

The making of a democratic symbol: the case of Socrates in North-American popular media, 1941–56

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How and why have particular figures from Greek antiquity occasionally become part of the modern popular vernacular? What is the role of the iconic figure as a means of remembering and remaking the classical past? This article considers these questions by way of one exemplary case study, the mobilizations of ‘Socrates’ for theatre and television audiences in North America in the early 1950s. I argue that during this period of acute political stress over issues of national security, Cold War orthodoxies and McCarthyism, creative artists developed distinctive interpretations of Socrates as oblique contributions to raging political controversies and in so doing helped inaugurate the widespread use of Socrates as a popular symbol of the ideals of democracy.

How and why have particular figures from Greek antiquity occasionally become part of the modern popular vernacular? What is the role of the iconic figure ‘as a means of transmission and reinvention’ of the classical past, ‘especially when whole texts are not directly known by most audiences’.¹ This article considers these questions by way of one exemplary case study, the mobilizations of ‘Socrates’ for theatre and television audiences in North America in the early 1950s. I argue that during this period of acute political stress over issues of national security, Cold War orthodoxies, and McCarthyism, creative artists developed distinctive interpretations of Socrates as oblique contributions to the raging political controversies, and in so doing helped inaugurate the widespread use of Socrates as a popular symbol of the ideals of democracy.

My approach in this essay is to attend to the rich local contexts within which writers selected the multi-vocal story of Socrates and adapted its elements — philosophical gadfly, trial, refusal to flee, acceptance of execution — to their own purposes. I start with an account of the ways in which Socrates was appropriated in American popular culture in the 1920s and 30s. Next, I discuss John Steinbeck’s use of Socrates to develop the political content of his wartime propagandistic novel *The Moon is Down* (1942). I then turn to review the emergence of a wave of

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1 I borrow some language from Hardwick and Stray (2008: 9).

politicized uses of the Socrates character in a variety of popular media in the early Cold War period. At the centre of this study is a detailed examination of three sustained interpretations of Socrates for theatre and television audiences during the heyday of McCarthyism in US politics: Maxwell Anderson's Broadway play *Barefoot in Athens* (1951), Lister Sinclair's *Socrates* for the Jupiter Theatre in Toronto (1952), and a CBS television dramatization of 'The Death of Socrates' on their celebrated show *You Are There* with Walter Cronkite (1953). Each of these three original dramatic works develops a different image of Socrates and makes a distinctive comment on McCarthyism.

Socrates became a democratic symbol in popular discourse in this period, we will see, in large part because of this icon's pliability *and* because that pliability was contained within certain opportune limits. Invoking Socrates could convey attachment to one or more but, conveniently, not necessarily all of a range of ideals that animated public discourse about what 'democracy' should mean, including, steadfast resistance to tyranny, commitment to free inquiry, civic loyalty, tolerance of diversity, recognition of the capacity of majority rule, and individual judgment to err (and belief in the ability of a democratic polity to recover from such errors), empowerment of reason, accountability and an open society. Notably absent from this set is economic justice. That invoking Socrates did not call for class analysis likely helped this icon become emblematic of liberal democratic values in the wider context of confrontation with communist ideology.² In conclusion, I observe that academic interest in Socrates in the US exhibits a remarkable measure of continuity with these works for general audiences. In particular, in the 1950s we find the start of a resurgence of scholarly interest in the capacity of the ancient sources on Socrates and Socratic philosophy to inform contemporary democratic theory.

Examination of the 'afterlife' of any iconic figure will be methodologically challenging. The sheer volume of material that animates 'Socrates' makes it especially so in his case. In this essay, I rely on the conceptual vocabulary of classical reception studies to order my investigations. Accordingly, I have tried to be alert not only to context, but also to the fact that every modern 'point of reception' of the figure of Socrates is a refraction of the intertwined reception histories of multiple ancient 'source texts' by various authors, and of the shifting traditions of meaning that attend the figure in specific genres of creative production and spheres of intellectual activity, through time and across different cultural settings. The iconic figure is an efficient, combinable, and affecting formal vehicle for the expression of ideas. The precise content of the ideas it conveys is not fixed or even necessarily persistent. Rather, each use in a new context activates and highlights some of its condensed associated meanings and ignores or rejects others. Each one grafts additional associations onto the figure. Deploying a customized iconic figure can be a highly effective way to convey ideas. The shifting meanings of the icon also influence perceptions of antiquity.

2 American Marxists opposed the turn to Socrates. See Winspear and Silverberg (1939).

The prevalence of non-partisan resonances before World War II

Four overlapping images dominate the reception history of Socrates as an iconic figure: the philosophical teacher/inquirer, the loyal democratic citizen, the victim of injustice, and the practitioner of unconventional eroticism.³ The image most familiar to early twentieth-century general audiences in America is that of the vigorous questioner and quirky intellectual (though other associations also persist outside the mainstream). This is evident in the history of appropriations of Socrates across various spheres of cultural production (e.g. fiction, journalism, education, art) in America in this period. For example, in 1908 a mural depicting ‘The Discussion of Principles of Justice by Socrates’ was commissioned and installed in a courtroom in the new Chicago Federal Building, without any comment on the possible oddity of using a figure who was executed by order of a democratic jury to decorate an American courtroom.⁴ In addition, the idea of the ‘Socratic method’ was used to support reforms in higher education at this time.⁵ The introduction of the case method of teaching into law schools also popularized the idea of a ‘Socratic method’ of learning and teaching.⁶ In the 1920s, we also find both serious and comic accounts of practices of examination in mass-circulation magazines under the heading ‘Socratic dialogues’.⁷ In the early 1930s, the pioneering journalist

3 For overviews of the broader reception history of Socrates cross-culturally, see Trapp (2007a, 2007b); Wilson (2007); Lane (2001); Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar (2009).

4 ‘A Socrates for Chicago’, *Harper’s Weekly*, 12 June 1909.

5 An experiment at Rollins College in Florida is a good case in point. In the 1920s, this liberal arts college reorganized the entire academic experience for its undergraduates to reduce its reliance on lectures and recitation. College administrators officially called the new model ‘the conference plan’ (after a programme developed by the philosopher and education reformer John Dewey). But in order to articulate the shape of this controversial plan to prospective students and the public, they turned to the phrase ‘Socratic method’. Rollins President Hamilton Holt explained: ‘The [conference plan] method in its perfect expression combines the two functions of tutor and professor; [it is] Socratic pure and simple. . . . *We have resurrected Socrates, and set him to work on an eight-hour shift.*’ J. P. Gavit, ‘Socrates on the Eight-hour Shift’, *The Survey* 66, no. 5 (1931), pp. 247–9, emphasis in original.

6 The pioneering reformer of law school teaching, Christopher Langdell, did not rely on the terminology of ‘Socratic method’, though he did refer to Socratic questioning to describe rigorous classroom discussion. However, law schools that adopted this new plan certainly did rely on precisely the appellation ‘Socratic method’ to convey its intellectual credibility to the legal profession, prospective students, and the public. See Kimball (2006: 192–247).

7 M. Baring, ‘Xantippe and Socrates’, *The Golden Book Magazine* 5 (1927), pp. 347–9; H. Myers, ‘Socrates Up to Date, A Dialogue Regarding Cause and Effect’, *Atlantic Monthly* 143, no. 129 (1929), pp. 250–3; J. R. Tunis, ‘Socrates and Football’, *Outlook and Independent* 153 (1930), p. 347; No author attributed in original publication, ‘Do Servants Need a Code? A Socratic Dialogue’, *Forum and Century* 92, no. 1 (1930), p. 34; G. Kaufman and M. Ryskind, ‘Socratic Dialogue’, *The Nation* 136 (1933), p. 403.

Lincoln Steffens was referred to as a ‘modern Socrates’ on account of his relentless efforts to expose corruption and ‘explode illusions’ the public had about government and certain industries.⁸ Another example is the ‘Dr. Socrates’ character in a popular crime thriller serialized in the mainstream *Collier’s Weekly* and adapted into a film entitled *Dr. Socrates*. Dr. Socrates is the nickname that a gangster gives to his intellectual, Plato-reading hostage.⁹ All these items suggest that popular audiences accepted Socrates as an exemplar of demanding intellectual inquiry and the search for truth, even though they likely lacked any familiarity with the ancient sources themselves.¹⁰

Socrates did not in this period readily symbolize specifically democratic ideals, nor was he used to sanction partisan political views. That was Pericles’ territory.¹¹ For example, Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis turned to Pericles’ veneration of daring speech (Thucydides 2.37–42), not Socratic practice, to work out his reasoning in his concurring opinion in *Whitney vs. California*, a landmark free speech case (1927). Brandeis’ opinion introduced into US jurisprudence the idea that courageous speech is necessary for the practice of self-government.¹² Explicitly drawing on Alfred Zimmern’s reading of the Funeral Oration in his highly influential *The Greek Commonwealth* (1911), Brandeis argued that bold speech and civic courage are essential for the health of democratic government, and that American political life

8 Shapiro (1972: 319). See also, A. J. Nock, ‘Lincoln Steffens’, *Saturday Review of Literature* (9 May 1931).

9 W. R. Burnett, ‘Doctor Socrates’ (serialized in *Collier’s Weekly*, March 16–April 20, 1935), adapted for the film *Dr. Socrates*, directed by William Dieterle (Warner Brothers, 1935). *Dr. Socrates* was remade as *King of the Underworld*, directed by Lewis Seiler and starring Humphrey Bogart (Warner Brothers, 1939).

