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“Of Course, You Know Her!” (Pl. *Phd.* 60a). Xanthippe’s Presence by Socrates Deathbed

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Abstract:

In Plato's *Phaedo*, when arriving to visit Socrates on his last day in prison, his friends and companions meet his wife, Xanthippe. This is the only time she is directly mentioned in the Platonic dialogues. The present paper aims to investigate the character of Xanthippe by going through the doxographic reception of the figure of Socrates' wife, a necessary path to reveal the social representation of the role of woman and wife entrenched in these views. Next,

we will investigate the way the character Xanthippe is represented on the Platonic stage, in search of traces of a different representation of gender in the Platonic pages. One in which the figure of the woman, wife and mother Xanthippe is there to challenge Socrates and his philosophy.

Keywords: Plato; *Phaedo*; Xanthippe; Gender.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, when arriving to visit Socrates on his last day in prison, his friends and companions meet his wife, Xanthippe. This is the only time she is explicitly mentioned in the Platonic dialogues. The present paper aims to investigate the character of Xanthippe by going through the doxographic reception of the figure of Socrates' wife, a necessary path to reveal the social representation of the role of woman and wife entrenched in these views. Next, we will investigate the way the character Xanthippe is represented on the Platonic stage, in search of traces of a different representation of gender in the Platonic pages. One in which the figure of the woman, wife and mother Xanthippe is there to challenge Socrates and his philosophy.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, the last moments of Socrates' life with his fellow inmates in prison are narrated, just a few hours before he was to ingest the deadly poison. From the perspective of literary structure, the dialogue is a narrative within the narrative, a dialogue within the dialogue. Echecrates and his colleagues in Phlius inquire of Phaedo of Elis, who was present on the final day of Socrates' death, for details on what he spoke εἶπεν and what his last moments were like (*Phd.* 57a). Thus, the narrative is dedicated to two central themes: what happened on a section of this last day and what Socrates' final words were.

The narrative follows a literary pattern already established in antiquity, where at the moment of their death, individuals reveal their way of life¹. In the case of Socrates, a man who accepted the notice of his conviction with serenity, it is anticipated that he will behave in the same noble manner γενναίως on the day of the execution of the sentence. In the hours immediately preceding his death, Socrates is presented as the paradigm of the philosopher who not only passively accepts death but faces it without fear. Furthermore, Socrates welcomes death as something good, engaging in a persuasive speech to his friends and disciples, attempting to convince them that the death of the philosopher is actually something to be desired. He argues that life should be lived by embracing beautiful risks (*Phd.* 114d).

¹ See for instance Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* as well as several examples of this both in Diogenes Laertius *Lives* and a few neoplatonic ones, such as Porphyry's Plotinus and Pythagoras ones.

On his final day, Socrates is accompanied by old friends and disciples. While the dialogue primarily involves effective interventions by Simias and Cebes, there is also the timid yet significant participation of Crito in the narrative surrounding the moments before and after the exposition of Socrates' arguments. The involvement of other characters on the stage set by Plato is restricted to small gestures, simple expressions of emotion, and evident perplexity in response to the dramatic moment and the surprising speeches of Socrates. Nevertheless, as Casertano rightly observed, it is one of Plato's most populated scenarios, featuring sixteen characters on stage, including an anonymous character in 103a4 (Casertano 2015: 13). As is to be expected in Plato, a delicate dramatic weaver as he is, no presence or absence on the dialogue scene - even if silent - should be considered accidental. As Saxonhouse (1998) rightly pointed out:

Plato was a careful author; presences and noted absences (such as that of Xanthippe and of Plato in the *Phd.*) enhance rather than detract from the philosophical import and make us aware of issues that do not appear in the spoken discourse of the dialogues. (Saxonhouse 1998: 112)

Amidst this bustling stage of Socrates' last day, one can discern the discreet yet undeniably surprising presence of a female character: Socrates' wife, Xanthippe. This marks the sole occasion in the entire Platonic corpus where she is mentioned, her appearance on the stage is exceedingly brief. Nonetheless, as we aim to demonstrate, it is not devoid of significance.

The surprise effect brought about by Xanthippe's presence is evident when we observe that, in the detailed list of those present in Socrates' cell, compiled by Phaedo at Echecrates' request in the prologue of the dialogue, Xanthippe (along with the other women of the house) is notably absent (*Phd.* 59bc). Even Crito, who assumes, in the dialogue, a pivotal role in Socrates' final day, is not named.

