Socrates, Hero?

In *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*, Gregory Nagy places Socrates firmly within the tradition of Greek heroes and hero cults—with a crucial difference: where cult fixates on the hero’s body and *kleos* on the hero’s story, Socrates is immortalized by “the living word” of philosophy. In other words, he is “resurrected” after death by those “initiates” who pursue the practice he helped found. But Nagy, in stressing Socrates’ continuity with the heroic tradition, may underplay his deviance. Unlike ritual, which reenacts, and myth, which is recited, philosophy always begins again completely open-ended. If Plato constructs Socrates as a hero, he’s a new kind of hero—veneration of whom must incite anew, rather than rehearse again, the hero’s labors.

My paper, part of a dissertation project on Socratic dialogue and the origin of the novel, will outline how Plato’s account of Socrates’ death (1) makes it legible as a heroic one, (2) deviates from the heroic model, and (3) forever alters that model, displacing ritual compensation and epic glorification with alternate modes of immortalization, and alternate visions of immortality.