10 The strength of that association may explain the absence of adaptations of *The Clouds* in major theatres during this period of great interest in Greek drama on the modern stage. News coverage of the recovery of material artifacts also raised interest in Socrates in this period. See ‘Americans to Unearth Athenian Agora, Plans Under Way to Reclaim Glories of Ancient Marketplace Where Socrates Was Tried’, *The New York Times*, 29 August 1926; ‘Socrates Statuette in British Museum’, *The New York Times*, 10 August 1926. On popular familiarity with the story of Socrates consider novelist Babette Deutsch’s explanation of her reasons for writing a work of historical fiction: ‘A charge of blasphemy may well be brought against an author who presumes to retell the story of Socrates. That it deserves a more general audience than Plato commands is my apology’ (Deutsch 1933: Author’s Note).

11 By this time, the record of Athenian democracy had become an admired example of political experimentation. Zimmern’s *The Greek Commonwealth* (1911, reprinted 1931) was instrumental in popularizing this shift in attitude. In the pre-Civil War era, it was more common for Athens to serve as a cautionary tale about mob psychology and the need for institutional checks and balances on demotic power. For example, *Federalist No. 55* (1787/88, written to advocate for the ratification of the US Constitution): ‘Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.’

12 Blasi (1988: 681–2).

must encourage the development of such personal character traits among citizens. Zimmern's text barely mentions Socrates, and neither does Brandeis' opinion. Similarly, in the mid-1930s it was possible for a celebrated American dramatist nearly to ignore Socrates altogether in a play explicitly about democratic life and set in Greek antiquity. Robert Sherwood's *Akropolis* (London 1933, New York 1935) is about the collapse of Athenian politics during the years of the Peloponnesian War, and by extension, the vulnerability of democracy under the stresses of war.¹³ It sets up a conflict between Pericles' bold building projects on the Akropolis, organized by the brilliant sculptor Phidias (calling to mind the New Deal's public works projects), and the warmongering ambitions of Pericles' rival Cleon ('the Hitler of his Day' according to the New York program notes). Sherwood was writing in 1932, the year both Roosevelt and Hitler were first elected to office. The drama presents a contrast between the laudable way in which Roosevelt's New Deal programs sought to lift the US out of economic distress (likening it to Pericles' projects) and the repugnant way in which Hitler attempted to ease economic stresses in Germany (likening it to Cleon's violent warmongering). The play focuses on how Cleon stokes mass suspicion of Pericles and orchestrates the arrest and execution — by hemlock — of Phidias. In the words of one critic, Phidias 'steals Socrates' thunder'.¹⁴

John Steinbeck's wartime recovery of citizen Socrates in *The Moon is Down* (1941–3)

Playwright Robert Sherwood went on to be a speechwriter for President Roosevelt. In 1941, Roosevelt tapped him to be the first director of the US Foreign Information Service (FIS, a precursor of both the CIA and the Voice of America). Sherwood and his staff set up headquarters in New York City and broadcast propaganda to Europe. Sherwood recruited another giant of American literary culture, John Steinbeck, to be a reporter for the FIS. In that capacity Steinbeck met refugees from occupied Europe and learned about the resistance movements. He soon took it upon himself to write something that would assist the resistance movements in Europe and promote popular support for the US entry into the war.¹⁵ The result was a slim novel that was quickly adapted for the stage and screen, *The Moon is Down*, in which Steinbeck depicts the military occupation of a small coal-mining town in an unnamed northern European country by the forces of an unnamed nation at war with England and Russia. The story details the swift invasion of this town and how the townspeople undertake increasingly bold resistance work. The story's tone is

13 Sherwood was a three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning dramatist. His later nonfiction work recounting his time in the Roosevelt administration, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, won a remarkable fourth Pulitzer in 1949. The original playbill is in the *Akropolis* Program File, Billy Rose Library for the Performing Arts Theatre Research Collection, New York Public Library (hereafter Rose Collection NYPL). The critic's comment appeared in 'Greek Play at the Hecksher', *New York World-Telegram*, 13 December 1935.

14 'Greek Play at the Hecksher', *ibid.*

15 Reported in Coers (1991: 10–11).

relentlessly optimistic — ‘free people’ will prevail over those who ‘follow orders’ and act as part of a ‘herd’. Strikingly, the final chapter features a sustained recollection of Socrates performed by the main character.

In the closing scene, the novel’s hero, resistance leader Mayor Orden, speaks with a friend while waiting for his own execution to be carried out. He wonders whether he should regret what he has done since it has cost him his life. To answer himself, Orden searches his memory for schoolboy lessons of Socrates. Orden asks his old friend whether he remembers that in school Orden had once performed parts of Socrates’ speech from Plato’s *Apology*. He asks:

Do you remember Socrates says, ‘Someone will say, “And are you not ashamed Socrates of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end?”’ To him . . . [Socrates says] ‘a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether he is doing right or wrong.’¹⁶

Mayor Orden then recalls the courage that filled him at that time and exclaims, ‘I was Socrates!’¹⁷ This final scene features these two men recounting as much of Socrates’ speech from the *Apology* and his last conversation described in Plato’s *Phaedo* as they can recall. The novel and play close with Mayor Orden reciting Socrates’ last words to his friend Doctor Winter: ‘Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius, will you remember to pay the debt?’ His friend responds, ‘the debt will be paid’.¹⁸ While the film version leaves out the talk of the debt to Asclepius, it adds a scene that explains why Steinbeck included Plato’s account of Socrates’ last words. The film closes with Mayor Orden walking to the gallows. As he dies, furious explosions erupt across town. The remaining resistance fighters have blown up the coal mine. His execution has not silenced resistance but emboldened it. As Orden had anticipated in a manner that corresponds to Socrates’ own expectations as expressed in Plato’s *Apology* (39c), his execution will spark more resistance.¹⁹

In offering Socrates and Mayor Orden as exemplars of democratic courage, Steinbeck calls upon only a slice of the story of Socrates available in the ancient sources — Plato’s depiction of his last days. The intent of *The Moon is Down* cannot tolerate any trace of Xenophon’s suggestion that Socrates is actually suicidal, or of the pedant we find in *The Clouds*. But Steinbeck’s recollection of Socrates also subtly does something more. During this period, fascist propaganda frequently marshaled references to Greek and Roman antiquity to glorify fascist ideals.²⁰ In *The Moon is Down* Steinbeck contests the fascists’ claim to embody the most laudable ancient

16 Steinbeck (1945: 178).

17 Ibid., p. 179.

18 Ibid., p. 188.

19 Orden’s mention of the debt reinforces words he had spoken earlier: ‘I prophesy to you who are my murderers that immediately after my departure punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you’ (Steinbeck 1945 (1942): 181).

20 See Fleming (2007).

virtues and to emulate noble ancient characters. In Greek antiquity Steinbeck finds — and portrays his character Mayor Orden finding — an eminently worthy ancient model, widely known and suited to represent the allies' own ideals and struggle against the Axis powers. Steinbeck not only appropriates an ancient figure to sanction his politics, but also depicts his character performing the hard, satisfying work of recollection and appropriation, and its connection to the practice of resistance. Steinbeck refuses to allow the fascists to claim antiquity as their own. Choosing Socrates as his vehicle, a figure familiar in some measure to people in many nations and across social strata, and setting the recollection in an unassuming context (a grown man's recollection of his school days), Steinbeck assures that his meaning is widely available.

Published in March 1942, just three months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the book sold nearly 500,000 copies before the end of the year. Later, same year, a stage adaptation played to packed houses on Broadway. Within a year of the Broadway production, Twentieth Century-Fox released a major, blatantly propagandistic wartime film adaptation.²¹ The film proved very popular as well. It opened with a quote from President Roosevelt, who referred to resistance in Norway to explain the very meaning of the war. The clear Socratic summing up in the closing scene of the film struck reviewers as compelling.²² After the war it was revealed that the book had been widely read throughout Europe during the war, having been smuggled into occupied lands, secretly translated, copied, and circulated.²³ Demand for the book increased after the war's conclusion.

While we know that *The Moon is Down* was based on a real village in Norway under German occupation,²⁴ it may also be that Steinbeck's turn to Socrates activated his audience's awareness of specific events in Greece as well. In particular, Steinbeck was writing very soon after the Nazis overran the Greek army in April

21 20th-Century American Best Sellers Database, online at <http://www3.isrl.illinois.edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/picked.books.cgi>. Special editions were produced for US and UK military personnel. Wartime propaganda in the UK also mobilizes the image of Socrates in other ways as well. For example, in October 1942 the BBC broadcast a radio drama entitled *Socrates Asks Why*, by Eric Linklater (who at the time was also commanding a fort in the Orkneys in northern Scotland), which conveys the idea that there is an answer to the question, 'What are the Allies fighting for?' that can satisfy great minds and suffering soldiers, that is, an answer that can *satisfy Socrates* (who was both a lauded soldier and great mind). The structure of this play alludes to Plato's *Apology* 41b–c, where Socrates delights in imagining that upon his death he will enjoy conversations with Homer, Hesiod, Palamedes, and Ajax.

22 B. Crowther, 'The Moon Is Down', *The New York Times*, 27 March 1943.

23 See Coers (1991).

24 King Haakon of Norway awarded Steinbeck the Haakon VII Cross in 1946 specifically because he had written *The Moon is Down*. 'In the judgment of the King of Norway himself, that novel had bolstered the morale of his entire war-ravaged nation' (Coers 1991: 30). Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1962.