Xanthippe makes her first appearance on page 60a: as Socrates' friends and disciples approach his cell early in the morning on his final day of life, they find her by her husband's side. The narrative subtly implies that she spent what turned out to be Socrates' last night with him. The character is portrayed through the gendered lens of a woman/mother/wife: seated next to her husband, she cradles one of his children in her arms. Upon seeing Socrates' friends, she laments and groans, "as is common for women" notes Phaedo, emphasizing the normality and normative nature of Xanthippe's role in the scene.²

² When we address Xanthippe in the *Phaedo*, the importance of gender analysis is glaring because the perception of this character is intimately related to her condition as a woman. This tension in the gender dimension is also evident when we speak, for example, of the perception of philosophy and public life in antiquity as purely masculine domains, which clearly affects our reading of ancient texts.

The term gender in this paper, from an epistemological point of view, refers to a category of historical analysis (Scott 1986), it means that we are considering physical and anatomical differences between men and women through the lenses of its contingency and historicity and looking for processes and practices of signification of these differences.³ As we shall develop further in this paper, Plato's texts display concepts around gender that naturally inform historical and cultural aspects of his time but also play with these norms to convey philosophical discourse.⁴

In the *Phaedo*, Xanthippe not only weeps but also speaks, she is the first voice heard within the narrative recalled by Phaedo about that tragic day. Her sentence underscores something perhaps obvious yet crucial to the *pathos* of the scene – the inevitability of Socrates' death and that today's dialogue will be his last with friends/disciples. “When Xanthippe saw us, she cried out and said just the sort of thing that women tend to say: ‘Socrates, this is now the very last time that your friends will speak to you and you to them’” (*Phd.* 60a). Xanthippe's tears and laments express her closeness to Socrates but also, and perhaps especially, express her awareness of the importance and gravity of that moment. In response, Socrates requests his old friend Crito to arrange for someone to accompany his wife home. She leaves the room “...crying and beating herself in her grief” (60b).

Anonymously referred to as one of the “women of the house”, Xanthippe, along with her three sons, returns to the scene at the end of the day, for a final familiar and intimate farewell, and they have a conversation with the philosopher who give them some instructions (116b). This farewell is only witnessed by the devoted friend Crito and there is no description of the conversation or instructions. Once again, she and the other women are asked to leave shortly before the execution of the death sentence.

Xanthippe's presence is indeed brief and discreet, as mentioned earlier. Her role adheres to a seemingly conventional gender representation, portraying the wife in tears, seated with her child, and with only a few recorded words by Phaedo. The scene appears ordinary at first glance. However, it is precisely her presence that adds an element of surprise. A small detail in Phaedo's speech, easily overlooked, emerges as a key to understanding the role of Socrates' wife in the

³ The core focus of “gender studies” lies in examining how the distinction between men and women has evolved and structured across various contexts over time. It also explores the emergence of such categories and their interplay with social dynamics. Scholars like Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí ([1997] 2021) and Maria Lugones (2020) argue that the notion of “women” as a unified social group originates from European colonization, with Oyèwùmí highlighting its absence in Yoruba language and society prior to colonization. Moreover, gender categories intersect with other social markers, such as race/ethnicity and social class, leading to different forms of marginalization, exclusion, and violence in modern times. In ancient Athens, social distinctions like “free,” “slave,” and “foreigner” existed, but they differ from contemporary concepts of class and race. For an introductory understanding of gender studies, references like Dorlin (2021) and Zanello (2018) are recommended.

⁴ Scott's (1986) methodology is very influential on the field of gender studies and its application is favorable in the context of this investigation as it challenges the supposed fixed and permanent nature of binary oppositions related to gender and proposes that analysis must be accompanied by constant critique (Scott 1986: 1065). This is important, especially considering the temporal distance between us and the Platonic text, a distance that presupposes different cultural contexts and elements that affect the interpretation of the philosophical text.

dialogue: Phaedo assumes, when he introduces her into the scene, that his interlocutor, Echecrates, “surely knew her” (*Phd* 60a – γινώσκεις γάρ). This detail serves as a cipher, a subtle clue, shedding light on the unexpected nature of Xanthippe's presence in the narrative, driving our attention to better investigate the image of this woman.

What is the meaning of this γινώσκεις γάρ, that is of presupposing that a foreigner like Echecrates already knew Xanthippe will be our starting point, in search of comprehending the dramatic and philosophical meaning of his presence in the *Phaedo*, next to Socrates on his deathbed.

