

Plato and the Poets

Edited by

PIERRE DESTRÉE

& FRITZ-GREGOR HERRMANN

MNEMOSYNE SUPPLEMENTS MONOGRAPHS ON GREEK AND LATIN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

BRILL

Plato and the Poets

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NOTE

Since the theme of this volume should also be of interest to those who are no specialists in either ancient philosophy or classical studies, the editors have decided to avoid using Greek fonts in the text for the most part, but to add quotations in Greek in footnotes.

INTRODUCTION

PIERRE DESTRÉE AND FRITZ-GREGOR HERRMANN

It is not the least paradox that Plato is both the western philosopher who more than any other cites, or alludes to, works of poetry, and the one who is at the same time the harshest critic of poetry. Among the poets who feature in Plato's work, Homer, unsurprisingly, holds pride of place. He is the poet quoted by far the most in Plato's dialogues, and Socrates says in *Republic X* that he has loved him from early childhood onwards; yet, Plato seems to be fully committed to banish him from his ideal city as the poet *par excellence*. From another perspective, if traditional epic, lyric, tragic and also comic poetry are vigorously condemned for their appeal to pleasure without reason, while Plato is advocating a new kind of poetry, Plato's own audience—ancient as well as modern—has always taken great pleasure in the multifaceted poetry of his exquisite art of writing, in which myths and poetical images play an important role. The *politeia* of the *Laws* is itself described as a poetical mimesis!

One way of addressing this paradox is to observe that Plato wanted to replace the works of Homer and the poets with philosophy, that is his philosophy, and that he therefore presents his own art of writing as a sort of new poetry. As Aristophanes famously made his character Aeschylus say: 'Small children have a teacher to advise them; for young men there's the poets' (*Frogs*, 1054–1055). Since Plato obviously wants to deny that traditional poets have the right *knowledge* which would allow them to be such teachers, and since time and again he insists that only philosophy provides such knowledge, wholesale condemnation of the poets and a complete replacement of poetry with philosophy, which could in turn be taken as a guide for the 'new', 'Platonic' poets, would seem the solution. And many passages in the dialogues certainly reflect such a tendency; it is quite probable that the famous expression of 'the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry' most of all reflects Plato's own engagement with the poets. But throughout his career, from the *Apology* and the *Ion* to the *Laws*, Plato does not tire of visiting and revisiting poetry—an indication that this quarrel was all but straightforward. And at the same time, reception of and intertextuality with the poets have a formative part in Plato's own compositions. We, as readers, are thus well

advised not to take the different angles of his repeated attacks for black-and-white critiques, or pure and simple rejection. And it should also be duly noticed that Plato's emphasis and perspective may in fact vary quite dramatically in accordance with the topic or topics that are the professed focus of a particular dialogue, and that there is thus the possibility that the weight and status, or even the meaning, of central concepts or themes, like mimesis or inspiration, may vary accordingly.

The nineteen essays in this volume focus either on one or more of the central themes that recur in Plato's dealing with the poets, or on a dialogue and the way or ways in which poetry and the poets are discussed there. There has been no attempt, on the part of the authors or on the part of the editors, at unification. While certain recurring themes crystallise themselves with increasing complexity in the course of the various discussions, there remain both contradictions and incompatibilities between results on the one hand, and on the other a number of loose ends and unresolved issues. Overall, however, it is hoped that the volume in its present form conveys not just an idea of the richness and multifaceted nature of Plato's appreciation, analysis and criticism of poetry, but also marks some progress in the long-standing debate over Plato's attitude—or should this be attitudes?—to poetry and the poets.

The collection opens with two chapters which, in very different ways, look, among other things, through Plato at texts and authors, philosophers and poets, before Plato.

In 'What Ancient Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry?', Glenn Most revisits the question of the historical content of Socrates' remark in *Republic* X that there was an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy. Surveying statements by Xenophanes and Heraclitus, Most argues that, whomever they criticised for whatever reasons, they did not criticise them *qua* poets or because they wrote poetry. Conversely, Most contends, in extant archaic and classical Greek poetry, there are, with one exception, no instances of criticism of philosophy; nor could one easily imagine how there could have been. In examining, then, the evidence of the quotations adduced by Socrates himself as evidence of poetry's side of this ancient quarrel, of which Socrates has presented the other side, philosophy, Most concludes that lack of context makes it impossible, on each occasion, to identify the target; but that diction and metre suggest, for all four quotations, Old Comedy, the genre of Aristophanes, the one genre of which we know that it actually did attack philosophers, as the source; and that Socrates' and thus Plato's point would be much stronger

if these quotations had currency in fourth-century Athens in some form and were recognised *as* attacks against philosophers by at least part of Plato's readers. That Plato at least could thus, in sincerity, let Socrates speak of that ancient quarrel tells us most of all something significant about Plato and about ancient philosophy.

In 'Poetry and Rhetoric in the *Gorgias*', Fritz-Gregor Herrmann suggests that at least one strand in Plato's criticism of poetry operates without the notions of either divine dispensation, inspiration, possession and madness on the one hand, or on the other mimetic imitation or representation. Criticism of poetry in the *Gorgias* is criticism of the poets' lack of knowledge; this, however, is the one feature that remains constant throughout Plato's dealing with the poets, from the early dialogues to the *Laws*. As poetry is in the *Gorgias* criticised in the wider context of a discussion of rhetoric, this dialogue provides the modern reader with a unique opportunity to assess how dispensable or indispensable those other features like *theia moira*, *enthousiasmos* and *mimêsis* are to Plato's criticism of poetry. A decision on these issues is bound up with the question of Plato's development, at least as far as his stance to poetry and the poets is concerned. At the same time, as both the wider discussion of rhetoric and the specific treatment of poetry contain implicit and explicit references to the writings of Gorgias of Leontini, the question of a pre-Platonic poetics to which Plato responded may need re-opening.

The five chapters following are concerned with aspects of Plato's discussion of poetry which arise in other dialogues usually regarded as composed before the *Republic*.

Starting from the *Ion* and the *Republic*, but having Plato's whole oeuvre in view, Catherine Collobert ('Poetry as Flawed Reproduction: Possession and Mimesis') establishes as two parameters in Plato's discussion of poetry the notions of divine possession and inspiration on the one hand, and of *mimêsis* on the other. From the outset, there is a tension between divine inspiration, which deprives the human poet both of any share in the poetic achievement and of rationality altogether, and the *technê* or skill which poetry claims for itself. But even as Plato moves from the notion of the poet as a transmitter, as discussed in the *Ion*, to that of a *mimêtês* or imitator, as discussed in the *Republic*, those aspects of the assessment of the poet do not change: the imitator, too, lacks rationality and does not aim at the truth; here, too, poetry does not entail human creativity. But the mimetic model also seems to deprive the poet of the

possibility of conveying truth that the model of divine inspiration certainly allowed for. This apparent contradiction is overcome by the suggestion that Plato conceives of poetry “as a mimetic activity that rests upon possession.” This, though, does not absolve the poet, as, while being possessed and inspired, in his ignorance he does not ask for the right things.

After Collobert’s wide-ranging discussion, the next two chapters, in developing their different positions, touch on some of the same material. The topic of Carlotta Capuccino’s discussion is Plato’s dialogue *Ion* (‘Plato’s *Ion* and the Ethics of Praise’). Is the theme of that dialogue the poet or the paedeutical function of poetry, and is poetry criticised and condemned, or is it praised? Capuccino’s contention is that, for good reasons, the rhapsode, rather than the poet, is Socrates’ real interest in the dialogue. The rhapsode as *hermêneus*, however, is, contrary to popular modern opinion, not a knowledgeable interpreter of the poet. As mediator of the poet’s voice, he is singing the poet’s praises. But praise of a poet who does not know, just as praise by a poet of something he does not know, is dangerous, as it can lead to even the good man’s listening because of the pleasure it provides through its being divinely inspired. Criticism of the rhapsode as praiser is thus criticism of the poet’s educational authority.

Following Capuccino, Francisco Gonzalez (‘The Hermeneutics of Madness: Poet and Philosopher in Plato’s *Ion* and *Phaedrus*’) takes up the issue of the poet as conveying *hermêneus*. Socrates maintains that such a conveyor of the thought of one person on one matter must, if skilled, i.e. possessing knowledge, be able to convey another’s thought on the same matter; but possessing the appropriate *technê* will put the rhapsode in a position not only of understanding the skills that form the subject matter of poetry, but also the skill of poetry itself. Being able to speak well about Homer without this leaves as only alternative divine inspiration. But Gonzalez observes that, in the dialogues, Socrates speaks about the very subjects about which, according to Socrates, Homer speaks. Does he, the great professor of ignorance, speak with *technê*, or is he, too, out of his mind? The solution to this puzzle is contained in the *Phaedrus*, where the mad lover is described in the same terms as the poet in the *Ion*. But the mad philosopher is possessed without having lost his mind: his *sôphrosynê* has mastered the danger posed by the Muses; he is the true interpreter.

From a different angle, Stefan Büttner, too, approaches the subject of inspiration (‘Inspiration and Inspired Poets in Plato’s Dialogues’). Proof that Socrates, and thereby Plato, Büttner suggests, is not ironic when

praising the divinely inspired in the *Ion* and in the *Phaedrus* is, not least, that when the dispassionate Aristotle speaks about inspiration he does so in earnest. Büttner then proceeds to show how inspiration is integrated into Plato's psychology, and how others besides poets are affected by inspiration. The *Politicus*, *Timaeus* and *Philebus* confirm that *nous* is the part of the soul affected by divine inspiration, as stated centrally in the *Phaedrus*; it is this which allows the philosopher to harness *sôphrosynê* and *andreia*. But Büttner maintains in addition that Plato's claim that poets are divinely inspired is also intended to account for the fact that actual good poets make justifiable ethical claims, even if they themselves cannot justify them rationally. But these inspired poets exceed by far the empiricists who, likewise without rational justification, attempt to make pronouncements on good and bad on the basis of observed patterns in the sensible realm; they are outshone only by the achievements of the inspired philosophers who provide a rational account in addition.

In 'Plato, Poetry and Creativity', Dominic Scott explores and explicates three different models or conceptions of what poetry is, with two further diverging comments in other contexts, and investigates the respects in which these models are compatible and, more significantly, to what extent they are irreconcilably different. With a focus on the *Symposium*, Scott contrasts divine inspiration, *theia moira*, of the *Ion* and *Meno*, which locates the source and impetus of the poets' creativity outside the composing subject, with the poets' incomplete ascent in the *Symposium*, which leaves the agency with the composer who, however, falls short of reaching the ultimate goal of divine and everlasting truth, and with the model of the *Gorgias*, paralleled in *Republic VI*, which lacks any reference to the eternal, and differentiates poetic and rhetorical activity from philosophical activity purely in terms of acting from routine and experience rather than acting on the basis of knowledge of the truth.

Analysing the dialogue from within, Elizabeth Belfiore provides a detailed discussion of Plato's use of poetry and of poets in the *Symposium* ('Poets at the Symposium'). All the speeches at Agathon's drinking party are in dialogue with poetry, argues Belfiore. But whereas the first five speakers quote poetry out of context in their unphilosophical praise of Eros, unaware of implicit contradictions which the Platonic reader can find between the lines, Diotima, as reported by Socrates, alludes to poetry, without quoting, without doing violence to the original contexts; moreover, first among the 'poets' for her is Parmenides. In a careful interpretation of these observations, Belfiore determines Plato's stance to

the question of poetry and philosophy by analysis of what Plato is *doing with*, as much as what he is *saying about*, poetry.

Next, there are six contributions centring around the *Republic*. Discussion of poetry is both a central theme within the dialogue and arguably what has sparked the greatest response in reception of Plato. But despite the vastness of scholarly literature on the two famous critiques of poetry in the *Republic*, the main issues involved are still very controversial: the status of tragedy, the aim and the parameters of the new poetry advocated by Plato, the meaning of mimesis, the problem of the consistency between the two critiques of poetry.

In 'Tragedy, Women and the Family in the *Republic*', Penelope Murray suggests four ways in which Plato's criticism of poetry, especially tragedy, is connected with his implicit negative attitude towards women. Her focus is on the application to women, in Book V of the *Republic*, of the programme of education of the two upper tiers of Plato's society, as outlined in Books II and III, on what this would mean for women, and for Plato's stance towards women. In pointing to the connection between lamentation and the feminine in Greek culture in general and in Plato's early dialogues in particular, Murray argues that of the two main elements of early musical education mentioned in *Republic* II and III, namely emphasis on stories about the gods as just models of behaviour and stories about heroes as brave and self-controlled men, the second holds the key to the male model of psychology that underlies the whole of Plato's conception of the state and man within it, including his views on degenerate forms of society and character in Books VIII and IX. That this is bound up with a specifically male type of poetry is reconfirmed in Book X.

Murray touches on Plato's psychology in connection with his poetry as well as on the central notion of *mimêsis*, 'enactment' or 'representation'. These two issues are taken up by Gabriel Richardson Lear and Jera Marušič. Lear and Marušič attack the old question of the consistency or otherwise of the notion of *mimêsis* in *Republic* Book III and Book X. Both argue that there is only one notion of *mimêsis* at play, and no shift in meaning involved.

In 'Mimesis and Psychological Change in *Republic* III', Gabriel Richardson Lear sees *mimêsis* specifically as 'appearance-making'. Plato's principal objection in Book III of the *Republic* does not concern the danger of thinking oneself into another's character, but in taking pleasure in what it is not good to take pleasure in, in imitating and representing different

characters. In the *Republic*, *mimêsis* is not criticised *qua* impersonation, but it may nevertheless have a negative psychological effect because of the addictive pleasure entailed in acting out an inconstant, uncontrolled multitude of manners.

In 'Poets and Mimesis in the *Republic*', Jera Marušič approaches the apparent differences between Book III and Book X of the *Republic* through a semantic analysis of the notion of *mimêsis*. Her contention, too, is that what constitutes *mimêsis*, the meaning of the term, is the same throughout the *Republic*; application to different objects imitated and represented, however, results in differences in the attributes such cases of *mimêsis* have, and thus effectively in different types of *mimêsis*. In a discussion of relevant passages in *Republic* X, Marušič develops a differentiated picture of exactly what Plato lets Socrates accuse poets of, and of the means he employs in introducing and exploiting the analogy of the painter, his craft and activity as a parallel to the poets.

In a number of chapters, the difference in context and direction of Books II and III on the one hand, Book X on the other, has been noted; different aspects of this tension are explored by Stephen Halliwell in 'Antidotes and Incantations: Is There a Cure for Poetry in Plato's *Republic*?'. Halliwell's prime contention is to set into relation Plato's criticism of poetry and the appreciation of poetry variously expressed in the dialogues. His concern is not least with the effect these two seemingly conflicting attitudes have had in the history of direct and indirect reception of Plato and Platonism, and how an understanding of these reactions to Plato may be in line with what Plato himself may have allowed the 'philosophical lover of poetry'. His target is the first half of *Republic* X as the key text suggesting to many readers that banishing poetry from the state expresses Plato's own ultimate position in the matter; Halliwell's antidote to a doctrinally rigid reading is an interpretation of the frame of the argument and what Halliwell calls 'Socrates' epilogue'; in his reassessment, Halliwell draws attention to the circumstance that Book X is addressing different sensitivities of the reader from those addressed in Books II and III.

In 'Tragedy, Pity and Thumos', Pierre Destrée addresses a discrepancy between *Republic* II–III and *Republic* X of another order: the apparent absence of the middle element of the soul, the *thumos*, from Book X. While the soul of the earlier part of the *Republic* is tripartite, falling into a rational part, *logistikon*, the collective of the desires, *epithymêtikon*, and, in between them, a spirited part or spirit, *thymoeides* or *thumos*, the division of the soul relied on in Book X is, it seems, the pre-Platonic bipartite division into a rational and an irrational part. By analysis of the

function of the *thumos* in the earlier part of the *Republic*, and by relating this function specifically to the education of the young through *mousikê*, i.e. in the first place poetry, Destrée shows how the *thumos* is very much the target of what is said about poetry and its effect on the soul also in the last book of the *Republic*.

Plato's analysis of the soul is also at the centre of the chapter by Rachel Singpurwalla ('Soul Division and Mimesis in *Republic X*'). Singpurwalla argues that the division of the soul in *Republic X* paints a picture of parts being defined in terms of cognitive tendencies; this, she argues, is Plato's fundamental criterion, as already laid out in the *Protagoras*; the tripartite division of the soul in *Republic IV–IX*, apparently determined by different values, must be interpreted against this background; what is said about painting and poetry in Book X forms a key to our understanding of the soul as divided along cognitive lines. Plato's views on poetry and its role in education and society must in turn be interpreted in light of this.

In 'Image-making in *Republic X* and the *Sophist*', Noburu Notomi begins by revisiting, as does Most in the first chapter in this volume, Socrates' statement in *Republic X* of the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy. Notomi draws attention to the circumstance that not only was philosophy a new thing in Plato's days, 'poetry' as well was something not previously conceptualised as a unified object. In this sense, too, it is Plato who invents the ancient quarrel between the two. In his discussion, Notomi emphasises the close relation between the discussion of poetry in *Republic X* with the discussion of the image-maker in the *Sophist*. Notomi's contention is that the intertextuality between these two texts forces us to re-evaluate what is said in the earlier text at a deeper ontological level. Through nuanced analysis, Notomi can show, in the *Sophist*, too, a space for the philosopher as image-maker, in contradistinction to the mere apparition-maker who produces nothing of worth.

In 'A Transfer of Energy: Lyric Eros in *Phaedrus*', Elizabeth Pender offers a reading of the *Phaedrus* that analyses this dialogue as Plato's response to the poets' treatment of the power of Eros. While Eros in poetry is a predominantly dangerous force, Plato, in using especially archaic poetry, integrates elements of Eros/*erôs* and poetic possession into his tripartite image of the soul, where they can be productive in conjunction with reason. Plato builds a dialectic of the poets' external control and compulsion exercised by Eros and the internal, self-imposed control that is reasoned *sôphrosynê*. The inconstancy that follows the rule by unbridled erotic frenzy in many ways echoes the inconstancy

Lear sees as the result of exposing the young to any sort of mimetic poetry. But Plato's own creation in the *Phaedrus*, the central myth of the soul as charioteer, too, is influenced by, and to some extent modelled in its diction and imagery on, lyric predecessors and their depiction of a winged Eros and the madness he conveys.

The issue of the good, philosophical poet raised, *inter alios*, by Collobert and Halliwell, is also addressed by Gretchen Reydam-Schils. In 'Myth and Poetry in the *Timaeus*', Reydam-Schils begins with the observation that, just as the Socrates of the early dialogues, the Socrates of the *Timaeus*, too, is ironic in his disavowal of expertise and his assertion that in his interlocutors he has found experts that can fulfil his passionate desire to see his *politeia* in action. When Socrates compares his creation of a city to the works of painters and poets, the reader must nevertheless reckon with the possibility of a different kind of creation from those condemned in the *Republic*, as the philosophical poet is also a maker with one eye on the forms. The subsequent accounts by Critias and Timaeus then exemplify two types of story and of story-telling, two types of approach: the memorised factual account, and the story, however imperfect, composed in accordance with knowledge and the truth. In *Timaeus*, Plato portrays the ideal writer whose creative recreation itself creates reality.

The last two chapters offer readings of Plato's view of poetry and the poets in his last work, the *Laws*. In 'Correctness' and Poetic Knowledge: Choric Poetry in the *Laws*', Antony Hatzistavrou addresses the question of the conditions of correct choric poetry in Book II of the *Laws*. He differentiates between different levels of knowledge and different aspects of mimetic correctness. Because a primary function of music in the *Laws* is educational, as had been the case in the *Republic*, Hatzistavrou's analysis serves to bring out both similarities and consistencies across the two works, and also differences, at least in emphasis and the degree of specificity. The result is an argued re-evaluation of the psychological conditions and the epistemological parameters of composition and reception of music and poetry at this final stage of Plato's development.

In 'Legislation as a Tragedy', Susan Sauv  Meyer, finally, argues that an interpretation of Plato's discussion of tragedy in Book VII of the *Laws* must take as its starting point the Athenian's statement that the legislation that constitutes the subject of the *Laws*, rather than true philosophy or Plato's dialogues, is claimed to be the finest tragedy. In introducing this metaphor of 'tragedy', Plato does not refer to the legislation presented in the dialogue as calamitous, a necessary evil, in short, not in any

modern sense of the word tragic; Plato's metaphor refers to tragedy as a genre, and it is the task of the interpreter to ascertain in what way this metaphor applies. A key feature of tragedy was its competitive setting: something also seen in the confrontation with aspiring tragic poets in *Laws* VII. Another key feature is the chorus, and the chorus is the primary means of education in *Laws* II. But the nature of tragedy is imitative representation, and in this sense, Meyer demonstrates, the laws in the *Laws* indeed represent imperfectly the best life.

The reader of Plato's dialogues may in the final analysis well be confronted not with one 'poetics', or with two contrasting models, but with several models of what poetry is and what the poets do.¹ The fact that a limited number of text passages can elicit such fundamentally different readings and responses, though, is also an indication that we are still far from a comprehensive account of Plato's thinking about poetry. May the nineteen discussions presented here help in the illumination and elucidation of Plato's ongoing dialogue with the poets.

¹ An observation made by Walter Cavini towards the end of the Louvain conference.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT ANCIENT QUARREL BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY?*

GLENN W. MOST

My title derives from a celebrated passage in Plato's *Republic*, one that is cited regularly in scholarly discussions of his view of poetry. It occurs in Book X, near the end of the second extended analysis of poetry in that work:

Then let this be our defense—now that we've returned to the topic of poetry—that, in view of its nature, we had reason to banish it from the city earlier, for our argument compelled us to do so. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let's also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as that “dog yelping at its master,” the one that is shrieking; “great in the empty eloquence of fools”; the “mob of overly wise critics”; and the “subtle thinkers” who are “beggars all”; and myriad other signs of this ancient opposition of theirs.¹

These words of Plato's are familiar; yet despite—or perhaps because of—their very familiarity, they turn out upon closer inspection to be full of unexpected perplexities. Just what kind of opposition between poetry and philosophy is denoted by the vague words *diaphora* and *enantiôsis*? Are the poetic phrases Socrates cites intended to prove merely the claim that that opposition existed, or also the further claim that it was ancient, and if so how are we to understand that quality of being

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¹ *Rep.* X, 607b–c. Ταῦτα δὴ, ἔφη, ἀπολελογήσθω ἡμῖν ἀναμνησθεῖσιν περὶ ποιήσεως, ὅτι εἰκότως ἄρα τότε αὐτὴν ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀπεστέλλομεν τοιαύτην οὖσαν ὃ γὰρ λόγος ἡμᾶς ἦρει. προσείπομεν δὲ αὐτῇ, μὴ καὶ τινα σκληρότητα ἡμῶν καὶ ἀγροικίαν καταγνῶ, ὅτι παλαιὰ μὲν τις διαφορὰ φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ποιητικῆ καὶ γὰρ ἡ “λακέρυζα πρὸς δεσπότην κύων” ἐκείνη κραυγάζουσα καὶ “μέγας ἐν ἀφρόνων κενεαγορίαισι” καὶ ὁ “τῶν διασόφων ὄχλος κριτῶν” καὶ οἱ “λεπτῶς μερμινῶντες,” ὅτι ἄρα “πένονται,” καὶ ἄλλα μυρία σημεῖα παλαιᾶς ἐναντιώσεως τούτων. This translation, as well as all other ones in this article, is taken from Cooper (1997); I have modified it, and the Greek text, to reflect my understanding of the poetic quotations (see below), and I have added a translation of the final words, which are oddly lacking there.

ancient? Furthermore, although Socrates speaks about a quarrel between two contestants, can we be sure that it was an equally balanced dispute, given that all the phrases he cites are from poets against philosophers? How are we to understand the fact that he speaks of a contest not between individual writers, between poets and philosophers, but rather between two modes of discourse, poetry and philosophy, given that all the quotations seem to be directed against single individuals or loose collections of individuals? And above all, how are we to interpret the specific phrases he cites—who wrote them, and what did their original authors mean by them, and how do they now function within the present argumentative context into which Plato has inserted them?

To some extent, most of these issues have already been discussed by a number of other scholars,² though of course I at least am hopeful that reconsidering them here will turn out to have some degree of usefulness. But along with these other questions, there is another, no less fundamental one, which does not seem to have been adequately explored at all, or even acknowledged more than a couple of times: whether in fact there was in reality, or was not, any kind of ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry of the sort that Plato describes here.

To limit the possibilities of misunderstanding, let me try to be more precise. My question is not whether or not there was, within the philosophical writings of Plato, a long-standing dispute between poetry and philosophy. For the scholarly consensus is that there indeed was, and this view is manifestly well founded.³ From the early *Ion* through the more mature *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, until the late *Laws*—to mention only these dialogues—Plato's own quarrel with the poets is well established, deep-rooted, persistent, recurrent, explicit, and intense. So no one is likely to dispute the claim that Plato's philosophy engaged synchronically in a systematic disagreement with poets and poetry and that this disagreement lasted diachronically throughout his whole career.

But by the same token it is obviously impossible to understand Socrates' phrase "an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" as referring to the domain of Plato's philosophy—not only because to do so would irrevocably destroy the historical fiction of Plato's *Republic* (at the

² See for example Gould (1990), 4–69; Rosen (1993), 1–26; Nightingale (1995), 60–67; Kannicht (1996), 189–191, 218–219; Murray (1997), 14–19; Levin (2001), 127–167; Naddaf (2002), 122–125.

³ See, besides the works listed in the preceding note, also e.g. Murdoch (1977); Ferrari (1989); Asmis (1992); Moss (2007).

dramatic date of the dialogue, Socrates is unlikely to have known very much about the development of Plato's writings from their beginning to end), but also because Socrates' words are manifestly designed to justify his present disparagement of poetry—or at least to deflect possible criticism of it—by referring to a conspicuous and long-standing hostility between the two discourses, of which Plato can presume his readers to know not only that it exists but also that it stands outside of and is prior to the current discussion and is now finding in that discussion only its most recent (and, perhaps, most perfect) instantiation. It thus seems certain that Plato can only mean Socrates to be making the claim that there was a well-known and well-established ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy long preceding the fictional date of this dialogue.

So the question arises: was there? In modern scholarship, the phrase “ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry” has been used so often that it has become rather hackneyed; for example it figures prominently in the titles not only of a recent book on Plato's views of poetry⁴ but also of various studies devoted to aspects of the relations between Greek poetry and philosophy in general.⁵ Particularly its use in studies of the latter sort suggests that at least some modern scholars assume that such a quarrel really was a general feature of ancient Greek culture before Socrates—in other words, they seem to consider Plato to be a reliable witness to a real Greek tradition of hostility between poetry and philosophy which existed independently before Plato (and indeed before Socrates). Is this because they have examined the matter and found Plato's words to be an accurate reflection of it, or because they have simply adopted his authority unquestioningly? Perhaps it is worth reexamining the question to see just what the evidence for such a quarrel might be. After all, already in 1902, in his commentary on this passage, Adam (1965), 2.417 pointed out, “There are few traces of this ‘ancient feud’ in the extant fragments of early Greek poetry.” And in recent years the voices of those who in one way or another have called the very existence of such a quarrel into doubt have multiplied: thus Brock (1990), 40 argues that “the ‘ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’ is for Plato essentially a matter of comedy attacking philosophy,” Nightingale (1995), 60 claims that “Plato's suggestion that there is an ‘ancient quarrel’ between these two genres should not be interpreted as true historical reportage; rather, it is part of a bold rhetorical strategy designed to define philosophy and invest it

⁴ E.g. Levin (2001).

⁵ E.g. Rosen (1988), Gould (1990), Kannicht (1996).

with a near-timeless status,” and Murray (1996), 231 suggests that Plato was “anxious to establish the antiquity of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, but one suspects that it was largely of his own making.”⁶ So let us reconsider the evidence for such a quarrel.

As is well known, in culture as in marriage, any good quarrel needs two sides. Let us begin with the one side, philosophy attacking poetry: setting aside for the moment the difference between individual exponents of the two discourses and the discourses themselves, let us ask what the evidence is for philosophers criticizing poets before Socrates. Xenophanes, as has often been pointed out in discussions of Plato’s “quarrel,”⁷ explicitly polemicizes against the representation of the gods to be found in Homer and Hesiod (21B10–12D–K), and also opposes the symposiastic custom of singing songs about the wars of the Titans, Giants, and Centaurs (B 1).⁸ And the influence of Xenophanes’ critique of epic theology on Plato’s own criticism of the poets’ portrayal of the gods in Book II of the *Republic* is manifest. So it is tempting to think of Xenophanes as one of the philosophical critics of poetry of whom Plato is thinking. But even if it is not unlikely that Plato himself may have understood Xenophanes in this way, it is worth remembering that from our standpoint it is easy to recognize that Xenophanes—who is writing his compositions in the same verse measures as the poets he is criticizing and who is presenting them, as far as we can tell, at the very same sorts of public rhapsodic recitations as the ones at which epic poetry was performed—represents not so much an attack upon poetry from without, from an external and heteronomous discourse like philosophy, as rather from within, from the discourse of poetry itself: like perhaps Hesiod (*Theog.* 26–28), and certainly Solon (Fr. 29 West), Pindar (e.g., *Nem.* 7.20–24), and so many other archaic verse writers, he is in a certain sense just one more poet who is criticizing other poets for their not telling what it is that he calls the truth (but that comes down in the end to the particular version of tradition that, in some determinate circumstances, for whatever reason, he happens to prefer). After all, if Xenophanes was really opposed to poetry on principle, why on earth did he choose to make use exclusively of it for

⁶ Cf. also Schlesier (2006), who examines the related question of how we are to understand Plato’s claim that the doctrine of poetic inspiration was ancient (see below).

⁷ E.g., Adam (1965), 2.417; Nightingale (1995), 64; Murray (1996), 230.

⁸ It is unclear just what kind of custom Xenophanes has in mind; certainly topics like these seem quite foreign to most of what we think we know about archaic Greek symposia. Does this passage provide evidence for the performance of Hesiod’s *Theogony* at such symposia?

all of his own writings? So, however Plato understood Xenophanes, and whether or not he was thinking of him here, Xenophanes is hardly likely to have understood himself to be a philosopher criticizing poets—not only in the trivial sense that, at the time he was writing, the word “philosophy” had not yet been invented, but also in the larger and more interesting sense that Xenophanes’ role as polemical rhapsode is characteristic of dimensions of archaic Greek poetry as a social institution whose relations with philosophy as it later came to be constituted are complex and indirect.⁹

What, then of Heraclitus, the only other pre-Socratic philosopher who is regularly cited in connection with this Platonic passage?¹⁰ Heraclitus too, to be sure, attacks Homer, Hesiod, and Archilochus by name (22 A 22, B 40, 42, 56, 57, 106D–K)—but he attacks not only these poets but also other figures, like Pythagoras, Hecataeus, and Xenophanes: indeed he does so in one of the very same aphorisms in which he also criticizes Hesiod (B 40). Of Heraclitus’ targets, Xenophanes wrote poetry, in which *inter alia* he attacked other poets; Hecataeus wrote in prose; Pythagoras probably did not write anything at all, and the works attributed to him later were in prose. So there seems little reason to think that Heraclitus was particularly opposed to poetry, or was attacking Homer, Hesiod, and Archilochus because they were poets. Rather, his criticisms of poets seem to be coherent with his attacks on any and all figures within Greek culture who made claims for authoritative wisdom, in whatever domain, but who did not live up to Heraclitus’ own high standards—in politics, for example, the Ephesians (B 121), and in mysteries and other religious practices a number of ritual figures and procedures (e.g., B 5, 14, 15D–K). So neither does Heraclitus seem to provide strong independent evidence for such a quarrel.

But apart from Xenophanes and Heraclitus, there is no other plausible pre-Socratic philosopher who can significantly hold down the philosophers’ end of the ancient quarrel to which Socrates refers.¹¹ So the evidence for a tradition of philosophers quarreling with poets is, if not quite non-existent, at best very scanty.

⁹ Of course, Greek philosophy as a whole may be said to have grown eventually out of such dimensions of archaic Greek poetry. But that is a different story, which I have discussed elsewhere: Most (1999).

¹⁰ E.g., Adam (1965), 2.417; Nightingale (1995), 64; Murray (1996), 230.

¹¹ Adam (1965), 2.417 also mentions Empedocles, but it is unclear what he has in mind. Democritus also discussed poetry, but not polemically, at least in his surviving fragments.

What, then, of the poets' half of the quarrel? Adam (1965), 2.417 cites a fragment from Pindar, ἀτελῆ σοφίας καρπὸν δρέπειν, "pluck the unripe fruit of wisdom" (Fr. 209 Sn.-M.); but even though Stobaeus (*eccl.* 2.1.21, 2.7 W.-H.) and the Byzantine life of Pindar (*vit. Pind.* Ambr. p. 4.6 Dr.), which transmit this text, both cite these words as having been written by Pindar about those they identify as *hoi physiologountes*, "natural philosophers," it is certain that Pindar himself could not have applied or even heard of this much later terminology (it is not attested before the 4th century BC), so that we cannot know for certain whom he had in mind and must treat this identification with caution as a possible but certainly anachronistic scholarly interpretation.¹²

But (with a single important generic exception, to which I shall return shortly) it is even harder to find evidence for any other pre-Socratic Greek poets quarreling with philosophers than it is for pre-Socratic philosophers quarreling with poets. Socrates himself quotes four poetic fragments as evidence for poets attacking philosophy¹³—the fact that he cites only this kind of text, and not ones in which philosophers attack poets, is no doubt due not to his considering the latter kind to be self-evident (or, alternatively, non-existent), but rather to the fact that at the moment he is speaking as a philosopher attacking poets, so he wants especially to cite poets attacking philosophers in order to create the impression of a kind of rough justice—philosophy, as it were, is getting back its own. The four quotations are all anonymous, attributed neither to an author nor to a work nor even to a genre; the authors of the passages are identified, as far as I know, neither by the scholia to this passage nor by any Neoplatonic commentary, and they do not seem ever to have been cited by any other Greek author, either independently or even from this very passage; they are devoid of both local and larger context, and are of highly uncertain interpretation and metrical analysis; even the exact limits of the quotations are unclear (so we cannot be certain that Plato's excerpts accurately reflect their metrical structure), and they are not above suspicion of being textually corrupt. Nonetheless, let us examine them with the only instruments available in such a case—the internal

¹² Pindar is often considered by scholars to have been an enemy of rational investigation of nature; for doubts on this view, see Most (2000).

¹³ The citations are taken as fragments of lyric poetry and are edited as frag. adesp. 987 in Page (1962), 524 (in the third citation, τῶν is omitted erroneously); in his apparatus, Page suggests that the last two might derive instead from a tragic or comic poet. As far as I can tell, they are missing from the standard editions of the fragments of Greek tragedy and comedy.

analysis of their language and meter—in order to see what light they can cast upon the quarrel.

(A) ἡ ‘λακέρυζα πρὸς δεσπότην κύων’ ἐκείνη κραυγάζουσα: “that ‘dog yelping at its master,’ the one that is shrieking.” The definite article probably does not form part of the quotation, here or in (C) and (D), but instead has a deictic function, pointing to a well-known formulation (or we may interpret it as a citational τὸ that has been assimilated to the gender of its substantive); the participle *kraugazousa* is often taken to belong to the quotation too, but given that the word occurs only in prose authors and is synonymous with *lakeruza*, it seems much likelier to be an interpretative gloss, together with the pronoun *ekainê*, intended by Socrates to explain the meaning of the unusual word *lakeruza*. If we are to delimit the quotation in this way, then, the resulting meter is ∪ ∪ - ∪ - - ∪ - ∪ - , which can be tentatively analyzed as *acephalous aristophaneus* + *iamb*; alternatively, and more probably, we may suppose that Plato has not cited the passage completely and that a long syllable is missing at the beginning (it is very tempting to supply ὡς before *λακέρυζα*), and in that case we can tentatively suggest the far more usual (complete) *aristophaneus* + *iamb*.¹⁴ Combinations much like this occur especially in Greek drama, both tragedy and comedy (the *aristophaneus* being particularly associated with Aristophanes).¹⁵ The dog barking at its master suggests a combination of insubordination and stupidity: a properly trained and intelligent dog barks at strangers and enemies, not at its own master, and for this very reason such a dog is taken as the model for the philosophical guardian at *Rep.* II, 376b. Evidently these words are not likely to be meant to be understood as really being only about dogs: presumably dogs are being used here metaphorically, and given that dogs are usually (though not always) a symbol of negatively valorized shamelessness in Greek culture, that this dog is a female, and that the dog spoken of here is doing something that dogs are not supposed to do, there can be little doubt that this dog is being used to castigate someone. Whom, and why? Only an individual, or a group? In the context of Socrates’ speech, we might be inclined to think of some particular philosopher who attacked the gods as being likened to a bitch that barks at her own master;¹⁶ but in the absence

¹⁴ In the latter case, an alternative, but less satisfactory, analysis would be *dochmius* + *hypodochmius*.

¹⁵ See Parker (1997), 82–84 on Aristophanes’ use of the *aristophaneus*.

¹⁶ At *Laws* XII, 967 c–d the Athenian says that some poets (presumably in particular

of any context whatsoever it is not possible to exclude any kind of stupid insubordination at all. The homely, indeed vulgar image suggests iambic poetry or sung lyric in Old Comedy; the meter strongly suggests rather the latter (and the adjective is found at Aristophanes *Birds* 609).¹⁷

(B) **‘μέγας ἐν ἀφρόνων κενεαγορίαισι’**: “great in the empty eloquence of fools.” The first syllable of *aphronôn* could be long or short, depending on whether mute + liquid makes position here or not.¹⁸ If we assume that it does, then the meter is $\cup \cup \cup - \cup - \cup \cup - \cup \cup - \cup$, which can be analyzed tentatively as *trochee* + *feminine hemiepes*;¹⁹ this is a combination found in three songs in Aristophanes.²⁰ It is clear that the words describe some man who is mighty among the empty discourses of fools, but it is less clear just who the target is. If the man is being claimed to really be mighty, so that he stands out by contrast among (*en*) the fools’ empty discourses, then they are being attacked and he is being praised; if the man is being claimed to be mighty only from the standpoint of the fools, so that it is within (*en*) their discourses alone that he is mighty, then both he and they are being attacked. Socrates presumably inclines towards the latter alternative, but in the absence of any context we cannot exclude the former one. Are the fools the members of some particular group? If so, then we might have here an attack upon a philosophical school or sect, e.g. “(Anaxagoras, really a fool himself, and) great (only) in the empty discourses of the foolish (Anaxagoreans).” Or are the fools all people, or all the members of a larger community? In that case, what would be at issue would be a single person’s justified or unjustified prestige among

comic poets) accused certain philosophers (presumably including Anaxagoras) of atheism and likened them to bitches baying in vain (τοὺς φιλοσοφούντας κῦοι ματαίαις ἀπεικάζοντας χρωμέναισιν ὕλακαῖς); the two passages are obviously not identical but may well be related to one another. The polemic image of the dog recurs in later poetic attacks upon philosophers, cf. e.g. Timon of Phlius *Suppl. Hell.* Fr. 825, 832.2; this may be motivated by the association between Cynics and dogs, by the poetic traditions to which Plato is referring, or perhaps even by these very passages in Plato.

¹⁷ Elsewhere the adjective is always applied to crows, never to dogs: a comic malapropism?

¹⁸ Such lengthening is very rare in comedy, but does occur sometimes, especially when a degree of seriousness intentionally reminiscent of tragedy or high lyric is being aimed at, cf. Parker (1997), 92–93.

¹⁹ An alternative, and more difficult analysis, would be *cretic* + *enoplian*. If we take the first syllable of *aphronôn* as short, it is not at all clear how the words should be analyzed metrically.

²⁰ Two are monodies, one is a parody of Euripides. See Parker (1997), 39 for the references.

fools in general. The content, fragmentary and ambiguous, could come from just about any poetic genre; but the *hapax* *κενεαγορίαισι* sounds comic (cf. *κενολογήσω*, Eupolis Fr. 456 K.-A.),²¹ and once again the balance inclines towards a song in Old Comedy, perhaps a parody or an allusion to a serious genre.

(C) ὁ **τῶν διασόφων ὄχλος κριτῶν**: “the ‘mob of overly wise critics.’” This quotation presents several textual difficulties.²² The easiest decision regards the definite article, which is probably to be excluded as deictic here as in (A) and (D). The other two questions are more delicate. *διασόφων* is transmitted by two of the three principle manuscripts, while the third reads *δία σοφῶν*; an adjective *διάσοφος* is not otherwise attested in Greek, and, because of the rarity of *δια-* as a prefix with adjectives, this reading has come under suspicion (Herwerden conjectured *λίαν σοφῶν*, “very wise”). At the end of the quotation, all three manuscripts read *κρατῶν*, the present active participle of *κρατέω* (“ruling, prevailing”); but the dangling participle in such a citation has seemed odd to many scholars, who have either provided an object for it by interpreting the reading of the one manuscript as *Δία . . . κρατῶν* (“prevailing over Zeus”; but this word order seems impossible) or have proposed conjectural emendations (*κράτων* “of heads,” Adam; *κριτῶν* “of critics,” H. Richards). On my view, *διασόφων* is acceptable as a typical comic *hapax*: a form of the corresponding verb, *διασοφίζηται*, is attested in Aristophanes (*Birds* 1619), and the prefix of the adjective can be interpreted as having an intensifying function as in the verb.²³ What, then, of the last word? If its first syllable is short, then the quotation can easily be analyzed metrically: - ∪ ∪ ∪ - ∪ - ∪ -, i.e. two iambs; but if that syllable is long, then the resulting pattern is - ∪ ∪ ∪ - ∪ - - -, and it is not at all clear how this should be understood metrically—indeed, this is perhaps one reason why Adam (1965), 2.418 feels impelled to combine his own conjecture *κράτων* (with a long alpha) with Herwerden’s *λίαν σοφῶν* to create the phrase *τῶν λίαν σοφῶν ὄχλος κράτων*, which can be read easily enough as *lekythion + spondee*, but at the cost of a double intervention into a text quite devoid of any contextual safeguard. All in all, it seems to me more prudent to retain

²¹ And cf. for later parallels in a similar context Timon of Phlius *Suppl. Hell.* Fr. 794 and especially 822.2.

²² My analysis of the textual problems is based upon the information provided in Slings (2003), 388.

²³ Wilamowitz suggested that the prefix *δια-* was Plato’s Attic equivalent of the common intensifying prefix *ζα-*: see Slings (2003), 388.

the short first syllable in the last word of the quotation, and then either to read $\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$ with the manuscripts or to adopt Richards' conjecture $\kappa\rho\iota\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$; I have printed the latter, with some hesitation, on the grounds that it seems considerably likelier that the words quoted would form a complete semantic unit, so that we would expect not a dangling participle but instead a genitive plural substantive which would go with $\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$ $\delta\iota\alpha\sigma\acute{o}\phi\omega\nu$ and conclude the phrase. $\kappa\rho\iota\tau\acute{\eta}\varsigma$ is not attested as early as the 5th century in the specific meaning of "literary critic," but the term is used regularly in that century, especially in Attic comedy, to refer to the judges at the competitions of the dramatic festivals,²⁴ and such a meaning would be quite appropriate here. If this analysis is accepted, then the metrical interpretation as two iambs leaves open, on principle, that they might come from iambic poetry; but an archaic iambic trimeter is rendered most unlikely by the lack of a penthemimeral or hephthemimeral caesura. Hence a dramatic source is much more probable: but if so, recitative or sung lyric, comic or tragic? The absence of the caesura typical of tragedy means that we can tentatively identify the line as being sung lyric iambs or, more likely, two metra of a comic recitative iambic trimeter; the slightly ludicrous term $\delta\iota\alpha\sigma\acute{o}\phi\omega\nu$ also points to comedy rather than to tragedy (the word $\delta\gamma\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ does not provide a distinguishing criterion, as it is found in both tragic and comic texts).²⁵ Another possible piece of evidence suggesting that this quotation derives from a comic source may be found in the fact that the formulation, "a mob of overly wise critics," seems to find a close parallel in a fragment of a recitative iambic trimeter of Old Comedy, Cratinus Fr. 2 K.-A. (from his *Archilochoi*), $\sigma\omicron\phi\iota\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$ $\sigma\mu\tilde{\eta}\nu\omicron\varsigma$, "a swarm of sophists"; and if we choose to adopt Richards' $\kappa\rho\iota\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu$, that would provide further (admittedly conjectural and circular) support for an attribution to Old Comedy.

(D) οἱ **λεπτῶς μεριμνῶντες**, ὅτι ἄρα **πένονται**: "the 'subtle thinkers' who are 'beggars all.'" Finally, an easy citation, at least relatively so. Setting aside the deictic definite article as in (A) and (C), and recognizing in the words ὅτι ἄρα a bridging formulation that connects within a single syntactic structure two parts of a poetic sentence that were originally not contiguous, we are left with this metrical structure: - - υ - - ζ ... υ - - ,

²⁴ LSJ s.v. $\kappa\rho\iota\tau\acute{\eta}\varsigma$ cites Aristoph. *Ach.* 1224, *Nub.* 1115, *Av.* 445, and compares And. 4.21.

²⁵ Adam (1965), 2.418 is reminded of Euripides, but the passages he cites are very different in spirit.

which is easily interpretable as two parts of a recitative iambic trimeter, either from iambic poetry or from tragedy or comedy. If the beginning of *πένονται* abutted directly onto the end of *λεπτῶς μερομνῶντες*, the result would be most of an iambic trimeter, but the insertion of the bridging words *ὅτι ἄρα* makes it extremely unlikely that the two phrases were immediately contiguous; presumably *πένονται* occurred in the line just before or just after *λεπτῶς μερομνῶντες*. The words describe people who, for all their subtle cogitations, do not succeed in becoming wealthy but still have to work hard for a meager living. Although nothing in the meter or language of these words provides a criterion for preferring an iambic, tragic, or comic source (all three words occur for example in both tragedy and comedy), their ethos, with their disdainful scorn for useless cerebrations and for anxious and pretentious poverty, is strongly reminiscent of Old Comedy.

Might Plato simply have invented these four quotations out of whole cloth? Almost certainly not, for their language is genuinely poetic, their meters seem authentic, and it would be very damaging for Socrates' argument if he had to resort to counterfeit citations. But even if they are genuine poetic citations, they are tantalizing in their obscurity and it is not likely that the veil of this obscurity will ever be lifted altogether; any proposals about their interpretation and collocation must be made with enormous caution and with the keen awareness that other, different understandings cannot be excluded. Moreover, they need not all come from the same author, or genre, or period—indeed, Socrates' rhetorical purpose would be best served if they happened to derive from very different provenances. Nonetheless, the preceding analysis of these citations seems to make an assignment of all four of them to Old Comedy at least highly plausible, if not quite certain.²⁶ Metrically, lexically, stylistically, the first two could both well come from monodic or choral songs, the latter two both from recitative iambic trimeters, all of them written by Aristophanes or by one or more of his colleagues and rivals.²⁷ Indeed,

²⁶ Wilamowitz assigned all four citations to Sophron: see Slings (2003), 388. But the fact that they can all be analyzed satisfactorily in terms of the meters found in Old Comedy makes it unlikely that they were written by Sophron, who seems, as far as we can tell, to have composed his works in a rhythmic prose.

²⁷ The suggestion that the source of all four quotations might be Comedy is not new. Adams (1965) 2.418, though disputing it himself, attributes it to Ast, Prantl, and Heine among older scholars; and cf. more recently e.g. Brock (1990), 40. A further question is to what extent this very passage in Plato—with its *agôn* between personified concepts and its reference to “harshness and lack of sophistication”—might itself be colored somewhat by the techniques typical of Old Comedy.

there is nothing to prevent us from supposing that all four quotations derive not only from the same genre, Old Comedy, but also from the same author and even from the same text. For all we know, what we find in this passage of Plato's *Republic* might be four fragments of the lost first version of Aristophanes' *Clouds*.²⁸

Now some readers might well think that we have already strayed much too far beyond the safe shallows of common sense into the murky depths of groundless speculation. Yet these last considerations suggest one more question, so temptingly that it seems hard to resist it. After all, philologists sometimes rush in where angels fear to tread. That question is this: for us, Plato's four citations are certainly fragments, inasmuch as they are surviving remnants of what were once whole texts but have not been transmitted as such and are probably lost forever. But what were they for Socrates' fictional interlocutors and above all for the very real ancient Greek readers whom the author Plato had in mind? Were they fragments for these too, in the sense that these quotations bore their meaning independently of the knowledge of their original textual context, or were they parts of wholes that could be brought to mind and that needed to be brought to mind if they were to be entirely understandable? To point the question: were Plato's readers supposed to recognize the quotations and identify them as coming from one or more specific texts, or did these phrases circulate as proverbial expressions devoid of any determinate context?

Difficult as were the earlier questions discussed here, this one is incomparably more delicate. In favor of the alternative that these phrases were intended to be identifiable quotations within a remembered context is the fact that at least the first one, a metaphor or simile, needs some degree of contextualization if its reference to philosophers is to be recognizable; but against it speaks the consideration that the generality of Plato's claims and perhaps also the longevity of the quarrel of which he speaks will be diminished if the reader can identify all of his quotations, especially if they all come from the very same source. In favor of the alternative that they had become proverbial may be the use of ἐκείνη in the gloss to the first quotation, where ἡ would have been quite enough (the demonstrative seems to point not to something that has just been said, but to something notorious in itself, independently of its present citation); but against it speaks the fact that none of these phrases

²⁸ I owe this ingenious suggestion to Dirk Obbink.

is ever cited as proverbial by ancient scholiasts or paroemiographers. How are we to decide between these two rival hypotheses? In abstract terms we have no difficulty in distinguishing between them; but I do not see what evidence could possibly decide the issue definitively one way or the other. My own preference is towards the proverbial hypothesis, as I take more seriously the possible threat to the rhetorical force of Plato's argumentation than the absence of these phrases from the little that we know about ancient scholarship. But I would prefer if possible a compromise solution, one leaning to this option but not embracing it absolutely, according to which these quotations did indeed circulate by themselves but most Athenians remembered that they came from Old Comedy attacks upon philosophers, even if many of them were no longer sure just which comedy or comedies were involved. So too, nowadays many quotations of Shakespeare circulate in Anglophone discourse and are recognized by at least a certain number of English speakers to derive from Shakespeare and to have some kind of determinate reference, but only very few speakers can securely identify exactly what play, let alone exactly what scene, they come from, and there are many people who use these phrases competently but are quite unaware that they derive from Shakespeare. My suspicion is that much the same was true of the four passages Plato has Socrates cite; but I do not see how this can be proven.

Let us sail back now from the oceanic uncertainty of Plato's ghostly readers to the relative safety of his transmitted text. On the one hand, identifying the quotations as ones from Old Comedy may seem to make it much easier to interpret Socrates' enigmatic reference to a quarrel between poetry and philosophy than we had first thought. For, while, as we have seen, it is very hard indeed to find any trace of attacks upon philosophers in any other poetic genre of Archaic or Classical Greek literature, it is well known that Old Comedy often chose as the butt of its invective contemporary philosophers, along with other kinds of intellectuals: Anaxagoras in particular seems often to have been satirized, and in Aristophanes' *Clouds* we have an extant comedy devoted in large part to making Socrates seem ridiculous. But on the other hand, before we jump to the conclusion that this is what Socrates has in his mind and what Plato wishes his readers to have in theirs, at least two serious problems with such an interpretation must be pointed out. First, Socrates calls the quarrel *palaia*, "ancient," and though this adjective need not denote something lost in the mists of primeval antiquity it certainly does suggest something old enough and of long enough standing to provide

a significant temporal dimension to the current discussion²⁹—and yet such comic attacks on philosophers were more or less contemporary with the fictional date of the *Republic* and at most preceded it by a couple of decades. On the one hand, scholars argue about just when the conversations in the *Republic* are to be imagined to have taken place, and probably no single date can be proposed that is entirely free of anachronism, but all the dates that have been suggested range from 425 at the earliest to 409/08 at the very latest, with a preference for the earlier part of this range;³⁰ on the other hand, the *Clouds* was first produced at the City Dionysia of 423, though the version we have is an unstaged revision of 418–416. Is that enough of a difference to justify the term *palaia*? And second, Socrates' whole rhetorical strategy at this point is designed to depersonalize his quarrel with the poets, to suggest that he is not criticizing them simply because he has a personal grudge against them but is instead acting out what is only the latest installment in a long-standing dispute involving institutionalized forms of discourse rather than mere individuals and many years of difference rather than a recent spat. But if Socrates cites only attacks by Old Comedy upon philosophers in order to bolster his case, does he not run the risk of reminding us of Aristophanes' attack on him in the *Clouds*, and thereby creating the appearance that he is seeking not impartial justice for philosophy but a personal vendetta for himself? In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates claims that the ill will provoked against him by Aristophanes' *Clouds* was one of the main reasons for the accusation against him (*Ap.* 18a–19c): is this discussion of poetry in the *Republic* nothing more than Plato's vindictive attempt to get some payback for him? But does this interpretation not seem too personal, too trivial to be entirely plausible?

This is a delicate and complex problem, and I doubt that it can be resolved exclusively on the basis of this single passage. Let us seek help from elsewhere in the Platonic corpus. There is another Platonic text that tells of “an ancient tale” (*palaioi mythos*) about poets:

²⁹ In Plato, the related adverb *πάλαι* can also designate something mentioned previously in the course of a single extended discussion, but the adverb usually, and the adjective always, points to something which occurred well before the present moment, and is separated from it by a considerable time: for a collection of most of the relevant passages see Ast (1835–1838) 3.25–17. Of course, if we wish to, we can simply dismiss the problem here by suggesting that Plato has nodded momentarily and called the quarrel “ancient” not from the point of view of the 5th-century character Socrates but from that of himself as a 4th-century writer. But surely the principle of hermeneutic charity will induce us to avoid the idea that Plato might have erred in this way.

³⁰ Doxography in Erler (2007), 202–203.

There is an old tale, legislator, which we poets never tire of telling and which all laymen confirm, to the effect that when a poet takes his seat on the tripod of the Muse, he cannot control his thoughts. He's like a fountain where the water is allowed to gush forth unchecked. His art is the art of representation, and when he represents men with contrasting characters he is often obliged to contradict himself, and he doesn't know which of the opposing speeches contains the truth. But for the legislator, this is impossible: he must not let his law say two different things on the same subject; his rule has to be "one topic, one doctrine."³¹

According to the Athenian here, speaking in the voice of a poet, "an ancient tale" told that when poets compose under the effect of divine inspiration they (a) are out of their minds, (b) represent mimetically other characters, and consequently (c) end up often contradicting themselves. Here too there is no doubt that such claims form an important part of Plato's own doctrine of poetry. But here too the language used to convey them allows, indeed impels us to ask quite simply whether or not there really was any such "ancient tale" prevalent in Greek culture before Plato's own writings.

The short answer is: no, there certainly was not.³² Of course, Greek poets since Homer often claim some form of divine inspiration; but for the unified, complex theory that Plato attributes to them, any evidence is entirely lacking. (a) Regarding poetic inspiration, Hesiod tells how the Muses gave him a branch of laurel and breathed poetic voice into him near a fountain but says nothing at all about being out of his mind (*Theog.* 22–35); Archilochus says that he composes poetry when he has lost his wits from wine but says nothing about oracular utterances or Delphi (Fr. 120 West); Pindar tells the Muse, "Give me an oracle, Muse, and I shall be your prophet" but gives no indication of having lost his mind (Fr. 150 Sn.-M.). While some of the bits and pieces of the Athenian's "ancient tale" regarding poetic inspiration can thus be found scattered among the actual utterances of the ancient Greek poets, there is no coherent and substantial evidence at all for such a view in early Greek

³¹ *Leg.* IV, 719c. Παλαιός μῦθος, ὃ νομοθέτα, ὑπό τε αὐτῶν ἡμῶν ἀεὶ λεγόμενός ἐστιν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν συνδεδογμένος, ὅτι ποιητής, ὁπότεν ἐν τῷ τρίποδι τῆς Μούσης καθίζηται, τότε οὐκ ἔμφρων ἐστίν, οἷον δὲ κρήνη τις τὸ ἐπιὸν ῥεῖν ἑτοιμῶς ἔῃ, καὶ τῆς τέχνης οὔσης μιμήσεως ἀναγκάζεται, ἐναντίως ἀλλήλοις ἀνθρώπους ποιῶν διατιθεμένους, ἐναντία λέγειν αὐτῷ πολλάκις, οἷδεν δὲ οὐτ' εἰ ταῦτα οὐτ' εἰ θάτερα ἀληθῆ τῶν λεγομένων. τῷ δὲ νομοθέτῃ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστι ποιεῖν ἐν τῷ νόμῳ, δύο περὶ ἑνός, ἀλλὰ ἕνα περὶ ἑνός ἀεὶ δεῖ λόγον ἀποφαίνεσθαι. I have altered the translation of μῦθος, see below. On this passage see especially Schlesier (2006), whose conclusions are close to my own.

³² See for example in general Maehler (1963) and Ford (2002).

poetry; if it is to be found anywhere at all before Plato, then probably only in the parodies of tragic and dithyrambic poets in the comedies of Aristophanes and his colleagues. (b) So too regarding *mimêsis* of character, there is nothing whatsoever like the Athenian's "ancient tale" in the attested ancient myths of Greek poetry. Helen, to be sure, is said to have spoken with the voices of the wives of different Greek warriors while they were hiding in the Trojan horse (Homer *Od.* 4.274–279), and the Delian maidens are said to be able to imitate the voices and babble of all people (*Hom. Hymn in Apoll.* 162–164), and the monster Typhoeus is said to imitate the sounds of all kinds of different animals and natural phenomena (Hesiod *Theog.* 829–835)—but nowhere is there reference to an archaic poet imitating different characters, and indeed it is hard to imagine such a doctrine ever having even occurred to anyone at all before the dramatic forms of tragedy and comedy, in which poets did precisely this all the time, had not only been invented but had also over the years become a familiar object for reflection. (c) And finally, as for the notion of poets contradicting themselves, archaic Greek poets have no hesitation in contradicting one another and doubtless contradicted themselves too from time to time; but given the largely oral nature of early Greek poetry, such contradictions were hardly likely to be noticed and criticized unless the poet himself chose for whatever reason to bring them to his listeners' attention, as for example in Hesiod's self-correction regarding the genealogy of Eris (*Works and Days* 11–12) or in Stesichorus' celebrated Palinode to Helen (Fr. 192–193 Page). But such passages certainly do not at all warrant the claim that there was "an ancient tale" according to which poets contradicted themselves by imitating different kinds of people.

So how can the Athenian possibly claim with any plausibility at all that such a *palaios mythos* ever existed in reality? To the real ancient idea of poetic inspiration he has attached a series of consequences and implications which are found nowhere among the ancient poets he seems to be thinking of but, if anywhere, then only in Old Comedy parodies of poets who claim to be divinely inspired. Here, as elsewhere, our tendency to draw a strict generic and historical boundary between 5th century comedy and 4th century philosophy may be misguided: Plato appears to have learned far more for his literary theories from Aristophanes and his colleagues than some scholars seem to suspect.

But how can the Athenian get away with attaching these other notions to the doctrine of poetic inspiration as a single, widely shared *palaios mythos*? Perhaps we might be tempted to try to escape from this exegetical dilemma first by suggesting that one could interpret *mythos* not as

“tale” but simply as “utterance” and take *palaios* in a weak sense, not as meaning “ancient” but merely “of long standing, since a long time ago,” and then by applying the phrase not to some myth or tale prevalent in Greek culture in the centuries before Plato but instead to Plato’s very own utterances, going back to the *Republic* and even farther, to the *Ion* and other early texts, and now repeated and summarized by the Athenian. After all, are not all the components of this *palaios mythos* familiar elements of Plato’s own often-repeated doctrines? But such an avenue of escape is quite precluded for us: for not only must *mythos* designate, if not perhaps a myth, nevertheless some form of utterance more public and more institutional than a merely personal way of speaking,³³ and *palaios* must indicate, here as in the passage in *Republic X*, a significant temporal distance from the present, doubtless one greater than the length of a single author’s career; but also, and above all, it would be a very bizarre form of self-reference indeed, given both that the Athenian stranger is not identical with Socrates or with Plato, and that these words are not even spoken in his *persona* but in those of a poet.

It is no doubt better to interpret the Athenian’s words here as being based upon Plato’s own philosophical interpretation of what he considered to be the true meaning of ancient myths about the divine inspiration of poets and other charismatic cultural figures, and as deriving from such myths philosophical consequences (largely unimaginable for their original authors) in the light of Plato’s own doctrines regarding *technê*, *mimêsis*, and other related matters. That is to say, for Plato the very notions of poetic inspiration and *mimêsis* must necessarily possess certain features and pose certain dangers, and for him these are inevitably contained in those notions, so that if they are not explicitly stated by the poets they can be legitimately attributed to them. For example, when Hesiod told of his poetic initiation, he surely did not have in mind the meaning that Plato was to attribute to it three centuries later; but from Plato’s point of view, this philosophical interpretation of his is exactly what Hesiod must have really meant, a set of ideas that might well not have been clear to him when he composed his *Theogony* but that he would have had to acknowledge as being his true meaning if Plato could have had an opportunity to question him obstinately enough. After all, Socrates seems to have believed, at least upon Plato’s testimony, that he would be able to

³³ On Plato’s use of the term *mythos* and concept of myth, see most recently Morgan (2000), 155–184, and Most (2002). The Cooper translation offers here “proverb,” which captures this public aspect of the word but misleadingly suggests a short a pithy sentence rather than a complicated story of the sort that the Athenian tells.

converse in the Underworld with the famous dead, including Hesiod himself, after his own death (*Ap.* 41a), and it is hard to imagine him not wanting to seize the opportunity in order to pose just such questions.

So in one sense the Athenian is quite right, for what is involved is indeed *in some sense* an ancient tale; but at the same time he presents that ancient tale under the semblance of a seamless unity together with a thoroughly modern and highly idiosyncratic interpretation that in fact attributes to it a meaning which we can recognize as being very different but whose difference he quite elides. A kind of philosophical allegoresis transports the dim and fuzzy ancient poetic utterance into the clear, cold light of the present, where it can reveal what it can be said always already to have really meant and can make a helpful contribution to a modern problematic; or conversely, the present philosophical concern is retrojected back into the distant past where it is discovered to have already been an essential component of a long-lasting and ancient tradition, one which has never died out—indeed, one which has been brought to renewed vigor in Plato's time and by his efforts. We, in our position, can see clearly that the ancient poetic utterances are being thoroughly transformed in meaning by the Platonic discourse so that they can come to signify something very different from what the poets themselves must have meant; but for the philosophical allegorist, that difference, which we cannot fail to recognize, is entirely unreal or at the least invisible to him, for he is fully convinced that what they meant is exactly the same as what he now says they meant.

To return to the passage in *Republic X* from which we began: to be sure, it is obvious that there are some significant differences between that text and this one in *Laws IV*. For the latter turns shrewdly upon an ambiguity in the word *mythos* (an ancient tale exactly as the poets told it, or its true meaning as the philosopher now explains it?) and allegorizes passages which it does not cite, while the former is bolstered by citations that are surely genuine and does not submit them to an allegorical interpretation. But nonetheless, bringing these two passages together may help us with our initial difficulties in understanding what is meant by the "ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry." For doing so suggests that *in a certain sense* there simply was no such thing. In both passages, Plato is generalizing so broadly from the evidence of poetry that he comes very close to a full-scale invention—without, however, quite getting there. Plato is not a literary historian: he is not a reliable witness to a real tradition that existed before him and independently of him, which he is now bringing to our attention as a neutral fact worthy

of being remembered. Instead, *in a certain sense* he has just invented that tradition by a process involving two steps: he cites these poetic utterances as anonymous fragments, thereby isolating and decontextualizing them; and he generalizes them in such a way that they can become evidence not only of individual personalities but of larger discursive structures. One sign of this procedure of generalization is that Plato has Socrates speak not of determinate individual philosophers and poets in this passage but of *philosophia*, philosophy, and *poiêtikê*, poetry; another is that he uses the vaguest of all possible terms to denote the difference between them, namely *diaphora* and *enantiôsis*, instead of anything more specific and more personal; a third is that he broadens the temporal horizon by calling that quarrel *palaiâ*, thereby extending it backwards, from the present moment of uncomfortable proximity to Aristophanes' *Clouds*, into a vaguer, fuzzier, more impersonal, and therefore rhetorically safer past horizon; and a fourth is that he adds, after these four quotations, just in case these are not enough, that there are many, many others that he could also cite if he chose to. This same procedure, together with the tendency of decontextualizing citation, leads Plato to have Socrates identify neither author nor text nor genre of any of the passages he cites (for to indicate their exact provenance would narrow the scope of his claims and thereby tend to deligitimate them). In fact, the only relevant quarrels that plays any substantial role in Greek literary history in the period up to Socrates oppose not philosophy *tout court* to poetry *tout court* but Xenophanes to the traditional accounts of the gods found *inter alia* in the epic poets, and not poetry *tout court* to philosophy *tout court* but rather Old Comedy to the general intellectual movements we call philosophy and Sophistic, and in narrower terms pit first a few comic playwrights against Anaxagoras, and then somewhat later in particular Aristophanes against Socrates—one more reason why Plato might well have preferred not to have Socrates identify more exactly the sources of his quotations. And these are not really generic oppositions between philosophy and poetry *tout court* anyway, if only because there is little or no evidence for any consciousness of such a generic opposition before Plato and this opposition may even be in the process of being constructed in this very text of his.

Out of this narrow and, potentially, uncomfortably personal basis, Plato constructs a large and fundamental conflict of cultural and philosophical values by substantially extending and radically over-generalizing a single case or closely connected group of cases. Does this mean that Plato simply invented the ancient quarrel? Yes, but only *in a certain sense*.

To say that the quarrel is largely a consequence of the way Plato viewed earlier and contemporary poetry and philosophy does not mean that he consciously fabricated it, that he recognized that he was imposing meanings on earlier writers that were historically false, that he was attempting to fool his readers by granting philosophy a status to which it was not entitled, or that he was intentionally counterfeiting a non-existent dispute for his own rhetorical purposes. Instead, given Plato's philosophical commitments, it was inevitable that he read the earlier poets in this way, attributing to them the meaning that he surely was convinced they must have had in mind—or would have had in mind, if only he could have asked them.

Viewed in this light, it becomes evident that there is a significant difference between what Plato meant by “the ancient quarrel of philosophy and poetry” and what some recent scholars have meant by the same phrase: the scholars who retroject Plato's words onto the earlier conditions of Greek literature seem to be presupposing that he read exactly as we do, and neglecting the difference between his mode of reading and his intellectual interests and program on the one hand, and our own on the other. That difference is nothing more, but also nothing less, than the difference between ancient philosophy and modern literary history. And *that* difference, unlike “the ancient quarrel of philosophy and poetry,” is a very real *diaphora* or *enantiôsis*.

CHAPTER TWO

POETRY IN PLATO'S *GORGIAS*

FRITZ-GREGOR HERRMANN

In recent years, Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* has not commonly been regarded as central to an account of Plato's attitude towards poetry.¹ Yet, the *Gorgias* is the dialogue which presents the first statement by Plato on that genre of poetry which is at the core of Plato's criticism of poetry in the *Republic*, tragedy; and secondly, the dialogue itself is, at least in its second half, consciously modelled on a real Greek tragedy, Euripides' *Antiope*.² We thus have both a theoretical criticism and—at least potentially—an immediate practical application, to wit, an example of how to write good tragedy, a tragedy not open to the criticism levelled against the genre as it is perceived by the character Socrates in this particular Platonic fiction, the dialogue *Gorgias*. In an assessment of Plato's attitude towards poetry and the poets, discussion of the *Gorgias* therefore has its rightful place. In this discussion, I shall take as my starting point Socrates' criticism of tragedy which arises in the dialogue in the course of the second discussion of the distinction between 'empirical' pursuits that aim for pleasure on the one hand, and on the other 'technical' pursuits that aim for what is best, be it in relation to the body or to the soul (500e3–501c6).³ Socrates asks Callicles (501d1–502d9):

¹ Among students of Greek 'poetics', Gorgias and Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* were the focus of attention in the first half of the twentieth century; see the evaluation by Süß (1910), 49–107, which is exploited for 'poetics' by Pohlenz (1920), with summary (1954), esp. 193; following Pohlenz (1920) and others, Koller (1954), esp. 157–162, makes exaggerated claims for a poetic theory in Gorgias and Plato's *Gorgias*. Reactions to Koller, not least Else (1958), whose criticisms are in themselves justified, are more in tune with current neopositivistic agnosticism than the more speculative 'historical' reconstruction of Koller's ilk, which is often regarded as a matter of—and for—the nineteenth century; as a result, too much of Koller and those on whom he draws is sacrificed. For a partial rehabilitation of Koller, however, cf. the long footnote 22 in Havelock (1963), 57–60, which constitutes the best brief account of the history of the term *mimēsis*, together with some incisive criticism concerning the methodology of diachronic semantic reconstruction. See further Flashar (1956), 18–19. The narrative account of Janaway (1995), 41–54, does—with the apparent exception of Pohlenz (1920)—not make reference to early twentieth-century discussion. On Gorgias and *mimēsis* cf. the index of Halliwell (2002), 421, s.v. 'Gorgias'.

² See esp. Nightingale (1995).

³ The relation between pleasure and the good, and actions motivated by either or

SOCRATES: But is this so in relation to one soul, but not in relation to two or more?

CALLICLES: No, but also in relation to two or more.

SOCRATES: So, there is also such a thing as ⟨someone's⟩ pleasing those gathered together without envisaging what is best?

CALLICLES: I certainly believe so.

SOCRATES: Now, can you say what the pursuits are that do this? Or rather, if you wish, tell me, while I am asking, which ever *seems to you* to be among them, and which ever *seems to you* not to be among them. Let us first consider playing the aulos. Does ⟨that pursuit⟩ not seem to you to be such a one as to pursue pleasure only, Callicles, and to have concern for nothing else?

CALLICLES: It seems so to me.

SOCRATES: So also all ⟨pursuits⟩ that are such, such as playing the cithara—in competitions, that is.

CALLICLES: Yes.

SOCRATES: But what about the instruction of choruses and the making and composing of dithyrambs? Does this not thoroughly seem to you to be such ⟨a pursuit⟩? Or do you believe that Cinesias, the son of Meles, has the least concern that what he will say be such that those who hear it might become better as a result? Or is his concern that it will please the crowd of the spectators.

CALLICLES: That at least is clear—certainly as far as Cinesias is concerned.

SOCRATES: But what about his father Meles? Is it that *he* seems to you to play the cithara looking at, and with a view to, what is best? Or ⟨does he do what he does looking⟩ not even to what is most pleasant? For when he sings he causes the spectators pain.—But be that as it may. Consider whether cithara-playing as a whole and dithyrambic poetry does not seem to you to have been invented for the sake of pleasure.

CALLICLES: It certainly seems so to me.

SOCRATES: But what about this solemn and wonderful ⟨pursuit⟩, the composition of tragedy: at what does it direct its effort? Is its beginning and its effort⁴—and is this what seems to you to be the case—solely to be pleasant to its spectators, or also, in the event that there is something that is sweet and pleasant to them but bad ⟨for them⟩, to ensure that it will not say this, but if there is something unpleasant but useful, that it will say and sing that, whether they like it or not? In which of the two ways would the composition and poetry of the tragedians seem to you to operate?

both, is one of the most persisting themes running through Plato's dialogues; outside the *Gorgias*, it surfaces notably in the *Protagoras* and the *Republic* and culminates in the *Philebus*, where it is the explicit topic of discussion. For the role of pleasure and the good in connection with poetry and poetic education in the *Laws*, see Hatzistavrou in this collection.

⁴ For the complexities of this sentence, see Dodds (1959), 324.

CALLICLES: That is certainly clear, Socrates, that (the composition and poetry of the tragedians) aims more at pleasure and at being pleasant for the spectators.

SOCRATES: Now, did we not say, Callicles, that such a thing is flattery.

CALLICLES: Very much so.

SOCRATES: Come on, then. If someone were to take away from around⁵ poetry as a whole melody and 'rhythm'⁶ and metre, will what remains come to be something other than speeches (*logoi*)?

CALLICLES: That is a necessity.

SOCRATES: Now, do these speeches speak to a large crowd and many people (*dêmos*)?

CALLICLES: Yes.

SOCRATES: So poetic (pursuit) is a (kind of) 'public speaking' (*dêmêgoria*)?

CALLICLES: It seems to be so.

SOCRATES: Now, would it be public speaking in the manner of the rhetor (*rhêtorikê dêmêgoria*);⁷ or do the poets not seem to you to do the thing of the rhetor (*rhêtoreuein*) in the theatres?

CALLICLES: It certainly seems so to me.

⁵ The language suggests that melody, 'rhythm' and metre are, as it were, 'wrapped around' the words; thus the common translation of 'the trappings of melody etc.'

⁶ The question whether *rhythmos* meant 'rhythm' in the modern sense or rather 'word order' must be left aside here.

⁷ This sentence has been construed and translated in a number of different ways which are bound up with potentially very different interpretations of what exactly the structure of Plato's argument is. As this may be important for our purpose, I cite some alternatives. Cary (1848), 204: 'Therefore it must be a rhetorical method of popular speaking: for do not poets appear to you to employ rhetoric in the theatres?' Deuschle (1982), 378 (written ca. 1859): 'Also wäre sie eine rednerische Volksansprache. Oder treten die Dichter in den Theatern nicht als Redner auf?' Plaistowe (1894), 80: 'Would poetry then be a kind of public speaking that is based on rhetoric, or don't you think that poets practice the art of rhetoric in our theatres?' Jowett (1892, 1937), 564: '[Soc.: Then poetry is a sort of rhetoric? Cal.: True.] Soc.: And do not the poets in the theatres seem to you to be rhetoricians?' Apelt (1919, 1988), 124: 'Also eine rednerische Volksansprache wäre sie. Oder scheinen dir die Dichter in den Theatern sich nicht als Redner zu zeigen?' Hamilton (1960), 109: 'In that case it will partake in the nature of oratory. Don't you think that the tragic poets play the part of orators in their own world of the theatre?' Chambry (1967), 254: 'Donc un discours d'orateur. Ou bien les poètes ne te semblent-ils pas faire acte d'orateur dans les théâtres?' Irwin (1979), 79: 'And surely public oratory is rhetoric. Or don't you think the poets practice rhetoric in the theatres?' Allen (1984), 291: 'Now demagoguery is rhetoric? Or don't you think the poets orate in the theatres?' Zeyl (1987, 1997), 847: 'And such popular harangue would be oratory, then. Or don't you think that poets practice oratory in the theatres?' Waterfield (1994), 97: 'And 'popular oratory' is just another way of saying 'rhetoric'. I mean, don't you think poets are rhetoricians of the theatre?' Hamilton/Emlin-Jones (2004), 98: 'In that case it would be oratory. Don't you think that the tragic poets play the part of orators in their own world of the theatre?'

Suffice it here to note that the assertion, independently advanced in 1991 by both E. Schiappa (2003, esp. 40–49; 212–216; cf. 219–225) and T. Cole (1995, 2), that *rhêtorikê*

SOCRATES: Thus we have now found a (kind of) ‘rhetorical’ pursuit (*rhêtorikê*) for people of this sort: children at once and women and men, both slaves and free men; (a rhetorical pursuit) which we do not admire very much: for we say that it is flattery.

CALLICLES: Very much so.

This passage is potentially crucial to an understanding of Plato’s thought on poetry between the *Ion* and the *Republic*, provided that it really is concerned with poetry and not just with rhetoric, as part of a process of demarcation of the ‘philosophy’ of Socrates, and by implication Plato, from the pursuit of Gorgias and those in his wake. An evaluation of the passage may begin with three modern comments. In 1959, E.R. Dodds (1959, 320) writes on this passage, which he labels a “digression on the social purpose of public musical and dramatic performances”:

I have described this section of the dialogue as a digression, since no use is made of it in the subsequent course of the argument. Plato, it seems, has simply taken the opportunity to point out in passing that his condemnation of rhetoric applies equally to certain other types of public performance, and in particular to tragedy, which shares with rhetoric its subservience to the whims of the δῆμος and its incapacity to distinguish between “good” and “bad” pleasures.—The modern reader may well be startled to find Plato speaking of Attic tragedy in terms that a bishop might use in discussing the dangers of commercial television.

Dodds subsequently advances three arguments designed to avoid a simplistic understanding of the passage in the *Gorgias*. A year later, in 1960, Paul Vicaire’s *Platon, critique littéraire* saw the light of day, too close in time to have taken Dodds’s commentary into account, and therefore an independent assessment. Vicaire notes (1960, 25) under the heading of “*Gorgias*: La poésie n’est qu’un aspect de la rhétorique; elle en a les défauts”:

Le *Gorgias* aborde la poésie par le biais d’une discussion sur la qualité et la légitimité des plaisirs, et dans la mesure où cette forme d’art peut être à quelque degré comparée à la rhétorique, sujet du dialogue. Socrate, pressé par Polos, développe ses vues sur la rhétorique. Celle-ci n’est qu’un empirisme, et ne vise qu’à plaire; “pratique étrangère à l’art” (463A), elle s’apparente à d’autres empirismes qui n’ont pour but que la flatterie: la cuisine, la toilette, la sophistique et la rhétorique. Socrate revient un moment plus tard à cette théorie de la flatterie, pour répondre à Callicles

as a term is probably first attested, and quite possibly coined, by Plato in the *Gorgias* has a bearing on this passage and on the reader’s assessment of how Socrates’ characterisation of tragedy and the tragic poet is intended; see further n. 10 below.

et réfuter la thèse de l'identité du plaisir et du bien. C'est alors seulement qu'il prend la poésie comme exemple de pure flatterie, le métier de poète ne pouvant être classé que parmi les professions "indifférentes au bien et seulement occupées ... des moyens qui procurent à l'âme du plaisir" (501B), sans tenir compte de la qualité de l'agrément.

