

# ‘... largely fictions ...’: Aelius Aristides on Plato’s dialogues

JAAP-JAN FLINTERMAN

Amsterdam

## Introduction

The observation that Plato’s dialogues are fictional compositions rather than records of actual conversations will come as no shock to students of ancient Greek literature, history, or philosophy. In fact, the characterization of the dialogues implied in this observation seems to be generally accepted among classical scholars. This consensus is exemplified by the fact that two monographs published during the last decade of the twentieth century, while proposing widely diverging views on the value of Plato’s dialogues as evidence for Socrates’ teaching, at least agree on their fictional nature: *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* by the late Gregory Vlastos (1991) and Charles Kahn’s *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (1996). Kahn, who rejects the notion of a Socratic period in Plato’s oeuvre and who regards the early and middle dialogues as nothing more than stages in ‘the gradual unfolding of a literary plan for presenting his philosophical views to the general public’,<sup>1</sup> unsurprisingly underlines the fictionality of the Socratic dialogue as a genre. According to Kahn, Plato’s dialogues are exceptional in this respect only as far as their effectiveness in conveying the *illusion* of reality is concerned: the ‘realistic’ historical dialogue created by the Athenian philosopher is ‘a work of imagination designed to give the impression of a record of actual events, like a good historical novel’.<sup>2</sup> But Vlastos, who thought it possible to distil the philosophy of the historical Socrates from the early dialogues, did not deny the imaginary nature of these texts either; what we are able to reconstruct on the basis of the early dialogues is, Vlastos held, ‘the philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> Kahn 1996, xv.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn 1996, 35.

(...) of the historical Socrates, recreated by Plato in invented conversations which explore its content and exhibit its method’.<sup>3</sup>

While the fictional nature of Plato’s dialogues seems to be beyond discussion, the value of part of these texts as evidence for Socrates’ philosophy thus remains controversial. In addition, the serviceability of the dialogues as evidence for the views held by the author himself is the subject of a lively debate. Many Platonic scholars nowadays are inclined to favour a non-dogmatic interpretation of the dialogues; their approach is characterized not just by a readiness to appreciate the philosophical significance of Plato’s preference for the dialogue form but by an outright refusal to treat Socrates or any other prominent character in a given dialogue as the philosopher’s spokesman.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the dialogues may be fictions but the dialogue *form* is not. In a fairly recent debate on the *Gorgias*, however, Benjamin Barber described the mood of Plato’s dialogues as ‘monophony masquerading as polyphony’,<sup>5</sup> and this rather unfashionable reading may serve to demonstrate that consensus on this issue is not imminent.

The present author is qualified neither to embark upon a discussion of the historical Socrates nor to participate in a debate about the interpretation of Plato’s oeuvre. Instead, this contribution will deal with the observations made by the second-century Greek orator Aelius Aristides, in his so-called Platonic orations, on the fictional nature of Plato’s dialogues and on the philosopher’s use of the dialogue form. My aim is to elucidate the functions of these observations in Aristides’ apologetic strategy, to locate them within the tradition of anti-Platonic polemic in Antiquity, and to determine their relationship to ancient theorizing on the dialogue form. In other words, this paper focuses on the perception of fictionality in Plato’s dialogues by an ancient observer, as well as on the concepts employed by him in this context.

This is not a wholly unnecessary undertaking. Whereas we, as moderns, may follow Arnaldo Momigliano in appreciating the fact that ‘the Socratics moved to that zone between truth and fiction that is so bewildering to the professional historian’,<sup>6</sup> the mental capability or intellectual readiness of the ancients to do so is still contested. In a contribution to a recent collection of

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<sup>3</sup> Vlastos 1991, 49.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Ostenfeld 2000, 211: ‘It seems to be a widespread, if not general, opinion these days that Plato has no spokesman among the interlocutors of his dialogues.’

<sup>5</sup> Barber 1996, 363.

<sup>6</sup> Momigliano 1993, 46.

articles on Dio of Prusa, Aldo Braccacci maintains that the ancients usually failed to distinguish the historical Socrates from the protagonist of Socratic literature:

The distinction between a ‘historic’ Socrates and a ‘literary’ one, which for moderns represents a difficult historiographic problem, is present only in episodic and exceptional form in ancient literature.<sup>7</sup>

If the present inquiry succeeds in questioning the validity of this contention, it will have served at least one useful purpose. Moreover, it is hoped that an investigation into this line of reasoning in Aristides’ Platonic orations will further our understanding of these curious texts, which together form ‘*un document sans équivalent dans la littérature conservée*’<sup>8</sup> and which are so characteristic of their author and of his socio-political and cultural milieu.

In order to attain this twofold aim, I shall first introduce Aristides’ Platonic orations and briefly examine matters of dating. This introductory section is followed by a discussion of the apologetic strategy employed by Aristides in his debate with Plato. As the orator’s observations on the fictional character of Plato’s dialogues and on the philosopher’s use of the dialogue form are inextricably linked with this strategy, this discussion is a necessary preliminary to the survey and analysis of these observations presented in the next section. Subsequently, we will turn to possible sources of inspiration for Aristides’ characterization of Plato’s dialogues as fictional compositions: the tradition of anti-Platonic polemic and theorizing on the dialogue form among contemporary Platonists.

### Aristides’ apologetic project

Among the extant works of Aelius Aristides, there are three texts in which the Antonine orator makes a stand against the attack by Plato’s Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, on oratory and on the four leading statesmen of fifth-century Athens: Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles. In the edition by Charles Behr,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Braccacci 2000, 242f.; cf. Braccacci 1992, 3311.

<sup>8</sup> Pernot 1993, 316.

<sup>9</sup> *P. Aelii Aristidis Opera Quae Exstant Omnia*. Volumen I Orationes I–XVI complectens, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1976–80. Translation with copious annotation: Behr 1986. The discus-

these are the second, third, and fourth orations: *To Plato: In Defence of Oratory*, *To Plato: In Defence of the Four*, and *To Capito* respectively. The titles of the second and third orations speak for themselves; the fourth oration is, in fact, a letter addressed to an admirer of Plato who had taken offence at the way in which Aristides had dealt with the philosopher’s Sicilian adventures in *To Plato: In Defence of Oratory*. *To Capito* is, therefore, later than *In Defence of Oratory*, and as Aristides’ letter adumbrates a large portion of the argument of *In Defence of the Four*,<sup>10</sup> it is presumably earlier than the latter work. Capito was probably a citizen of Pergamum,<sup>11</sup> where Aristides resided from 145 to 147 in the sanctuary of Asclepius.