The first section of this paper will be dedicated to the investigation of the testimonies about Xanthippe. We will search them for the motives and representations that could have made her a “surely known” figure in the ancient Greek culture of the end of the fifth century B.C.E. In order to guide our quest we will keep in mind Scott’s definition of gender which involves two main propositions and four interrelated elements. The propositions are as follows: “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1986: 1067). The four interrelated elements are: culturally available symbols; normative concepts that establish interpretations of the meanings of symbols intending to limit and contain their metaphorical possibilities; political and social aspects involving institutions and organizations; and subjectivity of identity.⁵ Then, in the second part of this paper, we will try to understand more closely the reasons for her presence and her dramatic and philosophical role in the *Phaedo*.

Phaedo's expectation that Echecrates is supposed to know Xanthippe is not immediately justified. The chances of a contemporary like Echecrates, even more being a foreigner, knowing Xanthippe were minimal. There is no evidence that Xanthippe had any public salience for society and politics in the fifth century B.C.E. Athens. None of the contemporary authors make any mention of her. Not even Aristophanes, the comedian who made prominent men and women of Athens characters in his plays, ever mentioned her existence. The fact that Aristophanes makes no reference to her in his comedies that have come down to us says much about the invisibility and indifference that the society of the time reserved for Xanthippe. As Saxonhouse notes:

Aristophanes, who is prepared to lampoon almost anyone - be they gods, Socrates, great tragedians, leading political figures of Athens, the demos, women in general, and Aspasia in particular - never mentions Xanthippe in his surviving comedies, indicating

⁵ Scott’s guidelines must be adapted to the context of this proposition, which means that we can not address all of the interrelated elements as we are dealing with a philosophical text and fictional characters, although related to historical figures. The element of subjectivity of identity, for example, according to Scott can be best addressed by the analysis of biographies (1986: 1068). In this paper we will be focusing mainly on the elements of the culturally available symbols and normative concepts.

perhaps how inconsequential she was to the cultural, political, and intellectual world of fifth-century Athens. (Saxonhouse 2018: 612)

Who was Xanthippe? The name Xanthippe was common in the 5th century B.C.E. The name is quoted explicitly in Xenophon's *Banquet*, when Socrates, conversing with his companions, expresses the opinion that women have nothing inferior to men except in their lack of physical strength and that therefore their wives should be equally educated. To answer Antisthenes' protest, Socrates provides an explanation of his wife's character. Antisthenes answered:

If that is your view, Socrates – asked Antisthenes- how does it come that you don't practice what you preach by yourself educating Xanthippe, but live with a wife who is the hardest to get along with of all the women there — yes, or all that ever were, I suspect, or ever will be?

Because – he replied – I observe that men who wish to become expert horsemen do not get the most docile horses but rather those that are high-mettled, believing that if they can manage this kind, they will easily handle any other. My course is similar. Mankind at large is what I wish to deal and associate with; and so I have got her, well assured that if I can endure her, I shall have no difficulty in my relations with all the rest of human kind. (X. *Smp.* 2. 10 Transl. Todd 1923)

The etymological game is straightforward. The name Xanthippe means blond horse. By this means Socrates easily associates the well-known difficult *χαλεπωτάτη* character with which his companions qualified his wife with that of impetuous horses *τοὺς θυμοειδεῖς ἵππους*, the most difficult to be mastered. Loriaux (1969: 26) acknowledges that Socrates seems to agree with the words of detraction of Xanthippe offered by Antisthenes. However, it should not be forgotten that the conversation has its backdrop in a more general discussion of the fact that women are not inferior to men, and, in the specifics of Socrates' response, the, sometimes presupposed, sharp contrast between genders is not given.

The philosopher is referring to Xanthippe's characteristics as common in humankind, presenting a rationale for his marriage to her that is almost agonistic (hence the mention of horses): being married to Xanthippe is for Socrates an opportunity for testing and training his skills to deal with people, precisely because he is continually challenged in the relationship. Between the serious and the comic, Socrates' response here is probably less a detraction from Xanthippe than a self-praise of the philosopher's moral and psychological capacity to choose and deal with his environment and relationships.

In *Memorabilia* (4.1.3-4), Socrates establishes an analogy between the nature of the best people and that of thoroughbred horses. He suggests that, just as horses that are trained from a young age can become gentle and highly valued, those that are not subjected to such training

can become the most difficult to handle and least esteemed. This reinforces the notion that it was acceptable for Socrates to compare the temperaments of human beings to those of animals.

