18</sup> Consider e.g. his dream narrated in *Or.* 51 (= *Sacred Tales* 5), 29-34. Smyrna was in fact a metropolis of rhetoric in the Second Sophistic, where distinguished rhetors pursued a career, such as the natives Niketes and Aristides, or Skopelianos of Clazomenae and Polemo of Laodicea, who settled in Smyrna and promoted rhetoric by attracting students and performing in public. Hopwood 2000, 231-40 outlines the flourishing rhetorical study and activity in Smyrna at the time. In the same spirit, Franco 2005, 361-84 discusses Smyrna as a "sophistopolis" and draws attention to Aristides' contribution to the rhetorical tradition established there.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. also *Pl. Cri.* 52b; *Ap.* 28e.

ΣΩ. νῆ τὴν Ἥραν, καλὴ γέ ἡ καταγωγὴ. ἢ τε γὰρ πλάτανος αὐτὴ μάλ' ἀμφιλαφὴς τε καὶ ὑψηλὴ, τοῦ τε ἄγνου τὸ ὕψος καὶ τὸ σύσκιον πάγκαλον, καὶ ὡς ἀκμὴν ἔχει τῆς ἀνθης, ὡς ἂν εὐωδέστατον παρέχοι τὸν τόπον: ἢ τε αὖ πηγὴ χαριστάτη ὑπὸ τῆς πλατάνου ρεῖ μάλα ψυχροῦ ὕδατος, ὥστε γε τῶ ποδὶ τεκμήρασθαι. Νυμφῶν τέ τινων καὶ Ἀχελῷου ἱερὸν ἀπὸ τῶν κορῶν τε καὶ ἀγαλμάτων ἔοικεν εἶναι. εἰ δ' αὖ βούλει, τὸ εὔπνουν τοῦ τόπου ὡς ἀγαπητὸν καὶ σφόδρα ἡδύ: θερινόν τε καὶ λιγυρὸν ὑπηχεῖ τῶ τῶν τεττίγων χορῶ. πάντων δὲ κομψότατον τὸ τῆς πόας, ὅτι ἐν ἡρέμα προσάντει ἰκανὴ πέφυκε κατακλινέντι τὴν κεφαλὴν παγκάλως ἔχειν. ὥστε ἄριστά σοι ἐξενάγηται, ὦ φίλε Φαῖδρε.

ΦΑΙ. Σὺ δέ γε, ὦ θαυμάσιε, ἀτοπώτατός τις φαίνεται. ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ, ὅ λέγεις, ξεναγουμένῳ τινὶ καὶ οὐκ ἐπιχωρίῳ ἔοικας: οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεος οὐτ' εἰς τὴν ὑπερορίαν ἀποδημεῖς, οὐτ' ἔξω τοῦ τείχους ἔμοιγε δοκεῖς τὸ παράπαν ἐξίεναι.

This scene has clearly been one of the most influential in the Ancient Greek and Latin letters: not only has it set a standard for the *locus amoenus* in Hellenistic poetry,<sup>20</sup> but it is also quite common for authors in the second century CE to evoke the landscape of the *Phaedrus*.<sup>21</sup>

The vivid description is expected to engage the reader both into the attractive landscape as well as into the philosophical matters that will come up in the conversation (love, immortality of the soul, memory and writing, reformation of rhetoric, dialectic method).<sup>22</sup> This landscape becomes the ideal place that will host Socrates' argumentation about the nature of true love and philosophy.<sup>23</sup> Young *Phaedrus* shows Socrates around while Socrates leads *Phaedrus* away from sophistry and initiates him into the world of philosophy, and this initiation is achieved through dialectical discourse.<sup>24</sup> In a similar way, Morgan (2012, 424) suggests that

<sup>20</sup> About the influence of the *Phaedrus* on Theocritus see Murley 1940. On the *locus amoenus* in Theocritus' 7th Idyll see Pearce 1988; Hunter 1999, 145-6; Fantuzzi, Hunter 2004, 143-52; see also the comprehensive monograph by Hass 1998.

<sup>21</sup> See Trapp 1990; see also Anderson 1993, 77; Yunis 2011, 25-30.