1941, despite the dramatic acts of resistance and resolute opposition by the Greek government and armed forces (28 October 1940) and celebrated initial Greek military victories (December 1940). Steinbeck's American audiences could have recalled that before the US had even entered the war President Roosevelt, in one of his most memorable and effective fireside chats, cited the 'heroic Greek resistance' as among the very best reasons for America to be the 'arsenal of democracy' and participate in the defense of 'our civilization'. The association of the Greek nation with highly visible, dramatic resistance may have supported Steinbeck's effort to call upon an iconic figure from Greek antiquity to symbolize that attitude in general.²⁵

The novel also generated a major literary and political controversy in the US. Waves of both vitriolic and celebratory commentary appeared in a wide variety of US major-market and literary publications. At issue was whether the confident optimism of the story and the humane portrait of individual invaders as 'disillusioned' about conquest and as 'martyrs to a cause in which [they themselves] do not believe'²⁶ made the text effective wartime propaganda — or a frightening indication of American naiveté about the viciousness of the real Nazi invaders.²⁷ The controversy did not extend to the interpretation of Socrates in the closing scene. Steinbeck's presentation of Socrates as a resistance hero possessed of 'the inner serenity of a man whose mind is clear about basic things'²⁸ was not contentious. Steinbeck offered Socrates as a model of patriotism uncoupled from belligerent nationalism and held him up as a democratic ideal.

Politically charged uses of Socrates in North American popular media, 1951–3

The political culture of the post-war US may look bizarre from the perspective of European social democracies that managed to accept the legitimacy of communist parties. But for reasons that are vastly too complicated to discuss in any detail here, hysterical fear of communist influence in domestic affairs gripped US politics in the post-war period. Legislators and public opinion considered communism in all forms so sinister and dangerous that democratic procedures could be suspended in the effort to combat it.²⁹ Loyalty oaths and political tests for teachers and workers

25 On 28 October 1940, the Greek government dramatically rejected an ultimatum from Mussolini demanding the occupation of Greek territory. By mid-December 1940, Greek troops had forced the invaders back into Albania. The strong Greek stand against Mussolini (celebrated as 'Ochi Day' in Greece to this day) and the initial December 1940 victory (the first Allied land victory of World War II) were celebrated, morale-boosting events. See 'The Hour of Greece', *The New York Times*, 29 October 1940 and Roosevelt Fireside Chat 16, 29 December 1940.

26 B. Atkinson, 'The Moon is Down: John Steinbeck's Story of Military Invasion Appears on Stage', *The New York Times*, 12 April 1942.

27 On the controversy, see McElrath *et al.* (1996: 215–55).

28 Atkinson, *op. cit.* (note 27).

29 Whitfield (1996: 15).

in various industries, restrictions on artistic freedom and personal liberties, self-censorship of major media, purges of textbooks of subversive writings, and official investigations and prosecutions of individuals for seditious speech and association with subversives all became widespread. Treachery, espionage, and informing were regularly in the news. In addition, denunciations of homosexuals as 'security risks' (i.e. vulnerable to blackmail) and of civil rights and social welfare advocates as 'pink' were common.

Government officials and journalists in this period often referred to the contest between Athens and Sparta detailed in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* to frame the Cold War conflict between the US and USSR and the stakes involved in the shaking out of post-World War II alliances.³⁰ Secretary of State George Marshall himself set this in motion in 1947 when he said in a widely reported speech: 'I doubt seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding certain of the basic international issues today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian War and the Fall of Athens'.³¹ In his view, Thucydides offered a cautionary tale: tragic losses of the sort endured by the Athenians after the Peloponnesian War await the superpower unable to effectively manage alliances, exercise leadership in world affairs, and contain domestic political tensions.

With controversies over the relationship between dissent and disloyalty dominating public discourse and references to ancient Greek history common in mainstream political rhetoric, creative artists found Socrates a relevant subject for oblique commentaries on the state of US politics. These post-war receptions include ephemeral as well as sustained and deeply engaging creative works. I cannot examine all of them in detail, so I offer the following list to convey the extent of the practice:

- (i) Anthony Quinn's starring role on Broadway as Stephen 'Sock' [Socrates] Christopher, a corrupt Greek-American US congressman advocating world government, in the comedy *The Gentleman from Athens* by Emmet Lavery in 1947 (the book of the play is dedicated 'To Socrates');³²
- (ii) a radio dramatization of 'The Death of Socrates' broadcast on the popular US program *CBS Is There* on 14 March 1948;³³

³⁰ Tritle (2006).

³¹ Address at Princeton University, 22 February 1947.

³² 'Comedy by Lavery Will Open Tonight', *The New York Times*, 9 December 1947. B. Atkinson. 'Anthony Quinn Appears in Emmet Lavery's Play About Congress, *The Gentleman From Athens*', *The New York Times*, 19 December 1947; Lavery (1948).

³³ *CBS is There and You Are There Logs* by Dick Judge, online at www.old-time.com/otrlogs2/; audio file available online at www.otrcat.com.

- (iii) a Broadway production of an original play by Pulitzer prize-winning dramatist Maxwell Anderson about the life of Socrates, *Barefoot in Athens*, October–November 1951;³⁴
- (iv) an original radio drama by Lister Sinclair, *Socrates*, broadcast 7 November 1951 on the popular Canadian program, CBC Wednesday Night, produced by Andrew Allan;³⁵
- (v) the staging of Sinclair’s ‘Socrates’ as part of the first season of Jupiter Theatre of Toronto in February 1952;³⁶
- (vi) the production of Sinclair’s *Socrates* later that year at The Little Theatre of London, Ontario;³⁷
- (vii) the inclusion of Socrates as one of ten ‘immortals’ on a 1953 spoken-word recording that imagined historical figures contributing to celebrated journalist Edward R. Murrow’s ‘This I Believe’ radio series;³⁸
- (viii) a new play called *Socrates’ Wife* that aired on NBC television’s ‘Hall of Fame’ series on 25 January 1953;³⁹
- (ix) a feature on ‘The Trial and Death of Socrates’ on CBS television’s wildly popular series, *You Are There* with Walter Cronkite broadcast 3 May 1953;⁴⁰
- (x) the appearance of Socrates as a character in Reuben Ship’s satire of the McCarthy hearings in his radio play *The Investigator* which was first broadcast on Andrew Allan’s Stage 54 on 30 May 1954 in Canada but was soon widely bootlegged and available in the US;⁴¹
- (xi) the debut of ‘Serenade After Plato’s *Symposium*’ by composer Leonard Bernstein, notable for the presentation of the interaction of Socrates and Alcibiades (1954);⁴²

34 Script published in Anderson (1951).

35 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Collection, Reel 112, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collection, McMaster University Libraries (hereafter CBC Collection McMaster).

36 Script published in Sinclair (1957).

37 Season # 18 (1951/52) in the LTT Studio Club. Reported in Johnston (2001: 122).

38 E. R. Murrow. *This I Believe: with Commentary by Edward R. Murrow*, Columbia Records (with Barry Jones as Socrates), 1953.

39 Episode No. 54, Season 2. In the UCLA Film and Television Archive; Jack Gould, ‘“Socrates Wife” Applies to the Present Principles for Which the Philosopher Died’, *The New York Times*, 26 January 1953.

40 UCLA Film and Television Archive. Released as a CBS DVD in 2005.

41 CBC Collection McMaster, Reel 106. Audio file online at *Journal for Multimedia History* 3 (2000); From the Archives: *The Investigator* (1954). On its circulation and influence see Gross (1989); Allan (1974: 124).

42 The original title is ‘Serenade for violin, strings, and percussion, 1954’ but it was later widely performed and recorded as ‘Serenade after Plato’s *Symposium*’ [Socrates and Alcibiades]. See www.leonardbernstein.com for recording history.

- (xii) two works of historical fiction, *The Escape of Socrates* by Robert Pick in 1954 and *The Last of the Wine* by Mary Renault in 1956;
- (xiii) a spoken-word recording of the *Apology* and *Phaedo* read in both ancient Greek and English, released by Folkways Records in 1956;⁴³
- (xiv) a NBC television situation comedy broadcast from 1956–8 (104 episodes) called *The People's Choice*, starring Jackie Cooper as a contemporary American small-town councilman named Socrates 'Sock' Miller, who looks after the public interest (he's an amateur ornithologist and has a talking dog);⁴⁴
- (xv) the 1 October 1957 broadcast of an original drama, 'The Gadfly', on ABC's *Telephone Time* which was recognized by the Writers Guild of America with a prize for the television script regarded as 'most valuable contribution to peace and human understanding' during 1957;⁴⁵
- (xvi) the broadcast of a performance of Sinclair's *Socrates* on Canadian television's Folio Series with Larry Mann on 29 May 1958;⁴⁶
- (xvii) the broadcast of an imaginary interview between Socrates, 'champion of democracy', and Lenin, 'Communist leader', on NBC's experimental television program 'Word for Word' in 1960;⁴⁷
- (xviii) comically giving the name 'Socrates' to the (literally) brainless and (metaphorically) politically naïve Scarecrow/Strawman character on the 1961 animated television programming *Tales from the Wizard of Oz*.⁴⁸

Three of these are especially rich examples of writers using a portrait of Socrates as a vehicle for addressing the politics of the day: Anderson's Broadway play *Barefoot in Athens* (1951), the Toronto Jupiter Theatre's production of Lister Sinclair's *Socrates* (1952), and the episode on 'The Death of Socrates' broadcast on CBS television's *You Are There* (1953). All three use Socrates to work through a conception of democratic citizenship thought to be appropriate to the times. All three comment on McCarthyism, but they don't say the same thing.

43 'Plato on the Death of Socrates: Introduction with Readings from the *Apology* and the *Phaedo* in Greek and in English trans.', performed by Moses Hadas, Folkways Records Album No. FW009979, 1956. Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

44 Some episodes are in the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Others are available commercially in the 'TV's Magic Memories' collection, Moviecraft Inc.

45 UCLA Film and Television Archive; 'David Evans Wins \$2,500 for TV Play', *The New York Times*, 21 November 1958.

46 CBC Folio, hosted by Clyde Gilmour, See online at www.tvarchive.ca. An excerpt survives in the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

47 'TV to "Interview" Lenin, Socrates', *The New York Times*, 25 May 1960.

