

Authors as Philosophers

The philosopher Aristotle said that good writers used judgment to balance logic and emotion. In “The Charioteer,” his mentor Socrates said the same about the human soul:

Let the soul be likened to the union of powers in a team of winged horses and their winged charioteers. Now all the gods' steeds and charioteers are good, and of good stock, but with other beings it is not wholly so. With us, in the first place, it is a pair of steeds that the charioteer controls: moreover one of them is noble and good, and of good stock, while the other has the opposite character, and his stock is opposite. Hence, the task of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome. Phaedrus 246b

If we apply Socrates to Aristotle, the “winged charioteer,” called *Ethos*, is every writer’s judgment and character. The “noble and good” horse, named *Logos* represents written texts, which are based on logic, argument, and order. Written texts have certain genre expectations for grammar, style, tone, etc. Audiences, on the other hand, are of “opposite character” and desire the emotional connection, excitement, and passion known as *Pathos*. If we balance *Logos* and *Pathos* with *Ethos*, then we can realize the purpose of an essay.

But “The Charioteer” is primarily a discourse about the progression of humanity through stages of love, nobility, passion, and philosophy. Beauty awakens both passion and nobility within us. As the charioteer exercises temperance and goodwill, “Love overflows upon the lover, and some enters into his soul, and some when he is filled flows out again; and as a breeze or an echo rebounds from the smooth rocks and returns whence it came, so does the stream of beauty passing through the eyes, which are the windows of the soul, come back to the beautiful one and filling the soul of the beloved also with love.” Socrates was lifting people from base desires towards a love of all mankind, turning passions to generosity. If writers follow the path of Socrates, through the intercession of his student Aristotle, then surely we can say that our writing is moving us towards the betterment of humanity.