<sup>22</sup> The diverse themes treated in the *Phaedrus* have raised a discussion about the unity of the dialogue, see for instance Plass 1968; Griswold 1986, 1-9, 138-56; Rowe 1986, 106-25, as well as the discussion between Heath 1989, 151-73 and Rowe 1989, 175-88. It is beyond the aim of this article to review the relevant argumentation. For a brief summary of the dialogue's major themes see Hackforth 1952, 8-12; Yunis 2011, 10-17. On the revolutionary, reformed, 'good' rhetoric suggested in the *Phaedrus* see Asmis 1986; Yunis 2005; McCoy 2007, 167-96; Werner 2010.

<sup>23</sup> See the discussion by Ferrari 1987, 1-26. Cf. also the opening scene in the *Laws* (625b-c), where the wise Athenian and his interlocutors agree to discuss legislation and virtuous governance while walking from Knossos to the shrine of Zeus on Mount Ida.

<sup>24</sup> On dialectic in the *Phaedrus* see Murray 1988; Nicholson 1999, 53-74; Werner 2010.

the walk of Phaedrus and Socrates *outside* the walls of Athens, with its beautiful trees, grass, and water, foreshadows the myth of the charioteer in Socrates' second speech, where the soul-chariots of the gods mount to the summit of heaven and then pass *outside*, stand on the back of heaven, and are carried around by its revolution to gaze upon the world of the Forms (247b-c), an activity in which non-divine souls may partly share.

In other words, the surroundings trigger philosophical query. Apart from the introductory scene of *Phaedrus*, the landscape gets new emphasis with the cicadas' myth (258e-259d) after Socrates' Palinode. Just like the Sirenes, the chirping cicadas, along with the heatwave and idyllic setting, are charming yet distractive (259b παραπλέοντας σφας ὡσπερ Σειρήνας ἀκηλήτους). More than a relaxing interlude, this part of the dialogue recalls the necessity for intellectual curiosity and vigilance, which are essential in order to address the upcoming philosophical matters.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, it may also seem as an indirect suggestion to the reader attracted by rhetoric to make his turn towards philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the myth of the cicadas could be perceived as a special invocation to the Muses, since once upon a time the gender of cicadas was human, but then received from the Muses the gift of singing and forgot about its maintenance (259c γέρας τοῦτο παρὰ Μουσῶν λαβόν, μηδὲν τροφῆς δεῖσθαι γενόμενον, ἀλλ' ἄσιτόν τε καὶ ἄποτον εὐθὺς ᾄδειν). In this context, also the cicada story is bound to the search for truth.

Aristides is about to complete his praise of Smyrna when he wonders, with a keen sense of irony, who is really able to describe it. As he reaches the end of *Or. 17*, he exclaims in embarrassment (17.20): τῷ ταῦτα ἐφικτὰ διηγῆσασθαι; οὐχ οὕτως ὁ Μέλης καλλιπαις οὔτε τις εἰς λόγους εὐτυχής.

Here underlies Aristides' awareness of his own skill; this oration is the actual proof of his rhetorical proficiency. Aristides seems to have in mind the following passage from the *Phaedrus* (261a):

ΦΑΙ. Τούτων δεῖ τῶν λόγων, ὃ Σώκρατες· ἀλλὰ δεῦρο αὐτοὺς παράγων ἐξέταξε τί καὶ πῶς λέγουσιν.

ΣΩ. Πάριτε δῆ, θρέμματα γενναῖα, καλλιπαιδὰ τε Φαῖδρον πείθετε ὡς ἐὰν μὴ ἰκανῶς φιλοσοφήσῃ, οὐδὲ ἰκανός ποτε λέγειν ἔσται περὶ οὐδενός.

This section introduces a critical question: how essential is true knowledge to rhetoric? While Phaedrus earlier (260a) argued that a

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<sup>25</sup> Hackforth 1952, 117-18.

<sup>26</sup> Yunis 2011, 175.

speaker should rely on what seems to be true, Socrates now invites the personified λόγοι to stand for the genuine nature of rhetoric, which should be aspiring to the truth. Socrates addresses the λόγοι by calling them θρέμματα γενναῖα ('worthy creatures'), whereas he attributes to Phaedrus the adjective καλλίπαιδα in the sense of 'begetter of discourses'.<sup>27</sup> Phaedrus will not be able to generate a meaningful speech unless he embraces Philosophy.