Behr has attempted to fix exact dates on these orations, assigning *In Defence of Oratory* and *To Capito* to the years in Pergamum and *In Defence of the Four* to the early 160s.<sup>12</sup> His propositions have not met with general assent. David Sohlberg has expressed his disinclination to believe that *In Defence of Oratory* was composed almost two decades before *In Defence of the Four*,<sup>13</sup> while Laurent Pernot has labelled Behr’s dating of the latter oration ‘conjectural’.<sup>14</sup> In responding to Sohlberg’s criticism, Behr appealed to ‘the improbability of Aristides writing II, IV, and then III with little time intervening’.<sup>15</sup> At first sight, the sheer scale of the Platonic orations — more than 400 pages in Behr’s edition — lends a certain plausibility to this observation. It seems, however, inadvisable to underestimate Aristides’ prolificacy. Moreover, I think that rather than perusing the Platonic orations for questionable chronological indications, we should study these texts on the basis of the assumption that they are parts of an apologetic project that was conceived as one entity. In doing so, we shall follow the lead of the author of a hypothesis of *In Defence of the Four*. This rhetorician — Sopater according

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sion of *orr.* 2–4 by Boulanger 1923, 210–39 still makes instructive reading; Pernot 1993 is the best treatment. Sohlberg 1972 and Karadimas 1996 focus on *or.* 2.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Behr 1986, 479 n. 1: ‘This little treatise is the forerunner of *The defense of the Four*, ...’

<sup>11</sup> See *or.* 4,5 and 4,22, with Behr 1986, 480 n. 31.

<sup>12</sup> *Or.* 2 (145–47 AD): Behr 1968, 54–56 with n. 52; cf. Behr 1986, 449 n. 1. *Or.* 4 (towards the end of the same period): Behr 1968, 59f. with n. 60; cf. Behr 1986, 479 n. 1: ‘around August 147 AD’. *Or.* 3 (161–65 AD): Behr 1968, 94f. with n. 2; cf. Behr 1986, 460 n. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Sohlberg 1972, 178 n. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Pernot 1993, 316 n. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Behr 1994, 1165f. n. 117.

to Friedrich Lenz<sup>16</sup> — characterizes the oration as a *deuterologia*, a second speech for the defence,<sup>17</sup> thus indicating that, in his opinion, *In Defence of Oratory* and *In Defence of the Four* should be considered parts of a whole. The choice of such a unitarian point of departure is justified to some extent by the fact that the line of reasoning on which this paper focuses can be found throughout the Platonic orations.

### Defending Hellenism without losing Plato

Confronting Plato was not an easy task; in fact, it placed Aristides in a predicament of frightening proportions. The classical past of Hellas in general and of Athens in particular was of inestimable value for the Antonine orator. It was the intellectual and emotional link with this past that constantly nourished his self-confidence as a Greek living in a world dominated by Rome. And it was oratory more than anything else that linked the contemporary Greek world with the classical past and thus served as the medium *par excellence* for the continual reaffirmation of Hellenic identity. In short, for a second-century Greek gentleman and man of letters such as Aristides, the attack by Plato's Socrates on oratory and on the four Athenian statesmen could never be a matter of indifference given the importance of the classical heritage for his identity. At the same time, Plato was also part and parcel of the Hellenic heritage, and the biting criticism of Athenian political discourse in the *Gorgias* exemplified the contradictions within the classical tradition. Consequently, in vindicating the victims of the attack by Plato's Socrates Aristides ran the risk of attacking a cultural icon and of undermining rather than reinforcing the integrity of Hellenism.<sup>18</sup>

How does Aristides deal with this dilemma? In the first place, a considerable portion of his arguments in defence of oratory and of the four Athenians is borrowed from Plato's own writings: he has scrutinized the philosopher's oeuvre for utterances which are at odds with the position in the *Gorgias*.<sup>19</sup> This part of his apologetic strategy permits the orator to present Plato

<sup>16</sup> Lenz 1959, 15: 'It is Sopater who speaks to us in H<sub>1</sub>, either directly or through the medium of one of his pupils who set forth the thoughts of his teacher writing down his introductory lecture on the oration.'

<sup>17</sup> H<sub>1</sub> 158,5–11 Lenz = III 436,2–10 Dindorf.

<sup>18</sup> For Aristides' phrasing of his dilemma see e.g. *or.* 3,129f.; cf. Pernot 1993, 330f.; De Lacy 1968, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Boulanger 1923, 212; De Lacy 1968, 10; Trapp 1990, 166f.; Pernot 1993, 325–328.

as his strongest ally rather than his opponent.<sup>20</sup> By thus turning the plaintiff into a witness for the defence, Aristides is able to refute the accusations against oratory and the four, while at the same time maintaining that he does not mean to give offence to Plato and to his admirers:

How then could someone have good reason to be incensed with us when Plato himself confirms the truth of what we say?<sup>21</sup>

In the second place, Aristides repeatedly goes out of his way to give expression to his respect and admiration for Plato.<sup>22</sup> The philosopher is literally showered with compliments. The function of this part of the orator’s apologetic strategy is similar to that of enlisting Plato as a witness for the defence. It can be illustrated by a passage from *To Capito*, where Aristides draws the attention of the addressee to the fact that, by taking offence at a small part of the argument of *In Defence of Oratory*, the references to Plato’s Sicilian adventures, Capito has failed to appreciate the introduction and the *katastasis*, the way in which Aristides has presented the facts of the case. Otherwise, Capito would not have missed the consideration and reverence that Aristides had shown for Plato.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Aristides’ foremost aim in praising Plato was to avoid being left empty-handed if confronted with the accusation that he had not given the philosopher his due.

### Double-edged compliments

In this velvet glove, however, there is an iron fist. Apart from some perfunctory compliments to Plato’s knowledge of things human and divine,<sup>24</sup> Aristides’ praise refers to the philosopher’s literary genius: he consistently extols Plato as

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. *or.* 2,462 and *or.* 4,8.

<sup>21</sup> *Or.* 3,568: πῶς οὖν ἄν τις νεμεσώη δικαίως ἡμῖν, ὅταν αὐτὸς Πλάτων ὡς ἀληθῆ λέγομεν ἐπισηφίζῃ;

<sup>22</sup> See De Lacy 1968, 10; Sohlberg 1972, 256–259; Pernot 1993, 323.