48 Premiered 1 September 1961. Rankin-Bass Productions. Aired in Canada and the US. See Internet Movie Database. Over 100 5-minute shorts were produced. Some are available on YouTube.

An anti-communist Socrates: Maxwell Anderson's *Barefoot in Athens* (1951)

Maxwell Anderson dominated American theatre in the 1930s and continued to be an important playwright until his death in 1959. He produced a large body of work distinguished by experiments in verse, tragedy, and comedy, and a persistent turn to historically significant settings and densely symbolic figures, distant and recent (e.g. *Mary of Scotland*, *Joan of Arc*, *George Washington at Valley Forge*, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti by the state of Massachusetts, and the Spanish Civil War). His works explore contemporary themes of great social urgency, such as the morality of war, political corruption, collectivist government, and social injustice. He championed the theatre as an art form of terrific civic importance in the modern world. He promoted less crassly commercial work in major market venues like Broadway, and advocated initiatives such as the establishment of a national outdoor theatre festival to be called (after the ancient Athenian archetype) 'The Festival of Dionysus', complete with competitions for dramatists.⁴⁹

Anderson began work on a play about Socrates shortly after a professional trip to Greece in 1947. His 1946 Broadway hit play *Joan of Lorraine* (starring Ingrid Bergman) had attracted the attention of the Greek producer Theodore Kritas, who arranged for a production at the Kotopouli Theatre in Athens.⁵⁰ Anderson attended the performance at the official invitation of the Greek government.⁵¹ While in Greece, he was powerfully moved by what he referred to as 'the plight of the Greek people'. He cabled five reports on the civil war in Greece to the *New York Herald Tribune*, arguing for US support of the Greek government against the communist fighters in the north. Two were published.⁵² Other American commentators attacked his position, citing the corruption of the Greek government. Anderson was deeply troubled by the mixed reception of his reports and published a letter to the editor stressing the threat at hand, the vibrant culture of open discussion he found in Athens and again advocating American support for the Greek government despite its faults.⁵³ His biographer reports that Anderson promised his Greek hosts that he would write something about Athens' struggles and the larger meaning of its uncompromising stand against Stalinism.⁵⁴ Anderson sent an early draft of his script about Socrates, *Barefoot in Athens*, to Kritas in August 1950 dedicating it 'to the

49 Anderson to Ray Lyman Wilbur, President of Stanford University, 9 December 1937, in Avery (1977: 64–6).

50 'Greek Critics Praise Production of "Joan"', *The New York Times*, 14 November 1947.

51 'Anderson to See Athens "Joan"', *The New York Times*, 13 October 1947; 'Greek Critics Praise Production of "Joan"', *ibid.*

52 'An American Observer in Greece', *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 November 1947 and 'The Plight of the Greek People', *New York Herald Tribune*, 1 December 1947.

53 Anderson to the editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, published as 'An American Playwright Looks at Greece: Maxwell Anderson's Views of the Present Government and Dangers of Red Guerilla Victory', 18 January 1948. Reprinted in Avery (1977: 218–22).

54 Shivers (1983: 227).

Greek people' and hoping for a run in Athens. That did not materialize. A year later, however, it opened on Broadway.⁵⁵

Barefoot in Athens opened at the Martin Beck Theatre on 31 October 1951. It is not simply a compressed dramatization of a narrative pulled entirely from the ancient sources. Elements of the plot are, of course, familiar. Socrates practices free inquiry, is accused of betraying Athens, is tried, convicted, and sentenced to die. Moreover, he appears barefoot, as the title suggests, following the ancient evidence for his embrace of an overtly modest lifestyle. Still photos of the performance show the British actor Barry Jones as Socrates looking ragged.⁵⁶ But Anderson also stages wholly manufactured scenes and develops new characters, or recreates ones we thought we knew. In particular, in *Barefoot* audiences witness Socrates conversing with the Spartan King Pausanias about the (false) allure of a Spartan way of life. Reviewers noted that Pausanias seemed designed to resemble Stalin.⁵⁷ And perhaps even more strikingly, *Barefoot* includes scenes of Socrates' domestic life with his wife Xantippe, in which she is depicted as troubled over their poverty but, nevertheless, as a playful, loving, and courageous romantic partner, not a shrewish nag.

Barefoot presents an inversion of what anyone familiar with the ancient sources would expect: Anderson's Socrates is a straightforward spokesman for democracy rather than complex critic of it. The action is set in Athens at the close of the Peloponnesian War. The play starts with Socrates' family gathered at their kitchen table discussing his indictment. Soon a character bursts into his home with news of the Athenian defeat at Aegospotami. The intruder declares, 'Forget the indictment... we have lost the war'.⁵⁸ And in subsequent scenes of act one it appears that the demos has indeed forgotten the indictment. Anderson presents Socrates doing and saying a series of things that remove all doubt about his true loyalty to the Athenian democracy. He labors alongside his friends Crito and Phaedo, as well as his Athenian accusers Meletus, Lycon, and Anytus, reluctantly to tear down the defensive city walls at the behest of the Spartans. He refuses to arrest Leon so that the Spartans and their lackey Critias might steal his property. He pleads with the charming and clever, but ultimately terrifying, Spartan King Pausanias to 'give us back our democracy'.⁵⁹ And finally, in the closest thing to a display of Socratic questioning we get in this script, Socrates coaxes Pausanias into admitting that his views rest on a delusion: Sparta professes to distribute moderate wealth equally to all, but actually sustains a privileged class of government bureaucrats who live very nicely and exercise great political control, suppressing the freedom of others.

55 Anderson to Kritas, 4 August 1950. Kritas tried to arrange for a production through the National Theatre of Athens but without success (Kritas to Anderson, 4 October 1950). Reported in Avery (1977: 246).

56 *Barefoot in Athens* files, Rose Collection NYPL.

57 Watt (1951).

58 Anderson (1951: 14).

59 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

In act two, the moral and intellectual deficiencies of some of Socrates' Athenian compatriots command our attention. Foolish, narrowly self-interested Athenian accusers in cahoots with the Spartans have reissued the indictment against Socrates. Anderson's trial scene presents a non-ironic, totally transparent Socrates defending himself with straightforward appeals to the democratic convictions of the jury. Anderson's Socrates directly praises democracy in clear and easily understood prose. There is no sign of the hairsplitting obfuscator satirized in *The Clouds* or of the dialectician who puzzles, confuses and irritates his interlocutors every bit as much as, simultaneously, he impresses, inspires, and delights them. Instead, Anderson's Socrates simply proclaims Athens to be a city 'drenched in the light of frank and restless inquiry'⁶⁰ and announces his own unswerving commitment to the lofty principle of free speech, a practice that he praises as at the heart of democratic government. The suspicious Athenians convict him anyway. Why? Anderson provides a simple answer. Scheming, corrupt, and deceitful politicians motivated by personal grievances (Lycon, Meletus, and Anytus) dazzled the jurors with a specious case of guilt by association with treacherous others (Critias and Alcibiades). The accusers used demagogic tactics to assail his character and challenge his loyalty, to the delight of the accusers' Spartan handlers. They succeed in suppressing his activities — they kill him.

Barefoot takes Socrates' commitment to freedom of the mind to symbolize opposition to Sparta/Communism, and the background of his story to be 'a world situation . . . analogous with the present'.⁶¹ Reviewers got this easily. Critics praised the play for its timeliness and its examination of the current state of politics. They embraced the way the play suggested 'deadly parallels' between the time of Socrates and 'the panicky mood of America today'. And they recognized the play's powerful editorializing 'on the side of the angels, pertinent, of course, to the situation in which the free-thinking man finds himself today'.⁶² Of course they were helped to this interpretation by advance feature articles about the production that Anderson wrote for the press, in which he explained his aims. He describes the historical period of Socrates' life as 'a long quarrel between a communist state and a democratic state'. In his view, Socrates was a player in 'The Ancient Struggle to Uphold Democracy', as one headline about the production proclaimed.⁶³

60 Ibid., p. 83.

61 Sam Zolotow, *The New York Times* (undated clipping). Clippings File, *Barefoot in Athens*, Rose Collection NYPL.

62 B. Atkinson, 'Socrates of Athens', *The New York Times*, 11 November 1951; *The New Yorker*, 10 November 1951.

63 'Notes on Barefoot at Athens', *The New York Times*, 28 October 1951; 'The Ancient Struggle to Uphold Democracy', *New York Tribune*, 12 August 1951. These feature stories formed the basis of an essay 'Socrates and His Gospel', attacking Plato for attributing his communist doctrines to Socrates, published with the script (Anderson 1951). See Hershbell (1970).

