

Plato: Phaedrus 229b - 230a (inclusive)

(1)

229b) Phaedrus Tell me, Socrates, isn't this or hereabouts the place from where Boreas is said to have abducted Oreithyia from the Ilissus?

Socrates Yes, that's how the story goes, anyway.

P Well, wasn't it from here? At any rate, the water has a pleasant, clean, clear appearance - just right for girls to play beside.

(c) S No, this isn't the place. It's about two or three stades downstream, where one crosses to go towards Agra. There is an altar of Boreas (somewhere) there.

P I've not really noticed it. But tell me, Socrates, by Zeus, do you think this story is true?

S It wouldn't be odd for me to doubt it as the experts do. I might give a clever explanation of it, and say that a gust of wind from the north pushed her from the nearby rocks while she was playing with Pharmacia, and although this caused her death she was said to have been abducted by Boreas - either from here or from the Areopagus, since there's another version of the story, that she was abducted from there, not here. Basically, Phaedrus, although I find these kinds of interpretations fascinating, they are the work of someone who is too clever

(2)

for his own good. He has to work hard and is rather unfortunate, if only because he next has to correct the way Centaurs look, and then the Chimera, and then there pours down on him a horde of similar creatures, like the Gorgon and Pegasus and countless other extraordinary beasts with all kinds of monstrous natures. If anyone has doubts about these creatures and wants to use a tough-and-ready kind of ingenuity to force each of them to conform with probability, he'll need a lot of spare time. As for me, I never have time to spend on these things, and there's a good reason for this, my friend: I am still incapable of obeying the Delphic inscription and knowing myself.

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It strikes me as absurd to look into matters that have nothing to do with me as long as I'm still ignorant in this respect, so I ignore all these matters and go along with the traditional views about them. As I said just now, I investigate myself rather than these things, to see whether I am in fact a creature of more complexity and savagery than Typhon, or something tamer and more simple, with a naturally divine and non-Typhonic nature.