Again, in Xenophon, the qualification of *χαλεπός* is attributed to Xanthippe, now regarding her identity as a mother. In the *Memorabilia* (2.2.1), Lamprocles, the eldest son of Socrates and Xanthippe, had gone angry *χαλεπαίνοντα* with his mother and could not bear her difficult temper *ἀνασχέσθαι τὴν χαλεπότητα*. Her savage ferocity *ἀγριότητα* compared to that of animals, added to her reputation as difficult, was enough for ancient tradition to make her a paradigmatic example of the shrewish woman. Loriaux (1969: 26) and Burnet (1911: 12) remember that this character of a difficult mother and wife was enough for the Cynic tradition to use her as the ultimate example of those difficulties imposed on the philosopher who marries. Echoes of this same idea are found in Diogenes Laertius: “When asked whether or not one should marry, [Socrates] said, ‘Whichever you do you will regret it.’” (D.L. 2.33. Transl. Mensch 2018).

Diogenes Laertius also mentions Socrates' wife directly. He recalls a lost testimony of Aristotle, where it is said that Socrates had married two women, the first being Xanthippe, with whom he had a son named Lamprocles; and the second, Myrto, the daughter of Aristides the Just, and had with her two sons: Sophroniscus and Menexenus. Diogenes Laertius explains that some authors said that the first wife, however, was Myrto and that some believed that they were both his wives at the same time due to the shortage of men in Athens at that time marked by the tragedy of war. In support of this information, there is an account that Athens had issued a decree allowing an Athenian to marry one female citizen and have sexual intercourse - for procreative purposes, due to the scarcity of men - with another (D.L. 2.26).

On the other hand, it is certainly the case to note that, even if “Diogenes agrees with Plutarch and other late sources in claiming that Socrates married twice, it should be noted that Plato and Xenophon, both contemporaries of Socrates, mention only Xanthippe” (D.L. 2. 26. Transl. Mensch 2018).

Diogenes recalls that Xanthippe used to scold (the verb is *λοιδορέω*) her husband on many occasions and that on one occasion she even threw water on Socrates out in public (D.L. 2.36). Diogenes Laertius also recalls that Alcibiades found her attitudes against Socrates unbearable and that his friends urged him to defend himself with his hands *χερσὶν ἀμύνασθαι*, that is to say, to respond with violence, on the occasion when Xanthippe had ripped off her husband's cloak in the marketplace:

Of Xanthippe, who first scolded him and later drenched him with water, he said, “Didn’t I say that Xanthippe’s thunder would end in rain?” When Alcibiades said that

Xanthippe's scolding was intolerable, he said, "But I am used to it, exactly as if I were constantly hearing the clattering of pulleys. And as for you," he asked, "do you mind the cackling of geese?" "No," replied Alcibiades, "for they provide me with eggs and goslings," to which Socrates replied, "Well, Xanthippe provides me with children." Once when she had stripped off his coat in the marketplace, and his friends advised him to use his hands to defend himself, he said, "Of course, by Zeus, so that each of you, while we are sparring, may say, 'Good one, Socrates!' and 'Well done, Xanthippe!'" He used to say that he consorted with a cantankerous woman just as horsemen do with mettlesome horses. "And just as these men," he said, "once they have tamed them, easily master the rest, so I, by living with Xanthippe, will know how to adapt myself to everyone else. (D.L. 2.37. Transl. Mensch 2018)

This mention of horses was probably borrowed from the passage from Xenophon quoted above. More generally, this is evidently a strongly caricatured representation, certainly the result of a long tradition that makes Diogenes have no hesitation in painting Xanthippe as a shrew (Hackforth 1955: 33). Proof of this, for example, is that there is no attempt to explain the reasons that led Xanthippe to these public acts of aggression towards her husband, treated simply as comic acts, inserted in a clearly burlesque atmosphere, as the one that well emerges from Socrates' answers. Her "motives" no longer seem to matter here, but the caricature of the shrewish wife and the teachings that Socrates demonstrates to take from the whole situation: those of the training of patience and tolerance that, afterward, will be useful to him in his dialectical exercises.

In this context, we can observe an effort to connect Xanthippe with multiple symbols (Scott 1986: 1067), besides woman, wife and mother, she is described as a wild being, a shrew, a difficult wife, someone that can be perceived as a burden, an inconvenient, notably in the public domain. From Xenophon to Diogenes, the representation of Xanthippe is caricatured as that of a shrew. As someone of whom people speak publicly and in an unflattering manner. It seems to clearly echo here the remark of Phaedo quoted above: "of course, you know her". That is, Xanthippe is someone well-known, emerging from the silence and invisibility to which she would be destined in her days. But it is precisely because she emerges from the domestic shadows to which a woman should be relegated in fifth century B.C.E.⁶ Athens that Xanthippe's reputation is that of a shrew. The circularity here is the mark of a gender representation to which unfortunately women are often subjected, even in our times: she is visible and on the mouth of all because she is a shrew, she is a shrew because she is visible and on the mouth of all. We will explore this topic further while talking about normative concepts.