<sup>23</sup> *Or.* 4,22f.: οὕτω πᾶσαν αἰδῶ καὶ τιμὴν ἀπεδώκαμεν αὐτῷ, ὥστε εἰ αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔμελλεν ἀντερεῖν, οὐκ ἄν μοι δοκοίη μᾶλλον αὐτοῦ φέισασθαι.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. *or.* 3,461: ... ὁ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμων, προσθήσω δὲ καὶ τῶν θείων ... I think that Sohlberg 1972, 259 overvalues utterances such as these by stating ‘dass es nicht nur der Stilist Platon ist, dem Aristides Anerkennung, ja im gewissen Sinne Verehrung entgegenbringt’.

an exceptionally gifted author or, in Aristides' words, as an orator.<sup>25</sup> Already in the proem to *In Defence of Oratory*, it is suggested that the philosopher was not wholly averse to oratory.<sup>26</sup> Plato is hailed as 'greatest of the Greek tongues',<sup>27</sup> and accorded a place of honour in the chorus of Greek literature, an accolade he earns by being 'closest to oratory'.<sup>28</sup> And in the peroration of the same oration, Aristides proclaims Plato 'the father and teacher of orators'.<sup>29</sup> The ultimate tribute, however, comes in the letter *To Capito*, where the philosopher is ranked with Demosthenes as Aristides' personal favourite.<sup>30</sup>

I certainly do not mean to suggest that Aristides' admiration for Plato was insincere. The fact that he dreamed about being placed on a par with Plato is sufficient proof to the contrary:<sup>31</sup> if anywhere, it is in his craving for glory that we should unhesitatingly trust Aristides. Nevertheless, in expressing his esteem for the philosopher in the Platonic orations, the Antonine orator had ulterior motives. As we have seen, praising Plato played a defensive role in his strategy: it was a way of anticipating the righteous anger of contemporary Platonists who might feel offended by Aristides' attempt to refute the *Gorgias*. But while allegedly meant to appease Plato's followers, Aristides' admiration for Plato was likely to infuriate them, because it amounted to an attempt to appropriate the philosopher as a literary artist. Aristides must have been fully aware of this effect, and this gives his praise for Plato a polemical edge. This interpretation can be substantiated by a brief demonstration of the controversial nature of the literary appreciation of Plato's oeuvre in the second- and early third-century cultural scene.<sup>32</sup>

Those who esteemed Plato primarily as a philosopher were not always all that happy about their less philosophically-minded fellow-admirers. Aulus Gellius, for example, relates how the Platonic philosopher Calvenus Taurus flew into a rage when confronted with a miscreant who read Plato's dialogues in order to improve his style.<sup>33</sup> The same deplorable habit is heavily

<sup>25</sup> See Walsdorff 1927, 89: 'Dennoch schätzt er auch Platon vor allem als Redner.'

<sup>26</sup> *Or.* 2,15.

<sup>27</sup> *Or.* 2,72: ὁ μέγιστη σὺ γλώττα τῶν Ἑλληνίδων — quoting Cratinus (fr. 293 Kock) on Pericles (cf. *or.* 3,51).

<sup>28</sup> *Or.* 2,427f.

<sup>29</sup> *Or.* 2,465: ... τὸν τῶν ῥητόρων πατέρα καὶ διδάσκαλον ...

<sup>30</sup> *Or.* 4,6; cf. *or.* 3,508.

<sup>31</sup> *Or.* 51,58.

<sup>32</sup> The next paragraph draws on Hahn 1989, 86–88; see also Holford-Strevens 1988, 67 with n. 34; Schmitz 1997, 87–89.

<sup>33</sup> Gell. *NA* 1,9,10.

frowned upon by Plutarch.<sup>34</sup> Apparently, the literary merit of Plato's work was a mixed blessing for his philosophically-minded adherents. Calvenus Taurus teases those members of his audience, whom he suspects of a primarily rhetorical interest, with the grace and splendour of Plato's prose, but at the same time he warns them against an aesthetic appreciation of the dialogues.<sup>35</sup> If we can believe Isidorus of Pelusium, Plutarch went even further by deploring the alleged impact of Gorgias on Plato's style; thus he accounted for the fact that the philosopher's prose had lost the distinctive characteristics of genuine Atticism, clarity and simplicity.<sup>36</sup> Plutarch's complaint reflects debates on the stylistic merits of Plato's prose, as can be seen from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who accused Plato of inappropriate 'Gorgianizing'.<sup>37</sup>

Given that the literary appreciation of Plato's dialogues was a potential embarrassment for his philosophically-minded devotees, it was to be expected that the oratorical camp would seize the opportunity by making praise of Plato's literary merits part of its polemic.<sup>38</sup> This is what Philostratus does in his letter to Julia Domna.<sup>39</sup> The Severan sophist gives Plutarch's criticism of Plato's style a positive turn: if even the divine Plato emulated Gorgias, Hippias, and Protagoras, it should be obvious that there is nothing wrong with the sophists. This is the background against which we should read Aristides' praise of Plato, and I think that it is reasonable to conclude that the addressee of *To Capito* must have been less than amused when he was offered, in reply to his objections, an encore of such double-edged compliments from *In Defence of Oratory*.<sup>40</sup>

### Platonic fictions

As far as the fictional nature of Plato's dialogues is concerned, Aristides comes straight to the point. In the proem to *In Defence of Oratory*, before quoting the

<sup>34</sup> *De profectibus in virtute*, *Mor.* 79d.

<sup>35</sup> Gell. *NA* 17,20,4–6; cf. the comments by Lakmann 1995, 168–177.

<sup>36</sup> *Plu. fr.* 186 Sandbach = *Isid. Pel. Ep.* 2,42.

<sup>37</sup> *D.H. Dem.* 5f.; cf. Walsdorff 1927, 9–15 and 85.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Gefcken 1929, 105: 'Die Verteidigung Platons als Stilisten hatte, *weil sie zugleich ein Angriff war*, erheblichen Erfolg' [italics added].

<sup>39</sup> *Ep.* 73; cf. Penella 1979, esp. 164f.; see also Flinterman 1995, 32; Flinterman 1997, esp. 81f.; and on the Severan empress as a patroness of literature and learning Hemelrijk 1999, 122–126.

<sup>40</sup> *Or.* 4,26, quoting *or.* 2,428 and 465; cf. above, n. 28 and 29.



accusations against oratory made by Plato's Socrates in the *Gorgias*,<sup>41</sup> he claims that Plato contrived a meeting between Socrates and Gorgias at Athens (Γοργίου καὶ Σωκράτους ὑποθέμενος συνουσίαν Ἀθήνησι) in order to make his over-contentious statements about oratory.<sup>42</sup> The use of the verb *hypothesthai* does not necessarily imply that the meeting is fictitious, but certainly strongly suggests so. Roos Meijering, in her study on *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia*, concludes from an analysis of the terms *hypothesis* and *hypothesthai* that these words do indicate that a poet 'occasionally deviates from tradition and reality if it suits him to do so'.<sup>43</sup> As far as Aristides' usage is concerned, it is relevant that he employs the verb for Plato's presentation, in the *Eighth Letter* (355a–357d), of the by then dead Dio of Syracuse as a speaking person:<sup>44</sup> a textbook example of *eidōlopoiia* and, as such, obviously a fictional device.<sup>45</sup> Our interpretation of the passage under discussion is supported by the scholiast, who explains to the readers of *In Defence of Oratory* what Aristides meant to say: 'you invented the meeting in order to inveigh against oratory'.<sup>46</sup>

The natural implication of Aristides' assertion that the *Gorgias* is an account of a fictional meeting would be that the conversation between Socrates, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles is also fictitious. For this obvious conclusion to be drawn, however, we have to wait until the summary of the argument of *In Defence of the Four*.<sup>47</sup> In the meantime, the orator limits himself to first insinuating and then claiming that Plato's Socrates is the philosopher's mouthpiece — a point which is, of course, central to his apologetic project.