The play appears to have a simple design. Free inquiry is a signature issue of democracy, and thus Socrates, the most celebrated practitioner of free inquiry, may be fairly cast as democracy's standard-bearer. But free inquiry is now under attack in democratic America. People associated with experimental ideas or critical views are being labeled subversive and persecuted. The situation recalls Socrates' unjust prosecution for introducing new gods and corrupting the youth. It seems that *Barefoot* likens proponents of McCarthyism to the hated prosecutors of Socrates. The 'principal purpose' of *Barefoot* thus appears to be 'to rebut McCarthyism in its claim that free thinking and free speech threaten national cohesion, even national existence'.⁶⁴ The point of the play seems to be to assert that free inquiry does not necessarily lead to treasonous thoughts and activity. This is why Anderson goes to great lengths to craft scenes that ridicule the suggestion that Socrates may have actually been a stealthy seditious rebel (e.g. he argues with Pausanias, and refuses to abandon Athens for Sparta). And so, in this interpretation of the play, the design of the plot makes sense as follows: act one sets up our protagonist Socrates' anti-communist credentials, and having thus inoculated us, in act two the playwright can use a story about his commitment to free thought to challenge McCarthyism, that is to oppose corrupt politicians who act to suppress free inquiry.⁶⁵

This reconstruction appears coherent. But there is a muddle in the play that contemporary audiences readily perceived and that is instructive for understanding how this iconic figure is adapted to a specific purpose in *Barefoot in Athens*. The play lacks an effective dramatization of Socrates' capacity to unsettle, unnerve, and trouble decent fellow citizens. The portrayal of Socratic inquiry in *Barefoot* is anaemic. He does not express, as he does in the ancient sources, deep understanding of the peculiar pathologies that attend democratic forms of power. Anderson strips Socrates of any interest in or capacity to subject democratic institutions like majority rule and rhetorical contests, and by extension contemporary institutional structures of liberal democracy, to scrutiny and critique. Nowhere in the play is this clearer than in Anderson's depiction of Socrates' response to the guilty verdict. He is surprised and puzzled and says, without any trace of irony, 'I thought that it had gone the other way'.⁶⁶

The majority of critics observed this weakness in the portrait of Socrates. The reviews reported that the play's dramatization of free inquiry in action was 'thin', 'curiously gray and disappointing', and 'flat and uninspired'.⁶⁷ Anderson's

64 Lane (2007b: 214).

65 Lane (2007b) and Puchner (2010: 45–6) read Anderson this way.

66 Anderson (1951: 86).

67 Atkinson, 'Socrates at Athens'; J. M. Brown, 'Socrates Without Plato'. *Saturday Review*, 24 November 1951; *The New Yorker*, 10 November 1951.

Socrates utters praise for free inquiry but does not perform the part of a critic, dissenter, or non-conformist. The only extended critical conversation he has in the play takes place with the Spartan proto-Communist Pausanias — a dangerous foreign enemy bent on inducing him to abandon Athens. It does not examine how and why Socrates' practice of free inquiry is a public good, or why in embracing this activity he is a public benefactor. Anderson's play thus does not even gesture toward what a democratic community loses when it prevents citizens from exploring challenging ideas among themselves. It does not interrogate the panicky mood in US public culture. Instead, it offers up platitudes. As one critic put it, 'Maxwell Anderson has chosen Socrates and his ancient Athens as the instruments for a reaffirmation that democracy is a wonderful thing'.⁶⁸ *Barefoot* fails to get traction on the problem of McCarthyism because it strays too far from what should be its main topic, 'which is that as dangerous as free inquiry may be to a democratic state, its suppression is far more perilous'.⁶⁹

In what direction does it stray? In my view, it strays right into the thicket of the contemporary politics of suspicion. In *Barefoot in Athens*, Anderson turns to Socrates to navigate, not attack, McCarthyism. To Anderson, Soviet-sponsored conspiratorial threats to national security were real, and required vigorous government activity aimed at rooting out the dangerous subversives wherever they might be. He had argued this in his essays on the civil war in Greece for American newspapers. When Anderson was back in the US writing *Barefoot in Athens*, fear of communist infiltration of American society gripped the nation. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) held high-profile hearings targeting the Hollywood film industry. The Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, headed by Senator Patrick McCarran, conducted investigations.⁷⁰ US State Department and UN official Alger Hiss was prosecuted and his appeals to the Supreme Court denied. Senator Joseph McCarthy delivered a speech claiming that there were numerous communist sympathizers and Soviet spies inside the US government and throughout American society.⁷¹ Earlier, the same year, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage for the Soviets. The Hollywood Ten, a group of writers and directors who, citing constitutionally protected rights of free speech and assembly, had refused to testify before the HUAC about their political beliefs and associations were convicted of contempt of congress. When *Barefoot* was in the theatre some of the Hollywood Ten were serving prison terms. A blacklist of suspected communist sympathizers plagued the entertainment industry, causing some luminaries, for example Charlie Chaplin, to choose exile, and

68 J. Gaver, 'New Play Lacks Dramatic Values', *Dallas News*, 1 November 1951.

69 R. Watt, 'Socrates and Maxwell Anderson', *New York Post*, 11 November 1951.

70 It was in response to the McCarran committee 'investigations' that the renowned classicist Moses Finley was driven from the faculty of Rutgers University and emigrated to Britain. See Tompkins (2006).

71 9 February 1950, Wheeling, West Virginia.

destroying the careers of many lesser-known artists working in all spheres of the industry. In this context, Maxwell Anderson broke with colleagues in the theatre and refused to join with other members of the Playwrights' Company (which included Robert Sherwood) and the Dramatist's Guild to defend people identified in *Red Channels*, a publication that fueled the blacklist.⁷² Anderson reveals his view of Socrates' relevance for contemporary affairs in a letter penned to explain himself to a friend: "Socrates maintained the right of anybody to speculate and converse on any subject. He did not defend those who betrayed their country."⁷³

Anderson shapes Socrates into his view of a model patriot for his times. His strategy is twofold. First, he divests Socrates of any connections with thoughts or actions that could signify communist sympathies to an American audience. This purpose guides his approach to the ancient sources for his raw material. Second, he presents Socrates as an exemplar of the patriotic response to false accusations: constancy and magnanimity. He willingly gives an account of himself, never considers exile, and recognizes the injustice visited upon him as an error to be endured with as much generosity as possible. The play suggests that the inevitable shortcomings of liberal democracy do not warrant sedition or justify desertion. Some contemporary reviewers read it this way. One found the "lesson" of the play to be that 'though the democratic system may err at times, it is worth preserving with all its faults'. In this critic's view, 'Socrates is represented as being glad to die to get over this point'.⁷⁴

Anderson molds Socrates into an unassailable anti-communist most obviously by putting strong words of praise of democracy in his mouth and having him express, over and over, contempt for the Spartan way of life.⁷⁵ He also makes him invulnerable to the designs of communist propagandists. For example, though Socrates is poor (as the title of the work, his tattered costume, and his wife's complaints about their meager resources in the opening scene stress), he is no easy mark for Spartan talk of economic justice. Additionally, in *Barefoot* Socrates is a robust heterosexual who enjoys the pleasures of conventional domesticity with his wife Xantippe. Anderson cleanses Socrates of the taint of homoeroticism. Any hint of such an association (common in non-mainstream uses of Socrates to signify 'Greek love') would have been a problem for Anderson, given how commonplace at the time it was to link sexual and political 'perversion'. Consider, for example, that in 1950 the US Senate issued a 'Report on the Employment of Homosexuals and Other Perverts in Government'.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Anderson's picture of Socrates' trial displays his

72 Shivers (1983:238). *Red Channels* was 'a who's who for those doing the blacklisting'. Leab (1983: 405).

73 Anderson to Elmer Rice, 13 February 1952, in Avery (1977: 255); Alonso (2007: 305).

74 J. Gaver, op. cit. (note 69)

75 For example, it holds the 'population down by terror and strict controls'. Anderson (1951: 48).

76 See Johnson (2006) and Sherry (2007).

willingness to give an account of himself, contrasting with contemporary controversies over refusals to testify before government hearings. Socrates' rejection of exile in Sparta contrasts with the high profile acts of desertion in the news (e.g. Brecht's abandonment of the US for East Germany on 31 October 1947, and the gossip circulating about whether Charlie Chaplin would return to the US to testify before the HUAC — he did not and chose exile in 1952). In Anderson's telling, Socrates' accusers are Athenians manipulated by Spartan authorities. Furthermore, Socrates' resistance to Spartan designs stands in sharp contrast to the Rosenberg's attraction to the Soviet cause on display at their recent trial for conspiracy to pass nuclear secrets to the Soviets.

In *Barefoot*, Socrates stands for democracy and free inquiry and exemplifies true patriotism. Socrates' accusers stand for the threat to American democracy posed by domestic procommunist conspirators. These correspondences, especially the likening of Socrates' accusers to the 'subversives' McCarthy sought to expose, proved difficult for Anderson to convey. This is probably because the analogy confusingly asked audiences to cast McCarthy as the *target* of false accusations when the heated public controversy of the time centered on whether or not McCarthy was making, not facing, baseless charges. Perhaps this confusion is behind *Barefoot's* failure to connect with Broadway audiences. Or perhaps Anderson's politics were too clear, and the absence of a soaring defense of toleration of dissent was too disappointing. In any case, the play was not a commercial success. It closed after only a few weeks.

For those audience members familiar with the ancient sources or moved to peruse them, Anderson had a special message: beware of Plato.⁷⁷ He made his utter distrust of the Platonic dialogues as a source for the views of the historical Socrates very clear in a long prefatory essay entitled 'Socrates and His Gospel', published with the script in 1952.⁷⁸ As the reference to Jesus and the New Testament in the title of his essay suggests, Anderson is passionate in this piece. In Anderson's view, 'Plato was an aristocrat and a homosexual. He hated democracy and toward middle life became convinced that a communism controlled and governed by a specially bred and trained workers class could produce the ideal state'. In his view, the strict limitation on private property, advocacy of eugenics, and provision for a philosopher-king in the *Republic* spoke for themselves. He wrote: '*The Republic* posits little more than a brutal Communist dictatorship. . . . If we boil it down, [it] is something very much like Russia under the Politburo'.⁷⁹ By placing such a doctrine in the mouth of Socrates, he believed, Plato betrayed his teacher. Anderson is of course following

77 Some commentators have noted this but fail to set the argument with Plato in the broader context of Anderson's concerns in the play as a whole, e.g. Wertheim (1982).

78 Anderson also dismisses the unflattering portrait of Socratic teaching in Aristophanes' *Clouds* as 'an obvious burlesque' (1951: xi).