⁶ The construction of the mythical narrative about the founding of the western civilization amongst the 'ancient Greeks' lies partially in a discourse about gender, that, from a totalizing perspective, ignores the diversity that arises from variables such as geographical positioning, economic class, and ethnical differences. In sum, talking about 'women' as being secluded in a domestic environment certainly does not do justice to all women, because there is no homogeneity within this category. For examples of critical texts about the 'founding of the western civilization' see: Bernal (1994); Dussel (2000); Vlassopoulos (2007); Trabulsi (2016); Greenberg and Hamikalis (2022).

The perception of Xanthippe is closely related to her condition as a woman, wife, and mother, and the attributes imposed on her are also imposed upon other women, which creates a reciprocity of significations within a rhetoric of gender that runs through time. Female invisibility is the social norm, the result of a misogynistic and patriarchal culture. Plato is fully aware of this background and make use of it when inserting female characters in his dialogues, the character Xanthippe is not an exception. There is a rhetoric of gender on screen, an usage of multiple symbols, and the way that Xanthippe's presence is depicted beside Socrates in his last hours is undoubtedly a Platonic statement, not a simple chronicle, as we shall demonstrate.

The effects of attaching these symbols to females can be perceived in prescriptions of conduct. The woman who remains invisible before society is the ideal praised, for example, in Pericles' *Funeral Oration*:

If I may speak also of the duty of those wives who will now be widows, a brief exhortation will say it all. Your great virtue is to show no more weakness than is inherent in your nature, and to cause least talk among males for either praise or blame. (Th. 2. 45. Transl. Hammond 2009)

The virtue of the widow, but it may simply be attributed to the woman as such here, is that of giving the least to be spoken of, whether for her glories or her faults. Xanthippe hardly seems any model in this respect, as does, for the sake of truth, the companion of Pericles himself, Aspasia. This is a good example of a normative concept (Scott, 1986: 1067)⁷, another element of gender rhetoric. Pericles is interpreting the symbol of the widow, and prescribing specific directions about the behavior these women should hold, at the same time he is talking about what would be the nature of the subject of the prescriptions. There would be much more to say about this gap between the public discourse of gender representation and the reality of relations between men and women in ancient Athens, however, the economy of this paper does not allow us to dwell on it any longer.⁸

Suffice it is to note here that we believe that Plato, mentioning Xanthippe, he is in some way going against the normalized aforementioned gender representation of women. As Saxonhouse (2018) suggests, "We never hear of the wives of other characters in the Platonic corpus. Yet with *Phaedo*'s side comment, Plato ensures that his readers attend to Xanthippe" (Saxonhouse 2018: 617). Her mere emergence from the invisibility (59b-c) in which she was

⁷ According to Scott, normative concepts establish interpretations to the symbols, and can be expressed in multiple contexts such as religion, education, science, law and political doctrines. Pericles' text, naturally, falls under the category of a political normative concept.

⁸ A central topic regarding gender and participation on the public sphere in classical Athens is citizenship. The extend of the limitation of the participation on public affairs derived from the fact that women could not take part in some political functions, more specifically the ones of jury and member of the popular assembly, crucial for Aristotle's definition of citizenship (Arist. *Pol.* 1275a22-22b), is often unduly amplified to justify a narrative of male superiority. It is relevant to consider the political sphere as something broader, including, for example, the religious dimension, in which women had crucial role. For works around this topic see: Blok (2005; 2007) and Cuchet (2015; 2018). This is one relevant aspect in Scotts' definition of gender because addresses social and political aspects that interfere in the perception of the character.

relegated as a woman, wife, and mother - this is our suggestion in this paper - may indicate something that deserves special attention.

As we've already introduced and shall see further in the next section, we do not find in Plato any sign of a shrewish Xanthippe. Socrates sends her away twice, it is true, but she as wife and mother is by his side at the beginning and end of the day, in a situation that suggests intimacy and clear awareness of the situation.

To be honest, however, even the literature we have examined above, which clearly bears a disparaging memoir of Xanthippe, reveals a different attitude of Socrates: he refuses to assault Xanthippe for having removed his cloak (D.L. 2.37), for example, and supports his wife when the son Lamprocles rages against his mother (X. *Mem.* 2.2.1-14):

So this mother of yours is kindly disposed towards you; she nurses you devotedly in sickness and sees that you want for nothing more than that, she prays the gods to bless you abundantly and pays vows on your behalf and yet you say she is a trial! It seems to me that, if you can't endure a mother like her, you can't endure a good thing. (X. *Mem.* 2. 2.10. Transl. Todd 1923)

There are few signs, therefore, of a possible attitude, in a certain way surprising and unexpected, of Socrates towards his wife, who can be regarded as far from the normal representation of gender relations, well known for challenging him, in a certain way, with her unusual public presence.