That the Socrates of Plato's dialogues is their author's spokesman is assumed rather than argued when Aristides quotes a statement by the Socra-

<sup>41</sup> *Or.* 2,22 = Pl. *Grg.* 463a–465c.

<sup>42</sup> *Or.* 2,13.

<sup>43</sup> Meijering 1987, 133.

<sup>44</sup> *Or.* 2,321 and esp. 324: ... ὁ Δίων αὐτῷ τετελευτηκῶς ὑπόκειται λέγων ὡς ἔμπρους ...

<sup>45</sup> In the passages mentioned in the preceding note Aristides compares his own introduction of the four Athenian statesmen as speaking characters to Plato's presentation of Dio in the *Eighth Letter*. The same device is employed by him at greater length in *or.* 3,365–400. The latter case is mentioned as an example of *εἰδωλοποιία* by [Hermog.] *Prog.* 9 (= 20,14–18 Rabe) and Aphth., *Prog.* 11 (= 44,28–45,1 Spengel). The remark of the scholiast at *or.* 3.365 about τὴν ἡθοποιίαν τὴν θρυλλουμένην (III 671,6–7 Dindorf) does not refer to Plato's art of characterization (as Ausland 1997, 376 n. 13 thinks) but bears witness to the fame of this passage from *In Defence of the Four* in later antiquity.

<sup>46</sup> Aristid. III 363,13–14 Dindorf: διὰ τοῦτο ἐπλάσω τὴν συνουσίαν, ἵνα χωρήσῃς κατὰ ῥητορικῆς.

<sup>47</sup> See below, text to nn. 74 and 75.

tes of the *Gorgias* (469b–c) in order to elicit an answer from Plato to the question whether the premise that it is better to suffer than to do wrong entails the conclusion that being wronged is an experience to be welcomed (αἰρετόν). The statement is introduced as follows:

If Plato would answer us, it would be of great value for our argument. And the answer is at hand. How? In the way in which he has made Socrates provide an answer.<sup>48</sup>

This explicit formulation of the mouthpiece view is, however, preceded by a more subtle discussion of the protagonist of Socratic literature. Aristides appeals to the *Alcibiades* of Aeschines of Sphettos (fr. 11 Dittmar = fr. 53 Giannantoni 1990) in order to find support for his claim that denying an activity the status of a *technè* does not necessarily imply a depreciatory judgment.<sup>49</sup> He justifies the enlistment of Aeschines’ help by pointing out that Aeschines’ writings have always been considered highly congenial and suitable to Socrates’ character, a judgment that has even given rise to the false opinion that Aeschines’ dialogues are Socrates’ own writings.<sup>50</sup> But in spite of the fact that no writings of Socrates are extant, Aristides continues, it is possible to make trustworthy statements about him. Such statements have to meet the criterion of unanimity among the Socratics. Thus, all Socrates’ associates agree that he pleaded complete ignorance, that he was nonetheless proclaimed the wisest of all men by the Pythia, and that he received signs from his *daimonion*.<sup>51</sup>

It is evident that the introduction of the criterion of the *consensus omnium Socraticorum* as a touchstone for reliable statements about the historical Socrates is potentially very damaging to the trustworthiness of Plato’s portrait of Socrates. In the *Defence of Oratory*, however, Aeschines’ Socrates is not yet employed to discredit Plato’s Socrates. All that changes in the *Defence of the Four*, where the orator contrasts with the disparagement of Themistocles in the *Gorgias* a laudatory statement on the Athenian statesman by Aeschines’ Socrates, in the *Alcibiades* (fr. 8 Dittmar = fr. 50 Gian-

<sup>48</sup> *Or.* 2,262: οὐκοῦν εἰ Πλάτων αὐτὸς ἡμῖν ἀποκρίναιτο, πλείστου γένοιτ’ ἂν ἄξιον τῷ λόγῳ. ὑπάρχει δὲ καὶ τοῦτο. πῶς; ὡς αὐτῷ Σωκράτης ἀποκρινομένος πεποίηται. Cf. the remark on the *Apology* in *or.* 28,82 Keil.

<sup>49</sup> *Or.* 2,61–65.

<sup>50</sup> *Or.* 2,77; for the false opinion see e.g. D.L. 2,60; cf. Döring 1979, 68 with n. 90.

<sup>51</sup> *Or.* 2,78–79.

nantoni 1990).<sup>52</sup> Unsurprisingly, Aristides holds that the view ascribed to Socrates by Aeschines better fits the opinion of the historical Socrates than the invectives of Plato's Socrates. What is interesting, however, is that the orator connects the lack of trustworthiness of Plato's portrait of Socrates with the philosopher's superior literary talent. While the less gifted Aeschines is supposed to have limited himself to reporting what he had heard, or something very close to it, Plato's genius finds expression in his ability to credit Socrates with views that he did not hold and with statements on issues in which he is agreed to have had no interest at all.<sup>53</sup> The link forged by Aristides between Plato's literary genius and the fictional character of his portrait of Socrates underlines the double-edged nature of his praise for Plato as a literary artist.

The contrast between Plato's and Aeschines' Socrates is resumed in the part of *In Defence of the Four* in which Aristides summarizes his objections against the maltreatment of the fifth-century Athenian leaders in the *Gorgias*. Again, the complimentary statements about Themistocles by Aeschines' Socrates (fr. 7 Dittmar = fr. 49 Giannantoni 1990) are favourably compared to a comment by Plato's Socrates, in this case from the *Alcibiades I* (118b–c), on an Athenian politician, namely Pericles.<sup>54</sup> And again, acknowledgment of Plato's literary genius is very much a part of the orator's polemic. In this case, however, Aristides does not confine his remarks to Plato's Socrates, but broadens his argument to include the dialogues as such. For Aristides continues by pointing out that Plato's superior talent finds expression in the majestic freedom that he permits himself, and that this poetic licence is not just a matter of word choice, but also applies to his handling of the subject-matter of his dialogues, the *hypotheses*.<sup>55</sup> The liberties taken by Plato with the historical facts are illustrated by a discussion of the inconsistencies in the dramatic dates of the *Menexenus* and the *Symposium*,<sup>56</sup> expand-

<sup>52</sup> *Or.* 3,348–351; cf. Tarrant 2000, 132.

