

# *Pitiful Dramatics and the Feminine Framing of the Phaedo*

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*Although often inclusive of women, Socrates expels Xanthippe from the jail in which he awaits death in the Phaedo. How are we to make sense of her dismissal? What is at stake is whether the dismissal reflects a dismissal of women and «the sort of thing characteristic of women» from philosophical dialogue, or whether it is a response against the sort of «pitiful dramatics» Socrates abhors. After an examination of the former possibility, this paper will argue for the latter, and draw out implications for the kind of tragic hero Socrates – the kind that does not inspire pity, as does the Aristotelian tragic hero, but something else entirely.*

It has been claimed that the question of what philosophy is is interchangeable with the question of who Socrates is.<sup>1</sup> But the question – who is Socrates? – is itself tied up with questions as to who Plato, Xenophon and Aristophanes are. Nonetheless, we draw lines and make assumptions as to their separability, one of the issues at the heart of Plato's *Phaedo*. Plato's Socrates, and more specifically, the Socrates of the *Phaedo* is heroic, but not quite in the sense Aristotle will elaborate. Rather than inspiring fear and pity, Socrates, on the day of his death, tends to the psychic well-being of those around him through philosophical dialogue. Who deserves such psychic care-taking is qualified by a small and curious incident at the beginning of the dialogue that easily escapes our notice, and yet is important enough to warrant inclusion. The incident I am referring to is the dismissal of Xanthippe from the jail cell after she reminds Socrates that this will be the last of his philosophical dialogues

<sup>1</sup> Sallis 2005, p. 7.