It is certainly the case to revisit, therefore, the scene of the *Phaedo*, to confirm two hypotheses that have been arising up to this point: a) that the historical relationship between Socrates and Xanthippe must have been in some way eccentric concerning gender normativity of the time and b) that Plato, by underlining the presence and the secure fame of Xanthippe, is playing with gender stereotypes intending to affirm something specific about Socrates and his philosophy.

Plato's Xanthippe

The two appearances of Socrates' wife in the *Phaedo* are far distant from the cartoonish scenes that we find in the above-mentioned literature in the previous section. The attitudes according to which Xanthippe is described in the Platonic pages do not seem to reveal anything unusual. Xanthippe seems to play as expected the role of wife and mother of Socrates' children, as well as her role as a woman in a scenic anticipation of funerary mourning, marked by weeping and lamenting. Pace Hackforth (1955:33), who seems to believe that the state in which Xanthippe finds herself does not overturn the character sketched by the derogatory patterns of

Xenophon's accounts, there seems to be by the truth in Plato no hint of the traditional shrew (Hackforth 1955: 12).

The expression “of course, you know her” (*Phd.* 60a) draws attention to Xanthippe but does not mean to characterize her as the woman known for public entanglements with her husband, it does not suggest an implied pejorative or burlesque reference to the woman⁹. No agonism in the couple's relationship transpires in the Platonic pages: the Platonic scene is one of calm intimacy between spouses. A delicate intimacy and only suggested, including the reference that she had spent the previous night with him and the couple's young son.

But then, if it is not to these derogatory traditions that Xanthippe's fame - remembered as certain by Phaedo (“surely you know her”) - refers, what would be the reason for underscoring her fame? To finally answer this question, we will carefully examine the text of the dialogue. Phaedo recounts as follows to Echeocrates the arrival of him and his companions inside the prison enclosure early in the morning on Socrates' last day:

So in we went and, as we did so, we found Socrates newly unchained, and Xanthippe – you know her, of course – holding his child and sitting by his side. When Xanthippe saw us, she cried out and said just the sort of thing that women tend to say: ‘Socrates, this is now the very last time that your friends will speak to you and you to them.’ Socrates turned to Crito and said: ‘Crito, someone had better take her home.’ Some of Crito’s people started to take her away, crying and beating herself in her grief (*Phd* 60a-b. Transl. Sedley & Long 2011).¹⁰

In this passage, two details about the dialogical fabric of the scene call our attention: the first character to speak in the dialogue within the dialogue, the staged dialogue, is Xanthippe herself, as we mentioned before, and not Socrates or one of his friends, as we might expect. The dramatic result of this - just imagine the scene played on a theatrical stage, for example - is really moving: the curtains open, the scene is initially static (man lying down, woman with child on her lap sitting up), the sound of the friends' steps arriving and finally the scene of their entrance, all together. Until that moment no words: the initial silence is broken by the words of Xanthippe.

Similarly, Socrates' first words, though not directly addressed to Xanthippe (pace Dixsaut 1991: 72), refer to her anyway, being a request for help to his companions: “someone take her home οἴκαδε” (*Phd.* 60a).

The reasons for Xanthippe's removal from the scene are not immediately evident on the page we are examining. Nor does the speech that Socrates begins to make immediately

⁹ See Loriaux 1969: 26

¹⁰ This distressing cry ἀνηυφήμησέ is a cry that precedes lamentations for death or imminent death. See A. *Ag.* 1541, Ch. 23; 429; Eur. *Hel.* 374; 1089, *Supp.* 51, *Tr.* 279, 1235; Hom. *Od.* 11.72,

afterwards seem, at first glance, to be related to it. One thing remains clear, however: there is no sign here of any special conflict between Socrates and Xanthippe. Her exit from the scene looks unproblematic even if it is punctuated by weeping and lamentation.

It is at the end of the dialogue, however, that the apparent departure of Xanthippe is glimpsed. After Socrates takes the hemlock, his companions burst into loud cries and shouts, just as Xanthippe did at the beginning of the dialogue. Looking at this scene, Socrates replies:

You astonish me – what a way for you all to behave! You realize it was not least for this reason that I sent away the women, so that they wouldn't strike the wrong note in this sort of way. For in fact I've heard that one should meet one's end in a reverent silence. No, keep quiet and show some resolve (117d-e. Transl. Sedley & Long 2011)

Xanthippe, by behaving as women usually behave on these occasions of mourning (Dixsaut 1991: 321), that is, by letting out a grieving cry ἀνηυφήμεσέ, goes against Socrates' expectation that in death one must pronounce auspicious words, which turns out to mean in fact respecting a religious silence (Louriaux 1969: 27). Lamentations do not allow death to take place under ideal conditions, as expected of a philosopher (Louriaux 1969: 27–28).