This subordination of poetry under rhetoric is given a different emphasis by Stefan Büttner, who in his *Literaturtheorie bei Platon* (2000, 229f.) sums up Plato's position in a section on 'Die Bewertung der Rede im *Gorgias*' which follows equivalent treatments of the 'evaluation of literature in the *Symposium*' and 'the evaluation of speech, or speeches, in the *Phaedrus*'. We read:

Die Aussagen über die Rhetorik im *Gorgias* sind auf gleiche Weise allgemein gehalten wie im *Phaidros*. Dies belegen Textstellen, welche die Tragödiendichtung bzw. die gesamte Literatur als eine Art Volksrednerie, die ihrerseits wieder ein Teil der Rhetorik sei, bezeichnen (δημηγορία ἄρα τίς ἐστὶν ἢ ποιητικὴ) (Grg. 502b1–d8). Daher ist es wichtig, die Kriterien, die in diesem Dialog zur Beurteilung von Reden eingeführt werden, zu betrachten.

This criterion for the evaluation of speeches is named later, after quoting *Gorgias* 503d6–504a4 (2000, 230f.):

Das entscheidende Kriterium für gutes Reden—und für das abbildende und das eigentliche Hervorbringen, deren Repräsentanten hier nebeneinander stehen, allgemein—ist also wiederum die vorangegangene Erkenntnis. ... Aus dieser Erkenntnis ergibt sich die einheitliche, harmonische Struktur der Rede, da der gute Redner "nicht aufs Geratewohl" die Bestandteile seiner Rede und deren Reihenfolge "auswählt" (οὐκ εἰκῆ ἔκλεγομενος), sondern—so kann man leicht ergänzen—aus der sachlichen Notwendigkeit (ἀνάγκη λογογοραφικῆ [Phdr. 264b7]).

These three quotations and representations of Plato's view of poetry in the *Gorgias* provide us with three theses.

First Dodds, who regards what is said about poetry as an aside, a digression which is strictly subordinate to the main theme, which is rhetoric. The reason which Dodds provides for this assessment is that, in the remainder of the dialogue, Plato does not return to poetry as a topic, let alone a theme of discussion. This, I think, is correct. But if there is one point that marks progress in Anglo-American scholarship on Plato over the last half-century, it is the gradual realisation that overt argument does not exhaust the content of Platonic dialogue. In this vein,

Andrea Nightingale⁸ has demonstrated how intertextuality with Euripides' tragedy *Antiope*, that is to say, implicit allusion and explicit quotation as well as adoption and adaptation of structural elements and the movement of the drama, inform Plato's dialogue *Gorgias*, perhaps from the very beginning, but certainly from Callicles' great speech (482c4–486d1) onwards, that is to say, considerably earlier than tragedy is mentioned and criticised at 501–502; Nightingale goes on to suggest that this intertext forms a subtext up to the very end of the dialogue, in that the function of Socrates' myth is the same as that of the *deus ex machina* at the end of Euripides' play.—One may or may not be convinced by each and every detail of Nightingale's interpretation,⁹ extensive use of a specific Euripidean tragedy at or near the relevant point of the *Gorgias* at which poetry is brought into the discussion cannot be denied. Dodds' statement concerning the absence of explicit discussion of poetry at any point in the *Gorgias* after 502, while formally correct, is therefore not a relevant argument in the context of an assessment of Plato's attitude towards poetry in the dialogue; following a line different from Nightingale's, I shall in due course suggest one way in which that may be so.

Secondly, Vicaire's claim that Plato's view on poetry as expressed in the *Gorgias* presents poetry as purely subordinate to rhetoric, which latter in turn shares the same intellectual deficiencies and, moreover, the same moral deficiencies as sophistic (1960, 281). To assess the strength of this reading, it is necessary to look at the way in which Plato lets Socrates introduce his remarks concerning poetry: The context is that Socrates, who has taken up the distinction introduced earlier, at 463a ff., of the professions that are τέχναι, 'arts', 'crafts' or 'skills' based on λόγοι, 'arguments', 'accounts' or 'reason(s)', and those that are ἐμπειρία, a word often translated as 'knacks', whatever that is, but perhaps more faithfully rendered as 'routines arrived at by experience which is a result of trial and error'—Socrates repeats his allegation that while 'skills' based on 'reason' aim at 'what is best', and thus aim at improving others, namely the recipients of such art or skill, rhetoric belongs to that brand of 'routines' that aim at 'pleasure' and the gratification of desires. This intended demonstration is achieved at 503a, and subsequently strengthened until Callicles refuses to participate further in discussion at 505d.

⁸ Nightingale (1995), Chapter 1, 47–55 and Chapter 2, 60–92.

⁹ Nightingale herself stresses the tentativeness and speculative character of some of her inferences.

The means of achieving this demonstration fall under one of Socrates' habitual ways of argumentation, habitual not least in the context of an *elenchus* or refutation. He argues by way of example from what is well known and agreed to what is less certain. On this occasion, though, Socrates does not rely on the power of analogy alone. He does not argue: "You, Callicles, agree that musical performances and also in particular tragedy aim at pleasure and gratification of the audience. Thus, don't you think that the same can be said for rhetoric which is also aimed at an audience?"—Instead, once he has obtained agreement on the nature of tragedy in the context of Athenian festivals as being flattery, he declares that tragic discourse is effectively rhetoric embellished by metre, 'rhythm' and, in some of its parts, melody, and that it is therefore already one example of rhetorical flattering or flattering rhetoric.

Socrates partly relies on the classification which he had introduced at 463, which in many ways prefigures the *dihaireses* or 'classificatory divisions' of the *Sophist* and other later dialogues. Socrates almost says: the case of tragedy demonstrates that one 'species' of rhetoric is flattery. This goes far beyond a mere claim that rhetoric in the assembly should be judged as flattery 'by analogy'. In order to obtain agreement from Callicles, however, Socrates employs another equivalence. He shifts, without announcing the fact, from talking about ῥητορικὴ, the τέχνη or ἐμπειρία of Gorgias, which as a technical term may or may not have been invented by Plato for the present purpose,¹⁰ to talking about ῥήτορες; but

¹⁰ See n. 7 above. Fundamental to a discussion of the origins and proliferation of adjectives in -ικός is Chantraine (1933), 384–394. He stresses the role of Plato in developing this type of coinage, which must have been *en vogue* among the (or some) sophists. In 1991, Schiappa (2003) and Cole (1995) simultaneously suggested that the term ῥητορικὴ was coined by Plato, a view that has gradually found acceptance. (Cf. e.g. Walker (2000), 4; Walker (2000) 331, n.4, cites Gentili (1988), 3, as a forerunner; the latter is an English translation by T. Cole of Gentili's Italian original of 1985.) Schiappa (2003, 40) writes: "The proposition advanced here is that the word *rhētorikē* may have been coined by Plato in the process of composing the *Gorgias* around 385 BCE." Cole (1995, 2) expresses a similar sentiment: "... the word *rhetoric* itself bears every indication of being a Platonic invention. There is no trace of it in Greek before the point in the *Gorgias* (449a5) where the famous Sophist—after hesitation and (possibly) a certain amount of prompting from Socrates (448d9)—decides to call the art he teaches the 'rhetorly'—that is, *rhētor's* or 'speaker's'—'art' (*rhētorikē technē*). And the 'speaker's art' would probably have sounded too much like the 'shyster's' or 'demagogue's art' for the historical Gorgias or any of his contemporaries to want to lay claim to it himself. [...] Even in the next generation the orator and educator Isocrates (c. 436–338 BC), usually credited with the creation of one of the two major 'traditions' in ancient rhetorical theory, never uses the word—nor does any other Attic orator. [note 2, p. 159: Aeschines uses the adjective *rhētorikos* (3.163) and the adverb *rhētorikōs* (1.71), but only to mean 'pertaining to a speaker' or 'eloquently'.] Down

in addition to moving from the thing to the person, from the practice to the practitioner, ῥήτορες in common Attic parlance were not in the first place rhetoricians, they were simply ‘speakers’, in particular those ‘speakers’ in Athenian democracy who did not just vote and in that way voice their opinions in the assembly, but who spoke out and commented on προβουλευματα (i.e. matters put in front of the assembly for discussion) or moved their own proposals and counter-motions for voting. In *this* way, Socrates obtains Callicles’ agreement, because in *this* way ῥητορικὴ, ‘rhetoric’, as an abstract form has through an ambiguity in the term ῥήτωρ been associated with particular historical and real-life individuals, Athenians like Callicles, not only specialised travelling professionals like Gorgias.

But yet one further observation of methodological importance must be made before we can reach a verdict on the assertion that, in the *Gorgias*, poetry is strictly subordinated to rhetoric. Why does Callicles so readily agree that rhetoric is like poetry without metre?—The answer may be that Callicles agrees because Callicles is the host and friend of Gorgias.

to the end of the fourth century, all occurrences are, with a single exception (p. 121), confined to Plato and Aristotle.² On p. 121, Alcidas 15.1 is cited as the other early reference for *rhētorikē*, without the implication, however, that this predates the *Gorgias*; cf. Cole (1991), 173 n.4.—These observations should be seen side by side with one made by Belfiore (1984, 2006), 93: ‘*Mimētikē*, ‘versatile imitation’, is Plato’s technical term for the imitation of many things, and *mimētikos* (pl. *mimētikoi*), ‘versatile imitator’, is the term for the practitioner of this art. That the *-ikē* forms of *mimēsthai* refer only to imitation of many things and that this helps to reconcile the account of *Republic* 3 with that of *Republic* 10 has been noticed only by Victor Menza, in an unpublished dissertation, to which the first part of this section owes much. [note 15: V. Menza, ‘Poetry and the *Technē* Theory’, Diss. Johns Hopkins 1972.] Like other Greek *-ikē* words, *mimētikē* designates an art or science, and *mimētikos* refers to the expert of this art. It is likely that these terms were coined by Plato and first used by him at *Republic* 3. 395e1. [note 16: This conclusion is based on the studies by P. Chantraine, *Études sur le vocabulaire grec* (Paris, 1956), 98;]’—In a similar vein, it could be claimed that *politikē* and *sophistikē* may equally well have been ‘coined’ by Plato, introduced for the first time at *Protagoras* 319a4 (cf. 321d5, 322b5, 8, e2, 323a7, b2, 324a1; *Gorgias* 463d2, e4, 464b4, 7, 484d7, 521d7; *Meno* 99b2) and *Protagoras* 316d3 (cf. *Gorgias* 463b6, 465c2, 520b2) respectively; the latter word is rare even in Plato. And the same may be true of *poiētikē*; before the *Republic*, the term occurs once at *Ion* 532c8, and once at *Gorgias* 502c12. Isocrates’ *Against the Sophists* contains the phrases *politikoi logoi* and *poiētikon pragma* in the context of *technai*, and the speech is related in subject matter to the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias* and, in parts the *Phaedrus*; written around 390 BC, it is almost certainly earlier than the *Phaedrus*, most probably earlier than the *Gorgias*, and quite possibly earlier than the *Protagoras*: but at any rate, the step to *politikē* and *poiētikē* is not taken.—But a counter-argument to all such observation and speculation is that, ultimately, our sources for pre-Platonic usage are too sparse, and it is not methodologically sound to base arguments on the silence of Isocrates.

And among the many echoes of the writings of Gorgias in Plato's dialogue are—as has often been observed—many allusions to the *Encomium of Helen*.¹¹

Even the first sentence of this work by Gorgias underlies in many ways the structure of Socrates' argument:

Order (*kosmos*) for the polis is having good men, for the body beauty, for the soul wisdom, for a thing excellence, for a speech truth: but the opposites of these are *akosmia*, lack of order.¹²

This is taken up not only by Socrates' body-soul analogies, for which Plato could draw on Gorgias' own exposition elsewhere in the *Helen*, but also by mocking Callicles on the notion of order and disorder (506d–e, 507c–508c), and by criticising all three interlocutors for preferring, literally or metaphorically, beauty of body over health of body, cosmetics over gymnastics: Socrates thus criticises Gorgias even where he does not spell this out. But this is the subject of another discussion. The reason why Gorgias' *Helen* is important in the present context is because it was Gorgias' own distinction which Socrates uses to obtain agreement from Callicles. Callicles, and Polus and Gorgias, *must* agree to Gorgias' definition concerning the relationship between poetry and (normal) speech (*Helen* 9):

And I believe poetry as a whole to be, and call poetry as a whole, 'speech having metre'¹³ ...

Socrates has thus used the famous device ascribed to Protagoras of letting the opponent trip himself up and cause himself to fall, a device famously used by Socrates against Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.¹⁴ If, says Socrates, on Gorgias' definition poetry is *logos*, 'speech', with metre, and there is no other difference between the two, i.e. poetry is a form of *dēmēgoria*—a term that may well have been Gorgias' own¹⁵—and if poetry is not concerned with what is best, but is flattery only, then those *logoi* of Gorgias also are such flattery, by virtue of being *dēmēgoria*, distinct from poetry only by the absence of metre.

¹¹ Cf. in particular Koller (1954), 157–166; Dodds (1959), 320–322, 325.

¹² κόσμος πόλει μὲν εὐανδρία, σώματι δὲ κάλλος, ψυχῇ δὲ σοφία, πράγματι δὲ ἀρετή, λόγῳ δὲ ἀλήθεια. τὰ δὲ ἐναντία τούτων ἀκοσμία.

¹³ τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον ...

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Herrmann 1995.

¹⁵ *Phaedrus* 261b may be evidence of that; cf. Gorgias DK82A4, end (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De Lysia*, 3.26)—though Dionysius uses the term frequently elsewhere.

This may suffice as a first answer to the claim that poetry is strictly subordinate to rhetoric. While this claim is true in one sense, it is false in another. Poetry came before rhetoric just as rhetoric came before philosophy. Poetry was there and held its authority before the advent of rhetoric, the art of *logoi* or speeches. Gorgias, not least in the *Helen*, has to establish rhetoric against poetry. Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, has to establish philosophy against rhetoric—and against poetry which has been there all along: But it is not certain at the outset which of these two tasks is the more difficult.

One of Plato's tasks, as tradition has it, was to demarcate and justify his brand of philosophy as the only good way of educating the young, better than other 'modern' forms of education, but better also than what could be claimed as traditional. The *Ion* is the first example of this self-establishment, by undermining the claims of poetry. But the *Gorgias* is part of the same process. The passage under discussion demonstrates, concerning this process, how conscious Plato was of his own task. By quoting and paraphrasing that part of the historical Gorgias' writing in which Gorgias establishes his new art and skill and pursuit against the old means of education, Plato indicates to his audience that this process is what they themselves witness as well. There is a certain irony in the fact that rhetoric, the *technê* of *logoi*, turns out to be neither a *technê* nor to have *logos*—but this cannot be pursued here.¹⁶

¹⁶ Gorgias' emphasis on the power of *logos*, which does not go back exclusively to an Eleatic emphasis on 'mind', *noos* and *noein*, is one of the sources for Plato's giving *logos* and the *logistikon* a place of prominence in his discussion of the soul in the *Republic*, in the same way—and perhaps this is not unconnected—in which Werner Jaeger (1946a) could show that Plato adopted the *thymoeides* from Hippocratic discussion of the difference in *physis* or the *physis* of men from Europe and Asia in *Airs, Waters and Places*. Jaeger focuses on the occurrences of *thymoeides* in chapters 12 and 16. One could add to this discussion that the contrast of *sôma* and *psychê*, 'body' and 'soul', which is so prominent in Gorgias' writings, is inherent in the third of the three contexts in the Hippocratic treatise in which the word *thymoeides* is used. In section 23, we find a developed 'psychology' in which not only the elements highlighted by Jaeger are present, but also the words *sôma* and *psychê*; on the other hand, the notion of *authâdeia*, 'stubbornness', in the subsequent and final section of *Airs, Waters and Places*, which Jaeger likewise connects with the psychology of Plato's *Republic*, is also present in Gorgias DK82B6, his encomium on the Athenian war heroes; this text not only contains the word *euorgêtoi*, 'of good (mild?) temperament', which would fit into the Hippocratic discussion of *Aris, Waters and Places* at least as well as with the Periclean funeral oration by Thucydides, but also *phronimoi* and *kosmioi*, central terms in Callicles' discussion with Socrates; in addition, we hear of *entheos aretê*, 'divinely inspired or gifted excellence', a term that may be relevant in connection with poetic *enthousiasmos*. Gorgias' body-soul contrast and body-soul analogy

To turn to the third of the three assertions from which we took our departure: Büttner draws attention to *Gorgias* 502b1–d8, where tragedy is branded *dēmēgoria*, ‘Volksrednerei’, talking to and for the people. As tragedy, and, argues Büttner, in turn all literature has been shown to be part of rhetoric, Büttner asks for the criteria of evaluation of what constitutes ‘gutes Reden’, making good speeches and speaking well; and he adds: ‘and what are the criteria for mimetic and actual production, which stand here side by side, in general?’—I will not take issue with Büttner’s answer, which is that the criterion is that of knowledge. That must be so. One may add that this knowledge is coupled, as always in Plato, whether he describes the good man or the good god, with knowing what is good and doing what is good, for oneself and for others.¹⁷ I should like to take issue, though, with Büttner’s characterisation of tragedy as part of what he calls ‘abbildendes Hervorbringen’,¹⁸ ‘depicting production’. It is true that in the classification of ‘true skills’ and ‘practised routines’, *technai* and *empeiriai*, each skill that aims at the best through knowledge has, following it, and pretending to master its domain, one of those ‘routines’. And in this sense, one may say that by pretending to have the same aim as medicine, cookery mimics, copies and imitates medicine.

But that is not what Socrates actually says. Nor does it seem that this is what was meant in the first place. Büttner implies that tragedy is ‘abbildend’, ‘depicting’ or ‘imaging’, by virtue of being *mimēsis*. But is tragedy *mimēsis* in the *Gorgias*? In criticising tragedy and the rest of music as well as rhetoric, Plato, in the *Gorgias*, lets Socrates argue along two converging lines: The first line of argumentation is that, in any pursuit, only knowledge can guarantee the desired outcome; a routine, by contrast, is *stochastic*, aiming at a target and, as a routine, often hitting it—but without guarantee for the future; this is further explored not least in the *Meno*. The other line of argument is psychological more than epistemological: True skill based on true understanding is always looking for the best, disregarding pleasure, not as an enemy to be avoided, but as wholly irrelevant as a criterion. Since rhetoric and poetry are not based on knowledge and do not aim for ‘what is best’, *to beltiston*, they are rejected. The ground for this rejection is simply that all human activity must aim at and be for the best. There is no alternative and no exception.

is thus in many different respects a link between technical medical discussion and the Platonic body-soul analogy.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Herrmann 2003 and 2007.

¹⁸ Büttner (2000), 230.

Aesthetic considerations do not at any stage enter the equation. And while thus all actual fifth-century poetry, rhetoric and politics in general are discarded, Socrates does, of course, open the back door to let politics in again, when he refers to himself as the best, and in fact the only true politician Athens has had (521d). And by letting politics in, again, Socrates by implication also re-admits rhetoric and, as a part of it, poetry, including the most noble art of tragedy: if they are transformed and aim for the best. The importance of this is that these same criteria are the fundamental considerations concerning poetry in the *Republic*, too. In the *Republic*, poetry plays a crucial role in education: Good poetry, depicting the good and thus aiming for the good, with reason, with *logos*, is not only admitted but produced and generated.

But this argument, shared by the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, does as such not have recourse to *mimêsis*. If poetry were ‘mimetic’ in the *Gorgias*—a claim not made by Plato—it would as an activity be ‘mimetic’ of another activity. Poetry should copy and represent philosophy as the true means of education. But apart from the fact that this claim is not actually made in these terms, the claim that poetry is *mimêsis* when made in the *Republic* has, at least at first, quite different connotations. So the question is, why is there no *mimêsis* in the *Gorgias*? Why is there *mimêsis* in the *Republic*? And does it matter?—The last question is obviously the crucial one. For if the epistemological and psychological basis for the criticism of poetry are identical in the *Gorgias* and in later dialogues, including the *Republic*, and if *mimêsis* does not play a role in the *Gorgias*, the question arises whether any theory of *mimêsis* is crucial to Plato’s evaluation of poetry at all.

Plato offers an extensive criticism of rhapsodes, poets and poetry in the *Ion*, and of rhetoric and its practitioners in the *Gorgias*. The basis of his criticism, the criterion that allows Socrates to dismiss poetry and rhetoric, is, as stated explicitly, the distinction between knowledge and lack of knowledge on the one hand (*Gorgias* 454e; 458e–459e; 462b–465e), and on the other the Socratic claim that whoever knows what is good does what is good as far as that is in his power. All striving really is for what is good (*Gorgias* 467c–468e; cf. 509e). In the *Ion* and the *Gorgias*, Socrates’ criticism, if it can be called that, applies to any claim about human action or the goals and ends of human life that is at variance with these premises and this objective. Poetry and the ‘demegoric’ activity of the politician and those who set themselves up as educators of future *rhêttores*, i.e. those who are *rhêtorikoi*, form one class, or two classes, of

people who have criteria in this respect at variance with Socrates' views. The target in both dialogues are people out of the ordinary, people who lay claim to knowledge which would allow them to give advice and have influence. Criticism in these early dialogues is of things as they are, and of, from Plato's point of view, actual circumstances in Athenian society. Perhaps there is an element of parody in the *Ion* when the rhapsode is made to claim that he is in fact the best general (540d–541c), but no such jocular overtones or undertones pervade the *Gorgias*. At any rate, in both cases, Socrates, who in the *Gorgias* is following the new thing 'philosophy', is confronted with others like him, of his age or older, whose unjust influence in society he criticises. These people go wrong in public and by influencing others, where interlocutors in other early dialogues are in danger of going wrong in private, for themselves or in the education of their children. But Socrates' criticism of rhapsodes and poets, rhetors and rhetoricians in the *Ion* and in the *Gorgias*, that is to say before his discussion of poetry in Books II and III of the *Republic*, is conducted wholly without the concept of *mimêsis*.

But while the concept of *mimêsis* is thus absent from discussions of poetry in the early dialogues, it is not absent from discussion altogether. The two important contexts before the *Republic* in which *mimêsis* plays a part may both be termed ethical and, from a Socratic point of view, which holds, in marked contrast with the position of Calicles, that examination of oneself, and therefore education of oneself, does not end with the beginning of adulthood, educational. The first of these two contexts that I shall discuss stems from the dialogue *Protagoras*, which I consider as close in time to but slightly earlier than the *Gorgias*. Protagoras is defending his role as teacher of excellence first in mythical form (*mythos*; 320c–322d) and then with an exegesis of this myth;¹⁹ the explicating and explanatory *logos*, or rational account, contains additional argumentation and examples; one of the arguments concerns the question of what in life is considered by all to fall under the remit of education and what is regarded as given by nature and incapable of change, and thereby outside the remit of education, a contrast made by Protagoras in support of his claim that 'being just' and 'excellence' are by all Athenians considered 'teachable' (323c–324d). But why then do not the good educate their sons in *aretê*, 'goodness' or 'excellence', given that their sons are being educated in everything else (324d–325c)? The answer to this *aporia*

¹⁹ The distinction between *mythos* and *logos* is made at 320c–d and repeated at 324d.

is that the Athenians educate and admonish their sons from childhood onwards, and for as long as they live. Nurse and mother and *paidagōgos* and the father himself fight for it (*diamachontai*) that their son be as good as possible (*hōs beltistos*; 325d), first at home and then at school, with teachers (*didaskaloi*), who care most of all for their ‘orderliness’ or ‘well-orderedness’, their *eukosmia*, more so than for their ‘letters’ and their musical education.²⁰ And Protagoras continues (325e1–326a4):

But (after that) their teachers care also for those things, and when in turn they learn letters (reading) and are to understand what is written (*ta gegrammena*), just as beforehand they understood what was said (*tên phônên*), they set in front of them on their benches poems of good poets to read and compel them to learn them by heart, (poems) in which there are on the one hand many admonitions, on the other many stories and ‘praises’ (*epainoi*) and *encomia* of good men of old, so that a boy eagerly imitate (*mimêtai*) and strive (*oregêtai*) to become such a person.

The context is education itself. *mimêsis* is ‘imitation’ of good people and good actions, by other people. There is a link between *mimêsis* and poetry, but it is indirect. Poetry is just the medium which allows *mimêsis* of good people who happen not to be there in person, or not to be alive; otherwise, children could just imitate good people whom they happen to see and good deeds which they witness. *Mimêsis* in the *Protagoras* is thus central to education, but not central to poetry.²¹ On the other hand, what is said about music, rhythm and harmony on the following page (326a–e) clearly foreshadows much that is said about education in *Republic* Book III. But there, in the *Republic*, poetry, or at least one part of it, is mimetic—here, in the *Protagoras*, the behaviour of the child or youth or young man who is reading and learning is mimetic. What is the connection?

It is possible that the *Gorgias* forms the missing link after all, also as far as *mimêsis* is concerned. For the other relevant context in which *mimêsis* plays a part before the *Republic* is *Gorgias* 511a–513b. The argument there is that in order to survive and be powerful and influential under a tyrant one must be similar to the tyrant; that one must imitate his actions, but

²⁰ R.E. Allen (1996, 185) translates ‘deportment’, which hits the sense in common Attic but loses the etymological connection with Socrates’ comments on what is orderly, *kosmiôs*, in the *Gorgias* (493c–494a; 504a–d; 506e–507a; 508a); the stem *eukosm-*, is absent from the *Gorgias*, and *eu-*compounds are particularly frequent with Protagoras and Democritus; but cf. *euhexia* at *Gorgias* 450a, 464a.

²¹ Even if there were no close links between Protagoras and Democritus otherwise, one should in this context compare Democritus DK68B39: ‘It is necessary either to be good or to imitate (*mimeisthai*).’

that external imitation is not sufficient: one must be similar, *homoios*, by nature, and *act* unjustly where the tyrant would act unjustly, and thus *be* unjust where the tyrant is unjust. It is thus impossible to be a good man—something Callicles claims he is—and be powerful and influential in a state that is not ordered for the best and ruled by the best. *Mimêsis* here has thus, at first glance, nothing to do with poetry. But appearances can be deceptive. And the context of 511a–513b is not unconnected with what went before. Like the discussion of poetry and rhetoric as 'demegoric', it forms an integral part of Socrates' extended argument with Callicles which runs from 481b to 527e or, if one excludes the application of their theoretical results to actual life and Athenian politics and Socrates' role therein, at least to 518c.

The main steps of this argument are as follows: Callicles' contention that Socrates' previous discussion had gone astray because Socrates had failed to realise linguistic habits which obscure the contrast that exists between what is beautiful and what is ugly by nature (*physis*) and what is so by convention (*nomos*), and that by nature (*physei*) what is beautiful and what is good is identical, and is identical with what is sweet and pleasant, and that the good man who is superior is entitled to living for what is pleasant unbridled by the restrictions imposed by convention (*nomôi*), this contention is rejected by Socrates both with the help of repulsive examples of what an unrestricted life of pleasure entails and with a theoretical refutation of the identity of good and pleasure based on a theory of desire as lack and a deficiency that is not pleasant (481b–497c). Callicles' subsequent distinction between good and bad pleasures allows Socrates to revert to his previously stated position (462b–463a; 474c–475b) that there are two fundamentally opposed ways of life, one directed towards pleasure, the other towards what is good (499e–500e). It is at this point that Socrates, in the passage which formed the starting point of our discussion, talks about tragedy as an example.

In the context of the life directed towards the pleasant and the life directed towards the good, pursuit of the good requires skill (*technê*) that has reason (*logos*), but pursuit of the pleasant gets by with the memory of what has worked well on a past occasion, with experience (*empeiria*) that does not require reason. If these pursuits are employed in contact with other people, *technê* is always focused on creating order in its works and deeds, replicating an order which the agent perceives and has in mind; pursuits that are directed towards pleasure only, and which are based on experience, on the other hand, achieve their aim by

flattery and pandering to what is perceived as pleasant by the recipient (500a–503e). The right order and arrangement, however, which is the aim of medicine, the *technê* concerned with the body, is health; the corresponding right order in the soul is justice and temperance, *dikaïosynê* and *sôphrosynê* (504a–e; cf. 463a–465e). This *should* be the aim of the good *rhêtôr*, irrespective of the positive or negative consequences for his own life, as suffering injustice at the hands of others, though an evil, is a lesser evil than doing and committing an injustice (504e–509c; cf. 480a–481b). Only once this has been re-established does Socrates ask for the means of achieving the two aims of avoiding both the suffering and the doing of injustice (509c). For both, a certain power (*dynamis*) and skill (*technê*) are required, not just the wish and will (*boulêsis*) to avoid them. But since it had previously been agreed that nobody *commits* injustice willingly (467c–468e), the focus is now on the avoidance of *suffering* injustice. In an unjust state, where a tyrant has managed to come to power, this is only possible for a young man if he is willing to become friends with the tyrant, and since being friends is only possible between like and like, not between better and worse, one can be friends with a tyrant only if one is neither better, and thus envied and feared, nor worse, and thus useless and despised, but similar to and like (*homoios*) the tyrant (509c–510e). At this point, at 510b, Callicles, who had withdrawn from participating in conversation at 505c, rejoins the argument, as what Socrates says here seems to him to be in tune with what he holds himself. But here Socrates concludes that this apparent power gained by being similar to the tyrant can only be bought at the price of destroying one's soul by imitating the despot (*diatên mimêsîn tou despotou*) (510e–511a). Callicles accepts and reiterates triumphantly that, all the same, 'this imitating man will kill the one who does not imitate' (*houtos o mimoumenos ton mê mimoumenon ekeinon apoktenei*) (511a). Socrates accepts this, but holds against it the proverbial wisdom that what we want is the good and noble life, not the long life, a position which he illustrates with multiple examples (511b–512e). Then, at 513a, he resumes his previous line of thought and turns it into an argument *ad personam*, asking Callicles whether he really wants to assimilate himself to the constitution of the city in which he lives and wants to become as similar as possible to the Athenian people, to whom he must be similar if he wants to gain power among them; for he will not be able to obtain such a skill and become powerful unless he is similar, for better or for worse (513a–b). And Socrates concludes (513b4–c2):

For it is necessary—not to be an imitator (*mimêtên*), but in your own nature to be similar to them, *if* you want to achieve anything noteworthy regarding friendship with the Athenian people, and by Zeus certainly also (regarding your friendship) with the son of Pylampes.

Now, whoever makes you most similar to them, he transforms you into what you desire to be, a politician and rhetorician (*politikon kai rhêtorikon*). For each delights in what is said according to his own character and habit (*êthei*), but despises what is said according to another's (*allotriôi*).²²

From 513c onwards, Socrates reflects on the true politician, Athenian politics, the fate of the soul and the afterlife.

Before we turn to an analysis and conclusion, it should be noted that here alone in the dialogue Calicles concedes that he realises that Socrates is right (*dokeis eu legein*), even though he still claims that he is not fully persuaded;²³ Socrates retorts that it is precisely Calicles' love of the *dêmos* and of his beloved which stand in the way of his being really persuaded (513c–d). As regards the argument and the role of *mimêsis* and its connection with rhetoric and poetry, we can say the following: What Socrates says about *mimêsis* at 511a and 513b does indeed overtly not refer to poetry as *mimêsis*, as in the *Republic*, or to the characters portrayed in poetry as object of *mimêsis*, as in the *Protagoras*. Rather, Socrates in the *Gorgias* proposes that the citizen (*politês*) who wants to devote himself to politics, who wants to become *politikos kai rhêtorikos*, must imitate and through and beyond imitation become similar to the *dêmos*, the 'populace', if he wants to be powerful, because in Athens the *dêmos* is despot and tyrant, and whoever wants to become friends with a tyrant must, from a young age, like what *he* likes and despise what *he* despises and become and be similar in nature to him.

However, if this is taken together with what is said about poetry and rhetoric at *Gorgias* 501d–502d, that they aim at pleasing the souls of the crowd, then it follows by necessity that, if the crowd is master and tyrant, and if befriending the crowd is possible only through being similar and alike, then addressing the crowd through rhetoric and tragedy in

²² οὐ γὰρ μιμητὴν δεῖ εἶναι ἀλλ' αὐτοφυῶς ὁμοῖον τούτοις, εἰ μέλλεις τι γνήσιον ἀπεργάζεσθαι εἰς φιλίαν τῷ Ἀθηναίων δήμῳ καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία τῷ Πυριλάμπους γε πρὸς. ὅστις οὖν σε τούτοις ὁμοιότατον ἀπεργάσεται, οὗτός σε ποιήσει, ὡς ἐπιθυμεῖς πολιτικός εἶναι, πολιτικὸν καὶ ῥητορικόν· τῷ αὐτῶν γὰρ ἦθει λεγομένων τῶν λόγων ἕκαστοι χαίρουσι, τῷ δὲ ἀλλοτριῷ ἄχθονται . . .

²³ To what extent Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, is or is not successful in persuading his interlocutors has recently become the focus of attention in a number of studies; see e.g. Nightingale (1995); Stauffer (2006); Notomi (2007).

a pleasing manner amounts to imitating, *mimēisthai*, the foibles of the crowd. Rhetoric and poetry are thus, as a logical consequence, *mimēsis* of the *dēmos* and what is pleasant to the *dēmos*, with no regard for what is good. The rhetor and politician as well as the tragic poet do the opposite of what is demanded of them in *Republic* II–III, to depict only what is good, to portray god and the gods as good, and to sing the praises of good men, so that, as expressed already in the *Protagoras*, the young can imitate the words, works and deeds of good men.—One can add, by way of confirmation, that it is at 513b–c that Socrates speaks of Callicles’ love of the people of Athens and of the son of Pylilampes, a topic he had introduced at the very beginning of his conversation with Callicles at 481d, when he had contrasted it with his own love of philosophy and Alcibiades. Plato is thus closing a ring, marking at this point that Socrates’ love of philosophy and the truth, which is constant and has *logos*, has been shown as superior to Callicles’ love of the people, who are fickle and lack *logos*. Plato has let Socrates reach this conclusion by adopting both Gorgias’ body-soul analogy, together with the notion of excellence, *aretē*, through order, *kosmos* and *taxis*, and, as importantly, Gorgias’ statements on persuasion and the power of *logos*.²⁴ In the dialogue *Gorgias*, however, as we have seen, *logos* is both the spoken word and persuasive speech, and also the rationale which accompanies some pursuits, by which they qualify as *technai*, while other pursuits lack this *logos* and are mere *empeiriai*.

Paradoxically, as we observed, poetry and rhetorical speeches, i.e. *logoi* with and without metre and ‘rhythm’ that are addressed to crowds, with the aim of pleasing through flattery, lack *logos*. But this is not made explicit, just as the status of poetry and rhetoric as *mimēseis* is not made explicit in the *Gorgias*.

And thus there is one *caveat*: that, in the *Gorgias*, poetry and rhetoric amount to *mimēsis* of the expectations of their audience has been presented as a logical consequence of what Socrates said in the course of his conversation with Callicles from 480 to 513. But the old principle holds true that we cannot assume that an author is committed to the logical consequences of his assertions, and to the conclusions of his premises, if these consequences and conclusions are not explicitly stated. Our conclusion should therefore be different. The dialogues *Ion*, *Protagoras* and

²⁴ For Plato’s response to Gorgias in *Gorg.*, cf. Notomi (2007) and Mace (2007); for parallels to *Gorg.* 501–513 at *Rep.* VI, 499d–501b, cf. Herrmann (2003), 77–80.

Gorgias all have something to say about poetry, and what they say is in some ways alike or similar to what will be said about poetry in *Republic* II–III, in some ways different. In both the *Ion* and the *Gorgias*, poetry as it is actually composed, produced and presented in Athens is criticised for its lack of rational content and the authors' lack of knowledge; in the *Protagoras*, the role of poetry is defined as setting good examples for the young, and in the *Gorgias* actual poetry is criticised for its lack of directedness towards the good, a lack that goes hand in hand with lack of concern for the truth. In none of the early dialogues, though, is the notion of poetry as *mimêsis* made explicit. We therefore cannot assert confidently that the way in which poetry and *mimêsis* are connected in the *Protagoras* and the way in which poetry and *mimêsis* may be connected in the *Gorgias* are in Plato's mind already connected with either a notion of all poetry as mimetic or the distinction between 'mimetic' and 'dihegetic' poetry, and, if ever, there is certainly no suggestion in the early dialogues that *mimêsis* in and by itself produces something that is inherently deficient or second best by virtue of its being imitation only, and that rhetoric and poetry are worse than philosophy for *that* reason.

What may be observed, though, is that the ethical and epistemological criteria for an evaluation of poetry seem constant throughout Plato's discussions. Good poetry presents what is worthy of imitation, and what is worthy of imitation may only be achieved through a knowledge of what is good and bad, and through a directedness towards the good which aims at making the listener better.

One of the dimensions which the *Gorgias* adds to this evaluation of poetry is the body-soul analogy, and an emphasis on different modes of persuasion. We have highlighted in our exposition above the importance of 'what seems to be the case to a person' at each stage of a conversation. This is in tune with Gorgias' assertions concerning *doxa* as created, or at least moulded, by the powerful ruler *logos* as something that is fallible and unstable, *sphalera* and *abebaios* (DK82B11.68), and by the role *doxa* has throughout both the *Helen* and the *Palamedes*. But the real importance, and the real influence, of Gorgias may be more fundamental than this. Central to Plato's *Republic* is the image of the tri-partite soul which allows, among other things, for an explanation of inner conflict. This uniquely Platonic image or model is wholly absent from the earliest dialogues like the *Ion* and the *Crito*, where not even the term *psychê* is mentioned. Plato gradually works towards the developed concept in the *Protagoras*, the *Charmides*, the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*, approaching the topic from different directions and drawing on different views that

had been expressed in the two previous generations.²⁵ The notion of an ordered soul, in which *logos* is ruler, may owe more to Gorgias than is often acknowledged. If this were so, it would be fitting that Gorgias should, in his discussion of the power of words on the soul, have had a place for poetry: For it is on the basis of Gorgias' psychology and ethics that Plato develops, in the *Gorgias*, a notion of the nature, the role and the value of poetry in the education of the citizens of a city that furnishes all the prerequisites on which Plato's own psychology and theory of poetry in the *Republic* can draw.²⁶

²⁵ In addition to Presocratic philosophy, most notably medical writings as those now collected in the Hippocratic corpus; cf. e.g. the suggestion by Werner Jaeger (1946a) concerning the source of the notion of the *thymoeides* in *Airs, Waters and Places*, where it was supposedly part of a bi-partite model; see n. 16 above.

²⁶ Sincere thanks to the audience at Leuven for constructive comments, and to Ian Repath for commenting on a draft of this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

POETRY AS FLAWED REPRODUCTION: POSSESSION AND MIMESIS

CATHERINE COLLOBERT

The invocation of the Muses might be interpreted as a matter of divine inspiration. The Muses, goddesses of Memory, are telling the poet a tale that he transmits to his audience. In this case the poet is merely a mouth-piece of the divine, making no contribution to the message he delivers. This identification of “divine inspiration” and “divine possession,” which in fact is not the poet’s, constitutes the basis for the Platonic theory of inspiration that is defended in the *Ion* and other dialogues. Divine possession entails non-rationality because it entails the poet’s being literally ‘out of his mind,’ and therefore unable to give any account of what he says. Plato dismisses any contribution the poet might make to the poem. But Plato’s theory is problematic. For while in Plato the fact that poetic ability is a divine gift serves to deprive the poet of any *technê*, in poetry, there are various indications that divine inspiration is compatible with poetic skill on the part of the poet. The apparent tension in the poets is due, on the one hand, to the general idea that all human achievements are the product of a mandatory collaboration between gods and humans, and on the other hand, to the fact that the gods, as Plato himself argues in the *Timaeus*, are essential to the success of any human enterprise (27c2–3).

In his theory of inspiration Plato seems to fasten on the tension between these two aspects of the general conception of poetry, and, rejecting the idea of poetic creativity, concludes that the poet is nothing but a transmitter. From the *Ion* to the *Republic* Plato seems to move from the idea of the poet as a transmitter to that of an imitator who reproduces the superficial and external features of reality. The two Platonic theories, *mimêsis* and possession, lead to a similar conclusion: the poet lacks knowledge, and his activity does not aim at truths. Poetry could be the product of possession; it could be *mimêsis*; but it is definitely an activity stemming from ignorance. Whichever view is adopted, the result is the same. Is it then merely this result that is important for Plato in his treatment of poetry? One might think so, although there is a major difference between the two conceptions. Even though the poet inspired by the gods does not look for the truth, he may tell truths, whereas

the poet, viewed as merely an imitator, cannot. This latter discrepancy evidently amounts to a contradiction between Plato's two conceptions of poetry. This chapter offers a new attempt to overcome what may be merely a superficial discrepancy in Plato's treatment of poetry by examining the conception of poetry firstly as a transmission of divine speeches, and secondly, as flawed reproduction, and lastly, as a mimetic activity that rests upon possession.

1. *The Poet as a Transmitter*

Conceived as a divine gift, poetry is viewed as divine by nature by the poets. They introduce various ideas on poetry that may lead to the Platonic theory of divine possession; among them, first and foremost the strong linkage between the poet and the Muses. This linkage is one of dependence for if the Muses do not speak to him, the poet is unable to sing.¹ Besides, e.g. for Homer the rejection of the divine linkage dispossesses the poet of the gift of song, as Thamyras experienced it (*Il.* 2.594–600). Plato assumes the linkage between the divine donor and the human recipient to be a possession, because to transmit his poetry the god needs to possess the human bard (*Ion* 534c7, *Laws* 682a3, 719c4). Plato may rely here on the poets' idea of an outward constraint associated with that of the song's gift created by the gods.²

1.1. *Possession versus Knowledge*

In the *Ion* he describes possession as a seizure: the god seizes the poet (*echetai*: 536b1). The seizure is compared to a magnetic link (533d2–e2). Through the link (*hormathos*), the poet makes the Muse's creative power (*dunamis*) his own. However, in receiving this power the poet relinquishes his own identity. Self-identity is here synonymous with reason since the divine possession means a self-dispossession that Plato terms: *ouk emphrôn* (*Ion* 534a1). The self-dispossession means both an absence of self-awareness³ and self-control, which amounts to a loss of

¹ Plato also states this in *Phdr.* 245a5–8.

² See Woodruff (1982), 146–148. Let us note that the move from inspiration to divine possession is Platonic not Democritean. The various testimonies on Democritus are flimsy, and one should be prudent in using them. Among the testimonies, Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, 46, 194, *De Divinatione*, I 38, 80, Horace, *Ad Pisones* 295 = fr. DK 17, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, VI 168 = fr. DK 18 where Democritus speaks of a 'divine spirit'. In any case, what Democritus stated is poetic *mania* not possession (see Tigerstedt [1969], 73). See e.g. Verdenius (1983), 43, Tigerstedt (1970), Harriot (1969), 86–87.

³ As Bailly (1950) indicates the phrase is used for a dead person.

reason. The poet is under the god's control and no longer under his own. He is then nothing but 'an unconscious instrument of the divine', as Murray puts it,⁴ which also implies a passive instrument in the divine hand, as Homer may have previously hinted at.⁵

Plato deduces the poet's non-rationality from his instrumentalisation, which is a common view shared by all the poets. He thus makes the non-rationality of the poet a necessary condition for poetry. As a result, being divinely possessed consists in being in a non-rational state of mind. There are twofold points that Plato wants to make: first, the poet's ignorance, and second, poetry is not an activity based on knowledge, that is, it is not a *technê*. In the *Ion* Plato brings forward two arguments to demonstrate the poet's ignorance, which correspond in fact to two widespread claims: Homer's encyclopedic knowledge and the poet's technical ability to interpret divine speeches.

Let us first consider the former. Beginning at *Ion* 537a1, the Platonic argument is directed against Homer and his alleged knowledge.⁶ The problem Plato tackles in the *Ion* is multiple knowledge: Homer is in fact supposed to possess not only one but numerous domains of expertise. Plato challenges the shared idea in order to prove that it rests upon a misleading and irrelevant basis. Supposedly stretching out from the art of war to astronomy and from ethics to the gods, and death (*Ion* 531c4–d1, *Rep.* 598e1–3), Homer's knowledge is posited as a hypothesis in the Platonic argument. If Homer knew the numerous *technai* staged in his poetry he would be *politechnikos*. Plato however refuses to bestow upon anyone a multiple expertise and criticises here Homer's alleged *polymathia*.⁷ He represents the *polymathia* by the metaphor of Proteus (*Ion* 541e7), which means that to take various shapes as well as to set out multiple domains of expertise means to possess none. As Woodruff puts it, the poets 'do not have knowledge *how* to do anything, because there is nothing we can put our fingers on that they know how to do'.⁸ Behind the

⁴ Murray (1998), 7.

⁵ According to Ford (1994), 31–56, this is what Homer suggests. However, the passivity of the poet is highly problematic. The poet in the *Odyssey* appears as possessor of a *technê*. See e.g. Tigerstedt (1968).

⁶ When one asks Niceratus why Homer is beneficial to him, he answers: 'You know, doubtless, that the sage Homer has written about practically everything pertaining to man. Any one of you, therefore, who wishes to acquire the art of the householder, the political leader, or the general, or to become like Achilles or Ajax or Nestor or Odysseus, should seek my favour, for I understand all these things' (*Symp.* 4.6).

⁷ This has been previously done in fact by Heraclitus (DK40).

⁸ Woodruff (1982), 146.

critique of *polymathia* surfaces a criticism of the worldview and values that poetry stands for and that will be made explicit in *Republic* Books III and X.⁹

In fact, the Homeric invocation of the Muses makes plain, to a certain extent, an absence of knowledge on the part of the poets, which also marks the human limits and incapacity to know without divine help. This is why the Muses are viewed as necessary auxiliaries: ‘You are present and know all things, but we hear only a rumour and know nothing’ (*Il.* 2.485–486). As grasped by Homer and the poets at large, poetic activity stems from divine knowledge. This is why Plato can stand on the shoulders of Homer in repeatedly claiming in his work¹⁰ the poet’s ignorance (e.g. *isasi de ouden hōn legousin: Men.* 99c4).

1.2. *The Poet’s Alleged technê: Interpreting the Muses’ Words*

Let us elucidate now the second Platonic argument, which questions the poet’s alleged *technê*. According to Plato, the poet’s ignorance is of the same nature as the seer’s¹¹ since they both have a connection with the divine. It is no accident that Plato brings them closer together for, on the one hand, this has roots in the tradition,¹² and on the other hand, it is helpful for arguing that the poet does not possess a technical ability to interpret the gods’ speeches. In fact, Pindar claims to be a prophet (*aoidimon Pieridōn prophatan: Pean* 6.6) and a seer (*mantis: fr.* 94a5 Snell).¹³ The poet introduces himself as a prophet whose function is to interpret: ‘Give your oracle, Muse, and I shall interpret’ (*fr.* 150 Snell). Plato echoes Pindar’s claim in asserting: ‘The good poets are for us the interpreters of the gods’ (*Ion* 535a5).

Plato tests the role of interpreter,¹⁴ for the role may be the poet’s *technê*, and accordingly, the rhapsode’s *technê*, since he is for the poet

⁹ Cf. Griswold (2006).

¹⁰ ‘I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say’ (*Apol.* 22b9–c3). See also *Prot.* 347e2–7, *Rep.* 598c5–e4.

¹¹ The poet shares with the seer the inability to give an account of ‘the pronouncements produced by this state of divination or possession’ (*Tim.* 72a3–5, trans. Zeyl).

¹² Apollo is considered as the god of poetry: he is *musagetês*, chief of the Muses, and of divination (*Il.* 1.69–73). The association of the Muses with Apollo is expressed in *Il.* 1.604, *Theog.* 94–95, *N.* 5.60–69, *Hom. Hymn Ap.* 25.

¹³ Bowra (1964), 7–8.

¹⁴ The *prophêtês* is ‘the one who interprets the gods’ will,’ as Bailly states (1950) (my translation). Bacchylides 9.3, Plato, *Tim.* 72a2–b4.

what the poet is for the Muses (533e2–4). Let us specify the Platonic line of argument. Socrates hypothetically defines the *technê* as consisting of understanding (*suneiê*: 530c2) the poet's thoughts and speeches. Ion's hermeneutic art is specialized in one kind of poetry: Homeric poetry. Socrates queries what may be thought of as a hyper-specialization. Given the fact that poets deal with similar issues in their poetry, there must be a specific difference, which allows us to distinguish for instance Homeric from Hesiodic poetic style. This is in fact what Ion affirms: Homer creates in his own way (531d6), which turns out to be for Ion the best way. If this is the case, Ion is therefore able to recognize bad poetry from good. Now for this ability to be demonstrated, he has to be an expert in poetry at large. As a result, his expertise must consist in being a competent judge of all the poets (532b6–7). Yet as is acknowledged by Ion, the conclusion cannot explain the cause of his exclusive love for Homeric poetry. Ion being thus in an *aporetic* state of mind (532c3–6), Socrates "generously" gives him a solution: he does not possess any skill or knowledge relating to Homer. There is only one reason to account for his peculiar ability. This is not in fact that of interpreting Homeric poetry, but divine inspiration, i.e., according to Plato, divine possession.

The conclusion, however, does not match Ion's experience as a rhapsode who is well aware of and attentive to the audience's emotions over which he has good control.¹⁵ The awareness is crucial to his performance. Consequently, from inspiration to possession the conclusion does not follow. However, the identification is decisive.¹⁶ It allows Plato to argue that the poet cannot claim to be both inspired and hermeneutist, i.e., interpreter. If hermeneutics were the poet's *technê*, the hermeneutist would be in a conscious state of mind—a requirement inseparable from performing a *technê*, since a *technikos* must have control over his production and procedure. Being out of control, the production of the divinely possessed poet is therefore non-rational. For to be rational any production must be a result of knowledge, and consequently, be under the control of the producer. Divine possession and *technê* are therefore mutually exclusive (*ouk ek technês all' entheoi ontes*: Ion 533e6).¹⁷

¹⁵ See Greene (1918), 17 ff.

¹⁶ It is worth pointing out with Tigerstedt (1969), 63 'the remarkable uniformity of Plato's statements about the nature of poetical inspiration.'

¹⁷ In the *Apology*, inspiration is contrasted to wisdom not *technê*. However as Tigerstedt (1969), 24 rightly observes: 'What is said of their inspiration and their lack of knowledge is in general agreement with the statements in the *Ion*'.

The poet cannot claim to be both transmitter and interpreter.¹⁸ Dispossessed of any creativity, a mere transmitter, the poet cannot interpret and explain the god-poet's speeches. Plato denies the poet a double function, entailing a double expertise, which Pindar seems to allocate to himself. The poet's hermeneutics is nothing but receiving, transmitting, and accordingly, reproducing the divine speeches.¹⁹ As Nancy argues, 'far from consisting of understanding the gods' logos, the poet's hermeneutics consists in uttering such a logos.'²⁰ Plato does not admit an investigative *hermêneia*: transmission excludes interpretation, contrary to Pindar's claim, which Plato puts in Ion's mouth (535a5). More precisely, the Platonic test of the poet's definition as a hermeneutist leads to the definition of poetic hermeneutics as a transmission, which does not have a status of *technê*.

The contradiction arising from the poet's claim to be both inspired and a possessor of a *technê* stems from the Platonic identification of inspiration and possession. From a Platonic standpoint, divine possession and madness is the only possible choice the poet can make if he wants to keep the divine character of his activity. It is worth pointing out that the equation between divine possession and madness is reiterated in the *Phaedrus* although at first sight with a slightly different form. Plato here argues on the one hand that one should be respectful of poetic madness because it is a divine gift, and because, in addition, the poet cannot give it up without becoming a bad poet (245a5–7).

Let us examine whether Plato's position amounts to a defence of poetic madness, as some commentators argue.²¹ Having praised poetic madness, Plato invites us to praise the mad man over the moderate. He contrasts madness with moderation (244d4), and the mad poet with the moderate man (245a8). It seems very unlikely that Plato could stand on the one hand, as an advocate of non-rationality against moderation, and on the other hand, of the mad poet's friendship against that of the moderate man. Irony turns out to be the only possible interpretation of the passage. As Rowe argues, 'the tone of the *Phaedrus* is predominantly

¹⁸ Theognis, 769, Pindar, *Peon* 2.4.

¹⁹ See *Symp.* 202e1–4, *Pol.* 290c3–6, *Epin.* 984e–985b. See Desclos (1996), 131–155.

²⁰ Nancy (2001), 124.

²¹ E.g., Brisson (1974), 226 ff., M. Nussbaum (1982), 81 ff., Tigerstedt, (1969), 46 ff. Socrates' first discourse that is inspired is wrong, it ends up with the observation that Stesichoros was obliged to make a discourse to counter the discourse made out of the Muses' inspiration (243a3–8). Besides, Plato contrasts Homer's inability to acknowledge his mistakes with Stesichoros' ability to do it (243a5).

“light, ironic and playful”.²² Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the same statements are expressed in the same way in *Phaedrus* 245a and *Ion* 533e–534a, namely that uninspired poetry is bad poetry. In the same vein, Plato states in the *Laws* that inspired poets do not know what is correct and just in music because they are in a frenzy state of mind (700d5–e5). Moreover, Socrates ranks the life of the poet sixth in the scale of human lives (*Phdr.* 248e2).²³ The Platonic view of poetry in the *Phaedrus* rests upon the definition of poetry as a type of *mania* that amounts to possession. Let us note in passing that among the four types of *mania* that Plato distinguishes, only *mania* of the Muses equates with possession. As Griswold argues, ‘the *Phaedrus* quietly sustains the critique of poetry’.²⁴

To conclude, by attributing an exclusively divine dimension to poetry, and thereby excluding all human contribution from the creative process, divine possession leads to a conception of poetry in which there is no room for collaboration between the divine and the human (see *Ion* 534e). Plato calls into question the conception of poetry as inspired, equating inspiration with possession in order to dispossess poetry of the status of knowledge, and accordingly, of *technê* understood as an activity performed out of knowledge. However, since poetry is not only viewed as reproducing the Muses’ words, but also as reproducing life, and as such as a true discourse, Plato has to challenge this view as well, to make it plain that poetic *mimêsis* is not in fact an adequate way to reach the truth.

2. Poetry as Flawed Reproduction

In defining inspiration as possession and poetic imitation as a deceiving illusion, Plato meets with the following objection: poetry is considered to be both the gods’ words and also misleading discourses. In the *Ion* Plato carefully avoids discussing the issue of truth. The poet’s ignorance does not necessarily imply that he tells false things, since what he says in virtue of being possessed is what the Muses tell him. How then is

²² Rowe (1986), 10. See also Griswold (2006), Murray (1992), 44. It is worth pointing out that the first discourse of Socrates (237a7–241d7) who claims he is speaking out of the Muses’ inspiration turns out to be false, as Socrates himself subsequently acknowledges (242d4–243a4).

²³ Plato carefully distinguishes between the *poiêtikos* and the *mousikos*; the latter is a philosopher.

²⁴ Griswold (2006), Asmis (1992), 359.

it possible for the poet to utter misleading discourses especially about morality? Surely, as Sikes puts it, ‘immorality cannot be inspired.’²⁵ Plato argues in two different ways to answer the question: first, the poet falls short of reproducing accurately the Muses’ words, and second, he reproduces poorly and solely the appearances. The former argument is epistemological, the latter metaphysical.

2.1. *Poetry: A Flawed Reproduction of the Muses’ Words*

It is worth pointing out that in order to demonstrate the poet’s incapacity to reproduce rightly the Muses’ words, Plato brings inspiration and *mimêsis* together in the *Laws*:²⁶ ‘Whenever a poet is seated on the Muses’ tripod, he is not in his senses but resembles a fountain, which gives free course to the upward rush of water; and, since his art consists in imitation, he is compelled often to contradict himself’ (719c3–8, trans. Bury). The mouthpiece theory is here expressed through the image of a fountain. The poet cannot stop telling his words, which are like water rushing upward. The flux of his speech is out of control. Notice that the cause of his inconsistent discourses is not the Muse, but the nature of his art. In other words, he is not divinely forced to tell inconsistencies. In this respect, the Muses are not responsible for the poetic inconsistencies. In fact, the gods do not want to and cannot mislead us: the gods do not lie (*Rep.* II, 382e7), and ‘would never blunder’ (*Laws* II, 669c3–4).

Reproducing the words and behaviours of numerous and versatile characters is a source of confusion: who tells the truth? Who acts rightly? Representing several characters at the same time, like Proteus taking on different shapes, the poet and the listener get lost in the labyrinth of inconsistent discourses (*Laws* 719c8). As we have already seen, the frenzied poet is an instrument in divine hands, but he must be a fallible one since his inspired imitative words make up a confused discourse. The reason for poetry’s incoherence is the poet’s inability to repeat the Muses’ words as they transmit them. Defined as a transmissive *hermêneia*, poetry consists in translating²⁷ (*hermêneuein*) divine words into human words. The translation consists in converting them into human discourses. The conversion understood as a human appropriation of

²⁵ Sikes (1931), 69.

²⁶ In the *Phaedrus*, there is mention of both imitation (248e2) and inspiration, but not at the same place. I shall return to this point in due course.

²⁷ The hermeneutist is ‘the interpreter of a foreign language,’ as Chantraine (1990), 373 notices (my translation).

divine words causes a gap, which is impossible to fill, between the human and the divine. Because of his ignorance, the poet is unable in the first place to be aware that his repetition is flawed, in the sense of being full of errors. Secondly, he is incapable to separate the true from the false,²⁸ rejecting the latter. He then is unable to reflect on the Muses' words, and to make up a true and consistent discourse from these words.²⁹ He is unable, that is, to be a true interpreter,

Because of the gap, therefore, the poet cannot be a mere mouthpiece. As Verdenius puts it, Plato 'certainly did not mean to represent [the poet] as no more than a speaking-tube in the mouth of the Muse'.³⁰ The poet is a flawed medium. His flaw however does not rest upon his incapacity to understand the Muses' words or upon his falling short of his enterprise, as Pindar conceives it, since Plato dismisses, as we have seen, the poet's claim of an investigative *hermêneia*. The poet's flaw rather lies in his incapacity to repeat accurately the divine words; he can only do it in a distorted way.³¹ For this reason, he is inferior to the Muses (*Laws* 669c2). His *hermêneia* is a distorted uttering of the Muses' words. This means first that the Muses cannot guarantee an understanding of their revelation,³² second and accordingly, that the gods are not responsible for the poet's lies.

2.2. Poetry: A Flawed Reproduction of Appearances

In *Republic* Book X the falsehood of poetry is clearly stated and the definition of poetry as a deceitful art appears to be justified (*Rep.* 601a–b). Plato, dare I say it, lays his cards on the table. The cautious critique of poetry, which Plato shows in the *Ion*, Book III of the *Republic*, and the *Phaedrus*, is no longer in place. The critique is final: poetry is nothing but an illusion and a dangerous deceit. *Mimêsis* is no longer viewed as a technique of narrative combined with a poetic experience, but is regarded as the nature of poetry. What matters here is to know what poetry really is (595b7).

²⁸ Most (1999), 343 interprets *Theog.* 26–28 in this sense: 'Mortals, in contrast to divine Muses, cannot tell the difference between truth and lies.'

²⁹ This is what Plato as a philosopher is able to do while using a poet's sayings, as we shall see in due course.

³⁰ Verdenius (1971), 261.

³¹ The distortion is very difficult to perceive (*Laws* 669c1–2).

³² See Verdenius (1971), 263.

The Platonic examination of art is structured around the relationship between what is reproduced and its reproduction. Poets and painters at large allow that painting and poetry divide reality in two, acknowledging therefore the distinction. To understand the nature of imitative poetry, Plato begins with an analysis of painting³³ so as to make it plain that imitative arts like painting and poetry fallaciously contend that they rightly imitate reality. It is worth pointing out that although the definition of art as mimetic was a common view in Ancient Greece, that which is imitated may be of a different nature. Some poets and painters may admit to Plato that their work is a reproduction of the “phenomenal” i.e., of visible³⁴ reality, or of what happens (*ta genomena*). However others claim that they imitate the essence, e.g. of the divine or human being, and look for harmony and symmetry. As Pollitt puts it, ‘Greek artists tended to look for the typical and essential forms which expressed the essential nature of classes of phenomena in the same way that Platonic “forms” or “ideas” expressed essential realities underlying the multiplicity of sense-perception. A geometric statuette of a horse is an attempt to get at the “horseness” which lies behind all particular horses. This principle helps to explain why the range of building-types in Greek architecture and the range of subjects in Greek sculpture and painting is so deliberately limited.’³⁵ Plato alludes to the latter theory in different passages,³⁶ and at a crucial point at 598a2–3 since it opens the discussion about *mimêsis*. It is asked whether the object of *mimêsis* is the thing itself as it is in nature or the things the craftsman makes. Even though the former is dismissed out of hand as though the alternative is not relevant or does not deserve to be examined, most of the argument in Book X is based on the hasty

³³ As Ferrari (1989), 105 points out: ‘Imitation is parasitic on what is imitated; it is from our understanding of what humans are like that we judge the sculpted man. In the case of visual arts, Plato seems to think, this understanding need be nothing difficult, a familiarity with an appreciation of how things look; whereas poetic image-making aims to capture what is far more difficult to understand and far more important: not just how people look, but how they act, and how they are motivated to act.’

³⁴ Parrhasios agrees with Socrates on the definition of painting as an image of visible things (Xenophon, *Memorab.* III, 10, 1). See Nehamas’ (1982), 58 analysis.

³⁵ Pollitt (1972), 6; see also 22, 175. See also Gombrich (1978), 87–89.

³⁶ It is worth pointing out that Plato himself alludes to the possibility for the painter to paint a model of the best possible man (472d). Furthermore he acknowledges that the painter expresses in his painting the rules of beauty, justice and the good: ‘Do you think, then, that there’s any difference between the blind and those who are really deprived of the knowledge of each thing that is? The latter have no clear model in their souls, and so they cannot-in the manner of painters-look to what is most true, make constant reference to it and study it as exactly as possible.’ (484c–d, trans. Grube, rev. Reeve).

rejection. It is in fact doubtful that the artist could have access to the essence of things, as Plato understands it—the only access being through dialectic. Plato's theory of Forms and by and large his epistemology work as a refutation of this theory of art: art is by nature *eidolic*: its product is an *eidôlon*. It suffices to demonstrate this point to invalidate the artist's claim to attain the Forms.

This is why in his criticism Plato is concerned with the relationship between a work of art and reality and this is why before expounding his theory of *mimêsis*, he makes a point of referring to the usual method of inquiry. This entails on the one hand, to acknowledge the existence of the Forms (596a6–7), on the other hand, their identification with truth. These two claims allow Plato to modify the usual meaning of *mimêsis* in giving it a negative connotation: it means a deceiving illusion. The amended adjective 'deceiving' is here crucial since the definition of painting as an art of illusion is well attested. In fact, the ability to produce illusion was one of the favoured ends of painting;³⁷ the painter's talent is proportionate to the success of his *trompe-l'œil*.³⁸ Zeuxis prides himself on having reproduced grapes so well that birds have been misled.³⁹ Plato calls into question the idea of illusion as being valuable.⁴⁰ As defined as *trompe-l'œil*, painting is the perfect target to aim at the true one that is poetry. It allows Plato on the one hand, to condemn illusion at large by propounding a new definition, which rests on a metaphysical basis, and on the other hand, to define poetry as an art of deceiving illusion since poetry conceived of as a reproduction of life is an analogue of painting.⁴¹

³⁷ Like Zeuxis, Parrhasios was reputed to reproduce with amazing fidelity the physical or emotive reality of those he painted. His Philoctetes was like a living person: 'His skin is parched and shrunk to look at, and perchance feels dry even to the finger's touch' (*Greek Anthology* XVI, 113).

³⁸ Pliny (XXXV, 64) relates that during a competition, Parrhasios brought a painted curtain, which misled Zeuxis. He asked in fact if he could draw it.

³⁹ Pliny, XXXV, 64. As Delrieu, Hilt, Létoublon (1984), 181 stress, 'the archaic narrative is mimetic; it represents life and likes to make illusion of it'. The idea of imitation as a production of illusions is clearly stated in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*: 'Also they can imitate the tongues of all men and their clattering speech: each would say that he himself were singing, so close to truth is their sweet song' (162–164, trans. Evelyn-White).

⁴⁰ I disagree with Nehamas (1982), 57 who argues that, 'it is clear that the term and its cognates ... did not go hand in hand with the Platonic notions of the counterfeit, the merely apparent, the deceitful and the fake'. See also on this issue, Nagy (1989), 47–51.

⁴¹ Remember that the analogy is not new since Simonides defines poetry as a 'painting that speaks' (Plutarch, *De Glor. Athen.* 346F). Moreover many painters used mythological themes in their paintings, and painted scenes of the Trojan Cycle, especially the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. See Pausanias' description of Polygnotos' works, Iliouperis and Nekya (X, 25–31).

The Platonic argument runs as follows. Contrary to what the painter boasts, the painted illusion is far from being perfect; for the painter turns out to be incapable of identically reproducing what appears as it appears. *Mimêsis* lays hold only of a small part of each thing (*smikron ti ekastou*: 598b7). This assertion is justified regarding the Platonic hierarchy of reality which descends from the more real to the less real thing, namely from the Form through appearances (*phainomena*) to image (*eidôlon*). The Platonic ontological scale leads him to define *mimêsis* as a copy of appearances.⁴² Painting cannot consequently picture reality as a whole, for it grasps real things only in part, which is itself an incomplete reality (597a4–11).

Plato questions the core of the painting's claim, which turns out to be a false *trompe-l'œil* that can mislead only children and foolish human beings (598c2). Although the artists are right to declare that imitating is producing an illusion, illusion however has nothing to do with likeness and reality. It is a flawed likeness, which distorts reality and is not its true copy. Even carrying a mirror around everywhere (596d9) will not suffice to obtain a true reproduction of things.⁴³ The result is in fact a dim thing (*amudron*: 597a11), a copy of appearances. The painter falls short of representing things as they are.⁴⁴ Painting and poetry distort reality as happens with an object reflected in water (602c8–9). The consequences are twofold: poetry is not a true discourse and is not even an imitation of the truth (598b3–4).

What, then, does poetry imitate? Plato answers: past human deeds (*Rep. X* 603c6, *Laws II* 682a4–5). In this case, human deeds correspond to appearances, and analogically are what the bed is for the painter. Noticing the difficulty of the Platonic analogy, Clay raises the question: 'What form (*eidos*), one asks, is the pattern for Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' Agamemnon?'⁴⁵ The answer might be that poetry is the song, namely the image of human and divine deeds, i.e., appearances (*Rep. X*, 603c6), and

⁴² Note that the Platonic definition rests on the distinction between being and appearance. However, observe that Democritus asserts something similar to the Platonic statement. He opposes 'being' to 'imitating': *agathon ê einai chreon ê mimesthai* (DKB39).

⁴³ The passage is here a direct attack against the Homeric conception of poetry and therefore is ironic since it makes it understood that anyone can be an artist. See Collobert (2004) *contra* Babut's (1985b), 135 claim according to which the passage defines the epistemic standpoint of the artist. On the other hand, as Muller (2001), 119 notes, 'the best and truest imitation is not a double of the original'. See also Aristotle, *Rhet.*, 1406b.

⁴⁴ Moss (2006), 642.

⁴⁵ Clay (2000), 124.

the Forms are those of virtue (*Rep.* VI, 500d3–e4).⁴⁶ Unable to attain the Form of justice, Homer falls short of reproducing it through his heroes' deeds. The Platonic concern here is to demonstrate that the purpose of poetry cannot be that of transmitting any sort of knowledge, nor, accordingly, give us access to the Forms.

Poetry is a flawed reproduction because the sole reality the poet may reach is appearances⁴⁷ that imply no knowledge and no understanding (*Rep.* X, 601b10–12). Poetic *mimêsis* leaves out understanding by which the poet would be able to set apart what deserves to be and not to be imitated (*Laws* II, 669c1–2),⁴⁸ and knowledge by which he would be aware of the good and bad things he imitates (*Rep.* X, 602a9). By contrast, reproduction as achieved by a craftsman supposes on his part an understanding of what he imitates, since the object of imitation has a specific function. He thus makes the product according to its function. A flute-maker for instance is able to produce a good flute according to the flute-player's specifications. He is the only competent and knowledgeable person to judge the qualities of the flute that its use brings to the surface (*Rep.* X, 601d1–602a10). Applying this reasoning to the painter and the poet, Plato comes to the conclusion that they do not have any idea of the excellence of the products they imitate, producing therefore a copy of excellence. In this sense, though the result of poetry is images, this does not imply that images are consciously produced by the poet nor that he has an active part in the process of production.⁴⁹ On the contrary, he is rather passive since he is not aware of the very status of his reproduction, which is an *eidôla*-making.

Plato moves from the Form to the use, from the highest reality to excellence. However, more than a shift it is rather a double argument. The distorting reality is considered firstly, from an ontological point of view, and secondly, from a technical one. From the latter point of view, the *trompe-l'œil* is misleading because the painter is unable to reproduce the perfection of the things he imitates. Since it distorts reality, painting's *mimêsis* rests on a double ignorance, that of the Form and of excellence, amounting to a lack of knowledge and of true beliefs. Applied to poetry

⁴⁶ Ferrari (1989), 121 ff.

⁴⁷ Note that appearances are tantamount to past deeds that include heroic and divine deeds. By falsely reproducing their deeds, the poet falls short of reaching the very nature of the gods and heroes (see *Rep.* II, 377e).

⁴⁸ As Ferrari (1989), 105 argues: 'Clearly, then, the goodness of the imitation is being thought of as inseparable from the goodness or appropriateness of what is imitated.'

⁴⁹ Contrary to what Griswold (1981), 147 asserts.

technical excellence becomes ethical (*eidôlon aretês*: 600e5). This is why poetry is said to reproduce badly what the gods and human beings are (*eikaze kakos*: *Rep.* III, 377e1). Here again, Plato calls into question a claim of both poets and painters arguing that the poet has no knowledge of what human action is. He has no knowledge, in other words, of the essence of human action and of what it should be, i.e., its excellence.⁵⁰ Not knowing the truth, he blindly imitates (599a1). His imitation is thus 'third from the truth' (602c2). What then is ultimately at stake is the poet's ignorance about ethical matters.⁵¹

To recapitulate, the examination of poetic ignorance at the core of the Platonic critique of poetry proceeds as follows: the frenzied poet is not aware of what he says just as the imitative poet is not aware of what he does. The theory of inspiration-possession focuses on the poet's non-rationality and ignorance, and concludes that poetry is not a *technê*, understood as interpretation, whereas the theory of imitation has as its focus the consequences of the poet's ignorance for his production. Each theory has its own angle of attack. The possession theory aims at the poet's cognitive state, while the imitation theory targets the nature of poetry and its product. Plato challenges the conception of poetry as a true discourse, concluding that since poetic reality is a pale and misleading reflection of reality, and since it is a misleading reproduction of the Muses' words, poetry is nothing but illusory words.

3. *The Poet: A Poorly Inspired Imitator*

I shall now argue that the flawed *hermêneia*, the distorted transmission of the Muses' words turns out to be a flawed report of the past. However, insofar as reporting the past is reproducing it in speech, we need to question the relationship between inspiration-possession and *mimêsis*. In fact, there must be something wrong with the Muses' revelation besides the poet's incompetence to repeat identically the Muses' words. It seems that the Muses' revelation to the poet is doomed to failure insofar as it does not allow him to tell truths.

⁵⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* VIII, 5–7, *Poet.* 6.

⁵¹ As a result, his characters *appear* to be good, but *are* not truly good. To pursue this point fully would outrun the scope of my immediate concern. See on this issue, e.g., Moss (2006), Belfiore (1983), Nehamas (1982).

3.1. *The Content of the Muses' Revelation*

However, at first glance, this does not accord with Plato's own acknowledgement of poetic truths in the *Laws* and *Republic*, Book III. Certain utterances of Homer are 'in a kind of unison with the voices of both the god and nature' (*Laws* III, 682a2–3, trans. Bury, slightly modified) thanks to the Muses, Plato nonetheless specifies. The truths the inspired poet utters bear on past events, as Plato has already stated in the *Republic*. Plato recounts a 'historical' fact⁵² borrowed from Homer (*Il.* 20.216), that of the foundation of Dardania by Dardanos. This is a factual truth—the only truth the poet can grasp (*Laws* III, 682a2). Note that in the epic genre poetic truth is regarded as factual only insofar as the poet tells the story of individuals regarded as real individuals, and speaks of events regarded as real events.⁵³ What the Muses reveal are thus factual truths. As a result, the truths that the poet is able to reach are only factual. However, the poet's incapacity to repeat accurately the divine words produces a discourse that is a mixture of factual truths and inaccurate assertions. The poet therefore provides us with a distorted image of the past, which makes his poetry a false and inconsistent report of the past.

3.2. *From Possession to Mimêtikê*

The claim of poetic inconsistencies is recurrent in Plato's works. It is worth observing that he addresses the matter in the *Laws* (719c1–10) where he brings *mimêsis* and possession together. Murray holds that the so-called imitation here is that introduced in Book III and not X of the *Republic*; and relying on Velardi,⁵⁴ she identifies inspiration with *mimêsis*. In Book III, *mimêsis* is defined as follows: 'To make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate the person one makes oneself like' (393c5–6).⁵⁵ Imitation consists in acting like someone else, which means

⁵² Bury (1994) translates the phrase *pollon ton kat' alêtheian gignomenon* into 'truth of history.'

⁵³ Collobert (2004).

⁵⁴ As Velardi (1989), 116 argues: 'La teoria dell'enthousiamos offre una saldissima base fenomenologica al concetto di mimesi'.

⁵⁵ Plato does not here introduce a new theory of *mimêsis*. As Else (1958), 78 argues: 'What we can infer with some confidence is that the original sphere of *mimesis*—or rather of *mimos* and *mimêsthai*—was that the imitation of animate beings, animal and human, by the body and the voice.' As McKeon (1957), 150 notes: 'It is invalid criticism to point out that a term like 'imitation' has many meanings in Plato.' The word has in fact several meanings, e.g. Halliwell (2002), Janaway (1995) contra Belfiore (1984). However, to treat this point fully would outrun the scope of my immediate concern.

to reproduce the other's voice and appearance, as though the imitator is the other person. In this case, *mimêsis* is understood as impersonation.

However, there may be a flaw in the picture. It is in fact doubtful that *mimêsis* means impersonation in this passage. *Mimêsis* is in the *Laws* defined as consisting of *poiôn* which means shaping, making, creating⁵⁶ 'numerous characters of contradictory moods' (719c6–8). I take it that the poet's self-contradiction amounts to the claim that numerous inconsistent discourses pervade poetry. Not only are there contradictory discourses held by various characters, but also one and the same character holds contradictory discourses. The poet therefore contradicts himself by creating various and versatile characters.⁵⁷ In this regard, the definition of *mimêsis* at 719c6–8 should rather be brought together with the definition in *Rep.* X, 603c5–d3. In the latter, Plato defines the poet's *mimêsis* as consisting of representing humans in conflict and struggle with themselves (603d6–7). Moreover, by definition appearances are contradictory. Therefore a discourse, which has as its object the appearances, and whose goal is to reflect or copy the appearances, is necessarily inconsistent. This is thus primarily the nature of the poet's art—not possession—that compels him to contradict himself. However, it is because of being possessed that the poet is not aware of self-contradiction, more precisely, he does not know 'which of these contradictory utterances is true' (719c8–10).⁵⁸ There is an obvious relationship between possession and ignorance.

For the relationship to be clarified, we need first to examine whether possession is the condition for *mimêsis* defined as a reproduction of appearances, as Plato hints in the passage of the *Laws*. According to the poets, they get inspired through the invocation of the Muses in which they ask the Muses to tell them the past, e.g. Achilles' wrath (*Il.* I.1), Odysseus' return (*Od.* 1.1). The poet therefore asks the Muses to give him access to what happened. According to Plato, the poet calls for the ecstatic experience that allows him to be a witness to the past, as though he had been there, as Homer puts it (*Od.* 8.491). This guarantees the vividness and accuracy of his narration, according to the poet (489).

⁵⁶ Bury's translation. Saunders rightly translates it by 'representing'.

⁵⁷ It is worth pointing out that the poet impersonates characters that he creates. However, the converse does not hold. He also creates characters that he does not impersonate. It is the case when he does not identify with his characters, and therefore, does not speak in the first person.

⁵⁸ True utterances are concerned with ethical matters. Further down, Plato argues that the poets are unable to discriminate between what is bad and what is good (801b11–c1).

This is why Plato could argue in the *Ion* that the poet's soul is in Ithaca or Troy where the action takes place, where the characters act (535c2–3). Being possessed, the poet is able to tell what he sees, reproducing therefore in speech the past with which the Muses connect him. However, reproducing the past in speech equates with reproducing the appearances on account of the equation between what happened and sensible reality. Connected with appearances, the poet can only speak of appearances, thereby producing a discourse that consists of a pale copy of them. The wording of the invocation allows Plato to argue that the poet does not aim to reach the Forms. This is why it is he and not the Muses that makes him an imitator of appearances. He therefore is to be blamed, not the Muses, who in fact only comply with the poet's request.

Furthermore, the poet's call for possession rests upon his conception of poetry as world-mirroring, as the telling of what happened. In fact, an ecstatic experience is needed to mirror the past since the experience allows the poet to have access to it. Possession turns out to be the condition for the poet's telling of the past. In other words, for the poet to accomplish his art of *mimêsis*, he must be possessed by the Muses. The call for possession amounts on the part of the poet to reducing his function to that of a flawed reproduction, which amounts to a production of images of the sensible (*Rep.* X, 599a2–3). What is at fault is the poet's conception of his art, and ultimately of knowledge.

As acknowledged by the poets, the invocation is needed on account of their ignorance, as we have seen. However, according to Plato, the request demonstrates the poet's ignorance of what knowledge and truth are all about. Plato shifts thus the meaning of the poet's ignorance, which is no longer ignorance of the past, but of the Forms. Not aware of the latter ignorance—moreover willing to please his audience—the poet does not request from the Muses an access to the Forms. This is why instead of connecting the poet with the Form and excellence, and so with the truth, they connect him at his request with past events, taking him to Troy or Ithaca.