<sup>53</sup> *Or.* 3,351: ..., ὁ δὲ τῆς φύσεως οἶμαι κέχρηται τῇ περιουσίᾳ, ὥσπερ καὶ ἄλλα μυρία δήπου διεξέρχεται ἐπὶ τῷ Σωκράτους ὀνόματι, περὶ ὧν ὁμολογεῖται μηδὲν ἐκείνων πραγματεύεσθαι. Cf. S.E. *M.* 7,9f. = Timo of Phlius fr. 62 Di Marco = *Supplementum Hellenisticum* 836: ἔνθεν καὶ ὁ Τίμων αἰτιᾶται τὸν Πλάτωνα ἐπὶ τῷ οὕτω καλλωπίζειν τὸν Σωκράτην πολλοῖς μαθήμασιν· «ἢ γάρ» φησι «τὸν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα μείναι ἠθολόγον». I owe this reference to Rein Ferwerda.

<sup>54</sup> *Or.* 3,575: ... ὃ γε ἐκείνου (i.e. Aeschines') Σωκράτης οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἐτρέπετο.

<sup>55</sup> *Or.* 3,577.

<sup>56</sup> *Or.* 3,577ff.

ing a line of reasoning that had already been introduced at the end of *To Capito*.<sup>57</sup> In the *Defence of the Four*, the exposure of the inconsistencies in the dramatic dates of the dialogues leads to the conclusion that the dialogues are fictions, *plasmata*:

But these incongruities result from the licence that is customary in the dialogues. For owing to the fact that they are all largely fictions and that one is at liberty to construct the plot using any ingredient one chooses, these works as such are not conspicuous for scrupulous preservation of the truth.<sup>58</sup>

The term *plasma* refers to the well-known tripartite division of narrative according to its truth-content in history, myth, and *plasma*.<sup>59</sup> This division goes back to the hellenistic period<sup>60</sup> and is reproduced by Sextus Empiricus, among others. Sextus defines *plasma* as the narration of things that have not really happened but that are related as though they had.<sup>61</sup> The equivalent term in Latin sources is *argumentum*, defined by Cicero and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as *ficta res, qui tamen fieri potuit*.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the employment of the term *plasma* amounts to a characterization of Plato’s dialogues as realistic fiction. By now Aristides has argued at length for the dialogues in general what had been postulated for the *Gorgias* in the proem to *In Defence of Oratory*:<sup>63</sup> the meetings between the interlocutors are fictitious.

Traditionally, the standard examples of *plasmata* were comedy and mime.<sup>64</sup> Appreciation of the liberties taken by tragic poets in adapting their traditional subject matter resulted in the addition of tragedy, and this devel-

<sup>57</sup> *Or.* 4,50f.

<sup>58</sup> *Or.* 3,586: ἀλλ’ ἐστὶν ταῦτα ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν διαλόγων ἐξουσίας καὶ συνηθείας ὀρημημένα. τῷ γὰρ ἅπαντας αὐτοὺς ἐπεικῶς εἶναι πλάσματα καὶ πλέκειν ἐξεῖναι δι’ ὃν ἂν τις βούληται, ἔνεστιν τι κὰν τοῖς λόγοις αὐτοῖς οὐ σφόδρα τηροῦν τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

<sup>59</sup> On this classification see Barwick 1928; Meijering 1987, 76–90.

<sup>60</sup> Pace Hose 1996, who advances the hypothesis that the division originated in late republican Rome; Erler 1997 argues that it ultimately stems from Plato himself.

<sup>61</sup> S.E. *M.* 1,263: ... πλάσμα δὲ πραγμάτων μὴ γενομένων μὲν ὁμοίως δὲ τοῖς γενομένοις λεγομένων (sc. ἔκθεσις ἐστίν), ...; cf. *M.* 1,252.

<sup>62</sup> Cic., *Inv.* 1,27; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1,13.

<sup>63</sup> *Or.* 2,13; see above, text to nn. 42–46.

<sup>64</sup> S.E. *M.* 1,263: ..., ὡς αἱ κωμικαὶ ὑποθέσεις καὶ οἱ μῖμοι. Cf. *M.* 1,252; *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1,13.

opment entailed the introduction of the term *dramatikon diègèma* as an equivalent of *plasmaticon diègèma*.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, in the *Defence of Oratory* Aristides in passing calls Plato's dialogues *dramata*,<sup>66</sup> while the scholiast applauds the designation of the dialogues, in the *Defence of the Four*, as *plasmata*, 'because they resemble *dramata*'.<sup>67</sup> It is certainly tempting to conjecture that in designating the dialogues as *dramata* Aristides is already hinting at their fictional status.<sup>68</sup>

At any rate, in the *Defence of the Four* the classification of the dialogues as *plasmata* is elaborated in an identification of the dialogues with comedy and tragedy. Aristides portrays Plato as a man who, despite his objections to dramatic poetry, is full of comedy himself<sup>69</sup> as well as a tragic poet.<sup>70</sup> Playing on the ambiguity of the verb *mimeisthai* (meaning both 'to imitate' and 'to represent'), Aristides accuses Plato of inconsistency, because the philosopher does not heed his own warnings against dramatic representation:<sup>71</sup>

And while you say that one should not imitate bad men and should not make oneself like one's inferiors, you yourself are not very consistent in following this precept, but you represent sophists, you represent sycophants.

<sup>65</sup> On this development see Meijering 1987, 87–90, with e.g. [Herm.], *Prog.* 2 (= 4,17f. Rabe): ... τὸ δὲ πλασματικόν, ὃ καὶ δραματικὸν καλοῦσιν, οἷα τὰ τῶν τραγικῶν.

<sup>66</sup> *Or.* 2,164: ... ἐν ἄλλοις τισὶ δράμασι ἢ λόγοις ...

<sup>67</sup> *Or.* 3,586, quoted above (n. 58); Σ Aristid. III 716,31–34 Dindorf: καλὸν τὸ πλάσματα· εἰοικασί γὰρ οἱ διάλογοι δράμασι, διὰ τὸ ἔχειν καὶ αὐτοὺς οἰαδηποτοῦν πρόσωπα, καὶ λόγους περικεῖσθαι, οὗς δοκεῖ τῷ Πλάτωνι.

<sup>68</sup> In this connection, we should note the juxtaposition, in the mosaic floor in the triclinium of the House of Menander at Mytilene, of a panel representing Socrates, Simmias, and Cebes, the chief interlocutors in Plato's *Phaedo*, with eight panels showing scenes from Menander's comedies and one portraying the comic poet himself. See Charitonidis/Kahil/Ginouvens 1970, 33–36 and, for the date (third quarter of the third century AD) of the mosaic floor, 12. I owe this reference to Heinz Hofmann. At Rome Plato's dialogues were staged as diversions during drinking-bouts, see Plu. *Quaestiones convivales*, *Mor.* 711b–d; cf. Lakmann 2000.

<sup>69</sup> *Or.* 3,614: ἀλλ' αὐτὸν τὸν Ἀριστοφάνη τίς ἔσθ' ὁ κωμωδῶν; ὅτῳ πολὺ τῆς κωμωδίας, φαίη τις ἄν, περίεστιν. The comic representation of Aristophanes to which Aristides takes exception, can be found in *Smp.* 185c, see *or.* 3,579 and 581; *or.* 4,50; and cf. Ath. 187c.

