**from *Phaedrus***

Plato

Written 360 B.C., Translated by Benjamin Jowett

**Socrates.** But he who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much which is not serious, and that neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, is of any great value, if, like the compositions of the rhapsodies, they are only recited in order to be believed, and not with any view to criticism or instruction; and who thinks that even the best of writings are but a reminiscence of what we know, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally for the sake of instruction and graven in the soul, which is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness, and that such principles are a man's own and his legitimate offspring;--being, in the first place, the word which he finds in his own bosom; secondly, the brethren and descendants and relations of his others;-and who cares for them and no others-this is the right sort of man; and you and I, Phaedrus, would pray that we may become like him.

**Phaedrus.** That is most assuredly my desire and prayer.

**Socrates.** … Go and tell Lysias that we…were bidden…to convey a message to him and to other composers of speeches–-to Homer and other writers of poems, whether set to music or not; and to Solon and others who have composed writings in the form of political discourses which they would term laws–-to all of them we are to say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth, and they can defend or prove them, when they are put to the test, by spoken arguments, which leave their writings poor in comparison of them, then they are to be called, not only poets, orators, legislators, but are worthy of a higher name, befitting the serious pursuit of their life.

**Phaedrus.** What name would you assign to them?

**Socrates.** Wise, I may not call them; for that is a great name which belongs to God alone,–-lovers of wisdom or philosophers is their modest and befitting title.