Thus, by calling for divine possession through the invocation, the poet not only confines himself to appearances, and therefore to ignorance of reality, but he makes him also unable to reach the Forms. In this regard, if the poet searched for truths, he would not ask the Muses to give him access to the past, but rather to the Forms. In not doing so, he condemns himself not only to be a poor mouthpiece, but also to an everlasting state of ignorance. In other words, by calling for possession, he calls for what he should not, making therefore a poor use of the divine power.

From possession to *mimêsis*, the conclusion follows. Out of inspiration the poet condemns himself to be a bad imitator since, if he were as knowledgeable as people believe he is, he would not request what he requests from the Muses. By bringing together possession and *mimêsis* and by ending with a condemnation of the poet's ignorance, Plato unites the two theories in the *Laws*. The ecstatic possession, which the poet calls for and which belongs to the category of 'non-conceptual, and therefore non-rational and non-reflexive,' as Havelock rightly points out, leads to an art that can only be a poor and bad imitation, an art which is *mimetike*.⁵⁹

Stemming from ignorance, his mimetic and inspired activity cannot fall under the category of *technê*.⁶⁰ However, as producing *eidôla*, poetry is a kind of production,⁶¹ hence the concept of *mimêtike* that Plato builds up.⁶² *Mimêtike* is the making of *eidôla*, but the making is a flawed reproduction. The poet is not a *technikos*, a skilled producer but a *mimêtikos*.⁶³ As a *mimêtikos*, he certainly possesses an ability to make *eidôla*, but the ability does not amount to *technê*.⁶⁴ Even though one might say that he is expert at the making of *eidôla*, his expertise is not only poor, but also fake. This is the case on account of his lack of 'understanding and control of the making of poetry,' as Janaway puts it.⁶⁵ Like *rhetorikê*,⁶⁶ *mimêtikê* is in fact a spurious *technê* because in the first place, it does not rest upon knowledge, and secondly, it aims at pleasure.⁶⁷ *Mimêtikê* is therefore a pseudo *technê*. In the *Ion*, the inspiration-possession theory leads Plato to dismiss a poet's *technê* as an investigative *hermêneia*; in the *Republic*, the attribution of expertise to the poet goes together with its devaluation.

⁵⁹ Havelock (1963), 156.

⁶⁰ As Janaway (1995), 15 puts it, '*technê* is a branch of knowledge which guides some human activity to a successful outcome.'

⁶¹ *Soph.* 265b3.

⁶² Belfiore (1984), 126. It is worth noting that in the *Laws*, 719c6, Plato uses the word *technê*. However it does not imply that he considers here the poet as a possessor of a *technê* as Plato conceives of it. In fact, he emphasizes in the passage the poet's lack of knowledge.

⁶³ Asmis (1992), 351.

⁶⁴ Nussbaum (1986), 94–99.

⁶⁵ Janaway (1995), 24.

⁶⁶ *Gorg.* 462e1–2. The sophist, the orator, and the poet fall under the same category of ignorant and 'insincere manufacturer of *eidola* by mimicry', as Dodds (1959), 227 puts it. In fact, the poet is said to be a kind of orator (502d1) to whom the possession of a *technê* is denied.

⁶⁷ In *Rep.* X, 600c4–5, Plato sets in contrast *mimēsthai* and *gignōskein*. See also 602b6–7, and *Gorg.* 502b6–c2. As Janaway (1995) 47, argues, 'in Plato's stricter philosophical sense a truly adequate *technê* both aims at the good and is a form of knowledge.'

Mimêtikê is the only expertise the poet can claim since the only thing he can and desires to do while possessed is mirroring the past.

To recapitulate, the poet's failure is twofold. In the first place, the poet falls short of mirroring accurately the past. He does not provide us with a true and reliable report of the past, which he regards as that of which poetry consists. Hence his flawed transmission equates with a flawed mirroring of the past. In the second place, the poet has no clue about the very nature of knowledge, which is not concerned with past events, therefore with appearances. In this respect, a factual truth is not a philosophical one, as Plato's use of factual truths makes plain. He uses the fact of the foundation of Dardania that Homer mentions to exemplify a point that allows him to make Homer say what he did not say, namely that the foundation corresponds to the third form of constitution. In doing so, Plato first lays stress on what is at stake from a philosophical standpoint, which is hardly the narrative's fidelity to the actual events,⁶⁸ and second, illustrates a way of using a poetic truth amounting to a fact by including it in philosophic reasoning.⁶⁹ A poetic truth is thus conceived of as an example. Let us notice that such inclusion results from the incompleteness of poetic truth. Such incompleteness is noted by Plato in the *Republic*, where he hypothetically posits the existence of truths in Homer (*an ei ên alêthê*: 378a2). Poetry may contain incomplete truths of which only a philosopher can make sense (378d6–8).⁷⁰ In this regard, the dispersed poetic truths might be for the philosopher material to be remoulded. However, this cannot make poetry a true discourse,⁷¹ for it is almost impossible to extract any coherent discourse from the welter of poetic inconsistencies (*Prot.* 347e1–7).⁷²

It follows that poetry is a flawed *mimêsis*. It is a flawed reproduction on the one hand, of divine discourses, and on the other hand, of true reality. As composed by the poets, poetry is merely a forgery. The Muses do not accompany the poet to knowledge's gates because he has no desire for it. This is why knowledge cannot be the purpose of the poets. The poet

⁶⁸ As Verdenius (1943), 261 states, 'a poem is an inconsistent collection of statements, of which some have only a sense in a very specific way' (my translation).

⁶⁹ One should not be mistaken about Platonic quotations of the poets. While quoting them Plato makes them say what he wants. For instance in *Meno* he relies on Pindar to demonstrate the immortality of the soul (81b3–c4). See Halliwell (2000b).

⁷⁰ See on the issue, e.g. Halliwell (1997).

⁷¹ For an interpretation to be done, true and false assumptions have to be set apart (378d8). If there is a hermeneutic enterprise in Plato, the enterprise does not mean that he recognizes poetry as a true discourse.

⁷² Note in passing that Plato here criticizes the sophistic use of poetry.

claims illegitimately to share the same goal as the philosopher, namely that of truth, while its goal is nothing other than the audience's pleasure. In other words, by invoking the Muses the poet intends to please human beings but not to tell them truths.

Let us observe however that if the poet ceased to be an imitator, he would also cease to be inspired, for his *mimêsis* is the result of his possession. But from a Platonic perspective, he would also cease to be ignorant. This is not to say as Nehamas does that: 'To imitate the Forms is a request that it is logically impossible for the artist to satisfy, for in virtue of satisfying it, the artist would cease to be an artist.'⁷³ As we have seen, some artists attempt to express the Forms, i.e. the nature of things, through their works of art. However it is true that these Forms are of a different kind from the Platonic. In imitating the latter the poet then would be a philosopher or at least a craftsman, a doctor or a lawgiver (see 599c1–600b5). On the one hand, there are those who act, and on the other, those who copy actions.⁷⁴ As possessed the poet is doomed to reproducing the sensible; but what is the point of doubling sensible reality, since it does not produce any knowledge?

Let us specify however that *mimêsis* is not necessarily negative. The mimesis of the craftsman, the legislator,⁷⁵ and the philosopher, Plato, who writes his philosophical dialogues, all look at the Forms (*Rep.* VI, 501b1–7).⁷⁶ Furthermore, the philosopher should not dismiss the Muses. In contrast to the poet, the philosopher knows how to make use of them (*Laws* 670a3–6);⁷⁷ but the use entails possessing knowledge (670b2).⁷⁸ The Muses might give the philosopher the impetus to accomplish what he must: reproducing the good, since in reproduction of this kind lies the activity proper to the philosophical life. This is why the art of the Muses Calliope and Urania can be honoured as it should be, by spending one's life in philosophizing (*Phdr.* 259d3). As Ferrari rightly puts it: 'The best sort of imitation is not poetry at all, but philosophy—an activity which

⁷³ Nehamas (1982), 60.

⁷⁴ For this distinction, see e.g. McKeon (1957), 152.

⁷⁵ Plato argues in the *Laws* that what makes the legislator superior is that he is able to define a constitution from the imitation of the most beautiful and excellent life (817b2–3). He is the true poet, as Tigerstedt (1969), 62 argues.

⁷⁶ The legislator of the *Laws* acts out of divine inspiration (811c8). As Belfiore (1984), 135 rightly puts it, 'Plato would admit imitation of the good as a separate category of imitation in poetry'. It is worth mentioning in passing that the *Republic* as Halliwell (1997), 325 argues, 'is concluded by an alternative "poetry"', i.e., the myth of Er.

⁷⁷ See also *Rep.* VIII, 545d7–9.

⁷⁸ Murray (2002), (2004).

cannot be distinguished, either in its products or procedures, from the practice of a certain kind of life.⁷⁹ In not being an art of life, in being of no use (*Rep. X*, 600 c2–e2), poetry is doomed to failure. The only relevant *mimêsis* is therefore that which exhibits itself in *praxis*, and philosophy is such *praxis* for Plato.

Conclusion

To conclude, the poet is loved by the gods, but first by the Muses (*Od.* 8.481). This is why ‘with all peoples upon the earth singers are entitled to be cherished and to their share of respect’ (8.479–480). Plato wages war against this idealized figure by showing that poetry claims to be something it is not. Poetry is certainly a divine gift; but the poet proves he is not worthy of the gift, for he persuades the Muses to offer him instead a pale reflection of reality. As a result, poets provide people with pseudo-knowledge. The poet cannot perform the educational role that he claims. The poet’s inspiration and *mimêsis* do not allow him to play the role because they both exclude *technê* and knowledge. This is why the philosopher must resist the poetic enchantment. In order to resist it Plato uses thereby the same *pharmakon* for the poetic enchantment as Penelope and Eumaios do in the *Odyseey*, claiming that poetry is nothing but illusory words. The theory of *mimêsis* offers such a *pharmakon*, as Plato himself acknowledges (*Rep. X*, 608a1–b2): the *pharmakon* consists of knowing what poetry really is (595b6).

⁷⁹ Ferrari (1989), 142.

CHAPTER FOUR

PLATO'S *ION* AND THE ETHICS OF PRAISE

CARLOTTA CAPUCCINO

My paper aims to establish two things: (1) what exactly is the main subject of Plato's *Ion*, and accordingly (2) for what purpose Plato wrote it. (1) In my view, and contrary to the mainstream interpretation, Plato's *Ion* is not a dialogue about poetry and the poet as a professional figure: Socrates' interlocutor, Ion of Ephesus, is actually not a poet, but the most famous of Homeric rhapsodes. His proper task, according to Plato, is to communicate to the audience Homer's thought and, in this way, to become his 'mediator' (*hermêneus*): the rhapsode is, on the one hand, the authorized depository of Homeric wisdom and, on the other, the living voice able to transmit it. His mediation is worthy of Plato's philosophical interest for it is not an exegesis of Homer's verses (aiming to establish what Homer really said), but a praise of his paideutic value and of the model of life he proposes: Ion is then a praiser (*epainetés*) of Homer, who recognizes and promotes his authority in both ethical and political life, by inciting the audience to emulation with his meaningful praise of the poet. (2) Plato's purpose is to show how the ethics underlying this kind of praise—a praise not only of a model of life but above all of the authority of such a model—is dangerous (i) because persuasive but groundless (one is praised not because he is wise, but is wise, because he is praised) and (ii) because it promotes a dogmatic and passive style of life and thought. The ethics of praise is then essentially incompatible with philosophy.

I. The *palaiá diaphora* between philosophy and poetry has posed, until our days, several difficulties to the interpreters of Plato, who have attempted, on the one hand, to ascertain its origin and historical development, and, on the other, to find some point of equilibrium in the 'inner quarrel' between Plato the philosopher and Plato the writer or the artist.¹

¹ Pl. *Rep.* X, 607b3–6. Whether it is an *ancient quarrel* or only an *old* one, on the basis of two possible meanings of *palaios*, the typical scholarly attempt is to trace back its origin and fundamental stages, and the different positions can be located between two opposites: on the one hand the denial that any real quarrel between philosophy and poetry ever existed before Plato's work (from Collingwood [1925], 170, to Nightingale [1995], 63–64) and, on the other, the recognition of such a quarrel in the history of

Wherever its roots might lie, and independently of any inner conflict, the criticism of poetry occupies, as a matter of fact, a non-trivial part in Plato's philosophical reflection: one can consider, for instance, its importance in the *Republic*, where the criticism of poetry occupies three books, and among them, significantly, the final one. Plato's analysis is twofold: on the one hand, it concerns the *nature* of poetry, especially in the case of the philosophical reflections in the tenth book of the *Republic*; on the other, it has to do with its *value*, with regard to the role of poetry in human life and its function within the *polis*. This second aspect is the object of the ethical reflections on poetry in the dialogues; paradoxically, Plato devotes his long preliminary inquiry to this aspect: until the tenth book of the *Republic* he never asks himself 'What is poetry?', but he investigates its effects by reflecting on its utility; as for its nature, he limits himself to showing what poetry, as a matter of fact, is not.²

I will devote my paper to this *preliminary inquiry*, starting from the *Ion*. I believe that this short dialogue can be a good starting point, since establishing its main theme is a quite controversial question which is strictly related, as we shall see, to the value of poetry according to Plato. In particular, I shall try to answer two questions. The first one concerns precisely the dominant theme, the 'hidden heart'³ of the dialogue: is or

philosophy until Plato, as a kind of thread which concerns various levels: on this point cf. the recent work by F.M. Giuliano, the most complete and, I think, the best study now available about Plato's conception of poetry (Giuliano [2005], especially 129–130); I do not agree, however, with his traditional interpretation which makes the *Ion* a dialogue on poets and poetry, attributing too little importance to the figure of the rhapsode, who actually remains Socrates' only interlocutor throughout the dialogue. Giuliano also addresses Plato's alleged 'inner quarrel', showing that the ambiguity is not in the attitude of the philosopher towards poetry, but in the nature of poetry itself (339–341); Marušić (2008), cap. 1 and p. 180 reaches the same result independently. But cf. also, before them, Verdenius (1943), 240–241.

² Unlike what happens in the cases of rhetoric (*Gorg.* 447d, 448e–449d) and sophistic (*Soph.* 221c–d), whose nature constitutes the primary subject of inquiry. It is interesting to notice that, whereas for the ethical virtues the starting question is 'what is it?' (e.g. *La.* 190d7–8), in the case of the alleged *technai* the question concerns the *technitês* first (*Gorg.* 447d1), in order to know what his art consists of (448e–449a), and only at a second stage the art itself, in order to find out what its object is (449c9–d2). On the *nature* of poetry, cf. Giuliano (2005), cap. III; the topic is tackled by Plato starting from a question about the nature of mimesis (*Rep.* X, 595c7), to reach the conclusion that *all* poets are imitators according to the general definition of *mimêsis* which follows from it (600e4 ff.). The more significant texts concerning the *value* of poetry are instead the *Apology* (22a ff.), the *Ion*, the *Gorgias* (502b ff.), and Books II–III of the *Republic*.

³ Verdenius (1943), 239. I am glad to acknowledge my debt to W.J. Verdenius, with whom I share both the initial question 'pourquoi et avec quelle intention Platon a écrit l'*Ion* [?] (p. 236) and other general theses about the *Ion* (cf. Capuccino 2005).

is not the *Ion* a dialogue on poetry and poets, which as such sets the philosopher (Socrates) in opposition to the poets, thus enacting a new stage of the *palaia diaphora*? The second question concerns, instead, the dominant character of Plato's inquiry on poetry, starting again from the *Ion*: is it, at the end of the day, a criticism or a praise?⁴

II. Let us begin with the first question: if by 'poet' we mean *narrowly* someone who composes or recites verses professionally, or composed or recited them in the past, the answer to this question is *no*, for the following two reasons.

1. First of all, Ion of Ephesus, Socrates' interlocutor in the homonymous dialogue, is not a poet. Moreover, he is presented in the dialogue itself as a well-determined professional figure, thereby distinguished from the poet: Ion is a renowned Homeric *rhapsode*. This is a *matter of fact*, then, which we can extrapolate from the *mise en scène* of the dialogic fiction and from the choice and characterization of the interlocutor (530a–c).
2. The second *reason* is an *exegetical* one, and concerns the position of the rhapsode in the chain of divine inspiration, which in the way it works resembles a magnetic chain of iron rings attracted by a magnet: just as the magnet itself in virtue of its strength attracts the first ring of the chain and the second one through it, and so on until the last one, so the Muse attracts to herself the inspired poet, e.g. Homer, who in turn attracts the rhapsode, who finally captures the audience, closing the chain of enthusiasm. I.e. every ring turns out to exercise the Muse's power, on her own concession, by a *principle of transitivity* of inspiration borrowed from that of magnetism: the poet is attracted by the Muse and attracts the rhapsode, the rhapsode is attracted by the poet and attracts the audience (533d ff.).

These two reasons are, as a matter of fact, strictly related. Several doubts have been advanced concerning the choice of Socrates' interlocutor, an itinerant Homeric rhapsode who proclaims to be famous, and indeed the best, but is otherwise unknown to us; and if we trust Xenophon's judgment—whether it depends on Plato or not—it seems that in the

⁴ Cf. Giuliano (2005), 5: '[...] corre l'obbligo di conciliare le contrastanti concezioni che [Platone] elabora sulla poesia. Le soluzioni proposte sono tanto varie quanto numerose, per un problema tuttora aperto.'

V–IV century BC rhapsodes did not enjoy, at least among educated people, a particularly good press.⁵ Consequently, according to the prevailing interpretation, the real object of Plato's inquiry would be poets and poetry, which enjoyed much more prestige in Greek culture at that time.⁶ The typical argument of those who support this interpretation is an *a fortiori* one: the rhapsode and the poet are both, in fact, rings of the same magnetic chain (unlike, e.g., the sophist, with whom some have also tried to identify Ion).⁷ And the fact that the rhapsode might represent the poet is justified on the basis of the aforementioned principle of transitivity. In this sense both intermediate rings, poet and rhapsode, exercise the same power of inspiration by divine dispensation, respectively on the rhapsode and on the audience, and therefore they are interchangeable; but the poet—and this is the strongest argument—remains nonetheless the direct inspirer of the rhapsode, and so the former appears to enjoy a privileged position vis-à-vis the latter.⁸

Actually, there is an essential difference between the positions occupied by the rhapsode and the poet in the chain (and so we come back to the second reason), a difference which allows us to re-evaluate his dignity as a Socratic interlocutor: although they are both intermediate rings, the object they are conjoined to is not the same. One extremity is in common, namely their connection point, that, as we have said, determines the superiority of the poet over the rhapsode, even in space (the poet is *above*). The other extremity is different: as for the poet it is the superior one, the Muse, and this close contact with the divine origin would seem to guarantee, once again, the dominant role to the poet. As for the rhapsode it is instead the inferior extremity, i.e. the audience, the element which closes the chain. I would like to demonstrate that, despite appearances, this, i.e. the position of the rhapsode and not that of the poet, is the real privileged position, and that, consequently, the rhapsode (and not the poet) is the *direct* object of Plato's interest in the dialogue.⁹

⁵ X. *Mem.* IV 2, 10–11; *Symp.* III 6. Notice that Xenophon's negative judgement does not necessarily reflect the common attitudes towards rhapsodes, and consequently does not attest to their loss of prestige in the common opinion: Xenophon's criticisms of the rhapsodes could belong to an intellectual *élite*, be independent, or derive from a (superficial) reading of Plato's *Ion*.

⁶ So Murray (1996), 98.

⁷ Cf. especially the long commentary in Flashar (1958).

⁸ Cf. Giuliano (2005), 138: 'Argomento dello *Ione* è il rapporto tra poesia e conoscenza, n. 4: '[s]volto sulla doppia direttrice, che il ponte del rapsodo Ione riunifica, della poesia e della sua interpretazione'.

⁹ Scholars have often maintained that the theory of inspiration concerns primarily

This second, exegetical reason in support of the thesis that the subject of the *Ion* is not the poet as normally understood (i.e. the *professional* poet) is actually a *cluster of reasons* which attempt to define who Ion of Ephesus is and in what his rhapsodic activity consists. On this subject, we can get all the necessary information in the proem, or more precisely in the second part of it, which is a sort of *main proem* which follows the meeting or greetings between the two interlocutors.¹⁰ Here Socrates declares that he envies or admires (*ezêlôsa*) Ion's activity, and we discover that, besides reciting the Homeric verses at festivals like the Panathenaiics (for which he has to *ekmanthanein* [...] *ta epê*), the rhapsode has also another activity, which is not attested by any source outside the Platonic *corpus*.¹¹ Ion himself presents it at 530c9 as a verbal activity which consists in *legein peri*, i.e. in speaking of or about Homer, and which cannot coincide with the simple declamation (*reciting* Homer); this activity seems to be his proper task, what makes him a good rhapsode. The Greek phrase *legein peri* describes only superficially the aspect of this rhapsodic saying, whose function had already been introduced in the previous words: the task of the Homeric rhapsode is to become *hermêneus* of the poet's thought for his audience.

The standard interpretation of what the rhapsodic activity described in this passage is relies on the *modern* meaning¹² of the term *hermêneus*,

the poet (about ten references to the *poiêtês*, against only a couple to the *rhapsôidos*), and since they believe that it is the thematic core of the dialogue, they pose poetry and the poets as its first and main subject-matter (cf. nn. 1, 8). It is often overlooked, however, that the theory is introduced by Socrates to explain to Ion the excellence of his *legein peri Homêrou*, and in the same way it ends with a reference to the rhapsode's activity (cf. n. 22). Giuliano notices the initial reference, but not the final one (2005, 148): since he identifies the relationship between the poet and the rhapsode with the one between poetry and its interpretation, it is understandable that he favours the former. He does not differ from the traditional view, in so far as he does not manage to see in Ion's activity enough autonomy to justify Plato's interest in him, except as secondary to his interest in the poet.

¹⁰ The proem of the *Ion* can be divided into a short initial part which presents the meeting of the two interlocutors (*minor proem*, 530a1–b4) and a second longer part which introduces the rhapsode's activity (*main proem*, 530b5–531a1).

¹¹ For a reconstruction of the rhapsodic activity attested by our extant sources I refer the reader to Capuccino (2005), app. B. What is especially difficult to pin down is the praising aspect beyond the more evident aspect of declamation, which characterizes the figure of the rhapsode in Plato: of this crucial aspect we have no testimony outside the *Ion*. The only scholars who recognise its importance are Verdenius (1943) and Velardi (1989).

¹² I refer to the unwarranted attribution of the meaning of modern words, such as 'hermeneut', 'exegete', 'interpreter', to the Greek *hermêneus* in its Platonic acceptation.

i.e. ‘interpreter of the text’, ‘exegete’; in our case, then, ‘interpreter or exegete of the Homeric verses’. This hermeneutic activity would coincide with a profound knowledge of Homer’s thought (*tên* [...] *dianoian ekmanthanein*), as the two other verbs of knowing in the passage seem to confirm: *suniēmi* and *gignôskô* (530c2, 5). ‘To know thoroughly the poet’s thought’, ‘to understand the things said [by him]’, ‘to know what he says [or means to say]’ would be the same, therefore, as being a good interpreter of his thought for an audience.¹³

I shall try to demonstrate that this interpretation is incorrect, on the basis of three proofs. Let us call the first one a proof based on *semantic coherence*. Our key term appears in another passage of the dialogue, where the noun *hermêneus* occurs three times and the verb *hermêneuo* twice (534e–535a). It is absolutely clear from the context—the so-called *Platonic theory of inspiration*—that these terms have here a passive sense: the *hermêneus* at issue is a mere physical medium or transmission channel; poets and rhapsodes, the rings of the chain mentioned above, let the god use their vocal chords so that he, through them, can make *his* voice heard to men. Therefore, the *hermêneus* cannot be an exegete, but is a mouthpiece or a mediator, whose passive task consists in offering to the god’s mind a material support it does not possess. At this point, if we insist on translating the first occurrence of *hermêneus* in the proem as ‘interpreter’ or ‘exegete’, we lose semantic coherence. It is worth inquiring, therefore, what other meaning this occurrence may have which is compatible with the following ones.

The second proof is *textual*. The *gar* at 530c3 is explicative: an Homeric rhapsode, if he wants to be *agathos*—a *good* rhapsode—must understand the things said by Homer, *because* (*gar*) if he does not know what Homer says (or means to say) he can not perform his task well, *i.e.* be *hermêneus* of the poet’s thought for the audience. The *gar* clearly separates the two moments of rhapsodic activity: first, the rhapsode must understand the things said by the poet—whatever this may mean—in a sort of epistemic acquisition, and then he has to inform his audience. It is a sequence at the same time chronological—first he knows, then he tells others—and logical: to know the things said by Homer or what the poet means to say is a necessary condition of being able to communicate (well) his thought

I believe that in Plato the term does not carry such a meaning: cf. Capuccino (2005), 124–125 n. 89, 128 ff., 194–196; cf. Most (1986) and Pépin (1975).

¹³ E.g. Murray (1996), 102: ‘Here it [the word *hermêneus*] clearly implies knowledge and participation on the part of the rhapsode.’

to others.¹⁴ Therefore, Ion is an *hermêneus* of Homer in the sense that he is a *mediator* of the poet: the main function of his rhapsodic activity, as Plato describes it, is to communicate to his contemporaries the thought of the greatest Greek poet, whatever the modalities and the contents of this communication may be. The textual proof independently leads to the same result as the semantic proof and confirms its validity: the rhapsode *hermêneus* is not, *as such*, an exegete of the Homeric text.

Finally, a proof based on *argument coherence*. The epistemic acquisition that allows the rhapsode to become a good mediator of Homer's thought can not consist in the textual knowledge which derives from a correct exegesis of the Homeric verses, since the object of the Socratic examination which occupies two thirds of the dialogue is not this modern hermeneutic knowledge.¹⁵ This is not the alleged knowledge Plato is denying to the best of the rhapsodes. The beginning of the philosophical dialogue clearly proves it: Socrates asks Ion if he believes himself to be *skilled* (*deinos*) only about Homer, or also about other renowned poets, like Hesiod and Archilocus (531a), and this alleged skill consists in knowing the truth concerning the *subjects* of their works, and not the meaning of their verses: the point is not to establish what Homer really said,¹⁶ but in what way, for example, a general must act in war. The verb *exêgeomai*, which characterizes this first section, has nothing to do with interpreting what Homer says (i.e. his verses), but means 'judging' the truth or correctness of what he says, i.e. the truth of the theses and the correctness of the principles concerning subjects of the utmost importance, for

¹⁴ Starting from 530b4, Socrates introduces the thesis that will be the subject-matter of the dialogue, through what we might call a '*thetic* praise':

1. Good (*agathos*) ⟨Homeric⟩ rhapsode → Knows ⟨Homer⟩
2. But Ion is a *good* ⟨Homeric⟩ rhapsode
3. Therefore Ion knows ⟨Homer⟩.

The predicate *agathos* is crucial for our understanding of the passage: because of the *gar* at 530c3, we must accept the *lectio* of manuscript F: *agathos rhapsôidos* (following Burnet (1967) *ad loc.*) in order to make sense of the *kalôs* (*poiein*) at c5, which is universally accepted. At the end of the dialogue:

1. Good ⟨Homeric⟩ rhapsode → Knows ⟨Homer⟩
2. But Ion does not know ⟨Homer⟩
3. Therefore Ion is not a *good* ⟨Homeric⟩ rhapsode.

On knowledge as a necessary condition to be a good poet, with reference to Homer, cf. *Rep.* X, 598e3–5.

¹⁵ The twofold Socratic examination of Ion's alleged *technê* occurs between 531a1–532b7 and 536d8–541e1.

¹⁶ This is *impossible* according to Plato (*Prot.* 347e1–7).

instance the relationships between men and gods or decisions to be taken in war.¹⁷ On the basis of these three proofs, and by adopting a principle of textual economy, it seems to me that also in the proem, which describes the rhapsodic activity, *hermêneus* does not mean ‘interpreter’, but ‘mediator’, in accordance with the original meaning of the term as reconstructed by Glenn Most and Jean Pépin.¹⁸ According to Most, the ‘basic meaning’ of the term consists in the *hermêneus*’ function of translating a meaning from a language in which it is hidden or unintelligible into another in which it becomes visible and intelligible.¹⁹ In Ion’s case, it consists in making Homer accessible to an audience living many centuries after his death. In the proem occurrence, which expresses the common opinion—shared by Ion—according to which the rhapsodic activity is a *technê*, this hermeneutic function seems to be active: in order to be performed correctly it requires a thorough knowledge (*ek-manthanein*) of Homer. As for the occurrences in the passage about inspiration, the same function turns out to be passive: it is the god’s voice that speaks, using the vocal chords of the poet and the rhapsode, who therefore have no more merit in the success of their mediation than that of providing its physical support.

III. The rhapsode’s task is then to mediate Homer’s thought for his audience. But in what does this mediation consist? Once again the second part of the proem (530b5–531a1) gives us two new formulations of Ion’s peculiar activity, apparently superficial: *legein peri*, more precisely *kallista legein peri*, is followed by *eipein* [...] *pollas kai kalas dianoisas*. The rhapsode *speaks* of the poet *better* than anyone else, expressing ‘many *fine* thoughts’ about him (530c–d). Finally, in his last words in the proem, Ion declares that he has ‘*embellished* Homer’, using a verb which suggests the value of his words’ beauty. For *kosmeô*, which literally means ‘to

¹⁷ The verb *exêgeomai* expresses competence (its original meaning is ‘to lead’, ‘to guide’, likely because one is able to) and is used to indicate the ability of the *technitês* to distinguish the *eu* from the *kakôs*. The line of the argument from 531a1 to 533d2 allows us to attribute to *exêgeomai* the correct meaning, since it substitutes the verb gradually with other terms and expressions which are synonymous: ‘to explain’ the things that someone *says* (*exêgeisthai ha Homêros legei*, 531a7) about a certain argument or *does* in a certain field (e.g. sculpture) is the same as to be able to ‘show’ (*apophainein*, 532e–533a) or ‘distinguish’ (*sumbalesthai*, 533c2–3) which things are said or done well, and which are not, ‘expressing a judgement’ (*apophainesthai gnômên*, 533a4) on them; i.e. it means, coming back to our verb, to be able to ‘explain’ whether such things have been said/done well (*exêgeisthai ha eu pepoiêken*, 533b2–3).

¹⁸ Cf. n. 12 above.

¹⁹ Most (1986), 308.

embellish', or 'to adorn', can be used metaphorically: it also means 'to celebrate', 'to honour', and can be an emphatic synonym of *epainô* ('to praise' or 'to eulogize'), as attested by some passages in the Platonic *corpus*.²⁰ Later on, Ion will speak explicitly of praise (at 536d6 and 541e2), and the issue discussed in the dialogue will be whether the rhapsode is a marvellous praiser (*deinos epainetês*) of Homer in virtue of some kind of knowledge (*sc. technê* and *epistêmê*) or by divine inspiration, with the conclusion that our interlocutor is a *divine* praiser, but lacking in knowledge.

*Epainetês*²¹ is not only a key term, but *the* key term *par excellence*—not by chance is it the last word of the dialogue—a term which marks the mediator-rhapsode's *legein peri* as a *praise of Homer* in the emphatic variant mentioned above. This praise is what the peculiar activity of the Homeric rhapsode Ion of Ephesus consists in. Let us see then what it is.²²

In Plato's work we find several testimonies to how praise dominates men's moral behaviour and how central it is in learning practices, where praising someone is making him a standard of comparison. For example, Protagoras reminds Socrates that the *didaskaloi* take care of the *paides*, forcing them to learn by heart (*ekmanthanein*)²³ the works of the *agathoi* poets, 'which contain many admonitions, descriptions, praises and encomia (*epainoi kai enkômia*) of ancient *agathoi* men, so that (*hina*) the *pais*, admiring (*zêlôn*) them, emulates (*mimêtai*) <them> and desires (*oregêtai*) to become like them' (*Prot.* 325e–326a).²⁴ *Zêlos* (admiration or positive envy), then, seems to be the feeling proper to praise, involving a striving towards emulation which determines its educational power.²⁵ And 'the

²⁰ Cf. *L.* VIII, 829c5; *Phdr.* 245a4. In *eu kekosmêka* at *Ion* 530d6–7, the adverb *eu* is emphatic.

²¹ On the possible meanings of this word cf. Capuccino (2005), 161 n. 202.

²² The noun *epainetês* concludes Socrates' explanation of magnetism (536d3)—which had been introduced to explain Ion's *eu legein peri Homêrou* (533d1)—just as it concludes the whole dialogue (542b4). The occurrences of the verb *epaineô* are also two (536d6 and 541e2). In order to understand the reasons for the long examination he is submitted to by Socrates (8 Stephanus pages out of 12.5) it is most important to grasp what Ion's own activity consists in.

²³ Just as Ion must *ekmanthanein* the verses and the *dianoia* of Homer (*Ion* 530b–c).

²⁴ And the teachers, according to the Athenian, must be exhorted and forced in turn by the guardians of the laws to learn *logoi* similar to those exposed in the first seven books of the *Laws* (good *logoi*, to use as educational models), and to teach them to the youth and praise them themselves (*L.* VII, 811d–e). For the negative part cf. also *Rep.* II, 383a–c.

²⁵ The term *zêlos* often occurs with an explicit reference to emulation, especially in education, but it can also be used to indicate emulation itself (e.g. *Gorg.* 486c8, *Rep.* VIII,

beginning of every work is the most important thing, especially for anything young and tender [...], for it's at that time that it is most malleable, and it absorbs every impression that anyone wants to stamp upon it' (*Rep.* II, 377a–b).²⁶

Also in their common use the terms of praise seem to *imply* some form of imitation: the praiser behaves or desires to behave like the object of his praises. For example, in the beginning of the *Protagoras*, Socrates is justifying his own behaviour by quoting Homer. To chase the beautiful Alcibiades, although the young man is by now beginning to grow a beard, is allowed for someone who claims to be a 'praiser of Homer' (*Homêrou epainêtês*), and as such is following his teaching: 'the most lovable youth is when the beard is first blooming²⁷ [...] which is exactly Alcibiades' age!', concludes Socrates triumphantly (309b1–2). Again, in a passage of the *Symposium* the priestess Diotima claims, through Socrates' mouth, to be persuaded that anyone would rather have children 'more beautiful and more immortal' than human ones (i.e. *logoi*), 'looking at Homer' (*sc.* taking him as a model)²⁸ and envying (*zêlôn*) Hesiod and the other *agathoi* poets for the works which give them *athanaton kleos kai mnêmên* (209c7–d4). And in the *Gorgias* Socrates claims that, if he were to be on trial, he could not mention to the jurors any pleasures (*hêdonas*) provided by himself, that kind of pleasures they judge to be *euergesias kai ôphelias*; on the contrary, he does not envy (*zêlô*)—and *therefore* he did not emulate—either those who provide them or those for whom they are provided (522b3–6).²⁹ Finally, a passage from the *Theages* not only associates envy with emulation, but again suggests its educative power: Demodocus' son pesters his father in trying to convince him to pay some sophist who will be able to make him *sophos* like his companions

553a9; *X. Mem.* II 1, 20.1; *Arist. Rh.* II 11, 1388a31–b22); finally, this more specialised meaning will prevail (*Rh.* II 11, 1388b8–10). Anyway, in the common usage whoever admires or praises someone is ready to behave accordingly, i.e. to imitate him (e.g. *La.* 180a4 and *Rep.* VIII, 562d9); cf. also *L.* III, 688d8 and *Prot.* 343a5. The verb *epainein* allows, moreover, that one can praise either by words or by deeds (*L.* III, 688d6–7; cf. *Mx.* 247e3–4).

²⁶ And what we accept among our opinions when we are young subsequently turns out to be 'undeletable and immutable' (*Rep.* II, 378d–e).

²⁷ *Il.* XXIV, 348 e *Od.* X, 279.

²⁸ *Apoblepô* is often used with this meaning in the *corpus*: e.g. at *Euth.* 6e4, *Phdr.* 237d1, *Alc.* 120b1, 122c1, 5, *Men.* 72c8, *Rep.* V, 466a5, 484c9, VII, 540a8. Cf. also *Crat.* 390e4; *Alc.* 2 149e7; *Prot.* 354c1, d2, 8; *Gorg.* 474d5, 503e1; *H. Ma.* 299e2; *Menx.* 240e4.

²⁹ Cf. also *Gorg.* 468e6–9, *Rep.* VII, 516c8–d7, VIII 550e1–2, 561d4–5.

from the deme whom he wants to emulate (*ezêlôken*):³⁰ this is his desire (*epithumia*, 121c–d).

Some of the texts mentioned (e.g. Gorg. 522b3–6) show negative cases, i.e. cases in which envy is denied, and therefore they do not focus on the object of *zêlos*. On the contrary, both the paideutic passage of the *Protagoras* (325e–326a) and that of the *Symposium* clearly indicate the objects of envy, for the *pais* in the former, for the adult in the latter: for the adults the objects are the *agathoi* poets—and Homer *in primis*—, for the youngsters the *agathoi* men praised by the poets.³¹ Not simply the poets, then, but the *agathoi* poets, and along with them ‘the ancient *agathoi* men’ they praise in their poems; just as the object of Socrates’ *zêlos* in the *Ion*’s proem is the *agathos* rhapsode.³²

What Plato’s dialogues show through their linguistic usage is made an explicit object of analysis in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. In the first book we find a definition of *epainos*:³³ *estin d’epainos logos emphanizôn megethos arethês* (I 9, 1367b28). The praise is a *logos* having *aretê* as its object, and more precisely *aretê* in actions (*dêk tôn praxeôn ho epainos*, b22). In an earlier passage of the same book Aristotle had already indicated *aretê* as the *skopos* of *epainos*: ‘At this point let us speak of virtue and vice, and of the fine and the ugly: for these are the aims of the one who praises and the one who blames’ (1366a23–25). Praise is then praise of an *aretê* or a beauty, aims at a form of excellence or at exalting something beautiful (conversely, *psogos* is condemnation of *kakia* and ugliness). In the second book, after having dealt with the three kinds of rhetorical *logoi* (deliberative, forensic, epideictic),³⁴ Aristotle describes the feelings and

³⁰ In this case the verb *zêloô* has the sense of ‘to imitate’. Compare the whole passage with *Prot.* 316b–c.

³¹ And, indirectly, the *agathoi* poets themselves, on the basis of what Plato says about the *didaskaloi* at *L.* VII, 811d–e (cf. n. 24 above).

³² Socrates would then praise Ion as Ion praises Homer, and the dialogue seems to begin with an example of the same kind of *legein peri* that will be its object of examination.

³³ Eulogy or praise, a word which does not occur in the proem of the *Ion*. Aristotle (*Rh.* I 9, 1367b28 ff.) distinguishes between *epainos* (praise) and *enkômion* (encomium), indicating the *erga* (and not the *praxeis*) as the proper objects of the latter. I will not deal with this here, since Plato, while using both terms (cf. e.g. *L.* VII, 801e, *Prot.* 326a2, *Euthd.* 303c3, *Menx.* 237a–b), often uses them as synonyms (perhaps following the common linguistic usage; e.g. *Symp.* 223a2, *Min.* 319b–d, *Menx.* 234c–235a, *Rep.* X, 607a4). Generally speaking, praise and blame are *ways* of dealing with a subject-matter, whereas the encomium is already a *type* of composition (it belongs to a genre).

³⁴ The epideictic genre includes praise (*epainos*) and blame (*psogos*).

the corresponding mental dispositions of the orator and of his audience needed for a *logos* to turn out to be persuasive. *Zêlos* is among these, and one envies (or emulates)³⁵ the men he desires to resemble, those who are the object of admiration of one or of many, those who lead poets and prose writers to compose praises and encomia. For Aristotle too, then, the praising *logos* excites *zêlos* and creates emulation (II 11, 1388b18–22).³⁶

Unfortunately the *Ion* does not offer any example of the praising activity of the rhapsode, whose performance is prevented twice by Socrates.³⁷ However, in a passage from the *Republic* we find something more specific about Homer's praisers: they 'say that [Homer] was the educator of Greece, and that to govern and educate human affairs it is worth taking an interest in him and studying him, and organising and living one's whole life in accordance with this poet' (*Rep.* X, 606e1–607a8). The distinctive trait of an *epainetês* of Homer seems then to be the praise of his excellence as the educator of a civilization.

The difference with respect to the uses of the praise vocabulary which we have examined so far lies in the *explicit* praise, formulated by the *epainetês*, of both the educational value of Homer and the model of life he proposes. The effect of this kind of praise, as we can infer from the above-mentioned passage from the *Republic*, is to recognize the poet as an ethical, political, and social *authority*.³⁸ People tend to justify their

³⁵ Also the Aristotelian treatment of *zêlos* in the *Rhetoric* confirms that the Greek word *zêlos* can be used directly to indicate emulation, gradually becoming specific for this use (see n. 25 above). In such cases envy remains implicit in emulation, and coincides with the form of suffering (*lupê*) which derives from noticing, in people similar to us by nature, the presence of highly esteemed goods (*agathôn entimôn*) which we could attain ourselves. This suffering is described by Aristotle at the beginning of chapter 11, as a consequence not of the *positive fact* that someone else possesses such goods, but of the *negative fact* that we do not possess them; and for this reason it is a feeling 'honest (*epieikes*) and proper of honest men', aiming at attaining goods, different from *phthonos*, which is instead 'a wicked feeling (*phaulon*), and proper of wicked men', aiming at keeping someone away from those very goods. In the passage from the *Protagoras* quoted above (325e–326a), Plato distinguishes *zêlos* from *mimesis* as its consequence.

For *zêlos*, *phthonos* and Aristotle's discussion of these topics, cf. Konstan and Rutter (2003).

³⁶ And the word *zêlos* can be seen as an indication that we are in the presence of a praise, as we had hypothesised.

³⁷ The missed *epideixis* comes before the two examinations of *Ion* as a *technitês* at 530d and 536d.

³⁸ According to Aristotle, the objects of envy (*zêlos*) are, among others, those men who possess the good of authority (*archê*): commanders, rhetoricians, etc. (*Rh.* II 11, 1388b16–18). Plato himself presents Homer as 'the best and most divine of the poets'

behaviour on the basis of this authority, which they learn to recognise from childhood, when they train in reading and writing on the basis of the Homeric texts; the main consequence of this is that their personal responsibility and intellectual autonomy turn out to be cancelled for the most part. Even in this case the Platonic *corpus* abounds with examples: one could consider for instance the famous *incipit* of the *Protagoras* mentioned above,³⁹ and more generally the passages in which Plato refers to Homer precisely by using an argument from authority.

As for the effects which such a *praise of authority* has on one's own moral behaviour, Euthyphro's case is emblematic. He justifies the charge of murder he brings against his father by quoting as a 'proof' (*tekmêrion*) the myth of Kronos and Zeus: we deem Zeus 'the best and most just of the gods' (*ton Dia tôn theôn ariston kai dikaiotaton*) and at the same time we admit that he shackled his father for unjustly devouring his children (*Euth.* 5e–6a).⁴⁰ That this type of justification is a common practice is proved by the phrases which, within the Platonic *corpus*, imply the poet's authority: *kath'Homêron* (*Symp.* 174c6; *Rep.* V, 468c–d), *ho ephê Homêros* (*Symp.* 179b1), *hôs ephê Homêros* (*Gorg.* 516c3; cf. *Symp.* 180a7 e *Men.* 100a3), *kai Homêros* (*Rep.* VI, 501b6), *hôsper Homêros* (VIII, 545d7–8; X, 612b2), etc. Socrates too avails himself of it, quoting Homer in the epilogue of the *Laches*: even if they will laugh at us because at an old age we think that it is still right to learn from a teacher, we will do this anyway, taking care of ourselves, because—as Homer says—'modesty is not good for a needy man' (201b2–3).⁴¹

As for the ability to think, Plato quite explicitly tells us that the *kaloi kagathoi* men are those who are able to 'spend their time together' (*suneinai*) entertaining themselves 'through their own voice and words'

(*Ion* 530b10) or 'the most divine and most wise poet' (*Alc.* 2 147c6–7), attesting in this way his authority. Cf. also *L.* III 680c–d and *Rep.* X, 607a2–3.

³⁹ Despite its joking and light tone, the passage is particularly significant.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Rep.* III, 377e–378a. On the negative side, the Homeric blame, e.g. that of Hades, is condemned by Plato because it deters us from acting courageously and induces, on the contrary, the fear of death (*Rep.* III, 386a ff.).

⁴¹ Cf. *Charm.* 161a4, where the same quotation occurs (*Od.* XVII 347) and Hes. *Op.* 317–319. See also *Gorg.* 525d–e, *Rep.* IV, 441b–c, *Min.* 318e2–4; and, moreover, *Phd.* 95a1–2 and *Th.* 152e–153a. On the possibility of learning and becoming better even at a mature age see *Prot.* 318b1–4.

Homer's educational authority is attested also outside Plato's works: see e.g. Xenoph. 21 B 10 DK (= Herodian. *p. dichr.* 296, 6): *ex archês kath'Homêron epei memathêkasi*; and Ar. *Ra.* 1009–1010: when Aeschylus asks why we admire (*thaumazein*) a poet, Euripides answers: 'for his skill [*dexiotêtos*] and his admonitions [*nouthesias*], and because we make better [*beltious*] the people in their cities.'

(*dia tês heautôn phonês kai tôn logôn tôn heautôn*) and ‘testing each other with their own *logoi*’ (*en tois heautôn logois peiran allêlon lambanontes kai didontes*).⁴² On the contrary, because of their *apaideusia*, *phauloi kai agoraioi* men ‘discuss poetry’ (*peri poiêseôs dialegesthai*) using an ‘extraneous voice’ (*allogria phonê*) which cannot be questioned about what it means to say.⁴³ The former have to be emulated (*mimeisthai*), leaving the poets aside (*Prot.* 347c–348a). And if someone ‘thinks alone’ (*mounos d’ei per te noêsêi*), he immediately goes and seeks someone else whom he deems better and with whom he may ‘discuss’ his thought (*dialegomai*, 348d6). This someone else, i.e. the dialogue’s interlocutor, will be the only witness (*martus*) called on to defend what is said, because it is impossible to discuss with a crowd (*Gorg.* 474a–b).

IV. Finally, a passage outside the Platonic *corpus* provides us with that example of an *epainos* of Homer which we do not find in the *Ion*:

[T1] I want to bring forward (*paraschésthai*) also Homer to you by praising him (*epainôn*).⁴⁴ In your fathers’ eyes he was a poet of such worth (*spoudaios*), that they passed a law that every four years at the Panathenaea he alone of all the poets should have his works recited; and thus they showed the Greeks their admiration for *the noblest deeds* (*ta kallista tôn ergôn*). They were right to do so. Laws are too brief to give instruction: they merely state the things that must be done; but poets, depicting life itself, select *the noblest actions* and so through argument and demonstration persuade (*sumpeithousin*) the men. Thus Hector, while exhorting the Trojans to defend their country, speaks these words:

Fight on unresting by the ships; and if some meet their fate
By wound of dart, or battling hand to hand, then let them die.
To fall in combat for your country’s sake is no disgrace;
For wife and child will live unharmed, and home and plot last on,
If once the Achaeans leave and sail their ships to their own land.⁴⁵

These are the lines, gentlemen, to which your forefathers listened, and such are the deeds which they *emulated* (*zêlountes*). Thus they developed such

⁴² Testing the truth and themselves (*Prot.* 348a5–6).

⁴³ For the context of the passage cf. n. 16 above; *contra* the common view expressed at *Prot.* 399a: expertise in poetry as the highest form of *paideia*.

⁴⁴ R. Velardi has the merit of having discovered the importance of this passage for the *Ion*, keeping in the text of the *Oratio in Leocratem* the *lectio epainôn*, which had been emended by many editors to *epôn*, although this was not necessary to understand the text (Velardi [1989], 34–35). The verb *paraschesthai* (*(parechô)*, which precedes *epôn* (Molше’s *lectio*), is technical jargon in law-courts and means ‘to produce evidence, witnesses’ (LSJ s.v. *parechô* B II).

⁴⁵ *Il.* XV, 494–499.

courage that they were ready to die, not for their country alone, but for the whole of Greece as a land in whose heritage they shared. Certainly those who confronted the barbarians at Marathon, by defeating an army from the whole of Asia, won, at their own peril, security for every Greek alike. They gave themselves no credit for glory but valued rather conduct deserving of it, whereby they made themselves the champions of the Greeks and lords of the barbarians. Their pursuit of valor was no idle boast; they displayed it in action to the world.⁴⁶

Lycurgus' oration confirms the remarks in the *Republic* concerning the praisers of Homer as well as what we have said on the use of the praise vocabulary: it is worth living one's life in accordance with the poet's teachings, emulating the best actions of the heroes whose deeds he narrates. To praise Homer means, then, to recognize his authority as an educator and at the same time to acknowledge that poetry has the capacity to *persuade* us to emulate men who are *agathoi*, or rather *aristoi*.⁴⁷

The passage suggests two reflections: (1) the first about the relation between excellence as object or aim of the praise on the one hand and

⁴⁶ Lycurg. *Leoc.* 102–104. Βούλομαι δ' ὑμῖν καὶ τῶν Ὅμηρου παρασχέσθαι ἐπαινῶν. οὕτω γὰρ ὑπέλαβον ὑμῶν οἱ πατέρες σπουδαῖον εἶναι ποιητὴν, ὥστε νόμον ἔθεντο καθ' ἑκάστην πεντετηρίδα τῶν Παναθηναίων μόνου τῶν ἄλλων ποιητῶν ἑαυφωδεῖσθαι τὰ ἔπη, ἐπίδειξιν ποιούμενοι πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνας, ὅτι τὰ κάλλιστα τῶν ἔργων προηροῦντο. εἰκότως· οἱ μὲν γὰρ νόμοι διὰ τὴν συντομίαν οὐ διδάσκουσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπιτάττουσιν ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν, οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ μιμούμενοι τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον, τὰ κάλλιστα τῶν ἔργων ἐκλεξάμενοι, μετὰ λόγου καὶ ἀποδείξεως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους συμπεΐθουσιν. Ἐκτῶρ γὰρ τοῖς Τρωσὶ παρακελεύομενος ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος τὰδ' εἶρηκεν·

ἀλλὰ μάχεσθ' ἐπὶ νηυσὶ διαμπερές, ὃς δέ κεν ὕμεων
βλήμενος ἦε τυπεὶς θάνατον καὶ πότμον ἐπίσπη,
τεθνάτω. οὐ οἱ ἀεικὲς ἀμυνομένῳ περὶ πάτρης
τεθνάμεν· ἀλλ' ἄλοχός τε σὴ καὶ νήπια τέκνα,
καὶ κληρὸς καὶ οἶκος ἀκήρατος, εἴ κεν Ἀχαιοὶ
οἴχωνται σὺν νηυσὶ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.

Τούτων τῶν ἐπῶν ἀκούοντες ὧ ἄνδρες οἱ πρόγονοι ὑμῶν, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ἔργων ζηλοῦντες, οὕτως ἔσχον πρὸς ἀρετὴν, ὥστ' οὐ μόνον ὑπὲρ τῆς αὐτῶν πατρίδος, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος ὡς κοινῆς πατρίδος ἠθέλον ἀποθνήσκειν. οἱ γοῦν ἐν Μαραθῶνι παραταξάμενοι τοῖς βαρβάροις τὸν ἐξ ἀπάσης τῆς Ἀσίας στόλον ἐκράτησαν, τοῖς ἰδίους κινδύνοις κοινήν ἄδειαν ἅπασιν τοῖς Ἑλλησι κτώμενοι, οὐκ ἐπὶ τῇ δόξῃ μέγα φρονοῦντες, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ ταύτης ἄξια πράττειν, τῶν μὲν Ἑλλήνων προστάτας, τῶν δὲ βαρβάρων δεσπότας ἑαυτοὺς καθιστάντες· οὐ γὰρ λόγῳ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπετήδευον, ἀλλ' ἔργῳ πᾶσιν ἐνεδείκνυτον.

Burt's translation (1962) modified, italics mine. Cf. what Plato says about poetry in the *Phaedrus*: '[it] educates the future generations by celebrating the achievements of the ancients' (245a4–5).

⁴⁷ Also for Aristotle the persuasive praise inspires *zēlos* and emulation (*Rh.* II 11, 1388b18–22); cf. pp. 72–74 above.

persuasion on the other; (2) the second one about the oratorical practice of ‘producing witnesses’ with respect to knowledge.

(1) Also the ordinary (non-philosophical) usage of the terms *agathos* and *eu* in the *Ion* shows the importance that praise has in this dialogue: starting with the proem our rhapsode is described as *agathos*, or rather *aristos* and retains this condition by linguistic necessity even when Socrates attributes the merit of his *eu legein* to *theia moira*, thereby depriving him of any form of knowledge.⁴⁸ Ion, then, is *agathos* neither in virtue of a *technê* nor in virtue of *epistêmê*; nonetheless, he is *agathos* because his large audience has so decided.⁴⁹ In other words, we cannot say that the audience praise Ion because he is *agathos*, making excellence depend on skill and knowledge, but we must say that he is *agathos* because the audience praise him: Ion is a *good* rhapsode on the basis of the external criterion of his success. A good rhapsode, like a good poet, is such if he achieves his aim and reaches the goal of the rhapsodic (or poetic) activity (*kêlein* and giving pleasure), but in this case the proof of this is not his skill, but the *enthusiasm* he provokes in his audience.⁵⁰ We can find again in the *corpus* some confirmation of this ‘praise culture’, treacherous because deep-rooted in the language. For example, at *Lys.* 206a we are told that the poet catches his audience with praises and encomia, and at 206b Hippothales agrees with Socrates that someone who harms himself by poetry, alienating his audience, cannot be an *agathos* poet—to believe the contrary would be ‘a great absurdity’ (*pollê alogia*): in order to be *agathos* he must ‘endear himself’ to his audience, which in this case is a single lucky listener, a *paidika*.⁵¹ And a passage of the *Republic* attests that

⁴⁸ *Ion* 533c–536d.

⁴⁹ Everyone says that Ion speaks well of Homer (*Ion* 533c6–7); the rhapsode has this reputation *before* Socrates locates its cause in the divine intervention and independently of it, i.e. in the common opinion he remains *agathos* anyway, whatever the reason of this excellence may be.

⁵⁰ A different problem is to determine the causes of this excellence: having denied that the rhapsode has *technê* and *epistêmê*, Socrates will locate these causes in *theia moira* and *enthusiasmos*. Just as *agathos* is the poet or the rhapsode who has success with an audience, so *kalos* is ‘ce qui plaît au jugement d’autrui’ (as synonymous with ‘admirable’, Méron [1979], 24). It is only as a consequence that the audience attributes truth and correctness to the contents of the *legein*, just as it attributes competence and knowledge to the poet and the rhapsode. On *kêlein* as the purpose of poetry, see *Lys.* 206a–b.

Cf. what Euthyphro maintains about piety: pious is what the gods like, i.e. ‘is pious because the gods like it’ and *not* ‘the gods like it because it is pious’ (*Euth.* 10a2–3).

⁵¹ On the praise of a victory cf. also 205d6.

to praise someone means 'to call him expert' of something not because he is really such, but in virtue of a certain result he has achieved (VI, 488c–d).⁵² Analogously, at *Phdr.* 259e–260a it is the audience that 'judges'⁵³ the rhetorician's *eu kai kalôs legein*; the latter 'does not need to know what is really just, but rather what is thought (to be just) by the totality of the people who will judge; not what is really good or fine, but what will appear to be so, because it is from this that *persuasion* springs, and not from truth, so that behind the success there is no knowledge.'⁵⁴

According to the analysis of A.W. Adkins,⁵⁵ this priority of praise is already typical of the Homeric world, in which the successfulness of an action determines the praise independently of the human ability which may or may not have produced it, and which is anyway attributed to the winner in virtue of the good result achieved. The same seems to happen to our famous Homeric rhapsode; this is then a traditional trait of culture which had had centuries to set in, a culture in which excellence is determined by one's success with the audience, who must be *persuaded* in spite of the truth. Rhetoric, as we have seen, persuades by using beliefs, poetry persuades by enchanting, i.e. by affecting emotions: through the voice of a rhapsode who declaims his verses, Homer, praiser of heroes, persuades the audience to emulate their actions by involving them, i.e. by giving them pleasure through the expressive means of poetry.⁵⁶ The poets 'seem to speak very well' (*panu eu dokein legesthai*) on any topic, from shoemaking to strategy, thanks to the vast natural appeal of meter, rhythm and harmony (*Rep.* X, 601a–b).

(2) It is customary to praise or blame something *without knowing it*⁵⁷—which is the same as praising or blaming it inappropriately—on the basis of 'witnesses and praisers' (*martusin kai epainetais*) which are thought

⁵² Cf. also *L.* II, 657e.

⁵³ The judicial verb *dikazô* shows most clearly the idea of a culture in which the majority of the audience has the power to judge also on questions of the utmost importance, like someone's life and death: Socrates is a memorable example of this. Cf. *Arist. Rh.* II 18, 1391b1–16: in the epideictic *logoi* 'the discourse is composed for the sake of the audience, as if they were judges', 'since the use of the persuasive *logoi* aims at judgement'.

⁵⁴ Still more strongly: knowledge is not *necessary* (*ouk einai anankên*, 259e7–260a1).

⁵⁵ Adkins (1960), 58.

⁵⁶ Cf. e.g. *Rep.* X, 605d3–5, and especially *Gorg.* 502a–c. Ion himself, representing the Homeric characters, 'has the most stunning effect on the spectators' (*ekplêxêis malista tous theômenous*, *Ion* 535b2–3).

⁵⁷ We can understand in this way the Athenian's words on wheat: praising it as good food, or criticising it, without being informed on its properties or its appropriate use.

to increase the worth of one's own opinion (*L. I*, 638c–d).⁵⁸ This remark of the Athenian provides an excellent summary of what Plato condemns in the praising *logos* and in the praiser. In the former he condemns the improper and common use which neglects knowledge of the praised object; in the latter he condemns the authority which justifies such a use. For example, the audience of a rhapsodic contest praise the actions and the behaviour of the Homeric heroes (and then go on to emulate them in their own conduct) not because they themselves *recognize* their goodness or correctness, but on the basis of Homer's authority. In the same way Ion praises Homer as a model of *paideia* by *asserting* the goodness and correctness of his teachings;⁵⁹ however, he does not have any accurate knowledge of the things he teaches, and so he can be produced as an *inappropriate* witness of the poet's authority. In this way a chain of *praisers of praisers* similar to that of the divine *hermênês* seems to be formed (*Ion* 534e ff.): Ion praises Homer who in turns praises *agathoi* men, just as the rhapsode worked as mediator for the poet, who in turn was a mediator for the god or the Muse. This praise of a praise is attested by a passage in the *Republic* in which Socrates levels his main charge against poetry, that of infecting also the *epieikeis*, which is 'something most serious'. Poetry has this effect because even the best amongst us, when they listen to the enactment of the Homeric characters, feel pleasure and *praise* Homer for being a good poet, consequently they *praise* the behaviour of his characters, including the weeping and crying of the bereaved heroes, as if these things were 'worthy of a man' (*X*, 605c–e).⁶⁰ Notice, moreover, that the praisers of Homer include both professionals, like the Homeric rhapsodes and the Homerides,⁶¹ and laymen (e.g. *Prot.* 309a–b), which shows that this was a widespread behaviour.⁶²

⁵⁸ For Homer produced as a witness cf. also *L. III*, 680c–d.

⁵⁹ More precisely, the epistemic correctness and the rhetorical *prepon* of what he says: see *Ion* 536e–541b, and cf. Capuccino (2005), 182–186.

⁶⁰ In the quoted passages Socrates comments that, by doing so, they do not praise *kalôs*.

⁶¹ The Homerides to whom the proem of the *Ion* refers are the legendary Homerides of Chius, the most expert in Homeric matters, of whom the rhapsodes become the 'modern' depositories. It is in this sense that in the end the rhapsodes and the Homerides turn out to coincide: the Homeric rhapsode of the V and IV century (Plato himself calls him *homêridês* at *Phdr.* 252b4 and *Rep.* X, 599e–600b) is the Homeric expert *par excellence*, the official expert, the heir of the tradition of Chius (in the epilogue we are told that Ion boasts 'Homeric wisdom'). His expertise is such that not even the legendary Homerides could refrain from crowning him with a golden crown (*Ion* 530d7–8), the most longed for prize.

⁶² Cf. *Rep.* II, 366d7–e3.

To summarise, the argumentative sections of the *Ion* aim at unmasking the *epainetés'* pretension, based on his success, to be wise about Homer's subjects,⁶³ for instance the art of war or the governing of a city, or the correct moral conduct. In this way Plato wants to deny the value of Ion's praise and at the same time wants to cast a shadow on Homer's educational authority, which is the object of that praise. The central section about inspiration aims at explaining the reason for the success even in the absence of knowledge: the audience likes Ion's *performances* in reciting and praising, just as it likes the Homeric compositions, and judges them *kala*, because they are inspired by a Muse or by a god, because they are divine words. The divine origin perhaps does not assure their truth,⁶⁴ but the epistemic criticism still holds true: what the rhapsode boasted of and Socrates refutes is the possession of a *technê* and an *epistêmê*, of some form of structured knowledge,⁶⁵ and not of a collection of true beliefs. According to Socrates, 'the discourses made well and correctly (*eu ge kai kalôs*) [...] must contain the *thought* (*tên dianoian*) of the speaker, a thought which must *know* (*eiduian*) the truth concerning the topic which one wants to tackle' (*Phdr.* 259e4–6);⁶⁶ and, according to the thesis of the proem,⁶⁷ knowing Homer is a necessary condition for being a good rhapsode. Since he is found lacking in knowledge, Ion is not entitled to be judged *the best* of the rhapsodes: by denying that someone knows, one also denies that he is excellent, by *modus tollendo tollens*.⁶⁸ And indeed this is the goal of Plato's examination, undermining the authority of the rhapsode (the praiser) and *through him* that of the poet (Homer),⁶⁹ the epistemic criticism being its means. The *aretê* remains, as shown by the pages on divine enthusiasm, but is not to be attributed to the rhapsode but to the god, as confirmed by the epilogue: Ion is a praiser of Homer *theios kai mê technikos*. In this way, also the second question asked at the beginning finds now an answer: Plato *condemns* the poetry with which he

⁶³ *Ion* 541e ([...] *polla kai kala peri Homêrou epistasai*)-542a (*Homêrou sophian*).

⁶⁴ Cf., however, *L. IV*, 719c–d.

⁶⁵ On the *technê* as structured or 'connected' knowledge, cf. Cambiano (1971) and Capuccino (2005), 172–186.

⁶⁶ For an analogy with the *dianoia* of the proem of the *Ion*, see Capuccino (2005), 189 ff.

⁶⁷ Cf. n. 14 above.

⁶⁸ Cf. again n. 14 above.

⁶⁹ Therefore, from the rhapsode to the poet, and not the other way around, as was instead suggested by the chain of inspiration: as to the reasons for this see p. 83 below.

is acquainted because of what it is, in its entirety,⁷⁰ *not* despite its divine origin, but exactly because of it and of the effectiveness that it confers. Of course this does not prevent him from attributing to a reformed poetry, which includes only selections of traditional poetry, a crucial role in the education of the just man. But this is a new poetry; for the ancient one, *as it is*, no appeal is possible.⁷¹

While, as far as excellence and its praise are concerned, the alternative appears rigid, at least in principle (in order to be *agathos* at something you must possess the relevant knowledge, otherwise you are not really *agathos*), elsewhere Plato takes into account the possibility that a man can possess an intermediate virtue: concerning the most important things (*ta megista*),⁷² as Simmias remarks in the *Phaedo*, when we cannot learn from others nor by ourselves how things are, we must accept the best kind of human reasoning (*logos beltistos*), *i.e.* the most difficult to refute, and, letting it guide us, ‘sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft’ (*Phd.* 85c–d).⁷³ The Socratic method turns out to be in fact Plato’s alternative to the dogmatic attitude of the praisers,⁷⁴ along with a practical counterargument to unmask the argument based on authority: in the *Republic* Socrates suggests that Homer should be asked why, if he really was the educator of Greece, not even the Homerides can mention wars won under his command, or cities made prosperous thanks to his ruling, or a surviving *bios homêrikos* (*Rep.* X, 599c ff.).⁷⁵ In the same way, he asks Ion why ‘although he is the best of the Greeks both as rhapsode and as general’ (as he himself claims) he chooses to be a rhapsode and to travel around Greece instead of being a general (*Ion* 541b6–c2; cf. *Rep.* X, 600d–e). The implicit answer is that they are not *really* good

⁷⁰ He does so by denying to poetry *as a whole* the status of *technê* (*Ion* 532c8–9: ΣΩ. *Poiêtikê gar pou estin to holon. ê ou*).

⁷¹ We still need to understand whether and in what measure this reformed poetry is inspired—since according to *Phdr.* 245a5–8 inspired poetry is better than the non-inspired one—and what the relationship is between *enthousiasmos* and the mimetic nature of poetry in the *Republic*. For a possible solution, cf. Giuliano (2005), 191–204, who does not focus on the reformed poetry, however, but wants to prove that, at least in principle, inspired poetry and mimetic poetry are not incompatible, to vindicate Plato from the charge of contradicting himself or being ambiguous in his treatment of this issue.

⁷² See the topics with which Homer deals—and with which mostly all poets seem to deal—at *Ion* 531c–d, and cf. *Rep.* X, 598e1–2, 599c–d.

⁷³ Cf. *Cr.* 46b4–6; see also *Prot.* 346e4–347a1.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Prot.* 347c–348a, *Gorg.* 474a–b and p. 12 above; on the praisers of Homer cf. also *Rep.* X, 606e–607a.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Phdr.* 245a4–5 (see n. 46 above).

educators, legislators or commanders.⁷⁶ If they were so, they would aim at being praised rather than praising, leaving behind 'many fine deeds' as memorials of themselves (*Rep.* X, 599a–b).⁷⁷

V. Let us return to the *Ion*. It remains to be clarified why the rhapsode is chosen as interlocutor, instead of Homer, to whom Plato does not hesitate to refer in the *Republic*. The answer lies in the term *hermêneus*, which describes precisely the mediating function of the rhapsode, who is the contemporary voice of Homer, since Homer does not have his own any more. At this point it becomes also clear why the position of the rhapsode in the chain of inspiration is privileged in comparison with that of the poet: the rhapsode, unlike the poet, is able to address *directly* the contemporary audience, and therefore to influence their judgement on very important issues. For we must not forget that according to Plato the written words, in our case the verses of the poems, are fixed, crystallised, and therefore need someone who makes them alive, speaking on behalf of their author, when he cannot speak.⁷⁸ Ion is this mouthpiece; since he is *epainetês* he is the medium between Homer and the Greeks of the 5th century BC, for whom he keeps alive Homer's educational model, with the consequences which we have discussed. In this way Ion keeps transmitting a culture of praise and authority, *i.e.* a culture where the praiser determines the worth and the ability of someone, and not *vice versa*, and where at the same time men are accustomed and authorized by the Homeric tradition to justify their behaviour on the basis of authority, for instance that of the great poet. Plato offers us several examples of this.

⁷⁶ Cf. Giuliano (2005), 88. This practical counterargument is the only one available to the laymen, who risk being deceived by Homer concerning his knowledge of the important issues he deals with, because they themselves lack such knowledge. On this see *Rep.* X, 598c–d.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Clit.* 410b–c, in which Clitophon seems to mimic the Socrates of the *Ion*: just as Ion, who does not respond pertinently to Socrates' questions, either lacks *technê* or is *adikos*, so Socrates, who does not tell Clitophon what justice is, either does not want to share this information with him (and therefore is *adikos*), or does not know it, and merely praises it. It is possible to be able to praise something even while not being an expert in it.

⁷⁸ But in this case 'to make them alive' does not mean to defend them like a father during the elenctic test. Lending his voice to the Homeric verses, the rhapsode gives them back the strength which comes from the musicality of rhythm and harmony, and which the written words mostly lose. Homer's words, which already have the power of tradition and familiarity (they are the foundations of *paideia*), take on the additional hypnotic power of Ion's voice: they are words which have always been deemed to be true, and are pronounced with the assertoric force of the truth conferred to them by their divine origin.

At *Rep.* II, 363a ff. Adeimantus says that ‘the fathers and all those who take care of someone [we are talking of education] insist with warning tone that we must be just, but do not praise justice itself, but the good reputation which comes from it, to attain, by appearing to be just persons, public offices, illustrious marriages and [...] other advantages [...] which are given to the just in virtue of his good reputation’; and they call Homer and Hesiod as witnesses of the goods which also the gods would grant them. He also says, at 366d–e:

[T2] My admirable friend [*ô thaumasie*], of all of you who claim to praise justice, from the original heroes whose discourses have survived to the men of the present day, no one has ever blamed injustice or praised justice except for the reputation, the honours and the rewards which derive from it.⁷⁹

Everyone has always praised only the appearance of justice, because of the advantages that it would have brought (367b–c).⁸⁰ The rulers think they are real *politikoi* because they are praised by the majority (IV, 426b–d), and generally everyone cares for what is praised (in speech, behaviour, and way of life) and despises what is not so (VIII, 551a4–5). Since, moreover, the approval of the mob, which praises what it likes and not what is good, becomes of the utmost importance in war, in politics, and in the education of the youth (*i.e.* in *ta megista*); in every case, persuasion,⁸¹ and not *technê*, enjoys the best reputation (see for instance VI, 488c–e): people look for words which excite ‘the applause and the praise of many’ (*Prot.* 339d10),⁸² and the soul, which is nourished by knowledge, can easily be deceived by the sophists who make appear what is not knowledge as knowledge by praising it (313c–d). This is the main risk for an adult who lives in a praise society.⁸³ Finally, how can we explain

⁷⁹ ὦ θαυμάσιε, πάντων ὑμῶν, ὅσοι ἐπαινέται φατὲ δίκαιοσύνης εἶναι, ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἠρώων ἀρξάμενοι, ὅσων λόγοι λελειμμένοι, μέχρι τῶν νῦν ἀνθρώπων οὐδεὶς πώποτε ἔψεξεν ἀδικίαν οὐδ’ ἐπήνεσεν δικαιοσύνην ἄλλως ἢ δόξας τε καὶ τιμὰς καὶ δωρεὰς τὰς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν γιγνομένας: [...]

Plato then seems to share Adkins’ thesis on the Homeric culture of praise (cf. p. 15 above). On justice and injustice as themes of the Homeric poems see *Alc.* 112b4.

⁸⁰ Cf. *L.* V, 732e–733a. On the advantages of praising what *appears* to be just cf. also *Rep.* II, 361e3–362a3.

⁸¹ *eu/kalôs legein* is to speak persuasively (cf. e.g. Callicles’ answer which, at *Gorg.* 510a11, expresses a common opinion; and *Menx.* 234c–237c).

⁸² Cf. the catcalls, the uncouth yelling of the audience and the applause which assign praise at *L.* III, 700c3–4.

⁸³ In such a society even the jurors, sometimes, cry out their comments of praise and blame as if they were at the theatre (*L.* IX, 876b). The *polis* itself praises and blames the

the lack of external sources who attest to this dangerous educational and ethical activity of the Homeric rhapsodes? The reason is actually simple. Plato neither expresses nor hides it (certainly it is not on this issue that his philosophy becomes esoteric), but shows this reason *on the surface*, through a technique—that of talking names—which was not at all foreign to the ancient world, and by addressing an audience who is well aware that Ion of Ephesus, the most famous of the Homeric rhapsodes, actually never existed.⁸⁴ His name is meaningful in three different ways. First, *Ion* reminds us of Ionia,⁸⁵ from which the rhapsode comes: Ephesus is his fatherland, and also the city of Magnesia, to which the usual name of the magnet refers, is a Ionic city. Second, it recalls the itinerant character of his profession, presented in the proem (530a–b) and confirmed in the epilogue (541e–542a): *Iôn* (⟨*eimi*⟩) means ‘he who goes’, and is therefore a name appropriate to the character. Finally, it is clearly an Heraclitean word: from the perspective of the *Cratylus* it is the most apt name to refer to becoming and, as a Cratylean name, according to the theory of the ancient proper names, it is appropriate not to the appearances (the itinerant aspect), but to the *nature* itself of the character.⁸⁶ The wandering is *constitutive* of Ion’s activity: not only does he never stay physically in a particular place, wandering from one city to the other as required

citizens through the laws (I, 632a): ‘The educational effect of praise and blame makes every person docile and well disposed towards the laws that are about to be established’ (V, 730b5–c1). It is harmful instead to praise one’s own soul (L, V, 727b–c) or that of one’s children (III, 694d), letting it do whatever it wants. Appearance ‘overcomes also the truth’ at *Rep.* II, 365c1–2.

⁸⁴ No other passage in Greek or Latin literature—including the Platonic *corpus*—refers to him; if we consider that since the very first words of the dialogue Socrates addresses him as if he were famous, and that therefore if he had really existed others would have mentioned him, we can conclude that most probably Ion belongs to literary fiction. It is curious that a scholium to Aristophanes (*sch.* V *ad Ar. Pax* 835–837a14) attributes to Socrates a *logos*, presumably written, entitled *Iôn* (but referred to Ion of Chius).

⁸⁵ We should not forget that Ion is also the name of the Greek mythical hero who was eponymous of the Ionic race.

⁸⁶ See e.g. what is said about the Sun at *Crat.* 409a: it could be *halios* ‘also because of its *aei heilein iôn* [constant turning and going]’; cf. 415b4: ‘the things go’ (*iontôn tôn pragmatôn*), 419a8, b4: the noun which signifies something good praises the good it represents, so for example *diïon* (‘which goes through’, ancient noun for *deon*) ‘praises what goes everywhere’ (*ion pantachou enkekômiasmenon*); on the contrary ‘what stops and binds is blamed’ (*to de ischon kai doun psegomenon*); 421b8, c2, c4: *on* + *iôta* becomes *ion* (what goes), and concerning the correctness of nouns like *ion* and *rheon*, we cannot but ‘say that what we do not know is barbarous’: perhaps some of these nouns are really such, and perhaps the first nouns cannot be found instead, because they are ancient.

by his profession, but he does not even stay still with his soul. Like Proteus, mythological mariner capable of legendary metamorphoses,⁸⁷ Ion evades the double Socratic examination by hiding himself behind multiple and always different answers (sometimes contradictory, 539e), and reappearing even as a general (541e–542a), because there is no knowledge in him: his beliefs fluctuate because they lack the stability of knowledge.⁸⁸

Once again, there are several echoes of this in the Platonic *corpus*. At *Soph.* 242c–e, different ontological stances, among which the Eleatics (starting from Xenophanes) and ‘the Muses of *Ionia* and Sicily’, are considered similar because of their way of communicating their doctrines: the *muthos* typical of children’s tales, which is opposed to the philosophical *methodos* of questioning a famous interlocutor *as if* he were present,⁸⁹ asking him what he means (243d6–8), in order to learn something from him, in case he proves to be wise, or to look for the truth together with him, in case his beliefs turn out to be false. Again, at *Tht.* 152e–153a we find Homer as a general of an heterogeneous army of supporters of the flux theory: among them, beside the proposer of that theory, Heraclitus, *Ionian* philosopher, we find a natural philosopher (Empedocles), a sophist (Protagoras), and the best poets, both comic and tragic, who are all referred to by Socrates as witnesses of the validity of the theory, with a typical argument based on authority.⁹⁰ The theory of flux, with the extreme consequences to which Plato leads it in the *Theaetetus* (lack of any form of stability and, consequently, impossibility of knowing and communicating), seems to recall, as if it were its theoretical counterpart, the itinerant aspect of Ion’s activity, attributed to this fictitious character to symbolise the lack of stability in his beliefs. That the passage suggested the same reading to Plato himself, even if only implicitly, is confirmed by what he writes later in the dialogue: he attributes to the thesis of the young Theaetetus that knowledge is perception, together with the underlying theory that *panta rei*, which is its necessary ontological counterpart, an enormous circulation in *Ionia*

⁸⁷ The image of Proteus occurs also in other passages of the *corpus*: *Euth.* 15d, *Euthd.* 288b, *Rep.* II, 381d. Proteus, like Ion, is a stranger, and because of his shifty and metamorphic character Plato defines him as an ‘Egyptian sophist’ (*Euthd.* 288b8).

⁸⁸ On the instability typical of opinion and extraneous to knowledge cf. *Euth.* 11c–e.

⁸⁹ Plato seems to do the same with Homer at *Rep.* X, 599d2 ff.: ‘Dear Homer ...?’

⁹⁰ It is controversial whether the argument is sincere or not, and this question is tied to our understanding of such a complex dialogue as the *Theaetetus*, which provides its context.

(179d6–7), starting from Heraclitus' pupils, who are fanatical supporters of it. These Heraclitean theories, or, as Socrates says, 'Homeric, if not even more ancient' cannot be discussed with their supporters from Ephesus, who claim to be 'acquainted' (*empeiroi*) with them, because they, in full accordance with their writings, are always on the move, like maniacs; they are by no means able to focus on some reasoning or issue, or to ask questions and answer in turn, calmly, but they shoot off against their interlocutor 'little enigmatic phrases' (*rhêmatiskia ainigmatôdê*) which, willy-nilly, they are unable to explain. All their attention is focused on not allowing anything to remain stable, either in argument or in their soul, since otherwise this would be still, which is unacceptable for them; in this way, they end up being unable to discuss even amongst themselves, and none of them is a pupil of anyone else, but they 'spring up wherever it may happen, each of them in a state of *enthusiasm*' (*all'automatoi anaphuontai hopothen an tuchêi hekastos autôn enthousiasas*, 179e–180c).⁹¹

To *go*, then, is on the one hand the profession of the itinerant rhapsode and, on the other, the way in which all things are according to Heraclitus, Cratylus, and the Heracliteans, but also Homer: the connection of all of them to Ephesus and Ionia confirms this suggestion. Moreover 'Ion' reminds us of Ionia directly and twice: Ephesus is his fatherland, and Homer is presented as the beginner of Heracliteanism. Whoever or whatever the 'Muses of Ionia and Sicily' may be—Heraclitus of Ephesus and Empedocles of Akragas, as some believe, or poetry and rhetoric which had their origins there—the composite army of Homer⁹² puts together poets, natural philosophers (including Heraclitus and Empedocles) as well as sophists, like Protagoras, under the aegis of motion. Although ostensibly this means that they share the same ontological doctrine—which is actually disputable—Plato at the end confesses that what links them is a style of thought: this is the style, originally poetic and Homeric, that Plato criticizes in the *Ion*.

