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Xenophon and the *Symposium* of Plato

In the eighth book of Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates takes aim at Plato's Phaedrus (whom he mistakenly identifies as Pausanias) for making outrageous assertions about the value of homosexual relations for improving the valor of an army. This attack involves disrupting the dramatic unity of the work, for Socrates criticizes a speech which was not made at the party Xenophon describes, but at a different party, described by Plato, with a later dramatic date. This is the only place in Xenophon's work where he attacks Plato this openly. This anomaly deserves a special explanation; I argue that Xenophon attacks Plato here because Plato's *Symposium* itself contained a hostile response to a previous version of Xenophon's own *Symposium*.

The idea that Xenophon wrote an earlier version of his *Symposium* and that this influenced Plato, has been argued by H. Thesleff. His arguments can be supplemented by an analysis of the relation between the speeches of Critobulus and Phaedrus. These speeches are certainly related, but Critobulus' speech cannot have been influenced by Phaedrus' because Phaedrus' speech is the offensive one that Socrates attacks in chapter eight. Instead, Plato derived his speech of Phaedrus from Xenophon's Critobulus, altering and distorting it on the way to such an extent that Xenophon was forced to respond. While Critobulus only suggested that a good-looking general would inspire loyalty in his troops, Plato's Phaedrus claims that homosexual coupling among the troops would contribute to military success. This is the idea that Xenophon's Socrates attacks in chapter eight.

There is evidence for a third round in which Plato inserted a rebuttal to Xenophon's attack on him into the mouth of Aristophanes (192a) in a revised version of his *Symposium*. And even in his first *Symposium*, Plato may have referred to Xenophon directly. In the opening of the work there is a reference to another version of the story told by one Phoenix (172b). Some scholars have suspected that this was a reference to Xenophon, but they dismissed this on the grounds that Xenophon wrote later. But if Xenophon wrote first, this possibility cannot be dismissed; and if it is correct, it suggests a surprising method by which Plato could indicate the names of his rivals.

From this dispute we may derive the following conclusions:

1. Plato's and Xenophon's works were read on several occasions and re-writing occurred.
2. The authors could rely on their audiences to be sufficiently familiar with the work of the other that they could recognize even indirect and inexact references.
3. Although criticisms could take on a personal character, explicit references to other authors were unnecessary and possibly offensive.