79 Anderson (1951: xii). Excerpts appeared in *The New York Times* under the title, 'Notes on Barefoot at Athens', 28 October 1951 and in *The New York Tribune* as 'The Ancient Struggle to Uphold Democracy', 12 August 1951.

the views of Karl Popper, in his diatribe *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Volume One: The Spell of Plato* first published in 1945. Composed during the war when Popper was living in New Zealand (having left Austria to escape the Nazis only to find himself close to the raging war in the Pacific⁸⁰), *The Spell of Plato* argues that Plato was the arch-enemy of democracy and the originator of totalitarian styles of thought and politics. Popper's aim in his study was to liberate a 'historical Socrates' from this Platonic frame and set him up as an exemplary practitioner of a kind of open criticism that is the basis of an 'open society' and 'the very life of a democracy'.⁸¹ In Popper's view, Plato fairly represents Socrates in his youthful early writings (*Apology* and *Crito*), but later betrayed his teacher by using Socrates' persona to advocate for abhorrent, communist political views, in effect portraying Socrates as a Spartan sympathizer and proto-communist. Plato was the Spartan sympathizer, Popper submits, not Socrates. Anderson encountered Popper's work months into writing *Barefoot*, when he was preparing the final script.⁸² Following Popper, Anderson sees his own efforts to contest Plato's defamatory fabrications as a political act of resistance to totalitarianism. His contribution is to give modern audiences a moving, dynamic symbol of democracy's excellence and persistence suited to difficult times.⁸³

Some of Anderson's most notable jabs at Plato mark the playwright's effort to distance Socrates from all association with homoeroticism. For example, in Plato's *Phaedo* Xantippe falls apart at the realization that the execution is imminent and is led away lamenting and beating her breast (60a); Socrates then turns his attention to his young male associates. Anderson offers a far different image of Xantippe's place in his final hours. Drawing on the suggestion in Xenophon's *Symposium* (17–19) that Socrates enjoyed Xantippe's intellectual company (he took her nagging to be a sort of sparring and good practice for philosophical work), Anderson's play ends not with Socrates surrounded by admiring men, but instead with a scene of Socrates in

80 See Gombrich (1999).

81 Popper (1966: 189). By the mid-nineteenth century European scholars interested in the conflict between the apparently liberal precepts of 'Socratic philosophy' and the purportedly illiberal qualities of Platonic metaphysical and political theory in which that depiction uncomfortably sits had extensively explored whether a distinctly 'historical Socrates' could be teased out of the ancient literary sources (that is, freed from Plato) and put to use in liberal philosophy. (See especially, Schleiermacher 1836 and Grote 1865.) In the US in this period, however, worries about Plato's 'illiberal' qualities were tempered by the fact that his metaphysics, utopian political streak, and complex characterization of Socrates' persona appealed to leading progressive northern intellectuals. See Emerson (1996 (first published 1850)), Wish (1949).

82 Maxwell Anderson, 'Diary', *Maxwell Anderson Papers*, University of Texas, Austin.

83 One of Popper's contemporary critics, Ronald Levinson (1953), cites Anderson's invocation of Popper in his essay, 'Socrates and his Gospel', as an example of the ease with which Popper's arguments can be misused outside academe. Popper discusses Levinson's reading of *Barefoot in Athens* (Popper 1966: 336).

the company of his calm and thoughtful wife, anticipating his death and together reciting poetic verses celebrating the cause of free inquiry for which he is about to die. The curtain comes down with Socrates in his wife's embrace, his head resting in her lap.⁸⁴

Anderson also takes a stab at the picture of Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. First, he plays with the well-known image of Alcibiades bursting in on the action. In the *Symposium*, a group of men are gathered to celebrate Agathon's victory in a dramatic competition. All the characters come forward to deliver speeches in praise of Eros. Toward the end, Alcibiades bursts into the scene drunk, eager to confess his love for Socrates. In the opening scene of *Barefoot*, in contrast, Socrates is home with his family when a civic-minded fellow Athenian rushes in to inform him that the Athenians have lost the war. Anderson also cleanses Socrates of all association with homoeroticism by naming his antagonist 'Pausanias'. For audience members familiar with Greek history and Plato's dialogues, the name Pausanias would have set a curious set of associations in motion. The name suggested not only the Spartan King Pausanias II active at the close of the fifth century (and who thus could be the loosely historical basis for Anderson's wholly made-up scenes of conversations between a Spartan King and Socrates), but also two other figures: a Spartan general active in the first part of the fifth century who was known in antiquity for betrayals and adopting Persian customs (a turncoat), and the lively advocate of pederasty in Plato's *Symposium* (a pervert). Anderson sets Socrates up as the enemy of political and sexual subversion.

Anderson's *Barefoot in Athens* does not find in the tale of Socrates' trial and death a parable about regrettable — and regretted — intolerance. The play does not illuminate the philosophical grounds for a defense of free speech in a democratic society and set out to arouse resistance. The press releases about the play issued months in advance of its opening confirm as much. One reports that Anderson is at work on a play about 'the domestic crises in the household of Socrates and the philosopher's trial and death'. Another promises that Anderson's treatment of the material will feature the 'domestic side of the philosopher's life'.⁸⁵ Anderson's play focuses on the personal predicament of an individual falsely accused by his beloved city of seditious intent and subversive activity. What will he do? How strong is his attachment to his country? What will he endure? How will he steel himself and with

84 'He goes close to her' and 'Putting his arms around her' are in the stage directions at the close of the play (Anderson 1951: 101). A photograph in the playbill for a regional production by the Peoria Players (April 1958) shows Socrates with his head in her lap. Maxwell Anderson Program File, Rose Collection NYPL.

85 'Theatre Gossip' *Barefoot in Athens* clippings file, Rose Collection NYPL; Press Releases, 2 February 1951 and 2 August 1951, *Barefoot in Athens* file, Rose Collection NYPL). Cf. the politics of *Barefoot in Athens* and Anderson's treatment of the Sacco and Vanzetti case in *Winterset* (1927) and *Gods of Lightning* (1929) with Wall (1941: 353).

what measure of grace? What will others learn from him? Anderson finds in the story of Socrates and Athens (and Socrates and Plato) a parable about loyalty and betrayal.

An independent *Socrates* by Lister Sinclair at the Jupiter Theatre of Toronto (1952)

Four months after *Barefoot* closed, an ambitious new Toronto company, the Jupiter Theatre, had a huge success with a play about Socrates written by Lister Sinclair, a young Canadian author already well known for radio dramas.⁸⁶ The founders of the Jupiter Theatre aimed to establish a fully professional theatre company in Toronto and to encourage ‘the emergence of a truly Canadian voice in the theatre’.⁸⁷ *Socrates* was the biggest hit of their first season. Almost a thousand people had to be turned away in the last two days of its one-week run 22 February to 1 March 1952.⁸⁸ The play had wider exposure than this short run suggests: earlier versions of the script had been produced for a popular CBC radio drama series, the Jupiter Theatre’s production was widely reviewed in print and on radio and the production traveled to the Little Theatre in London, Ontario later that same year.⁸⁹

The Jupiter Theatre had a political as well as an artistic agenda. The producers aimed to stage experimental, challenging, and whenever possible new Canadian plays instead of British standards and London imports. Sinclair’s *Socrates* was the first Canadian-authored script produced by the company. But in addition to embracing a Canadian nationalist project, Jupiter’s founding members also openly sympathized with blacklisted American artists. The other two productions of their first season were, pointedly, works by major authors who had been targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947: Bertolt Brecht’s *Galileo* and *The Biggest Thief in Town* by Dalton Trumbo. Brecht had left the US rather than testify. Trumbo was one of the Hollywood Ten. When the Jupiter’s season started, Trumbo had only recently been released after serving a ten-month prison term as a result of a conviction for contempt of congress.

Despite the partisan political context of being produced at the Jupiter, Sinclair’s *Socrates* seems rigorously non-ideological. Like Anderson, Sinclair compresses (and reorders) events of the years 404–399 BC and uses material from different sources in anachronistic ways for dramatic effect. But Sinclair draws more freely and fully upon Plato’s *Symposium* and Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, as well as Plato’s *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo* and the writings of Xenophon. Sinclair does not fashion scenes out of whole cloth (as with Socrates’ kitchen table in *Barefoot*). Sinclair’s script creates scenes that allow him to deliver precisely what Anderson’s play lacked: multiple depictions of playful and exacting Socratic questioning in action. Front and center in Sinclair’s work are Socrates’ unsettling, irritating, unnerving examinations of others

86 Sinclair (1948).

87 Reported in Partington (1997: 63). See also, Kotyshyn (1987).

88 Partington (1997: 66).

89 *Globe and Mail* reviews reported in Partington 1997, CBC Wednesday Night, 7 November 1951. See (iv) in list above.

— and his practice of taking up such examinations on every occasion and with all comers. The result is that the play conveys a strong condemnation of *both* Cold War ‘rival orthodoxies’ — dogmatic communism and liberalism — and of the polarizing, rigid manner of argument characteristic of contemporary political discourse in the US and Canada.⁹⁰ Sinclair recollects the story of Socrates to focus attention on the importance for democratic citizenship of the kind of independent thinking that is possible only when one stands apart from traditional orthodoxies. The play’s sensational success at the Jupiter likely had to do with the resonance of that message as much as with the clever plotting, witty writing, strong acting, and the novelty of an ambitious new theatre company’s first season.