⁹¹ See what follows at 180d. For the educational power of praise, which we have discussed, the most serious changes are those which concern the praise and blame of customs (*L. VII*, 798d3–5): to change frequently one's customs, because the model to which one conforms changes, is risky, both because the new habits could be worse than the old ones for the lack of competence in those who impose the change on the basis of authority and because—and this is the most serious aspect—the change itself, especially if frequent, suggests an inconstant lifestyle.

⁹² Homer is said to describe especially the 'Ionic life' (*Iônikon bion*) at *L. III*, 680d1.

The passages collected so far, with their numerous references, have presented this style as typical of a praise and authority culture, in which success with the audience and the ability to persuade it, manipulating beliefs and emotions, are more *valuable* than knowledge and truth for the purpose of gaining the reputation of personal excellence; and to have this reputation is more *valuable* than really being excellent. A culture in which these are the most esteemed values cannot but promote a corresponding style of thought, in which the privileged forms of expression are the *muthos* and the *rhêmatiskia ainigmatôdê*: these very long or very short discourses, then, have a fixed form and, in order to justify the validity of one's own or someone else's opinion, allow the testimony of an extraneous but famous voice, through an argument by authority. The immediate outcome of such a cultural choice is the numbing of reason, while the long-term result is the impossibility of communication, as suggested by the second passage quoted from the *Theaetetus*. Just as the ultimate outcome of the flux theory was the impossibility of communication, the Heraclitean interpretation of thought locks each one up in one's own perennial changing; and this image cannot but remind us of the chains of *enthousiazontes* in the *Ion*. Each one is seized by his own peculiar enthusiasm, because each chain determines a private relationship between each member of the audience and his rhapsode, between the rhapsode and his poet, between each poet and his Muse: horizontal movements are not allowed, there is no contact between members of the audience, between rhapsodes or between poets. The same passages let us understand the character of the philosophical style as opposed to the poetic one: its most important form of expression is the dialogue by short and relevant questions and answers, the only witness admitted is one's own interlocutor, and the voice to test the one's own. The immediate result consists in knowing one's own reason, while the long-term one is the capacity for learning, thereby improving oneself, as well as for teaching, thereby improving others: the *Theaetetus* does not allow the Heracliteans to have pupils. We should not forget, finally, that the intellectual styles shared by the members of the Homeric 'army', on the one hand, and by the philosophers, on the other, are at the same time attitudes in life: from the praise and recognition of authority emulation follows, just as the *logos beltistos* has the purpose of guiding one's own moral conduct.

VI. A final clarification is necessary: this style, at the same time passive and dangerous, which we have called *poetic*, seems to belong, actually, to a much wider category of influential characters: beside the poets we have

met the naturalist philosophers, the sophists, the rhetoricians,⁹³ without forgetting the indistinct audience of the *phauloi* and *epieikeis*. These are all exponents of that Ionic culture which is contrasted with philosophy, and of which Ion is nothing other than the symbolic incarnation. I would like to emphasise that it is not by chance that this culture is originally Homeric, and therefore *poetic*. Though, as I hope to have proved, it is not the professional figure of the poet that is central in the dialogue, we must nonetheless grant to poetry its own role. I have two observations to make on this point. First, Ion of Ephesus is presented as an *Homeric* rhapsode, as a mediator of the thought of *Homer*, and finally as a praiser of *the poet*. His rhapsodic activity is therefore closely connected to poetry, and not to that of just any poet, but of the 'most divine' of the poets, the one who has always provided the foundations of the *paideia* and keeps it alive for the audience that responds emotionally when attending the rhapsodic competitions. The Ionic culture is therefore traditional and *essentially* poetic, or, if you prefer, Homeric, both in the form and in the contents which convey its values: the style of thought which we have outlined and the attitude in life which follows it have their origin—according to Plato, of course—in Homer and in the poetic tradition which begins with him and continues to live thanks to his heirs, the Homeric rhapsodes and praisers, who preserve its ancient wisdom.

However, this style *is not an exclusive prerogative* of Homer, and reaches beyond the professional category of the poets, as suggested by a passage of the *Ion* itself (534b3–c5), in which we find a *non-strict* use of the noun *poietês*. From this passage we can pick up the following:

1. *The poet* (universal which stands for 'all poets') is not able to *do poetry* (specifically *poiein*: compose and/or recite verses) until he is inspired and out of his mind;
2. No man can be a poet (or an oracle) as long as he remains in possession of his mental faculties;
- 3a. *The poets* are those who *do poetry* (*sc.* compose and/or recite verses) and *say* many beautiful things *about* their subject-matters, like Ion *about* Homer—the plurals *poiountes* and *legontes* rephrase the universal *poietês* of (1);

⁹³ Poets, rhetoricians, sophists and politicians are often treated together, mostly in pairs, in the Platonic *corpus*: e.g. the rhetorician believes to be expert in strategy, just like Ion and Homer from whom the rhapsode has learnt that art, at *Gorg.* 455b–456a, sophists and rhetoricians can be interchanged with respect to their subject-matter and scope

- 3b. Each of them (*sc.* poets) composes (*poiein* with the generic meaning of ‘making’) his works within a specific genre, which can stretch from the epic poem to the encomium.

It seems, then, that according to Plato poets can express themselves both in verses and in prose, and that rhapsodes and *epainetai* fully belong to this category. Encomia are spoken or sung at *Lys.* 205d–e, *logoi* at *Phdr.* 235e–236a, and praising discourses in the *Symposium*, e.g. at 214b9–c1.

This broad sense of *poietês*, which goes beyond the activity of the poet, is confirmed by a passage of the *Gorgias* (502c–d), in which poetry deprived of *mêlos*, *rhuthmos* and *mêtron* shows its most intrinsic character of rhetorical *logos* addressed to the people. The public discourse of the rhetorician and the theatrical *performance* of the tragic poet are both forms of *dêmêgoria*, that of the poet targeting at the same time all the different members of a composite *grand publique*: youth, women, slaves and free men. What is in common between verses and rhetorical prose seems to be, then, this intrinsic *speaking of* something, which takes many possible different forms of *saying*; for example, Homer, by narrating in hexameters Achilles’ heroic deeds or Odysseus’ scheming, speaks of the courage, the intelligence, and the just behaviour of men. But even more important is the way in which this speaking occurs: the *poet* is someone who communicates contents of some importance to a wide and indeterminate audience, in the way proper to poetry and rhetoric, i.e. persuasive, emotional, charming. It is interesting to notice that this similarity between poetry and rhetoric is not exclusively a result of Plato’s own sensibility, but belongs to his literary tradition. Without forgetting the comparison of Odysseus to a bard, and of his words to ‘snowflakes’, in a famous passage of the *Iliad*,⁹⁴ we can find the first strictly linguistic testimony in the *Theogony*: the nine Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne, ‘who in their hearts always think of singing’, when they honour a king, at his birth they pour on his tongue sweet dew, and ‘from his lips the words flow sweet like honey’; this politician (v. 90), thanks to the irrational power of persuasion which he shares *with any poet*, administers justice and settles disputes ‘with peaceful words’. ‘Such is for men the sacred gift of the Muses’, a single gift which is in common, thanks to which ‘on earth there are singers and citharists’, and the king chosen by the god is one of these *poets*.

(465c; cf. *Prot.* 318e–319a), and Homer is a hidden sophist at *Prot.* 316d–e; rhetoricians, sophists and politicians are treated together at *Phdr.* 278b–c. The passages are several.

⁹⁴ *Il.* III, 216–224.

It is the audience, however, that marks the most important difference between poetry, on the one hand, and rhetoric and sophistic, on the other: at *Gorg.* 502d the former is defined as a kind of rhetoric addressed to an indeterminate crowd of youngsters, women, slaves, and free men, whereas rhetoric is addressed primarily to adult free men, and sophistic to their young sons. For Plato, then, poetry is the most dangerous form of flattery, because it is the one that affects the whole citizenry.

VII. In conclusion, to take stock of what has been said so far, I believe that Ion of Ephesus is the distillate of all the characters of the poetic tradition that Socrates, in his dialectical wandering, has encountered in the form of poets, orators, politicians, and sophists, and which converge in a passive mental *habitus* which takes away responsibility and prevents oneself and others from living life to the best of all human possibilities, *i.e.* in the light of reason. The *Ion* puts on stage the essential incompatibility between two styles of thought and life, the rational philosophical one and 'poetical thinking'—to borrow Martin Heidegger's expression—an incompatibility which will be discussed again, in less radical form, in other Socratic dialogues (and not only in the Socratic ones) which also submit that same poetic attitude, in a different and weaker form, to the dialectical examination of philosophy. The difference is the following: whereas there can be no agreement between philosophy and the poetic tradition embodied by Ion,⁹⁵ at least in principle the philosopher Socrates can refute successfully—*i.e.* in a persuasive way which gains the interlocutor's agreement—a poet, a rhetorician or a famous sophist (this is what he tries to do, for example, by questioning the contemporary poets, as we read in the *Apology*);⁹⁶ even if after 15, 20 or 40 Stephanus pages

⁹⁵ Ion does not accept that he is a non-*technikos* (in the way Socrates puts it) *epainetés*: the choice which he faces is between being *adikos* and being *theios* (and not between being *theios* and being *technikos*, *contra* Giuliano [2005], 176–177) and his choice is obvious: the adjective *theios* does not carry any negative connotation in the poetic tradition to which the rhapsode belongs (for the traditional meaning of the jargon of the divine as opposed to the Platonic meaning cf. Capuccino [2005], 207 ff.). If we consider that Ion not only is part of that poetic tradition, but represents it in the dialogue, then it becomes clear why Plato does not allow him to reply one final time: Socrates has no chance of persuading him, between the poetic attitude and the philosophical one there cannot be any agreement, and their routes would continue in parallel forever.

⁹⁶ *Ap.* 22a8 ff.

stuffed with pressing questions no answer is found, at least the interlocutor will have changed his mind on some of his opinions, recognizing their falsehood. And this means, finally, that he will begin to be aware that he does not know, and therefore to come closer to the real philosophical attitude.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ I have to thank, first of all, Luca Castagnoli for translating the Italian version of my paper into English, and Angelo Giavatto and Francisco Gonzalez for revising the translation. Warm thanks are also due to all the people who read and commented on both the French and the Italian version of my paper, in particular Giuseppe Cambiano, Walter Cavini, Francisco Gonzalez, Fritz-Gregor Herrmann and Simonetta Nannini.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HERMENEUTICS OF MADNESS: POET AND PHILOSOPHER IN PLATO'S *ION* AND *PHAEDRUS*

FRANCISCO J. GONZALEZ

The apparent conflict between the critique of the poet in the *Ion* and the apparently much more positive appraisal of the poet in the *Phaedrus* has not escaped the attention of most scholars. In the *Ion* the poet and his rhapsode do not know what they are talking about since they function only as mouthpieces of the gods: filled with inspiration they are empty of intelligence (*nous*). Furthermore, the perspective from which this critique is carried out is that of *technê*: the poet in speaking of ship-building lacks entirely that specialized knowledge which the ship-builder has; the rhapsode in identifying with only one poet lacks completely the technical skill that would make him equally an expert on all poets. In the *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, the inspired madness of the poet is praised and ranked above technical skill and the 'mortal temperance' that characterizes it. Furthermore, the madness and inspiration of the poet is not opposed here to the sober rationality of the philosopher: on the contrary, the philosopher too is characterized as mad and inspired.

To see that this apparent conflict between the two dialogues is only apparent, we first need to recognize that the critique of the rhapsode Ion is much more ambiguous than at first seems. Since, as already noted, Ion is critiqued from the perspective of technical knowledge, this critique would be unambiguous only if Socrates were himself the possessor of such technical knowledge. Instead, Socrates is in important ways more like Ion than he is like the carpenter or the doctor to whom he appeals. Yet the *Ion* overall leaves very obscure where exactly the philosopher stands in the opposition between divinely inspired poet and technical expert.

1. *Ion's* Madness and Socrates' Envy of Self-Possessed Expertise

At the very outset of the *Ion*, Socrates attributes to the rhapsode a *technê* (530b6) which he repeatedly claims to envy (*ezêlôsa*; 530b5, c1, c6). This motif of envy presents Socrates as himself lacking the kind of *technê* to

which others, at least implicitly, make a claim. But what exactly does he assume to be the rhapsode's *technê*? He at the outset identifies it with 'being a hermeneut of the thought of the poet' (*hermênea* . . . *tês dianoiás*, 530c3–4), rather than only of his verses. But what does this mean? As a rhapsode Ion recites the words of a poet, but if he is to have a *technê* he must, according to Socrates, do more: he must in some way convey the *thought* of the poet. But convey in what way? The word *hermêneus* is often translated here as 'interpreter', so that the skill of the poet, according to Socrates, would be to *interpret* the thought of the poet, where this implies explaining and evaluating what the poet thinks. It may indeed be precisely such an ability that Socrates will find lacking in Ion. Yet the word *hermêneus* in Plato rarely if ever denotes 'interpreter' in our rich sense of this term: what is normally or always referred to by this word and its cognates is simply the conveying of a message or piece of information *without* thinking about its meaning or judging its truth.¹

¹ For a critique of the common translation of ἑρμηνεύς as 'interpreter' and an argument in favor of the translation 'medium' or 'mediator', see Capuccino (2005), 124–132, 194–196. Consideration of the use of the concept in Plato's dialogues confirms this thesis; though some passages may not explicitly rule out the sense of 'interpretation,' such a reading is never required and, at least in most cases if not all, is highly implausible. In the *Republic*, when sensation signifies (σημαίνει) to the soul that what is light is heavy or that what is heavy is light, these significations are called ἄτοποι τῆ ψυχῆ αἱ ἐρμηνεῖαι (524b1). These are communications that mean or signify something strange and are therefore ἐπισκέψεως δεόμενα. The ἐρμηνεῖαι are therefore the strange messages conveyed and *not* their interpretation: this interpretation is instead called ἐπισκέψις. In the *Theaetetus*, in the context of considering the definition of knowledge as true opinion plus *logos*, Socrates considers the identification of *logos* with the ἐρμηνεῖα of what differentiates one thing from another (209a5). Socrates appears to use the word ἐρμηνεῖα here in order to *avoid* using *logos* or *doxa* or *episteme*: so the meaning is to be identified with some kind of *conveying* of the difference, without any further specification of what kind of conveying is at issue here. Socrates proceeds to argue that how something differs from other things is already conveyed in having any opinion about it rather than about these other things. In the *Symposium* *daimones* are described as ἐρμηνεῦον καὶ διαπορθεῦον to the gods that which comes from humans and to humans that which comes from the gods (202e2). The two words seem very close in meaning here if not synonymous. They would differ in meaning if we interpreted the first word as meaning that the *daimones* *interpret* what they convey; but can the meaning really be that they interpret to the gods what comes from humans? In the *Republic*, faced with a challenge to the view that men and women should hold the same jobs in the ideal city, Glaucon begs Socrates to ἐρμηνεῦσαι their λόγος (453c10). One might be tempted to argue that Glaucon is here asking Socrates to *interpret* the λόγος, but the context makes it more plausible that he is asking Socrates simply to give voice to the λόγος and speak on its behalf. At *Theaetetus* 163c2, ἐρμηνεῖς clearly refers to those who translate from a foreign language (as at *Philebus* 16a3): but there is no evidence that the Greeks understood this 'translation' as 'interpretation,' as we today tend to do. The word ἐρμηνεῖα at *Cratylus* 407e6, used there as a description

Socrates' use of the term therefore leaves open the possibility that Ion conveys the thought of the poet without any thought of his own, that is, as a passive and transparent medium. Indeed the opposition that will prove operative throughout the dialogue is that between a technical mastery of that about which the poet speaks and of poetry itself, on the one hand, and the conveyance, without thought or *technê*, of some message beyond both the poet and the rhapsode. After this opposition is strengthened and even exaggerated throughout the course of the dialogue, we will need to reflect again on that *hermênea tês dianoias* which Socrates claims to envy.

Socrates' opening characterization of Ion's *technê* sets the stage for his first refutation of Ion. If the rhapsode's *technê* is to 'convey' the thought of the poet, and if the ability to 'convey' one person's thought on a particular subject implies the ability to convey another person's thought on the same subject, then, as Socrates argues, Ion must be able to speak of all

of Hermes, is presumably very close in meaning to the word 'messenger' (ἄγγελον) that follows it and thus unlikely to mean 'interpreter'. In the *Laws*, the preface (*prooimion*) is said to be rightly followed by a λόγος that serves as a kind of ἐρμηνεύς of the laws (907d4–5): the meaning appears to be that this λόγος announces or promulgates the laws, not that it interprets them. The word that immediately follows to describe what the λόγος does is indeed προαγορεύων. What *interpretation* there is here is clearly provided by the *prooimion* rather than by the λόγος that follows it. Later in the same dialogue we are told that the genuine guardians must *know* (εἰδέναι) the truth about the laws and be capable of following them in deed and of ἐρμηνεύειν λόγῳ (966b7). Though the meaning of the verb is perhaps somewhat ambiguous here, it clearly *could* mean nothing more than promulgating the laws in speech. As for the words, ἐρμηνευτική and ἐρμηνευτής, they refer to the specific art of conveying messages between gods and mortals (*Statesman* 260d11 and 290c5). Grondin (1993), 6–12, in his discussion of this set of words, acknowledges that the prevailing and unifying sense is the expression in words of what has previously been thought. If he insists that 'interpretation' is also meant, this is interpretation understood as the simple reversal of expression: uncovering the thought behind the words (7). But if we understand 'interpretation' to mean the explication of the meaning of what is both said and thought as well as the determination of its truth, then ἐρμηνεύειν apparently never means 'to interpret'. For example, what the Greeks would apparently call a ἐρμηνεία is the message conveyed from the god by the priestess at Delphi that no one is wiser than Socrates, *rather than Socrates' interpretation* of this message with regard to what it really means and how it is true. Perhaps one can say, therefore, that while the divinely inspired and mad poet who does not understand what he is saying is a 'hermeneut' in the Greek sense, Socrates is a 'hermeneut' in the modern sense. It is this modern sense that is intended when Lhomme (2001), 176 characterizes the 'inspired' Socrates in the etymological section of the *Cratylus* as opposing a true hermeneutics to the hermeticism of the silent Cratylus. He explains the difference thus: 'Qui dit hermétisme dit sens caché; qui dit *hermêneia* dit double sens' (181). But again, the Greek ἐρμηνεία does not, in any of the cited instances, express ambiguity. Though the ἐρμηνεία of the senses described in the passage of the *Republic* is ambiguous, it is not ambiguous because it is a ἐρμηνεία.

poets equally well, since they all speak of the same subjects. Furthermore, if ‘conveying’ what different poets think on a subject implies having knowledge oneself of that subject, then Ion must possess the art of the diviner and all the other arts concerned with the subjects of which the poets speak (531a–532b). The point is that if being a *hermêneus* is to be a *technê*, it must involve evaluating, judging, and *knowing* that of which one is the *hermêneus*.

Given the noted assumptions behind Socrates’ characterization of Ion’s *technê*, he is able to conclude from Ion’s insistence that he can interpret well only Homer that the rhapsode is incapable of speaking with *technê* and *epistêmê* even about Homer (532c5–7). Socrates now drives home Ion’s lack of a *technê* with an argument significantly different from the ones just considered. If Ion spoke with *technê*, Socrates argues, he would be able to speak well about all the poets, not only because they all speak about the same subject matter, but *because they are all poets* and, in the case of poetry as in the case of any other art, any one who has mastered it must have mastered the *whole* of it (532c–533c). If it is a *technê*, therefore, being a *hermêneus* of the thought of the poet implies not only a mastery of the subject about which the poet thinks but also expertise regarding the art of poetry itself.

When Ion is at a loss to explain how he can speak so well about Homer if he is so ignorant of both the content and the form of his poetry, Socrates introduces an alternative to possessing a *technê*: a ‘divine power’ (*theia dunamis*) that makes both the rhapsode and the poet ‘possessed by god’ (*entheoi*, 533d–534e). The famous analogy of the magnet and the rings is introduced to describe how this power is transferred from the god to the poet, from the poet to the rhapsode, and from the rhapsode to the audience. The implication of the analogy is that whatever power the poet or the rhapsode has is directly derived from, and completely dependent on, the power of the god: just as the ring has no power to attract another ring without the magnet, so the poet has no power to inspire the rhapsode, nor the rhapsode to inspire his audience, without the god. Having a *technê*, in contrast, implies having power in and through oneself to produce a certain effect. If possessing a *technê* is possessing a certain power, being ‘inspired’ is being the mere conduit of a power not one’s own.

What needs to be emphasized here, however, is the way in which Socrates’ long speech on poetic inspiration, in identifying being a *hermêneus* with being a passive medium, makes it incompatible with the possession of any *technê*. The rhapsode is not the ‘interpreter’ of the

thought of the poet for the following reasons: 1) The poet no more possesses *technê* than does the rhapsode, but is equally possessed (533e5–7; see also *Apology* 22b9–c4 and *Meno* 99c1–5 and c11–d1). 2) Thought therefore exists neither in the poet nor in the rhapsode, since the presence of the ‘divine power’ (*theia dunamis*) excludes the presence of thought.² 3) Both the poet and the rhapsode become thereby mere *vehicles* through which the god speaks.³ From these points Socrates concludes that poets, and not only rhapsodes, are *hermênês*, so that the rhapsodes become mere *hermêneôn hermênês*, *hermeneuts of hermeneuts* (535a9). If both poets and rhapsodes can now be described as *nothing but hermênês*,⁴ this is because Socrates is now denying both any sort of expertise.⁵ Mere ‘hermeneutics’ is the mere transmission, without knowledge, of a message and power for which even the poet is not responsible.⁶ Socrates therefore seeks to show that Ion cannot possess a *technê* as a mere *hermêneus* because the thought he conveys, if any, is neither his nor that of the poet for whom he speaks.

This incompatibility of the hermeneutics of the poet and rhapsode with thinking is further emphasized when Socrates insists on the *madness* of Ion and his audience by describing the way in which they cry and feel fear *as if they were present at the scenes the poet describes*. This form of being-present-at-what-is-not-present is madness because it means *being besides or outside oneself* (*exô sautou*, 535b7–c1). To have a *technê* is to have a power in and through oneself and thus to be self-possessed. In poetic hermeneutics one is moved by things beyond one’s control and beyond one’s experience.⁷

² ὁ νοῦς μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῆ, 534b6.

³ ὁ θεὸς αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ λέγων, διὰ τούτων δὲ φθέγγεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς, 534d3–4.

⁴ Οὐδὲν ἄλλ’ ἢ ἐρμηνῆς, 534e4.

⁵ Russon (1995), 410 notes: ‘... since poets are the interpreters of the deities, and rhapsodes are the interpreters of the poets, interpretation means putting the same message in a new context, or, what is the same, to put the same message in a new context is interpretation.’ I would add that the emphasis is on the *sameness* of the message and that the message is conveyed without ‘interpretation’ as we normally understand the word. On Socrates’ account, the poet and the rhapsode no more ‘interpret’ what the god says than the rings interpret the magnet from which they hang.

⁶ As Capuccino (2005), 195 nicely states the point: ‘È chiaro che si tratta di espressione (*vs. in-interpretazione*) o comunicazione: il movimento è verso l’esterno.’

⁷ Stern-Gillet (2004) is therefore right to argue against attempts to find in the *Ion* a conception of poetic genius: ‘Far from being creative geniuses, as the Romantics would have it, poets, in the *Ion*, are no more than passive and irrational mouthpieces of the gods’ (181; see also 194).

When Ion hesitates to agree that he is possessed and mad when he praises Homer (*katechomenos kai mainomenos*, 536d5–6), Socrates returns to a point already implied earlier but only now made fully explicit: Ion cannot possibly have knowledge of the *technai* of which Homer speaks (537a1–2). The doctor is the one to judge whether things pertaining to medicine are done and spoken well in Homer’s poems, and so with the subjects pertaining to other *technai*. Because different *technai* have different subject matters, the rhapsode cannot speak with knowledge about the subject matter of another art. Of what in Homer’s poems, then, is the rhapsode a knowledgeable judge? When Ion replies that the rhapsode can judge what it is fitting for a man or woman to say, Socrates can again show that this is something for the different *technai* to judge: it is the doctor, after all, who can judge what is fitting for a man or woman to say about medicine. In the end poor Ion can avoid appearing mad only by insisting that he is a general in his capacity as rhapsode and can therefore judge what Homer has to say about war. But this claim to be a general makes Ion mad *indeed!* In other words, Ion can either admit to being mad or madly claim to be a general. Yet Socrates concludes the dialogue by presenting Ion with a slightly different choice: either Ion does wrong in refusing to demonstrate the knowledge he has or he is divine in being possessed by the god without knowledge. The choice, in other words, is between being an expert (*technikos*) and unjust (*adikos*) or being possessed by some divine dispensation (*theiai moirai katechomenos*) and thus divine (*theios*, 542a2–7). Ion, unsurprisingly, chooses the latter alternative.⁸ But what of this choice? Is it a necessary one? Are the alternatives exclusive? The example of Socrates himself, I suggest, forces us to question the legitimacy of this choice. Consider that Socrates at one point in the dialogue describes Homer as speaking ‘of how people deal with each other in society—good people and bad, ordinary folks and craftsmen’, of how the gods ‘deal with each other and with men’, and of ‘what happens in heaven and hell’ (531c–d). How could we fail to note that *Socrates* speaks of the same subjects and how therefore could we fail to ask if *he* does so with a *technê*?⁹ If Socrates *does* speak with a *technê*, then he is the one who does wrong by refusing to demonstrate, or even

⁸ It is significant that Clitophon, at the end of the eponymous dialogue, presents Socrates with a similar choice: Socrates’ unwillingness to define justice in a conclusive way shows either that he does not know what it is or that he refuses to share what he knows (410c).

⁹ As Carter (1967), 111 has remarked, ‘The significant point is that the themes of poetry are also the themes of philosophy’.

acknowledge this *technê*, both here and elsewhere. As we have already seen, he starts the dialogue with the claim to be *jealous* of Ion's *technê* (530b5–6), thereby implying his own lack of the same. Furthermore, and more revealingly, when Ion later in the dialogue describes Socrates as being 'wise' (*sophos*), Socrates retorts that he speaks the truth only as a 'layman.'¹⁰ But if Socrates speaks the truth as a layman and not as an expert, are we to conclude, using the alternative into which he forces Ion, that Socrates speaks the truth as one possessed and out of his mind? Is he a mere vehicle through which a god speaks? And are we ourselves as interpreters of the dialogue, because lacking expertise on its content, also mere rings dependent on the divine magnet? Given that Socrates presents himself as neither a *technikos* nor out of his mind, the choice into which he forces Ion appears to be one from which he excludes himself. But with what justification? If the philosopher is neither a *technikos* nor a mad poet, does he not demand a reconciliation between inspiration and thought?¹¹ Do we not need to discover a type of 'interpretation' that thinks and a type of thinking that 'interprets' something beyond itself? In other words: a hermeneutics that is not the passive and thoughtless medium of a divine power and a thinking that is not self-possessed but open to conveying something divine that exceeds its grasp? If philosophy suggests such a third alternative, then it becomes possible to give a much more sympathetic portrayal of the poet than that which a superficial reading of the *Ion* would suggest.¹²

2. Imitative Madness versus Expertise in the Republic and Laws

The critique of the poets in Book X of the *Republic* is worth noting in this context because it too is carried out from the perspective of, and according to the standard of, the *technai*. The fact that Homer only

¹⁰ ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τάλιθ' ἢ λέγω, οἷον εἰκὸς ἰδιώτην ἀνθρώπων, 532d8–e1.

¹¹ Socrates' description of each *τέχνη* being assigned its specific task by the god (537b5–6) may hint at a reconciliation of *τέχνη* with divine inspiration, but it certainly does not collapse the distinction. Russon (1995), 412 is therefore too quick to conclude, on the basis of apparently nothing but this passage, that 'The argument of the *Ion* therefore reveals that the *technê* and the inspired action of the rhapsode have an identical ontological and epistemological status' and that 'the dualism between *technê* and "enthusiasm" is thus overcome.'

¹² Russon (1995), 418 is apparently trying to articulate such a third alternative when he concludes: 'Philosophy is thus the *technê* of *technai* which reflects on reflection and sees its rootedness in *poiesis*.' See also Carter (1967), the purpose of whose study is to

imitates technai such as medicine or generalship is used to show that he does not *possess* these *technai*. (598d–601c). The conclusion is that the poet

uses words and phrases to paint colored pictures of each of the crafts. He himself knows nothing about them, but he imitates them in such a way that others, as ignorant as he is, who judge by words, will think he speaks extremely well about cobblery or generalship or anything else whatever, provided—so great is the natural charm of these things—that he speaks with meter, rhythm, and harmony ... (601a4–b4; Grube/Reeve trans.).

It is again not hard to imagine a Homeric retort that would ask Socrates what he knows of the crafts to which he continually appeals in his arguments. We should recall the conversation reported by Xenophon in which the tyrant Critias prohibits Socrates from talking about his usual topic, i.e., “cobblers, builders, and metal workers” (*Mem.* I.2.37). If Socrates does not in the *Republic* describe the poet as possessed or mad, this is only because he does not there address the question Ion forces him to address, i.e., how the poet can so effectively imitate and speak about things of which he is supposedly completely ignorant. The connection between madness and mimesis is explicitly made in the *Laws*, however, where the poets are characterized (or made to characterize themselves) as being out of their minds (*ouk emphrôn*, 719c4) when they exercise their art of imitation (*tês technês ousês mimêseôs*, 719c5); the latter forces them to contradict themselves in representing contradictory viewpoints without knowing which is true (c6–d1). The contrast is again between being self-possessed in the mastery of a *technê* and being besides oneself as a transparent medium through which what is outside oneself is merely reflected. And again, the alternative fails to explain the place of the philosopher.

3. Socrates' Praise of Madness in the *Phaedrus*: *Dianoia Sprouts Wings*

The *Phaedrus* can now be seen as remedying this deficiency by explaining the philosopher's middle position between the inspired madness of the poet, on the one hand, and the kind of technical expertise and sobriety which Lysias claims for himself. A comprehensive interpretation of the

show that ‘in the final analysis dialectic and inspiration are complementary, and that the artist-philosopher is the pinnacle of Platonic wisdom’ (111).

Phaedrus is of course not possible here, but an outline of the key moments and developments of the dialogue should suffice to show how it complicates, as well as supplements in an essential way, the argument of the *Ion*.

The main point of Lysias' speech is that the non-lover, because he 'is not overcome by love and therefore in control of himself',¹³ is the one who can offer a relationship that is mutually beneficial. The implicit identification here of eros with madness is then made explicit by Socrates in his first speech, since he defines eros at the very outset as the overpowering and subversion of *logos* by an irrational desire for beauty (238b7–c1). Thus the operative opposition in Socrates' speech is that of 'intelligence and temperance against love and madness'.¹⁴ All the criticisms of the lover in this speech therefore boil down to the claim that he is deficient in reason and self-control. It is not hard to see that the critique of the lover in Lysias' speech and in Socrates' first speech parallels the critique of the poet in the *Ion*: in both cases the critique opposes the self-possession of knowledge to its absence. Both poet and lover are mad because possessed by a foreign power beyond their control and their reason.

Yet not only does Socrates immediately retract his critique of love as impious and false; his speech's content is already undermined by its very performance. Socrates observes, both at the start of the speech and at its close, that he is being possessed by the nymphs of the place.¹⁵ His critique of erotic madness is thus delivered in a state characterized at least by the onset of madness! This should be no surprise given the dramatic context with which Socrates provides the speech, a context entirely lacking in Lysias' version: Socrates' non-lover is a lover wily enough to pretend to be a non-lover (237b3–5). In order that we may visualize this pretense, Socrates delivers the speech with his head covered (237a), thus implying that he can critique the lover before Phaedrus only by hiding his own identity as a lover. So if we attend to its performance and context, Socrates' first speech is a ruse by which someone possessed by erotic madness puts up the front of being sane and rational. Is it not thereby implied that the sharp dichotomy asserted by Lysias between love and madness, on the one hand, and reason and self-control, on the other, can result only in hypocrisy and dissembling? That Lysias' speech starts *in medias res*, thereby leaving the non-lover's motive completely in the dark, confirms this suspicion. But this situation, I suggest, parallels

¹³ Οὐχ ὑπ' ἔρωτος ἠττώμενος ἀλλ' ἔμαντοῦ κρατῶν, 233c1–2.

¹⁴ Νοῦν καὶ σωφροσύνην ἀντ' ἔρωτος καὶ μανίας, 241a3–4.

¹⁵ Νυμφόληπτος, 238d1; ὑπο τῶν Νυμφῶν ... σαφῶς ἐνθουσιάζω ..., 241e4–5.

the situation in the *Ion* and the suspicion awakened there by Socrates' critique of the rhapsode. As has been seen, this critique appeals to the dichotomy between possessing a *technê*, on the one hand, and being possessed and out of one's mind, on the other, while keeping in the dark where Socrates himself stands with regard to such a dichotomy if, as he clearly indicates, he is himself no *technikos*.

What is significant about the way in which Socrates in the *Phaedrus* retracts his first speech by offering a second is that he proceeds to purify himself not by disassociating love from madness, as one might expect, but by arguing that madness (*mania*) is the source of many good things that cannot be provided by self-control (*sôphrosunê*). Furthermore—and this is especially significant in the present context—this point is explicitly applied to the case of the poet: the poet who relies on *technê* is 'unaccomplished' (*atelês*) and his poetry will be eclipsed by that of those who are mad (*tôn mainomenôn*, 245a5–8). When one also notes that the good madness in question here is characterized as sent by the gods (*apothêôn*, 245b2), it is hard not to see the *Ion* in a very different light.¹⁶ If *Ion* is lacking in *technê* and possessed by the gods, then this is a reason for praising him rather than critiquing him.

Yet there is an implicit critique of the poets when Socrates claims that none of them have sung of the place beyond the heavens as it merits (*kat' axian*, 247c4) and proceeds himself to dare to speak the truth about it (247c4–5). This contrast between Socrates and the poets is presumably behind the relatively low ranking of the poet in the hierarchy of incarnations (248e1–2). But how exactly does Socrates' 'speaking of the truth' differ from what the poets do?¹⁷ While this contrast was already suggested in the *Ion*, it can no longer be presented as it was there, i.e., as a contrast between self-possessed *technê* and inspiration without knowledge. This is because philosophy is itself described in Socrates' second speech as a form of inspired madness. The contrast between poet and philosopher can now only be one between two sorts of inspired madness or, in other words, between two ways of conveying a power and message beyond either, between two forms of 'hermeneutics.'

¹⁶ So uncharacteristic does Heitsch (1993), 91–92 find this unreserved praise of madness and divine inspiration that he insists that what Socrates is made to say here should not be attributed to Plato himself.

¹⁷ Heitsch (1993), 118 commenting on 249d4–257a2, observes that Socrates' description of 'enthusiastic' experience is here itself so 'enthusiastic' as to free itself from the rules of grammar (116), though he also suggests that Socrates' etymological jokes at 252b are supposed to provoke a certain critical distance.

The madness or possession by a god that characterizes the philosopher is described as *recollection*, that is, being reminded by something beautiful here of the true beauty beyond the heavens (see also 254b5–6).¹⁸ This is a type of madness because, in transporting one to a beyond, it both neglects what is here below (249d8) and cannot clearly see what lies beyond. Thus, when the lovers who are potential philosophers see an image (*homoiōma*), they are, according to Socrates, no longer in possession of themselves¹⁹ and do not understand what they are experiencing ‘on account of not seeing-through sufficiently’.²⁰ This is furthermore described as possession by the god when Socrates describes the lover who is in touch in memory with his specific god—Zeus in the case of philosophers—as having, like Bacchantes, the god in him²¹ and as seeking to make the beloved in the god’s image (253a6–b1).

What needs to be emphasized in the present context, however, is that this philosophical madness, unlike the madness attributed to the poets, is *not* the absence of thought or reasoning. On the contrary, Socrates also characterizes the recollection in question as proceeding from many sensations to a unity gathered together through a reasoning (*logismos*) and as understanding things according to the spoken *eidos* or ‘form’ (249c6–b1).²² The strange synthesis of madness, possession, and reasoning articulated here is perhaps most succinctly captured by

¹⁸ Carter (1967), 118–119 makes the important observation, however, that Socrates in the dialogue exhibits *all four* types of divine madness: at 242c3–4 he claims to be a seer (μάντις), though not a very serious one (οὐ πᾶνν δὲ σπουδαῖος); at 243a2–3 he finds it necessary to purify himself (καθίρασθαι); as for the madness of the poet, Socrates describes himself as suffering from it as he starts breaking out into dithyrambs (238c5–d3). Thus philosophical madness can be seen as a kind of appropriation and transformation of all the other types of madness.

¹⁹ ὄυκέτι’ (ἐν) αὐτῶν γίγνονται, 250a7.

²⁰ Διὰ τὸ μὴ ἱκανῶς διαισθάνεσθαι, 250b1.

²¹ ἐφαπτόμενοι αὐτοῦ τῆ μνήμῃ ἐνθουσιῶντες ... καθ’ ὅσον δυνατὸν θεοῦ ἀνθρώ-
πῳ μετασχεῖν, 253a2–5.

²² Nor should the opposite mistake be made of believing that nothing more is at issue here than the purely logical process of concept formation. Heitsch (1993), 111–113 assumes that because recollection is not described as *preceding* the process of forming universal concepts but is rather identified with it, therefore recollection is simply reduced to this process and thus ceases to be ‘recollection’. This simply does not follow: as the rest of the speech proceeds to show, and as the *Phaedo* explicitly argues, forming a unity out of the multiplicity of sensations is possible only to the extent that the sensations provoke in us a recollection of that one form to which they all point and of which they yet fall short. The point, in short, is that the formation of universal concepts is not a purely logical procedure but requires us to be inspired and possessed by a vision that transcends both our perceptions and our logic.

Socrates' description of the philosopher's understanding (*dianoia*) as having wings (249c4–5). It is hard not to see this passage as overcoming the opposition in the *Ion* between *dianoia* and inspiration, and therefore the characterization of hermeneutics as the thoughtless conveyance of some divine power. The philosopher is a hermeneut who conveys a divine power beyond reason in and through reasoning, who speaks for the god while also speaking for himself.

When Socrates at the end of his second speech describes two lovers who resist consummating their love and instead pursue a life of philosophy (256a6–7), he is describing a state that is neither what he now dismisses as 'human temperance' (*sôphrosunê anthrôpinê*) nor 'divine madness', as is indicated by his claim that these lovers achieve a good greater than what *either* human temperance *or* divine madness can provide (256b5–7). Though their love takes them beyond human temperance and divinely inspires them, they are also capable of achieving self-control and self-possession.²³ What is said here clearly overcomes the opposition between divine madness and human self-control that was seen to dominate the argument of the *Ion*. It is in this regard surely significant that Socrates at one point in the speech describes Beauty as enthroned right next to Self-Control (254b5–7). Yet it should be noted that Socrates' praise of erotic madness does not make its benefit dependent on self-control: even the non-philosophical lovers who do not control themselves and give way to physical desire are described by him as winning a not inconsiderable prize from their erotic madness.²⁴

The prayer with which the speech concludes offers a final and succinct reconciliation of *technê* with erotic madness and divine possession when Socrates describes *himself* as someone who practices *a divinely given expertise in love*.²⁵ At least in the *Phaedrus*, therefore, Socrates does indeed turn out to be unlike Ion in possessing a *technê*, but one quite different from that in terms of which he judges Ion. Socrates' *technê* is given and inspired by something higher than itself; furthermore, it is a *technê* of loving and striving, rather than a *technê* of mastery. Neither self-possessed expert nor mad poet, the philosopher is a hybrid of the two. Yet this is not to say that in the philosopher reason and inspiration are simply juxtaposed in an external fashion.²⁶ Rather, the kind of reasoning

²³ ἐνκρατεῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κόσμοι ὄντες, 256b1–2.

²⁴ Οὐ μικρὸν ἄθλον τῆς ἐρωτικῆς μανίας, 256d5–6.

²⁵ Τὴν ἐρωτικὴν μοι τέχνην ἦν ἔδωκας 257a7–8.

²⁶ Carter (1967), 117 states the reconciliation thus: 'Recollection—philosophic inspi-

or expertise that characterizes the philosopher is intrinsically unlike that of the doctor or the mathematician in that it is the recollection of a reality that, while inspiring and motivating it, is yet not fully grasped or clearly seen by it. Philosophy is a constant and irresolvable tension between reason and inspiration and thus between self-control and madness. The philosopher must be open to divine inspiration while resisting the danger of becoming a passive mouthpiece of the god and thus losing himself and his own reason.

4. *The Inspired Madness of the Poet as Both Gift and Danger*

This ambiguity of inspiration as both a gift and a danger to philosophers is captured in the story Socrates tells about the cicadas. The cicadas were born of those human beings who were so overwhelmed by the gift of the muses that they stopped eating and drinking and so died. In pursuing philosophical conversation Socrates is honoring the cicadas, and therefore the Muses, while at the same time ‘navigating around them as if they were the Sirens, proof against their enchantment.’²⁷ The implication is that to give way completely to the song of the cicadas, and thus the inspiration of the Muses, would be to abandon philosophical conversation and thereby, paradoxically, dishonor the Muses. The philosopher can honor the Muses only by at the same time resisting their song. And is this not what Plato is doing in critiquing the poets? Is not the appeal to *technê* simply the philosopher’s way of exorcising the poet within him?

Here we also have the explanation of another important motif of the dialogue: Socrates’ ambivalent relation to nature, to what lies outside the city walls, i.e., to the beautiful natural setting in which the conversation of the dialogue takes place. That nature that cannot speak to him (230d3–5) is for Socrates both a threat to the life of conversation he carries out within the city and also a source of inspiration.²⁸ He is both at home and

ration—alone is myth or at best true opinion: as pointed out in the *Ion*, it is without knowledge On the other hand, reason alone is unable to lead men to the realm beyond heaven, if by reason is meant the purely logical attempt to gain truth through an analysis of sense data, or to gain insight into the world of reality through transcendental speculation.’ More succinctly he states, 118: ‘The philosopher has inspiration *plus* a method of tying down such inspiration.’ But this view seems to leave inspiration and reason completely external to each other, so that philosophy is nothing but poetry verified by logic.

²⁷ Διαλεγόμενους και παραπλέοντας σφας ὡσπερ Σειρήνας ἀκηλήτους, 259a7–b1.

²⁸ Heitsch (1993), 73 notes the contrast between Socrates’ rationalistic argument that the trees and the landscape have nothing to teach him and his excited, enthusiastic

not at home in this natural setting. Outside the city there is always the danger that he will get ‘carried away’ in the way that Orithuia was carried away by Boreas: a danger illustrated by Socrates’ blasphemous, false, and ‘nympholeptic’ first speech. On the other hand, it is only in this danger of being ‘carried away’ that Socrates can offer his second speech with its praise of erotic madness. The philosopher is most likely not the simple animal Socrates would like him to be, but rather something much more complicated and even monstrous, like Typhon (230a): at least as much the product of myth as of reason.

In the discussion of writing with which the dialogue concludes there is a passing, but highly significant, critique of the poets, and even of the rhapsode. Socrates claims that no *logos* is worth much effort to be written down *or to be spoken in the manner of rhapsodes*, that is, ‘without interrogation or teaching for the sake of persuasion.’²⁹ Therefore Socrates proceeds to say that someone who possesses nothing worthier (*timiôtera*) than what he has composed or written deserves the name of poet or speech-writer or lawgiver (278d8–e2), while a poet or lawgiver or speech writer who ‘composed knowing how it stood with the truth, is capable of coming to the aid of what he has written, undergoing an *elenchos* with regard to it, and is himself capable of demonstrating the little worth of what he has written,’³⁰ deserves the name, not of *sophos*, but of *philosophos*. What distinguishes the philosopher here is the peculiar skill which Socrates calls the *dialektikê technê* (276e5–6) which, as a skill of impregnating a soul with *logoi* that can defend and reproduce themselves (276e6–277a1), is presumably the same as the erotic *technê* which Socrates earlier claims for himself. And Socrates’ attitude towards his own speech on love is precisely what he claims a philosopher’s attitude must be to what he has composed: with the exception of the collecting and dividing that he proceeds to call ‘dialectic’, the speech appears to him ‘to have been played playfully’ (*paidiai pepaisthai*, 265c8–9). If the inspiration of silent nature is a danger, so is the love of speeches that normally keeps Socrates within the city and that requires the promise

description of the setting of the discussion (in which Heitsch also notes some playful irony). Especially significant in my view is the fact that Socrates, though supposedly unaccustomed to being out in the countryside and unconcerned with myth, knows better than Phaedrus the exact location where people say Orithuia was abducted by Boreas (229b–c).

²⁹ ἄνευ ἀνακρισέως καὶ διδαχῆς πειθοῦς ἔνεκα, 277e6–9.

³⁰ Εἰδὼς ἢ τὸ ἀληθές ἔχει συνέθηκε ταῦτα, καὶ ἔχων βοηθεῖν, εἰς ἔλεγχον ἰὼν περὶ ὧν ἔγραψε, καὶ λέγων αὐτὸς δυνατὸς τὰ γεγραμμένα φραῦλα ἀποδείξει, 278c5–7.

of a speech in order to be led out into the country. The written speech with which Phaedrus lures Socrates beyond the city walls is indeed a *pharmakon* (230d6) in the double sense of cure and poison. If speech, whether written or spoken, is made an end in itself, then it provides the mere appearance of memory and wisdom. It must instead be used as a provocation to recollect that which transcends it. The love of speeches³¹ must be transformed into the speech of love.³² But what is true here of speech in general must also be true of poetry. Poetry that can critique its own deficiency and thus recognize the distance between it and what inspires it, poetry that does not see itself as the transparent medium of a divine message but as the thoughtful interpretation of something that must always transcend it, poetry, in short, that does not take itself too seriously: such poetry is worthy of the philosopher.

Even in Book X of the *Republic*, therefore, Socrates is ready and eager to admit poetry back into the ideal state if it can defend itself, since he is well aware of its ‘charm’³³ and has had a passion (*erôta*) for it inculcated in him since childhood. Until poetry can thus defend itself, Socrates must suppress his passion as something potentially harmful and must resist the charm of poetry with the incantation that it is not to be taken seriously (607b–608b). Socrates’ critique of poetry is thus like Odysseus’ order to be bound to the mast of his ship as it sails past the Sirens: it is a way of resisting the charms of poetry without being insensible to them. As Socrates observes at the beginning of Book X, the cure (*pharmakon*) against the potential danger of poetry is a knowledge of its nature (595b5–7): which implies that armed with such knowledge one need not reject poetry outright.

5. *Reassessing the Argument of the Ion: Poet and Philosopher as Kin*

The relation between the philosopher and someone like Ion is therefore much more complex than the explicit argument of the *Ion* might suggest. If Socrates critiques Ion from the vantage point of *technê*, this is not because he claims himself to possess the kind of *technê* he shows Ion to lack. His goal, as indicated by the repeated references to ‘envy’ at

³¹ Τοῦ τῶν λόγων ἐραστοῦ, 228c1–2.

³² ἄπλῶς πρὸς Ἐρωτα μετὰ φιλοσόφων λόγων τὸν βίον ποιῆται, 257b5–6.

³³ ὡς σὺνισμέν γε ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς κηλουμένοις ὑπ’ αὐτῆς, 607c6–7.

the start of the dialogue (530b5, c1, c6), is instead to become Ion's rival by overcoming the opposition between *nous* and divine inspiration in which Ion remains trapped. In this context it is worth noting philosophy's simultaneous rivalry with, and appropriation of, poetry in the *Laws*. When Clinias asks the Athenian for a model work that will enable the guardian of the laws to decide what material all the children may learn, the Athenian offers as the paradigm the very discussion they have been conducting: a discussion he claims to be very much like a work of poetry.³⁴ Especially significant in the present context is the Athenian's remark that their discussion appears to have been conducted 'not without a certain inspiration from the gods.'³⁵ A few pages later, when the Athenian imagines being asked by the tragedians whether they and their work will be allowed into the city, he retorts that they who are producing the laws are themselves tragedians (817b2) and fellow poets *regarding the same matters*.³⁶ They are not better than poets but rather better poets insofar as the constitution (*politeia*) they have constructed is the truest tragedy as 'the imitation of the most beautiful and best life.'³⁷ These passages simply make explicit what is already implied in the other dialogues we have considered: the aim of the philosopher is not to banish poetry, along with the inspiration and madness that characterize it, in favor of some presumed *technê*, but rather to be a better poet than the poets. If there is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, it is a feud among kin. If, as is more likely, the quarrel is Plato's invention, that is because the philosopher needs such a quarrel.

6. Conclusion: *The Hermeneutics of the Philosopher versus the Hermeneutics of the Poet*

What then emerges as the difference between the philosopher and the poet? The difference can be explained in terms of the 'hermeneutics' of each. Both philosophy and poetry are hermeneutical in the sense of bearing the message of a reality that transcends them. In this sense they are both mad and inspired. What Socrates suggests in the *Ion*, however, is that the poet is a *hermêneus* who does not attempt to understand or interpret the message he bears from the gods. He, like Ion, is only a vehicle

³⁴ Παντάτασι ποιήσει τινὶ προσομοίως εἰρησθαι, 811c9–10.

³⁵ οὐκ ἄνευ τινὸς ἐπιπνοίας θεῶν, 811c8–9.

³⁶ Ποιηταὶ μὲν οὖν ὑμεῖς, ποιηταὶ δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμέν τῶν αὐτῶν, 817b6–7.

³⁷ Μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου, 817b4.

or message-bearer. The philosopher, in contrast, is an *interpreter* of the divine message he carries: a hermeneut in the modern, rather than the ancient sense. He responds to the inspired glimpses of a divine reality by seeking to understand this reality and relate it to the reality immediately surrounding him. His inspired madness is also a *logismos* that seeks, as recollection, to relate all his perceptions back to the common forms he has seen in the place beyond the heavens.³⁸ He neither ignores the divide between Beauty Itself and a beautiful person by giving in to his lust for the latter nor leaves the divide unbridged by only contemplating beauty from afar. His relationship to the person in whom he finds beauty is a constant mediation between the physical and the spiritual, the mortal and the divine. And if the Form of Beauty has central importance for the philosopher, that is on account of its ability to bridge the sensible and the intelligible.³⁹ The inspired madness of the philosopher is a process of mediation and interpretation and thus also highly rational and sober. He can, like the poet, identify with what he represents—thus Plato's anonymity in the dialogues—while still maintaining a critical and ironic distance.⁴⁰

But is it tenable to characterize the poet and his rhapsode as mere vehicles that reflect as little on the source of their inspiration as iron filings reflect on the magnet?⁴¹ Is this characterization not as absurd as the characterization of the artist in *Republic X* as a mere copier? There is without question a good deal of exaggeration here, but also a defensible point. While the poet no doubt reflects on the form and construction of his poem and in this respect possesses a real skill, the 'message' of the poem can be argued to be itself 'inspired' and subjected to little

³⁸ Capuccino (2005), 249 illuminates the difference between the types of 'enthusiasm' and mediation that characterize the philosopher and the poet as follows: 'Infine, la funzione mediatrice si distingue in virtù della sua direzione: dal basso verso l'alto per il filosofo, nella sua tensione *umana* alla perfezione divina; dall'alto verso il basso per il rapsodo *divino*, che nulla sa di ciò che pronuncia la sua voce posseduta'. Yet, at least according to the account in the *Phaedrus*, even the philosopher needs an external stimulus to awaken recollection and reasoning from within. The difference is that he is stimulated, rather than possessed, by this divine presence.

³⁹ It is worth noting in this context that Gadamer at the end of *Truth and Method* turns precisely to Beauty in Plato as a model for hermeneutics.

⁴⁰ Lhomme (2001), 158 writes the following of Plato's dialogues as *mimēsis*: 'Le dialogue est une scène: il est une *mimēsis* d'entretien, mais une *mimēsis* *distanciée*, une *mimēsis* corrigée, *diégétiquement remaniée*, déplacée.'

⁴¹ Capuccino (2005), 216 shows that this was not the traditional conception of the poets: 'Per tradizione, i poeti *non* sono lo strumento passivo degli dei' and this because inspiration and knowledge were not considered incompatible (221).

questioning and reflection. A love poem is less an interpretation of love than a vehicle for certain intuitions about love. Consider Peter Ackroyd's description of Shakespeare in his biography of this arguably greatest of all poets and playwrights, a description that unintentionally parallels Plato's description of the imitative and inspired poet: 'Shakespeare is both everything and nothing. He is many and yet no one. It might almost be a definition of the creative principle itself, which is essentially a principle of organisation without values or ideals His presence is conspicuous by its absence.'⁴² Compared with such a description of the poet as an empty vehicle ('nothing,' 'without values or ideals,' 'absent') in and through which everything can appear, Plato's description can hardly be judged a gross exaggeration. Yet even if Plato somewhat exaggerates the case against the poet, this may be because Plato himself recognizes the proximity between poet and philosopher and therefore the constant temptation the philosopher faces of becoming only a poet: a temptation that must be fought with the same determination that Socrates fights the temptation of being lulled to sleep by the cicadas. There is always the danger that hermeneutics will abrogate its duty to interpret and portray itself as a silent and transparent medium. Philosophy is always in danger of becoming nothing but poetry: a danger it would never face if it were the kind of *technê* which Socrates in the *Ion* so envies.

⁴² Ackroyd (2005), 313. See also the parallels Stern-Gillet (2004), 195–198 shows between the account of the poet in the *Ion* and A.E. Housman's description of his own process of poetic composition.

CHAPTER SIX

INSPIRATION AND INSPIRED POETS IN PLATO'S DIALOGUES

STEFAN BÜTTNER

Introduction

The controversial problem of inspiration in Plato's dialogues is a subject which has often been examined. The reason for this is, to begin with, the fact that Plato nowhere defines exactly what he understands by inspiration and how it functions. There is not even agreement among scholars as to whether Plato took inspiration as a phenomenon seriously.

This is especially the case concerning Plato's remarks about the inspiration of poets. In the *Republic*, Plato criticises poets because they do not represent the world according to a rational understanding of its origins, but only according to perceptible reality. Their works are therefore of only limited quality. (The key word is *mimêsis*: the poet twice removed from truth; *Rep.* X, 597e). The praise of these same poets in the dialogues *Ion* or *Phaedrus*, above all praise of Homer, therefore sounds suspicious. This the more so as the *Phaedrus* seems to state that the inspired poet far surpasses the rational poet (*hê tou sôphronountos poiêsis*, *Phdr.* 245a) precisely because of his own aesthetic feeling.

In this chapter, a fresh attempt will be made at an adequate understanding of Plato's concept of inspiration. What distinguishes this attempt from previous investigations is that full consideration will be given to the several remarks by Aristotle on inspiration as an additional source of clarification. Unlike Plato, Aristotle is not suspected of enthusiasm. If Aristotle takes the phenomenon of inspiration seriously in his writings, then it is very probable that Plato also takes it seriously. I include among the relevant passages those in which a divine gift (*theia moira*) is mentioned. First, I shall argue that the term 'inspiration' when discussed by Plato is not exclusively an expression of ironic criticism, either generally or specifically in reference to poets. Secondly, I shall attempt to clarify which powers of the soul are primarily involved in inspiration. Finally, on the basis of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata physica*, it will be confirmed that the inspiration of the poets is not essentially distinct from that of prophets, politicians or other inspired persons.

1. *'The Inspiration of the Poets'—An Ironic Transformation of the Criticism of Poets in the Republic?*

In addition to praising inspired poets, Plato also often says that the poets have no knowledge of the subjects they write about. The conclusion which has until now often been drawn from this, and which can already be found in Castelvetro's commentary on the *Poetics* of 1570,¹ is that Plato's remark about inspiration is an ironic allusion to the poets' appeal to the Muses, and is thus—compared with the direct criticism in the *Republic*—merely a more polite way of saying that the poets are incompetent.² The advantage of this interpretation is that it avoids having to resolve contradictions between the various positions voiced by Plato.

Against this interpretation, we may raise the following objections:

1. Disciples of Plato, who belonged for decades to his closest circles, such as Philip of Opus, Xenocrates, and Aristotle, refer to Plato's statements on enthusiasm—especially in relation to the influence of *daimones* and to mantic enthusiasm—without a suggestion that there is any doubt about their seriousness.³ In the Academy, on Plato's initiative, the Muses were honoured in a cult context from the beginning, and for them, Plato occasioned the building of the Museion.⁴ His nephew and successor, Speusippus, erected statues there of the Graces, who were closely associated with the Muses.⁵ It is also reported that his successor, Xenocrates (whom Plato allegedly often encouraged to sacrifice to the Graces),⁶ also offered sacrifices to the Muses.⁷ If Plato had in fact not acknowledged the reality and influence of the Muses, then this must have passed unnoticed by his own followers—which would seem to be extremely improbable.

¹ Castelvetro (1978–1979), I, 91–93.

² See e.g. Dalfen (1974), esp. 77–118; Murray (1981), 87–100 and idem (1996), 10–12. For a comprehensive overview of scholarship on enthusiasm in Plato, see Büttner (2000) 255–273.

³ On the influence of *daimones* in all areas of life in Philip of Opus and Xenocrates, see Heinze (1892), 92–96; for Aristotle, above all the passage in *EE* 8,2 on mantic enthusiasm discussed below; for poetic enthusiasm, see the texts in Moraitou (1994), esp. 83–100; on rhetorical enthusiasm, see Schirren (2005). See also Berry (1940), 42–48, on Xenophon and Aeschines of Sphettos.

⁴ Cf. Müller-Graupa (1933), 799–801 and Wilamowitz (1881), 279–288.

⁵ *D.L.* 4,1 and *Acad. index* Col. VI, 37,30–38,1.

⁶ *D.L.* 4,6.

⁷ *Acad. index* Col. VII, 41,44–45.

2. There are many reports of inspired individuals in Plato's dialogues which suggest that the designation of 'inspired' can indeed be taken as a sincerely intended expression of praise. Precisely here, there occurs a fundamental problem. In principle, if one so chooses, every statement can be understood as being ironic. My essential criterion for taking a passage of Plato which refers to enthusiasm as being free of irony is that the passage is integral to a context of which one can assume that it represents authentic Platonic teaching. It is then probable that the statement concerning enthusiasm is intended to be serious, above all when similar statements occur in more than one dialogue in comparable contexts. A good collection of testimonies which belong in this category can be found in Berry.⁸ I mention here only a few:

- A. In the *Republic*, Adeimantus describes the situation of the city-states of his day. There, as a result of bad education, nobody values justice as a principle higher than that of escaping punishment for a crime. There are only two exceptions to this attitude: those who have acquired true knowledge (*epistêmên labôn*), that is, the philosophers, and those who, through a divine nature (*theiai phusei*), regard injustice as unacceptable (*Rep.* II, 366c–d). Socrates later approves this statement, when he says that a man in our cities can only resist injustice with a divine talent (*theou moiran*, *Rep.* VI, 493a).⁹ There is no trace of irony here.
- B. Socrates speaks repeatedly of his *daimonion*, which he also calls *theia moira* (*Apol.* 33c): through this, he often speaks and acts rightly, although he does not know why. Here, the same phenomenon is spoken of as that which occurs with the poets, and with the same terminology.
- C. In the palinode of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 244a et seq.), the inspiration of seers and poets is paralleled with that of philosophers, which is obviously meant seriously.¹⁰

⁸ Cf. Berry (1940), 49–85.

⁹ Compare also *theiai moirai* at *L.* I, 642c.

¹⁰ Almost nobody would doubt that Plato here takes the enthusiasm of the poets seriously. See, however, Dalfen (1974), 125, who takes the passage as not being seriously meant by Plato, but as merely repeating a popular view, and who designates the speech as a Stesichorus speech, '[deren] Geltung ... noch im Phaidros aufgehoben [ist]'; i.e. a view that is discredited in the very same dialogue. Yet the seriousness of the entire palinode in the remainder of the dialogue is not called into question, and has significant parallels in the speech of Diotima in the *Symposium* and with *Rep.* III, 402a–403c. Precisely the classification of kinds of madness is claimed later in the *Phaedrus* as an example of a

- D. In the *Laws*, the Athenian says to his two interlocutors that their discussion will ‘not be conducted without a certain breath of the gods’ (*ouk aneu tinos epipnoias theôn*, *L. VII*, 811c). Insofar as this remark occurs in the context of a legitimation of the constitution which they are in the process of presenting, it can scarcely be supposed that any irony is intended.¹¹
- E. In Book IV of the *Laws*, the Athenian speaks about the poets in comparison with the law-givers (*L. 719c–d*). While a law gives exactly *one* prescription, the poets formulate opposing statements, because they have to present many different characters (*tês technês ousês mimeseôs*).¹² Thus, it is claimed that the poets do not compose rationally (*ouk emphrôn*), but that they repeat what the Muses breathe into them.

These examples are intended to demonstrate that Plato did not introduce inspiration fundamentally in an ironic sense. The last three examples include the inspiration of poets and writers (insofar as example D concerns Plato’s writing of the dialogues). We turn now to the question of the powers of the soul that are involved in the process of inspiration.

2. Which Powers of the Soul Are Particularly Involved in Inspiration?

1. In the dialogue *Meno*, Plato investigates the question whether the virtues and right conduct are possible through natural inclination (*phusis*), through habit (*trophê*), or through rational instruction (*epistêmê*). Because each of these possibilities is formulated in absolute terms, the discussion is in danger of ending in aporia (in Books 6 and 7 of the *Republic*, however, the combination of these elements in the attainment of virtue is presented explicitly). At the end, though, a new suggestion is made (*Men.* 99a ff): It is insisted upon as an empirical fact that there have been good citizens. Insofar as they were unable to pass on their virtues to others, they had no knowledge of these virtues. And yet, their suc-

model speech (*Phdr.* 265a–d). If the division were in its substance incorrect, then the dialogue, including the refutation of the Lysias speech and the transfer of the rhetorical practice presented here to a theory of rhetoric, would be pointless.

¹¹ For additional passages, see *L. III*, 691 e, 696 b, *L. XII*, 951b–c.

¹² This passage is also interesting because the concept of mimesis, used here in the technical sense of artistic representation, is associated by Plato with the phenomenon of enthusiasm, without any indication that Plato perceived a problem in doing so.

cess cannot be explained in terms of mere chance (*tuchê*): rather, a true opinion guided their actions (*doxa alêthês*). Good citizens are in no way different from prophets and poets, who also do many fine things (*polla kai megala katorthousin*), without having any actual knowledge of their deeds, and so they are also to be called inspired and divine, just like the prophets and poets (*phaimen an theious te einai kai enthousiazein*).¹³ This explanation of how people of different groups or sets, who are unable to offer any justification of what they do, often get things right in speech and in action recurs in surprisingly similar words in the *Eudemian Ethics* (Ch. 8.2).

2. There, Aristotle investigates the fact that there are people who, without any special knowledge or talent (*epistêmê*), are nonetheless frequently successful in various fields (*hôs epi to polu*, *EE* 1247b27–b28). The frequency of this phenomenon cannot be explained by chance (*tuchê*). Without *ratio*, they are regularly successful (*aphrones gar ontês katorthousin polla*, *EE* 1247 a4: this is precisely the same problem and formula as in the *Meno*). Aristotle calls these people fortunate (*eutucheis*), in the sense of naturally gifted (*euphueis*).¹⁴ Aristotle then goes one step further than Plato in the *Meno* and names the power of the soul which is responsible for this non-rationally achieved success (*EE* 1248 24a–34a):¹⁵

And this is the question, what is the beginning of movement in the soul. It is clear that, just as a god [is the beginning of movement] in the universe, so also [a god is the beginning of movement] in the [soul]: thus, in a

¹³ If this passage is intended to be ironic, then at most in view of the fact that politicians (or more precisely, a certain conduct of certain politicians) are put into the same class as the almost entirely uncontrolled mantics. In this context, it is not the particular achievements of some politicians which are discredited; rather, it is only the ways in which those politicians perceive things which are criticised.

¹⁴ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle even designates natural talent as a divine gift (*theia moira*, *EN* 1099b9–b25 and 1179b20–b23, as enthusiasm is often designated by Plato).

¹⁵ The Greek text follows the studies of van der Eijk (1989): τὸ δὲ ζητούμενον τοῦτ' ἔστι, τίς ἢ τῆς κινήσεως ἀρχὴ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ; δῆλον δὴ ὡσπερ ἐν τῷ ὄλῳ θεὸς κἀν ἐκείνῳ. κινεῖ γὰρ πῶς πάντα τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον· λόγου δ' ἀρχὴ οὐ λόγος, ἀλλὰ τι κρεῖττον· τί οὖν ἂν κρεῖττον καὶ ἐπιστήμης εἴη πλὴν θεός; ἢ γὰρ ἀρετὴ τοῦ νοῦ ὄργανον. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, ὃ οἱ πάσαι ἔλεγον, εὐτυχεῖς καλοῦνται οἱ ἂν ὀρμησῶσι κατορθοῦσι ἄλογοι ὄντες, καὶ βουλευέσθαι οὐ συμφέρει αὐτοῖς. ἔχουσιν γὰρ ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἢ κρεῖττον τοῦ νοῦ καὶ τῆς βουλεύσεως (οἱ δὲ τὸν λόγον· τοῦτο δ' οὐκ ἔχουσι) καὶ ἐνθουσιασμόν. τοῦτο δ' οὐ δύναται· ἄλογοι γὰρ ὄντες ἐπιτυγχάνουσιν. Whether θεὸς ἐν ἐκείνῳ denotes the human intellect (as my translation proposes), is debated, but not relevant for what follows. What is important here is that it is precisely τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον, the human intellect, which is named as the source of accuracy and of enthusiasm.

certain way, 'the divine in us' moves everything [in us]. The beginning of rational thought is, then, not rational thought, but something stronger. Yet what other than a god [i.e. that is, 'the divine in us'] can be stronger than rationally certain knowledge? [In any case, not virtue. Because] Virtue is [only] an instrument of the *nous* [i.e. 'the divine in us'].¹⁶ Therefore, as our forefathers have said,¹⁷ the fortunate are those who, when they undertake to achieve something, act rightly, even when they are not rationally led to do so, and it does not help them to plan according to rational calculation. They have such a beginning of movement, which is stronger than reason¹⁸ and calculated planning—others have Reason, but not this [the stronger beginning]—and inspiration, though they are not capable [of rational planning]; because without Reason, they are still successful.

In cases where rational ability is weak, it is then *to en hêmin theion*, the 'divine in us', which is responsible for the frequent success and the inspiration of the fortunate. The phrase 'the divine in us' is used consistently by Aristotle to denote the human *nous*, and there are also

¹⁶ As Seidl (1971), esp. 137–161, has shown with many examples, Aristotle uses the term *nous* sometimes in the sense of 'intellect', sometimes in the sense of 'ratio'. The meaning can also change when the term *nous* is used repeatedly in close proximity, so that each case must be judged on its own merit. For the clarification of this text, a passage in the *Problemata physica* (Pr. 955b22–956 a10) is helpful; Kenny (1978), 9 n. 1, on the suggestion of D.J. Allan, draws attention to it. To the question why older people have a deeper theoretical and practical ability to understand (*nous*), the reply is given that *nous* belongs by nature from the beginning to the soul, whereas knowledge and the arts are acquired over time (*hai d'allai epistêmai kai technai tôn hup' hêmôn poiêtôn eisin, ho de nous tôn phusei*). Just as the human hands, which belong from birth to the body, become ever more efficient with maturity, so *nous*, which by nature belongs to the soul, unfolds its full potential only with time. *Nous* develops more gradually than the hands, however, because the hands can use any number of things already available as tools, but the tools of *nous* (*ta tou nou organa*) only become accessible later: 'Knowledge is a tool of the *nous*; it is useful to it just as the flute is to a flute player' (*esti gar nou men organon epistêmê—toutôi gar esti chrêsimos, kathaper auloi aulêtêi*). Virtue is a habit, and therefore equally something which must be acquired first, like knowledge and the arts. Therefore, the proposal at *EE* 1248 a29, that virtue can be something which precedes the 'divine in us', must also be rejected; similarly, the assumption that *epistêmê* is the beginning of the movement of the soul (*EE* 1248 a28). If we here employ the meaning 'ratio', the understanding of this text becomes decidedly more difficult: 'Only a god is stronger than knowledge, while virtue is only a tool of 'ratio', so that virtue must be inferior to the god, from whom ratio proceeds'. Here, it is not clear why ratio should precede virtue, insofar as both (together) must first be acquired.

¹⁷ Here, it is probably the Pythagoreans who are meant, who, according to Aristoxenos, also knew a conception of good fortune based upon natural talent (cf. Mills 1982, 204–205).

¹⁸ That *nous* must be rendered by 'ratio' here is clear from the immediately following usage of *logos* for the same thing. See also e.g. *EE* 1247 a30, where that which was previously designated as *logos* und *technê* is denoted with *nous*.

instances in his writings of *nous* being designated as *theos*.¹⁹ The close thematic and terminological relationship to Plato here makes it probable that with the designation of *nous* as a specific power of knowledge in the case of inspiration, we have an authentic element of Plato's teaching.

It has always been seen as a problem that Plato makes precisely the irrational nature of Man responsible for the success of the inspired. This problem can be reduced considerably if we understand by the irrationality of inspiration not a sub-rational, aesthetic impulse, but rather a supra-rational grasp of, for example, ethical principles.

Within the act of thinking, Plato differentiates between *nous* (lat. *intellectus*) and *dianoia*, that is, Reason, whereby *dianoia* is subordinate to *nous*. *Nous* can also act without a methodical *dianoia*. In principle, it does so already with respect to recognition of objects. We can see this most clearly in Plato's description in the *Philebus* (39a f.) of how an opinion (*doxa*) is formed. There, he suggests that a 'writer' (*grammateus*) in the soul interprets the characteristics which perception had previously distinguished, when, for example, it recognises something which is brown and rectangular as a door. A *doxa* is formed from the combined activity of *nous* and *aisthêsis*.²⁰ For Plato, sense perception simply cannot be responsible for a creative inspiration because, in his view, it is not sufficiently capable.²¹

Nous, on the other hand, is also often—as a derivation of the divine *nous*—denoted by Plato as *to theion*.²² The desire which arises in noetic

¹⁹ *De An.* G5 with *GA* 736b27–b29, *EN* 10,7; further references in Wagner (1970), 104 n. 2. Compare also the same remark of Theophrastus in *Simpl. in Ph.* 964,30–965,4. That the 'stronger beginning' refers to the relation of the intellect to ratio is also shown by *APo.* 100b5–b15, where it is said that scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) cannot be the principle of scientific knowledge, but rather the intellect (*nous*) and its recognition of the principles is this beginning, and *EN* 1177b26–b31, where Aristotle praises the theoretical, intellectual life of philosophers as the highest way of life (*bios kreittôn ê kat' anthrôpon*).

²⁰ Cf. Büttner (2000), 66–92. For terminological issues and for some of the assumptions concerning the nature and activity of the soul and its parts in Plato, cf. also Büttner (2006).

²¹ In addition to Plato's frequent criticism of sensuality, see especially *Symp.* 210d: precisely in the realm of beauty, it is not perception but thought which first comprehends the essence of beauty, 'the wide sea of the beautiful' (*to polu pelagos tou kalou*).

²² These expressions are usually employed for the *logistikon*, which embraces intellect together with ratio, occasionally only for the intellect: see e.g. *Rep.* VII, 518e, IX, 589d–e, 590d, *Polit.* 309c, *Tim.* 41c, 45a, 69d, 72d, 73a, 88b, 90a–c, *L.* XII, 950b, *Alc.* 1133c; see the references not only for Plato but for the whole of Antiquity, in Wagner (1970), 104 n. 1 and 126–132. The term 'intellect' as a translation of *nous* is a compromise, as it is difficult to find an exact equivalent for *nous* in English which encompasses at once its specific cognitive, emotional and voluntary implications. The term 'intuition' would approximate

recognition, is regarded as the greatest and divine desire (e.g. *Tim.* 90b). The term *enthousiasmos*, that is, divine inspiration, already implies that the inspired individual experiences a higher and divine feeling, because that power in him is especially active which comes closest to the thought of God.

The opinions according to which inspired individuals speak or act, are, on the one hand, true, as Plato says in the *Meno*.²³ On the other hand, they identify the essence in central areas of knowledge with exceptional accuracy, or they are the correct solutions which are found when everybody else has failed. We might then call these opinions—in order to distinguish them from simple sense perceptions—‘divine, correct opinions’.

3. These formulations find confirmation in the *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 90a–d), where *nous* is denoted as *to theion*, *to theion en hêmin*, and as *daimôn*. The person who exercises his *nous* comes to true ‘eternal and divine opinions’ (*athanata kai theia dogmata*).

it, if intuition were not then understood as an instinctive, passive act. On the other hand, the term ‘intellect’ (and the situation is similar with ‘mind’ or ‘reason’) evokes a certain dryness and lack of feeling, which is not appropriate to *nous*. Only when we understand the process of the acquisition of knowledge by the intellect as a non-discursive, immediate grasping of the nature of something, combined with a definite emotional element, can we then comprehend how the enthusiasm of a poet and the manifestation of this power in his poetry (*muria tôn palaîôn erga kosmoussa*) is to be distinguished from the sober calculation of a ‘rule poet’ (*hê poiêsis . . . tou sôphronountos*) (*Phdr.* 245a). By this sober calculation is meant not a virtue, but rather a pernickety rationality and obsession with poetic technique. In any case, in the analogous question in the *Phaedrus*, whether one should become involved with the lover or the non-lover, it is observed that the non-lover possesses only a mortal prudence (*thnêtê sôphrosunê*) and acts small-mindedly and with calculation (*thnêta te kai pheidôla oikonomoussa*, *Phdr.* 256e), whereas the madness of the lover, when it develops properly, leads in fact to self-control and ordering of the soul (*enkrateis autôn kai kosmioi ontes*, *Phdr.* 256b).

²³ When it is said at *Men.* 99a that those concerned could have acted correctly *noun mê echontes* (likewise *Men.* 99e: *aneu nou*), *nous* is used here, as often with Plato (cf. Jäger 1967, 13–22), not in the sense of intellect, but rather of ratio, i.e. the ability to justify exactly what has been done; this is shown by the parallel expressions at *Men.* 99c (*isasi ouden*) and 99d (*mêden eidotes*). Socrates compares the politicians addressed with a philosopher-king, who can instruct others in the good: in comparison to him, they are like a shadow in relation to the actual thing which gives a shadow (*Men.* 99e–100a). This is precisely the language of the *Republic* with which there those who know are distinguished from those who are guided by opinions; cf. e.g. *Rep.* VI, 506c, where Socrates discusses correct opinions which have no rational foundation (*hai aneu epistêmês doxai*). He then designates those who know as *hoi aneu nou alêthes ti doxazontes*. A right opinion about ‘good’, ‘just’ etc. must then result from an unmethodical application of the intellect in the individual case, when it lacks a rational foundation.

4. In this connection, a remark of the stranger in the *Statesman* becomes significant. In the context of deciding what kind of man would make the best politician, the stranger observes that those who are inclined to courage (*andreia*) and those who are inclined to caution (*sôphrosunê*) could easily come into conflict with one another. The good statesman must be able to reconcile such tendencies, and for this purpose, he has two means (*Polit.* 309c–d).²⁴

First, [he attempts to bring together the contrary inclinations] by uniting the immortal parts of their soul, which are related to one another, with a divine bond, while the animal [part] is united by a human [bond].

The 'human bond' refers to appropriately arranged marriages, which should reconcile differing natures with one another. The 'divine bond' is inferred from that which is the same and related in all individuals, namely, the eternal or divine part of the soul, the *logistikôn*.²⁵ How should we understand the divine bond in the *logistikôn*?²⁶

STRANGER: I say that the absolutely correct opinion about beauty, justice and their opposites, whenever it occurs with certainty in the soul, arises as a divine [opinion] in a demonic part [of the soul].²⁷

YOUNG SOCRATES: That is in any case appropriate.

The statesman establishes the divine bond by introducing into the souls of the citizens true and certain opinions about the most important things, including the beautiful, just, hateful, bad etc. (above all through a musical training).²⁸ That means that the citizens have no knowledge of the Good, but they do have a correct attitude. This attitude implies 'divine, correct

²⁴ ΞΕ. Πρῶτον μὲν κατὰ τὸ συγγενὲς τὸ ἀειγενὲς ὄν τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῶν μέρος θείῳ συναρμυοσαμένην δεσμῷ, μετὰ δὲ τὸ θείον τὸ ζωογενὲς αὐτῶν αὐθις ἀνθρωπίνοις.

²⁵ The division of the soul into a divine and an animal part is a commonplace in Plato, even when the expressions vary. We may recall the image of the soul as a chimaera composed of a man, a lion, and a many-headed, greedy creature in the *Republic*. While the two lower parts of the soul have an animal character, the man in the image, as Socrates says in the comparison, is the divine part, element or aspect of the soul (IX, 589d: also *to theion*, IX, 589e: *to theiotaton*).

²⁶ ΞΕ. Τὴν τῶν καλῶν καὶ δικαίων πέρι καὶ ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν τοῦτοις ἐναντίων ὄντος οὐσαν ἀληθῆ δόξαν μετὰ βεβαιώσεως, ὅποταν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐγγίγνεται, θείαν φημι ἐν δαιμονίῳ γίγνεσθαι γένει.—ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Πρέπει γοῦν οὕτω.

²⁷ There is no other convincing interpretation of γένος here. For further references for γένος = *species*, *pars* in Plato, see Ast s.v. γένος. The more literal translation 'descent' would refer to the divine origin of the *nous*, as this is presented in the *Timaeus*, where *nous* is also denoted as *daimôn*; the result is thus the same with both translations.