<sup>70</sup> *Or.* 3,615, taking the Athenian Stranger as Plato's double and the self-designation in *Lg.* 817b literally.

<sup>71</sup> Pl., *R.* 394e–396e.

phants, you represent Thrasymachus who never blushed, doorkeepers, children, and countless others.<sup>72</sup>

The consequence of the characterization of the dialogues as dramatic poetry and, as such, works of fiction is spelled out when Aristides takes Plato to task for the gratuitousness of his attack on the four Athenian statesmen. In the orator’s opinion, it would have been possible for the philosopher to conclude the argument without maligning them — just as comedy could do without ridiculing people by name!<sup>73</sup> The possible objection that the names of Themistocles, Miltiades, Cimon, and Pericles had been brought up by Callicles (*Grg.* 503c) is brushed aside as ludicrous.<sup>74</sup>

For who does not know that Socrates, Callicles, Gorgias, Polus, all of this is Plato, who turns the discussion in whatever direction suits him?<sup>75</sup>

In fact, Aristides claims, there was no Callicles to cause trouble for Plato or to prevent him from concluding the argument as he wished.<sup>76</sup> In other words, both the meeting hypothesized in the *Gorgias* and the reported conversation are products of Plato’s literary creativity. And Aristides’ manner of presenting this observation amounts to an exposure of the dialogue *form* as a sham: after all, all interlocutors are Plato’s puppets.

This implication of the identification of the dialogues as fictional literary texts was adumbrated in the proem to *In Defence of Oratory*, where the *Gorgias* was characterized as an indictment and the role of Socrates’ interlocutors as defenders of oratory as a disguise:

<sup>72</sup> *Or.* 3,616: καὶ λέγεις μὲν ὡς οὐ χρὴ μιμεῖσθαι τοὺς φαύλους οὐδ’ ἀφομοιοῦν αὐτὸν τοῖς χεῖροσιν, αὐτὸς δ’ οὐ πᾶν χρῆ τούτῳ διὰ τέλους, ἀλλὰ μιμῆ σοφιστᾶς, μιμῆ συκοφάντας, μιμῆ Θρασύμαχον τὸν οὐδεπώποτε ἐρυθρίασαντα, θυρωροῦς, παιδία, μυρίους. The same accusation can be found in *Ath.* 505b.

<sup>73</sup> *Or.* 3,631; cf. *or.* 3,8.

<sup>74</sup> *Or.* 3,632: ὅπου γ’ εἰ καὶ ὁ Καλλικλῆς ἔτυχεν περὶ αὐτῶν ὑπολαβῶν, ἔστι μὲν οἶμαι γέλως πᾶν τοῦτο.

<sup>75</sup> *Or.* 3,632: τίς γὰρ οὐκ οἶδεν ὅτι καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης καὶ ὁ Καλλικλῆς καὶ ὁ Γοργίας καὶ ὁ Πῶλος πάντα ταῦτ’ ἐστὶν Πλάτων, πρὸς τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτῷ τρέπων τοὺς λόγους; Cf. the scholium ad loc. (Σ *Aristid.* III 724,8 Dindorf): πάντα ἐμφαίνει πλάσματα.

<sup>76</sup> *Or.* 3,640: καὶ οὐδεὶς αὐτὸν Καλλικλῆς παρῶν ἐτάραττεν, οὐδ’ ἐκόλυεν τὸ μὴ ὅπως βούλεται περᾶν τὸν λόγον.

For it would be terrible if he, in undertaking to make his indictment openly, at least in a certain sense did not deny oratory its defence, but allowed two or three men to oppose, maintaining at least the pretence of a dialogue, while we, who are able and intend to help in every way, shall lack the courage to do so, as if it would not be allowed to bring in other arguments against Plato than the ones that he chose to make against himself.<sup>77</sup>

It is here that we touch upon the functions of Aristides' constant harping on the fictional character of the dialogues. By pointing out the illusionary character of the dialogue form, he alerts his audience to its persuasive force and clears the way for his own apologetic project. His praise of Plato's literary genius has proven to be more than a way of dealing with the dilemma caused by his decision to enter the lists against the philosopher and of sweetening the pill for Plato's admirers, who might take offence at his arguments. As it leads up to the claim that the dialogues are fictions, it is also a highly effective ingredient in his polemic. At the same time, the exposure of the dialogue as a literary cover for an indictment adds a polemical dimension to the other method used by Aristides to lessen his predicament: borrowing arguments against Plato from Plato's own writings. But before this assertion can be substantiated we should examine the possible sources of inspiration for Aristides' observations.

#### Anti-Platonic polemic and Platonic theorizing

We started our inquiry with the observation that the characterization of Plato's dialogues as fictional compositions would come as no surprise to modern read-

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<sup>77</sup> *Or.* 2,14: καὶ γὰρ ἂν εἴη δεινόν, εἰ ἐκεῖνος μὲν ὑποστάς κατηγορεῖν ἐκ προφανοῦς οὐκ ἀπεστέρησεν τρόπον γέ τιν' αὐτὴν τῶν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς λόγων, ἀλλ' ἀπέδωκεν δυσὶν καὶ τρισὶν ἀντειπεῖν, ὡς γοῦν ἐν σχήματι διαλόγων, ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ τὸ ὅλον βοθηεῖν ἔχοντες καὶ προηρημένοι μὴ τολμήσομεν, ὥσπερ τοσαῦτ' ἀντιλέγειν Πλάτωνι δέον, ὅποσα ἂν αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτὸν βουληθείη. Incidentally, Aristides labels the attack on oratory in the *Gorgias* sometimes a κατηγορία, sometimes a ψόγος, an invective, see e.g. *or.* 2,15. Accordingly, his own *Defence of Oratory* vacillates between an apology and an encomium. The same is true of *In Defence of the Four*, which goes a long way to explain the difficulties experienced by Sopater in pigeonholing the latter oration as either forensic or encomiastic, H<sub>1</sub> 158,13–162,6 Lenz = III 436,12–437,33 Dindorf.

ers. A concise survey of ancient views will suffice to demonstrate that the same should have been true of Aristides’ audience.

Plato’s contemporaries and Greek intellectuals of the next generation can hardly have failed to recognize that his dialogues were not records of actual conversations. After all, in Aristotle’s *Poetics* the Socratic dialogue and the prose mime are bracketed together as examples of mimetic prose.<sup>78</sup> Aristotle’s concept of *mimèsis*, elusive as it is, clearly leaves room for a positive appreciation of what *we* would call fiction: a representation of reality which does not have to correspond to actual events, but which constructs a course of events that reflects universal human behaviour and experience.<sup>79</sup> It is, incidentally, likely that the bracketing of the Socratic dialogue with the prose mime was primarily motivated by the fact that both are also mimetic in the narrower sense in which Aristotle uses the word:<sup>80</sup> in both genres, the spoken word is directly represented.