The opening scene provides a good example of Sinclair’s approach to Socrates’ broad meaning for contemporary audiences. Sinclair draws attention to Socrates’ questioning and its deeply disquieting effects on individuals and cultural norms. He shows that his practice inspires suspicion and aversion as well as delight and attraction. The play opens with a clever scene adapted from the ancient sources. A crowd in the agora awaits news of the Oracle’s answer to Chaerephon’s inquiry, ‘Who is the wisest man?’ The audience watches as the answer, ‘Socrates’, makes it way through the gathering. We witness the varied reactions of Aristophanes, Agathon, Crito, Alcibiades, Phaedo, Meletus, Lycon, Anytus, and a set of figures Sinclair creates to represent the attitudes of segments of the demos (named for strong historical sovereigns and signifying, it seems, political power): Philip, Cyrus, and Triptolemus. Sinclair includes not only Socrates’ well-known response to the Oracle, ‘I am wisest because I know that I know nothing’, but also his own interpretation of its meaning: ‘The Oracle is a rebuke to complacency’.⁹¹ Every dramatized encounter with Socrates drives home this same point. Once the indictment for subversive thought and activity (corrupting the youth and introducing new gods) is reported, Sinclair presents members of the demos wondering aloud about whether the charges will resonate beyond a small circle of accusers. They talk of the relationship between Socratic questioning, dissent, and disloyalty. One citizen is puzzled. He asks, ‘Socrates is always saying that the idea of law is sacred. He says almost nothing else. How can he be guilty of sedition and blasphemy?’ to which another citizen quickly counters, ‘Anybody worth talking to for five minutes is guilty before the law of blasphemy and sedition’.⁹²

Every turn in the plot and all the dialogue highlight Socrates’ non-conformism. For example, in a scene in act two that both draws on and takes liberties with Plato’s *Symposium*, Sinclair presents Socrates attending a symposium at Agathon’s home on the eve of his trial. Satisfying the expectations of audience members familiar with Plato’s *Symposium* and Socrates’ unconventional eroticism, Alcibiades bursts in. But Alcibiades does not join the party and give a speech. Instead, he announces that

90 Sinclair’s program notes express this ambition. Partington (1997: 66).

91 Sinclair (1957: 27).

92 Sinclair (1957: 32).

guards are on their way to arrest Socrates and urges him to flee. Socrates chooses to wait, calmly, and it comes to pass that Socrates strikes up a conversation with the guards who do not realize with whom they are speaking (a modification of Plato's account of Socrates' friendly conversations with his prison guard in the *Phaedo*). Without revealing himself, Socrates asks the guards, 'On duty?' To which they reply, 'Out for a dangerous man. Name of Socrates'. Socrates leads them to consider what's dangerous about this man. They acknowledge that he looks for wisdom, but ask, 'what's dangerous about that?' Socrates replies, 'What if he were to find it?' They continue talking about gadflies and chains and caves until they understand that people would probably prefer the safety of their current beliefs to any challenging new wisdom. When Socrates reveals himself the guard expresses the theme of the play: 'I hope you realize that you've got to be found guilty for the sake of peace and quiet'.⁹³ Questions of guilt or innocence, justice and injustice, will yield to the demands of security. Non-conformity will be contained within boundaries.

This theme drives the presentation of the trial. The prosecutor Anytus rebukes Socrates for having undertaken a radical form of questioning, that is, for crossing an unwritten though generally known and rigorously policed limit. Anytus says, 'The Assembly knows that some kinds of criticism are permitted; but not *your* kind'. Socrates' response only reiterates the point that serious questions can be unsettling. He says, 'Only the kind that leaves the wrongs untouched [is permitted]'.⁹⁴ In a scene close to the conclusion of the play Sinclair seems to draw a parallel between Socrates' accusers and those who, in the spirit of McCarthyism, would label Socratic questioning 'treason'. Lycon, an accuser, admonishes him for 'wounding' his 'parent Athens', and says, 'Open your eyes, Socrates, before you die; look at your city, and all she is, and learn what you were about to destroy'. Lycon's words perversely echo both the city as parent argument voiced by the 'Laws' in Plato's *Crito* (50c-51d) and Thucydides' account of Pericles' entreaty to citizens, in the Funeral Oration, to gaze at Athens and love her (2.43.1) — two sources that speak to political obligation. Lycon is accusing Socrates of seeking to harm the city. Socrates of course understands his actions differently. Socrates says, 'I look, Lycon, but what do I see? The living flesh is rotting off the bone. The Athens that I see is dead; a marble skeleton mounted in a life-like attitude in the museum of imagination. Your imagination has corrupted your memory. Your Athens never lived.'⁹⁵ Properly to meet one's obligation is to seek to bring Athens closer to an ideal, to improve her, to enrich her life. What honors Athens, in his view, is impatience with dogma and a demand for challenging thought and speech. That is what Socrates offers his city. Sinclair's *Socrates* relentlessly presents him as a symbol of the contempt for smug orthodoxies necessary for a fully alive polity. In so doing, the playwright spoke to Canadian audiences impatient for conceptual tools fitted not only to the task of standing up to

93 *Ibid.*, p. 58–62.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

McCarthyism and its ilk in Canada, but to the task of interrogating Cold War orthodoxies altogether and imagining the contours of a more satisfactory vision of a distinctly Canadian variant of democratic citizenship.

Critics praised Sinclair's *Socrates*. The *Globe and Mail* declared it had 'stirred the breath of greatness'. Several commented on Frank Peddie's superb depiction of Socrates. In his hands, this 'ugly old Athenian . . . a gargoyle of humanity' elicited great audience sympathy. Another critic concluded that the play's final scene was a 'whole sequence of nobility and genuine spiritual exaltation. A loud shout of absolute silence announces the gadfly of Athens is gone, and the others resume life in a world that has become rudderless, bleak'.⁹⁶ Two years later, in an essay for a collection on the Canadian 'sense of identity', Sinclair reprised his view that Socrates should serve as a model for artists and writers eager to define 'a Canadian idiom'. Canadians have a 'certain point of view'. We lie, he says, 'between the greatest and the grimmest of the Grim Great Powers . . . We are very large in extent, but we are very small in population . . . We have a small voice, but we wish to make it heard, certainly for our own sakes, and, we believe, for everybody else's sake as well.' Explicitly mentioning Socrates, he continues, a Canadian idiom is the point of view 'of the still small voice, the gadfly' that can become influential by employing 'the little arts of Socrates to bring down giants by their own great strength'. The 'famous calculated diffidence' of Canadians is like 'the weapon of Socrates'.⁹⁷

'Guerilla warfare against McCarthy in a public medium': Socrates on television (1953)

In 1953, CBS television sought to adapt a hit radio program that recreated historical events from around the world as if they were breaking news stories.⁹⁸ They enlisted a young Walter Cronkite to star as the 'news anchor' of each program. Unknown to Cronkite and CBS officials at the time, the producer Charles Russell and director Sidney Lumet secretly employed three blacklisted Hollywood screenwriters — Walter Bernstein, Abraham Polonsky, and Arnold Manoff — to write the teleplays. These writers relied on impostors to deliver their scripts to CBS and to pretend to be the writers in meetings with the station managers.⁹⁹ The writers found the format presented a huge opportunity. 'History', Polonsky later recalled, could 'serve us well'. He continued, 'We had no need to invent conflicts to serve our purposes. They

96 Partington (1997: 66). Also, 'No happier casting for the famous character could have been made', *The Monthly Letter* (News and Views of Club Programmes and Club Activities), Toronto, February 1952, section 'Theatre 9V'. The cast also included Christopher Plummer as Alcibiades.

97 Sinclair (1954: 236–7, 240).

98 Horowitz (1983: 80).

99 Walter Bernstein's screenplay for the 1976 film *The Front* (starring Woody Allen and Zero Mostel) was based on this group's work on *You Are There*. See Bernstein (1996) and Bernstein's Interview with Edward Summer, 'Written By' (February 2002), Writers Guild of America.

were there for the taking and we happily . . . took them. . . . In that shameful time of McCarthyite terror, of know-nothing attempts to deform and defile history, to kill any kind of dissent, we were able to do shows about civil liberties, civil rights, artistic freedom,' and more.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, the writers chose subjects such as Joan of Arc, the trial of Galileo, the Salem witch trials, the Boston Tea Party, the signing of the US Declaration of Independence, and the rise of Hitler. As Polonsky put it in an interview in 1970, this show was 'probably the only place where any guerilla warfare against McCarthy was conducted in a public medium'.¹⁰¹

The episode on 'The Death of Socrates' is widely considered *You Are There's* best, owing to the sheer quality of the writing.¹⁰² But it was also the one that most intensely resonated with contemporary politics — and viewers — and that thus remained memorable for some time. Cronkite explained in an interview on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the show that the people involved with making the *You Are There* programs found history 'rich with striking parallels for thinking about dissent and intellectual freedom' and that, stunningly, 'the farther back in time we went the more contemporary the parallels became'. Cronkite singled out the episode about Socrates. 'Socrates was the perfect hero for the 1950s', he recalled, not only because he effectively engaged the free speech issue, but mostly because 'he did not back down'.¹⁰³

The appeal of the *You Are There* show was its claim to provide audiences with an accurate account of notable episodes from history, based on primary sources, through the device of imaginary 'live' interviews by known reporters with key figures from history.¹⁰⁴ The producer Russell made this clear to all. Every episode was to be a 'dramatic recreation of a specific personal moment in history. Authentic and specific, no speculation'.¹⁰⁵ To help create the show's aura of historical authenticity, the producers set up a strong visual allusion to Cronkite's enormously successful coverage of the 1952 national political conventions (nominating Eisenhower and Stevenson) live from a newscasters' box in the hall. On *You are There*, Cronkite

100 Schultheiss (1997: 13).

101 A. Polonsky, 'How the Blacklist Worked in Hollywood', *Film Culture* (Fall/Winter, 1970: 47), cited in Polonsky (1997: 32). This line was reproduced in later appreciations of the series (e.g. the program notes to *To Illuminate Our Time: You Are There*, Film Society of Lincoln Center, 16–17 January 1998).

102 The credited writer for the *You Are There* episode on 'The Death of Socrates' is the front, Kate Nickerson. The true writer was Arnold Manoff. For discussion of the assignment of the Socrates episode to Manoff see 'Interview with Abe Polonsky', 6 July 1999, *Archive of American Television*, Polonsky (Part 5).