²⁸ To clearly recognise the just, prudent, brave etc. and their opposites in every individual case is the goal of education, and above all of the education in the arts; cf. *Rep.* III, 401d–402c.

opinions' because of the importance of their objects. The divine part of the soul, that is, the *logistikon*, or perhaps more exactly, the *nous* within the *logistikon*, is named as the seat of these opinions.

This confirms the statement in the *Meno*, where it is said that inspired statesmen act correctly in ethical matters because of correct opinions; a natural gift merely contributes to their greater success. There is no evidence of any irony in the remarks about the divine or the demonic in the *Statesman*; on the contrary, this is a passage which is not merely integral to the concluding summary of the dialogue—it could scarcely be omitted from it.

There are other places in Plato's writings where it is said that *nous*, when used in an unmethodical way, can nonetheless achieve exceptional success or can lead to inspiration. We may mention briefly one further example.

5. In the *Phaedrus*, erotic mania is extensively described as the fourth kind of inspiration. It has its origin in the cognitive ability of the charioteer of the soul—the *nous* (*Phdr.* 247c–d). Although the goal of erotic mania is said to be the philosophical life; it also includes the preliminary stages of philosophy which are explained in the *Symposium*. Lovers know with the faculty of the charioteer, but not in a strictly rational fashion. In this way, they are similar to the prophets which are mentioned there. Those who love rightly regard not the physical beauty of the beloved, but rather the beauty in the soul. Here, however, different people regard different character traits, so that one admires another who is like Zeus, or Ares, or Apollo, or like Hera. When these admirers have found a soul which is suitable to them, they concentrate entirely on the activities which are those of the relevant deity. They 'recognise the [intelligible] nature of their god' (*anheuriskein tēn tou spheterou theou phusin*). When they 'grasp him through memory (i.e. recollection)' (*ephaptamenoī autou tēi mnēmēi*), that is, when they grasp the specific character trait through *nous*, they take over from the deity by divine inspiration (*enthousiōntes ex ekeinou*) the divine habits and activity for themselves, as far as this is humanly possible (*Phdr.* 252e–253a).

In this discussion, all of the components relevant to the process of inspiration are mentioned: first, that which is distinguished, that is, the god or the intelligible trait,²⁹ second, the human person with *nous*, and

²⁹ The hierarchy of the gods and that of the intelligibles is identical. See esp. *Soph.* 248e–249d, where the life, soul, and thought which are regulated by the intelligibles are

third, the substantial emotional effects which result from the cognition of the object.

We may emphasize in particular the limitation of the lover to specific areas of activity. This aspect can be compared to the limitation of the inspired poet to specific Muses and thus to specific possibilities of character and representation, which are discussed above all in the *Ion* (534b–c, 536a–d) and in the *Laws* (III, 700a–701b). Also in the *Republic*, Socrates says that poets and actors only compose or perform in one specific literary genre (*Rep.* III, 395a–b).

If we bring all of the evidence of these discussions together, then inspiration can be shown to be a special gift (*euphuia*), which enables the inspired individual to analyse particular situations and anticipate their further development. The inspired person acts here in an unmethodical fashion, and cannot rationally justify his activity. The prophet is able to place himself so effectively in the position of another person that he can anticipate what they will or should do. The inspired poet grasps certain characters so effectively that he can foresee both the good and bad conduct that they will display in given situations. He can also recognise what good or evil will result from such action. He is able to see all of this, even though, unlike the philosopher, he does not need to define what is right as such, or why such actions are appropriate or not, or good or evil. The politician has a clear notion of what certain people should do if they are to act in a good and beneficial manner.

Excursus: Mantic Enthusiasm

To the passages thus far considered may be added statements by Plato concerning mantic enthusiasm which contain aspects of the activity of the soul during inspired action, as Plato might have imagined it. Unfortunately, these statements are sometimes inconsistent or unclear, and therefore support the foregoing argument only to a limited extent. At the same time, these passages are ultimately too important to be omitted, and are thus included here in the form of an excursus.

discussed. Proclus *In Parm.* 907,13–908,5 combines three Platonic passages in order to demonstrate the identity of the gods with the Ideas: 1) all Ideas are at rest, *Parm.* 132d; 2) everything which is at rest conducts itself towards the same in the same fashion, *Soph.* 249b–c; 3) everything which conducts itself in the same fashion towards the same, is the most divine, *Polit.* 269d. Therefore, the Ideas are the highest divinity. See also e.g. *Symp.* 211e: the Idea of the beautiful is itself divine beauty (*auto to theion kalon*).

One passage which confirms the interpretation of enthusiasm presented above occurs at the beginning of Book IX of the *Republic* (571d–572b). There, Plato addresses the topic of prophecy during sleep, and explains which role each part of the soul plays in this process.³⁰ According to this discussion, those prudent individuals have the best chance of experiencing such dreams who, before falling asleep, stimulate the activity of the rational soul, the *logistikon* (which is here explicitly designated thus). At the same time, the soul must be free of all current disturbances, as far as this is possible; the lower parts of the soul, the *epithumêtikon* and *thumoeides*, must be satiated or satisfied.

When the *logistikon* then in sleep, entirely uninhibited and in a pure fashion (*kath' hauto monon katharon*), arranges observations and seeks to identify something unfamiliar from the past, the present, or the future, the probability that someone in his sleep then comprehends the truth is at its greatest.³¹ Plato's mention of dream images, i.e. specific situations in the past, the present, or the future, as well as our own experiences of dreams demonstrate that the pure (*katharon*) activity of the *logistikon* in sleep cannot denote a methodical thought process; even the prudent man can only ensure the most favourable possible conditions for such dreams. As Plato here names the thinking of the *logistikon* as the subject of prediction, and as this thinking includes rational and intellectual activities, rationality in the strict sense cannot be intended; it must then be an exceptionally successful activity of the *nous* in the specific case that is here designated by the *logistikon*.³²

One difficulty is that here neither the term 'enthusiasm' nor a similar term occur. However, insofar as a process of natural and not technical mantic, *mantikê*, is described, while natural mantic is typically associated with enthusiasm by Plato,³³ it is highly probable that we have here

³⁰ This passage constitutes a contrasting piece to the bad dreams of the tyrant, who is the real subject of Book IX, i.e. it is an explanatory part of the development of the argument. This explanation only functions when the views expressed by Socrates, the speaker here, are in fact his own views; he also mentions no extraneous source. It is therefore most probable that no irony is intended.

³¹ Aristotle says the same in very similar terms in Aristotle *fr.* 10 R.

³² This is not to say that, in such cases, ratio plays absolutely no role, but only that it is not active in a methodical and controlled manner. Similarly, for example, in our average experience of sense perception, when we might say, 'I see a table', on the basis of a distinguishing of colours, and then unconsciously draw a series of unmethodical and sometimes inexplicable conclusions; thus, ratio is partially, but not in a strict sense, involved.

³³ For example, *Phdr.* 244a–d, *Ap.* 22b–c, *Men.* 99a–100a.

evidence that, in Plato's view, the activity of the *nous* is decisive for inspiration.

In the *Timaeus*, however, although mantic and enthusiasm are mentioned together, the *epithumêtikon* is there responsible for this activity. This contradiction of the *Republic*³⁴ is reduced in that, in the *Timaeus*, the effects of the parts of the soul are located in different parts of the body. The *epithumêtikon* is active in the abdomen, where the liver is situated. As it is described in the *Timaeus*,³⁵ the liver is the organ which plays the decisive role in dream mantic. It is sometimes smooth and shining, and so, like a mirror, able to absorb and project images.

It is the process of thought (*hê ek tou nou pheromenê dunamis*), however, which structures the surface of the liver in various ways. It can then exert an influence on the *epithumêtikon*, and if necessary it can, for example, even intimidate it. During predictive dreams, however, the opposite occurs: a certain breath from thinking (*tis ek dianoiâs epipnoia*)³⁶ soothes the *epithumêtikon* by means of calming images on the liver. The liver becomes smooth and receptive for clear images. *Timaeus* then ascribes to the *epithumêtikon* the use of this mantic ability in sleep, because it does not need Reason.

Even though a subject of prediction other than that in the *Republic* is named, the process is essentially the same (and is described in the same words). In the *Timaeus*, consistent with the intention of the dialogue, the focus of attention is on the liver, which is the physiological basis of prediction; and the liver lies in the abdomen, and thereby in the region of the *epithumêtikon*. At the same time, it becomes clear in the *Timaeus*, as far as the powers of the soul are concerned, that foretelling the future is only possible with the assistance of (non-methodical) Reason.³⁷

We find passages in Philo of Alexandria which combine both descriptions of dream mantic. There, it is explicitly *nous* which, following contact with the other parts of the soul, and with the assistance of the liver, anticipates the future. It is also said that *nous* is divinely inspired.³⁸

³⁴ Cf. e.g. Pfeffer (1976), 35, who regards the two passages to be irreconcilable.

³⁵ For the following, see *Tim.* 70d–72b.

³⁶ 'Breath' (*epipnoia*) is a term which in Plato is specifically associated with the phenomenon of enthusiasm; see e.g. *Rep.* 499c, *L.* 811c, *Men.* 99d and *Arist. EE* 1214a23–a24.

³⁷ In the *Timaeus*, it remains open what generates the images on the liver which are supposed to give information about the future. What is said explicitly is only that thinking can produce images on the liver.

³⁸ See Philo of Alex. *de special. legg.* I § 219 and *de migr. Abr.* § 190.

With respect to mantic enthusiasm, Aristotle is only vaguely helpful. In *De divinatione per somnum*, he divides dreams which offer correct predictions into causal dreams (self-fulfilling prophecies), dreams which coincidentally address the truth, and dreams which are signs of future events.³⁹ None of these types of dreams is divinely sent (*theopempton*).⁴⁰

Dreams which contain signs of the future are, in the mantic context, particularly interesting. Here, Aristotle distinguishes between those which result from something which has occurred during the day, and those which arise from actual perceptions during sleep.⁴¹

The melancholic is especially susceptible to both of these kinds of dreams. His imagination is exceptionally easy to arouse and, beginning from a certain idea, he quickly and logically creates a chain of associations which fits together.⁴² The melancholic thus proves to be particularly reliable in identifying the outcome of these associations.⁴³

In order for mantic dreams to occur, it is also advantageous when the dreamer has a simple disposition. The soul is then empty and unburdened by any methodical conclusions, so that nothing prevents or distracts him from moving naturally from one idea or image which arises to another.⁴⁴

That for Aristotle this chain of associations, which leads to a specific goal, in spite of its lack of logical steps, is in no sense free from rationality and reason, is apparent from a passage in *EE* 2,8:⁴⁵

... we say that the inspired and prophesying, although they perform a work of ratio (*dianoias ergon*), nonetheless say and do what they say and do in

³⁹ *Div. Somn.* 463a21–b11.

⁴⁰ *Div. Somn.* 463b13.

⁴¹ *Div. Somn.* 463b12–464b5.

⁴² In *Mem.* 452a13–a16, Aristotle considers the related problem of recollection (*anamnēsis*), and gives as an example the chain of associations, ‘milk-white-cloud-dampness-autumn’. Similarly, in *Div. Somn.* 464b1–b4, Aristotle says that a seer says and follows things in which like is bound to like (*echomena tou homoïou legousi kai dianooountai*), so that the ideas follow one another (*kai houtō suneirousin eis to prosō*). In both works, it is also said that the production of the chain of association is scarcely any more under the control of the one remembering or dreaming; this is particularly true in the case of the melancholic.

⁴³ *Div. Somn.* 464a32–b1.

⁴⁴ *Div. Somn.* 464a19–a24 and 463b15–b16, and *EE* 1248a40–b1.

⁴⁵ ... και τούς ἐνθουσιῶντας και προλέγοντας, καιπερ δianoίας ἔργον ποιούντας, ὁμως οὐ φαμεν ἐφ’ αὐτοῖς εἶναι οὐτ’ εἰπεῖν ἢ εἶπον, οὔτε προᾶσαι ἢ ἐπραξαν. ... ὥστε και διάνοιαί τινες και πάθη οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν εἰσίν, ἢ προᾶξεις αἱ κατά τὰς τοιαύτας δianoίας και λογιμοῦς, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ Φιλόλαος ἔφη εἶναι τινας λόγους κρείττους ἡμῶν (*EE* 1225a27–a33, cf. *MM* 1207b3–b5).

an uncontrolled fashion ...⁴⁶ so that a certain kind of thinking (*dianoiai tines*) and certain states [of the soul] (*pathê*) are not in our control, and are not actions which are undertaken according to prior considerations and planning (*toiautas dianoias kai logismous*); rather, as Philolaus says, there are certain ways of thinking (*tinas logous*) which are stronger than we are.

'Stronger than we are' means, 'stronger than our methodically engaged ratio.' It would appear that with this expression—as in *EE* 8,2—the *theion en hêmin* or *nous* is intended.⁴⁷

Even if the precise course of mantic enthusiasm, as Plato and Aristotle conceive of it, remains unclear, these selected passages tend nonetheless to support the thesis that maintains that it is rather a supra- than a sub-rational power of the soul which is responsible for enthusiasm.

3. *The Place of the Poet among the Special Gifts* According to (Pseudo-)Aristotle, *Problemata Physica* 30

We mentioned at the beginning that the seriousness of Plato's statements concerning the inspiration of poets is frequently called into question by scholars. The examples of passages which discuss inspired poets without any trace of irony have, I hope, sown doubts about these doubts. A further reason for including the inspired poet among the group of inspired individuals can be found in another Peripatetic text, namely, the *Problemata physica*, which was probably written by Theophrastus.⁴⁸ In Problem 30, there is a striking similarity with the statements of Plato. The question here is: 'Why are all of the exceptional personalities (*perittoï andres*) in

⁴⁶ At this point (*EE* 1225 a30), Aristotle somewhat unexpectedly introduces the following sentence: *alla mên oude di' epithumian*, which Dirlmeier 1962, 36, translates thus: 'Aber auch Handlungen auf Grund von Begierde (stehen nicht durchweg bei uns). But also actions motivated by desire (are not always under our control)'. With this remark, he assumes that the undertaking (*hormê*) of one inspired is an uncontrolled, rational undertaking. It is difficult to reconcile this with the discussion in *EE* 8,2, where an intellect-based *alogos orexis* is mentioned as the cause of *eutuchia*. Perhaps the lines can be better understood thus: '(The seer anticipates the future according to ratio, but not as the result of a rational effort:) nor by means of the respective desire (which is under his control)'. Nonetheless, in view of the cryptic formulation of the insertion, a certain lack of clarity remains.

⁴⁷ Insofar as someone employs the divine (*theion ti*)—which is in turn identical with the intellect (*theion ho nous*)—when he practises 'science', he leads a life which 'is stronger than human life' (*kreitton ê kat' anthrôpon*). This formulation from *EN* 10,7 agrees with the above-mentioned formulation in *EE* 8,2, that 'the divine in us' is stronger than rationally acquired knowledge (*kreitton kai epistêmês*).

⁴⁸ Cf. Flashar (1962), 711.

philosophy, politics, poetry and other arts, melancholics?⁴⁹ Consistent with the approach of this work, the solution is sought by considering the physiological cause of genius (and is found with the melancholic in the group which, according to Aristotle, already seemed predestined for the natural mantic).

The explanation in the *Problemata physica* is briefly as follows: the humour of black gall can become especially warm or cold. In some people, there is an excess of black gall. This humour is close to the region in the body in which, according to the Peripatetics, the individual thinks (breast, heart). When the black gall in a melancholic becomes warm, he may become, among other things, manic (*manikos*) and brilliant (*euphuês*),⁵⁰ and

... many are affected by manic or inspired states, because this warmth is close to the seat of thought, and this is how some become Sibyls or Bacchantes or divinely possessed, if this state occurs not through illness but through a natural mixture of the humours. Marakos of Syracuse was also always a better poet when he was in an ecstasy.

However, those whose [black gall] reverts to a moderate warmth are also melancholics, but they are more rational and less exceptional; at the same time, they remain superior to others in many respects, whether in education or in the arts⁵¹ or in politics.

Thus, this passage in the *Problemata physica* mentions exactly the same categories of exceptional individuals, both manic and inspired, as are

⁴⁹ *PP* 953a10–a12.

⁵⁰ *PP* 954a34–a38: Πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ διὰ τὸ ἐγγὺς εἶναι τοῦ νοεροῦ τόπου τὴν θερμότητα ταύτην νοσημασιν ἀλίσκονται μανικοῖς ἢ ἐνθουσιαστικοῖς, ὅθεν Σίβυλλαι καὶ Βάκχιδες καὶ οἱ ἔνθεοι γίνονται πάντες, ὅταν μὴ νοσήματι γένωνται ἀλλὰ φυσικῆ καύσει. Μαρακὸς δὲ ὁ Συρακούσιος καὶ ἀμείνων ἦν ποιητής, ὅτ' ἐκσταίῃ. Ὅσοις δ' ἂν ἐπανθῆ τὴν ἄγαν θερμότητα πρὸς τὸ μέσον, οὗτοι μελαγχολικοὶ μὲν εἰσι, φρονημώτεροι δέ, καὶ ἤπτον μὲν ἔκτοιοι, πρὸς πολλὰ δὲ διαφέροντες τῶν ἄλλων, οἱ μὲν πρὸς παιδείαν, οἱ δὲ πρὸς τέχνας, οἱ δὲ πρὸς πολιτείαν. Flashar (1962), 253, places *manikos* in parentheses (because the manic states are first addressed shortly thereafter; one can, however, also interpret the adjective as 'tending towards *mania*'), and translates *euphuês* with 'good-natured'. Louis (1994), 33, on the other hand, translates *euphuês* with 'brilliant', referring to Arist. *Poet.* ch. 17, 1455a33–a34 (and *Rhet.* 1390 b28). In my view, this is an entirely convincing reference, as Chapter 17 of the *Poetics* is the only passage in which Aristotle clearly engages with Plato's conception of enthusiasm. There, the adjectives *manikos* and *euphuês*, as in the *PP*, are closely associated with one another. On the relation of the statements in *PP* 30 to those in the unquestionably authentic writings of Aristotle, see van der Eijk (1990), 37–72.

⁵¹ In the *Problemata physica*, the enthusiasm of the poet is also transferred to practitioners of the other arts. One thinks initially of the visual arts, although the formulation is quite unspecific. In Plato, the discussion of enthusiasm concentrates on the poets.

mentioned by Plato: prophets, politicians, philosophers—and repeatedly also poets. Although this text is concerned with the physiological cause of these special abilities, it also says that this inspired state entails an excitement—admittedly, not completely controlled—of the thought process. In the case of exceptional melancholics, degrees of *mania* are recognised, which allow rational thought to be more or less involved.

Conclusions

When we bring all of the threads together, we can understand Plato's concept of inspiration in the following way.

The notion of the inspiration of the poets is on the one hand of course an insult: the traditional poets, by being unable to justify what they regard as good or bad, just or unjust in any given circumstance, do not satisfy the requirements of the philosophers. On the other hand, however, the good poets are more than averagely successful in ethical matters, and for this, they deserve acknowledgement.⁵² This success is the product of a special gift. With the help of their *nous*, albeit not in a strictly rational mode, but in a way which transcends any simple categorisation of experience, they are able to understand character so profoundly, that they can accurately anticipate the actions of those characters and the good or evil which results from their actions.

The Empiricists (*empeiroi*) must then be distinguished from Enthusiasts, even though in their case, as with the Enthusiasts, they lack the ability to account for their conduct, and they justify themselves with

⁵² Plato did not regard the poet in all of his works, or in all of any one of his works, as an 'enthusiast'. This entails a certain risk for the reader to read classical poetry, or, to speak with the Athenian in the *Laws*, 'each (poet) says many things in a fine way, but many also in the opposite way' (*polla men hekaston eirêkenai kalôs, polla de kai tounation*, *L. VII*, 811b). In the *Laws*, Plato clarifies the criteria presented in the *Republic*, in that through the Athenian, he appropriates in their entirety some of the traditional works of poetry (principally lyric, e.g. Solon's *Elegies*, Pindar's *Odes*, or traditional hymns and *encomia*); some of these works are held by the Athenian to be generally useful, if they are improved according to the *tupoi* for poetry, but for other works, he does not grant even this possibility (*L. VII*, 802b–c). Thus, for all the honour which Plato accords Homer, the latter has nonetheless had his day as an educational model. His authoritative position is to be replaced with the 'philosophically tested' poetry according to the model of the Platonic dialogue (*L. VII*, 811c–812a). This refers less to the literary form of the dialogue than to conformity with the required principles of representation; thus, for example, the *Critias* has as its aim the continuation of the narration of outstanding deeds of the early Athenians (*megala kai thaumasta erga*, *Tim. 20e*), and as such is to be understood as a fragment of a prose epic.

opinions. The difference lies in the fact that the exceptional accuracy of the Enthusiasts is limited to a specific sphere—lovers desire specific Apollonian, Zeus-like, Artemis-like etc. characters, Corybantic dancers are (powerfully) inspired by certain rhythms and melodies,⁵³ while poets are adept at depicting certain characters with particular forms of expression. The natural mantics rely exclusively upon their natural endowment and are for this reason alone other than and different from the Empiricists.

An Empiricist, on the other hand, can engage in any of these areas. Yet with the same degree of effort as each of these groups of Enthusiasts, he will only ever achieve a limited degree of success. While the Empiricist evaluates situations according to certain patterns and rules, the Enthusiast can see through situations to the intelligible preconditions (and also the rules). Although neither analyses a situation according to an especially strict method, there exists nonetheless a significant degree of difference. This does not mean that an Enthusiast does not or should not gather experience. On the contrary, someone possessed of a special ability can classify new experiences in his sphere very quickly. For the correct ethical conduct above all, but also for the philosopher and the poet, the effective, classified acquisition of experience is of the greatest importance.

Inspiration is therefore not grounded in an autonomous, irrational, aesthetic capacity of feeling, which in any case we do not find in Plato: in his view, sense perception does not possess the necessary strength, while feelings are only an accompaniment to certain cognitions of difference(s).

The decisive factor for the quality of poetry in relation to both inspiration and mimesis is the content of knowledge with which the poet is able to invest his work. The traditional inspired poet stands midway between the completely uncontrolled ecstatic prophet and the good politician, because of the limitation in his ability to justify his knowledge rationally.⁵⁴

The philosophical poet represents a special category of poetic inspiration. He can do both: through thought, he can be inspired by the object of his thought; *and* he can justify his thought. Earlier, we heard how the

⁵³ On the Corybantes in Plato, see Linforth (1946), 121–162.

⁵⁴ Against this background, the dialogue *Ion* must be subjected to a new and thorough examination. If an ironic depiction of the poet occurs there, then, in a fashion similar to the politicians in the *Meno*, not because their achievements are not acknowledged, but because the description of the inspired poet resembles in an exaggerated and radical manner the inspired mantic.

Athenian in the *Laws* considered himself inspired when he required that the laws should also be legitimated. Konrad Gaiser assembled a group of similar texts and thus was able to show that Plato had probably regarded himself as the best of poets.⁵⁵

Inspiration in Plato's dialogues is therefore to be taken seriously, even with respect to the poets—of whom in a certain fashion Plato regarded himself as the leader!

⁵⁵ Gaiser (1984).

CHAPTER SEVEN

PLATO, POETRY AND CREATIVITY

DOMINIC SCOTT

The subject of this paper is poetic creativity as it features in various Platonic works: the nature and source of creativity, as well as the way in which it differs from the activity of philosophy. I shall argue that Plato gives us at least three quite different models of poetic creativity. One can be extracted from the *Ion* and the *Meno*, another from the *Symposium* and a third from the *Gorgias* and *Republic VI*. The main focus of this paper will be on the model given in the *Symposium* where Diotima talks of how such poets as Homer and Hesiod succeeded in creating works that would secure them everlasting memory (209a–d). This passage has not received the attention it deserves within discussions of Platonic poetics, and it is all the more interesting when juxtaposed with the more familiar account of poetic creativity found in the *Ion*.

1. *Model One: Theia Moira in the Ion and the Meno*

The Ion

Ion is a rhapsode who boasts of his ability to perform Homer and to expound his meaning. Socrates appears to envy the rhapsode, but is puzzled as to why he is able to speak so well about Homer but not about any other poet. In the first main section of the dialogue (531a–533c), he argues that Ion does not actually have any skill or understanding¹ of what Homer said; if he did, he would be just as impressive on any poet who dealt with similar topics. The central section (533d–536d) then gives the explanation for Ion's peculiar ability: he is in receipt of a divine gift (*theia moira*). Socrates describes this as a form of possession in which Ion is temporarily driven out of his mind; it is not Ion who speaks, but the god who uses him as a mouthpiece. Socrates' repeated insistence throughout this passage that the rhapsode speaks as one possessed makes Ion uneasy:

¹ I agree with Kahn (1996), 103 that Plato uses the words *epistēmē*, *sophia* and *technē* interchangeably in this dialogue. See also Harris (2004), 193, n.12.

he still wants to see himself as speaking with understanding and skill. So in the third and final section of the dialogue (536e–542b), Socrates provides a further argument to show that this is not the case.

Although most of the *Ion* is concerned directly with rhapsody rather than poetry, this does not make it tangential to the topic of poetic creativity. The account of divine inspiration given in the central section does shift the spotlight onto poets, for a while at least. Of prime importance to the whole passage is the magnet analogy: just as a loadstone attracts a metal object, it also implants the same power in that object to attract another, until a whole chain is formed. So the god (or the muse) makes the poet inspired, and the poet in turn inspires the performers (including rhapsodes), who do the same to their audiences. Having introduced poets as the closest link to the muse at 533e, Socrates continues to talk specifically about them until 534b. He then reintroduces the figure of the rhapsode, but still keeps the poet in the spotlight until the end of the passage (cf. e.g. 534c). So, although he introduces divine inspiration to explain something about *Ion*, everything he says applies also to the poets.²

Before we turn to *theia moira* directly, we need to consider the content of the *technê* or understanding that Socrates is at pains to deny to rhapsodes and poets. What is beyond doubt is that in his view they lack any understanding of the actual topics that feature in their poems. The diverse range of examples given in the dialogue includes divination (531b & 539b–d), politics (531c), religion (531c–d), chariot driving (537a), fishing (538d) and medicine (538c). Socrates shows no interest in the possibility that the poet might have a specific and unique understanding of literary composition, and *Ion* makes no allusion to such a skill in his or the poets' defence.³ The assumption of the dialogue is that poets pretend to an understanding of 'first order' topics (e.g. of politics and religion), rather than of how to talk about them, and are therefore competing on the same terrain as the true expert (*technikos*), but without any understanding.

² Some would say even more so: Ledbetter (2003), 91 thinks that the influence of the god is stronger over the poet than over the rhapsode. There has been a tendency in the literature to argue that not only does the account of divine inspiration apply to the poets, they are the dialogue's real focus (or target); even that the hapless *Ion* is merely a stand-in for Homer: see e.g. Méridier (1931), 13, Tigerstedt (1969), 25, Murdoch (1977), 9, Woodruff (1983), 6 and Kahn (1996), 107–108. For our purposes, we do not have to go to this extreme; all that matters is that the ascription of *theia moira* (and with it the denial of *technê*) applies at least as much to the poets as to *Ion*.

³ Janaway (1995), 14–35 argues that Socrates does not actually deny such *technê*, merely that it is the source of whatever is beautiful (*kalon*) in what they say.

To turn now to the account of poetic creativity in the central section: one thing that is clear is that the source of creativity is external, a point illustrated at 534a–b: ‘poets tell us that they gather songs at honey-flowing springs, from glades and gardens of the muses, and that they bear songs to us as bees carry honey’. But, of course, the overall message is stronger than this. It is not as if poets draw from a divine source and, by virtue of possessing some exceptional talent, add some element of their own to produce the end result, for instance by acting as interpreters of the muse. Something like that, we know, was the traditional claim made by, and on behalf of, the poets. What we have in the *Ion* appears to be a revisionist account, which acknowledges the presence of divine inspiration, but then makes this the sole explanation for poetic creativity.⁴ The result is that, when the poet is moved by a divine power (533d), he is quite literally possessed. The word ‘enthused’ (533e & 534b–c) means that the god is in the poet at the moment of inspiration. The point is made most clearly at 534c–d:

That’s why the god takes [the poets’] intellect (*nous*) away from them when he uses them as his servants, as he does prophets and godly diviners, so that we who hear should know that they are not the ones who speak those verses that are of such high value, for their intellect is not in them: the god himself is the one who speaks, and he gives voice through them to us.⁵

In other words, divine dispensation requires a temporary displacement of the poet’s own reason. Possession is, from another perspective, ‘de-possession’. Taking their cue from this, many commentators have rightly stressed the stark contrasts that run throughout this passage: like the Bacchant, the poet is ‘out of his mind’ (*ekphrôn*) rather than being in possession of it (*emphrôn*).⁶

Even though poets lack understanding, is there nevertheless any truth in what they say? The *Ion* does not give an explicit answer to this question—it only states that the utterances of the poet are beautiful or

⁴ On Plato’s break with the tradition, see Murray (1996), 6–12.

⁵ Translations of Platonic texts are from Cooper (1997), unless stated otherwise.

⁶ 534a–b. Commenting on the ‘rigid either-or’ contrast operative in this passage, Burnyeat (1977), 13 writes ‘either ideas come in an uncontrolled eruption of inspired material or they are the product of reason’. The starkness of the contrast is very much the focus of Harris (2004): see esp. 195, ‘if god is in, reason is out’, and ‘the immanent power of god necessitates the evacuation of reason’. See also Ledbetter (2003), 90: ‘the gift of inspiration is incompatible with the poet’s being *at all* engaged intellectually’ [emphasis added].

'fine' (*kala*: cf. e.g. 533e). But given that it is the god who speaks, rather than the poet, it is safe to assume that the utterances in question are all true: as in the *Apology* (21b) Socrates would insist that the god can never utter falsehood.⁷

The Meno

The *Meno* only fleetingly mentions the poets, grouping them with prophets and soothsayers as divinely inspired at 99d. Because the reference is so brief, most commentators on Plato's poetics pass over the dialogue.⁸ Nevertheless, the *Meno* is extremely useful for our purposes. Brief though the reference is, the context in which it appears tells us much more than the *Ion* about how *theia moira* differs from the process of philosophical discovery.

First, we need to understand how the reference to divine inspiration arises as part of the dialogue's overall argument. The work opens with the question of how virtue is acquired, though Socrates immediately steers the conversation onto the question of what virtue actually is. In the first ten pages of the dialogue, Meno tries and fails three times to define it. When pressed to try yet again, he famously resists by denying the possibility of all inquiry and discovery whatsoever. In response, Socrates introduces the theory of recollection as an account of how we are able to discover what we do not know. This puts their inquiry back on track, and between 87d and 89a Socrates takes Meno through an argument to show that virtue is some sort of knowledge. In the last ten pages of the dialogue, however, Socrates seems to unravel this conclusion. If someone had knowledge, he argues, they ought to be able to teach others and make them knowledgeable as well. But when Socrates asks whether there are in fact any teachers of virtue, he is unable to find any. This makes him suspect that it is not after all teachable, and hence not a form of knowledge, despite what they concluded at 89a. His way out of the difficulty is to make a distinction between virtue as knowledge and virtue as true belief: the great Athenians such as Themistocles and Pericles, whom most people would agree to be paragons of virtue, had true beliefs

⁷ See also Woolf (1997), 199 for a similar point. Janaway (1995), 33–34 tries to resist the claim that there is truth in poetic utterances, only beauty. But he does not consider the problem that the divine origin poses for his interpretation. For a different objection to Janaway, see Ledbetter (2003), 89–90.

⁸ Tigerstedt (1969), 35–45 is an exception.

about the direction in which to take their city; they said many fine and great things.⁹ But they did not have knowledge, and that is why they were unable to explain what they said and so teach anyone else.

This still leaves unanswered the question of how they acquired their true beliefs, and this is the point where divine dispensation enters the dialogue. Socrates compares the politicians' ability to say many fine and true things to that of prophets, soothsayers and poets:

As regards knowledge, they [sc. the politicians] are no different from soothsayers and prophets. They too say many true things when inspired, but they have no knowledge of what they are saying. ... And so, Meno, is it right to call these men divine who, without any understanding, are right in much of what is of importance in what they say and do? ... We should be right to call also those soothsayers and prophets whom we just mentioned, and all the poets, and we should call no less divine and inspired those public men who are no less under the gods' influence and possession, as their speeches lead to success in many important matters, though they have no knowledge of what they are saying. (99c–d)

This passage is remarkably similar to the central section of the *Ion*. The adjective *entheos* occurs in both; those who are inspired are called 'divine' (*theioi*) and 'possessed' (*katechomenoi*). The two dialogues also have the same list of paradigm cases of possession: as well as poets, *chrêsmôidoi* and *manteis* ('prophets and godly diviners': cf. *Ion* 534d). At *Meno* 99a all these people are said to have no *nous*, just as in the *Ion*. The *Meno* adds one term not found in the *Ion*, '*epipnous*', which is as close as Greek comes to our word 'inspiration'.

So far so good, but does the *Meno* do anything other than to echo or recall the *Ion*? It does say explicitly that the poets, like the prophets, soothsayers and politicians, give correct guidance.¹⁰ This at least adds something to the *Ion*, which said nothing explicitly about truth. But we should not exaggerate the importance of this addition. As I argued above, the point was already implicit in the *Ion*: given the divine source of their inspiration, it would be very implausible that the poets should say anything false.

⁹ As the dialogue progresses, it becomes clear that *aretê* has a political dimension: Socrates is particularly interested in the quality by which a politician becomes useful to his city. See 98c and 99c.

¹⁰ Cf. 99d: *katorthousin*. For commentators who deny that the politicians have true belief, see Hall (1981), 37, also Tigerstedt (1969), 43 and Weiss (2001), 164–165. I have argued against this interpretation in Scott (2006), 189 n. 20.

As far as the nature of divine dispensation goes, the *Meno* actually says far less than the *Ion*. All it does is to repeat that the poets are possessed, 'enthused' and ignorant of what they say. Nevertheless, assuming that the *Meno*'s use of *theia moira* is the same as in the *Ion*, I would argue that the *Meno* does add something very important that was lacking before. The *Ion* explains how the poets acquired their true beliefs; with the theory of recollection, the *Meno* answers a corresponding question about the philosopher's *epistêmê*.¹¹

Before developing this, we need to emphasise one point about the conclusion of the *Meno*. Despite appearances to the contrary, the dialogue does not end with a straightforward identification between virtue and true belief. Rather, Socrates distinguishes between two types of virtue: genuine virtue, which is based on knowledge, and an inferior species of virtue, a sort of 'shadow-virtue', which consists in true belief.¹² It is the latter that made the likes of Themistocles what they were and that is said to come by divine dispensation.

Bearing in mind that Socrates gives a dual answer to the question of what virtue is—either knowledge or true belief—we can also pursue the question of its acquisition on two tracks. If shadow-virtue is acquired by divine dispensation, what about genuine virtue based on knowledge? The issue is complicated because Socrates appears to give two conflicting answers. At various points in the second half of the dialogue, he says that knowledge comes by teaching (cf. 87b, 89d & 98d), while earlier in the dialogue he claims that knowledge comes by recollection (85c–d), a process that he contrasts with teaching (82e & 84d). But the appearance of conflict disappears once we realise that Socrates uses 'teaching' in different ways in the dialogue. When he insists that to be reminded is not to be taught (82e & 84d), the sense of teaching at issue is that of instilling answers into the pupil (i.e. rote learning), and he distinguishes this from the process of using questions to elicit answers that are already latent. But within 87b–c itself, when he first states that knowledge *is* teachable, he glosses the word as 'recollectable'. This establishes a new sense of the word

¹¹ Woolf (1997), 202 also sees the *Meno* as filling this gap left by the *Ion*, and in general argues that the two dialogues are thematically close and complementary. At 198–199, for instance, he points out the 'extraordinary specific verbal similarity between *Meno* 99c–e and *Ion* 534c–535a' which 'seems to indicate the dialogues are to be read with reference to one another'.

¹² In other words, Socrates never actually reneges on the conclusion of 87–89 that (genuine) virtue is a form of knowledge.

‘teaching’: acting as a catalyst to prompt someone to recollect. Asking questions in this sense can now be called teaching. So when towards the end of the dialogue Socrates says that knowledge is teachable, he means that it can be recollected with the aid of a questioner.¹³

How does this help us to understand the contrast between teaching (now understood ‘maieutically’) and *theia moira*? The two are radically distinct. One aspect of the contrast should be very obvious: learning that culminates in *epistêmê* involves drawing from within; ‘teaching’ presupposes knowledge already existing in the learner, which the ‘teacher’ merely elicits (by questioning). By contrast, anyone under the influence of divine dispensation receives information from an external source. But there is another aspect of the distinction between recollection and inspiration, over and above the inner/outer contrast. This involves the notion of agency. When discussing the *Ion*, I stressed that the god does not merely inform those they inspire, but also possesses them. The poet contributes nothing, except to provide a mouthpiece for the god. The recollection theory of the *Meno* represents the other extreme from this, because not only does the knowledge come from within, the learner must extract it for himself. When commenting on the slave boy’s performance, in particular extrapolating as to how he might continue on the path to full knowledge, Socrates stresses that the boy *himself* will extract the knowledge from within (himself). Socrates actually repeats the point within the space of a line (85d) going out of his way to stress the agency involved in recollection. Recollection is not a matter of being triggered by something or someone else to retrieve knowledge; the process must involve active participation from the learner.

So between them, the *Ion* and the *Meno* provide an account of poetic inspiration and of its relation to philosophical discovery in which the two appear at the very opposite ends of a spectrum. One might query whether the contrast between the two is quite so radical and suggest that the poets and politicians recollect to a limited degree,¹⁴ prompted not by any human questioner, but by divine intervention. If this were right, both kinds of virtue, knowledge and true belief, should involve drawing upon internal resources; the differences would lie in the nature of the catalyst and in the completeness of the process. But there is absolutely no hint of

¹³ This paragraph presents a summary of my interpretation set out in Scott (2006), 142–144.

¹⁴ Woodruff (1982), 140 describes poetic inspiration as ‘a case of recollection miscarried’.

such a compromise in the *Meno*, and the vocabulary used at 99b–c merely reinforces the stark contrast already sketched in the *Ion*—in particular the idea that divine inspiration actually precludes the activity of reason. The possibility of a compromise position, however, should be borne in mind when we turn to the *Symposium* below.¹⁵

2. Model Two: The Symposium

Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* gives an account of poetic creativity that stands in stark contrast to the model of the *Ion* and *Meno*. As a whole, her speech attempts to explain the nature and function of love, describing it as the desire to possess the good forever (206a11–12), which she thinks involves the desire for immortality. But because immortality in the literal sense (i.e. as enjoyed by the gods) is beyond the reach of mere human nature, all we can achieve is a form of 'surrogate immortality', and this we do by leaving behind something that serves as a continuation of our existence after death. The resources for this are contained within all of us: Diotima talks of everyone being 'pregnant in body and soul', so that when we come to the appropriate age we seek to give birth to this pregnancy, though we can only do in the presence of the beautiful. *Eros* is the force that drives us to do this when the moment arrives.

Some are 'more pregnant in body' and seek a physically beautiful partner with whom to have biological offspring. Others are 'more pregnant in soul' and produce a correspondingly different kind of offspring: broadly speaking, the products of the mind. However, this group is itself divided into two. One group includes inventors, legislators and poets, and is described in the passage on which we shall be focusing, 208e–209e. The way in which they give birth bears some parallels to the previous group. They fall in love with a physically beautiful partner, though preferably one who also has beauty of soul (209b), and their coming together causes the lover to beget *logoi* that may ultimately ensure them everlasting memory. However, there is another group of lovers included among the 'more pregnant in soul', and these turn out to be the philosophers. Described as devotees of the 'higher mysteries', they ascend the 'ladder of love', starting

¹⁵ Throughout this section, I have avoided discussing the question of Plato's sincerity in the *Meno* and the *Ion*, an issue that has long divided readers of both dialogues. (For references see Tigerstedt (1969), who makes the issue the main focus of his article.) I shall

with the love of a beautiful body and passing through a series of stages until they reach the form of beauty itself (210a–212a). As a result, they give birth to ‘true’ virtue (212a), which I take to imply that they attain true wisdom.

At this point, we should take note of a problem that has troubled readers of the *Symposium* and prompted different solutions. All of the three groups distinguished in the speech seek immortality of some sort. But how exactly do they achieve it? In my view, the primary vehicle is memory. That memory is central to Diotima’s speech comes out when we look at her references to the love of honour:

Look, if you will, at how human beings seek honour. You’d be amazed at their irrationality, if you didn’t have in mind what I spoke about and if you hadn’t pondered the awful state of love that they’re in, wanting to become famous and ‘to lay up immortal glory forever’ and how they’re ready to brave any danger for the sake of this much more than they are for their children . . . I believe that *anyone* (*pantes*) will do anything (*panta*) for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows; and the better the people, the more they will do, for they are all in love with immortality. (208c–e; emphasis added)

This passage comes before the three-fold division of lovers has been made, and clearly states that the love of honour is something that applies to *all* human beings—including those later divided off as philosophers: in fact, the desire for ‘glorious fame’ ought to apply even more to this group in so far as they are better than the others. The physical lovers achieve ‘immortality, remembrance and happiness’ (208e) through having children. At least part of what they achieve, I suggest, is being remembered by their children and by their descendants in turn. The next group, the inventors, poets and legislators, are remembered for their various achievements, e.g. the laws that they left behind them. The point again is that memory is ultimately the vehicle for surrogate immortality. I would argue that the point also applies to the lovers of the higher mysteries (who, as we have just seen, are at least as motivated as anyone by the prospect of ‘glorious fame’): they will be remembered for their wisdom—not only by humans, but by the gods, whose love they have now come to earn (212a). Because the gods are truly immortal, such memory is

not attempt to resolve this question here; my interest is simply in the model of poetic creativity proposed, whether or not Plato (or his principal interlocutor) applied it to any actual poets.

forever secure in a way that mere human memory is not. Hence this group are said to have attained as great a share of immortality as any human can.¹⁶

An alternative view is that the second and third groups achieve their surrogate immortality not so much by securing memory for themselves, but by generating virtue in other people—psychological gene-spreading, as it were. The philosophers would do this by helping their protégés to acquire philosophical wisdom (the highest kind of virtue). But even the second group, the legislators and the poets, propagate virtue in their beloved or, more generally, in their citizens and audiences. This interpretation in effect sidelines memory as the primary vehicle for surrogate immortality. I shall not attempt to argue against it here because, even if it is accepted, most of what I have to say about Diotima's account of poetic creativity will go through anyway.¹⁷

Symposium 209a–d

We now turn to the passage that describes the second group of lovers. At 209a1–5, Diotima states that those who are more pregnant in soul are pregnant with and beget '*phronêsis* and the rest of virtue'. All the poets and those craftsmen 'who are inventive' fall into this category. So far, this is a completely general statement about anyone who has a psychic pregnancy, and the reference to *phronêsis* is very underdetermined. It could be taken to mean that such people possess and realise a certain cognitive potential that may take various forms. In the case of inventive craftsmen, it would be expertise in a particular subject matter: medical knowledge might be an example.¹⁸ Applied to the poets, her point may be that they have some cognitive grasp (loosely described as *phronêsis*) of the various topics that feature in their work.

But almost immediately she turns away from this very general notion of *phronêsis* to talk of its 'greatest and noblest' form, which is concerned with ordering cities and households and is called 'justice and temperance'. She then explains what happens when someone 'has been pregnant with these (*toutôn*) in his soul from early youth.' (I take *toutôn* to be a reference to the immediately preceding 'justice and temperance', i.e. the highest kind of *phronêsis*, and hence that everything up to 209e is concerned

¹⁶ I would like to thank Frisbee Sheffield for first suggesting this interpretation to me, even though she no longer accepts it.

¹⁷ See nn. 23 & 31 below. I have also discussed this issue in Scott (2007), 149–151.

¹⁸ As Rowe (1998) 190 suggests.

specifically with *phronêsis* in this narrower sense.)¹⁹ 209b–c describes the way in which such pregnancies come to be delivered: anyone pregnant with this sort of *phronêsis* seeks out someone in whose presence to give birth; if he finds a suitable lover, he immediately teems with *logoi* about virtue and seeks to educate his beloved. She goes on:

For (*gar*) I imagine it's by contact with what is beautiful, and by associating with it, that he brings to birth and procreates the things with which he was for so long pregnant, both when he is present with him and when he is away from him but remembering him ... (209c)²⁰

Since this sentence begins with a *gar*, I assume that it in some way explicates the meaning of the previous few lines—specifically that what it now describes as the moment of delivery corresponds to the reference to their ‘teeming with *logoi*’ three lines before.

The rest of the passage (209d–e) falls into two sections, one illustrating the previous few lines with examples from the poets, notably Homer and Hesiod, the other with examples from legislators (e.g. Solon and Lycurgus).

There are several references to begetting throughout this passage. But what exactly is it that these lovers beget? At 209c Diotima merely says that they give birth to what they have been carrying inside them, though if this sentence does indeed explicate the previous few lines, including the claim that they are teeming with *logoi*, the implication is that they give birth to *logoi*. Elsewhere in this section, however, she also talks of giving birth to virtue (including *phronêsis*) and, in the case of the legislators, laws. I would add that, if the legislators beget laws, we should expect as a parallel that the poets beget poems. If we look further ahead to the higher mysteries, assuming that it can be used to provide some sort of parallel to

¹⁹ An alternative view would be that *toutôn* refers further back to the less determinate ‘*phronêsis* and virtue in general’, which all psychically pregnant people possess. If so, the reference to the highest form of *phronêsis* at 209a would be a parenthesis after which Diotima resumes her discussion of the more general form. For this view, see Bury (1932) 121. But this alternative is less plausible given the way the passage immediately develops. At 209b, Diotima starts to talk about what happens when someone comes to give birth to what they have long held within him. What is significant is that the person focuses upon what the good person should do and the sorts of practices appropriate to him. This makes sense if Diotima has in mind the finest type of *phronêsis*, but not if she is thinking about any kind of craft or knowledge. A narrower construal of *toutôn* also makes good sense of the way in which the passage segues into a mention of Homer and Hesiod, who wrote about both city and household, as well as the great legislators. Note that this group of poets are called ‘good’ at 209d, which stands in contrast to ‘all’ the poets mentioned at 209a.

²⁰ Trans. Rowe (1998) 92—slightly more accurate than Cooper (1997).

209a–d, we find that the lover begets *logoi* and *dianoêmata* ('thoughts') (210a–d), and eventually true virtue (212a).

Disparate though these claims are, it is quite possible to reconcile them. (1) As far as *logoi*, laws and poems are concerned, the point may be that all lovers in this group can be described in general terms as giving birth to *logoi* about the management of the city or the household, but in one case this takes the form of poems, in the other of laws. In other words, '*logoi*' is a genus of which poems and laws are two species. Another way of solving the problem is to say that the lover initially begets *logoi* in the sense of 'ideas', which are subsequently refined and developed into a fully-fledged poem or set of laws. This fits well with the reference at 209c to the process of nurturing or rearing the newborn (to be discussed in more detail below).²¹ (2) If Diotima also talks of begetting virtue and *phronêsis*, we should not be too concerned. Her real interest is in the way that certain people can survive in the memories of others. If she vacillates between picking out a psychological state and the products of that state, this is because it does not ultimately matter for her argument which she chooses. In a similar fashion, we might say that Homer is remembered for his genius *or* for his poetry (though he can hardly be remembered for the former without the latter).²²

We are now in a better position to assess this model of poetic creativity and to appreciate how it differs from the *theia moira* account of the *Ion* and *Meno*. Most striking is the fact that in those dialogues the source of creativity is completely external to the poet, whereas in the *Symposium* it lies within. True, Diotima insists that there must be an external factor in the form of the beauty of the beloved. At 206d, in fact, just after insisting that one can give birth only in the presence of beauty, she says

²¹ On this view Solon and Lycurgus did not, strictly speaking, *beget* actual laws (*pace* 209d); begetting was necessary but not sufficient.

²² Some interpreters would say that what the lover begets is virtue in the beloved: see Price (1997), Vernezze (1992) 340–348 and Irwin (1995) 302–316. This must be wrong as far as the immediate object of delivery is concerned, because at 209c the lover begets what he has long had within him both in the presence of the beloved *and in his absence*, and the latter point makes no sense if what he begets at this stage is virtue in the beloved. Further down the line, of course, the lover may create virtue in the beloved by educating him (cf. 209c: *paideuein*). But, first, Diotima does not *unambiguously* describe such education in terms of the begetting and rearing of children—the reference to legislators generating 'all kinds of virtue' (209e) could be to virtue in themselves. Second, even if she did so, such generation of virtue downstream does not rule out the delivery and generation of *logoi*, poems and laws upstream, which is all I need to insist upon in this paper. So, sceptical as I am of the interpretation, there is no need to argue against it here.

‘therefore the goddess who presides at childbirth—she’s called Moira or Eileithuia—is really beauty’, thereby identifying beauty with *moira*. (Plato also presents the whole process as something divine, so it would still be appropriate to describe poetic creativity in the *Symposium* as involving *theia moira* in some sense: cf. 206c). But although she invokes *moira* in this way, she is just talking about the catalyst for a process that consists in drawing upon one’s own internal resources.

Another point of difference between the *Symposium* and the *Ion/Meno* account centres on the process of creativity, in particular on the notion of agency. So far we have focused on the moment of delivery. But at 209c4 Diotima alludes to a further stage when she says that lover and beloved together rear the newborn after it has been delivered. The comparison here is with the way in which biological parents concern themselves with the rearing and education of their children. The most plausible way of cashing out the metaphor, as I have already suggested, is that the poet, with the help of his beloved, subjects his initial ideas to a process of elaboration and development. If correct, this makes for a highly significant contrast with the model of the *Ion* and *Meno*. The *theia moira* model has been criticised for simplifying the process of artistic creativity: there may indeed be an initial period (or moment) of inspiration, which is highly charged with emotion and difficult to subject to rational analysis but, as Vincent Tomas argued, what distinguishes artistic creativity from madness or passive imagination is the presence of ‘critical control’.²³ Although artists may not start out with a fully explicit conception of what they will ultimately create—in that case it would not be counted as creativity—they are able to subject their initial (and ‘inspired’) insights to criticism, to reject some ways of developing them and follow others instead. Because it puts all the emphasis on the mysterious process of inspiration, Tomas explicitly cites the *Ion* as an oversimplified account of what creativity involves. If I am right about the *Symposium*, however, Plato did after all present the beginnings of a more plausible view. Diotima allows for an initial phase comparable to the phenomenon of inspiration and accompanied by powerful emotions, but also opens up space for the kind of critical control and elaboration that Tomas argued to be necessary in any plausible account of artistic creativity.

²³ Tomas (1958) 7–8.

Poetry and Philosophy

An important part of the *Ion-Meno* account was its rigid dichotomy between poetic inspiration and philosophical discovery, and we should now consider how the contrast has been reconfigured in the *Symposium*. The progress of the philosophical lover is described in the ascent passage (210a–212a) under the heading of ‘the higher mysteries’ (so that, by implication, all those discussed in 209a–d can be called ‘lovers of the lower mysteries’). To reach the summit of their ascent, philosophical lovers must pass through several more stages than the poets and legislators, who fell in love with a single person and then proceeded to generate and nurture their *logoi*. By contrast, the lovers of the higher mysteries fall in love repeatedly with a whole series of different instantiations of beauty—the beauty of a particular body, of bodies in general, of souls, of laws and practices, of the sciences—until finally they apprehend the form of beauty itself. The text explicitly talks of giving birth to *logoi* at the first, third and fifth stages, and at the very last stage the lover gives birth to true virtue (212a). I would suggest that the lover begets *logoi* at every stage and, further, that in each case there is a process of reflection on the ‘new-born’: there are plenty of references to the lover’s reflection on the various objects of his love throughout 210a–c. One aspect of such reflection, I would argue, is the elaboration of the *logoi* and *dianoêmata* (reflections, 210d) to which he has given birth.²⁴

So although Diotima allows poetic creativity a degree of complexity, especially when we compare her account with the *theia moira* model of the *Ion* and *Meno*, philosophical discovery is far more complex again. The process of pregnancy, begetting and then development is repeated no less than six times and at increasing levels of abstraction. That is one clear point of comparison. Another is between the end results in each case. At the culmination of the ascent, philosophers are said to beget genuine virtue, not images of it. I have taken this to mean that they achieve true understanding, so that the reference to mere ‘images’ of virtue (212a) is a retrospective qualification of the praise bestowed on the lovers of the lower mysteries: even though they were pregnant with and gave birth to the highest kind of *phronêsis* (209a), this turns not to be the highest cognitive state possible.

²⁴ Very likely, reflection on the results of one delivery prepares the way for the next. A good example is the movement from the third to the fourth stages of the ascent (210c): the love of souls makes one produce *logoi* about moral education, reflection on which introduces one to the beauty of practices and laws.

But in what way is the poets' *phronêsis* defective? The easiest way to answer this is to think of it as some sort of true belief that falls short of true *epistêmê* (in that it lacks the requisite kind of *logos*: cf. *Symp.* 202a). Some commentators have noted the similarity between the political *phronêsis* described here and what appears in other texts under the heading of 'demotic' virtue, which is also described in terms of 'temperance and justice': the combination of self-restraint and recognition of social boundaries that enables human beings to live and work together.²⁵ But there is a problem in saying that the lovers of the lower mysteries merely had demotic virtue: as described in other Platonic texts, such virtue is something possessed by the broad run of citizens, whereas the political *phronêsis* of *Symp.* 209a–e is what enables the best of the poets and statesmen to stand out and secure everlasting memory. But this problem is not insoluble: the 'good' poets of *Symp.* 209c did indeed grasp something unusual and extraordinary, but perhaps the success of their poetry made their insights so widely accepted as to become commonplace. If so, their virtue could be called 'demotic' by prolepsis.

We now come to an intriguing similarity between the lovers of the lower and higher mysteries. The one phase that the former complete corresponds closely to the third stage in the ascent passage. Compare the two relevant passages:

Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with *logoi* about virtue—the qualities a virtuous person should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him.

(209b–c)

After this he must think that the beauty of people's souls is more valuable than the beauty of their bodies, so that if someone is decent in his soul even though he is scarcely blooming in his body, our lover must be content to love and care for him and to seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better.

(210b–c)

There is, of course, a discrepancy between the requirements made of the beloved in the two passages. For the lover of the lower mysteries, the beloved must have bodily beauty; beauty of soul does not seem necessary,

²⁵ See *Phdo* 82a–b and *Rep.* 432a, 434c & 518d–e (cf. also Protagoras' conception of *aretê* at *Prot.* 332e). The comparison between the political *phronêsis* of the lower mysteries and demotic virtue goes back to Bury (1932) 121. See also O'Brien (1984) and Rowe (1998) *ad* 209a–b.

though the combination is greatly valued. For the lover of the higher mysteries, beauty of soul is necessary; bodily beauty may be desirable but is not necessary. What both lovers may have in common, however, is that they would prefer the combination of bodily and spiritual beauty. And there are further similarities: both produce *logoi*—one about virtue, the other about how to produce it; both are concerned with ‘practices’ (*epitêdeumata*): at 209b–c the lover thinks straightaway about what the virtuous person should do by way of practices; the lover of the higher mysteries goes on to consider the question at the following stage.²⁶ But what I wish to take away from the comparison is that lovers of the lower mysteries seem similar to the higher, but leap ahead too quickly to a stage that needs more careful preparation. The fact that they have not proceeded in order and completed the first two stages is presumably linked to the fact that they go no further: they are not familiar with the idea that one kind of beauty might be superseded and that a greater level of abstraction is possible. For the initiate into the higher mysteries, by contrast, this possibility has already been illustrated in the move from the first to the second stage (from the love of a particular body to that of beautiful bodies in general); they are therefore ready to find it repeated in subsequent stages.

In the *Symposium*, therefore, what the poets achieve is something like a disconnected fragment of the philosopher’s ascent. In this sense, there is greater continuity between the two groups than on the *Ion-Meno* account, where poets and philosophers were radically different in kind. Another way of putting the point is to say that, if Diotima had talked the language of recollection, she would have characterised both poets and philosophers as recollecting, but the former as doing so haphazardly and incompletely; only the philosophers, by following a more systematic method, complete the process to the end, culminating in true wisdom. On such a view, poetry would be a case of recollection stalled.²⁷

We might be tempted to go a step further, and claim that recollection is actually implicit in the *Symposium*—that Plato expects us to read the theory into Diotima’s speech: for ‘pregnancy’, read latent knowledge in the soul from a prior existence; for ‘delivery’, the recollection of that knowledge in one’s present incarnation. But we should be cautious here.

²⁶ See Sheffield (2006), 138 for a comparison of the lovers of the lower and higher mysteries.

²⁷ Though not ‘miscarried’, *pace* Woodruff (1982), 140 (see n. 14 above). The lovers of the lower mysteries succeed in giving birth to their pregnancies.

Diotima certainly never describes the process of pregnancy and delivery as recollecting knowledge from a previous life. And even if she did, she would have to espouse a different version of the theory for at least the following reason: in the *Meno*, everyone has the same resources lying within them, even though they differ in the extent to which they succeed in bringing them to the surface; in the *Symposium* it is not clear that everyone *does* have the same resources. For one thing, some are more pregnant in soul than body; furthermore, among the lovers of the lower mysteries, people have different pregnancies: the good poets are pregnant with a superior kind of *phronêsis*, which marks them out from other poets and craftsmen. This in turn raises the possibility that there is a further difference between the lovers of the higher and lower mysteries, and that philosophers have a different pregnancy not just from inventors and poets in general, but also from the 'good' poets and the legislators. Philosophers are pregnant with something superior to political *phronêsis*: *epistêmê* of the form.²⁸

3. Model Three: *Gorgias* 501–502 and Republic VI 493

Finally, we turn to a pair of texts that present a very different account of poetic creativity from either of the two models we have considered, both in terms of the source of creativity and the kind of process involved. The passages in question are not usually cited in discussions of Platonic poetics, perhaps because they mention poets only *en passant* as part of a broader critique of orators, demagogues and sophists.

One of the central purposes of the *Gorgias* is to define rhetoric and differentiate it from the true art of politics. Central to this project is the distinction between pleasure and the good. This in turn yields a distinction between a craft (*technê*), which aims at producing the good for its subjects, and a 'knack' (*empeiria*), which aims at pleasure. This

²⁸ On recollection and the *Symposium*, see Allen (1991), 89–90 and Brisson (2007), 248, who seem confident that recollection can be read into the dialogue. For a much more cautious approach, though still attributing some form of innatism to the work, see Sheffield (2001) and (2006), 127, n.17. One could go to the extreme of denying that the *Symposium* is advocating any sort of theory of innatism: at no point is *phronêsis* said to have been in the soul from birth, only from youth (209a–b). But if the internal resource did not lie within the soul from birth, we would need to explain what would have caused the pregnancy to arise after birth. So it is likely that the *Symposium* is committed to some form of innatism, even if we cannot be sure of what kind, and how closely it resembles recollection as found in the *Meno*.

distinction can be found in various different fields: it differentiates the doctor from the cook, and the gymnastics teacher from the beautician. Where the soul is concerned, Socrates uses it to prise apart the true politician from the orator and the legislator from the sophist. In this way, cooks, beauticians, orators and sophists together form a genus of 'flattery' (*kolakeia*).

This classification is initially set out for the benefit of Polus at 464b–465e. It reappears in the argument with Callicles only after Socrates has explicitly argued for the distinction between pleasure and the good; in the argument with Polus it was just assumed. Once the distinction has been established, the ground is clear to make Callicles accept that rhetoric is merely a form of flattery. Realising that this will still be too much for Callicles to stomach straight off, Socrates follows a somewhat indirect strategy, and this is the point at which poetry and the arts more generally enter into the dialogue. Seeking to distinguish someone who tries to benefit their audience from one who just tries to gratify them, Socrates starts with the example of musical performance, securing Callicles' agreement that a flute-player only aims to please his audience. He then makes the same point about poets: first about composers of dithyrambs (502a) and then of tragedies:

And what about that majestic, awe-inspiring practice, the composition of tragedy? What is it after? Is it the project, the intent of tragic composition merely the gratification of spectators, as you think, or does it also strive valiantly not to say anything that is corrupt, though it may be pleasant and gratifying to them, and to utter in both speech and song anything that might be unpleasant but beneficial, whether the spectators enjoy it or not? In which of these ways do you think tragedy is being composed? (502b)

Just after this, he argues that tragedy is a kind of oratory: strip away the music and the metre, and you have, in effect, a simple piece of rhetoric. At this point, Socrates can declare his hand: once Callicles has accepted that tragedy is merely a form of flattery, he ought to do the same for political rhetoric.

In the context, the reference to poetry is just a means to an end, viz. getting Callicles to understand the true nature of political rhetoric. Nonetheless, it is extremely interesting in its own right and, of course, central to our topic. Before we ask what this passage can tell us about poetic creativity, however, we should be clear about how its assessment of the value of poetry differs from that of the *Ion* and the *Meno*. The *Meno* puts the poets and the Athenian politicians more or less on a par, and explains their achievements in the same way: true belief produced by

theia moira. In doing so, it pays some sort of compliment (overtly, at least) to the poets, at least in as much as it concedes that they say many fine things and benefit their citizens by leading them in the right direction. By contrast, the *Gorgias*, which also puts the Athenian politicians in the same bracket as poets, clearly denies that they benefited their audiences; in so far as they substitute pleasure for the good, they say things that are neither true nor fine, and ultimately corrupt them.

As far as poetic creativity is concerned, the passage says nothing explicit, but a little earlier Socrates has referred to the process by which another kind of flattery, cookery, becomes successful at what it does, and how this differs from the craft of medicine:

I said that the one, medicine, has investigated both the nature of the object it serves and the cause of the things it does, and is able to give an account of each of these. The other, the one concerned with pleasure, to which the whole of its service is entirely devoted, proceeds towards its object in a quite uncraftsmanlike way, without having at all considered either the nature of pleasure or its cause. It does so completely irrationally, with virtually no discrimination. Through routine (*tribê*) and experience (*empeiria*) it merely preserves the memory of what customarily happens, and that's how it also supplies its pleasures. (501a–b)

Assuming that the same account applied to all kinds of flattery, poetic included, we can infer that poets learn by experience what pleases their audiences and what does not. There is nothing more mysterious to their 'art' than this—a process of trial and error. Crucially, Socrates does not for a moment invoke any sort of divine explanation for the achievements of orators and poets.

Although we cannot be certain that what goes for pastry chefs applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to poets, our second passage, *Republic* 493a–494e, provides grounds for confidence. The passage in question is yet another case where Socrates mentions the poets *en passant* in the course of making a more general point—in this instance, a critique of the sophists. At 493a–c, he describes the 'wisdom' on which certain sophists pride themselves and on the basis of which they claim to be teachers. All they have done is to work out what annoys and pleases the multitude, to label such things bad or good respectively, and to predict what will evoke the appropriate responses in future. He illustrates the point with the following analogy:

It's as if someone were learning the moods and appetites of a huge, strong beast that he's rearing—how to approach and handle it, when it is most difficult to deal with or most gentle or what makes it so, what sounds it

utters in either condition, and what sounds soothe or anger it. Having learned all this through tending the beast over a period of time (*chronou tribê*), he calls this knack wisdom, gathers his information together as if it were a craft, and starts to teach it. (493a–b)

Socrates then applies the analogy to the sophists—in fact not just to them, but to anyone attempting to produce pleasure for the multitude, poets included:

Then does this person differ from the one who believes it is wisdom to understand the moods and pleasures of a majority gathered from all quarters, whether they concern painting, music, or, for that matter politics? If anyone approaches the majority to exhibit his poetry or some other piece of craftsmanship or some service to the city and gives them mastery over him to any degree beyond what's unavoidable, he'll be under Diomedean compulsion, as it's called, to do the sort of thing of which they approve. But have you ever heard anyone presenting an argument that such things are truly good and beautiful (*kala*) that wasn't absolutely ridiculous? (493c–d)

Sophists, demagogues and poets express all sorts of beliefs about the good, the just and the fine. These are all misguided, because they in fact merely track what pleases or displeases the majority. This is more or less the same as the point made so forcefully in the *Gorgias* that such people confuse the pleasant and the beneficial.²⁹ But our focus is on how these beliefs are acquired. The method appears to be purely empirical: it is by spending time in the presence of the multitude that the knack is acquired. This is very close indeed to what was said of the specific case of the pastry chef in the *Gorgias*. Note the occurrence of the word *tribê* at 493b. There is no mention of any distinctively rational reflection, just of a somewhat informal and unstructured process of experience, repeated over a period of time.

In comparison with the *Ion* and *Meno*, this model is obviously naturalistic: gone is any trace of a divine influence. Also, inarticulate though they may be, the poets of the *Ion* and *Meno* did at least attain the truth, whereas in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, they only create a semblance of it. Hence, far from being beneficial, the poetry described here is likely to be downright harmful, pandering as it does to the soul's desire for pleasure. The source of creativity is still external, though in a very different way from the model of the *Ion* and *Meno*. In one respect, however, the poets of the *Gorgias* and *Republic* do seem better off than their counter-parts in

²⁹ Shorey rightly makes the connection between the two passages in (1937) ii 39 & 41.

the other two dialogues: their poems are the result of their own efforts, in the sense that they ascertained on their own what does or does not please their audiences.³⁰ However, at least from the point of view of the *Republic* (cf. IX 590d), this would not be enough to place the poets on a higher plane than those of the *Ion* and the *Meno*: apprehending the truth, even if it means relying on someone else, counts for more than the exercise of freedom.

As regards the *Symposium*, the differences with the *Gorgias* and *Republic* are no less plain. On two points, the comparison is very similar to that with the *Ion* and *Meno*. Poetry in the *Symposium* is seen as divine and beneficial in its products. Also, in so far as the lovers of the lower mysteries have some sort of *phronêsis*, they have attained the truth. They may only have a shadow of true virtue, but it does not involve falsehood or error, as in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*. Furthermore, the source of poetic creativity in the *Symposium* is not external in the way it is according to the *Gorgias* and *Republic*: the poets do not work from the outside in, trying to determine what pleases their audiences, but from the inside out, generating and then developing their pregnancy.³¹

All in all, the *Gorgias* and *Republic* present a much bleaker assessment of the poets than either of the other two models. It is essentially a 'market-research' model of poetic creativity—if 'creativity' is any longer the right word.

4. Conclusion: Puzzles about the *Apology* and the *Phaedrus*

In this chapter I have concentrated on explicating three models of poetic creativity detectable in Plato's works. Let me end with two important qualifications. First, I have held back from addressing questions about Plato's actual commitment to these models, e.g. whether he sincerely

³⁰ One might challenge whether the poets of the *Gorgias* do in fact have intellectual autonomy. Eventually, after continually saying what the people want to hear, the orator comes to believe it for himself (513a–c). He becomes brainwashed by his own imitative activities. We could apply this to the poet and so conclude that their autonomy has been diminished. But it would be going too far to assimilate this to the phenomenon of 'depossession' in the *Ion*. In the *Gorgias*, the poet, if he is parallel to the orator, makes his own judgement about what values he needs to express; if he eventually aligns himself with the *dêmos*, it is his own agency that has brought this about. (I would like to thank Gail Fine and Verity Harte for discussion of this point.)

³¹ For those commentators who think that the lovers of the lower mysteries, poets included, achieve surrogate immortality by reproducing their virtue in others (cf. nn. 17 and 21 above), there is an even sharper contrast between the *Symposium* and *Republic* X

advocates the *theia moira* model in the *Ion* and *Meno* or whether he is merely being ironic.³² Whether he did endorse any of these models, and in what order, are questions that lie beyond the scope of this chapter. This is not to deny their importance, especially to those concerned with the development of his thought. The three models are so different from each other that, if he did advocate them and at different times, it would be important to understand what led him to change his mind.³³ But my concern has been with the prior task of establishing the details of each model, one by one. A premature concern with writing Plato's intellectual biography—coupled with a desire to find a smooth transition between works—can lead one to overlook or 'flatten out' important details in individual texts.

The second qualification is that the texts we have considered are by no means the only ones in which Plato writes about poets and their creativity. Before concluding, I should say something about the *Apology* and the *Phaedrus*, both of which mention poetic inspiration, but neither of which can be easily assimilated to any of the models we have discussed.

Here is Socrates talking in the *Apology* about the poets:

I soon realised that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some sort of nature (*phusei tini*) and by inspiration (*enthousiazontes*), like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say. (22b8–c3)

There are obvious similarities with the *Ion* and *Meno* in these lines: Socrates groups the poets with prophets and seers, uses the word *enthousiazontes* and stresses their complete ignorance. But the passage also includes an element missing in the other two dialogues: nature. Presumably the point is that, in addition to being divinely inspired, poets have some natural talent that sets them apart from others. If so, this is actually incompatible with both the other dialogues. In the *Meno*, Socrates does

599a–600e, which explicitly denies that Homer ever improved anyone through his poetry. On this contrast between the two works see Asmis (1992) 354.

³² The same question arises with Diotima in the *Symposium*. See Rowe (1998a).

³³ One might claim that, different as the models are, Plato could still have entertained them simultaneously: in one and the same dialogue he could have applied the different models to different poets, treating some poets as inspired but wholly inarticulate, others as cynical populists and others again according to the more charitable and subtle model of the *Symposium*. But anyone wishing to press this point will have somewhat limited space for manoeuvre, because both Diotima in the *Symposium* (209a) and Socrates in the *Meno* (99d) claim that their models apply to all poets. In these works, at least, there is only room for one model at a time.

not consider the possibility that *theia moira* and nature might act in combination with each other, and actually argues that neither knowledge nor true belief can come by nature, so that the quality by which the politicians (and, by implication, the poets) became distinguished did not come by nature (cf. 98c10–d5). Nor does the *Ion* make any reference to the poets having a special natural talent. Indeed the magnet analogy actually rules this out. It is true that to be inspired one must have some natural predisposition, just as the rings must be metal. But this does not mark off the poets from anyone else: their performers and audiences all share the same nature alike. So the *Apology* cannot be straightforwardly grouped with the *Ion* and *Meno*. If anything, its reference to nature may seem to anticipate a theme in the *Symposium*, at least if we take Diotima to be saying that people have different pregnancies depending on their nature.

The *Phaedrus* presents us with a different kind of puzzle. In the central speech of the dialogue, Socrates distinguishes four kinds of beneficial madness, the third of which is described at 245a1–8 as

... the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. If someone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses' madness he will fail and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.

It is possible that this is to all intents and purposes the same as the model of the *Ion* and *Meno*: there is the same reference to possession, and the comparison to the Bacchantes recalls *Ion* 534a4–5. If so, Plato seems to have shelved the interesting and complex account of the *Symposium*, and reverted to the simpler model of the two earlier dialogues. If we read further in Socrates' speech, however, we find a category very similar to that of the lower mysteries of the *Symposium*. The fourth kind of madness is explained by reference to recollection: someone who sees the beauty of their beloved is gradually reminded of the form. Those who follow the process of recollection right through to the end, the philosophers, attain true wisdom and philosophical understanding. Such people seem very much like the lovers of the higher mysteries in the *Symposium*. Socrates calls them followers of Zeus, because in their discarnate state they followed in the procession of Zeus to view the forms, and had the best view. But besides the Zeus-like philosophical souls are other sorts of souls, which followed the processions of other gods when discarnate:

Hera, Apollo and Ares are the gods explicitly mentioned. These lovers do not recollect fully, but they do share the initial frenzy and impact of love that affects the philosophers. Subsequently, they pursue other paths: the followers of Hera take a more political route; the followers of Ares pursue a predictably military life-style. These souls, who engage in incomplete recollection, seem more like the lovers of the lower mysteries in the *Symposium*. Certainly the followers of Hera would represent the likes of Solon very well: extraordinary in their own way, and inspired, but falling short of philosophical wisdom.³⁴

So in the fourth kind of madness, Socrates opens up several other possibilities alongside the philosopher, and appears to be pursuing something like the distinction between the higher and lower mysteries of the *Symposium*. But although the great politicians reappear, there is no mention of the poets, even though it might be natural to introduce them as the followers of Apollo. In the *Phaedrus*, therefore, the poets have already appeared under the third category of madness, which seems (disappointingly?) similar to the account of the *Ion* and *Meno*. Within the fourth kind, Socrates creates the conceptual space to repeat the account of poetic creativity sketched by Diotima, but in the end fails to do so. Why this should be is a puzzle for a future occasion.³⁵

³⁴ On the different categories within the fourth kind of madness, see Scott (2007), 144–146.

³⁵ I would like to thank audiences at Charlottesville, Cornell, Leuven and Yale for comments on previous drafts of this paper.

CHAPTER EIGHT

POETS AT THE SYMPOSIUM

ELIZABETH BELFIORE

1. *In Praise of Eros*

At the beginning of the symposium dramatized in Plato's *Symposium*, the physician Eryximachus makes a proposal to Agathon's guests:

I propose that we let the *aulos*-girl who just now came in go and play to herself, or, if she wishes, to the women inside, and that today we spend our time with each other in talk.¹ (176e)

After all of the guests enthusiastically agree to decline the girl's services, Eryximachus proposes, specifically, that they compete in praising the god Eros (177a–d).

In proposing Eros as a topic for competitive speaking, Eryximachus reports the complaint of Phaedrus that poets have not yet made an encomium of Eros. Prodicus, Phaedrus said, praised Heracles,² and others have praised salt for its usefulness, but no one has adequately praised Eros (177a–c). The salt example suggests that the kind of encomium Phaedrus and Eryximachus have in mind is one that praises something or someone for qualities that are useful to humans. Phaedrus' complaint, then, while perhaps an exaggeration, is an accurate reflection of much of Greek literature, in which *erôs* is often represented as more to be feared than praised, a destructive force causing sickness and madness.³ There are indeed hymns to Eros in tragedy that represent the god as a powerful force.⁴ In another respect, however, these passages are not encomia, for

¹ An *aulos* is not a flute but a wind instrument something like a recorder (Dover 1980, on 176e6). Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own, and I follow the text of Burnet (1901).

² Bury (1932), on 177b, notes that Prodicus' story about Heracles' choice of Virtue is recounted in Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21 ff.

³ Numerous examples, especially in archaic poetry, are given by Calame (1999), and Cyrino (1995).

⁴ Sophocles' *Antigone* 781–801 and Euripides' *Hippolytus* 525–564 are cited by Bury (1932), 19. Cf. Soph. *Trach.* 441–445, where Eros is said to be a sickness, who rules gods and humans. Rowe (1998), on 177b1–2 cites Alcaeus, frag. 327 Voigt (= Lobel-Page),

they attribute to Eros a power destructive to human beings. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Eros is addressed as: 'You who harm and make unjust the minds of even just people, you have stirred up this quarrel of kindred men' (*Ant.* 791–794); and in Euripides' *Hippolytus* the god is called: 'Eros, the tyrant of men . . . destroying mortals and sending all misfortunes to them when he comes' (*Hipp.* 538–542). In giving his encomium, then, each speaker is asked to remedy what is presented as a deficiency in the literary tradition, by praising Eros for the good things he gives to humans. One way in which the first five speakers—Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, and Agathon—do this is to use quotations and allusions to show that, even if the poets have not made formal encomia of Eros, their poems do in fact praise the god for his beneficence.

Thus, even though they have agreed to dispense with the entertainment provided by the *aulos*-girl in order to entertain one another with their own conversation, each of the first five speakers actually invites others to speak for him, by quoting extensively from poets and other literary authorities.⁵ Their competitive use of quotations is itself a traditional sympotic game, and an activity at which Plato's Socrates himself excels, as will be seen at the end of this chapter.⁶ In the context of Plato's *Symposium*, however, the reliance on and selective use of quotations and allusions by the first five speakers reveal not only their own lack of understanding (*amathia*) about *eros*, but also the inadequacies of the poetic tradition itself.⁷

a passage that characterizes Eros as δεινότατον ('most terrible'), without attributing beneficence to the god. Friedländer (1969), 10 calls attention to other ancient sources of information about Eros.

⁵ Brandwood (1976), 991–1003 provides a useful 'Index of Quotations' in Plato, although it has limitations noted by Halliwell (2000), 95, n. 4. Brownson (1920), 22–73, and 'Tables', 159–165 collects and discusses Plato's quotations of and references to the poets. Tarrant (1951) is also helpful.

⁶ See Halliwell (2000) on 'the general Greek practice of invoking and citing poetic texts to formulate, illustrate, or reinforce a point of view' (95), and Plato's portrayal of and reaction to this practice. Competitive quotation of poetry at symposia is discussed by Lissarrague 1990, esp. 135, and in several of the chapters in Murray (1990): Lukinovich, esp. 264; Pellizer, esp. 179–180, Rösler. Vetta (1983) provides an excellent introduction to the role of poetry in the Greek symposium. Of particular interest is his discussion of *metapoiêsis*, the correction or transformation of a poem known to an audience (xxx–xxxi).

⁷ I borrow the translation of *amathia* as 'lack of understanding' from LSJ (1996), Supplement, s.v. ἀμαθής. On the comic aspects of the speakers' 'false conceit of wisdom' see Patterson (1982), esp. 81–90 (quotation p. 82).

Amathia is characterized at 204a as the condition of someone ‘who is not beautiful and good or sensible [*phronimon*], but thinks he is adequate in these respects’. The first five speakers exhibit *amathia* when they claim expertise they do not in fact have. One way in which they do this is by quoting or citing the works of poets without examining critically the views these ‘authorities’ express. Poetry is full of contradictions.⁸ Moreover, as Socrates notes in the *Protagoras*, it is not possible to question the poets, whose works can be interpreted in different ways by different people. To quote poetry, he says, is to act like inferior people who invite *aulos*-players to their symposia.⁹ In contrast, Socrates in the *Symposium* questions the traditional views the others espouse. He wins the competition by arguing that Eros is not a god but a daimonic philosopher, a figure unlike any in poetry, who also strongly resembles Socrates himself. Socrates, moreover, proves to be a far better *aulos*-player than the one banished by Eryximachus.