In his turn, Aristides claims that river Meles is not "so blessed in its child", but only a few paragraphs earlier he acknowledged that "a fairer offspring of the river and one who pertains to all cities is Homer" (17.15).<sup>28</sup> These two statements sound contradictory, yet this inconsistency could be resolved if we consider that here καλλίπαις has the same meaning as in the above passage from the *Phaedrus* ("begetter of discourses"). This would more likely suggest that the Aristides and rhetoric are more effective in their praise of Smyrna than poetry ("Homer").

Considering the above, the verbal expressions from the *Phaedrus* incorporated in Aristides' laudatory presentation of Smyrna seem to reflect the rhetor's attitude towards his art, in a way similar to Socrates' exploration of the surroundings as a threshold to philosophical pursuit. Just as Smyrna demands Aristides' oratory in order to be experienced and praised, the unique landscape of the *Phaedrus* directs Socrates and Phaedrus to philosophical investigation.

### 3 Aristides and Socrates Possessed by the Nymphs

In his final speech about Smyrna, Aristides praises the rebuilt city. As the oration reaches its end (21.15), the orator compares his condition to being possessed by the Nymphs in his attempt to glorify Smyrna:<sup>29</sup> ταῦτ' ἐμὲν οὖν ὡς περὶ οἱ νυμφόληπτοι δυνάμει τινὶ τῶν Νυμφῶν αὐτῶν ἔοικα προσμελωδῆσαι [περὶ τὸν Μέλητα], οὐχ οὕτω προθέμενος.

The orator expresses his gratefulness to the Nymphs because they inspired him and empowered him to carry out his task. He acknowledges that the intervention of the Nymphs provided him with rhetorical skills which, judging by the course of events and the timely reconstruction of the city, made this sequence of texts effective. Of note is the prefix προσ- in the infinitive προσμελωδῆσαι, as it sug-

<sup>27</sup> Translated by Hackforth 1952, 122, followed by De Vries 1969, 202; Yunis 2011, 182. Also cf. Pl. *Smp.* 177d, where Phaedrus is introduced as πατήρ τοῦ λόγου.

<sup>28</sup> Passages translated by Behr 1981, 4.

<sup>29</sup> On the definition and benefits of nympholepsy see Connor 1988; see Larson 2001 for a comprehensive study of the Nymphs; on nympholepsy in poetry (from Epic to Hellenistic) see Pache 2011.



gests the addition of extra material that was otherwise not intended;<sup>30</sup> Aristides probably recalls his first Smyrna speech, which is now extended and completed by this final one under different circumstances.<sup>31</sup> This compound infinitive type might suggest a link between the two speeches by highlighting the Nymphs' intervention. Of course, this connection seems more evident to the readers rather than to the original listeners. Also, the pleonasm *νυμφόληπτοι* and *τῶν Νυμφῶν αὐτῶν* within the same clause makes a clear point. Thanks to his rhetoric reinforced by the Nymphs, Aristides is finally able to articulate another praise for his cherished, reborn Smyrna. This final laud could be revoking the series of his actions that preconditioned it: mourning the city in *Or.* 18, motivating the Emperors in *Or.* 19 and celebrating the restoration works in *Or.* 20.

Aristides' self-characterisation as *νυμφόληπτος* takes us directly to two related Socratic utterances. As Socrates reaches the conclusion of his first speech, he interrupts his argumentation and warns Phaedrus not to be surprised by what comes next (238d): *τῷ ὄντι γὰρ θεῖος ἔοικεν ὁ τόπος εἶναι, ὥστε ἐὰν ἄρα πολλάκις νυμφόληπτος προϊόντος τοῦ λόγου γένωμαι, μὴ θαυμάσῃς.* This statement sounds like a disclaimer, as Socrates attributes – not without irony – his response to Lysias' speech to his possession by the Nymphs. Although he links the divinity of the place to his upcoming rhetorical attempt, his pretentious defence of Lysias' argumentation has to be immediately followed by its recantation. In the interlude preceding his rebuttal of both speeches, Socrates recurs to the Nymphs (241e): *ἄρ' οἴσθ' ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν Νυμφῶν, αἷς με σὺ προὔβαλες ἐκ προνοίας, σαφῶς ἐνθουσιάσω;*