103 *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, 27 October 2003.

104 They did not hire professional historians as advisors but the show did employ a full-time research staff. They did not consider how far an account of the historical Socrates could be drawn out of the suspicious literary sources, but treated all the ancient sources as equally useful. See Horowitz (1983: 82).

105 Charles Russell, unpublished manuscript. Reported in Schultheiss (1997: 11).

appeared on camera only from behind a desk at the start and end of each episode. To get around the potentially tricky problem for a visual medium of having twentieth-century reporters interact with historical figures (e.g. put the reporters in period costumes?), correspondents conducted their fictionalized interviews as off-camera voices. The show opened each week with a booming voice declaring, 'All things are as they were then except, *you are there*'. Cronkite's closing tag line stressed the importance of turning to historical events to inform reflection on contemporary matters: 'What sort of a day was it? A day like all days, filled with the events that alter and illuminate our times, and you were there.' The art direction also aroused a feeling of 'historical authenticity', though it did so by activating viewers' notions of historicity and not by presenting a scholarly re-creation of the setting. In the important death scene, for example, the costumes, the positioning of the actors around a couch, and the gestures performed by all the actors vividly recall the well-known Jacques-Louis David painting of 1787, *The Death of Socrates*, on display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York since 1931 and widely reproduced.¹⁰⁶ The shows studied effort to present a meticulously researched product worked with the choice of subject matter subtly to ridicule McCarthy's practice of promulgating reckless, unsubstantiated accusations.

The script packs a number of references culled, indiscriminately, from Xenophon, Aristophanes, Plato, and Plutarch into this half-hour long program. The casting invites a direct comparison with Anderson's *Barefoot*, since Barry Jones played Socrates in both. But not many viewers could have made that comparison, given *Barefoot*'s lack of commercial success. In contrast to the Anderson and Sinclair adaptations, the *You Are There* show manages to convey the tremendous controversy in the sources over the meaning of Socrates. We see the irritating intellectual that Aristophanes' *Clouds* pokes fun at. We witness an expression of the public sentiment that he might be a genuinely dangerous influence in the city. We are able to consider that the impiety charge is an unsubstantiated lie, concocted as part of a plot to circumvent the amnesty in place after the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War, and thus illegally attack Socrates for his past association with now-disgraced politicians like Critias. Even evidence of regret on the part of the Athenians after the execution finds expression in this production. The controversy that Socrates sparked in his own day is front and center.

The opening scene features a group of interested citizens gathered outside the prison frantic for news of Socrates. Rumors are flying. Has he been pardoned? Will he flee? Will he die? This scene includes an exchange between an off-camera correspondent and Aristophanes (played by E. G. Marshall) that is remarkable for its self-deprecating and ironic allusion to the blacklist in the entertainment industry. The reporter asks Aristophanes whether his plays give credence to the accusations against Socrates as some have suggested. Aristophanes tells the reporter, 'The politicians blame "us" [artists], when it is a group of "stupid men" who have managed

106 'Met Gets Rare David Canvas', *The New York Times*, 14 June 1931.

to get the city into this predicament.’ He continues, directly into the camera, ‘it was only a play’. In the ancient sources it is Socrates himself who suggests that the Aristophanic comedy can be viewed as his early accuser. When the camera takes the viewer inside the prison we meet Socrates coming from the bath, expressing relief to have been able to spare the women the chore of washing his body. The show portrays Socrates in prison calmly examining his companions’ beliefs regarding the current situation, that is, his unjust conviction, impending execution, and refusal to flee; and shows his capacity even now to be a good philosophical interlocutor, good friend, family man, and civic benefactor. A series of quick, clear exchanges between Socrates and Crito and Socrates and Apollodorus, filmed as alternating close-ups, effectively conveys the intensity and stakes involved in serious philosophical inquiry. This is followed by a somber depiction of the administration of the hemlock, moderated only by illustrations of Socrates’ own legendary cheerfulness. This presentation of Socrates elicits feelings of loss, remorse, and regret. The show’s creative team successfully uses Socrates to focus attention on how abuses of democratic authority can be difficult to curtail and can enfeeble democratic discourse and perpetrate injustice on individual citizens. The show challenges viewers to see a parallel to their own time and to recognize that McCarthyism is damaging the polity as well as victimizing individuals.

As a whole, the episode presents the prosecution of Socrates as illustrative of a pathology that can infect democracy, or of the capacity of an admirable, even exemplary city to blunder badly. Cronkite’s concluding comments as anchor suggest that this is precisely what the creative team was going for. He speaks of the enduring symbolic import of the ‘cup of poison’ as a ‘test and symbol’ of a gap between principles and actions that will last in the public memory, activating ‘grief and sorrow’ and initiating painful examinations in the years to come. The contemporary parallel was palpable. When this episode first aired in May of 1953, the recent election had delivered control of Congress back to the Republicans, and McCarthy grew more powerful as he now became chairman of the Senate Committee on Government Operations.¹⁰⁷

Conclusions

I have argued that the reception history of the iconic figure of Socrates in North American popular media from the immediate postwar period to the early 1950s includes a story of the making of a democratic symbol. This does not mean that the specific political meaning of Socrates came to be fixed in a partisan way.

¹⁰⁷ McCarthy’s decline began when Edward R. Murrow decried his tactics and evident disregard for truth on his 9 March 1954 CBS television show, *See It Now*. The public response to the live television broadcasts of the senate hearings he ran later that same year (‘Army-McCarthy’ hearings) undermined him further (most famously the public response to Joseph Welch’s retort to McCarthy’s questioning, ‘Have you no decency, sir?’ on 9 June 1954, the 30th day of the hearings).

Rather, I have shown that in this period a set of writers for mainstream fiction, theatre and television audiences all found Socrates an appealing, compliant, and resonant resource for developing their distinctive and contrasting accounts of the demands of democratic citizenship. This material suggests the contours of the cluster of (sometimes conflicting) ideals becoming associated with post-war American liberal democracy in the public mind.

The Cold War era reception of Socrates in creative media encouraged new perceptions of classical antiquity to take hold in both academia and popular opinion. For example, scholarly interest in Socrates and democracy, apart from the controversies around Popper, first develops in this period.¹⁰⁸ In 1954, academic John Montgomery published an edited volume aimed at a broad readership that revisited traditional assessments of the trial and death of the historical Socrates explicitly in order to consider the ‘unparalleled influence’ of Socrates’ story and to draw from it lessons for thinking about politics today, especially McCarthyism. Offering excerpts from major modern thinkers such as Mill and Nietzsche as well as essays by contemporary notables and his own introduction, Montgomery suggests that Socrates’ story resonates because it is emblematic of the most dreadful error that political authorities must guard against making — the violation of individual liberties.¹⁰⁹ Also in 1954, Hannah Arendt delivered a lecture on Socrates and democracy at Notre Dame. In it Arendt was at pains to retrieve from the Platonic corpus a specifically Socratic understanding of citizenship to set alongside the more familiar Platonic image of the philosopher-king. Her main aim was to mine Socrates’ form of political engagement to forge a compelling model of democratic citizenship suited to contemporary times. Socrates was exemplary, she argued, not because he ‘possessed any special truth from which the multitude was excluded, but because he remained always ready to endure the pathos of wonder and thereby avoids the dogmatism of mere opinion holders’. To conduct oneself this way, to both think and act in the world, Arendt urged, requires a sort of courage that Socrates epitomized.¹¹⁰ Also in this period Gregory Vlastos began to frame what became his extremely influential account of the continuities between Socratic philosophy and ancient democratic ideals and practices. In 1956, he published an introduction to the *Protagoras* in which he argued that ‘Socrates democratizes courage’.¹¹¹ And in 1959, five years after McCarthy’s downfall, Leo Strauss suggested in lectures that Plato’s *Symposium* contains a political theory useful for thinking about American politics. He proposed a parallel: just as some truths about Senator McCarthy could be

108 Critical responses to Popper included contrary readings of Plato (e.g. Levinson 1953) and efforts to recover controversial aspects of Socrates’ politics in the ancient sources and history of ideas (e.g. Montgomery 1954; see also, Levinson’s review of Montgomery in Levinson 1955).

109 Montgomery (1954: 5), with discussion in Lane (2007b: 212–13).

110 Arendt (1990). See Villa (2001) for discussion of this essay in a similar light.

111 Vlastos (1956: l–li).

examined only now that the hysteria has died down a bit, Plato's *Symposium*, set (he argues) in 407 when Alcibiades returned to Athens, presents a consideration of truths about Alcibiades, Socrates and Athens that were impossible to regard during the hysteria surrounding the profanation of the mysteries back in 415.¹¹² Over the next few years, work in ancient political philosophy re-examining the historical Socrates' relation to Athenian democracy, as well as work on Socratic philosophy's capacity to speak to issues in contemporary democratic theory, surged in the US.¹¹³ Similarly, the Cold War-era adaptations paved the way for Socrates' availability for additional, wide-ranging, and specifically political adaptations in later years. For example, Martin Luther King called upon the figure of Socrates to ground his civil disobedience in a love of country in his 1963 *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, and Derek Humphry organized advocates for the legalization of assisted suicide under the banner of 'The Hemlock Society' in 1980.¹¹⁴ 'Socratic citizenship', as well as Socratic questioning, became part of the popular lexicon.

112 Strauss (2000: 24).

113 This literature is large. Important markers include Vlastos (1983), Kraut (1984), Stone (1988); Euben (1990, 1997); Kateb (1998).

114 Note also that *Barefoot in Athens* was adapted for NBC television's Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1966. This production featured Peter Ustinov as Socrates and was a hit (possibly because it was molded to speak to civil rights issues). Released on VHS by Compass Productions Films for the Humanities, Princeton 1983.

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