2. *The First Five Speakers*

2.A. *Phaedrus*

The first speaker, Phaedrus, is almost exclusively concerned with a single aspect of Eros: the god’s role as a source of courage in facing death, especially in battle.¹⁰ In claiming that Eros benefits humans by inspiring them with military courage, Phaedrus appeals to poetic authorities well known to his educated audience, thus situating his opinions firmly within Greek tradition. The very sources to which he appeals, however, could also be used to undermine his claims. His failure to question them convicts him of lack of understanding.

In support of his claim that Eros is the oldest of the gods, Phaedrus quotes from Hesiod, *Theogony* 116–120: ‘Hesiod says that first Chaos

⁸ Halliwell (2000), 102 cites *L.* IV.719c–e, *Men.* 95d–96a, and *Prot.* 339aff, for Plato’s view that self-contradiction is a fundamental characteristic of mimetic poetry. Two poets may also contradict each other. For example, in Plato’s *Lys.*, Homer and Hesiod are cited in support of opposite views (*Lys.* 214a quotes *Od.* 17.218 and *Lys.* 215c–d, quotes Hes., *Erga*, 25–26: noted by Vicaire (1960), 19–21).

⁹ *Prot.* 347b–348a, noting that different people have different interpretations of poetry; cf. *Phdr.* 275d. The *Prot.* passage is noted by Reeve (2007), and Tecuşan (1990), 257–260.

¹⁰ Military terminology is used at 178e (στρατόπεδον); 179a (μαχόμενοι ... λιπών τάξι, ὅπλα ἀποβαλόν).

came to be, “but next [came] broad-breasted Earth, the ever steadfast seat of all things, and Love’” (178b). However, he omits Hesiod’s reference to Tartarus (119), and stops just before the poet’s lines attributing destructive powers to the god: ‘Love ... the loosener of limbs, who overcomes intelligence and wise counsel in the breasts of all gods and humans’ (*Th.* 121–122).¹¹ Moreover, in quoting Homer’s statement that a god ‘breathed battle-strength’ into some of the heroes (179b) Phaedrus omits the name of the god who does this in *Iliad* 10.482: Athena. Athena, however, is a virgin goddess, whose domain is not *erôs* but wisdom.¹² The passages omitted by Phaedrus, then, suggest that wisdom is a more desirable possession than *eros*. His use of the example of Achilles and Patroclus (179d–180a) reinforces this same idea.¹³ In stating that Achilles gave aid to his lover Patroclus by taking vengeance on Hector (179e–180a), Phaedrus omits the fact that it was Achilles’ mistake in judgment that caused Patroclus’ death in the first place. Achilles blames himself for his companion’s death when he speaks the well-known lines in the *Iliad*:

I must die soon, then; since I was not to stand by my companion
when he was killed. And now, far away from the land of my fathers,
he has perished, and lacked my fighting strength to defend him.
Now, since I am not going back to the beloved land of my fathers,
since I was no light of safety to Patroklos, nor to my other
companions, who in their numbers went down before glorious Hektor,
but sit here beside my ships, a useless weight on the good land,
I, who am such as no other of the bronze-armoured Achaians
in battle, though there are others also better in council¹⁴

(*Il.* 18.98–106)

¹¹ *Th.* 119 is bracketed by Solmsen (1990) and by Mazon (1951), who cites Plato in support of the excision. The line is, however, accepted by West (1996), and Phaedrus’ omission of Tartarus is consistent with his omission of *Th.* 121–122.

¹² In *Il.* 15.262 the phrase is used of Apollo, another god associated with wisdom. References are given by Bury (1932), on 179b.

¹³ Phaedrus follows Aeschines (1.142: *Against Timarchus*) and Aeschylus, *Myrmidons* (frags. 228, 229 Mette = 135, 136 Radt) in representing this relationship as an erotic one, although he departs from Aeschines in representing Achilles as the *erômenos* (noted by Dover [1989], 53, 197). Dover (1980), on 180a4 suggests that Aeschylus may have been the first to make Achilles the *erastês*. Unlike Phaedrus, Xenophon’s Socrates (*Symp.* 8.31) denies that there is an erotic element in Homer’s representation of this relationship (Dover [1989], 199).

¹⁴ Translation Lattimore (1951). Lines 105–106, often suspected, are ably defended by Edwards (1991), ad loc.

According to these lines, then, courage without wisdom leads to disaster. Phaedrus' example of Alcestis, the lover who 'so excelled in *philia* (friendship) because of *erôs*' (179c) that she was willing to die for her husband, Admetus, is also questionable. At least in Euripides' play Alcestis appears to be motivated by *philia* rather than *erôs*.¹⁵ It is instead Admetus who exhibits sexual passion for his wife, saying that he will embrace a model of her in bed (348–352). Admetus' *eros* does not make him courageous, however. He allows his wife to die for him because he is a coward (*Alc.* 954–957), and because of a mistake in judgment that he later recognizes (*arti manthanô*: 940). A more comprehensive survey of the passages Phaedrus quotes, then, suggests that, according to the very tradition to which he appeals, the association of *erôs* with courage is a dubious one, and that *eros* and courage without judgment lead to disaster. Phaedrus shows his *amathia* by failing to ask questions about the relationship between *erôs* and courage.

2.B. Pausanias

Pausanias, unlike Phaedrus, distinguishes two kinds of Loves and two kinds of lovers. The inferior lover, governed by the Eros who is the son of the vulgar Aphrodite, loves women as well as boys, bodies more than souls, and foolish more than sensible people, being concerned only with 'accomplishing the act' (181a–b). Pausanias uses quotations to support his criticism of this kind of lover, whose oaths are no oaths (183b) and who 'goes flying away' (183e).¹⁶ In contrast, the superior lover is inspired by the superior Eros, who is the son of the heavenly Aphrodite. This man loves only males, who are by nature stronger and more sensible (181c), and he loves 'good character' (183e) more than body. He educates the beloved, giving him understanding and the other virtues, and the beloved, in return, gratifies his lover sexually (184c–e).

In spite of these differences, however, Pausanias resembles Phaedrus in using literary sources selectively, omitting those lines that tell against his distinction between the two Loves. In referring to the genealogies of the two Aphrodites, the heavenly and the vulgar (180d–181c), who are the mothers of the two Loves, Pausanias does not name his sources,

¹⁵ Noted by Rowe (1998), on 179b5–6. See especially *Alc.* 279: σὴν γὰρ φιλίαν σεβόμεσθα ('I honor your friendship').

¹⁶ Bury (1932), ad loc., notes that the statement at 183b is a proverbial expression with a number of poetic versions, and that 183e recalls *Il.* 2.71.

but his fellow symposiasts would have recognized them as Hesiod and Homer.¹⁷ Just as Phaedrus quoted Hesiod selectively, so Pausanias omits certain things from the Hesiodic account of the birth of Ouranian (Heavenly) Aphrodite. According to Hesiod's well-known story, Ouranos hates the children Gaia bears him, and hides them deep within her, causing her pain. Gaia then persuades her son, Cronos, to castrate his father, and Aphrodite grows from the severed genitals (*Th.* 154–200). The violence surrounding Aphrodite's birth in Hesiod's poem might well lead Pausanias' audience to question Pausanias' view that she has no share in *hybris* (181c). Pausanias also fails to mention Hesiod's statement that deceit is included in Aphrodite's portion (*Th.* 203–205). Nevertheless, Pausanias' contention that the superior beloved may be deceived (185a) might well remind his audience of this characteristic, of dubious morality, attributed by Hesiod to the heavenly Aphrodite. The Greek literary tradition to which Pausanias appeals, then, suggests that the son of the heavenly Aphrodite may have inherited destructive and hubristic tendencies from his mother, whose birth resulted from an act of *hybris*. If this is so, the superior Eros may not be very different from the inferior Eros, the son of the vulgar Aphrodite. It appears, then, that the literary sources to which Pausanias appeals could equally well be used to support the view that there is no distinction between the two Loves. In fact, his failure to question these sources is one indication that Pausanias lacks understanding of his subject.

2.C. *Eryximachus*

The physician Eryximachus argues that the god Eros has power over all divine and human affairs (186b) and over medicine in particular. The science of medicine knows how to make things that are most hostile, that is, the opposites in the body (for example, the cold, the hot, the dry and the wet), become friends and have *erôs* for one another (186d–e). The same principle, he says, applies to music (187a). In support of his views about music, Eryximachus does not appeal to poetic authority but instead quotes the prose of the philosopher Heraclitus:

... as perhaps Heraclitus means to say, although he doesn't say it well with his words. He says that the one 'itself being at variance with itself it agrees with itself', 'like the harmony of bow and lyre' [*diapheromenon auto hautôi*

¹⁷ Dover (1980), on 180d6–9 cites Hesiod *Th.* 190 ff. (daughter of Ouranos) and *Iliad* 5.370–430 (daughter of Zeus and Dione).

sumpheresthai, hôsper harmonia toxou te kai lyras]. It is very illogical to say that harmony is at variance or is composed of elements that are still at variance. But perhaps this is what he meant to say, that harmony has come into existence, by means of musical skill, from things that were previously at variance (that is, the high and the low) and then later came to be in accord.¹⁸ (187a–b)

The text of the Heraclitus passage quoted by Eryximachus is problematic. Fragment 22 B51 Diels-Krantz reads: ‘they do not understand how, being at variance with itself it is in accord [*homologeēi*] with itself; there is a back-turned [*palintropos*] harmony like that of bow and lyre.’¹⁹ Kirk-Raven-Schofield, on the other hand, read *sumpheretai* (‘agrees’) instead of *homologeēi* (‘is in accord with’) on the basis of *Symposium* 187a, and *palintonos* (‘back-stretched’ or ‘counter-stretched’) instead of *palintropos* (‘back-turned’). They translate: ‘being at variance it agrees [*sumpheretai*] with itself . . . : there is a back-stretched [*palintonos*] connexion, as in the bow and the lyre.’²⁰ They convincingly argue that *palintonos*, which has as much support in ancient sources as does *palintropos*, gives better sense, referring to something ‘tending equally in opposite directions. A tension in one direction automatically produces an equivalent tension in the other; if not, the system collapses.’²¹ According to the texts of both Diels-Krantz and Kirk-Raven-Schofield, then, Eryximachus misquotes Heraclitus, adding ‘the one’ before ‘being at variance,’ and leaving out ‘back-stretched’ (or ‘back-turned’).²² The addition is of little significance here, but the omission, as will be seen, has serious philosophical consequences.

The doctor also radically misinterprets the philosopher.²³ One problem is that Eryximachus is concerned with harmony between musical notes, while Heraclitus focuses on the very different kind of equilibrium

¹⁸ ὥσπερ ἴσως καὶ Ἡράκλειτος βούλεται λέγειν, ἐπεὶ τοῖς γε ῥήμασιν οὐ καλῶς λέγει. τὸ ἐν γὰρ φησὶ “διαφερόμενον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρεσθαι,” ὥσπερ ἄρμονίαν τόξου τε καὶ λύρας.” ἔστι δὲ πολλὴ ἀλογία ἄρμονίαν φάναι διαφέρεσθαι ἢ ἐκ διαφερομένων ἔτι εἶναι. ἀλλὰ ἴσως τότε ἐβούλετο λέγειν, ὅτι ἐκ διαφερομένων πρότερον τοῦ ὀξέος καὶ βαρέος, ἔπειτα ὕστερον ὁμολογησάντων γέγονεν ὑπὸ τῆς μουσικῆς τέχνης.

¹⁹ οὐ ξυνιαῖσιν ὄκως διαφερόμενον ἐωυτῷ ὁμολογεῖ παλίντροπος ἄρμονίη ὄκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης.

²⁰ Kirk-Raven-Schofield (1995), 192: frag. 209: οὐ ξυνιαῖσιν ὄκως διαφερόμενον ἐωυτῷ ξυμφέρεται παλίντροπος ἄρμονίη ὄκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης.

²¹ Kirk-Raven-Schofield (1995), 192–193; quotation, 193, n. 2.

²² Diels-Krantz (1951–1952), vol. 1, 162, n.3 note Diels’s suggestion that ὁμολογεῖ ἐν (‘the one agrees’), is a possible reading, quoting *Symp.* 187a.

²³ A convincing interpretation of B51 is provided by Kirk-Raven-Schofield (1995), 192–193.

that exists within a single physical object.²⁴ Heraclitus' *palintonos harmonia* is a 'back-stretched connection' in which two opposite tensions—that produced by the strings of a bow or lyre, and that produced by the curved arms of these artifacts—are balanced so as to create a single unified effect. According to Heraclitus, this kind of 'war,' and 'strife' between opposites produces order in the cosmos: 'War is common and justice is strife and all things happen according to strife and necessity' (DK 22 B80). Eryximachus, however, calls this principle of equilibrium of opposites 'very illogical' and reinterprets Heraclitus so as to eliminate it. What Heraclitus really means, according to Eryximachus, is that there is no longer variance within a harmony. He then uses his corrected version of Heraclitus to support his own view that medicine and music produce *erôs*, friendship and harmony between things that were previously enemies and in disagreement (186d, 187b–c).

Eryximachus' correction of Heraclitus is certainly playful, as Christopher Rowe notes.²⁵ However, it can also be taken as symptomatic of this physician's lack of understanding of his own science (*epistêmê*: 186c) of medicine. There is considerable evidence that many medical writers, from Alcmaeon on, held a Heraclitean view of health as a *krasis* (blend) of opposing powers in the body (for example, the hot, the cold, the wet and the dry). In this dynamic equilibrium, no opposite was suppressed: it retained its own power, but was restrained by the corresponding opposite.²⁶ The fact that Eryximachus simply calls this theory 'illogical' and his omission of the word 'back-stretched' that characterizes the kind of harmony constituted by a dynamic equilibrium suggests that Eryximachus does not have the medical knowledge he claims.

2.D. *Aristophanes*

As befits a comic poet, Aristophanes presents his encomium in the form of a humorous myth. Humans, he says, were originally 'whole people,' with two heads and two sets of limbs, who, when they moved quickly, went rolling around like giant beach-balls with appendages (189e–190a).

²⁴ Cf. Konstan and Young-Bruehl (1982), 41; Nehamas and Woodruff (1989), 21 n. 24.

²⁵ Rowe (1999b), 62 n.34.

²⁶ Alcmaeon DK 24 B4. Konstan and Young-Bruehl (1982), 43 note Eryximachus' debt to Heraclitus. On ancient medicine see Vlastos (1947), esp. 156–158, citing Alcmaeon, and Tracy (1969), 22–76, esp. 23–24, and 67: 'Health ... is ... a *dynamic* equilibrium maintained through the active interplay of opposing forces' (24). I argue elsewhere that, according to Plato, psychological health also depends on equilibrium of opposites: Belfiore (1986 and 2006).

After Zeus cut them in two, as punishment for their attack on the gods, each half longed for and sought after its other half (191a). Eros, then, is desire and pursuit of the whole (192e–193a). If we succeed, with the help of Eros, in becoming reunited with our other halves, we will return to our former condition as whole people and so become blessed and happy (193d).

The greatest good that Eros gives us, according to Aristophanes, is a return to our original nature as whole people (193c–d). In fact, Hephaistos offers literally to fuse lovers together in order to make them whole (192d–e). Unfortunately, this story recalls Homer's myth of Aphrodite and Ares, who were chained together in bed by Hephaistos as a shameful punishment for adultery, while the other gods stood around laughing (*Od.* 8.266–366). Indeed, the comic poet fails to explain how a return to our former whole state will benefit us, anymore than being chained together helped Aphrodite and Ares. The whole people were licentious, incontinent, thought big thoughts and attacked the gods (190b–d). Aristophanes identifies them with or compares them to Homer's Ephialtes and Otus (190b)²⁷ and the Giants of myth (190c).²⁸ The half-people are too weak to have these defects, but Aristophanes does not rule out the possibility that the Eros who returns them to their ancient whole nature would also make them licentious and arrogant again.²⁹ Aristophanes says that humans must be pious if they are going to return to their ancient whole nature (193d), but he does not explain how, if they do become whole again, they will be different from the original whole people, who were notably impious. Indeed, if satisfied *erôs* could make people more vicious, it is hard to see how it could be a true healer of human nature or lead to happiness.

The poetic sources to which Aristophanes alludes, then, could also be used to support the view, contrary to his own, that being whole is a bad thing. Socrates later takes him up on this very point, when his Diotima argues that *erôs* is not of the half or the whole, unless these are good (205e). In failing to ask questions about his sources and the issues they raise Aristophanes shows that he has little understanding of the *erôs*, that, according to Socrates, is one of his main subjects (177e).

²⁷ Dover (1980), on 190b7 cites *Il.* 5.385 ff. and *Od.* 11.307–320.

²⁸ Sources include Pindar, *Nem.* 1.67–69; Eur. *Her.* 177–180, *Ion* 206–218 cited by Gantz (1996), vol. 1, 445–454.

²⁹ Cf. Ludwig (2002), 107, who makes a good point, although he expresses greater certainty than the text warrants: 'If eros ... aims at reconstituting the natural man in each of us, then the fulfillment of eros would entail becoming lawless once more.'

2.E. Agathon

According to the tragic poet Agathon, Eros is most happy, most beautiful, and best (195a, cf. 197c), the youngest of the gods (195a, c). He is himself the embodiment of the good things he gives to humans. As is suitable for a poet, Agathon's views about *erôs* depend, more than those of any other speaker, on the poetic and literary tradition. His speech is full of quotations and allusions to poetry and prose writers, and the end of his speech employs an extraordinary variety of metrical forms.³⁰ Agathon quotes and echoes Homer;³¹ he substitutes 'Eros' for 'necessity' in a line from Sophocles,³² quotes the rhetorician Alcidas,³³ Euripides,³⁴ and a poetic source unknown to us.³⁵ Agathon's statement that Eros lives among flowers (*kat' anthê diaita*: 196a) recalls a common theme in literature, and, of course, the title of Agathon's own play, *The Flower*.³⁶ Agathon uses other terms that are common in poetry when he speaks of Eros as 'enchanting' (*thelgôn*: 197e) gods and humans, and says that Eros is 'the father of charms, yearning, longing' (*kharitôn, himerou, pothou patêr*: 197d).³⁷ Moreover, Eros is himself a poet, who inspires other poets (196d–e).

Nevertheless, Agathon's use of his sources casts doubt on the authority of the poets to whom he appeals and on the beneficence of Eros. When he cites Hesiod and Parmenides he expresses reservations about their stories, saying: 'If they spoke the truth' (195c). Agathon implicitly claims to

³⁰ Dover (1980), 124.

³¹ Bury (1932), ad loc., notes that 195b 'like always draws near to like' (ὅμοιον ὁμοίῳ ἀεὶ πελάζει) is derived from *Od.* 17.218, and that the couplet at 197c recalls *Od.* 5.391[-2] = 12.168[-9].

³² 'Not even Ares withstands Eros' (Ἐρωτι "οὐδ' Ἄρης ἀνθίσταται": 196c–d). Bury (1932), Brandwood (1976), and Vicaire and Laborderie (2002), ad loc., cite Soph. *Thyestes*, frag. 235 Nauck (= 256 Radt).

³³ "The laws, kings of the city," are just' ("οἱ πόλεως βασιλῆς νόμοι" δίκαια εἶναι: 196c). Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.1406a18–23 attributes a similar phrase to Alcidas: cited by Bury (1932), Hug (1876), Brandwood (1976), ad loc.

³⁴ Eros is said to make everyone a poet 'even if he is previously unmusical' (κἄν ἄμουσος ἢ τὸ πρῶν: 196e): Eur. *Stheneboea*, frag. 663 Nauck, Kannicht, cited by Bury (1932), and Brandwood (1976), ad loc.

³⁵ 'Governance of gods and humans' (κυβερνᾶν θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρώπων: 197b) is possibly from a tragedy of Agathon (Bury (1932) and Brandwood (1976), ad loc.) or Aeschylus (Renahan (1990), 125–126).

³⁶ Eros and flowers: Calame (1999), 153–164. On Agathon's play, *Anthei*, see Lévêque (1955), 105–114.

³⁷ Examples are given by Calame (1999). See subject index s.v. *thelgein, pothos, himeros, kharis*.

be Homer's equal when he speaks at length about the delicacy (*hapalotês*) of Eros, and argues that a poet like Homer is needed to demonstrate this delicacy (195c–e). In quoting Homer's lines (*Il.* 19.92–93) about the delicacy of *Atê* (Delusion), however, Agathon conveniently suppresses the first and last parts of Homer's passage (*Il.* 19.91–92 and 94), according to which *Atê* harms humans.³⁸

Delusion is the elder daughter of Zeus, the accursed
who deludes all; her feet are delicate and they step not
on the firm earth, but she walks the air above men's heads
and leads them astray. She has entangled others before me.³⁹

(*Il.* 19.91–94)

Homer's lines could in fact be used to support the view that delicate things like *erôs* can be harmful. Moreover, Agathon contradicts himself. His god is apparently capable of the emotion most opposite to himself, for Eros hates old age, which he flees (195b), and, even though Agathon says that Eros brings peace and friendship (195c, 197c), he also states that there is always war between Eros and ugliness (196a). These ideas about old age and ugliness are also contrary to both the Greek poetic tradition and everyday experience, for old people as well as young fall in love, and one person's beloved may be considered ugly by others.⁴⁰ Diotima's statement that a person can love someone with a beautiful soul, even if the beloved has only a small amount of bloom (literally, 'flower', *anthos*: 210b) will later correct Agathon's view that Eros and ugliness are opposed, perhaps with a pun on the title of his play, *The Flower*. Moreover, contrary to Agathon's claims about *erôs* (196b), poetry is full of instances in which *erôs* uses force, commits injustice, and is served unwillingly.⁴¹ Immediately after Agathon's speech, Socrates reminds his audience of the deceptions practiced by lovers and of the disasters *erôs* can cause when he quotes Hippolytus' famous line in Euripides' play: 'My tongue swore but not my heart' (*Hipp.* 612, quoted at 199a).

³⁸ Omissions are noted by Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004), 87–88; Dorter (1969), 225; Rosen (1987), 179.

³⁹ Translation Lattimore (1951).

⁴⁰ Old age: Plato, *Parm.* 137a referring to Ibycus frag. 287 Page; traits considered ugly: *Rep.* 5. 474d–475a.

⁴¹ Dover (1980), on 196b7, cites Sappho 172 Lobel-Page, and Theognis 1353–1356 on Eros and compulsion. See also Ibycus 287.7 (force). Examples of the association of *erôs* with *hybris* are given by Fisher (1992), esp. 104–111; Lattimore (1964), 23 and n. 24, 81–82; MacDowell (1976), 17. Inadequacies in Agathon's arguments about the virtues of Eros are noted by Robin (2002), lxxviii–lxxix.

Agathon's speech, then, demonstrates that neither he nor the tradition within which he claims expertise is able to give a satisfactory account of the benefits of *erôs*.

3. Summary: *The First Five Speakers*

The first five speakers are all represented as experts on the topic of *erôs*.⁴² Socrates notes that the whole occupation of the comic poet Aristophanes is concerned with Dionysus and Aphrodite (177e). As for the other speakers, Pausanias and Phaedrus both claim knowledge about the role of *erôs* in political virtue (178e–179a, 182a–b); the doctor Eryximachus holds that medicine is an erotic science (186c–d); the tragedian Agathon contends that the god Eros is a poet (196e), and Pausanias and Agathon are themselves lovers (193b–c). All of their claims to expertise, however, turn out to be false, for each man is characterized by *amathia*, lack of understanding, in that each thinks he knows about Eros when in fact he does not. One way in which Plato indicates this is by means of each speaker's use of literary quotations and allusions. Their use of these sources suggests that, far from being reliable sources of knowledge, the words of the poets can be cited in support of opposite points of view. The speakers, however, do not appear to be aware of this problem, and they do not see the need to question or examine the ideas the poets express. Instead, according to Socrates, they give encomia by attributing the greatest and finest things to their subject, without regard for the truth (198d–e). Socrates, in contrast, holds that the foundation of an encomium should be the truth (198d, 199a–b). It is now his turn to praise Eros. His speech, unlike those of his predecessors, is a radical challenge to traditional reliance on the poets as sources of knowledge.

4. Socrates' *Encomium*

Socrates uses the paradoxical figure of Diotima—a childless woman who praises childbirth and male homoerotic love—to challenge the views of

⁴² Bacon (1959), 429 writes that 'each man sees love in terms of his own profession'; Reeve (1992), 91 views each speaker as a representative of conventional wisdom. Sheffield (2006), 215–216, n. 8, argues convincingly that each of the first five speakers can be associated with one of the Muses.

the first five speakers and the poetic tradition to which they appeal. She first discusses the nature of Eros (201e, 204c), and then turns to his deeds (204c).

Diotima disagrees with the other speakers about the nature of Eros. They claim that he is a god, that he possesses beauty and virtue, and that he gives good things, including the virtues, to humans.⁴³ According to Diotima, however, Eros is not a god but a *daimon* (202d–203a), a being who lacks good things (201c). He is not evil and ugly, nor is he beautiful and good (201e, 202b). Instead, Eros occupies a position between mortal and immortal (202d), and between wisdom and lack of understanding (203e). He is a philosopher and lover rather than a beautiful beloved (204b–c).

Although Diotima's Eros is unlike any divinity in the poetic tradition, he does strongly resemble one human being. As has often been noted, the Socrates portrayed by Alcibiades and others in Plato's *Symposium* has much in common with Eros in the speech attributed to Diotima.⁴⁴ Both are *daimonion*,⁴⁵ lack beauty,⁴⁶ are unshod,⁴⁷ live outside and in doorways.⁴⁸ Socrates and Eros both contrive plots so as to associate with the beautiful.⁴⁹ Both are courageous⁵⁰ and resourceful,⁵¹ and both are characterized as magicians and spellbinders.⁵² Diotima's Eros, with his absurd birth story, is a figure from comedy (203b–d),⁵³ while Socrates' physical appearance is comic (215b, 216d), and his words arouse laughter

⁴³ god: Phaedrus: 178a; Pausanias: 180d; Eryximachus: 186b; Aristophanes: 189c, 193c–d; Agathon: 195a; possesses beauty: Agathon: 195a, 197c; Pausanias: 181a; possesses virtue: Agathon: 196b–197b; gives good things to humans: Phaedrus: 179a–b; Pausanias: 185b–c; Eryximachus: 188d; Aristophanes: 193c–d; Agathon: 197c–e.

⁴⁴ Socrates as Eros: Bacon (1959), 424; Bury (1932), xlii, lx–lxii; Clay (1972), 58, and (1975), 248–249 with n. 18, citing Maximus of Tyre, *Philosophoumena* 18. 84b (Hobein), and Ficino, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. Marcel (Paris 1956), 242; Osborne (1994), 93–101; Robin (2002), ci–cix.

⁴⁵ Eros: 202d; Socrates: 219c.

⁴⁶ Eros: 203c; Socrates: 215b, 216d.

⁴⁷ Eros: 203d; Socrates: 174a, 220b.

⁴⁸ Eros: 203d; Socrates: 220c–d, 175a.

⁴⁹ Eros: 203d (πλέκων μνχανάς); Socrates: 213c (διεμηχανήσω).

⁵⁰ Eros: 203d, 212b; Socrates: 219d, 220d–221c.

⁵¹ Eros: 203d (πόρωμος); Socrates: 223a (εὐπόρωος).

⁵² Eros: 203d (γόης καὶ φαρμακεύς); Socrates: 194a (φαρμάττειν), 215c–d.

⁵³ Dover (1980), on 203b4 remarks that Penia, the mother of Eros in Diotima's story, was personified in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, produced in 388, shortly before Plato wrote the *Symposium*.

(221e–222a).⁵⁴ In addition, Socrates is like Eros in loving beauty,⁵⁵ and both Socrates and the *erastês* of Diotima's speech have disdain for lesser objects.⁵⁶ Moreover, just as Eros desires what he lacks (200a–b, cf. 201b), and *erôs* causes people to desire the good things they lack (205a), so Socrates causes Alcibiades to desire to remedy his deficiencies (215e–216a).

Above all, both Eros and Socrates are philosophers. Eros is a philosopher because he is between wisdom and lack of understanding (*amathia*), and because he recognizes his own deficiencies (203d–204b). Socrates is also a philosopher (218a–b) who desires wisdom because he recognizes that he lacks it. These characteristics explain Socrates' claims to expertise in this dialogue. He does indeed claim to know about nothing except erotic matters (177d, 198d) and Diotima, whose views Socrates reports, is said to be a wise woman who taught Socrates about erotic matters (201d). However, unlike the first five speakers, Socrates is not represented as lacking understanding, for he recognizes that he is ignorant and knows nothing (*agnoei*: 216d, cf. 175e, 219a). That is, his claim to know about erotic matters is, among other things, a disclaimer of knowledge.⁵⁷

Alcibiades' speech shows that Socrates resembles Eros in still another way. Just as Diotima's Eros is unlike any figure in the poetic tradition, so Alcibiades' Socrates is unlike anyone else. Socrates, Alcibiades says, is so unique and outlandish (*atopos*: 215a, 221d) as to be unlike any other model, ancient or modern (221c–d). Socrates cannot be compared to Achilles, Nestor or Antenor (221c), and he is much more invulnerable in every way than Ajax is to iron (219e). Alcibiades' Socrates is also superior to everyone else in his skill at playing an *aulos* of a very different kind from the instrument that was banished at the beginning of the *Symposium*, and that returns when Alcibiades arrives.⁵⁸ The young man compares Socrates to the satyr Marsyas, but hastens to add that the

⁵⁴ Clay (2000), 142–143 notes that throughout the dialogues Socrates resembles a character from Attic comedy in being a figure of lower class status, who often provokes laughter. Philosophers are said to be objects of ridicule to the many in *Tht.* 175b and *Gorg.* 485a (cf. *Rep.* 517d, *Gorg.* 474a). Patterson 1982 provides an excellent discussion of Socrates and the comic in *Symposium*.

⁵⁵ Eros: 204b; Socrates: 211d, 216d.

⁵⁶ *Erastes*: 210b–c; Socrates: 216d, 219c.

⁵⁷ On this issue see Detel (2003); Gould (1963), 44–45; Nightingale (1995), 123–129; Osborne (1994), 93–94; Roochnik (1987 and 1996, 233–251); Rowe (1998), on 177d7–e.

⁵⁸ Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004), 39 note that the voice of an *aulos*-girl is heard at 212c. Cf. Reeve (2007), second paragraph from end.

philosopher is a ‘much more marvelous’ *aulos* player (215b),⁵⁹ for the enchantment that Marsyas produced by means of musical instruments is produced by Socrates with ‘bare words’ (*psilois logos*: 215c), that is, words without musical accompaniment.⁶⁰ With his own, unaccompanied words Socrates affects Alcibiades much more strongly than Pericles and other good public speakers (215e). Like the other symposiasts, Alcibiades quotes poetry in giving his encomium. The Socrates in his story quotes Homer at 219a and Alcibiades does the same in his own voice at 220c.⁶¹ At 221b, Alcibiades adapts a line from Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (362), that is, significantly, a description of Socrates himself.⁶² The philosopher, then, does resemble Achilles and Ajax in one respect: he has been immortalized in poetry. Alcibiades’ quotation shows that Socrates does not follow poetic tradition, but makes his own.

After Diotima discusses the nature of Eros, who turns out to resemble Socrates in many respects, she next speaks about his deeds, that is, his usefulness to humans (204c–d). She compares his benefits to those provided by initiation into the Lesser and the Greater Mysteries.⁶³ It is much easier to be initiated into the erotic matters that correspond to the Lesser Mysteries: even Socrates might achieve this, says Diotima (209e–210a). At this stage, people are inspired by love in the generic sense of a desire for good things (205d), as well as by love for other people, but they have no true understanding of philosophy. Accordingly, in this part of her speech, Diotima emphasizes love of honor (*philotimia*: 208c) and desire for glory (208d–e), and she praises poets and lawgivers.⁶⁴ In this part of her speech, Diotima, like the first five speakers, makes use of poetic

⁵⁹ In myth, the satyr Marsyas was hubristic in challenging Apollo at the *aulos*, a crime for which he was flayed (Solon frag. 33.7 West, Herodotus 7.26, *Euthd.* 285c–d). There is a suggestion that Socrates rivals the gods at 214d, and the idea of opening the silenus statue recalls the flaying of Marsyas (North [1994], 94–95). Gagarin (1977), 31 connects Socrates’ *hybris* with that of Marsyas.

⁶⁰ Bury (1932), ad loc, cites *Laws* 669d in interpreting ψιλοῖς λόγοις to mean “‘in prose’”, devoid of metrical form as well as of musical accompaniment. However, England (1921), ad loc, argues that the words at *Laws* 669d mean ‘without music (or tune)’ rather than without meter, and this meaning fits the *Symposium* passage well.

⁶¹ Bury (1932), ad loc, notes that 219a (‘gold from bronze’) is from *Il.* 6.235–236 and that the line of verse at 220c is from *Od.* 4.242.

⁶² ‘Swaggering and casting his eyes about’ (βρενθόμενος καὶ τῶφθαλμῶ παραβάλλων: *Symp.* 221b), ‘You swagger . . . and cast your eyes about’ (βρενθύει τ’ ἐν ταῖσιν ὁδοῖς καὶ τῶφθαλμῶ παραβάλλεις: *Clouds* 362).

⁶³ On allusions to the Mysteries see Brisson (1998), 65–71, Riedweg (1987), 2–29, Rowe (1998), on 209e5–210a1.

⁶⁴ See Ferrari (1992), 255–256; Sheffield (2001), esp. 3–4, 10.

and mythological quotations and allusions. She includes the poems of Homer and Hesiod among the spiritual children of people who have been initiated into the Lesser Mysteries (209d). Moreover, Diotima refers to the mythological figures Alcestis, Achilles, and Patroclus, who were also mentioned by previous speakers (208d), and she echoes Archilochus in calling intercourse of a man and a woman ‘the divine thing’ (206c).⁶⁵ She alludes to poetic sources unknown to us in referring to ‘the most great and deceitful *erôs*’ (*doleros erôs*: 205d), in quoting a hexameter at 208c, and a pentameter at 208e.⁶⁶ Socrates’ Diotima, however, differs in two ways from the other speakers in her use of poetic sources. First, she does not quote selectively, leaving out passages that might support opposing points of view. Some might question her interpretations, for example, the extent to which Alcestis and Achilles are represented as motivated to die for those they love by the desire for immortal fame (208d). Whatever the motivations of these characters, it is undeniable that they do in fact achieve glory in Euripides’ *Alcestis* (e.g. 435–454 and 995–1005) and Homer’s *Iliad*. Second, Diotima never suggests that the poets are authorities on Eros. She begins by teaching Socrates about the birds and the beasts, that have, she claims, the same natural desire for immortality that humans have (207a–d). Nature, she implies, has more to teach us than poetry.

According to Diotima, moreover, love of honor generates poetry only at a stage preparatory to philosophy. The second half of her speech about the benefits given by Eros is concerned with initiation into the Greater Mysteries of love (210a–212a). Long preparation by means of the Lesser Mysteries that are for the sake of the Greater (210a) and an arduous climb up the ladder of Eros are required before the lover arrives at a stage characterized by ‘unlimited philosophy’ (210d) and finally sees ‘a beauty marvelous in its nature’ (210e). Diotima characterizes this beauty in purely negative terms, as being unlike anything else. It *neither* comes to be *nor* passes away, *nor* is it beautiful in one respect, ugly in another. It does *not* appear like a face or hands, or anything that participates in body, *nor* is it any particular discourse or kind of knowledge. The negative

⁶⁵ θεῖον τὸ πρῶγμα. Dover (1980), ad loc. notes that Archilochus, frag. 196a.15 refers to τὸ θεῖον χοῆμα. Henderson (1976), 170–171 argues that this phrase refers to marriage rather than intercourse, an interpretation that would make good sense for the *Symp.* passage.

⁶⁶ ‘Deceitful *erôs*’: Bury (1932), ad loc. compares Sappho 1.1–2 Lobel-Page: ‘Αφροδίτα ... δολόπλοκε; Sier (1997), 212 notes that the meter was probably iambic tetrameter. Hexameter and pentameter: Hug (1976), on 208c.

particles *ou*, *oude*, or *oute* occur fifteen times within the space of eight lines (211a). Diotima goes on to tell Socrates that true beauty will *not* seem to him to be like gold or clothes or the beautiful boys and youths at whose sight he now experiences intense emotion (211d), that it is *not* 'full of human flesh and colors and much other mortal nonsense' (211e), and that the person who associates with it will *not* give birth to images of virtue, because he is *not* touching an image (212a). These negatives make it clear that the lover who is initiated into the Greater Mysteries has an experience unlike any in the poetic tradition. To further emphasize this point, Diotima avoids any quotation from or explicit mention of poetry in this part of her speech. Thus, just as Eros and Socrates are themselves unlike any figure in the poetic tradition, so the philosophical lover strives to achieve a vision unlike any other.

Although Diotima does not quote poetry in the second half of her speech, her characterization of beauty in negative terms recalls the language and thought of Parmenides, a philosopher who wrote in verse and for whom the author of the dialogue *Parmenides* had great respect.⁶⁷ This philosophical use of an earlier source is particularly revealing because two other speakers in the dialogue mention Parmenides. Phaedrus quotes a line in support of the view that Eros is oldest of the gods (178a–b), and Agathon (195c) says that ancient stories told about the gods by Parmenides and Hesiod took place under the rule of Necessity rather than that of Eros.⁶⁸ R.G. Bury notes that if the passages discussed by Phaedrus and Agathon were a part of Parmenides' poem they must have belonged to the section of the poem called 'The Way of Opinion'. In this section of his poem, Parmenides discusses 'the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true trustworthiness'.⁶⁹ If this is the case, Phaedrus and Agathon take lines out of context to support views that Parmenides himself says lack truth. Diotima, in contrast, presents the views as her own, leaving it to the audience to notice literary parallels without citing them as authorities.

⁶⁷ Sier (1997), 284, calls attention to Plato's use of negatives in this passages, quoting Parmenides Frag. 28 B8 DK. Solmsen's (1971) argument that this passage is indebted to Parmenides was anticipated by many German scholars: see Palmer (1999), 3, n. 4, who also cites numerous later studies.

⁶⁸ Phaedrus' quotation at 178b = 28 B13 DK. Agathon's allusion at 195c does not correspond to anything in our text of Parmenides, although commentators note that Necessity plays a role in 28 B8.30–31: see Dover (1980) and Rowe (1998), ad loc.

⁶⁹ Bury (1932), 23, 74. I quote DK 28 B1.30; cf. B8.50–52.

5. *Socrates and the Gorgon*

In the *Symposium*, then, Plato represents the poetic tradition about love as being inadequate. The first five speakers' use of quotations and allusions suggests that those who rely on the poets without questioning them are lacking in understanding. Socrates, on the other hand, is represented throughout the dialogue as directly challenging the poetic tradition. He famously wins a victory over the poets at the end of the *Symposium*, when he forces Agathon and Aristophanes to agree that the same person knows how to make both comedy and tragedy, and then puts both poets to bed (223c–d).

I conclude with one example of another way in which Socrates wins a victory over the poets—this time, by means of his own manipulation of poetic allusions.⁷⁰

When he describes his reactions to Agathon's encomium, Socrates alludes to Homer:

And I, thinking that I myself would not be able to say anything anywhere near as fine, almost ran away out of shame, and would have done so, if I'd had anywhere to go. For the speech reminded me of Gorgias, so that I really had the experience recounted by Homer. I was afraid that Agathon would end by sending against my speech the head of Gorgias, who is terribly clever at speaking, and turn me to stony speechlessness.⁷¹ (198b–c)

The reference to Homer in this passage (198c) indicates that Socrates is alluding to the Gorgon's head Odysseus fears encountering in the Underworld:

... green fear took hold of me
with the thought that proud Persephone might send up against me
some gorgonish head of a terrible monster up out of Hades'.
So, going back on board my ship, I told my companions
also to go aboard, and to cast off the stern cables.⁷² (*Od.* 11.633–637)

⁷⁰ In addition to those already noted, Socrates uses quotations at 174b, 174c, 174d, listed by Brandwood (1976), 992.

⁷¹ ἐπει ἔγωγε ἐνθυμούμενος ὅτι αὐτὸς οὐχ οἷος τ' ἔσομαι οὐδ' ἐγγὺς τούτων οὐδὲν καλὸν εἰπεῖν, ὑπ' αἰσχύνῃς ὀλίγου ἀποδράς ἄχόμην, εἴ πη εἶχον. καὶ γὰρ με Γοργίου ὁ λόγος ἀνεμίμησεν, ὥστε ἀτεχνῶς τὸ τοῦ Ὅμηρου ἐπεπόνθη· ἐφοβούμην μὴ μοι τελευτῶν ὁ Ἀγάθων Γοργίου κεφαλὴν δεινοῦ λέγειν ἐν τῷ λόγῳ ἐπὶ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον πέμψας αὐτόν με λίθον τῇ ἀφωνία ποιήσειν.

⁷² Trans: Lattimore (1951).

The image of the Gorgias'/Gorgon's head, which occurs exactly in the middle of the dialogue,⁷³ has a wider resonance, however. For one thing, it recalls the common sympotic motif of the Gorgon's head on the inside of drinking cups. As Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux points out, the Gorgon, the *aulos*-playing satyr, and Dionysus are often presented frontally on the inside of drinking cups, staring at the drinker, and presenting him with representations of both the divine and the bestial aspects of his own nature under the influence of wine.⁷⁴ Socrates' punning allusion to the Gorgon's head would also remind his audience of the story of Perseus and Medusa. In Pindar's *Pythian* 12, Perseus kills the Gorgon Medusa in order to use her head to turn his enemy to stone. Pindar's story also has sympotic and musical associations, for Athena invents the *aulos* as an imitation of the cries of the Gorgon Euryalos, sister of Medusa.⁷⁵ Socrates' image of the Gorgias/Gorgon head brings with it all of these associations—Homeric, Pindaric, musical, and sympotic. At this symposium, the philosopher does not play the role of Homer's Odysseus, who leaves Hades in fear, but that of Perseus, who appropriates the powers of the Gorgon's head for his own use. After hearing Agathon's poetic and Gorgianic eloquence, Socrates 'almost' runs away (198b–c). But of course he does not do so, and, far from being turned to stony speechlessness (198c), he proceeds to speak at great length. Indeed, according to Alcibiades, Socrates resembles an *aulos*-playing satyr, who, far from being turned to stone by others' eloquence, immobilizes people and leads them to examine their own lives (215b–216a).

The Gorgias/Gorgon head in the middle of the dialogue, then, is an integral part of the sympotic imagery in the rest of the dialogue, and it also functions, like the images in drinking cups, as an invitation to Socrates' audience to search for the truth about themselves that is reflected within Socrates' speech. Finally, it demonstrates how truth cannot be found by merely citing poetic authority, for the poets must always be subject to philosophical interrogation.⁷⁶ Like Perseus killing

⁷³ *Symp.* 198 is 26 Stephanus pages from the beginning of a dialogue 51 pages long.

⁷⁴ Frontisi-Ducroux (1989), esp. 156, 163: 'Ultimately it is his own face that the drinker encounters while looking into the cup he brings to his lips [T]he frontal representation of the vases suggests a visual exploration of the frontiers of the human condition' (quotation: 163).

⁷⁵ Sympotic associations: Belfiore (1992), 14–19.

⁷⁶ Halliwell (2000), 104–109. Cf. Ford (2002), Chapter 9, who argues that Plato uses quotations in *Rep.* 1 and 2 to 'illustrate the unreliability of taking poets as founts of wisdom or sources of technical knowledge' (216).

the Gorgon, the philosopher must overcome any servile dependence on the poets that his traditional education in poetry has given him, and learn to use their words as Perseus and Athena use the Gorgon. I leave readers, if they so desire, to follow up the implications of this metaphor.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ I am indebted to Amy Coplan, Pierre Destrée, Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, Sandra Peterson, Marilyn Skinner, and to audiences at the University of Minnesota and the Eleventh Annual Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

TRAGEDY, WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

PENELOPE MURRAY

Preliminaries

In this chapter I shall argue that Plato's attack on poetry, and particularly on tragedy, in the *Republic* is related to his exclusion of the feminine. This manifests itself in a variety of different, but inter-related ways:

1. His censorship of literature involves censorship of behaviour associated with the female, especially lamentation. Lamentation is associated with women, and with tragedy.
2. Plato is suspicious of tragedy's mode of presentation: there is a sense in which he regards dramatic impersonation as dangerous in itself. And I am going to suggest that his suspicion is not unconnected with the fact that tragedy very often involves men impersonating women.
3. Tragedy (and probably not just in Plato) is associated with the female (a) explicitly in various statements I shall look at; (b) implicitly through imagery.
4. The abolition of the family is central to Plato's conception of the ideal society. Plato equates the family with strife, and family strife is, of course, a major focus of Greek tragedy. The connexion between tragedy, family conflict and the breakdown of society is underlined by the theatrical imagery which Plato uses to structure his narrative of the degeneration of the ideal state.

I should make it clear from the start that I am not suggesting that Plato deliberately sets out to exclude the feminine, or even that he is especially interested in issues of gender outside Book V; but if we read attentively we shall see that he cannot escape from the cultural assumptions of the society in which he lived.

In Book V of the *Republic* Plato makes the radical proposal that women in his ideal state can be rulers alongside men. The only significant difference between men and women, he maintains, is that the female bears children,

whereas the male begets them (454e). But it does not follow from this biological difference that men and women are suited by nature to perform different functions in society. In fact there is no administrative job in a community which is peculiar to woman as woman or to man as man. 'Natural capacities are distributed similarly between the two sexes,' says Socrates at 455d–e, 'and women naturally take part in all occupations as well as men, although in all the woman is weaker than the man.'¹ The point seems to be that, although women are in general the weaker sex, there are many women who are better than many men at many things (455d). It would therefore be ridiculous to restrict all occupations outside the house to men only—it would simply be a waste of talent and resources. Women who have the requisite natural capacities to become rulers or guardians should receive exactly the same training, both intellectual and physical, as their male counterparts, and should share equally in the task of guarding and administering the state.

In effect Book V attempts to put forward a view of human nature which dispenses with the notion of gender: men and women are to be treated in exactly the same way and to perform exactly the same functions. Halliwell argues in his commentary on Book V that 'the radicalism of the idea of female guardians resides not so much in the specifics of a way of life, as in the degree to which Plato's case approaches a gender-neutral interpretation of human nature . . . what is at issue is not a view of women, but a philosophical conception of human beings as creatures to whose lives biological gender can be made largely irrelevant.'² I think he is right; but at the same time I cannot help feeling that what is required of the female guardians is that they should simply turn themselves into men, since the paradigm of human nature that Plato is dealing with is a masculine one. As Rousseau so elegantly put it: 'Having dispensed with the individual family in his system of government and not knowing any longer what to do with women, [Plato] finds himself forced to turn them into men.'³

In order that these guardians (and it is important to remember that we are talking only about the lives of the guardians, both rulers and auxiliaries, throughout this discussion) should fulfil their function as

¹ Translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

² Halliwell (1993), 15. In addition to this commentary, works relating to Book V which I have found particularly useful include Annas (1976), Bluestone (1987), and Okin (1979).

³ *Émile*, 4.699–700.

well as possible they are to live a completely communal life. All private property is to be abolished, together with the nuclear family (458c–d, cf. 416d, 466c–d). Women and children will be shared in common: no parent will know its own child, and no child will know its parents. The sex lives of the guardians will be rigidly supervised to ensure that the right sort of children will be born: there will be special festivals arranged at which selected couples will be allowed to mate, and the offspring of these unions will be taken off to state nurseries where they will be cared for by wet-nurses and nannies. The capacity of women to be guardians is not dependent on the abolition of the nuclear family, but the arrangements that Plato envisages, whereby babies will be taken away from their natural mothers and cared for by others, will ensure that female guardians will be free to perform their duties alongside men. ‘You are making child-bearing an easy job for the women of the guardians’, as Glaucon comments (460d, cf. 450c2–3).

The abolition of the family is not suggested in order to free women for other activities, but it will have that effect. Plato is interested in duties, not in rights. The point of abolishing the family and private property is to promote the cohesion of the group, to ensure the happiness of the community as a whole. For Plato sees the family and private life as the main threat to the unity of the state. As Socrates says at 464d–e, the arrangements he has outlined will safeguard the city from the dissension which arises when each person claims for himself anything he can get hold of and takes it to his own private house, when he has a wife and children of his own, and his own individual pleasures and pains. Instead, the guardians will have a common cause, working towards the same end, and in as far as possible have the same experience of pleasure and pain. Since they will have no private property apart from their own bodies, they will be free from the dissensions that arise from the possession of property or children or family. Family ties are to be replaced by loyalty to the state.

Plato's proposals are radical by any standards, but particularly when viewed against the background of the social practices of fourth-century Athens. This is signified in Plato's narrative by the reluctance which Socrates displays in putting forward his proposals, and by the comments of his interlocutors.⁴ You're stirring up a hornet's nest here, says Socrates (450b1); people will think that what he is suggesting is utterly

⁴ 449b–451b, 452b–c, 453b–d, 457b–c,d, 458a–b.

ridiculous, but one must not be afraid of being laughed at. The emphasis on the laughter that his proposals for the equality of the sexes is going to incur⁵ has been seen by some commentators as a specific reference to Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, produced 393 or 392, and therefore several years before Plato was working on the *Republic*, at least according to the majority view which dates it to the period between c. 385 and 365. But I think Halliwell is probably right that Socrates' repeated references to the fear of laughter show that Plato was aware of the *general* potential for comedy in the materials of his argument, not that he is alluding to any particular play from the comic stage.⁶ It is significant, however, that Socrates uses a theatrical image when he introduces the 'ridiculous' notion of the communism of women and children into his ideal state: now that he has completed the male drama, the *andreion drama*, he says at 451c1–3 (with a pun on *andreia* which, of course, means both 'manliness' and 'courage': he has completed his account of the preliminary education of the male guardians and also discussed the quality of courage which those guardians are to have), now that he has done that, it is time to perform the women's drama (*gunaikeion drama*) next. This is generally explained as a reference to two different varieties of the prose 'mimes', associated with the Sicilian writer Sophron, which portrayed male and female characters respectively, though of course both were performed by men. But the use of the theatrical metaphor at this point is perhaps also a reminder of the prominent part that women (or rather female characters) played in Greek drama as a whole. Plato's *gunaikeion drama* will also foreground women and their role in society, albeit in a very different and much more radical way. 'We must swim on,' says Socrates at 453d, 'and try to escape out of the sea of argument in the hope of being rescued by a dolphin or some other miracle.' This image anticipates the motif of the trio of waves that have to be surmounted (472a), that is, 1) the proposals for female Guardians, 2) the sharing of women and children in common 3) philosopher-rulers.

But how can people be persuaded of the feasibility and rightness of these revolutionary proposals? Plato's answer to this question seems to reside in his amazing faith in the power of education to change society. When the community of wives and children is first mentioned (423e)

⁵ See 451a, 452a–e, and note the use of the word *kômôidein* at 452d1.

⁶ Halliwell (1993), 224–225. On the vexed question of the relationship between *Republic V* and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* see also Adam (1963), I. 345–355; Ussher (1973), xiv–xx and Tordoff (2007).

Socrates stresses the paramount importance of education (*paideia*) in promoting and maintaining social values: if the guardians are well educated (*eu paideuomenoi*), he says, they will accept his proposals for the organisation of society, including what he says about the role of women, marriage and the production of children. It is vital that they stick to the established curriculum, since any change in the music and literature (*mousike*) of a state has profound social consequences (424c). The established curriculum he mentions here seems to refer to the educational programme for the Guardians discussed in some detail earlier on in the *Republic* in Books II and III. Exactly the same programme of *mousikê* and *gumnastikê* is now going to be extended to women too (451d–452a, 456b–c) because the object of that education is to produce citizens of the best possible kind (456e9–457a10, cf. 522a). But what connexion is there between the educational programme outlined there (in Books II and III) and the proposals for female guardians and the abolition of the family in *Republic* V? This is the question which I want to address in this paper. To my knowledge it is not a question which has been seriously considered before, although Adam (1963) does note the problem in his comment on *eu paideuomenoi* at 423e3–4 (if the guardians are well educated they will accept the proposals for the organisation of society including the abolition of the family and the community of wives and children):

Does this refer to the scheme of education already given, or is it a promise of the philosopher's training in Books VI and VII? . . . the natural interpretation of Plato's words is that he means the former, at the same time it is not easy to see how the musical education of Books II and III would enable the guardians to grasp such a conception as the community of wives and children.

The topic of how the guardians should be educated is first raised in Book II at 376e. Greek education traditionally consisted of *mousikê*, that is all the arts over which the Muses presided—poetry, song, music and dance—and *gumnastikê* (physical education). Socrates proposes to adopt a similar system for his guardians (both rulers and auxiliaries at this stage). He begins with literature, pointing out that, since the minds of young children are highly impressionable, it is essential that they should be told suitable stories from their earliest years. Ideas about the gods and their mythology derive primarily from the poets, but most existing poetry misrepresents the nature of the divine by suggesting, for example, that the gods fight among themselves, that they deceive human beings and are responsible for evil. It is significant that the first example Socrates gives of an unsuitable story (378a) is the succession myth in Hesiod's

Theogony (154–182), which tells of how Kronos castrated his father, Ouranos (the sky), in order to separate him from Gaia. Kronos himself swallowed his own children through fear of being usurped, but Zeus escaped this fate and eventually deposed his father (*Theog.* 453–506). Potential guardians must not be told such tales lest they be encouraged to act in the same way towards their own fathers. Nor must they hear of ‘the many other manifold enmities of gods and heroes towards their kith and kin’ (378c). They must not be told, for example, of Hera being tied up by her son, or of Hephaestus being thrown out of heaven by his father for trying to defend his mother from a beating. Family strife is at the centre of this highly influential set of stories of violence amongst the gods. The poetry of Homer, Hesiod and all the other poets who perpetrate such falsehoods will therefore have to be strictly censored, and replaced by stories composed according to guidelines laid down by the founders of the state.

A second objection to the traditional poetry of the Greeks, according to Plato, is that it is morally harmful, encouraging cowardice and lack of self-control (386a1–392a2). In a society which requires its guardians to be courageous and self-controlled we cannot allow literature which depicts heroes weeping and wailing, fearing death, or even bursting into fits of uncontrollable laughter. Particular examples of inappropriate behaviour to be censored include Achilles’ unrestrained displays of grief at the death of Patroclus (388a), his uncontrolled outbursts against his supposed superior, Agamemnon (390a), and his insolence towards Apollo and the river-god Scamander (391a–b). Although there may be some pleasure (*hêdonê*, 390a) in hearing Agamemnon addressed as a ‘drunkard with the eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer’, such words are hardly calculated to encourage self-control (*sôphrosunê*) amongst the young. Achilles in particular is targeted as an unsuitable role model, because he is traditionally the embodiment of heroic courage, *andreia* or ‘manliness’.⁷ But however courageous he may be on the battle field, his is not the sort of courage conducive to the harmonious society envisaged in Plato’s ideal state. Homer’s Achilles is the ultimate individualist, putting his own sense of honour before all else; in fact he is the antithesis of what the guardians should be, for the most important requirement of them is that they should subordinate themselves to the good of the community as a whole. If they are going to fulfil their task of defending their

⁷ See Hobbs (2000), 199–219.

city, therefore, they will need a new heroic role model, exemplifying a different kind of courage from that of Achilles. And indeed later on, in Book IV (429a8–430c7), Socrates proposes a new definition of courage as steadfastness of purpose, and the courageous man is described as one who clings to the dictates of reason about what he should or should not fear, in spite of pain and pleasure (442b11–c3).

Part of Plato's purpose in constructing his educational programme is to replace Achilles as a role model for the young with that of the philosopher as the highest human type, no doubt as exemplified by Socrates, at least as he is portrayed in the *Phaedo* calmly awaiting his death. This image is already prefigured in the *Apology* where Socrates refuses to beseech the jury with tearful appeals in the normal fashion, producing children, relatives and friends to arouse the maximum amount of sympathy (*Ap.*34c). Such behaviour, he says, would suggest that Athenian citizens are no better than women (35b), and rather than pandering to this practice the jury should make it clear that 'anyone who stages these pathetic scenes (*touta eleina tauta dramata eisagontos*) and so brings ridicule upon our city is far more likely to be condemned than if he kept perfectly quiet'.⁸ The theatrical imagery here is unmistakable, as is the association of women, tears and dramatic performance. Again in the *Phaedo* lamentation and the feminine are explicitly brought together in the memorable scene with Xanthippe, Socrates' wife, who is there at the prison with their child: 'as soon as she saw us', says *Phaedo* (60a), 'she shrieked and said the sort of things that women usually say: "Oh Socrates, this is the last time that your friends will talk to you and you to them!" Socrates looked at Crito, "Crito", he said, "let someone take her home". Some of Crito's people led her away crying and lamenting'. This scene is recalled right at the end of the dialogue (117c–d) when Socrates begins drinking the hemlock which is going to kill him, and his friends can contain their grief no longer: 'Apollodorus, who had never stopped crying even before, then broke out into such a storm of weeping and grieving that he made everyone present break down, except Socrates himself, who said: "What a way to behave, my friends! This was just why I sent the women away, so that they wouldn't make this sort of disturbance . . . Calm yourselves and be strong"'. As Nicole Loraux remarks, Socrates' calm in the face of death here is 'manifest proof that he is the very embodiment of the

⁸ Trans. H. Tredennick (Penguin 1959). See Burnet (1924) *ad loc.* who points out that *eisagô*, besides its use for 'bringing into court', also has the technical sense of 'bringing out' or 'producing' a play.

philosophical nature to which books 6 and 7 of the *Republic* attribute the essential quality of *andreia*.⁹ It is also significant that this *andreia* is specifically defined in contrast to ‘womanish’ behaviour.

The association of lamentation with the feminine is grounded in the reality of women’s traditional role as mourners in the funeral ritual.¹⁰ But Plato’s characterisation of typically female behaviour in the passages discussed above also reflects standard Athenian ideology concerning the emotional nature of women. Traces of that ideology are reflected in the *Republic* too, despite the insistence on the equality of the sexes in Book V. Thus, when discussing the censorship of literature in Book III, Socrates declares that all the weepings and wailings of famous men will need to be cut from the repertoire if young guardians are to learn that the death of loved ones is no great misfortune, and that death itself holds no terrors. ‘We would be right’, he says at 388a, ‘to remove the lamentations of famous men and give them to women—but not to the serious ones (*oude tautais spoudaiais*: perhaps those who are fit to be guardians)—and to the inferior men, so that those whom we say we are educating as guardians of the country will be ashamed to act like these.’ They can’t have Achilles lying on the ground, taking up the dark dust in both his hands and pouring it over his head, with all the weeping and lamentation the poet describes (388b). Nor can they have Priam grovelling in dung in his grief over Hector. Still less must the gods be shown grieving for their children as Thetis weeps for Achilles and Zeus for Sarpedon. For if young men listen to such things it will encourage them to break out into dirges and laments at the slightest occurrence and show no endurance in their own misfortunes (388d). The same restrictions are to apply to the musical modes which accompany dirges and lamentations: these too must be removed, says Socrates (398e), ‘for they are useless even to women who are to be of good character, let alone to men.’¹¹ As in the discussion of literature at 388a the assumption is that lamentation is the natural province of women, though a certain category of ‘better’ females may be exempt from the norm.

In *Republic* X the gravest charge against poetry is that it encourages its listeners to indulge in uninhibited displays of grief, and once again such behaviour is described as being characteristically female:

⁹ Loraux (1989) 29.

¹⁰ See Alexiou (1974); Garland (1989); Easterling (1991); Foley (2001) 21–29; Loraux (1998), 11–28; Suter (2008).

¹¹ Trans. Barker (1984) 131.

When we hear Homer or some other tragic poet imitating one of the heroes in a state of grief, delivering a long speech of lamentation, or chanting and beating his breast, you know that even the best of us enjoy it and give ourselves up to it. We follow in genuine sympathy, and praise as an excellent poet the one who most affects us in this way . . . But when the sorrow is our own, you notice that we pride ourselves on just the opposite, that is, on our ability to keep calm and be strong, because this is manly behaviour, whereas that which we admired is womanish.¹² (605d–e)

Homer, tragedy, lamentation and 'womanish' behaviour are all to be eliminated from the lives of the guardians, as from the city as a whole, and their interconnection is made abundantly clear in this passage. Homer dominates the discussion of *mousikê* in Books II and III in which there are only four direct quotations from tragedy (all Aeschylean). But it is noteworthy that the first mention of Achilles (383b) is in a quotation from a fragment of Aeschylus in which Thetis voices her bitterness against Apollo for the death of her son. Her suffering and grief at his untimely death mirrors that of Achilles himself for Patroclus, and mother and son share the same deeply pessimistic world view. Indeed for Plato Achilles exemplifies the fundamentally mistaken view that human life is worth taking seriously: in reality mortal existence is of no great concern¹³ and therefore cannot be tragic. For tragedy, whilst lamenting the brevity of life and the cruelty of the gods, presupposes and affirms its value. The tragic mentality, to which Plato is so opposed, is already present in the *Iliad*, and Achilles himself is an essentially tragic figure.¹⁴ In *Republic* X epic and tragedy are explicitly elided when Homer is described as 'the original master and leader' of the tragic poets (595c1–2), and the 'first of the tragic poets' (607a3), as in the passage quoted above, where 'Homer or some other tragic poet' puts on stage the grieving hero whose womanish lamentation poses such a threat to the well-being of the citizens of Plato's ideal state.

¹² οἱ γὰρ που βέλτιστοι ἡμῶν ἀκροώμενοι Ὅμηρου ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν τραγωδοποιῶν μιμουμένου τινὰ τῶν ἡρώων ἐν πένθει ὄντα καὶ μακρὰν ῥῆσιν ἀποτείνοντα ἐν τοῖς ὀδυρμοῖς ἢ καὶ ἄδοντάς τε καὶ κοπτομένους, οἷσθ' ὅτι χαίρομεν τε καὶ ἐνδόντες ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἐπόμεθα συμπάσχοντες καὶ σπουδάζοντες ἐπαινοῦμεν ὡς ἀγαθὸν ποιητήν, ὃς ἂν ἡμᾶς ὅτι μάλιστα οὕτω διαθῆ . . . Ὅταν δὲ οἰκειὸν τινὶ ἡμῶν κῆδος γένηται, ἐννοεῖς αὐτὸν ὅτι ἐπὶ τῷ ἐναντίῳ καλλωπιζόμεθα, ἂν δυνώμεθα ἡσυχίαν ἄγειν καὶ καρτερεῖν, ὡς τοῦτο μὲν ἀνδρὸς ὄν, ἐκείνο δὲ γυναικός, ὃ τότε ἐπηνοῦμεν.

¹³ *Rep.* 604b–c, 486a–b. See further Hobbs (2000), 216–211; Halliwell (1984) and (1996).

¹⁴ On Achilles and tragedy see Michalakis (2002).

Weeping and wailing are, of course, traditionally the province of women, particularly in the context of mourning for the dead and lamentation at funerals. In the *Iliad* it is predominantly the women (Andromache, Hecuba, Helen, Briseis) who lament for the dead, but there is no suggestion in Homer that tears are *per se* unmanly.¹⁵ Priam's grief at Hector's death is as unrestrained as that of the women, heroes express their emotions openly, and there is nothing unheroic about weeping. Indeed Achilles, the greatest hero of them all, is the one who weeps the most: in the opening book of the poem he bursts into tears when Briseis is taken away from him (1. 348 ff.) and weeps as he complains to his mother about the slight to his honour; after the death of Patroclus, Books XVIII and XIX are largely devoted to the depiction of Achilles' grief, and once Hector is killed he gives himself up to mourning his friend (XXIII), and the poem ends with the memorable reconciliation scene with Priam when the two of them weep together in remembrance of their sorrows (XXIV. 508 ff.). This is a very different model of heroic manliness from that which we find in the culture of fifth- and fourth-century Athens, for Plato is not alone in regarding tears as unmanly.

The issue is complex,¹⁶ but broadly speaking we begin to see a change already in the archaic period, reflected in the poetry of Archilochus. Fr. 13 (West), for example, encourages a friend to be strong and endure his grief over the death of friends who have drowned, and the poet says: 'From now on act like a man, and put away these womanish tears.' Funerary legislation at Athens, allegedly going back to Solon, was designed to control public displays of mourning, and seems to have been particularly aimed at women. According to Plutarch (*Life of Solon* 21.5), Solon attempted to curb women's disorderly and unbridled expressions of grief by restraining breast-beating and lamentation, and prohibiting them from lacerating their bodies. And he adds that even in his own day those who are overcome by 'unmanly and womanish expressions of emotion in their mourning' could be punished by the *gunaikonomoi*. In tragedy women's love of tears and lamentation is a commonplace. Indeed Nicole Loraux has argued that one of tragedy's main functions is to provide an arena for the 'womanish' expression of grief and pleasure in tears which the state sought to restrict: theatre is full of lamentation because

¹⁵ See Monsacré (1984).

¹⁶ On the gendering of tears see Arnoud (1990), 102–106; Loraux (1998) and (2002); Segal (1993), 63–67; Van Wees (1998).

lamentation is excluded from the city.¹⁷ Within the confines of the festival occasion actors and audience (predominantly, if not exclusively male, of course), were able to indulge in behaviour which would otherwise be regarded as dangerous, even if the boundaries between *mimêsis* and reality were not always clear-cut. The case of Phrynichus' *Capture of Miletus* which, according to Herodotus (VI.21), so upset the audience that the playwright was fined one thousand drachmas for reminding them of their misfortunes and his play banned from ever being performed again, shows what a powerful effect the representation of grief on the stage could have. As Gregory Nagy has put it:

'From the standpoint of Athenian state theater ... mimesis is not mere representation: rather, it is archetypal reenactment. That is, the songs of lamentation heard by the civic audience of Athenian state theater are taken to be archetypal, not derivative, in relation to the real-life laments of real-life people. Far from being an *imitation* of real-life genres the dramatised lament of Athenian state theater is taken to be a *model*.'¹⁸

The threat posed by feminine lamentation, whether on stage or in real life, has been variously analysed, some seeing it in predominantly political terms, others emphasising its psychological effects,¹⁹ but in Plato the two are inter-linked through the image of the soul as city. As far as he is concerned the feminising emotions of pity and grief spell danger because they interfere with the proper functioning of the psyche by undermining the control of reason, which should at all times stand guard over the 'mournful element' in us (*tou thrênôdous*, 606b), banishing lamentation with healing (604d).

It is not difficult to see why Plato is so anxious to get rid of all poetry which depicts famous men lamenting, nor is it accidental that he depicts such behaviour as womanish. Excessive lamentation is associated not only with women, but also with tragedy. And women and tragedy go together.²⁰ Quite apart from the fact that tragedy features a large number of female heroines and female choruses, tragedy is specifically said to

¹⁷ Loraux (1998), 10 and (2002) *passim*. For a recent treatment of the female lament in tragedy, which usefully summarises earlier scholarship, see Dué (2006). A different view is taken by Suter (2008b), who argues that male lament had always been an integral part of tragedy from its origins in Dionysiac ritual and hero cult.

¹⁸ G. Nagy, *Foreword* to Loraux (1998), x.

¹⁹ See Foley (2001), 21–55; Loraux (1998), 20–28 and (2002) *passim*; Dué (2006), 46–49.

²⁰ See Hall (1998), 29–34; Loraux (1998), 11, 57–65 and (2002) *passim*; Murray (2003); Zeitlin (1996), 341–374.

appeal to women, by Plato at least. In the *Gorgias* (502d5–7) tragedy is described as ‘a sort of oratory addressed to an audience of men, women and children alike, slaves as well as free men’. In the *Laws* tragedy is the favourite entertainment of educated women and young men at 658d (where boys are said to prefer comedy, and old men epic recitations), but at 817c tragic poets are said to ‘declaim to women and children and the general public’. This quotation comes from the passage where the question being considered is whether tragedians are to be admitted into the Cretan city, and the Athenian stranger replies: ‘We [the law-givers] are tragedians ourselves, and our tragedy is the finest and the best we can create. At any rate, our entire state has been constructed so as to be a representation of the finest and noblest life—the very thing which we maintain is most genuinely a tragedy’. As for the sons of the *malakôn Mousôn* (‘soft, effeminate, unrestrained Muses’), they will have to take their songs to the authorities to be duly considered. This description of tragedians as ‘sons of the *malakôn Mousôn*’ encapsulates the notion of the femininity of tragedy, which seems to be so prominent in Plato’s work. But the clearest indication of the ‘womanish’ nature of tragedy occurs in the discussion of *mimêsis* in Book III of the *Republic*, beginning at 392c.

The notion of *mimêsis* at issue here is that of dramatic impersonation. For Plato reciting poetry (and indeed simply listening to it) is potentially dangerous because it requires the reciter, whether schoolboy, rhapsode, poet or actor, to imitate or impersonate the character whose words he is speaking. If I recite the words of Achilles I make myself like Achilles in the process. Imitation in this sense of the word involves a deep emotional identification on the part of the imitator: speaking in the voice of another is in some sense to become that person, and to acquire that person’s habits. So imitation has profound effects on character. It is extremely important, therefore, that potential guardians should only act the part of suitable characters—that is, men who are courageous, self-disciplined, just, generous and so on (395c4–5). It is explicitly said that they should not be allowed to imitate (i.e. play the part of) women. Since they are men, says Socrates at 395e, we cannot allow our guardians

to imitate women, whether they are young or old, whether they are abusing their husbands or pitting themselves against the gods and boasting of their supposed good fortune, or mourning and lamenting in misfortune. We certainly cannot permit the representation of women in sickness or love or child-birth.²¹

²¹ γυναῖκα μιμεῖσθαι ἄνδρα ὄντα, ἢ νέαν ἢ πρεσβυτέραν, ἢ ἀνδρὶ λοιδορουμένην

The reference to a woman 'pitting herself against the gods' is perhaps to Aeschylus' *Niobe*, from which Socrates had quoted disapprovingly earlier on (380a3–4). But the particular examples of unsuitable female behaviour in this passage point to the tragedies of Euripides. One thinks of Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1043–1044 where Aeschylus contrasts himself with Euripides, claiming that he never cluttered up his stage with 'harlots like *Phaedra* or *Sthenoboea*. No-one can say I have ever put an erotic female (*erōsan gunaika*) into any play of mine'. In his lost play *Auge* Euripides apparently portrayed the heroine giving birth in a temple. However, the general description of women 'gripped by catastrophe, grief and sorrow' could apply equally to women in Homer as in tragedy, and we should not assume that the discussion here is confined exclusively to drama. The general point is that epic and tragedy provide many examples of unsuitable female behaviour, to which young guardians should not be exposed. But there is also the implication that the mere fact of imitating a woman is dangerous. It is not just bad women they should not imitate: they should not imitate any women at all. If that is the case, where does that leave tragedy? Almost all Greek tragedies include female characters, who would, of course, have been played by men; indeed gender-inversion of this sort is an essential feature of Greek drama. Furthermore, the notion of *mimēsis* in the sense that it is used in Book III (i.e. impersonation) seems to be bound up from the start with questions of gender. The first time it occurs is in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* where Euripides and his relative, Mnesilochus, call on the tragic poet Agathon, and find him dressed in drag, and in the very act of creation. When Mnesilochus comments on his outlandish appearance, Agathon replies:

I change my clothing as I change my mentality. A man who is a poet must adopt habits that match the plays he's committed to composing. For example, if one is writing plays about women, one's body must participate in their habits ... If you're writing about men, your body has what it takes already; but when it's a question of something we don't possess, then it must be captured by imitation (*mimēsis*).²² (Ar. *Thesm.* 148–156)

Agathon is here presented as the archetypal effeminate tragedian, but Aristophanes also brings out the femininity of tragedy through the

ἢ πρὸς θεοὺς ἐρίζουσάν τε καὶ μεγαλαυχουμένην, οἰομένην εὐδαίμονα εἶναι, ἢ ἐν συμφοραῖς τε καὶ πένθεισιν καὶ θρήνοις ἐχομένην· κάμνουσαν δὲ ἢ ἐρῶσαν ἢ ᾠδίνουσαν, πολλοῦ καὶ δεήσομεν.

²² Trans. Sommerstein (1994). For discussion of the passage see further Muecke (1982); Sommerstein (1994) *ad loc.*; Zeitlin (1996), 375–416.

figure of Euripides, both in this play and elsewhere. In the *Frogs* the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides is presented through a series of oppositions, including that of the masculine war-like productions of Aeschylus, versus the woman-centred plays of Euripides. I wonder if it is significant that Plato's quotations from tragedy in *Republic* II and III are all from Aeschylus—admittedly there are only 4 of them, and 2 are from the *Niobe* (380a3–4, 381d8, 383b1–9, 391e7–9). But it is as though Plato ignores Aristophanes' distinction between the good old-fashioned masculine Aeschylus and the wicked, new-fangled womanising Euripides and lumps all tragedy together. In so far as tragedy is feminised, Plato makes no distinction between Aeschylus and Euripides.

This notion of the femininity of tragedy must surely have something to do with the transvestism that is such a notable feature of the genre, and which is so hilariously parodied in the scene with Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae*. But parody though it is, what we have here is essentially the same notion of *mimêsis* as that which Plato finds so dangerous in Book III of the *Republic*. 'We cannot allow our guardians to imitate a woman', as he says at 395e. This blanket ban on potential guardians impersonating women certainly gets rid of a great deal of Greek tragedy, and also has the effect of removing all female role models from the education of potential guardians.²³ This, I suggest, is one way in which they can be prepared for the radical proposals of Book V concerning the equality of the sexes.

The only model which it is appropriate for the decent man (the *metrios anêr*) to imitate is a man of good character behaving with steadiness and determination (396c5–d1). The trouble is that such a man is not a very attractive subject for poetry, as Plato himself recognises: 'If a man arrived in our city', he says at 398a, 'who could turn himself into anything (*pantodapon gignesthai*) by his skill and imitate everything ... we would fall down before him as a sacred and wondrous pleasure-giver, but we would say that there is no place for such a man in our city ... But we ourselves, for our own good, would employ the more austere and less pleasing poet ... who would imitate the expression of the good man.' And again in Book X: 'The prudent and calm character, always at one with itself, is not easy to imitate, nor, when it is imitated, is it easy to understand, especially at a festival when all kinds of people are crowded together into the theatre' (604e). People naturally prefer characters who

²³ On this point see Hobbs (2000), 245–249.

are emotional, varied and volatile, and it is poetry of that sort which gives the most pleasure. This quality of *poikilia* (variegatedness or variety) which Plato so despises both in literature and in life is on more than one occasion specifically associated by Plato with women,²⁴ and I think this is another way in which we see poetry being feminised. In particular I am thinking of the famous image at 557c4 where democracy is likened to a patterned dress: 'I dare say that a democracy is the most attractive of all societies', says Socrates. 'The diversity of its characters, like the different colours in a patterned dress, make it look very attractive. Indeed, most people would, for this reason, judge it the best form of society, like women and children when they see (*theômenoi*) gaily coloured things.' The use of the verb *theaomai* here surely reminds us of the theatre, and the pleasure which tragedy in particular is said to give to women (and sometimes children too). One of the primary meanings of the verb is, according to LSJ (3) 'to view as spectators, esp. in the theatre.' This passage also raises another very large topic which I am not going to embark on now, but which needs to be addressed, and that is the political dimension of Plato's hostility to tragedy.²⁵ In Plato's view variegation and variety are characteristic of democracy as much as they are of tragedy, and it is hardly surprising that tragedy is the form of poetry that is most persuasive and delightful to the *dêmos* (*Minos* 321a3–4; whether the *Minos* is by Plato or not, that is certainly a genuinely Platonic view).

Multicoloured variety is in fact a marked feature of traditional Greek mythology with its tales of murder and mayhem amongst the gods, irascible heroes and families in conflict. And such *poikilia* is the very antithesis of the principles of harmony and unity on which Plato's ideal state will be based.²⁶ Hence the traditional mythology of the poets is to be replaced by myths composed on Platonic lines. We are given an example of such a myth in the so-called 'noble lie' (414c–415d), an invented foundation myth which is to be told to the whole community. One of the professed aims of this story is to promote cohesion amongst the groups of citizens who make up the *polis*. They are to be told, amongst other things, that Earth is their mother, and that they are to regard their fellow citizens as brothers, born of the same mother earth (414e). God

²⁴ See e.g. 431b–c. On the ethical significance of *poikilia* see most recently Moss (2007) 436, 441–3.

²⁵ On this see e.g. Hall (1997); Nightingale (1995) 53–55; Ober and Strauss (1990); Salkever (1986).

²⁶ See e.g. 399e, 404 e, 423d, 443e, 462a–d.

will so arrange it that those fit to rule will have gold in their natures, the auxiliaries will have silver, whereas farmers and other workmen (*dēmiourgoi*) will be made of iron and brass. The most important task of the guardians is to ensure that each individual is assigned his proper role in society, regardless of the family into which he has been born. Thus if a guardian produces a son of inferior metal, he must be thrown out and join the lower classes; conversely a child of the lower orders who is unexpectedly born with gold or silver in his composition must be promoted to the ruling class. This is a myth for the whole community, rather than just for the guardian class, but the attitudes which the myth is designed to foster are in accordance with the values which the guardians themselves are to espouse: loyalty to the group as a whole rather than to the nuclear family. As Okin points out: 'the noble lie, according to which the citizens are to be told that they are one big family, can be read as the complete expression of an ideal which can unfortunately be met only in part ... Plato would have undoubtedly extended the communal ownership of property to all the classes of his ideal city, if he had thought it possible.'²⁷ That the sharing of wives and children in the guardian class will foster the same values in society at large is explicitly stated at 462e–464a, where the family relationships of the 'noble lie' will be replicated not only amongst the guardians (each one will regard anyone whom he meets as related to him, whether as brother or sister, father or mother, son or daughter, grandparent or grandchild), but also, by some unspecified means, amongst the citizens in general.²⁸ And it will not be simply a question of nomenclature, but also of behaviour, so that, for example, all children will be expected to treat those whom they call fathers with the appropriate care and respect. Plato's myth is carefully designed to produce the opposite effects from those of the stories contained in Hesiod's *Theogony* with which he begins his critique of the poets at *Rep.* 378a.