Of particular interest is the quality of the Nymphs' possession. Unlike other forms of divine mediation, the subject here undergoes a state of eloquence and spiritual elevation rather than ecstatic frenzy.<sup>32</sup> This interpretation is in accordance with the blessings of divine *μανία* that Socrates analyses in his *Palinode* (244a-245c).<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, when Socrates later discusses the nature of dialectic, he repeats the idea that the Nymphs, who stimulated his earlier speeches, as well as Pan,<sup>34</sup> are more skilled than Lysias (263d): *ὄσφ λέγεις*

<sup>30</sup> Connor 1988, 158 fn. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Behr 1981, 362 fn. 1 points to this direction, when he underlines that this oration “copies in a loose way, as if Aristides were writing from memory without consulting the original, the themes of XVII”.

<sup>32</sup> As highlighted by Connor 1988, 158-61.

<sup>33</sup> See Dodds 1951, 64-101. Schenker 2006 sees in this dialogue a redefined version of Socrates, who embraces the irrational as a first step to his search for truth.

<sup>34</sup> As a son of Hermes, Pan is closely related to *λόγος*, cf. Pl. *Cra.* 408d *καὶ ἔστιν ἦτοι λόγος ἢ λόγου ἀδελφός ὁ Πάν, εἶπερ Ἑρμοῦ υἱός ἐστιν.*

τεχνικωτέρας Νύμφας τὰς Ἀχελώου καὶ Πᾶνα τὸν Ἑρμοῦ Λυσίου τοῦ Κεφάλου πρὸς λόγους εἶναι. Finally, the peroration of the *Phaedrus* draws together the Nymphs and their divine surroundings with the λόγοι uttered by both interlocutors in the course of the dialogue (278c): καὶ σύ τε ἐλθὼν φράζεε Λυσίᾳ ὅτι νῶ καταβάντε ἐς τὸ Νυμφῶν νᾶμά τε καὶ μουσεῖον ἠκούσαμεν λόγων. Thus, Socrates seems to acknowledge that his fluency is in some sense affected by the Nymphs and their implied presence on site.

It is remarkable that in all of the above instances Socrates perceives of the setting as a divine space, which inspires and encourages him to continue his philosophical pursuits. Beyond its described seductive power, the landscape is able to involve Socrates and young Phaedrus into philosophical inquiry achieved through dialectic discourse.<sup>35</sup> As Hackforth (1952, 14) puts it, Socrates' "susceptibility to the influence of external Nature felt as a power lifting him out of his normal rational self into a state of 'possession' (ἐνθουσιασμός)", which can be beneficial for inspiration.

In a parallel way, therefore, Aristides and Socrates share a condition of nympholepsy. Aristides acknowledges the beneficial influence of the Nymphs on his works about Smyrna. He is remotely placed at his country estate, at a distance from the newly rebuilt Smyrna, and thus he was not able to visit the city or to deliver in person his second praise; but his nympholepsy reinforced his rhetorical expertise, making him capable of composing this new praise which glorifies Smyrna in the aftermath of the earthquake. The well-integrated deliberate allusion to Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, who also experiences the inspiring favour of the Nymphs while outside the city walls in pursuit of true dialectic and philosophy, creates a substantial intertextual connection between the *Phaedrus* and Aristides' praise of Smyrna.

#### 4 Conclusion

This paper features some echoes of Plato's *Phaedrus* into Aelius Aristides' depiction of Smyrna. By alluding to the idyllic setting of the *Phaedrus*, which means much more than just scenery that fosters a dialogue on rhetoric and philosophy, Aristides is likely to suggest that his beloved Smyrna is equally an ideal city to practice rhetoric. In the same way that Socrates and Phaedrus are guided through a unique location into the pursuit of true dialectic and love, Aristides constructs Smyrna through his oratory and allows the modern readers to journey around the city under his guidance. Besides that, both

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<sup>35</sup> Werner 2010 provides a comprehensive reading of the dialogue as a defence of dialectics.

landscapes are significantly presented as related to the Nymphs, who possess both Socrates and Aristides in order to inspire them and turn them into creative and skilled intellects.<sup>36</sup>

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