But, the final page (117d-e), while confiding the reason for Xanthippe's initial estrangement, also challenges a simplistic and misogynistic interpretation of the gender role of the weeping and wailing wife: yes, because Socrates' companions behave in the same way as his wife, that is, they also weep and cry. In short, such as in Xenophon's *Symposium* passage (2.10), the expression of emotions is portrayed as a human thing, beyond gender¹¹. If something can be added is that the context of this dialogue there is an aggravating factor for the men, they - unlike Xanthippe - cry and weep even after having heard Socrates' arguments, throughout the whole dialogue, arguments that were supposed to convince them not to mourn his death. In a sense, Xanthippe, who had not yet heard the arguments, could be considered less reprehensible for weeping and grieving Socrates' death. On the same note, the mourning and cry of the servant of the Eleven (116b-c) has not been reproached by Socrates, who, on the contrary, considers him to be "courteous". This is another sign that the crying has little to do with gender representation and more to do with Socrates' disappointment that those close to him didn't understand that his death shouldn't be mourned. But we will come back on that in a while.

If the expulsion of the flautist in Plato's *Symposium* (176e) could be read as related to the fact that the men there were about to make speeches λόγοι, something that was incompatible with female presence, in the *Phaedo* this misogynistic reason for the woman's exit is challenged

¹¹ Sheffield (2023) in her chapter entitled '*Beyond Gender*' explores the significance of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* around these same lines of acknowledging Plato's playful use of gender categories that exposes the author's understanding of their contingency and, ultimately, their irrelevance to the philosophical life.

in the final passage. Plato makes use of the conceptions related to gender, more specifically relationships of power derived from the signification of perceived differences between the sexes, to create a scenario that first indicates Xanthippe inadequacy in the context of the conversation with his friends to then in a second moment challenge these stereotypes by showing the same behaviour traditionally attached to women being expressed by men. The reason for her withdrawal is the same one censured to the companions at the end.

Thus, Xanthippe's entrance and departure cannot be understood simply by a traditional representation of gender. Plato challenges the understanding of personal and political relationships. We agree with Saxonhouse (1998): Xanthippe is not only there, but her presence in the dialogue endows an unexpected (and often unnoticed) complexity to Socrates' death and his speeches.

I do want to suggest that her presence adds to the complexity of the dialogue [...] The richer philosophy of Plato acknowledges the role she plays in deepening the dialogue he has written about the death of Socrates (Saxonhouse 1998: 127).

Her brief but significant presence beside Socrates on his deathbed - a scene that is coherent with an eccentric gender relationship (historical or narrated) of the Socrates-Xanthippe couple - reveals something essential about Socrates' death and Plato's philosophy. Xanthippe emerges at the center of the stage for a few moments, and her presence challenges Socrates' successive speeches in two directions, which we announce immediately: her body and the body of her son deny the separation, the estrangement, the non-communion between body and soul, Socrates at least succeeded in remaining alive in his son; her tears and cries confront the expectation of the immortality of the individual. The wife who spends the last night beside Socrates' bed, together with her little son, the same one who at the end of the day's speeches again comes to say goodbye, affirms something with her physical, concrete attention: she confronts the argument that Socrates' real identity would not be in his body, but in his soul. Because it is the body of this Socrates, who is lying down, washing himself, talking to his friends, that she cares for.

Dramatically, this resilience of Xanthippe manifests itself with a Platonic expedient of great scenic effect: she anticipates the death and funeral rituals of Socrates, as Mora (2012: 155) has well seen:

Xanthippe's presence in prison the day before will be an anticipation of the next day when the philosopher will have died, the body will be exhibited and finally buried; this contradicts the philosophical statements, the well-constructed arguments. The configuration of Xanthippe as a mourner the next day makes Socrates' corporeality, mortality and individuality manifest. In the association of the wife with the mourner

who will become, her presence sets up the scenography of the dialogue in the death itself (Mora 2012: 155).