Plato stresses again and again that the worst thing for a *polis* is that it should be split and fragmented, the best that there should be unity and cohesion amongst the citizens (e.g. 462b, 464a–b). The chief danger to the state comes not from an external source, but from *stasis*, that is, internal strife or civil war, a disease exemplified by Greek rising against Greek and setting fire to the land which is their common mother (470c–d). *Stasis* epitomises the threat that disunity poses in both the city and the

²⁷ Okin (1979) 30. Cf. *Laws* V, 739c–d where Plato makes this point explicitly.

²⁸ On the difficulties of this issue see Halliwell (1993) on 462b5.

individual soul,²⁹ and, significantly, is associated with poetry at *Rep.* X, 603c–d. In terms of the ideal state Plato insists that the most important factor in promoting the harmony and unanimity on which it depends is the arrangement for the sharing of women and children, i.e. the abolition of the family amongst the guardian class (464a–b, cf. 458b and 543a). These guardians will no longer have private joys and sorrows, and they will be free of all the conflicts and dissensions that arise when people have money or children and relatives (464d–e). It is significant, then, that Plato uses precisely such a conflict to illustrate how the inhabitants of the ideal state might degenerate. Having outlined the characteristics of the timocratic youth at 548e–549c,³⁰ Plato goes on to describe how a character of this sort might arise in the first place. His father will be a good man, who, living in a badly run state, will shun public office and the honour that comes with it, preferring to avoid trouble. But his mother will feel aggrieved about the family's lack of status, and when she sees her husband's indifference to money, politics and law-suits, she will complain to the son that his father 'isn't a real man' (*anandros*, 549e) and 'harp on with the usual complaints that women make in such circumstances'. The servants, too, will join in, urging the boy that when he grows up he must prosecute where his father has failed to do so, stand up for his rights and be 'more of a man than his father' (549e). The son, torn between the differing values of mother and father, compromises and takes the middle way, 'resigning control of himself to the intermediate ambitious and thumoeidic element, and becomes an arrogant and honour-loving man' (550b).

Given the paramount importance of the principles of harmony and unity for the welfare of Plato's ideal state, it is hardly surprising that he wants to get rid of traditional mythology and banish the poets. Greek poetry from Homer onwards specialises in conflict. And it hardly needs saying that families and familial strife are the very stuff of tragedy. As Aristotle says in the *Poetics* (1453b) the most successful tragic plots (in that they are best at arousing the emotions of pity and fear) are those in which the sufferings involve those who are near and dear to each other, for instance where brother kills brother, son father, mother son, or son mother. This is why tragedies are about very few families. (1454a).³¹

²⁹ See Halliwell (1993) on 459e3 and Nussbaum (1986) 158–160.

³⁰ On the timocratic state and man see further Hobbs (2000), 27–31.

³¹ For a detailed demonstration of the truth of this statement see Belfiore (2000).

The threat posed by traditional Greek poetry to the unanimity of the state is conveyed not only by argument, but also through imagery, indeed Plato's arguments cannot be separated from the network of images, associations and verbal echoes that characterise the texture of his work.³² It cannot be mere coincidence that when Socrates is asked about the decline of the ideal state, he prefaces his account with a reference to the poets. Change in any society begins, he says, when there is dissension (*stasis*) within the ruling class, but how will such *stasis* arise amongst the rulers and auxiliaries in our *polis*? 'Shall we invoke the Muses, like Homer, to tell us "how the quarrel (*stasis*) first began"? Let's imagine that they speak to us in tragic manner (*eipein tragikôs*)' (545d–e). This playful invocation to the Muses of epic and tragedy at the beginning of the tale of the city's decline is, I suggest, more than mere play. For in Plato's view *mousikê*—poetry, literature, music—and society are intimately connected. Throughout the *Republic* he associates political decay with neglect of the proper 'musical' education which he himself has outlined.³³ That education is based on the removal of all poetry which depicts conflict and strife. In the communal society of the guardians, where men and women alike will be united by their devotion to the common cause of the state, there will be no place for the heroic individuals of epic and tragedy. Poetry must be cleansed of all its unsuitable role models so that the guardians may lead a life of unshakeable fortitude and self-control—not for them the grief of Achilles or the wailing of Andromache. Women, it seems, are to be eliminated altogether from poetry deemed suitable for the guardians. The abolition of the family goes hand in hand with the expulsion of tragic poetry, whose very life blood is the depiction of familial strife.

I shall end by quoting some highly pertinent remarks made by Bernard Knox *à propos* this topic:

The myths of Attic tragedy are set from first to last in the framework of the family, that close-knit unit—closer in ancient Greece than it is today—which sets an indelible mark on our formative years and stays with us backward and forward, a burden and support, until we die . . . Greek tragic myth is a web of interlocking family histories. Within the families, as well as in their relations with each other, the whole spectrum of the passions family life can breed is displayed. And these passions, as is to be expected of material shaped by oral tradition, are exemplary in their extreme intensity.

³² See Murray (2003).

³³ See Adam (1963) on 546d, and cf. 548b–c.

Knox goes on to relate the following anecdote:

A French literary critic who had just returned from Communist China once began a lecture with the sentence: "Les Chinois sont en train d'abolir la famille. Ce sera la fin de la littérature". (The Chinese are in the process of abolishing the family: that will be the end of literature).³⁴

Returning to Plato and the original question proposed in this paper: what have Plato's proposals for the musical and literary education of his guardians to do with the abolition of the family and the appointment of females to the highest office of the state? The answer, I suggest, is that these themes are intimately connected.

³⁴ Knox (1979) 21.

CHAPTER TEN

MIMESIS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE IN *REPUBLIC* III

GABRIEL RICHARDSON LEAR

According to a widespread interpretation, the conception of *mimêsis* described by Socrates in *Republic* III differs from the one he describes in *Republic* X. In the former book it is impersonation or dramatic enactment, while in the latter it is appearance-making or representation.¹ The two conceptions appear to be suited to the differing philosophical concerns of the discussions in which they appear. The conception of mimesis as assimilation of oneself to another suits Socrates' investigation in Book III into how the class of warrior-guardians should be educated. For it is an assumption of that discussion that the young guardians will learn by performing or reciting poetry themselves. The idea seems to be that the young guardians will become brave and temperate warriors by imitating—impersonating—such characters in dramatic performance. When, in Book X, Socrates turns to the question of how poetry affects the audience of someone else's performance, it is more useful to conceive of mimesis as the creation of an artifact that appears a certain way to those who see or hear it. Still, the alleged mismatch between the conceptions of mimesis in *Republic* III and X is awkward. What exactly is it about poetry that Plato considers to be so dangerous, the fact that it can involve impersonation or its status as an appearance? Worse, the differing conceptions of mimesis appear to classify different things as mimetic.

¹ See especially Halliwell (1988), 5; Halliwell (2002), 48–61 but also Annas (1981), 336–337; Janaway (1995), chap. 5; and Nehamas [1982] (1999), 260 for somewhat different ways of describing the alleged contrast between the two conceptions of mimesis. Although 'representation' is often treated as a modern formulation of Plato's 'appearance-making' the ideas are subtly, but importantly, different. 'Representation,' because it focuses on the way an artwork communicates, suggests that the original is not present but is re-presented in a different form. 'Appearances,' on the other hand, may or may not be present along with the original or actual thing whose appearance it is. Of course, insofar as poets and painters are *merely* appearance-makers, the object they make (the appearance) is separate from the object whose appearance it is. But as Nehamas has taught us, even Plato is willing to say that the poet *in a way* makes the original object insofar as he makes its appearance (596e, Nehamas ([1982] 1999, 262)). No one would say the same of representation-making.

Whereas in Book X *all* poetry and indeed all painting too is the product of mimesis insofar as it is all merely an appearance rather than the reality it depicts, in Book III mimesis is only one kind of poetic narration; whatever is not a case of making one's own body or voice like the body or voice of someone else is not a case of mimetic narration. (Thus it seems that *no* painting qualifies as mimetic in the Book III sense.)²

Contrary to what is usually believed, I will argue that the core meaning of mimesis does not change between *Republic* III and X.³ In both places, to engage in mimesis is a matter of appearance-making. This core conception remains constant even though it is true that in Book III Plato describes in detail only the sort of appearance-making that is achieved through the poet-performer's impersonation of his object whereas in Book X he includes sorts of appearance-making that do not use the poet-performer's body and voice as a medium. Since I take it that this interpretation of mimesis in Book X is not controversial, I will confine my discussion to Book III.

My purpose is not so much to show that Plato is consistent, although I consider that to be an interpretive advantage. Rather, my target is the proper interpretation of Plato's views in Book III of the nature of artistic activity and of moral education. It is widely supposed that, according to Plato, mimesis involves the psychological assimilation of the poet-performer to the characters he imitates. On this view, which I shall call the *standard interpretation*, the performer, as part of the activity of imitation, imagines what it is like to be his character and attempts to inhabit (in imagination) his character's point of view. Homer and the tragic poets,

² This worry is related to, but different from, a worry that has received a lot of attention lately. At the beginning of *Republic* X Socrates congratulates himself on having banished all mimetic poetry earlier (in Book III). But in fact in Book III he did not banish all poetry involving mimesis. He banished only the sort that imitates everything indiscriminately; poetry that limits its imitation to the portrayal of good men was retained. This debate is not my concern here. I share the gathering consensus that by "as much poetry as is mimetic", Socrates means to refer not to all poetry which employs mimesis, but to all poetry which is characterized by unbridled mimesis of anything and everything. (Belfiore (1984), Burnyeat (1999, 292), Ferrari (1990, 125), and Halliwell (1988, 106) offer what I believe is the correct interpretation of the phrase in question, but Moss (2007, 417) and Nehamas ([1982] 1999) offer different interpretations in a similar spirit.) One may accept this solution and still maintain that Socrates has shifted the meaning of mimesis between the two books.

³ Belfiore (1984) has also argued that the meaning of mimesis is consistent between the two books. However, we disagree about what that meaning is. Whereas she argues that the root idea is making one thing like another in sound or shape, I will argue that the root idea is making something that appears to be other than what it is.

as Giovanni Ferrari puts it, “take on the perspective of a multiplicity of characters” when they imitate them.⁴ This interpretation of mimesis has, in turn, led scholars to view Plato’s theory of moral-poetic education as a matter of practicing not only the gestures and tones of voice of an Achilles or Odysseus, but also their emotions and, more broadly, their inner life.⁵ In other words, by reading mimesis in Book III as principally a matter of self-assimilation (rather than appearance-making), scholars have tended to see the target of Plato’s ethical assault on poetry in terms of imagining and pretending to inhabit perspectives other than one’s own. As Stephen Halliwell says, “understanding a character ‘from the inside’ . . . is precisely what Plato fears about the mimetic mode in *Republic* 3.”⁶ Moreover, scholars also feel they need to defend poetry from Plato’s attack by arguing that there is positive value in such imaginative activity.⁷ But all of this is a mistake. No doubt Plato would object to our habitually imagining what it is like to be a variety of characters—he would abhor our own modern mode of engaging literature, a mode into which we’ve been trained by modern novels from Jane Austen to Proust—but his worry in Book III and in the *Republic* as a whole is somewhat different. Plato believes that, with sufficient repetition, the practice of mimesis will train us to take some sort of non-rational pleasure in the outward manifestation—in the appearance—of the character-type imitated. This can be a beneficial development, provided that the mimesis practiced is consistently of *one* sort of character and of a *good* sort of character. In this case, mimesis will prepare the child’s non-rational predilections to allow for the blossoming of right reason. He worries, however, that exposure to what I will call dramatic poetry, both as performers and as audience members, will give us a taste for creating mere appearances.⁸ We will come to enjoy

⁴ Ferrari (1990), 117.

⁵ See Ferrari (1990); Halliwell (2002), chap. 2; Murray (1996).

⁶ Halliwell (2002), 80. However, Halliwell (2002, 78–79) argues *contra* Ferrari (1990, 134) that in Book X the audience’s assimilation to theatrical characters stops short of “full-scale psychological immersion”. Audiences sympathize with but do not in a strong sense identify with the characters portrayed. This seems to me to be correct.

⁷ So, for example, Nussbaum (1990, chap. 5) argues that reading and identifying with characters in novels trains our moral perceptual capacity. Halliwell (2002, chap. 2), in arguing that Platonic and Romantic aesthetics are parallel in the role they give to the imagination also gestures at a possible defense, without thereby endorsing it.

⁸ This is intended to cover both styles which Socrates rejects in Book III, the one which is purely mimetic and the so-called “mixed” style, whose narration is not entirely mimetic, but which nevertheless imitates a wide variety of characters (397b–d). See Janaway (1995), 100–101 on the interpretation of this passage.

acting like Achilles one day and like Paris the next; first playing the fool and then the philosopher. (This is the inconstant enthusiasm characteristic of the democratic man of Book VIII.) Since no one can genuinely *be* like Achilles, Paris, a fool, *and* a philosopher—being implies stability and steadfastness, but these character-types conflict—a person who develops a taste for acting this way will merely appear to be many things without in fact being any one thing at all. The issue then isn't essentially about identification; it is about the *multifariousness* of mimesis. Indeed, it is the multifariousness of mimesis that makes full identification with any one character impossible. Emphasizing the fact that, in Book III, mimetic narration is a sort of appearance-making makes it more evident that this is the target of Plato's critique of Homer, the tragedians, and all poets whose taste for mimesis is unfettered by a longing for the real.

1. *Mimesis As Appearance-Making in Book III*

Socrates broaches the topic of mimesis in Book III after his lengthy discussion of the content of poetry suitable for educating the guardian class. Now that they have covered poetic content, they should investigate poetic style or diction (*lexis*), "for we'll then have fully investigated both what should be said and how it should be said," (392c).⁹ *Lexis*, then, is a *way* or *manner* of using words to convey the content of a story. There are, he says, three ways of using words to tell a story. One can use simple narration (*haplê diêgêsis*), mimetic narration (literally, narration coming about via mimesis, *dia mimêseôs gignomenê diêgêsis*), or a combination of the two (392d). Simple narration as Plato understands it occurs when the narrative voice is and seems to be the voice of the poet. He cites as an example the opening lines of the *Iliad*, immediately following the invocation to the goddess. Homer asks what god caused the fight between Agamemnon and Achilles and answers:

Apollo the son of Zeus and Leto. Incensed at the king
he swept a fatal plague through the army—men were dying
and all because Agamemnon spurned Apollo's priest.
Yes, Chryses approached the Achaeans' fast ships
to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom

⁹ Quotations from the *Republic* are based on C.D.C. Reeve's revision of Grube's translation and on Reeve's own translation. Sometimes I have preferred the formulation of one, sometimes of the other.

and bearing high in hand, wound on a golden staff,
 the wreaths of the god, the distant deadly archer.
 He begged the whole Achaean army, but most of all
 the two supreme commanders, Atreus' two sons ...¹⁰

According to Socrates, “the poet himself is speaking and is not trying to make us think that the speaker is anyone other than himself” (393a). This is what Plato means by simple *diêgêsis*.¹¹ Now consider what happens in the lines immediately following the ones I just quoted:

“Agamemnon, Menelaus—all Argives geared for war!
 May the gods who hold the halls of Olympus give you
 Priam's city to plunder, then safe passage home.
 Just set my daughter free, my dear one ... here,
 accept these gifts, this ransom. Honor the god
 who strikes from worlds away—the son of Zeus, Apollo!”
 And the ranks of the Achaeans cried out their assent:
 “Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!”

According to Socrates, the poet in this passage “speaks as if he were Chryses, and tries as hard as he can to make us think that the speaker is not Homer, but the priest himself, who is an old man” (393a–b). Homer could have told this bit of the story in his own voice, of course. Socrates demonstrates what this might sound like by giving a lightning quick and rather dull synopsis of this segment of the poem in a voice that certainly sounds like Socrates' (393d–394a). (It isn't only by lacking meter that his

¹⁰ Robert Fagles' translation. Socrates actually quotes only the last two lines, 393a.

¹¹ Notice that Plato assumes that narration either will occur through direct dialogue or that it will be in the voice of the poet. He does not consider descriptive narration of events by a persona quite other than that of the author. Think of the beginning of *Rebecca*: “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again ...” This is the voice of the second Mrs. de Winter, not Daphne DuMaurier. But simple narration as Plato understands it occurs when the narrative voice is and seems to be the voice of the poet.

There's an interesting question what Plato thinks is happening when other people recite the beginning of the *Iliad*. Are they imitating Homer? The *Ion*'s account of the transmission of divine inspiration from poet to rhapsode might be of some help here. Ion does not so much imitate Homer (in the sense of creating the appearance that Homer is speaking) as he becomes, like Homer, a vehicle of divine speech. He is a sort of second Homer and neither of them is really the one speaking. I cannot pursue this thought here, but it is worth mentioning that, if this is Plato's view, it is not adequate to the facts of Greek poetry. The narrative voice in Greek lyric is often quite distinctive, even when it narrates in the simple style. Pindar and Hesiod are both quite present in their poems and they don't sound like each other. Thus, given that people can and did recite the poems of both Pindar and Hesiod, recitation of their poetry must, at least sometimes, involve adopting a narrative voice other than one's own. In other words, although in *Republic* and *Ion* Plato wants to treat the voice of the poet and performer as equivalent, this does not do justice to the distinctiveness of the simple narrative voice in the poetry he knew.

speech fails to be poetic!) His point here is to show that verbal style (*lexis*) is independent of verbal content (*muthos*). Whereas in pure narration the poet creates a speech that seems to be his own, in narration through mimesis, the poet conveys the same information, but in a speech that seems to be spoken by someone else (393b).¹²

It is tempting, but potentially misleading, to say that Plato here conceives of mimetic narrative as impersonation. ‘Impersonation’ refers both to the agent’s transformation of himself and to the effect this self-transformation has on his audience. Now the mimetic activity Socrates describes here is that of the poet selecting his words so as to create a certain effect. So it is correct to say that mimesis in this case requires some change in the poet or, at least, in what he does. But this is not the aspect of mimesis which Socrates emphasizes here, in his general account of what mimetic narration is.¹³ Rather, what he chooses to emphasize is what the poet tries to make his audience think. In mimetic narration, Socrates says, the poet “tries as hard as he can to make us think that the speaker is not [the poet], but” someone else; in simple narration “the poet himself is speaking and is not trying to make us think that the speaker is anyone other than himself”. That is to say, the basic distinction Socrates draws between mimetic and simple narration is in the intention of the poet to create an effect in the eye (or ear) of the beholder. He confirms this point a bit later when he describes the mimetic poet as “hidden” (393c), suggesting that he is occluded from view. Mimetic images needn’t be unlike the poet who creates them. It is perfectly possible—indeed, Plato will require—that a poet-performer speak as if he is someone whose moral character is like his own. (The only narration allowed in the ideal city is the kind which imitates only good men and describes all other characters in plain narration, 396c–e; 397d.) But even in this case, the poet will endeavor to create in the audience the phenomenal experience of one of the characters in the story he’s telling and “hide” the appearing of himself,

¹² *Contra* Murray (1996, 171), ‘*hôs Chrusês genomenos*’ indicates what *seems to the audience* to have happened, not what has happened.

¹³ By contrast, the transformation of the poet-performer in the act of creation is the focus of his discussions of poetry in the *Ion* and *Phaedrus*. Notice that in those dialogues, poets are transformed (i.e., possessed and driven out of their minds by the Muse) regardless of whether they narrate mimetically or not. The habit of speaking without knowing what one is talking about, the state of having one’s reason put to sleep or otherwise put out of commission, is the psychological condition of the poet which interests Plato, both in the *Ion* and in *Republic X*. It is not at issue in *Republic III*, however, in part because, as I shall argue, the psychological condition of the person in the act of mimesis is not the focus of his discussion there.

the person in the act of creating the story.¹⁴ The audience does not experience *him* as present at all. In fact, so far as the success of the mimesis is concerned, it is neither here nor there whether the poet is present. What is essential to mimesis is that the poet creates an appearance *other* than an appearance of himself.¹⁵ True, he does this by changing his own behavior, but the poet-performer's manipulation of his own body and voice is simply the means by which he creates his mimetic effect.

This is, of course, what we find out in Book X is the poet's craft—he makes appearances by means other than the standard route of appearing (596e). I do not mean to deny that in Book X, unlike in Book III, Socrates emphasizes the peculiar ontological status of a mimetic appearance. It is at a “third remove” from what is by nature (597e; 599a; 602c); its manufacture is completely divorced from any epistemological connection to reality (597e–598b; 601c–602a; not only is the product of mimesis at a third remove from reality, but the imitator himself is at a third remove from the truth, 597e, 599d). This analysis is far more robust metaphysically and epistemologically than anything attempted in Book III, even if it does leave many important questions unanswered about what it means for something to be an appearance.¹⁶ Still, as we have seen, even in Book III mimesis is grasped by contrast with making something truthful or real. Thus it seems fair to regard the later discussion as an amplification of the conception of mimesis already introduced earlier. Indeed, the Book X discussion seems to presuppose (rather than to prove) that mimesis is appearance-making. For example, Socrates argues that a person who paints a couch makes an appearance; and, for that reason, Glaucon says that he should be called an imitator of a couch rather than a maker (596e–597e). Nor does Socrates ever argue that poems are appearances; that is

¹⁴ Presumably we should offer a similar account of what happens when a poet tells a story in which he himself is a figure speaking in direct speech. Plato would have been aware of such a case in *Odyssey* 8 where there is a blind bard who sings a song about the events at Troy and who bears an uncanny resemblance to Homer.

¹⁵ Compare the use of *mimēisthai* in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, a passage often cited in discussions of the meaning of *mimēsis*. Here, too, mimesis is not simply a matter of acting like another, but crucially involves making an audience believe that the speaker is someone other than the performer. (Contrast Nehamas [1982] 1999, 258–260.) When the Delian maidens sing songs about the past, “they can imitate the tongues of all men and their clattering speech: each would say that he himself were singing, so close to the truth is their sweet song” (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 160–164).

¹⁶ For example, does an appearance need to be a sensible phenomenon or is it a broader phenomenon including anything that in any way *seems*? Are appearances inevitably deceptive or do cases of illusion simply provide clear cases of the distinction between appearance and reality?

taken for granted. How can he leave such an important premise without a defense?¹⁷ In part, of course, it is simply obvious that poetic performances are not the real thing by comparison with actual virtuous actions. But it is also important that he has already established, in Book III, that insofar as poems are narrated mimetically, the poet aims to make his speech appear to be the speech of someone other than himself.

It might be objected that the conception of mimesis must differ in Books III and X because the former classifies only some poems as mimetic whereas the latter is intended to be a comprehensive account of all poetry and, indeed, of painting as well. If everything Homer creates is mimetic in the sense elucidated in Book X (viz., as appearance) but only some parts of his poems are mimetic in the sense elucidated in Book III (viz., as narrated in direct discourse), then the conceptions of mimesis must differ. Related to this, Socrates allows for a non-mimetic sort of narration in Book III, but what could be the equivalent non-mimetic use of color in painting?¹⁸

These arguments assume that the discussion of mimetic narration in Book III is intended to be a comprehensive account of mimesis. However, when Socrates says at 393c that “to make oneself like another in voice or posture (*schêma*) is to imitate the person one makes oneself like,” he is not defining mimesis; he is pointing out that this sort of activity is a case of mimesis. (Indeed, it would be odd if Socrates did think he had given a comprehensive account of mimesis in Book III since, at the beginning of Book X, he professes still to be unclear what, in general, mimesis is (595c). The account of mimesis as appearance-making is intended to supply that lack.)

In general, mimesis is a form that a given medium can take. In Book III Socrates discusses mimesis as being, in the first instance, a form of speech (notice, it is a kind of *lexis*). Poets are able—through their choice of vocabulary, by the way they use pronouns—to create the effect of speech

¹⁷ Janaway (1995, 124–125) worries about this and claims that the argument running from 598d–602b is intended to establish this point. However, the point of that argument is to show that not even good poets, such as Homer, are guided by genuine knowledge. That is to say, the point is to show, not that poems are at a third remove from reality, but that poets are at a third remove from the truth. In brief, Socrates’ thought is that if Homer really did have knowledge (and if, therefore, his poetry-making were guided by knowledge) he would have followers who genuinely did good deeds rather than merely seeming to. In other words, his argument depends on the idea that Homeric performances are only appearances by contrast with genuine human action, it does not prove it.

¹⁸ Annas (1981), 95; 336–338.

belonging to someone else.¹⁹ But speech is not the only medium of mimesis—even in Book III Socrates suggests that a person can create a mimetic image not only with his voice, but also with his bodily posture (*kata schêma mimeisthai*, 393c). And indeed he goes on to suggest that weaving, embroidery, and architecture may also, in their grace or lack thereof, imitate character (401a, *mimêmata*). From the point of view of Book III, there should be nothing surprising in Socrates' suggestion in Book X that colored paint may also be a medium of mimesis (in paintings).²⁰ For we have already seen in this book that it is possible to fashion imitations in media other than the human body or voice. This is an important point. If, in Book III, mimesis is essentially impersonation, what can Socrates mean by saying, in this very discussion, that weaving and embroidery are mimetic products? We have two choices. Either we can say that, not only does the meaning of mimesis shift between Books III and X, but that it shifts within Book III itself.²¹ Or we can say that Plato thinks that it is fairly obvious that the meaning of mimesis, as described with respect to narration, can be applied to other art forms as well. The latter option seems to me to be preferable: (1) in Book III Socrates *does* introduce mimetic narration as a form of appearance-making; (2) this conception of mimesis can be extended to weaving and embroidery and so, in taking this option, we avoid attributing to him an entirely unexplained sense of mimesis in Book III; and (3) the instances of mimesis described in Book III all fall under the general account of mimesis as appearance-making offered in Book X.

There is an important corollary to this point: even though poetry that makes use of simple narration is not mimetic *in that sense*, it may nevertheless be mimetic in some other sense. Plato thinks that there are aspects

¹⁹ *Lexis* refers to the poet's composition of words, not their delivery. (Compare Aristotle's use of *lexis* in the *Poetics* (chapters 20–22) to refer to metaphor, borrowing foreign words, etc.). Thus Plato is not talking about whatever vocal effects a rhapsode or actor might add in performing those words. *Contra* Burnyeat (1999, 267–268; cf. 279) Chryses' speech in the *Iliad* will be an example of mimetic narration whether he reads it to his daughter with a quavering voice or not.

²⁰ Some people worry that there is no equivalent in painting to indirect (i.e. non-mimetic) speech (e.g. Annas 1981, 95; 336–338). However, there is a non-mimetic use of color in painting: a line drawing has a color, but the color is not mimetic. It is true that a painting is always mimetic in some respect of other. However, this does not mark a difference between painting and poetry. As I will explain below, the only reason simple narration can be poetic, in Plato's view, is that it is mimetic in some other respect, e.g. its meter. Nowhere in Book III does Socrates suggest that pure narrative poetry is composed entirely without mimesis; it is non-mimetic only in respect of its narration.

²¹ Janaway's solution (1995, 102).

of a poem other than its narrative form which are mimetic, in particular its meter and musical accompaniment. There is, for example, a musical mode that “imitates (*mimêsaito*) the vocal sounds and tones of a courageous person engaged in battle or in other work that he is forced to do” (399a). Likewise, the dactylic meter—the meter of the *Iliad*—is “warlike,” “heroic,” and “characteristic of an orderly and courageous life” (399a–400b). Thus even if a story were told through simple narration, and thus the person who seems to speak is the one who speaks, it would nevertheless be mimetic if it were set to verse. Presumably in this case, although the poet’s *narration* would not create an appearance at odds with reality, the rhythm and mode of his song would. Socrates does not explain how exactly rhythm creates an appearance, but perhaps he has in mind that hearing the description of a battle in a martial rhythm makes it seem as if we are somehow witnesses at the scene.²² Thus from the fact that there are some poems that are not mimetic when it comes to narration, it simply does not follow that there is any poetry that is utterly non-mimetic.

The fact that meter is mimetic is especially telling because Socrates appears to assume that meter is the hallmark of poetry. For example, when he recasts part of the *Iliad* into simple narration, he says that he will not speak in meter since he is not a poet (393d).²³ The implication is that if he were to speak as a poet, he would speak metrically. Since, as we learn later, meter is mimetic, Socrates would thereby be engaged in mimesis even though narrating in the simple style. Thus we should not interpret Socrates’ rejection of the dramatic mimetic *kind* of poetry,

²² See *Ion* 535c where Socrates says that it seems to both Ion and his audience that they are witnesses of the events at Troy. Barker (2005, chap. 1) argues that the likeness between musical modes and the various *harmoniai* in the soul is much more literal than we might have expected. Both souls and the strings of a lyre have parts which can be proportioned in the same ratios. Barker’s work strikes me as being very important, but at the moment I cannot see how a lyre attuned in a certain ratio manages also to create an appearance of a soul “attuned” in the same way; and for the reasons I have already given, appearance-making is central to the conception of mimesis on display in *Republic* III.

²³ Cf. *Phaedrus* 258d8–11: “should we question someone . . . who has written in meter, like a poet, or without meter, like an ordinary person (*idiôtês*)?”; *Phaedo* 61b where Socrates says that he has “made poems” (*epoiousa*) of Aesop’s fables. Presumably what he means is that he has set them to verse (as Grube translates). Aristotle, on the other hand, devotes considerable effort to arguing that meter is independent of poetry but is instead a medium (as is color) in which mimetic creation may or may not occur (*Poetics* 1). It would be interesting to know how Plato would respond to Aristotle’s argument that Empedocles is not a poet despite having written hexameters. At any rate, Aristotle’s insistence on this point suggests that in his view it is one which has not yet been grasped—evidence that, in his view, Plato was among the number of those who carelessly identify poetic speech with metered speech.

either in Book III or in Book X, as the rejection of mimesis.²⁴ If Socrates banned mimesis from the ideal city, he would have to ban poetry altogether, and this is something he evidently does not do. (See 607a where Socrates allows only “hymns to the gods and eulogies of good people,” not to mention the fact that throughout the *Republic* it is assumed that guardians receive a musical-poetic education, e.g. 403c, 410a, 424b–d, 429e–430b, 457a, 522a.)

In summary, then, Socrates does not offer a general account of mimesis in Book III. Instead, he describes one aspect of the poet’s mimetic activity—mimesis in narrative *lexis*—and invites us to extend that notion of mimesis to other aspects of poetic mimesis (viz. meter and mode) and to other, non-poetic sorts of mimesis (viz. embroidery, weaving). In the paradigm case, narration, mimesis is characterized by the poet’s attempt to make his words seem to the audience to be spoken by someone else. That is to say, mimesis as introduced in *Republic* III is an activity of appearance-making. As we will see, Socrates believes that this activity alters the psyche of the poet-performer over time. But the vagaries of the poet’s body and soul are not definitive of mimesis or its success. Indeed, so far as the psyche goes, the psychological effect essential to mimesis is an effect in the audience.

2. *Mimesis and Psychological Transformation*

Narrating through mimesis is a matter of telling a story in such a way as to create the appearance that the person speaking is one of the characters in the story rather than the poet-performer. Central to Socrates’ concern in Book III is that the poet achieves this effect by “likening himself” to (*homoiooun heauton*, 393c; cf. *aphomoiooun hautous*, 396a) and “making himself an image” of (*apeikazein*, 396d) the character he portrays. In other words, the poet-performer himself is the medium of the appearance he creates. Socrates worries that if the young guardians

²⁴ This mistake would be easy to make since Socrates often says that the ideal city will ban imitators, full stop (e.g. 394e). Why does he speak of imitation “full stop” when referring to this unbridled, dramatic form of imitation? Presumably this is because he believes that drama is the inevitable outcome of the urge to imitate if that urge is given free reign and not controlled by the sort of laws he describes in Books II–III. Or, as Aristotle would say, drama is the *telos* of mimesis (compare the similar view in *Poetics* 4). So I agree with Halliwell that all poetry is mimetic (2002, 51 n.35), but unlike him I do not think there are different senses of *mimesis* in Book III, but believe rather that there are different respects in which a poem may be mimetic.

repeatedly engage in likenesses of shameful actions as part of mimetic performance, then they “will develop a taste for the real thing from imitating it. Or haven’t you noticed that imitations, if they are practiced much past youth, get established in the habits and nature of body, tones of voice, and mind?” (395c–d).

Just what is involved in mimetic likening of oneself to another? I have suggested that it involves altering only those aspects of oneself which present an appearance to an audience. But according to many scholars, Plato goes further: as Penelope Murray writes, “[in Book III] mimesis involve[s] a deep identification on the part of the imitator with the object of his imitation” and dramatic poet-performers, in Giovanni Ferrari’s words, “take on the perspective of a multiplicity of characters.”²⁵ In other words, many readers assume that, according to Plato, when a person imitates, he attempts not only to liken his outward appearance but also his emotions, beliefs, and point of view on the world to that of the character he portrays.²⁶ This interpretation is natural (although certainly not required) if one conceives of mimesis as impersonation. If the goal of mimesis is to become like (rather than simply to seem like) the person imitated, why limit one’s self-assimilation to the body?²⁷

However, there is no direct evidence that, in Plato’s view, poet-performers liken their souls or subjective experience to the object of their mimesis. On the contrary, he says explicitly that it is the poet-performer’s voice (*phônê*) and posture (*schêma*, 393c), words (*logoi*) and deeds (*ergoi*, 396a) that are shaped in the pattern of the character imitated. He never says that these outward actions are matched by a corresponding likening

²⁵ Murray (1996), 6; Ferrari (1990), 117.

²⁶ We should limit “identification” to this sort of “deep identification” when discussing the experience of poetry. If the claim that poetry invites identification with its characters is to be of any interest, it must mean something more than that it invites us to understand the values, beliefs, and feelings of the characters and, in that sense, know what the world “looks like” to them, since understanding like this is necessary for any interpretation of another person’s action and cannot be special to the experience of poetry. I would also argue that the fact audiences and performers react emotionally to poetic characters is not yet sufficient reason to say that they have identified with them in any strong or interesting sense. In general, we do not need to imagine being another person in order to pity him. I feel sad when my baby cries and do so directly, without imagining what the world looks like to him—a very difficult thing to imagine given that he is only a year old! But this point requires more argument than I can give here.

²⁷ Nehamas ([1982] 1999) who argues that the core meaning of mimesis in Book III is “acting like” another, believes that Plato’s argument in this book depends on equivocating between the two senses of this phrase: trying to seem like another and trying to be like another.

of the poet's soul to the soul of the figure he imitates. This is important because, for Plato, one of the dangers of mimesis is that outward appearance *does not necessarily* correspond to inner reality.

Nevertheless, it may seem that there is important indirect support for the interpretation of mimesis as subjective self-likening. Socrates says that practicing the imitation of a type of character instills "the habits and nature of body, tone of voice, *and mind*" characteristic of that type (395d, emphasis added). Where do these habits of mind come from? According to the now-standard interpretation, they develop the same way that habits of body and voice do, through the practice of mimetic likenesses. In this case, they are the likenesses of the character's inner life. The idea seems to be that the poet, the first imitator, imagines himself as being the characters he imitates and thereby transmits this psychological condition to the performers and audience, the later links in the poetic chain. In other words, according to the standard interpretation, the poet's imaginative identification with a character he portrays is the necessary first step in the child's habituation into that character-type. Thus, according to Stephen Halliwell, "understanding a character 'from the inside' . . . is precisely what Plato fears about the mimetic mode in *Republic* 3".²⁸ The psychological result of participating in mimesis seems to indicate that the poet and performer achieve their mimetic effect by imagining themselves as the characters they represent.

I will return in the next section to the issue of how, according to Plato, mimesis provides moral training. But first, we should be clear that *if* he does believe that mimesis requires psychological assimilation on the part of the poet-performer to the character he imitates, that view would be unique to the *Republic*. To be sure, the idea that the poet undergoes some kind of psychological transformation which he then passes on to performer and audience is, without doubt, Platonic. We are told in the *Phaedrus* and the *Ion* that poets and rhapsodes are possessed with a divine madness that drives them out of their everyday minds (*Phaedrus* 245a, *Ion* 535e–536d); this possession makes them think they are really witnessing the scenes they describe (*Ion* 535c) and so, if the scene is terrifying they quake with fear and if it's sad, they feel sad too (*Ion* 535c). Then, like an iron ring magnetized by the Muses, they pass on their divine enthusiasm to the audience. Notice, however, that Socrates does not describe the psychological state of the poet and performer as one

²⁸ Halliwell (2002), 80.

of immersion in or identification with the characters' points of view. In fact, the context of the *Ion* suggests that the enthusiasm amounts to adopting the perspective of a *witness*.²⁹ As Socrates says explicitly at 535c: "Doesn't your soul, in its enthusiasm, believe that it is present at the actions you describe, whether they're in Ithaca or in Troy or wherever the epic actually takes place?"³⁰ Recall, the guiding question of the dialogue is the rhapsode's epistemic condition. Clearly, the rhapsode is not in fact an eyewitness of the events he describes. And as Socrates points out, when Ion weeps and shouts he is in fact in the midst of an adoring crowd (535d). Nor does Ion have any general understanding of the subjects Homeric characters discuss. If Ion has neither experience nor general understanding, how is he able to speak so well about Homer's thought? Socrates' solution is that the rhapsode (and before him, the poet) are possessed by the Muses with the (divinely inspired) impression of seeing it all firsthand along with suitable words to describe their experience. And the audience, in turn, is made to feel that they too see the events at Troy unfolding before their eyes. The psychological transformation, then, seems to be into that of a spectator.

The point is that although Plato does describe the vicissitudes of the poet's mental states in other dialogues, he does not describe the poet as coming to inhabit or identify with his characters. Thus the *Ion* and *Phaedrus* do not support the standard interpretation of the *Republic*. Furthermore, as we have seen, Socrates says nothing at all in the *Republic* about how the poet feels when he speaks mimetically.³¹ The difference between mimetic and plain narration is not in what the poet imagines, but in the appearance he attempts to create for the audience. He is attempting to appear as someone other than who he is. Keeping in mind that mimesis is, in the first instance, a matter of creating an appearance prevents our adopting an interpretation of Platonic mimesis that is unduly focused on the subjective experience of the poet. Plato does not use 'mimesis' to refer to a transformation of the poet's (or performer's) subjective experience. In particular, he does not suggest that a poet's imitating, say, Achilles amounts to or involves adopting Achilles' perspective in his (the poet's) imagination. It may well be that poets sometimes try to imagine what it's like to be the character they portray.

²⁹ Burnyeat (1999, 265–266) makes a similar point.

³⁰ Woodruff's translation in Cooper (1997).

³¹ By contrast, in Book X he does discuss at length the way the non-performing audience of tragedy feels.

Imaginatively inhabiting his point of view might be a useful technique for writing his character. But there is no reason to think that *this* act of imagination is essential to mimesis as Plato conceives it.³² The poet is not so much interested in Achilles' subjectivity as he is in the figure Achilles cuts.³³ Given that this is so, it makes much more sense to think of the mimetic poet as concerned not with what is going on in *Achilles'* mind, but what goes on in *the audience's* mind when they see or hear Achilles. For what he is trying to create is an appearance that will be taken by its audience to be an appearance of Achilles. What he must imagine, then, is what it is like to see or to hear such a person from a third person perspective . . . the perspective of the audience.³⁴

3. *Mimesis and Moral Education*

I have shown that there is no positive evidence that, according to Plato, mimesis requires the poet or performer to "take on the perspective" of the character he portrays. Nevertheless, Socrates clearly believes that

³² *Contra* Ferrari (1990), 108–109; 116–117; Halliwell (2002), 51–54, 75–76; Murray: "There [Book III] mimesis involved a deep identification on the part of the imitator with the object of his imitation . . .," (1996, 6; cf. 168, 170).

³³ Notice that I am not here accepting the view that Homeric characters have no inner life. Even when the drama portrayed by a poet is internal and psychological, he may still be interested in how this internal drama looks (or would look) to an observer (e.g. to a close friend or, in modern times, to a therapist) rather than in recreating the first-person experience of the character in question.

³⁴ Halliwell thinks this is the view of Book X, though not of Book III (2002, 81). Interestingly, this is precisely the advice Aristotle gives to poets at *Poetics* 17: "When constructing plots and working them out complete with linguistic expression, one should so far as possible visualize what is happening. By envisaging things very vividly in this way, *as if one were actually present at the events themselves*, one can find out what is appropriate, and inconsistencies are least likely to be overlooked" (Heath 1996 translation). It is perhaps worth pointing out that imagining oneself as a witness to pitiable and fearful events suffices to elicit pity and fear. So the fact that the audience is emotionally engaged in drama and may even sympathize with the characters does not imply that they imagine themselves to be the pitiable characters in question.

Ferrari claims that, according to Plato, the poet enacts and imaginatively becomes the characters he represents *in order to see the world from their point of view* (pp. 116–117). In other words, Ferrari's view of mimesis as enactment depends crucially on his view that poets engage in mimesis as a route to knowledge. But Plato gives no evidence that this is the poet's motive or that anybody thought it was (although of course the *audience* tends to think that *they* can acquire knowledge from poetry). Rather, the Platonic poet's motive seems to be to give the audience pleasure. This is clear in the *Gorgias* 501d–502d; the case can be made that this is Plato's view in the *Republic* as well, but that would take us too far afield for this essay.

it has a psychological effect: over time, it establishes “habits of mind” (395d). How does mimesis inculcate an ethical outlook unless it involves practicing a point of view? In this section I want to propose an answer that is both grounded in the text of the *Republic* and plausible in its own right. The ready availability of this alternative will, I hope, confirm once and for all the conclusion of the previous section: mimetic narration as Plato understands it does not essentially involve the poet-performer in an act of imaginatively adopting the perspective of his characters. The method of acting which he has in mind is not method-acting.

Plato says very little in the *Republic* about how repeated mimesis has an educative effect. He has Socrates mention in one sentence that it does shape the child’s thought (*dianoia*, 395d) and has Adeimantus readily agree, as if this is supposed to be something everyone already knows. Perhaps because he has not yet introduced the complex psychology of Book IV, Plato does not explain in any detail the psychological mechanism by which this occurs. However, he does say that repeatedly imitating a certain type of character will lead children to enjoy (*apolausôsin*) the reality being imitated (395c). In other words, pleasure in appearing to act and speak in a certain way will, over time, lead one to take pleasure in really acting and speaking that way.

What I suggest is that this pattern of gratification (and displeasure) in certain outward actions is the habit of mind which repeated mimesis instills. The habit of mind created by imitating Achilles is not (at least not necessarily) the ethical outlook which the poet-performer imagines to be Achilles’. Rather, the habit he acquires is the habit of enjoying acting in a proud, insubordinate, and brutal way. To see the difference, it suffices to notice that the performer may not think that Achilles himself enjoys his violence. He may think, for example, that since his desecration of Hector’s body is motivated by grief, a painful emotion, that Achilles takes no pleasure in what he does. (The performer may well be wrong about this, of course, and I suspect that in this case Plato would think he would be.)³⁵ Thus, if the mimesis of Achilles *did* require the performer to temporarily adopt what he takes to be Achilles’ point of view, he (the performer) would not try to mimic pleasant feelings. And yet, for all

³⁵ It was a trope of archaic poetry to attribute to poetry the sweetness of honey and the power to gratify our “hunger for tears”. But Homer, for example, in the scenes of epic performance at Alcinous’ palace (*Odyssey* VIII) distinguishes the pain of a real life participant in tragic events and the pleasure an audience feels in hearing about those events in poetry and song. I thank Rana Saadi Liebert for this reference and for illuminating discussion of these issues.

that, the performer himself might enjoy acting like Achilles, might enjoy (seeming to) take the fullest possible revenge against an enemy. Plato's thought, as I understand it, is that repeatedly playing Achilles will train a child to take pleasure in Achilles-like behavior and will in this way shape the child's character.³⁶ Not only will he develop habits of bodily comportment but, worse, he will develop habits of desire.

It might seem incredible, and incredibly unfair to poetry, to suggest that merely by repeating the motions of a performance a person will come to take pleasure in similar actions. Doesn't it matter what attitude the performer has to the character he portrays? Isn't repetition, of mimesis or anything else, just as likely to create aversion?³⁷ In fact, Plato seems to agree. Socrates suggests that the specifically mimetic aspect of poetry depends for its transformative effect on the child-performer's taking his characters seriously. At least, he does not believe that all direct dialogue of bad characters is harmful to the guardians. So long as a bad character, such as Thersites, is clearly marked as ridiculous (and hence contemptible), Socrates is willing to let the young guardians speak in his voice (396e).³⁸ It is only when performers enact their characters "in seriousness" that their souls are in danger (396d, 397a). (This is an important point: Socrates' admission of comic mimesis into education demonstrates that he does not think all mimesis involves or leads to identification with its object. For if he did, comedy would be as dangerous as tragedy.)³⁹ It is not entirely clear what it means to take mimesis

³⁶ In support of this interpretation, note the parallel in the *Laws*. There, Plato makes it clearer than he does in the *Republic* that it is the pleasure people take in what they imitate that facilitates the effect music and poetry have on character (655d–656b); a well-educated person is one who has been trained to take pleasure in the right songs and, consequently, the actions portrayed in those songs (653b–654d).

³⁷ Being made to practice the piano in my childhood did not, alas, cause me to enjoy playing the piano.

³⁸ Ferrari reads this passage as evidence that laughter can interrupt the activity of identification typical of mimesis (1995, 118; so also Halliwell 2002, 83). I agree that laughter inoculates children from the bad effects of mimesis, but clearly it does not impede or interrupt the mimesis itself (since otherwise there would be no dramatic portrayal of the comic character at all). Thus, if laughter *does* prevent identification, as Ferrari suggests, that proves that identification is not constitutive of or necessary for mimesis.

³⁹ In fact, Socrates criticizes the ethical effect of comedy, too, in the *Philebus* 48a–50b. But there, the (baleful) effect of comedy depends on the fact that the audience does *not* identify with the characters imitated. On the contrary, Socrates argues that comedy teaches us to distance ourselves from and hold in contempt people we ought to regard as "our own" neighbors and friends. This also supports my point: comedy is mimetic but does not involve (in this case) the audience identifying with its characters.

seriously, but presumably admiring the characters one portrays is one way of doing so.⁴⁰ This is why Socrates takes such pains to reform the depiction of gods and heroes, for he believes that children will naturally view them as role models (388d). Since Achilles is glorious, he will seem to children to be in the right when he ranks any sort of life, no matter how servile, as better than death (386c). Or, to take another example, since Odysseus is a man of wide and heroic experience, he will seem to speak wisely when he says that the best thing of all “is when the tables are well laden with bread and meat, and the wine-bearer draws wine from the mixing bowl, brings it, and pours it in the cups” (390a–b). The scenes of Odysseus meeting Achilles in the underworld or feasting with Alcinous will need to be censored regardless of whether they are narrated mimetically or not. But precisely because they are about heroes, their mimetic portrayal is especially noxious. Not because mimesis inevitably involves identification, but because mimesis of *these* characters affords children the opportunity to practice and delight in seeming to be (a distorted vision of) the sort of person they very much would like to become.⁴¹

I have suggested a model of how repeated mimesis instills “habits of mind” that does not rely on the idea that mimesis involves trying to think and feel like the characters one imitates. The child admires or otherwise takes seriously the character he plays and so takes pleasure in making himself appear like that admired figure. Over time, he develops habits of desire and enjoyment in acting like that. Although the child may long to act like his poetic heroes “in real life,” his action at this point can only be less than the genuine article. For one thing, he is unlikely to find himself in situations where genuine, adult heroic action is appropriate. His youth limits him to merely “playing at” being a hero. But also, and more important, even if the child desires to do the sorts of things heroes do, he cannot (according to Plato) understand the reasons why such actions are good, for reason has not yet developed. Thus the child, due to his immaturity, can only act-*like* a hero; that is to say, he can only create the appearance of heroic action. He must await the coming of reason before he really acts *as* the hero does, that is to say, as does the

⁴⁰ In the *Protagoras*, it is assumed that repetition of Homer’s mimesis inculcates virtue because children admire his heroes (326a).

⁴¹ I have here treated ‘serious imitation’ as equivalent to ‘admiring imitation’, but this cannot be quite correct. It is hard to imagine that the tragic poet *admires* all the things he imitates—including winds, dogs, birds (397a)—even though, Socrates says, he is *serious* in his imitation.

virtuous person who is ruled by reason. Still, the non-rational habit of mind developed by poetic mimesis is, according to Plato, a first step in the development of virtue:

Anyone who has been properly trained will quickly notice if something has been omitted from a thing or if that thing has not been well crafted or well grown. And, *since he feels distaste correctly*, he will praise fine things, be pleased by them, take them into his soul, and, through being nourished by them, become fine and good. . . . And because he has been so trained, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.⁴² (401e–402a, emphasis added)

Good poetic training gives one good taste which, in turn, leads one to pursue pleasures that reinforce that training. This settled predilection for the right things will harmonize with and support reason's judgment that what we happen to desire is, in fact, desirable.

But what if the mimetic training is not good? What if, in addition to imitating admirable heroes, a child imitates, in all seriousness, cowards, lowly craftsmen, and a multitude of other characters? (This poetry which narrates a wide variety of characters mimetically is what Plato calls the 'mixed style' (397d). Homeric epic and tragedy are examples.) Plato's description of the ill effects of the typical Greek education in Homeric poetry might at first seem consistent with the interpretation of mimesis which I have rejected. Socrates censors poetry which narrates anything in all seriousness (397a) on the grounds that it will make children "twofold or manifold" (397d) rather than citizens who do only one work, as the laws of the ideal city require. Is not the point that the dramatic style of poetry, by training children to practice the habits of mind of many characters, turns them into people who really do see the world as both shoemakers and ship's captains, farmers and jurors, soldiers and moneymakers do (397e)? So, for example, since they have practiced the habits of feeling and thought typical of a shoemaker, they want to make shoes, are mindful of the appropriate moments for tanning hides and building lasts, and are on the lookout for the latest fashions; and since they have practiced the habits of feeling and thought typical of a ship's captain, they long for the open waters, discuss naval strategy with their friends, and prepare themselves for battle.

⁴² ἂν τις ὀρθῶς τραφῆ, εἰ δὲ μή, τοῦναντίον; καὶ ὅτι αὐτῶν παραλειπομένων καὶ μὴ καλῶς δημιουργηθέντων ἢ μὴ καλῶς φύντων δέξεται ἂν αἰσθάνοιτο ὃ ἐκεῖ τραφεῖς ὡς ἔδει, καὶ ὀρθῶς δὴ δυσχεραίνων τὰ μὲν καλὰ ἐπαινοῖ καὶ χαίρει καὶ καταδεχόμενος εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν τρέφοιτ' ἂν ἅπ' αὐτῶν καὶ γίγνοιτο καλὸς τε κάγαθός, . . . ἐλθόντος δὲ τοῦ λόγου ἀσπάξοιτ' ἂν αὐτὸν γνωρίζων δι' οἰκειότητα μάλιστα ὁ οὕτω τραφεῖς.

Two points of Plato's characterization of the effect of bad poetic education cast doubt on this interpretation, however. First, Socrates does not fully explain what it means to be 'twofold' or 'manifold'. Rather, he gives examples, such as 'a ship's captain who also makes shoes' and 'a money maker who also soldiers' (397e). But it is notable that the poet of the bad, multifariously mimetic poetry is himself an example of the manifold character which this poetry creates.⁴³ Socrates says that this poet is able to "become multifarious" and that for that reason "there is no man like him in our city and it is not in accord with divine law for there to be one" (398a). Since the context suggests that this divine law is the law that each person should do only one job, Socrates is suggesting here that the poet of unbridled mimesis is himself the manifold man. However, the poet does not *really* want to live as both a shoemaker and a ship's captain. Indeed, he doesn't even want to appear *as* multiple; rather, he wants multiply to appear now as shoemaker, now as ship's captain. This at least raises the question whether the manifold man created by bad poetry is someone who genuinely has the habits of mind characteristic of a multitude of people—assuming this possibility is even conceivable—or whether he is rather, like the poet, someone who merely appears to be a multitude of people and has a habit of mind that is something quite other than any one of them.

Second, although Plato does not directly describe the inner life of the manifold man, he does describe in more detail the condition of soul brought on by multifarious mimesis. The psychological effect of this style of poet which he emphasizes is not a kaleidoscopic rotation through various points of view. It is, rather, intemperance, a determination to do as one pleases; an inability or unwillingness to resist the pleasures that conflict with the work one ought to do. Throughout the *Republic* Plato associates the variety typical of Homeric epic and tragedy with unbridled appetitiveness. For example, although citizens in the healthy "city of pigs" sing hymns,⁴⁴ dramatic poetry arrives on the scene only when the citizenry is gripped by a fever for "couches, tables, and other furniture, and relishes, of course, and incense, perfumes, prostitutes, pastries—and the multifariousness (*pantodapa*) of each of them . . . painting and

⁴³ Although I do not agree with Burnyeat about what precisely it is to be manifold in the way that the poet is, I agree with him entirely that becoming like the manifold poet is Plato's fear for the young guardians (1999, 271–274).

⁴⁴ Judging by extant hymns, these hymns would include mimesis but (being limited to the portrayal of gods and heroes and being properly censored in their content) would not be in the dramatic style.

embroidery (*poikilian*)” (373a). Later, after banning the dramatic style of poetry, Socrates compares a complex diet, rich in pastries to “polyharmonic songs and odes that make use of every sort of rhythm” and says that with respect to musical education “complexity (*poikilia*) engendered intemperance . . . whereas simplicity in musical training engenders temperance in the soul” (404d–e). In other words, the habit of mind inculcated by bad poetic education is a habit of wayward and excessive desire for pleasure.

There is no obvious way that the standard interpretation, in terms of imaginative or psychological assimilation, can account for Plato’s claim that the psychic effect of mimesis is either temperance or intemperance. On that interpretation, children must become intemperate by practicing seeing the world in intemperate ways. But it seems at best a matter of contingent fact that the various characters portrayed in mimetic dialogue will be portrayed enjoying multifarious pleasures. And in any case, why pick on the pleasures of these characters? Shouldn’t identification with them school us equally in their (various and inconsistent) fears, angers, and sorrows? On my account, however, the focus on pleasure is perfectly understandable, for the idea is that acting like Achilles or any other character we take seriously is, simply, fun; and that the person who imitates a multitude of characters has fun acting in a variety of ways which, taken as a whole, are inconsistent. It is plausible to think, with Plato, that it is but a short step from the multiplicity of one’s habits of pleasure to intemperate inconstancy with respect to the one work one ought to do.

The inconstancy of the manifold person’s actions marks them as appearances in the following way. Although such a person seems to be a cobbler when he makes shoes, his neglect the next day of the demands of the shoemaking craft reveals that he is not, in fact a cobbler, a person his fellow-citizens can rely upon to perform a socially necessary task and who dedicates himself to filling this social role well. Or, to take another example, if a person exercises and watches his diet, he may seem to us to be an athlete; but if, next week, he eats lots of sweets and stays in bed instead of practicing with the team, we will conclude that he is not an athlete after all, but only seemed to be. Inconstant actions, therefore, are akin to the poet-performer’s appearance-making. Plato’s thought is that the dramatic style of narration, with its unbridled mimesis, trains children to enjoy this sort of ersatz-action.

Now, the child who is exposed only to the mimesis of good characters will also learn to take pleasure in appearances. But since the appearance

of a good person is the only appearance-making he is allowed to enjoy, this pleasure will be consistent with genuine action. There will be space in his personality for the development of reason to situate the child's love of seeming-brave (for example) in a practical context aimed at and guided by reality. What was in childhood merely playing can be transformed in adulthood into genuine action. Better still, the aspect of the adult's soul that remains childlike, delighting in mere appearances, will be able to enjoy the genuine action which reason recommends. Such an adult will have been trained in childhood to enjoy seeming to do what reason says must genuinely be done. That is to say, his poetic training will have made him temperate.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

POETS AND MIMESIS IN THE *REPUBLIC*

JERA MARUŠIČ

1. *Introduction*

The picture of poets as *mimêtai* dominates in the second discussion of poetry in the *Republic*, yet it at the same time appears puzzling both in itself and in relation to the discussion of *mimêsis* attributed to poets in Book III: it is neither obvious in what sense, for example, Homer's poetry as a whole should be considered as *mimêsis*, nor, on the other hand, how this characterisation of it can be reconciled with the account in Book III, according to which Homer engages in *mimêsis* only when he impersonates one character or another about whom he narrates. The notion of the poets' *mimêsis* in the two discussions, and the problems arising from it, are the main subjects of this chapter.

In order to outline these problems, it may for the moment be sufficient to define *mimêsis* as representation or imitation, *i.e.* doing something by imitating something else: later on, the notion of *mimêsis* will be considered in more detail. Now, as becomes immediately obvious, in different arguments in the *Republic*, even within Book III alone, it is not one and the same activity, but various activities of poets that are characterised as *mimêsis*. Here, as is often the case in the dialogues, the activity of performing (reciting, singing, playing an instrument, dancing) is not viewed as separate from that of composing, but instead as part of it. As first suggested in Book III, in that a poet speaks 'as if he were' (393a and c), *i.e.* impersonates, one individual or another about whom he narrates, a poet engages in a *mimêsis* of this individual, that is, he represents or imitates, him: for example, Homer engages in a *mimêsis* of Chryses soon after the beginning of the *Iliad*, when he impersonates Chryses imploring the Achaeans to release his daughter, whereas just before that, Homer narrates as Homer, that is without engaging in *mimêsis* of Chryses or of any other individual about whom he is narrating.

The other activity of poets that is characterised as *mimêsis* in Book III is musical composing. According to the account the interlocutors associate with the musicologist Damon, musical composing and performing are

viewed as *mimêsis* of various characters and modes of conduct (courageous, cowardly, orderly, frantic; 398d–e, 399a, 399e–400b).¹ However, this *mimêsis* can be easily distinguished from the *mimêsis* ‘through impersonation’ that has previously been attributed to poets. For while a poet engages in the former *mimêsis* through discourse, *i.e.* the *verbal* element of his activity (composing), he engages in the latter *mimêsis* through using harmony and rhythm, the two *musical* elements of his activity. For the same reason, the account of ‘musical’ mimesis does not interfere with the arguments about the poets’ *mimêsis* in Book X, for there again it is the poets’ verbal (and not musical) activity that is characterised as *mimêsis*. Given that the poets’ ‘musical’ *mimêsis* does not raise an interpretative problem of the kind addressed in this chapter, I shall leave it aside here.

By contrast, the characterisation of poets’ impersonating characters as *mimêsis* does interfere with arguments in Book X. For in the first, ‘epistemological’ argument of *Republic X* (595c–602b), by and large all poetry, viewed in its verbal aspect (*i.e.* as speaking or narrating), is characterised as *mimêsis*, and Homer’s poetry features as its most prominent example. Thus, for example, while according to Book III, Homer engages in *mimêsis* only occasionally (*i.e.* whenever he narrates ‘through’ impersonation), in the epistemological argument Homer’s entire activity of composing is characterised as *mimêsis*, evidently regardless of whether or not he composes through impersonation. Moreover, and importantly, while the *mimêsis* attributed to Homer in Book III was treated as such neutrally, now the characterisation of the activity by Homer and other poets as *mimêsis* is discrediting: for this characterisation, as we shall see, relies on the premise that poets lack knowledge of the matters they speak about. How, then, should this *mimêsis* by poets be understood, and how does it differ from the *mimêsis* consisting in impersonation, given that the two can occur, it seems, in the very same instance of a poet’s (verbal) composing, for example, in Homer’s narrating the story of the *Iliad*? The problem is in fact well known and widely studied. In what follows, I shall first aim to show in what way some prominent solutions to it are not satisfactory. I shall then attempt a different solution to the argument’s problems.

¹ Damon is mentioned at *Rep.* III, 400b and 400c and again at *Rep.* IV, 424c. In the *Laws*, an analogous account of music as *mimêsis* is presented as generally known and accepted (II, 668a, b–c); there, we also find a more precise account of harmony and rhythm, which *Republic III* lacks (II, 653d, 664e–665a). A technical definition of them is given at *Philebus* 17c–d.

2. *Solutions to the Question of the Poets' Mimêsis*

Given that, according to Book III, we must consider only some of the poets' verbal composing (*i.e.* through impersonation) as *mimêsis*, whereas following the epistemological argument in Book X, we must regard as *mimêsis* their (verbal) composing as such, the conclusion that has commonly been drawn is that the term *mimêsis* in the two books is used with different meanings, 'narrower' and 'wider'. This 'semantic' assumption concerning the term *mimêsis* in the two books underlies most of the solutions on the subject proposed by scholars. In *Republic III*, *mimêsis* would denote 'impersonation' or 'dramatic enactment', whereas in the context of *Republic X*, *mimêsis* would denote 'artistic representation or depiction'; this meaning, it seems, has been derived from the consideration that *mimêsis* is described there as the making of images and that both painters and poets are said to engage in it.² Such 'artistic presentation and depiction' would in the case of poetry consist in creating verbal images of objects, characters, their actions *etc.*, through narration. Following this interpretation, some scholars, for example Janaway and Giuliano, have identified the mimetic character attributed to poetry in *Republic X* with the 'fictionality' of the poets' discourse; poetry would be mimetic in that it creates its own world, as opposed to describing the real world.³ In Halliwell's view, moreover, the account in *Republic X* of poetry as *mimêsis* is not new, but is present elsewhere in the dialogues and draws upon an earlier tradition, which would already conceive of the poets' activity as a kind of 'artistic representation or depiction'.⁴ *Republic X* would thus 'merely' draw adverse conclusions from an already familiar conception of poetry: most importantly, *Republic X* would show that the (thus understood) mimetic nature of poetry renders it incapable of providing knowledge or attaining the truth.⁵

There are in my view several problems that these interpretations raise. First, we may object that in the very similar argument in the *Sophist* (233d–236c), the sophists' discourse is (on the assumption that sophists lack knowledge about the matters of which they speak) characterised as *mimêsis* and as a sort of 'image making' comparable with painting:

² Extensive accounts of this claim may be found in Halliwell (1998), 1–16 and Halliwell (2002), 37–71.

³ See Janaway (1995), 128; cf. 125–129 and Giuliano (2005), 75; cf. 74–77.

⁴ See Halliwell (1998), 7; cf. Halliwell (2002), 22.

⁵ See Halliwell (1998), 10 and Halliwell (2002), 59 and 64.

but surely ‘artistic representation’ or fictionality are not characteristic of sophists’ discourse and thus cannot be the reason for attributing a mimetic character to it. On the other hand, the ‘falsehood’ (*pseudos Rep.* II 377a) attributed to the poets’ narrations in *Republic* II, which in my view is to be interpreted indeed as ‘fictionality’ (or ‘inventedness’), is not characterized, or associated with, *mimêsis* there at all.

Another important problem I see in the interpretation of the poets’ *mimêsis* as verbal depiction or representation is the following. This interpretation seems to take the characterisation of poetry as *mimêsis* (whatever it may consist in) in *Republic* X as a neutral *observation* of some (possibly even generally acknowledged) feature of poetry. Whereas, in fact, this characterisation is offered there as a sort of (discrediting) *discovery* that yet *reveals* the true nature of the poets’ works, which is, by most people, namely those who highly value poets and their works, not perceived: as Socrates suggests, ‘it is necessary to examine’ whether the admirers of Homer and other poets ‘have been *deceived* by these *mimêtai*’ and ‘looking at their works *do not perceive* that these are at the third remove from what is true’—that is to say, that they are *mimêmata*—and that their works are not ‘true things, but appearances’ (*Rep.* X 598e–599a).⁶ The suggestion that poets must in fact be *mimêtai* is made only once it has been established that poets *cannot* have comprehensive knowledge concerning the subjects they (individually) speak about, since these subjects are too many and diverse, and therefore they *cannot* speak well about these subjects: it is *on the premise* that the poets’ activity does not rely on knowledge that it is characterised as *mimêsis* and is compared with making painted images instead of true things. Where exactly this similarity lies is, of course, a complex question, which will be addressed later on; but it is nonetheless clear, I believe, that the characterisation of poetry as *mimêsis* and ‘image making’ in *Republic* X is not at all presented as a generally known and accepted view, but rather as a provocative original suggestion. Thus, the case is not that the conclusion that poets are not able to ‘obtain any real hold on the truth’ or deliver ‘knowledge or wisdom’, is drawn from some generally accepted

⁶ According to the controversial ontological account presented, things such as plants, animals, men’s artefacts are at the second remove from what is true, while only forms—yet oddly, not forms of beautiful, large, and such, but forms of artefacts—are completely true. See Fine (1980) for a perceptive analysis of this account. However, the tri-level ontological picture does not seem to affect the discussion of poetry much, this being concerned only with the distinction between things themselves and *mimêmata* of them.

assumption that their ‘concern is with “appearances” and “simulacra”’;⁷ quite on the contrary, from the (independently established) assumption that poets cannot, and therefore do not, have knowledge about the variety of matters they speak about, it is concluded that their works must be ‘images’ and their activity *mimêsis* (although many people ‘do not perceive’ this).

Against the interpretations of the poets’ *mimêsis* in *Republic X* presented above, I thus agree with Annas that it is far from clear what this *mimêsis* consists in. Although Annas adheres to the common view that there is a shift in the concept of *mimêsis* from impersonation to ‘image making,’ she (unlike Halliwell) finds the characterisation of poetry as image making not only new (as opposed to traditional), but also unfounded and unconvincing.⁸ For similar reasons, Burnyeat rejects even the ‘semantic’ assumption of the shift of the concept of *mimêsis*: countering it, he aims to show that the kind of poetry under attack in Book X is the very same as that in Book III, *i.e.* ‘poetry that is mimetic in the sense of book III.’⁹ On Burnyeat’s account, this, ‘mimetic,’ poetry includes those genres that characteristically consist in impersonation, *i.e.* tragedy and comedy.¹⁰

Although I do not agree with Burnyeat’s own account (for reasons I shall indicate below), I do agree with his criticism of the attempts to solve the apparent inconsistencies in the argument between the two books simply by attributing to the term *mimêsis* in them a different meaning; for these attempts in a way get rid of these ‘argument-related’ inconsistencies at the cost of ‘acquiring’ terminological ones. Against this ‘semantic’ solution and the interpretations relying on it, I shall argue that the term *mimêsis* is used in the two books with exactly the same meaning, and that the *mimêsis* of Book III consisting in the above-mentioned impersonation and, on the other hand, the discrediting *mimêsis* of the epistemological argument in Book X differ in the first place in being *mimêsis* of different *objects*, and secondly in being, the one non-deceptive, and the other deceptive. My argument will rely on the analysis of the notion of *mimêsis* that follows next.

⁷ See Halliwell (1998), 10 and Halliwell (2002), 59.

⁸ See Annas (1981), 337.

⁹ See Burnyeat (1999), 313; for the whole discussion, see 286–300.

¹⁰ See Burnyeat (1999), 290–291; cf. also Burnyeat (1999), 311.

3. *The Activity of Mimêsis: An Analysis of the Notion of Mimeisthai*

The use of the verb *mimeisthai* and cognate terms is relatively well documented from the sixth century BC onwards. While it is not possible to consider here the history of these terms, relying on these occurrences, we may attempt the following definition of *mimêsis*: doing or making something that is like, and is intended to be like (*i.e.* imitating), something else in one aspect or another. The English verbs that are closest in meaning to the verb *mimeisthai*, are 'imitate' and 'represent' (depending on the context). An activity characterised as *mimêsis* may be virtually of any kind and complexity, *e.g.*, bodily, verbal, musical, social, military, political. We can here consider only a few examples. In Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, Orestes explains his ferocious plan to murder his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus: he and his friend Pylades will enter the palace pretending to be travellers from Phokis: 'Both of us will speak the speech of Parnassus, imitating (*mimoumenô*) the parlance of a Phocian tongue' (*Choephoroi* 563–564); in Euripides' *Electra*, Clytemnestra justifies her betrayal of Agamemnon, saying that 'when [...] a husband does wrong, rejecting his wife at home, the woman is apt to imitate (*mimeisthai*) the man and acquire another lover' (*Electra* 1036–1038); in Plato's *Republic*, it is considered whether the prospective guards¹¹ should, in their study of poetry, engage in *mimêsis* of various craftsmen and specialist workers, including a *mimêsis* of the rowers of triremes (*Rep.* III, 396b).

4. *Figurative and Non-Figurative Mimêsis*

These examples of *mimêsis* may first be differentiated in one important, 'ontological' respect,¹² which can be illustrated using the examples above from Euripides' *Electra* and Plato's *Republic*. As is clear from the context, following her husband's adultery, the betrayed woman will in her turn engage in such conduct: her activity, referred to as a *mimêsis* of her husband's activity, will therefore be an instance of adultery no less than her husband's, the activity imitated. That is to say, the woman's *mimêsis*

¹¹ I here adopt Schofield's and Burnyeat's translation of *phylakes* as 'guards' in place of the traditional 'guardians'; see Burnyeat (1999), 257, n.3.

¹² This ontological distinction has been pointed out already by Russel (1981), 101, followed by Ledda (1990), 19, n.36.

consists in a *true* (or *real*)¹³ adultery. By contrast, the activity of the children, referred to as *mimêsis* of rowing, is not in its turn an instance of rowing, like the activity imitated: instead, their activity constitutes a ‘figure’ of the activity of rowing; the children do not *truly* row, but *represent* men rowing.¹⁴ In what exactly, then, are these two cases of *mimêsis* similar and in what do they differ?

What ‘qualifies’ either of the two activities for being instances of *mimêsis* is their intentional likeness with another activity. However, in the first case, the activity performed is *essentially* like the activity imitated, *i.e.* it is like it in the aspect by virtue of which an activity *is* a (true) instance of adultery. By contrast, the children’s activity is not like the activity imitated, rowing, in the *essential* aspect of this activity (for example, it is not carried out with oars in a boat floating in the water), but in some *non-essential* aspect of the activity, for example in the manner of moving, which is, however, performed on dry ground. But crucially, the children’s activity is like the one imitated in an aspect *by virtue of which* their activity *refers to*, or *stands for*, rowing, and therefore, constitutes a *figure* of rowing. The children’s activity may thus be more precisely characterised as ‘figurative’ *mimêsis*, whereas the scorned woman’s adulterous activity is ‘non-figurative’ *mimêsis*.¹⁵ As we shall see, both cases of the poets’ *mimêsis* that concern us here are of the figurative kind.

5. *Productive and Non-Productive Mimêsis*

Another distinction, which turns out to be relevant in particular for the comparison of the painter and the poet in *Republic X*, is between productive and non-productive *mimêsis*.¹⁶ In all the examples considered above, the activities referred to as *mimêsis* are non-productive: they do not have a material result. However, a productive activity, *e.g.*, painting, sculpture,

¹³ For the use of ‘true’ and ‘real’ see n.21.

¹⁴ In my account of figurative *mimêsis*, I rely on two insightful studies on the subject: Goodman (1976), esp. 21–26, and Ledda (1990), 18–24. Ledda critically applies Goodman’s account of pictorial representation to figurative *mimêsis*. He further shows how the peculiar ‘representational’ nature of figures is reflected in a syntactical ambiguity of expressions such as *mimeisthai ti*, when they refer to figurative *mimêsis*.

¹⁵ Some Platonic examples of non-figurative *mimêsis* are: *Gorgias* 510b–511a, *Phaedo* 105b6, *Theaetetus* 148d4, *Philebus* 13d3, *Euthydemus* 288b8, 301b2, 303e8.

¹⁶ This distinction may correspond to the one briefly mentioned in the *Sophist*, between *mimêsis* ‘through instruments’ and *mimêsis* ‘employing oneself as an instrument’ (*Soph.* 267a); however, ‘instruments’ could be both those employed in a productive activity (*e.g.* painting) and those employed in a non-productive activity (*e.g.* music).

embroidery, may also be characterised as *mimêsis*. Each of these activities is by its nature figurative *mimêsis*. Now, it is important to note that in the case of non-productive figurative *mimêsis*, one who engages in it, a *mimêtês*, typically constitutes himself a figure of the agent who is the object of *mimêsis*: for example, Orestes and Pylades will constitute figures of travellers from Phokis; the young men constitute figures of rowers. By contrast, with productive figurative *mimêsis* it is typically only the material result of the activity that constitutes a figure, whereas the *mimêtês* or his activity itself do not have a figurative character. To take an example from *Republic X*, by painting a couch, a painter engages in *mimêsis*, but it is only the result of his activity, the painting, that constitutes a figure, namely a figure of a couch, whereas a painter of a couch obviously does not constitute a figure of a couch-maker, nor his activity a figure of couch-making. As poetry is as such a non-productive activity, the *mimêseis* attributed to poets in Book III and X are also of the non-productive kind.

6. Figurative Mimêsis and Deception

Finally, the distinction that will turn out to be crucial for the comparison of the *mimêsis* by poets in Books III and X is one that concerns only the figurative kind of *mimêsis*: this *mimêsis* can be either deceptive or non-deceptive. As observed earlier, in the case of figurative *mimêsis*, the activity itself constitutes a figure of another activity, or its material result constitutes a figure of something: however, this figure (in one case an activity performed and in the other case an object made) can be perceived, by one who observes it, in fact *as a figure*, or by contrast, it can be perceived, mistakenly, *as the thing itself* of which it is a figure. Orestes and Pylades engaging in a *mimêsis* of Phocians through *mimêsis* of their speech obviously do not intend to be perceived as engaging in such *mimêsis* and thus as figures of Phocians (Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*); they want to be (and eventually are, by Clytemnestra) perceived as (true) Phocians. By contrast, the figurative *mimêsis* of rowing performed by the young wards (*Rep.* III) is supposedly intended to be, and will be, perceived as a figure of rowing and not as a true instance of rowing. An example of productive figurative *mimêsis* that deceives (intentionally) is found in Euripides' *Helen*: a *mimêma* (*Helena* 74 and 875) of Helen is fashioned by Hera (in the role of the *mimêtês*) to induce Paris to abduct the *mimêma*, *i.e.* the figure, of Helen, instead of Helen herself.

The kind of figurative *mimêsis* that is likely to deceive may thus be called ‘*deceptive*’, and the other kind ‘*non-deceptive*’. As I shall argue, the *mimêsis* attributed to poets in *Republic* III is figurative and non-deceptive, whereas the *mimêsis* attributed to them in the epistemological argument in *Republic* X is figurative, but deceptive.

7. *Republic* III: *Mimêsis through Impersonation*

Let us now apply the above distinctions to the poets’ *mimêsis* ‘through impersonation.’ Homer’s speaking ‘as if he were’ Chryses himself is characterised as *mimêsis* inasmuch as it is a kind of ‘likening oneself to someone else, either in voice or shape’ (393c);¹⁷ or, in the terms used above, Homer’s narrating is an activity that is (intentionally) like another activity, *i.e.* Chryses’ speaking. The object of Homer’s *mimêsis* may be described as Chryses (indicating the agent), or also as Chryses’ speaking, or discourse (indicating the activity). Clearly, Homer’s *mimêsis* is of the *figurative* kind. For Homer’s speaking is like Chryses’ speaking in some aspects by virtue of which it constitutes a *figure* of Chryses’ speaking, and Homer himself constitutes a *figure* of Chryses. This likeness is both verbal and non-verbal: on the verbal level, Homer speaks like Chryses in that he says things as if he were Chryses;¹⁸ whereas on the non-verbal level, Homer’s speaking is like Chryses’ speaking in ‘voice’ and ‘gesture’ (as suggested at 393c5–6).

Further, and importantly, Homer’s *mimêsis* of Chryses is evidently non-deceptive, for by engaging in it, Homer is not perceived, nor does he intend to be perceived, as Chryses, but indeed as a figure of Chryses. That must be so even though Homer is described, when impersonating Chryses, as trying ‘as much as possible to make it seem to us that the one speaking is not Homer, but that it is the old priest’ (393a–b), and later on (implicitly) as hiding himself (393c). The intention attributed to Homer (by Socrates) in fact cannot be that of making his (Homer’s) public believe that he is Chryses himself: for given that Homer has spoken as himself, as

¹⁷ The manner in which this characterisation is introduced suggests its novelty. *Contra* Halliwell (2002), 51, n.35.

¹⁸ In grammatical terms, this means that, in referring to Chryses, Homer speaks in the first person (*e.g.*, using ‘I’). This ‘grammatical’ aspect of *mimêsis* is illustrated in Socrates’ paraphrase of Homer’s narration recounted ‘without *mimêsis*’: in it, Socrates narrates Chryses’ and Agamemnon’s speeches referring to them in the third person, differently from Homer, who narrates the two speeches in the first person (*Rep.* III, 393c–394b).

Homer, just beforehand, even ‘announcing’ the character in whose name he will speak next (*Republic* III 393c), such an intention would obviously be in vain and thus unreasonable. Instead, the intention attributed to Homer is presumably that of seeming, or looking to his public, as if he were Chryses (and not Homer), *despite* their *knowing* that he is not (and that he is in fact Homer).

8. Republic X: *The Epistemological Argument*

In Book X, the poets’ *mimêsis* appears much more intricate than in Book III. Once the interlocutors establish, against the belief of the many, that poets cannot be competent in the matters about which they speak, the poets are compared with the painter, who had been introduced beforehand, and characterised as *mimêtai* who somehow deceive their public into crediting them with great knowledge and wisdom:

It is necessary to examine, then, whether these people [who credit Homer and other ‘good’ poets with knowledge] have been deceived through having met these¹⁹ *mimêtai*, and looking at their works do not perceive that these are at the third remove from what is true (*to on*)²⁰ and are things that are easy to make for someone without knowing the truth (*alêtheia*)—for they make appearances (*phantasmata*), but not true things (*onta*)—, or there is indeed something in what these people are saying and good poets truly know the things about which they seem to the many to speak well.²¹
(598e–599a)

In what follows, the suggestion that poets are in fact *mimêtai* will of course prevail, whereas the widely held belief in the poets’ knowledge and wisdom, which is here (rhetorically) still allowed for, will not only be rejected, but also presented as a naïve judgement resulting from

¹⁹ ‘These *mimêtai*’, *i.e.* *mimêtai* in general, who were mentioned in the previous paragraph; 598c–d.

²⁰ See n.6.