In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the labelling of Plato’s dialogues as mimetic prose does not have a polemical edge. Things must have changed, however, in the early Hellenistic period. With the vanishing of the last generation that had personal memories of fifth-century Athens, the fictional character of Plato’s dialogues ceased to be a self-evident truth. Instead, it became the outcome of biographical and literary research, and the results of such scholarly efforts could well be put to polemical use. Anecdotes such as the one told by Athenaeus about Gorgias and Phaedo, who protest never to have spoken the words that Plato puts in their mouths,<sup>81</sup> may originate in this period, and a pun by Timo of Phlius on Plato and *plattein*, also quoted by Athenaeus,<sup>82</sup> points in the same direction: in the third century BC the fictional character of Plato’s dialogues had become an argument in the armoury of anti-Platonic polemic.

In the second century BC, Herodicus of Babylon produced one of the most vehement attacks on the Socratics written in antiquity, *Reply to a Socrates-worshipper* (Πρὸς τὸν Φιλοσωκράτην). Large extracts of this treatise are supposed to have been preserved in the books 5 and 11 of Athenaeus’

<sup>78</sup> Arist. *Po.* 1447a28–b11. On the tradition that Plato was indebted to Sophron see Haslam 1972; Clay 1994, 33–37.

<sup>79</sup> See Halliwell 1986, 132f.; Rösler 1980, 309–311.

<sup>80</sup> *Po.* 1460a5–8; cf. Halliwell 1986, 126–131; Haslam 1972, 22.

<sup>81</sup> Ath. 505d–e = Swift Riginos 1976, anecdotes 37 and 58.

<sup>82</sup> Ath. 505e = fr. 19 Di Marco = *Supplementum Hellenisticum* 793: ὡς ἀνέπλαττε Πλάτων ὁ πεπλασμένα θαύματα εἰδώς.



*Deipnosophistae*. Although Herodicus' pamphlet is mentioned only once by Athenaeus,<sup>83</sup> a good case has been made by Karl Schmidt for the theory that the attacks on philosophers in general and on Plato in particular in these books of the *Deipnosophistae* were, with few exceptions, taken from Herodicus.<sup>84</sup> A characteristic ingredient of Herodicus' anti-Platonic polemic is his use of archon lists to expose inconsistencies in the dramatic dates of the dialogues.<sup>85</sup>

Already Johannes Geffcken pointed out that Aristides refers to eponymous archons in his exposure of the inconsistency in the dramatic date of the *Menexenus*,<sup>86</sup> and suggested that the orator's treatment of this issue might ultimately stem from Herodicus' pamphlet.<sup>87</sup> Geffcken may well have been right, the more so since there are other rather striking similarities between Aristides' Platonic orations and the anti-Platonic polemic in the *Deipnosophistae*. For example, Athenaeus combines a critical discussion of the dramatic date of the *Parmenides* with censure of Plato's suggestion that Zeno had been Parmenides' favourite;<sup>88</sup> in *To Capito*, where Aristides for the first time brings up the inconsistencies in the dramatic dates of the dialogues,<sup>89</sup> he takes exception at precisely the same intimation in the *Parmenides*.<sup>90</sup> As Herodicus represented an extremely hostile tradition of anti-Platonic polemic, it is nothing less than a provocation that Aristides plays this card precisely in his letter to the already offended Capito.

Thus Aristides probably borrowed the chronological arguments for his claim that the dialogues are fictional compositions from a tradition of anti-

<sup>83</sup> Ath. 215f: ὡς ἰστορεῖ ὁ Ἡρόδικος ὁ Κρατήτειος ἐν τοῖς Πρὸς τὸν Φιλοσωκράτην. In addition, Athenaeus twice refers to Herodicus without mentioning a title. In 192b a comparison of the convivial customs of the Homeric heroes with the proceedings during the symposia described by Plato, Xenophon, and Epicurus (Ath. 186d ff.), presumably derived from a treatise Περὶ συμποσίων, is rounded off with a quotation from Herodicus; in 219c Herodicus is cited as the source for a poem, allegedly by Aspasia, portraying Socrates as chasing after Alcibiades instead of the other way round.

<sup>84</sup> Schmidt 1886. Schmidt was followed by Düring 1941, an edition with commentary of Herodicus' fragments; see also Geffcken 1929, 98–101, esp. 99 n. 1, and now Trapp 2000, 359f.

<sup>85</sup> Ath. 217a–218e.

<sup>86</sup> Or. 3.577f.; cf. above, text to n. 56.

<sup>87</sup> Geffcken 1929, 106 n. 12: '..., so kann hier Herodicus vorliegen.' Düring 1941 prints or. 3,577–582 as fragments from Herodicus' Πρὸς τὸν Φιλοσωκράτην.

<sup>88</sup> Ath. 505f, referring to *Prm.* 127b.

<sup>89</sup> Or. 4.50f.; cf. above, text to n. 57.

<sup>90</sup> Or. 4.37; note also the parallels mentioned above, nn. 69 and 72.

Platonic polemic. For the claim itself, however, and especially for the exposure of the dialogue form as a cover for sustained argument, he may well have drawn on theorizing on the dialogue by contemporary Platonists. This becomes manifest if one takes a look at a definition of the dialogue prevailing among second-century Platonists. It is provided by Albinus, in his introduction to the study of Plato’s dialogues:

[A dialogue] is nothing else than a text consisting of questions and answers on some political or philosophical subject, with proper characterization of the persons employed and written in a polished style.<sup>91</sup>

Almost the same definition of the dialogue can be found in Diogenes Laertius’ treatment of Plato’s writings,<sup>92</sup> and the gist of these Middle Platonist definitions is reproduced by the sixth-century author of the anonymous *Prolegomena to the Platonic philosophy*, who is also generous enough to point out that the only difference between dialogue, on the one hand, and tragedy and comedy on the other, is that dialogues are in prose.<sup>93</sup>

Although there are minor differences between these three definitions, they are consistent in the importance they attach to *èthopoia*, characterization. That *èthopoia* is a procedure in which fiction has its part, is evident from the definition that we find in the *Progymnasmata* ascribed to Hermogenes: *èthopoia* is the representation, through invented speech, of a person’s character.<sup>94</sup> Aelius Theon, who prefers the term *prosôpopoia*,<sup>95</sup> mentions in one and the same breath Homer’s poetry, the dialogues of Plato and the other

<sup>91</sup> Alb. *Intr.* 147,17–21 Hermann (the pagination of Hermann’s edition is reproduced in the edition by Nüsser 1991): ἔστιν τοίνυν οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ λόγος ἐξ ἐρωτήσεως καὶ ἀποκρίσεως συγκείμενος <περὶ> τινος τῶν πολιτικῶν καὶ φιλοσόφων πραγμάτων, μετὰ τῆς πρεπούσης ἠθοποιίας τῶν παραλαμβανομένων προσώπων καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὴν λέξιν κατασκευῆς.