Thus the woman's body, which is socially responsible for the care of birth and death, defining moments of individual corporeality, plants itself in the middle of the scene with her screams and tears, with her mother's arms, crying in advance the absence of a body that will soon die, as if it were already dead - because this will be Socrates' argument: to live as a philosopher is to live as already dead. And she, somehow, had foreseen it. The anticipated mourning wants to challenge her husband's discourse that the body was never there, in a way, it was always regarded by Socrates as a burden, an hindrance. Xanthippe claims - before these Socratic speeches - with her funeral lament, exactly the opposite argument: that the absence of Socrates' living body, anticipated by her mourning, is something to be grieved with yearning.

That is why she needs to be removed. Not because philosophy is not the place of the women and therefore, as a woman, she couldn't understand the speeches. And yes, more precisely, because she does not agree with them. And considering Socrates' intentions of dealing with human nature and dialectics, she was indeed a good oppositor, even in Socrates' last moments.

Xanthippe is not the only one to resist immortality and separation. All his friends at the end weep, anticipating his death. Exactly as Xanthippe does. But another character in the scene seems not willing to understand Socrates' speeches: his most faithful friend, Crito. Despite Socrates' repeated assertions that the body is worth nothing, in 115c, Crito nevertheless asks Socrates "how should we bury you?". As Mora notes:

Crito's question does not connote the funerary code as in the subtle scene of the woman with the child in her arms, sitting next to the recently unchained husband, but rather denotes it, shamelessly (Mora 2012: 161).

The narrative tension between Socrates' anticipation of the funeral ritual and his denial of death reaches its climax in the final passage about Socrates' bath. Before taking the hemlock, Socrates decides to wash himself (*Phd.* 116a), with the declared intent of avoiding the trouble that the women would have of washing his corpse. Among them, obviously, Xanthippe herself. This task is one of the funeral ritual tasks that women are usually called upon to undertake. It should be noted, of course, that it makes extraordinarily little sense that Socrates, who claims total disinterest in the fate of his mortal body, should be worrying about what will happen after the body-soul separation, in his funeral rituals. Why then would Socrates be with this anticipating, himself, the funeral ritual and, at the same time, assuming here the role of the woman, and more precisely of his wife, in the washing of his body?

Is he appropriating exclusively feminine functions because he wants to feminize himself, or is he doing so in order to deprive the feminine of what is proper to it, to empty it of its content? Or is he transgressing the dichotomies male/female and life/death? (Mora 2012: 162-3).

We believe that Mora's questions above do not have a simple answer. But they certainly indicate the eccentric behavior of Socrates with respect to normative gender representations. As it is odd considering the expected representation of gender the behavior of the Crito himself, who will oversee organizing the funeral rituals, again a female task. And, likewise, the weeping and wailing of all the friends at the end.

We must acknowledge that the dialogue suggests that Xanthippe does not stand alone. Thus, her line, “she cried out and said just the sort of thing that women tend to say: ‘Socrates, this is now the very last time that your friends will speak to you and you to them’” (*Phd.* 60a) is the line of one who - as Saxonhouse (2018: 618) has rightly observed - does not separate speech and soul from the body. By punctuating that this will be the last occasion on which a dialogue between Socrates and his friends can take place, Xanthippe simply acknowledges that the dialogue is done through the body, which sounds absolutely like Plato. There is nothing “typically feminine” about her remark. The impending loss of Socrates' body, as we have seen, will be felt by all the friends at the end. What Xanthippe does here, in her words, is to represent the pain of the absence of the other's body, understanding in her pain the pain of all the remaining friends. An attitude of *koinōnia*, which again seems to contrast so much separation advocated by Socrates.

Once again, Xanthippe needs to leave so that Socrates can conduct his theoretical project of separation from corporeality and denial of death. But Xanthippe only comes out because she has been on stage before and has spoken and made herself *known*:

Xanthippe is not only there to be sent away; she is there to be a brooding reminder that we are more than speech or soul, that the love of wisdom requires the female as well as the male. Plato himself ensured that we recognize this by putting Xanthippe there for us to notice (Saxonhouse 2018: 621).

Therefore, next to Socrates, on his deathbed, is a woman, wife, and mother. She is placed there by Plato yet in an agonistic function, in the same way in which tradition recalls her, but now philosophically. Xanthippe seems again to throw water on Socrates, but now figuratively, confronting him theoretically in the core of his theories. The traditional image of the shrew is probably the cartoonish result of this figure of a woman who Plato, therefore, already recognizes as strong, outspoken, and difficult in the sense of defiant.

We cannot resist imagining Plato looking amused at Socrates next to Xanthippe. Not laughing at Xanthippe, as the tradition from Xenophanes to Diogenes Laertius is doing, but rather, this time, at Socrates, challenged in his speeches by her mere presence beside him.

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