<sup>92</sup> D.L. 3,48.

<sup>93</sup> 14,4–10 Westerink 1990.

<sup>94</sup> [Hermog.] *Prog.* 9 = 20,7–9 Rabe: Ἠθοποιία ἐστὶ μίμησις ἤθους ὑποκειμένου προσώπου, οἷον τίνος ἂν εἴποι λόγους Ἀνδρομάχη ἐπὶ Ἑκτορι. The element of invented speech is explicitly mentioned when the author explains what is, in his view, the difference between ἠθοποιία and προσωποποιία (20,13f. Rabe): ἐκεῖ μὲν γὰρ ὄντος προσώπου λόγους πλάττομεν, ἐνταῦθα οὐκ ὄν πρόσωπον πλάττομεν.

<sup>95</sup> Theon, *Prog.* 10 = 115,11ff. Spengel.

Socratic, and the comedies of Menander as models of this art of characterization in ascribed speech.<sup>96</sup>

The central importance of *èthopoiia* in Middle Platonic theorizing on the dialogue would, in itself, have sufficed to enable Aristides to maintain that the conversations reported in the dialogues are invented. More Platonist grist to Aristides' mill could have been provided by treatises such as those reproduced by Diogenes Laertius or preserved on a second-century papyrus. In both cases, Socrates, Timaeus, the Athenian Stranger, and the Eleatic Stranger are taken as Plato's spokesmen. In the words of Diogenes Laertius:

His own views [Plato] expresses through four characters: Socrates, Timaeus, the Athenian Stranger, and the Eleatic Stranger.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, characters such as Socrates' interlocutors in the *Gorgias* are considered to have been introduced by Plato as whipping-boys:

In order to refute false opinions, he introduces characters such as Thrasymachus, Callicles, Polus, Gorgias, Protagoras, and besides Hippias, Euthydemus and the like.<sup>98</sup>

This combination of the mouthpiece view with the whipping-boy interpretation is, of course, precisely what Aristides must have had in mind when he wrote that 'Socrates, Callicles, Gorgias, Polus, all of this is Plato, turning the discussion in whatever direction suits him'.<sup>99</sup> Nor is it surprising in the light of such theorizing on the dialogue by contemporary Platonists that the orator maintains

<sup>96</sup> Theon, *Prog.* 2 = 68,21–24 Spengel.

<sup>97</sup> D.L. 3,52: καὶ περὶ μὲν τῶν αὐτῷ δοκούντων ἀποφαίνεται διὰ τεττάρων προσώπων, Σωκράτους, Τιμαίου, τοῦ Ἀθηναίου ξένου, τοῦ Ἐλεάτου ξένου. The version of the mouthpiece view found in the papyrus (*P. Oxy.* 3219 fr. 2 col. i) is different from Diogenes Laertius' in that the former accepts without further ado what is denied by the latter: that the Eleatic Stranger is Parmenides and the Athenian Stranger Plato; cf. Tarrant 2000, 27–29. As we have seen above (*or.* 3,615, mentioned in n. 70), Aristides implicitly endorses the view expounded in the papyrus.

<sup>98</sup> D.L. 3,52: περὶ δὲ τῶν ψευδῶν ἐλεγχομένους εἰσάγει οἷον Θρασύμαχον καὶ Καλλικλέα καὶ Πῶλον Γοργίαν τε καὶ Πρωταγόραν, ἔτι τ' Ἴππίαν καὶ Εὐθύδημον καὶ δὴ καὶ τοὺς ὁμοίους.

<sup>99</sup> *Or.* 4,632 (quoted above, n. 75).

that the meetings underlying the conversations are also fictitious: according to Diogenes Laertius, it is Plato who brings the characters on the stage.<sup>100</sup>

We have established that, at the very least, Aristides could have drawn on theorizing on the dialogue by contemporary Platonists. But what was the polemical point of bringing up the fictional character of the dialogues if Platonists themselves ‘would have acknowledged that Plato chose the historical setting for fictional conversations to suit his philosophical purposes’?<sup>101</sup> A possible answer to this question can be found in the hypothesis that there were also second-century Platonists who maintained that the dialogues were meant to be records of actual historical conversations. Proclus, in a fascinating passage of his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, reports that some (τινές) have made such an assumption,<sup>102</sup> and John Dillon has suggested that ‘τινές will be the Middle Platonists.’<sup>103</sup> However, while Proclus’ remark concerns the dialogues as such, the evidence adduced by Dillon for his suggestion pertains to the Atlantis story and is, therefore, inadmissible in the present context.<sup>104</sup> The identity of Proclus’ τινές must remain an enigma. In the meantime, we should assume that Aristides’ characterization of the dialogues as fictional compositions would, in itself, not have met with opposition among contemporary Platonists.

But perhaps the question raised in the above paragraph is off the mark. For Aristides, the function of the line of reasoning that we have followed in this paper did not depend on the views of contemporary Platonists. By characterizing the dialogues as fictional compositions and by exposing the dialogue form as a cover for sustained argument the orator had sharpened the contrast between his own way of handling the dispute with Plato and the philosopher’s polemical methods. Whereas Plato had steered the discussion in whatever direction suited his argument, Aristides had, by borrowing arguments from Plato’s own writings, allowed his interlocutor to speak for

<sup>100</sup> Εἰσάγει (D.L. 3,52) is the crucial word, see Mansfeld 1994, 80 n. 134; cf. Orig. *Cels.* 1,28 about the introduction by Celsus of a Jew as an anti-Christian polemicist (Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ προσωποποιεῖ [...] καὶ εἰσάγει Ἰουδαῖον πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν λέγοντά τινα μειρακιωδῶς καὶ οὐδὲν φιλοσόφου πολιᾶς ἄξιον), with Andresen 1981, 339f.

<sup>101</sup> Tarrant 2000, 9.

<sup>102</sup> Procl. *in Alc.* 18,15–19,2 Segonds 1985.

<sup>103</sup> Dillon 1973, 232.

<sup>104</sup> Dillon 1973, 294f., referring to Procl. *in Tim.* 75,30ff. Diehl; cf. Tarrant 2000, 54f. with 225 n. 5, where it is suggested that ἱστορία ψιλή (the characterization of the Atlantis story attributed to Crantor by Proclus) ‘signifies a bare narrative rather than unadulterated history in our sense’.

himself. Whereas Plato had disguised an indictment as a dialogue, Aristides had put into practice the principle of Plato's Socrates that what matters in a discussion is obtaining agreement from one's interlocutor.<sup>105</sup> He had beaten the philosopher at his own game — and still, nobody could deny that he had given Plato his due.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Grg.* 471e–472c; cf. Karadimas 1996, 163. This passage from the *Gorgias* is paraphrased in *or.* 3,643.

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