²¹ The adjective *alêthês* and cognate terms is in this chapter consistently rendered with ‘true’ and its cognates, though ‘real’ would in some cases be more appropriate. In Plato’s dialogues, *alêthês* may be applied both to objects (typically, as antonymous with *phainomenos*) and to discourse (as antonymous with *pseudês*); whereas English typically, but not strictly, applies the antonyms real/apparent to things and the antonyms true/false to a discourse, thus distinguishing terminologically between ‘ontological’ and ‘non-ontological’, *i.e.* discursive or propositional, truth. By translating *alêthês* with ‘true’, which may in English be used (though it is less common) in the ontological sense as well (*e.g.*, a true couch), I avoid predetermining the sense of *alêthês* in particular occurrences. The differentiation between non-ontological and ontological sense of *alêthês* will be relevant for my interpretation of the epistemological argument.

a particular deception produced by poetry. Yet, it is not obvious just in what sense poetry is characterised as *mimêsis*, nor exactly what is deceptive about it: this is explained only in subsequent arguments, and even there, in good part, through the comparison of poets with painters. Before examining these arguments, let us consider first how the allegation of incompetence is granted in the argument.

9. *Poetry as Discourse on 'Arts'*

In the epistemological argument, poetry is approached as speaking about matters related to one art and branch of knowledge or another, or in short, about one art or another. Thus Socrates initially observes how poets are credited by their admirers with the knowledge of 'all the arts, as well as all human things concerning excellence and vice, and divine things no less' (598e),²² evidently on the understanding that these constitute the subject matter of the poets' compositions (and inasmuch as poets make fine compositions about them). Later on, any poet, and in particular Homer, is challenged to prove that he has knowledge not so much of medicine and 'other arts' as of '[...] the greatest and most beautiful things Homer undertakes to speak about, wars and generalship, government of states, man's education [...]' (599c–d); or again, Socrates mentions the poets' speaking about 'leatherworking' and 'generalship' (601a–b). Although the present argument does not make it clear in what sense poets speak about arts, this has been extensively illustrated in the *Ion*: there, for example, Homer's verses from the *Iliad* about Hecamede's preparation of *kykeôn* for the wounded Machaon count as verses about medicine (*Ion* 538b–c), evidently on the grounds that a preparation of *kykeôn* for a wounded man is an action of the medical kind. By the same token, Homer's verses about Nestor's giving advice to his son Antilochus on chariot-driving count as verses about this art (537a–c), and so on. So, in general, poets speak about arts in that they narrate about facts, events, or actions, that are in one way or another related to specific arts.

²² Leszl (2006a), 332–336 and (2006b), 292–296 has pointed out 'the illegitimate transition' of this argument from 'human excellence and vice and divine things' to 'all the arts': as he convincingly argues, while poets must have been regarded as authorities in the former matters, there is no firm evidence, nor is it likely, that they were regarded as competent in arts such as medicine, generalship, etc. By contrast, Giuliano (2005), 87–90 seems to defend the 'transition' as legitimate.

On this understanding, as is obvious, the arts poets speak about will turn out to be numerous. Now, this understanding enables Socrates in *Republic X* to formulate the question ‘do poets know about the matters of which they speak?’ as the question ‘are poets competent in the arts they speak about?’. Thus, if Homer happens not to be competent in the art of medicine, he will turn out to be speaking about matters in which he is not competent when he narrates about Hekamede’s preparing *kykeôn* for the wounded Machaon. Relying on this understanding of the poets’ activity, the discussion provides two arguments to show that poets are in fact not competent in the matters of which they speak. First, the knowledge that poets should, individually, possess is simply too vast, for it comprises numerous arts and matters about which other people have only selective and limited knowledge (598c–d). And secondly, while Homer and the other poets speak of matters related to various arts, no one of them has ever proved himself as competent by engaging in actions that require competence in these arts, *e.g.*, neither Homer nor any other poet is known to have cured anybody (599c).

These two arguments (*i.e.* that of ‘excessive knowledge required’ and that of ‘lack of practical evidence’) appear sufficient to conclude that poets in fact *cannot* be competent in the matters they speak about. But if that is so, it follows that poets *cannot* speak ‘well’ about their subject matter. Therefore, as Socrates argues further, the impression that poets do speak well about their subject matter and that they are therefore competent in it must be mistaken and a result of some deception. Rather dismissively, Socrates explains that the false impression that poets speak well is due to the musical elements of a poet’s discourse; as he suggests in conversation with Glaucon:

[...] to other such people [*i.e.* people incompetent in the art concerned],²³ who judge from words, it seems, if someone speaks about leather-working in verse and rhythm and harmony, that he speaks very well, or again, about generalship or whatever else; for these things as such have by nature enormous charm. (601a–601b)

That is to say, the musical elements, namely verse, rhythm and harmony, as it were ‘cover up’ the inferiority of the things that poets say about matters related to one art or another: by employing these means, poets wrongly seem, to people who are themselves incompetent in the art

²³ The listeners to a poet’s composition are compared here with the viewers of a painted leatherworker who are themselves incompetent in this art. I shall return to this example shortly.

concerned, to speak well about these matters. As a consequence, these people will credit poets with knowledge of the respective arts.

The crucial question to be addressed now concerns the allegation that poets do not speak 'well' (*eu*). But what exactly does 'not well' mean here? That is to say, just how do things said by poets about one art or another differ from the things said about this art by someone competent in it, who alone would speak 'well' about them, and in what are the former inferior to the latter? For example, how is Homer's narration about Hekamede's preparing *kykeôn* for the wounded Machaon inferior to a discourse given by someone competent in medicine about how *kykeôn* is prepared, or how someone wounded should be treated? We might expect that this not speaking 'well' about an art consists, in this case, in not speaking about it correctly, saying incorrect, false things about it;²⁴ but as I shall argue, the main fault poets are charged with is another one: the 'deficiency' of their discourse. This 'deficiency' is in fact not stated explicitly, but may be derived only from the comparison of the poets' discourse on arts with a painter who paints craftsmen. I shall thus now examine this comparison in detail.

10. *A Painting of a Couch Is 'Far from What Is True'*

The example of painting a couch is introduced in the discussion as a paradigm of (figurative) *mimêsis* and contrasted with manufacturing a couch (598a–b). Contrasting it with the making of artefacts, Socrates describes this *mimêsis* as follows:

The practice of *mimêsis* is then far from what is true (*to alêthes*) and, as it seems, fabricates everything because of this: because it captures something little of each thing (*smikron ti hekastou*), and this is an image (*eidôlon*).
(598b)

The above argument seems to refer to *mimêsis* in general, and not only to painting. Although the thing it 'captures' is described as 'image', this term, as well as 'appearance', *phantasma*, will later on be used metaphorically for *mimêmata* in general, even if they are not visually perceptible, and in particular for *mimêmata* made by poets. Importantly, the argument indicates exactly in what sense the things painted are not 'true things' (cf. 596e: *onta, alêthê*). After characterising the practice of

²⁴ In the *Ion*, in fact, the question raised about whether poets speak correctly (*orthôs*) about matters related to one art or another implies the possibility that they do not.

mimêsis as being ‘far from what is true’, it is in fact suggested that ‘it captures *something little* of each thing’. That is to say, presumably, that the object which this practice ‘makes’ (fabricates) is like the object it imitates only in ‘something little’, *i.e.* in a particular (minor) part, or aspect, of the object imitated. In the case of painting, the ‘little thing’ captured is evidently one particular visual appearance of the object imitated, *e.g.*, a visual appearance of a couch. As may be recalled, it is by virtue of this visual likeness to a couch that the object made by a painter refers to a couch and constitutes a figure of it. By contrast, the object made by a painter, *i.e.* an image of a couch, is not like a couch in those aspects by virtue of which a couch is a couch, *i.e.* in the essential aspects of a couch.²⁵ If it were, the object made would not be an image of a couch but itself a couch.²⁶ As we have seen earlier on, this non-essential likeness is characteristic of ‘figurative’ *mimêsis* in general.

The above opposition between ‘appearance’ and ‘truth’, the former applying to the object made by painting (or *mimêsis* in general) and the latter to the object imitated by it, thus seems to be intended as the opposition between ontological deficiency (or incompleteness, partiality) and completeness: the deficiency and partiality of a painting of a couch with respect to a couch consists in its being like a couch only in ‘something little’, *i.e.* in a particular non-essential aspect, of a couch. The characterisation of painted images as not being ‘true things’ and the practice of *mimêsis* as being ‘far from what is true’ seems to be understood here in an ‘ontological’ sense.²⁷ As we shall see in a moment, not being ‘true’ will later on in the argument be used in another, ‘descriptive’, sense.

²⁵ Or we could say, with the ontology of the *Meno* and *Cratylus*, it does not have the form of couch; cf. *Men.* 72a–76a, *Crat.* 389a–390a.

²⁶ The distinction corresponds to the distinction between making a likeness (*eikôn*) of Cratylus and another Cratylus (*Crat.* 432b–c). See Janaway (1995), 114–115 for a similar understanding of *mimêsis* of appearance as opposed to *mimêsis* of the truth.

²⁷ According to Moss (2007), 422 the ‘mimetic art’, being ‘of appearance’, consists in ‘copying the way the things appear, at the cost of misrepresenting the way things are’, where misrepresentation would consist, for example, in the altered proportions of the object represented. However, in my view it is quite clear that at this stage the argument is not concerned with the *correctness* of the image (*mimêma*) in relation to the object it refers to (in its proportions), but rather with the *ontological* status of the image in relation to this object, *i.e.* not with the ‘propositional’ but rather with the ‘ontological’ truth (the two will be discussed later on).

11. *'Seeming to Be Truly a Carpenter' And Descriptive Truth*

Now, the ontological 'deficiency' of paintings with respect to 'true' things to which they refer proves fundamental in the next step, in which, as I shall argue, the ontological truth is 'translated' into 'descriptive' truth. The discussion now focuses on the question of a painter's knowledge. The objects painted are various craftsmen ('replacing' the earlier couch). Importantly, a painter is able to paint one or other of them without being competent in their respective art:

Thus a painter, we say, will paint us a leather-worker, a carpenter and other craftsmen, being competent in none of these arts; but all the same, if he is a good painter, having painted a carpenter and showing [him] from afar, he [the painter] may well deceive children and naïve people into believing that it [the painted figure of the carpenter] is truly a carpenter.²⁸

(598b–c)

As we may suppose, the painting of a carpenter is one showing someone doing carpentry work, for example, manufacturing a couch, in some specific moment of that activity. Ontologically, the painting will not differ from the painting of a couch examined earlier; the image (or figure) of a carpenter is 'ontologically deficient', *i.e.* not true, in relation to a carpenter, the object it refers to. In the language of Book X, it constitutes an apparent carpenter, not a true carpenter (596e).

The above argument, however, is concerned with the epistemological rather than with the ontological aspect of painting a craftsman: as is argued, a painter will paint various craftsmen without being competent in their respective arts and crafts. This epistemological condition of a painter seems to be quite obvious: for inasmuch as an image is (by definition) like the object it imitates and refers to only in the visual appearance of this object, making an image of an object will of course not require any knowledge of the arts or crafts that are related to this object itself in other ways; for example, making an image of someone manufacturing a couch, or again an image of a couch, or reins, or a bit (cf. 601c–602b), does not require the art needed to make a couch, or reins, or a bit. The art required for making an image of any of these objects (regardless of what the object is) is the art of painting alone.

²⁸ οἷον ὁ ζωγράφος, φαμέν, ζωγραφήσει ἡμῖν σκυτοτόμον, τέκτονα, τοὺς ἄλλους δημιουργοὺς, περὶ οὐδενὸς τούτων ἐπαίων τῶν τεχνῶν· ἀλλ' ὅμως παῖδάς γε καὶ ἀφρονὰς ἀνθρώπους, εἰ ἀγαθὸς εἶη ζωγράφος, γράψας ἄν τέκτονα καὶ πόρρωθεν ἐπιδεικνὺς ἐξαπατῶ ἂν τῷ δοκεῖν ὡς ἀληθῶς τέκτονα εἶναι.

As is next suggested, a painting of a craftsman (if skilfully painted and shown from afar), even though it is made by a painter not competent in carpentry, can produce a particular deception: to naïve viewers, or more precisely those not competent in the respective art (as specified at 601a, where an analogous example is given), the painted carpenter may (wrongly) seem ‘to be truly a carpenter’. Exactly what then does this deception consist in? With (to my knowledge) two exceptions, it has been assumed that the deception consists in mistaking the figure of a carpenter for a true one; consequently, the example has been understood to be about a ‘painter-illusionist’ and a ‘trompe l’oeil’.²⁹ However, this rather unconvincing interpretation relies on the ‘ontological’ reading of the phrase ‘seeming to be truly a carpenter’ (and ‘what seems to be a leather-worker’ at 600e–601a). More precisely, the implied claim that the carpenter painted is not ‘truly’ a carpenter, but may only seem ‘to be truly’ one, is understood as equivalent to the claim that the painted carpenter is not a true carpenter, but only an image, or a figure of one. Hence, those to whom the painted carpenter seems ‘to be truly a carpenter’ would mistake the figure of a carpenter for a true one. But in fact, the implied claim that the carpenter painted is not ‘truly’ a carpenter, but may only seem ‘to be truly’ one, may be understood in a non-ontological sense as well, *i.e.* as equivalent to the claim that the painted carpenter is in fact not, but only seems to be, *such as* a carpenter *is*; that is to say, that the painting does not represent a carpenter truthfully. Now, as we shall see in a moment, even this ‘non-ontological’ reading allows of two different interpretations: a ‘veridical’ one, suggested by Belfiore, and a ‘descriptive’ one, which I shall endorse.³⁰

Grammatically, the two examples (of a carpenter at 598c and a leather-worker at 600e–601a) seem to allow either of the alternative readings, the ‘ontological’ (mistaking the image for a true thing) and the non-ontological (either ‘veridical’ or ‘descriptive’). However, the argument in favour of the non-ontological interpretation against the ontological

²⁹ See Annas (1981), 336 and 340; Janaway (1995) 134 and 136; Murray (1996), 200; Halliwell (2002), 134; Moss (2007) 423, who all find the example of ‘trompe l’oeil’ rather implausible, but do not suggest an alternative interpretation.

³⁰ To my knowledge, the ‘ontological’ reading was first contested by Belfiore (1983), 44–47; her ‘veridical’ interpretation is presented below; however, her convincing arguments against the ontological reading seem to have remained ignored or at least not adequately appreciated. More recently, the ontological reading has been contested also by Burnyeat (1999), 302–305 (without reference to Belfiore’s article). I have developed my ‘descriptive’ interpretative solution, which differs from Belfiore’s (‘veridical’), following a suggestion made by Fritz-Gregor Herrmann.

one is not only the obvious unlikelihood of mistaking a painting of a carpenter (or a leather-worker at 600e–601a) for a true one. The crucial argument can be retrieved from the generalisation drawn from the example in the next paragraph (598c–d): as a consequence of the same kind of deception, a *mimêtês* will seem, to someone naïve, to be ‘knowledgeable about all crafts’ and ‘omniscient’. Now, if the deception from the example consists in mistaking the image of the carpenter for a true carpenter, it cannot provide a model for the deception that results in crediting the maker of the image with respective knowledge. By contrast, adopting the non-ontological interpretation, the deception from the example functions perfectly well as a model for the generalisation made.³¹

Now, on the ‘descriptive’ reading, the painted carpenter is not such as a carpenter *is*, but only such as a carpenter visually *appears*. Let us consider this possibility closely. For the sake of the argument, we may imagine a highly accurate painting of a carpenter manufacturing a couch (e.g., comparable to a reflection in a mirror; see 596d–e): an image that is, so to speak, in every detail like a particular visual appearance of a carpenter at work. But even in this case, the image will capture only one particular visual appearance of a carpenter at work, *i.e.* the painted carpenter will be (exactly) such as a carpenter visually *appears*.

Now, we may take a further step and imagine a description of what is in the painting. It is obvious that a description of someone manufacturing a couch, derived from the painting, will not be an adequate and complete description of the carpenter’s manufacturing a couch, to which the painting refers. If it were, it may be argued, it could be successfully used as an instruction of how to make a couch, but that is evidently not the case. Instead, the painting will ‘provide’ only a description of a single visual appearance of the carpenter’s activity. As such, the painting will thus provide an incomplete, or deficient, description of a carpenter’s activity, to which it refers. By contrast, the description of someone’s manufacturing a couch that relies on relevant knowledge will provide a satisfactory and complete description of a carpenter’s manufacturing a couch. On the descriptive reading, then, a carpenter painted is not ‘truly a carpenter’ in that the painting does not provide ‘the whole truth’, as it were, of what a

³¹ See Burnyeat (1999), 304–305 for a similar objection. Slightly different arguments against the ontological reading are given by Belfiore (1983), 44–46. Both scholars reject also the ontological reading of the parallel example of the painter’s deception in the *Sophist* (234b), yet in my view this reading cannot be excluded there.

carpenter does: it does not provide a description of a carpenter ‘*as he is*’, but merely provides a description of a carpenter ‘*as he (visually) appears*’.

Further, on this reading, a viewer to whom the painted carpenter mistakenly seems ‘to be truly a carpenter’ is one who takes the painting as equivalent to a complete and adequate *description* of a carpenter at work, for example, of a carpenter manufacturing a couch. According to the argument, this deception may be produced only in a ‘naïve’ viewer, one not competent in carpentry (cf. 601a1–2); by contrast, a viewer competent in carpentry, for example, one who has knowledge of couch manufacturing, cannot be deceived into taking the painting as equivalent to such a (complete and adequate) description.

It is also important to note that even if a painter happened to be competent in carpentry, he could not paint what is ‘truly a carpenter’ (in the descriptive sense), due to the very nature itself of paintings, and more generally figures: for even the most accurate painting of a carpenter will capture no more than an exact particular appearance, *i.e.* ‘something little’, of the object it imitates and refers to, thus corresponding to a description of the appearance only, *i.e.* of some non-essential aspect of this object. Now, if the painting of a carpenter is less than accurate, *i.e.* if, in one aspect or another, it is not like a particular visual appearance of a carpenter at work, the painted carpenter will not even be *exactly* such as a carpenter visually appears; *e.g.*, the tools (used by a carpenter) painted may not have the same shape as the true ones. Only in this respect, presumably, competence in carpentry could be relevant, inasmuch as it involves knowledge of how the tools look like. It is possible that the later argument at 601c–602b discusses such ‘incorrectness’ of the image with respect to the visual appearance of the object it refers to: for Socrates argues there that a painter does not even have to take into account the *use* of the artefact (reins, a bit) whose image he makes; whereas for manufacturing an artefact, the ‘correct belief’ of how the artefact is used is required and is gained from a user of the artefact who in fact has knowledge of its use. In this case, we may say, the painting will be equivalent to a description of a carpenter that is incorrect, in addition to being deficient (*i.e.* of the visual appearance only).

Now, according to Belfiore’s above-mentioned ‘veridical’ interpretation of the argument, the painted carpenter is not ‘truly a carpenter’ insofar as a carpenter is painted *incorrectly* (in the way just indicated): ‘Plato’s painted carpenter is a painting that appears to the ignorant to represent someone *doing carpentry*, someone who functions well as a carpenter, while actually it represents someone doing things no skilled carpenter

would do.³² Consequently, Belfiore maintains that a painting of what is ‘truly a carpenter’, *i.e.* ‘a representation, made by someone with knowledge, of a person who is actually doing carpentry’, is possible.³³ However, this account is in my view too narrow for the reasons already given above. A painting whose object imitated is a (skilled) carpenter and which is as accurate as a reflection in a mirror (yet, as argued above, such a painting can presumably be made just as well by someone incompetent in carpentry) will surely represent—but crucially, represent only by virtue of being like an *appearance* of a skilled carpenter—someone doing things that a skilled carpenter *would in fact do*; on Belfiore’s account, in that case the painted carpenter will count as being ‘truly a carpenter’. The argument, by contrast, indicates that it is due to the nature itself of a painting, which captures only ‘something little’ of the object imitated, its appearance, that a carpenter painted is not ‘truly a carpenter’.

12. *Poets ‘Applying Colours of Arts’*

Poets, it may be recalled, inasmuch as they are incompetent in the arts about which they speak, cannot speak ‘well’ about them; instead, they do something similar to what the above painter does: a poet ‘applies, with names and verbs, some sort of colours of each of the arts’ (609a). On the above interpretation, poets are here alleged to be doing the following: by speaking about one art or another, they tell about these arts as little as a painter ‘says’ about carpentry by making a painting of a carpenter. That is to say, just as a painting of a carpenter or another craftsman at work will provide a deficient, and possibly incorrect, description of the activity it refers to, so too will a poet’s narration. By narrating about Hekamede’s preparing *kykeôn* for the wounded Machaon, Homer does not provide an adequate, satisfactory description of such matters as how *kykeôn* is prepared or how someone wounded is cured, but instead a deficient, and possibly even incorrect, description of these matters: it is in this sense that his narration consists in ‘applying colours’ of medicine. One would not be able to prepare *kykeôn* or, more generally, to cure a wounded man, by relying on his narration.

Yet, to those not competent in medicine, who will thus judge Homer’s narration only ‘from words’, as these are embellished by verse, rhythm

³² See Belfiore (1983), 44–45.

³³ See Belfiore (1983), 46.

and harmony (601a), Homer will seem to speak ‘very well’, *i.e.* to provide an adequate, satisfactory, account of these matters, and therefore to be competent in medicine. But in fact, Homer does not have such competence (as has been established through the arguments of ‘excessive knowledge required’ and ‘lack of practical evidence’). These incompetent hearers are in their turn similar to the viewers to whom the painted leather-worker ‘seems to be a leather-worker’: these viewers mistake such a painting for a satisfactory description of what a leather-worker does, because they lack competence in the art concerned and thus judge only ‘from colours and shapes’ (600e–601a).

13. Poets as *Mimêtai* of ‘Medical Discourses’

We may now return to Socrates’ initial allegation that poets are *mimêtai* and that their admirers, ‘looking at their works do not perceive that these are at the third remove from what is true³⁴ and are things that are easy to make for someone without knowing the truth—for they make appearances, but not true things’ (598e–599a). In what sense, then, are the poets’ works ‘appearances’, and that is to say, figurative *mimêmata* (cf. 599b *epi tois mimêmasi*), and further, in what sense are they mistaken, by the poets’ admirers, for ‘true things’? Observe first that the poets’ ‘works’, characterised as ‘appearances’ and *mimêmata*, must evidently be the poets’ *compositions*, and not, as has often been assumed (as seen above), men, gods, objects, events, about which poets narrate; how indeed could the latter be referred to as ‘the poets’ works (*erga*)’?

Now, the argument does not specify what exactly the ‘true things’, as counterparts of ‘appearances’, or *mimêmata*, made by poets, are; that is to say, what the object of the poets’ alleged *mimêsis* is. However, the argument suggests that those who credit poets with knowledge about the matters of which they speak do so inasmuch as they ‘do not perceive’ that the poets’ works are ‘appearances’ and not ‘true things’; that means, supposedly, that they mistake the poets’ works, which are in fact *mimêmata*, for the things themselves of which they are *mimêmata*. What may be inferred, therefore, is that the ‘things’ for which the poets’ works are mistaken are the things whose making requires precisely the knowledge that is mistakenly attributed to poets.

³⁴ Cf. n.6.

Now, as Socrates suggests in the argument, poets are credited with knowledge of the arts they speak about, this being a result of the deceptive impression that they speak ‘very well’ about these arts. It is thus the poets’ works, being viewed as things said about matters related to arts, that are characterised as *mimêmata*, whereas their true counterparts, which the poets’ compositions only resemble, will be things said about these matters that rely on the relevant knowledge. This interpretation of the poets’ *mimêsis* seems to be validated also in Socrates’ rhetorical challenge launched at Homer and all other poets who speak about matters related to medicine: he asks them to prove that they are each ‘competent in medicine’ (*iatrikos*) by indicating actions that require such competence; whereas not having engaged in such actions, each of them must be considered as a ‘*mimêtês* of *medical discourses* (*iatrikoi logoi*)’; ‘medical discourses’ are evidently discourses about matters related to the art of medicine that, unlike the poets’ discourses on these matters, rely on relevant knowledge. The poets’ narrations then stand in relation to such ‘medical discourses’ just as painted images stand in relation to the things whose images they are: the poets’ narrations are only *like* them ‘in something little’. More precisely, the poets’ narrations about actions, events and matters related to the art of medicine will be *like* medical discourses in that they are about the same matters (for example, about how someone wounded is cured or how a battle is fought); however, as concluded above, the poets’ narrations will provide deficient, or even incorrect, accounts of these matters, whereas discourses relying on the relevant knowledge will provide adequate descriptions of these matters. But moreover, and importantly, the poets’ works are *deceptive mimêmata* of discourses that rely on knowledge: for to those who are not competent, poets’ discourses do seem to provide satisfactory accounts of their subject matter and thus to rely on knowledge. In this sense, therefore, these people perceive poets’ works as ‘true things’, failing to see they are only *mimêmata* of them. However, the deceptive character of these *mimêmata*, as we have seen above, is due to their being embellished with ‘verse and rhythm and harmony’; if they were stripped of these poetic elements, poets’ works would reveal themselves as inferior and deficient or—we may now say—as *mimêmata* (601b).

Poets, too, like the painter, are said not to have knowledge of ‘the truth (*alêtheia*)’ and of making ‘true things (*onta*)’ (599a), or again, they are alleged not to ‘capture’ the truth (600e). However, here too we may distinguish between two senses of ‘truth’ involved. A poet’s narration

‘does not capture the truth’ primarily in the *descriptive* sense, *i.e.* in that it is a deficient description of the matters related to arts and crafts (*e.g.*, how someone wounded is cured, how a battle is conducted). On the other hand, the poets’ narrations may be described as *ontologically* not true, *i.e.* *phantasmata* or *mimêmata*, with respect to discourses that rely on knowledge of the subject matter (*e.g.*, ‘medical discourses’), which are their true counterparts (*onta*).

14. *Homer: A Mimêtês of Chryses and a
Mimêtês of Someone Competent in Medicine*

By narrating, a poet may thus evidently engage in two different kinds of *mimêsis*, deceptive and non-deceptive. But exactly how does this happen? In order to answer this, we may describe poets’ deceptive *mimêsis* in slightly different terms, *i.e.* as *mimêsis* of those who are competent in the arts the poets speak about (instead of *mimêsis* of competent discourses). A poet will be *like* someone competent in medicine in that he will speak about the same matters as such a person, and will thereby constitute a figure of such a person; but moreover, inasmuch as a poet is perceived, not as a *mimêtês* and a *figure* of someone competent in medicine, but as being in fact competent in medicine, his *mimêsis* is deceptive.³⁵

So, inasmuch as Homer narrates seemingly well, but in fact deficiently, about actions and events related to medicine, his narration constitutes a deceptive *mimêsis* of someone competent in medicine. However, by thus narrating, Homer may *at the same time* impersonate one character or another involved in these actions: in this case, his narration will constitute also a non-deceptive *mimêsis* of this character. While in fact nobody will mistake Homer for Chryses, when he is impersonating this character, the listeners who are themselves not competent in medicine will mistake Homer for someone competent in this art, when he narrates about matters related to it. These two kinds of *mimêsis* thus differ in the first place in having a different object, and secondly in being, the one non-deceptive, and the other deceptive: in the first case, Homer is, for example, a non-deceptive *mimêtês* of Chryses imploring the Achaeans to

³⁵ In the *Sophist*, in a similar way, the sophist is characterised as a ‘*mimêtês* of a wise man (*sophos*)’ and contrasted with the wise man (*Soph.* 268b–c), inasmuch as he is not competent in the matters he debates about, yet seems to be competent in whatever happens to be the subject of the debate; his *mimêsis* is thus evidently also deceptive.

release his daughter; in the second case, Homer is a deceptive *mimêtês* of someone competent in medicine speaking about how one treats a wounded man.³⁶

Although it is not possible to consider here the next, 'ethical', argument in *Republic X* (602c–607a), it is worth noting that its concern is again with the *mimêsis* 'through impersonation', where this shift of reference remains tacit: in the argument, Homer is approached as a *mimêtês* of 'one of the heroes grieving and making a long speech in laments' (605c–d) and no longer as a *mimêtês* of, e.g., someone competent in medicine; likewise, 'mimetic' poetry is described as poetry that involves *mimêsis* of 'men engaged in forced or voluntary actions, and men who reckon to have fared well or ill as a result of so doing, and in all these things either feel pleasure or suffer' (603c); both these descriptions clearly refer to the figurative non-deceptive *mimêsis* of characters about whom poets narrate.³⁷

15. *Poets and Knowledge of the Good*

While the picture of poets as *mimêtai* of characters about whom they narrate is as such neutral, the one that portrays them as deceptive *mimêtai* of competent speakers is of course discrediting for poets, for it shows them as incompetent speakers who may be taken for wise men only by those who are themselves naïve. Now, it would presumably be naïve indeed to consider Homer's narrations about one battle or another as (sufficiently) instructive concerning matters of war strategy, and to consider Homer himself as competent in this art.³⁸ But in fact, the ultimate concern of *Republic X* is to show it is equally 'naïve' to consider the poets' narrations about education, government of state, wars and any other human

³⁶ As mentioned above, Burnyeat (1999), 292–300 offers an account according to which Books III and X are concerned with the same kind of poets' *mimêsis* (i.e. through impersonation). However, there are in my view at least two strong arguments against Burnyeat's interpretation: in the epistemological argument in Book X, the *mimêsis* discussed is clearly presented as deceptive, while the *mimêsis* 'by impersonation' is not deceptive, and further, in this argument poets are characterised as *mimêtai* explicitly on the premise that they do not have knowledge about the matters of which they speak; they will thus be no less *mimêtai* if they speak without impersonating the characters about whom they narrate.

³⁷ In Marušič (2008), I suggest in more detail where and for what purpose this shift is made in *Rep. X*.

³⁸ As Ion does, claiming that he has learned the art of generalship from Homer (*Ion* 541b). But as suggested by Leszl (see n. 22), this could not be a widely shared belief.

affairs as ‘instructive’ about ethical matters and to consider poets as wise in such subjects.³⁹ However, the claim that their narrations about these matters are in fact only ‘images of excellence’ (599d, 600e), *i.e.* deficient in what they say and teach about what is good for men and what they should therefore pursue, relies on the fundamental assumption that there is such *knowledge* of what is good for men and that it can be learned much as strategy of war or appropriate medical treatment can be learned.⁴⁰ Yet perhaps it is precisely this sort of knowledge, of which poets are in the argument deprived with greatest vehemence, that cannot be posited at all.⁴¹

³⁹ For a similar suggestion, see Ferrari (1989), 130.

⁴⁰ I discuss this assumption in Marušič (2008), 8–14, relying on an illuminating criticism of it by Bambrough (1971).

⁴¹ I thank Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, Giuseppe Ledda, Simonetta Nannini and Malcolm Schofield for their reading and helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ANTIDOTES AND INCANTATIONS: IS THERE A CURE FOR POETRY IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*?*

STEPHEN HALLIWELL

It is a factor of cardinal importance not only for the reading of Plato's dialogues but for the whole history of Western aesthetics that as regards the philosophical evaluation of poetry we can identify not just one but two 'Platos', and in consequence two possible Platonisms—two ways of thinking which can both lay claim to some basis within arguments and feelings expressed in Plato's work. There is, to put it concisely, the seemingly Platonic attitude (and, consequently, the Platonism) which criticises, censors and even 'banishes' poets, and which speaks in terms of unmasking the false pretensions and the damaging influences of poetry. But there is also the Platonic stance which never ceases to allow the voices of poetry to be heard in Plato's own writing, which presupposes not only extensive knowledge but also 'love' of poetry on the part of Plato's readers, and which at certain key junctures claims for *itself* nothing less than the status of a new kind of philosophical poetry and art: the status, indeed, of 'the greatest music' and even of 'the finest and best tragedy'.¹ This complex doubleness in the dialogues' perspectives on poetry has always been recognised by some of Plato's most sympathetic admirers, both in antiquity and in more recent times. Yet it has been largely suppressed by the orthodoxies of modern scholarship, especially in the anglophone world. The greatest Neoplatonist reader of Plato's attitudes to poetry, Proclus, was in no doubt on the matter: adapting a phrase from *Republic* X and calling Homer 'the teacher not only of tragedy but also of Plato's own entire use of mimesis and his whole philosophical system', he carries his perception of the fusion of

* This chapter started life as a commentary, at the Princeton Classical Philosophy Colloquium of December 2002, on a paper by John Ferrari, whom I thank for the original stimulus of our exchanges. An Italian version formed the 7th Carchia memorial lecture in Rome, March 2007, and some of my ideas were also presented in research seminars at the Universities of Columbia and Durham. I am indebted to my hosts and audiences on all these occasions.

¹ The 'greatest music', *Phaedo* 61a; cf. *Phaedrus* 248d, 259d. The 'finest tragedy', *Laws* 7.817b.

poetry and philosophy in Plato to a point which rules out any unmodified idea of exiling poetry from the city or the soul.² The notion of Platonic writing as itself a kind of poetry has roots, as I have already mentioned, in explicit moments of self-consciousness in the dialogues, as well as in their multiple literary qualities. An awareness of this far-reaching fact continued to have significance for a range of readers from the Renaissance to Romanticism, including (to limit myself to English examples) such figures as Sidney, Shaftesbury, Coleridge, and Shelley. But on the landscape of modern criticism it has been largely overshadowed by the other 'Platonism' already cited, and above all by the conviction that Plato's attitudes to poetry were summated in the *Republic's* motif of 'banishing' (most of, and indeed the 'best' of) the poets from the ideal city.

The main aim of this paper is not to reconsider the senses in which Plato's own writing contains elements of poetry, but to tackle head-on the bleak and I think mistaken modern orthodoxy that the idea of banishing the poets is somehow the philosopher's supreme, definitive utterance on the subject. What I wish to do is to trace a deep ambiguity—a mixture or intersection, if you like, of the two Platos and/or Platonisms I have sketched—in what is almost always taken to be the 'proof text', the primary exhibit, of those who believe that the 'banishment' or repudiation of the poets, including Homer and the tragedians, is the whole (or the main) story of Plato's relationship to poetry. I am referring to the first half of *Republic* Book X (595a–608b), where, on the standard reading, Socrates not only returns to but reiterates and revalidates the verdict of exile passed on the mimetically versatile poets in Book III (most vividly, though not without ambivalence, at 398a). This apparent reaffirmation of the verdict of exile is not only juxtaposed with but, so I shall maintain, dramatically *undercut* by Socratic expressions of hesitation and attraction towards poetry—in short, by indications of lingering if equivocal 'love' of poetry. To dwell on the supposed banishment, as so many critics do, without seeing the eloquent, complex force of the continuing attachment to poetry is to miss a whole layer of Plato's own writing and thinking in this context. Furthermore, to read the arguments of Book X (as, once again, many do) without taking full account of the *framing* of these arguments by Socrates' remarks both at the start of the book and in what I shall call

² Proclus *In remp. Platonis* 1.196.9–13 Kroll, with Halliwell (2002), 323–334, for the larger background to this remark.

the 'epilogue' at 606e–608b is to create a doctrinal rigidity which distorts the subtle dialectical movements of Plato's text.³

Given limitations of space, I cannot undertake here a complete interpretation of both the frame *and* the arguments of Book X. I have recently outlined a fresh perspective of my own on the main steps in the argument of Book X, a perspective which takes those steps to be far more provisional and, in part, rhetorically provocative than most scholars are willing to admit. Anyone who thinks that the arguments of Book X set out a doctrinally fixed position needs to explain, among other things, why at 596b even the lowly carpenter is given cognitive access to metaphysical 'forms', when earlier in the work they were accessible only to advanced philosophers; why the mirror simile at 596d–e is incongruous with its context (one cannot turn a mirror on, for example, 'things in Hades', 596c); why the model of painting as necessarily at three removes from the truth is in conflict with things said about painting elsewhere in the *Republic* (especially the acknowledgements of pictorial idealism at V, 472d; VI, 500e–501c); why part of the ostensible rebuttal of the case for Homer's wisdom involves recourse to *ad hominem* biographical rhetoric (if Homer knew so much, he should have served as a lawgiver, his friends should have become his 'followers', etc., 599b ff.); and why, more generally, Socrates adopts a patently satirical tone of voice at regular intervals (suggesting, for instance, that works like those of Homer are 'easy to make', 599a). My own view is that such considerations, none of which has been satisfactorily dealt with in the now orthodox readings of Book X, all point to the role of the arguments not as statements of an established position but as incitements to recognise the need for a new and better understanding of artistic mimesis.⁴ That view will remain a largely silent background to the present paper, since it is not on the arguments themselves but on the interpretation of their 'frame', and particularly of Socrates' epilogue, that I intend to concentrate here. We shall see

³ Two representative examples: the paraphrase of *Rep. X* in Griswold (2003), §§ 3.3–3.4, is silent about the ambivalence expressed in Socrates' epilogue; Untersteiner (1966), 143–147, with the summary on 286, largely suppresses this feature of the passage. By contrast, a sensitive awareness of Book X's ambivalence is shown by Vicaire (1960), 263–265 (though on 401 he mistakenly transfers the incantations from Socrates to poetry itself); cf. Collingwood (1938), 49 ('Socrates seems half to relent'), though his account of the larger context is over-zealous. Levin (2001), 143–167, takes seriously the need to reconsider the possible value of poetry, but her response is more narrowly defined than mine.

⁴ See Halliwell (2002), 55–62, 133–143; the related French version in Halliwell (2005b) emphasises Book X's pointers to the need for radical rethinking of the issues.

later, however, that there is one crucial respect in which the epilogue confronts readers with a paradox that embraces the whole of the preceding critique of mimesis.

The opening of the final book of Plato's *Republic* is in many ways a puzzling juncture in the work. I want to contend that if we attend sensitively to this juncture, and allow ourselves to be (philosophically) puzzled, we may be set on a course that leads to a rewarding but far from straightforward interpretation of Plato's relationship to poetry, an interpretation that replaces clichés and received opinions—including the standard reading of Plato's supposedly outright 'hostility' to poetry and the tired, reductive slogan that Plato 'banished the poets'—with something much more intricate and true to the nuances of Plato's own writing. At the heart of my case will be the thesis that Book X offers not a simple repudiation of the best poets but a complicated counterpoint in which resistance *and* attraction to their work are intertwined, a counterpoint which (among other things) explores the problem of whether, and in what sense, it might be possible to be a 'philosophical lover' of poetry. The arguments about poetry advanced in this book do not provide a definitive solution to this problem. Indeed, the whole thrust of the epilogue to these arguments is to set up a challenge and prospect that looks outside and beyond the Platonic text itself into the lives of those reading it, whether in the Academy or elsewhere.⁵ Plato's own writing in this part of the *Republic* tells us, if it tells us anything, that it does not contain the final answers to the questions it raises about poetry.

As Socrates (re)turns unexpectedly to the subject of poetry at the start of *Rep. X*, and suggests that the conclusions previously reached in Book III have been corroborated by the division of the soul undertaken in the intervening stretch of the dialogue (595a), he puts it to Glaucon that 'mimetic' poetry (including both tragedy and Homeric epic) can cause grave damage (*lôbê*) to the minds of its audiences unless they possess the 'drug' or 'antidote' (*pharmakon*) that consists in knowing precisely what such poetry amounts to (595b).⁶ Revealingly, Glaucon, who was

⁵ Büttner (2000), 208 plausibly takes *Rep.* 607b–608b to reflect ongoing debate about poetry in the Academy. Else (1972) argues the radical thesis that Book X is in part a reaction to (an early version of) Aristotle's *Poetics*: cf. Halliwell (1988), 195. I leave aside here speculations (common in a previous generation of scholarship) about sophistic works to which Plato may have been responding. But note Isocrates 12.18–19 for a fourth-century case in which a thinker's attitudes to poetry came under attack.

⁶ In medical terms, the metaphor here implies a drug which *prevents* a disease (cf. *Rep.* II, 382c ~ III, 389b) rather than one which cures a disease already contracted (as e.g. III,

not Socrates' interlocutor for most of the earlier discussion of poetry but who did fulfil this role during the foundational division of the soul into its parts, does not immediately grasp what Socrates means (either, we might suppose, by the 'damage' poetry can do to the soul, or by the 'antidote' against it). Socrates responds to Glaucon's uncertainty by announcing emphatically yet nervously (see below) that he will speak his mind on the subject (595b), and then embarks on an elaborately unfolding critique of the status of mimetic art (first painting, then poetry).⁷ It looks at first sight, therefore, as though the 'drug' or 'antidote' of knowledge needed to combat the psychological harm of mimetic poetry will be contained in the arguments of Book X itself. But we have some powerful reasons for declining to draw this superficially tempting inference.

Most powerful of all is the fact—which will form the main compass-point of my enquiry—that in the epilogue to this part of the dialogue Socrates proposes that until poetry (now personified as a beautiful woman) or her lovers (*philopoiêtai*, a word which occurs only here in the whole of surviving Greek) can produce a better defence, which means a fully ethical justification, of her value to souls and societies, he and those who think like him will continue to 'listen to her' (in itself a remarkable detail to which we shall have to return) '... while singing as an incantation to protect ourselves the argument we are in the process of stating'.⁸ There are three reasons, I submit, for refusing to identify the 'antidote' of knowledge posited at 595b with the 'incantation' of 608a and, consequently, with the contents of Book X itself.⁹ In the first place, the terms in which the end of the second critique of poetry is couched suggest (as I shall later stress)

406d, 408a): i.e., those who possess the knowledge will never succumb to poetry's harmful effects. If the drug were curative, the harm would have to be suffered first, so no one would be strictly immune. Note, furthermore, that *λώβη* and cognates, when signifying mental or physical harm, usually imply *permanent* damage.

⁷ I leave aside here the controversy over how the sense of *mimêsis* in Book X relates to that (or, rather, *those*) found in Book III: cf. Halliwell (2002), 56. The latest discussion, Moss (2007), offers interesting analysis, but her claim (437 n. 36) that the term was used 'more broadly' in Book III contradicts Socrates' intention at 595c (cf. 603a) to discuss mimesis 'as a whole' (*holôs*), a detail Moss ignores. Whatever the case at the start of *Rep. X*, by 603b–c it is hard to see any difference between mimetic poetry and poetry *tout court*; cf. *Tim.* 19d.

⁸ ἀκροασόμεθ' αὐτῆς ἐπάδοντες ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὃν λέγομεν (608a). I ignore here the textual problem of the first word of the following sentence: see the apparatus in Slings (2003), 389, with the note of Adam (1963), 419–420.

⁹ 'Antidote' and 'incantation' are commonly identified: e.g. Belfiore (1983), 62, Murray (1996), 233, Burnyeat (1999), 288 (cf. 293, apparently taking the antidote to include the whole of Books IV–IX), Giuliano (2005), 131; cf. Ferrari (1989), 142 ('related'), Leszl

that the argument is not finished and may not be secure: poetry or her adherents may yet come up with the requested defence, thus making the argument itself in need of (at least) revision and therefore incompatible with the status of ‘knowledge’. Secondly, the language of ‘incantations’ or ‘spells’, which Socrates uses here with some emphasis, is hard if not impossible to reconcile with the conditions of philosophical knowledge, since, as we shall later find, the concept of an incantation (*epôidê*) in Plato denotes a decidedly non-epistemic agency.¹⁰ Finally, since the knowledge specified at 595b conveys immunity to harm, those who possessed it would have no need for protective spells or incantations—any more, one might add, than they would need to give poetry a further chance to justify itself.

Rather than taking the knowledge referred to at 595b to be contained in Book X itself, then, it makes much better sense to treat it as the special property of true (that is, ideal) philosophers, the philosophers whose paradigm is constructed in *Rep.* V–VII and who are defined above all, in their fully achieved state, by transcendent knowledge of the good. Those who possess such knowledge are taken by Socrates to be very few. In fact, he refers to their extreme rarity further on in Book X itself, at the start of the passage in which he brings what he calls the ‘greatest charge’ or ‘greatest accusation’ against poetry. That charge is precisely that (mimetic) poetry is capable of doing grave damage (with a verbal echo of the start of the book) ‘even to good people, with the exception of a very few’.¹¹ But the ‘greatest charge’ argument allows us to add something else of fundamental importance for the shape of Book X’s critique of poetry. As he proceeds to explain the kind of experience in which even good people ‘surrender’ to the power of poetry, Socrates speaks in the first-person plural of ‘the best of us’ (605c). It is much more than a grammatical technicality to observe that first-person plural verbs and pronouns stamp the point of view both of the ‘greatest charge’ argument and of the subsequent epilogue.¹² In other words, Socrates—by which, as throughout, I mean strictly the persona presented in the text—

(2004), 179 (‘recalls’). Halliwell (1988), 107 (*ad* 595b), blurs the difference in a way which (as with much else) I no longer think right.

¹⁰ The language of knowledge certainly plays no part in the incantation itself; note the verb νομίζειν at 608b.

¹¹ ... καὶ τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς ἱκανὴν εἶναι λωβᾶσθαι, ἐκτὸς πάνυ τινῶν ὀλίγων (605c).

¹² See 605d, 606a, 607b–608b *passim*. Furthermore, the second-person singulars addressed to Glaucon at 606c–d imply as much about Socrates’ as about Glaucon’s own experience.

does not purport to be one of ‘the very few’, that tiny minority (even among ‘the good’) who are immune to the potential harm of poetry.¹³ This is all the more striking given that he *does* associate or align himself and Glaucon with ‘the good’ (*epieikeis*), and even with ‘the best of us’ (*beltistoi*): that is, with those who are committed to trying to follow the dictates of philosophical reason.¹⁴ What this means in terms of the overall direction of argument in the later parts of the critique is that it is perfectly possible to be committed to philosophical ideals and yet to remain deeply susceptible to the power of poetry. Socrates, who after all never claims to be a true or perfect philosopher in the strong sense advanced in the *Republic* (i.e., he never purports to have left the Cave), does not himself claim to possess the ‘antidote’ of knowledge of poetry’s real nature which he posited near the start of Book X.¹⁵ What he does profess to have (and to *need*) is a ‘spell’ or ‘incantation’ against poetry.

In order to work towards a fuller comprehension of what this might mean, I want now to adduce a further feature of the opening of *Rep.* X and to ask how it might help to steer our reading of the second critique of poetry. This is the fact, to which I have already alluded, that Socrates prefaces his further remarks on poetry with two indications of personal hesitation—one, a (partly) ironic gesture of nervousness about whether his views will be ‘denounced’ by the present company to the tragedians and other mimetic poets, the other a confession (in which it is impossible to detect irony) of long-standing love or affection (*philia*) and respect for Homer. (Socrates, as we shall see, will later go further and speak of *erôs*, passionate desire, for poetry: 607e.) Why should Plato give Socrates these personally inflected notes of sensitivity and uncertainty, which go beyond a passing and far less conspicuous hint of apology in the previous

¹³ One might wonder whether this minority would still listen to poetry: the answer (in the abstract) must be that they would have no reason to do so for their own part, but that their return to the Cave might in some circumstances require it.

¹⁴ On either side of his reference to ‘the best of us’ at 605c Socrates uses *beltiston* to describe the best part of the soul (605b, 606a); he also applies the adjective directly to reason, *logos*, at 607a. But earlier in 607a the word is used of those admirers of Homer who are ‘as good as they can be’ (βελτίστους εἰς ὅσον δύνανται). So 605c can readily denote those with strong philosophical aspirations but who (except for the ‘very few’) fall short of the ideal.

¹⁵ It is only a partial counter-argument that at 606b Socrates ostensibly includes himself among the ‘few’ who recognise that emotions felt in the theatre have consequences for their psychic life outside the theatre. If we wish to identify these few with those of 605c, as I did in Halliwell (1988), 148 (though I am no longer sure this is obligatory), then 605c–d shows that Socrates does not claim to be one of those who have fully *internalised* this awareness.

critique of poetry in Books II–III?¹⁶ The answer I propose is that Book X addresses poetry as a subject of directly personal concern for lovers of poetry who are reading the *Republic* itself, whereas Books II–III were orientated much more (though not exclusively) towards the role that poetry should play in the education and formation of young souls in the ideal city. Books II–III, which after all belonged to the project of founding a hypothetical, imaginary city (a city in words and a city of philosophical ‘myth’) as an analogy to the formation of the individual soul, certainly provided indications that in thinking about the role of poetry in education Plato’s readers need to ponder the role of poetry in adult (and therefore their own) lives.¹⁷ But the educational terms of the discussion nonetheless provided the dominant framework of the earlier critique, giving it a formalised and quasi-institutional focus. By contrast, *Rep. X* makes no explicit reference to the educational system or the socio-political structure of Callipolis; instead, it broadens the earlier topic of education into the larger question whether Homer’s poetry deserves to count as the supreme ‘education’ (*paideia*) of Greece.¹⁸ Nothing is said about young Guardians, or indeed any Guardians at all—only the *internal* guardianship, *phulakê*, which the soul exercises or fails to exercise over itself (606a).¹⁹ And, after the opening of the book, the only reference back to the society and politics of the imaginary city which has shaped so much of the dialogue’s quest comes at the conclusion of the argument (607a–c), where, as we shall soon see, it becomes caught up in a remarkable statement of ambivalence on Socrates’ part.

Where Books II–III, then, scrutinised and evaluated poetry principally in terms of education (including the politics of education), Book X reopens the subject in a way which allows that earlier perspective to fade partly into the background, though not, of course, to vanish alto-

¹⁶ Socrates struck an apologetic note in relation to Homer at III, 391a; the tone of 398a is also germane but far more impersonal than the start of Book X. Cf., though the point at issue is different, Socrates’ embarrassment in speaking derogatorily of the poets at *Apol.* 22b.

¹⁷ Cf. Burnyeat (1999), 256, 262, as well as the general emphasis of his lectures (an outstanding discussion of the subject) on Plato’s concern with ‘the total culture’.

¹⁸ See esp. 606e; cf. also the idea that *paideia* itself is a subject on which Homer allegedly ‘attempts to speak’ (599c–d).

¹⁹ For the idea of an internal ‘guardian’ in the soul, see esp. IX, 591a (with the cognate verb at 591e). Cf. the Myth of Er’s (symbolic) motif of the *daimôn* which accompanies the soul through life as a ‘guardian’, *phulax*, and ‘fulfiller’ of the life which the soul chose in its preexistent state, 620d.

gether from the mind of a retentive reader of the work.²⁰ The relationship of Book X to the earlier parts of the *Republic* raises many complex issues, including details of psychology and metaphysics which lie outside my brief here.²¹ My immediate concern here is with a shift in perspective, between Books II–III and Book X, that affects the relationship to poetry of at least one kind of reader of Plato's text. What I mean by this is that whereas the earlier critique concentrated relatively impersonally, as far as Socrates was concerned, on its role in the education of the young Guardians, Socrates' confessional stance of 'love and reverence' towards Homer—a love implanted in him precisely in his own childhood (595b)—serves as an invitation to readers to filter the arguments which follow through *their own* love of poetry. This is not a historical speculation about a particular readership for the *Republic*, but rather a way of tracing in Plato's text a set of cues for one kind of implied reader. We shall see that this factor recurs with renewed emphasis in the conclusion to the critique, making it even more plausible and important to suppose that Socrates, in speaking of his own love of poetry to Glaucon (whom he takes to share it: see below), is tacitly addressing those who themselves understand from the 'inside' what it is like to succumb to the power of poetry.

It is worth adding here a consideration which is hardly ever taken into account in approaches to the first part of Book X but which supplies a further set of cues for an implied reader of the work. As we come to the start of what we call Book X from the end of what we call Book IX (and we have no reason to think the book divisions are themselves Platonic),²² we have at the front of our minds the idea of the city of the *Republic* as

²⁰ There are, of course, some direct back-references, e.g. at 603e (to 387d–e, 388), and the connections between the two sections include a central preoccupation with tragedy and Homer ('leader of the tragedians', 595c, cf. 598d, 605c, 607a).

²¹ As regards psychology, Socrates starts by referring back (595a) to earlier analysis of the soul, yet he never directly adduces the tripartite model in what follows and sometimes seems to ignore it, e.g. in the blurring of *thumos* and *epithumia* at 606d; for differences between Book X and earlier books in this respect, cf. Belfiore (1983), 50–56. On the metaphysical side, the issues are comparable: Book X 'echoes' the hierarchical ontology of the middle books but nowhere specifically picks up the earlier discussion and again sometimes seems to ignore it (e.g. in giving the craftsman understanding of 'forms' at 596b).

²² The book divisions represent points of transition in the discussion, some (e.g. II, V) much stronger than others (e.g. IX, which is part of an ongoing sequence). But the start of each book from II onwards certainly requires to be read against the background of what has preceded.

above all the city (*polis*) or constitution (*politeia*) ‘in the soul’. This motif is indeed one of the salient features of the final pages of Book IX; it is more prominent here than anywhere else in the entire dialogue. At 590e–591a Socrates proposed that the point of education is to establish a ‘ruler’, a ‘guardian’ and a ‘constitution’ *inside* the soul. It is by attending to ‘the constitution in oneself’ (591e), he proceeds to say, that the good person will adopt the right attitude to externals such as wealth and honour; and he and Glaucon end the book by agreeing that such a person will engage in politics only ‘in the city of himself’, ‘the city in words’ which has been constructed in the course of the dialogue, a city which may exist only as an ideal ‘model’ (*paradeigma*) but which is nonetheless a compelling standard by which the individual must ‘found his own city’ or ‘make a new city of himself’ (*heauton katoikizein*, 592b). This passage at the end of Book IX can be (and has been) debated from various angles. I want, for present purposes, to bypass the immense and, in a sense, inexhaustible question of the relationship between the literal (political) and analogical (psychological) roles of Callipolis in the *Republic* as a whole. The sole point I want to stress is that the fact that the end of Book IX has placed an unprecedented weight on the ‘internal’ city helps to steer a reader round to considering the following discussion of poetry in terms, above all, of ‘the city within’. It is no accident that apart from 590d–592b the most explicit occurrences of this same trope are both in *Rep. X* itself, at 605b (where the mimetic poet is said to introduce a ‘bad constitution’ into the individual soul) and, most significantly, at 608b, in the epilogue, where the protective incantation against poetry is to be sung by one who ‘fears for the constitution inside himself’. It is not, of course, that Book X forgets altogether about the politics of poetry; 605b for example, just cited, explicitly juxtaposes city and soul in a way which chimes with the central design of the whole work.²³ But it is nonetheless fair to emphasise that, unlike the discussion in Books II–III, the second critique of poetry is independent of any particular political or social framework, let alone the peculiar class-structure of Callipolis, and is correspondingly focussed on the impact of poetry on the individual soul. This reinforces my suggestion about Socrates’ personal accent at 595b–c. Both factors set up the subject of poetry in a way whose implicit addressee is the

²³ Cf. also the references to the city at 595a and 607b: but the first is directly in the shadow of Book IX’s emphasis on ‘the city within’, while the second is sandwiched between the confessional character of the ‘greatest charge’ and the highly personal accents of the epilogue, as discussed in my text below.

individual lover of poetry. Such individuals are now invited to consider the subject in an entirely contemporary and politically non-idealistic setting.

The points I have made about the start of Book X all acquire extra force when taken in conjunction with the much more elaborate cues provided by the epilogue to the discussion of poetry, the second part of its 'frame', at 607–608. It is to the details of this remarkable passage that I now want to turn. The first striking point about it is that it casts the preceding arguments and the decision to revisit the subject of poetry as a 'defence speech' (*apologia*)²⁴ for the earlier banishment of mimetic poetry from the ideal city. Now, several sections of the *Republic* refer to themselves as 'defences' against possible criticism—in itself an important indicator that Plato knew his works would be available to a mixed readership which could not be expected to be always instinctively sympathetic to the ideas explored in them.²⁵ In the present case, we can be quite specific about what is at issue, since Socrates proceeds to address poetry directly in her personified status as an alluring female (a kind of imagery for which Plato had precedents, not least in Old Comedy)²⁶ with an attempt to rebut any suspicion that he and Glaucon deserve to be convicted of 'harshness and philistinism' (607b). The terms used in this last phrase occurred much earlier, at III, 410d–411a, precisely to describe those who have no dealings with *mousikê*, those who 'keep lifelong company with gymnastics but never touch *mousikê*' (410c).²⁷ At 607b, then, Socrates is keen to explain that he and Glaucon are

²⁴ See the cognate verb, *apologeisthai*, at 607b. For other Platonic uses of judicial imagery, see Louis (1945), 64–65 nn. 99–100.

²⁵ See e.g. IV, 419a ff. (Adeimantus *requests* a defence against possible criticisms: cf. 420b, d), V, 453c (Socrates prompts Glaucon to come up with a defence of their position); cf. VI, 488a, 490a. Some of Plato's writings were criticised outside the Academy even during his lifetime: cf. Crantor fr. 8 (Mette) for mockery of the supposedly Egyptian borrowing of the social structure of the *Republic*.

²⁶ Poetry is a female (deity) who has gone into (voluntary) hiding in Aristophanes fr. 466 PCG; cf. Music personified as an abused female (perhaps a hetaira) in Pherecrates fr. 155 PCG, Cratinus' presentation of Comedy as his wife in *Putine*, and the sexual characterisation of Euripides' Muse at Aristophanes *Frogs* 1306–1308: cf. Hall (2000) and Sommerstein (2005) on such figures. Since some of the (unidentified) quotations at *Rep.* 607b–c are probably comic (Halliwell [1988], 155), it suits the context nicely if Plato is (subliminally) adapting a comic trope in personifying poetry.

²⁷ At 410d Socrates couples *sklêrotês*, 'harshness', with *agriotês*, 'fierceness' or 'hardness' (over-development of the spirited, *thumoeides*, part of the soul); *agri-* terms are from the same root as *agroikos*, which Socrates uses in the same context at 411a: note their synonymy at *Phdr.* 268d–e, with Halliwell (1988), 154, for some further documentation.

not irremediably hostile to poetry and the cultural values associated with it (a charge, incidentally, which some may have made against the historical Socrates).²⁸ It is vital to see, as Gadamer is among the few to have done, that it is precisely in order to make this point that he adduces the ‘ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’: in other words, the reference to the ‘quarrel’ (which I take to be a shorthand for a real history of tension between different strands in Greek culture, not some kind of self-referential invention on Plato’s part) is not an outright justification, let alone a *promotion*, as many have suggested, of philosophical ‘enmity’ towards poetry.²⁹ It is part of a ‘defensive,’ self-exculpating step on Socrates’ part, and in some sense on Plato’s part too; it is a gesture towards trying to move beyond the quarrel, not to exacerbate it. The core of what Socrates is saying to poetry in this context—and therefore, in effect, to Plato’s readers—is in three stages: first, please do not convict us of philistinism (because we are not philistine: i.e. we share an inclination towards *mousikê*); secondly, *we* have not created the tensions between philosophy and poetry (consider all the gibes and insults that poetry has hurled against philosophers); and thirdly, what we ourselves really want (or at least are happy to envisage) is a *rapprochement* between poetry and philosophy, indeed, nothing less than a reversal of the verdict of ‘banishment’ we have reached and a welcome return of poetry to the city (607c).

Before (or, in fact, while) we look more closely at that last, crucial point, we ought to register a further and paradoxical dimension to the judicial imagery of the whole epilogue. I have already mentioned Socrates’ idea of a ‘defence’ on his own part in attempted vindication of the earlier decision to remove or exclude mimetic poetry from the city. It is precisely this pressure to defend that decision which leads into the complex expression of self-exculpation I have just summarised. But this self-exculpation includes an invitation to poetry to defend *herself* further against the charges brought by Socrates and Glaucon. The same verb *apologeisthai*, to ‘defend oneself’, used by Socrates of himself at 607b is

²⁸ Aristophanes *Frogs* 1491–1495 shows that Socrates could be at least satirically suspected of ‘abandoning *mousikê*’, though this is relative not absolute (since it is a coded gibe at Euripidean drama).

²⁹ Nightingale (1995), 60–67 contends that the quarrel was invented by Plato, but her statement that Socrates ‘concludes his attack . . . by announcing [*sic*] a quarrel’, 66, erases the apologetic nuances of 607b, as does e.g. Reeve (1988), 221 (‘Plato is ready to rejoin the . . . quarrel’). To make the quarrel a *reason* for the banishment, as does Corlett (2005), 71, is a sheer distortion. Gadamer (1980), 46–47, discerns the correct nuance.

now applied, twice over, to poetry herself (607d, 608a). This picks up the judicial imagery of 605c, where Socrates formulated the greatest charge or gravest 'accusation' (the verb is the standard forensic term, *katégorein*). Taken together with the intervening image of the 'ancient quarrel', the double use of the verb 'to defend oneself', with first Socrates (and Glaucon) then poetry herself as subject, seems to suggest that the dispute is one in which the roles of prosecutor and defendant can easily be switched round. Who exactly is on trial—poetry for its/her power to harm the soul, or Socrates and Glaucon for seeming to repudiate such a fundamental component in Greek culture and for taking the risk of displaying cultural philistinism and boorishness (a suggestion, furthermore, which 607b couches in the quasi-judicial language of conviction or condemnation, *katagnôskein*)?

Reading Plato fastidiously means, in part, attending to the subtly figurative elements of his writing. If we do that in the present instance, we are confronted, I submit, not just by echoes of a contemporary background of debate but, more importantly, by an elaborately layered metaphor for the inconclusiveness (the *internal* inconclusiveness) of the *Republic's* second critique of poetry. Having initiated the idea of a trial by bringing the gravest of charges against poetry, Socrates then places himself in the position of defendant (against possible 'condemnation' from outside the text, i.e. from lovers of poetry reading the *Republic*), and, in a further move, places the judicial onus on poetry again (and/or her spokesmen, *prostatai*)³⁰ to make a *new* defence against the charges brought—and a new defence whose success Socrates himself is prepared to celebrate, since he and Glaucon know their underlying susceptibility to poetry's bewitchment (607c). Before examining this last strand further, we need to uncover a deep paradox built into the judicial or forensic imagery of the epilogue. Not only is this imagery used to express the idea of an unfinished series of trials and retrials, as well as the possibility of accuser and accused changing places. Socrates behaves quite unlike a real litigant by hoping for his opponent's *success*. (Picture a real-life, especially an Athenian, plaintiff who says, 'I would dearly love the defendant to

³⁰ After imagining poetry delivering her own defence at 607d, Socrates then invokes her spokesmen, the 'lovers of poetry': (i) at the *metaphorical* level this trades on the fact that (in Athens) a woman could not speak in court herself; (ii) at the *literal* level, the assumption is that a detailed poetics could hardly be accommodated within a poetic work itself (Plato has not envisaged a full *ars poetica* in verse). The claim of Naddaff (2002), 125, that by inviting a new defence Socrates 'announces before the fact the defense's defeat', makes the passage perversely self-confounding.

come up with a better defence'!) The judicial trope that unfolds from 605c to 608a is, in sum, a pointed expression both of inconclusiveness (it is far from certain, even now, that the sentence of banishment should be implemented) and of ambivalence (it is far from certain that Socrates and Glaucon *want* her to be banished). Any reader of *Republic X* who ignores these complications in the epilogue to the discussion of poetry is missing something vital.

But the complications do not stop with the paradoxes of Socrates' judicial imagery. In explaining his and Glaucon's attitude of 'good will' towards poetry, the good will of people who have tried to force themselves to give up their erotic passion for a woman they loved in their youth, Socrates introduces the motif of an incantation to be sung for self-protection while listening to poetry, until it becomes clear whether she can deliver an adequate defence of herself after all (607e–608b). Although the passage as a whole somewhat blurs the distinction between listening to a further defence of poetry and listening to poetry in performance (and the blurring is increased by the possibility that poetry might defend herself *in poetry*: 607d), it is certainly insufficient to treat 608a–b to refer exclusively to listening to a defence.³¹ When that is Socrates' primary meaning, at 607d, he simply says, 'we shall listen graciously' (either to poetry, in her self-defence, or to her spokesmen in prose), without any suggestion of exposure to the full force of poetic seductiveness. By contrast, the whole impetus of the incantation metaphor is that it evokes a need for urgent protection in a situation of active danger, the danger posed by poetry's capacity to bewitch.³² The incantation passage therefore prompts two pressing questions of interpretation. The first is: why will Socrates and Glaucon have to continue to 'listen' to poetry *at all*, if the case for poetry's 'banishment' has been confirmed in Book X? why can they not just live without her?³³ And the second is: what can Socrates mean by a spell or incantation against poetry, particularly one to be 'sung' or chanted *while* listening to poetry?

³¹ Janaway (1995), 153 and n. 44, rightly opposes Gould (1990), 221 and n. 13, on this point.

³² The metaphor borrows part of its force from the erotic analogy in which it is embedded. Where *erôs* is concerned, incantations are most commonly used to attract someone: see e.g. Xenophon *Mem.* III.xi.16–18. But Plato probably alludes (obliquely) to the use of spells by passive victims as well as active users of erotic 'magic' (cf. n. 42): for a conspectus of such practices in antiquity, cf. Winkler (1990), 79–98.

³³ That Socrates speaks of continuing to listen to poetry is often overlooked, even by such an acute reader of Plato as Burnyeat (1999), 287: Socrates 'has forsworn [Homer] for good' (corrected spelling). Cf. Gadamer (1980) 39, 'permanent exile.'

It is only a partial answer to the first of these questions to say that Socrates speaks for philosophers who must live in the actual world of a city like Athens, a world in which it is inconceivable for Plato's readers that poetry (including the works of Homer and the tragedians) could cease to exist in the foreseeable future. Since Socrates also speaks for those who, as this very passage reiterates, acknowledge 'the city in the soul', the question stands: why, even in a non-ideal city, will people like Socrates and Glaucon not do everything possible to *stop* 'listening' to poetry? why will they not 'exile' poetry from their internal city, even if she still walks the streets, as it were, of the material city in which they find themselves? The appropriate answer to this question, I believe, is radical and yet in a sense obvious: Socrates speaks here for philosophers *who do not want or intend* to abandon poetry. The answer is 'obvious' in that it is not only embedded in the language of continuing to listen to poetry but is expressively manifest in the psychological and erotic imagery of the epilogue as a whole.³⁴ It is radical, however, in that it undermines those rigidified readings of the *Republic* which take the 'banishment' of the best, most imaginative poets to be Plato's emphatic, final word on the subject.

When Socrates proposes to Glaucon that they would be pleased to welcome poetry back from exile, he cites the experience of being 'bewitched' (*kêleisthai*, 607c) by poetry, i.e. caught in the magical spell of its words, as the *reason* for not wanting to see poetry actually banished. The vocabulary of 'bewitchment' is applied to the psychotropic powers of poetic language as early as the Homeric poems; it is also famously applied to Socrates himself by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* and by Glaucon in the *Republic*.³⁵ Since this vocabulary has available erotic connotations, Socrates' motivation for wanting to give poetry a further chance to justify herself blends into the overtly erotic imagery which then dominates the last part of the passage. Socrates compares himself and Glaucon to a person who, when young, felt *erôs* for a woman but later decided that

³⁴ Murray (2003), 6 thinks that Plato's imagery reinforces his arguments against mimetic poetry, but her reference to *Rep.* 607b–608a ignores precisely the emotional ambivalence which the erotic imagery of the passage helps to convey.

³⁵ Homeric *kêlêthmos*: *Od.* 11.334 ~ 13.2. Socratic bewitchment: *Symp.* 215b–216a (comparison with music of Marsyas), *Rep.* II.358b (snake-charming metaphor); cf. Socratic incantations, n. 39 below. For some other Platonic uses of *kêlein*, *epaidein* etc., see Louis (1945), 69–70, 221, Belfiore (1980): the latter's interesting analysis treats Plato's use of such language as more schematic than I take it to be. The erotic associations of *kêlêsis* terms are evident at e.g. Ibycus 287.3 *PMG*, Euripides *Tro.* 893.

the desire was harmful and consequently tried to ‘force’ himself (607e) to keep his distance from her, i.e. to end the relationship. But the simile, like the rest of the epilogue, is saturated with ambivalence. The former lover has not really lost his *erôs*; it is ingrained or rooted in the soul,³⁶ which is why ‘force’ is needed to achieve any distance from the beloved. What’s more, the lover continues to feel ‘well disposed’ towards the woman, keen that she should be seen at her ‘best and truest’ (608a), which underlines the earlier judicial imagery of hoping that a valid defence of poetry will after all be found. Socrates goes on to refer to the incantation as a means of avoiding falling back into a passion which he characterises as belonging to his boyhood and to the lives of the many.³⁷ But this disdain for the ‘immaturity’ and ‘vulgarity’ of a passion for poetry is not only a rhetorically coded statement of cultural considerations (love of poetry is implanted during the formative period of boyhood, as Socrates himself noted at 595b, and it is characteristic of large sections of a community like Athens). It is also a mark of the ambivalence of the passage and does not cancel out the sense of erotically charged *anxiety* about falling back in love. Unlike the many scholars who cite the negative without the counterbalancingly regretful elements of this passage, I contend that Socrates speaks in the voice of one who does not wish to lose the ability to be ‘bewitched’ by poetry but to find an ethical justification for continuing to have that experience (607c–d), and as someone who wants to *transform* the value of his relationship to the previous object of his *erôs*, not to abandon that relationship altogether (607e–608a).

If this means, then, that Socrates represents the philosophical lover of poetry,³⁸ and in a manner which wistfully makes poetry an object

³⁶ The perfect participle ἐγγεγονότα denotes not a previous state but a continuing presence. I do not know what Murray (1996), 232 means by saying that this clause ‘is presented almost as an excuse for P[laton]’s love of poetry’: the dramatic point is clear; Socrates speaks as someone whose love of poetry can never be securely eradicated. The verb ἐγγίγνεσθαι is common in Plato, often denoting how something, whether good or bad, takes a strong hold in the soul (e.g. *Charm.* 157a, *Gorg.* 504e, *Rep.* IV, 439c) or the city (e.g. *Rep.* V, 456e, VIII, 552c, 564b). For an application of the verb to *erôs*, cf. Isocrates *Helen* 55.

³⁷ The adjective *paidikos*, ‘boyish’, ‘childish’, at 608a, is sometimes associated by Plato with the idea of play (*paidia*) and therefore as the antithesis of *spoudaios*, ‘serious’: see esp. *Crat.* 406b–c. Such an overtone at 608a would meld nicely with the wording of the incantation itself in the following sentence, as discussed later in my text. *Paidikos* is not intrinsically derogatory: see e.g. *Lys.* 211a.

³⁸ It is not only in this context that Plato represents Socrates as a (wistful) lover of poetry. In addition to the many poetic quotations and references put in his mouth, *Apol.*

of emotional ambivalence not outright hostility, that goes some way towards answering my first question (why should Socrates and Glaucon not simply *stop* 'listening' to poetry?). But it might seem to do so only at the cost of complicating even further the second question (what does Socrates mean by singing a spell or incantation while listening to poetry?). In one respect, however, the answer proposed to the first question is part of an answer to the second too: it is precisely because of the ambivalent combination of attraction and resistance that the lover of poetry will continue to listen to poetry (while sustaining the hope of finding a justification for doing so) yet will also make use of an incantation for protection. But what exactly does Socrates imply by the metaphor of an incantation? On one level it is clear that the metaphor involves a kind of contest between the 'magic' of poetic language and emotions and the counter-magic of philosophical rationalism. But it is not sufficient to maintain, as some have done, that the incantation represents a purely rationalistic reinterpretation of the old Greek motif—prominent in Homer and given a fresh statement in Gorgias' *Helen*—of the 'magic of words'. I earlier gave three reasons for not equating the incantation, which is for those fearful of resuccumbing to the quasi-erotic appeal of poetry, with the 'antidote' or drug of 595b, which is the knowledge (fully possessed only by perfect philosophers) that would give *immunity* against the power of poetry. Admittedly, it is possible to find passages in Plato where drugs and incantations operate together, including the riddling passage of *Charmides* where Socrates purports to have a 'Thracian' cure for headaches which combines the two.³⁹ But *Republic X* gives no hint of such a medical model. Instead it separates the two things, as they sometimes were in the professional medicine of the Hippocratics; and it uses the metaphor of an incantation to evoke a rather insecure, apprehensive frame of mind, even if it (possibly) has

41a–b is tellingly eloquent: Socrates would be prepared to 'die many times' to experience a life in Hades in which he might meet poets like Hesiod and Homer.

³⁹ *Charm.* 155e, which leads into a passage on the combined soul-and-body medicine of the Thracian 'doctors of Zalmoxis' (156–158): at the end of the dialogue Socrates suggests that possession of true virtue would make the incantation unnecessary (176a), but at the same time we are left with the image of Socrates himself as the great user of (philosophical) incantations (176b). Cf. the (allegorical) midwives at *Theaet.* 149d. Another passage which combines drugs and incantations (metaphorically) is *Meno* 80a, significantly describing Socrates himself in his capacity to bewitch the minds of others! The image of Socratic incantations was later used satirically by Timon of Phlius fr. 25 (Diels).

some resonance of Orphic and Pythagorean practices as well.⁴⁰ The incantation, then, is for those who lack the drug; equally, anyone who had the antidote would have no need of the incantation. Moreover, the incantation conjures up a non-epistemic and at least partly self-persuasive device. It is to be ‘sung’ by the person himself, not by a doctor or healer; and it is implicitly in need of repetition, as suggested by the indefinite clause in 608a (‘for as long as poetry is unable to defend herself, we shall listen to her ...’). In all these respects the closest Platonic comparandum is *Phaedo* 77e, where after purporting to furnish arguments that souls exist both before and after their embodied lives, Socrates acknowledges that there remains a ‘child’ of fear inside Cebes and Simmias—fear that their souls will be scattered to the winds at death. Cebes, accepting the existence of this inner child, asks Socrates to try to persuade them out of their fear, and Socrates responds by telling them to ‘sing an incantation’ over this child every day.⁴¹ As in *Rep.* X, there is a tension between the rational force of philosophical *logos* and the recalcitrant power of (irrational) emotion, and the metaphor of ‘incantation’ relates to the attempt to enable the former to prevail over the latter. The big difference between the two contexts, however, is that Cebes and Simmias have no *wish* to be afraid of death (quite the reverse) whereas in the *Republic* Socrates and Glaucon have experienced an *erôs* and bewitchment that they find it hard to abandon and to which at least one part of their soul continues to feel an attraction.

The critical point—and paradox—which now needs integrating into an interpretation of *Rep.* 608b is that while the incantation is identical with the argument, the *logos*, of the second critique of poetry (Socrates

⁴⁰ The list of therapies at *Rep.* IV, 426b involves a marked division, overlooked by e.g. Giuliano (2005) 131, between purely physical and more indirect processes; this suggests a viewpoint from which incantations are considered a somewhat extreme resort: note the parallel division (relating to means of harm) at *Laws* XI, 932e–933a, and for this kind of view in Hippocratic medicine, cf. Lloyd (1979), 15–16, 40, 42; Plutarch recognises such a division in his echo of *Rep.* 608b at *Mor.* 920c. For connections between *epôidai* (literal or metaphorical) and persuasion (sometimes affective rather than fully rational), see e.g. *Laws* II, 659e, VI, 773d, VIII, 837e. Untersteiner (1966), 147 underestimates the non-rational implications of *epôidê* at *Rep.* 608a (and elsewhere in Plato). We know that, among others, Orphics could be thought of as using *epôidai*: see Euripides *Cyclops* 646; cf. the Derveni papyrus col. 6.2, Betegh (2004), 14. The evidence for Pythagorean use of *epôidai* is late (e.g. Iamblichus *Vita Pyth.* 164, 244) but probably has roots in earlier practice.

⁴¹ Although Socrates suggests that his friends might seek someone who can sing an incantation for them (78a), he hints that it is best for them to perform their own incantations, a point he later reiterates in relation to his own myth at 114d.

is quite explicit about that), it is an incantation which is only provisional (since the judicial image of the epilogue has already emphasised the hope of a new defence of poetry) and which in itself *reiterates the tensions* which were latent in the argument itself. Socrates specifies the twin elements of the incantation: first, that ‘we must not take such poetry seriously as a means of grasping the truth’; secondly, that ‘the one who listens to it must be very wary of it, out of fear for the constitution inside himself’. This paradoxical combination of thoughts matches the shape of the earlier critique, treating mimetic poetry simultaneously as insubstantial, unreal, or specious, yet also, on the other hand, as capable of overwhelming the souls of ‘even the best of us’, as Socrates put it in the ‘greatest charge’ section (605c). Critics of Plato have sometimes complained that this pair of ideas is a weakness in the case that Socrates makes, a flaw in Plato’s supposed theory of art. But I have argued elsewhere that it makes better sense to regard the apparent anomaly as reflecting a set of problems inherent in mimetic art itself, as well as giving a clue to the deliberately provocative status (which I touched on earlier) of some of the arguments of Book X itself: the anomaly is an issue, in other words, for anyone who recognises the artificiality of mimesis yet is susceptible to its imaginative potency. The crucial consideration for my present case, however, is that Socrates conspicuously builds the anomaly into the incantation itself, and by doing so he heightens its precariousness as a means of providing protection. In the erotic terms of the preceding context, it is equivalent to telling oneself that the woman one used to love is utterly insignificant and could never be taken seriously—but that one had better be perpetually vigilant against her ability to plunge one back into a state of bewitched passion. Or, to glance back at the parallel incantation in the *Phaedo*, it would be like laughing at the triviality of death (as Socrates actually does in that dialogue)—and then reminding oneself how terrified of it one might become at any moment. Why should Plato go out of his way, we ought to ask ourselves, to make Socrates not just recall the tensions visible in the earlier arguments, but underline the fact that he and Glaucon currently have no better protection against poetry than to repeat those arguments in an anxious, quasi-magical act of self-persuasion?⁴²

⁴² I use the term ‘quasi-magical’ guardedly; for reservations about counting incantations as magic, see Dickie (2001), 24–25. But there is evidence both in the *Republic* and elsewhere for distinguishing *epôidai* from physical treatments (see n. 40 above), and for therefore treating metaphorical incantations as relying on something other than cognitive efficacy (see my text on *Phaedo* 77e above). Plato must have been familiar with Gorgias’

The nub of my unorthodox answer to this question is that, far from presenting the 'banishment' of mimetic poets as the unequivocal outcome of an irreconcilable conflict, Plato wishes to create a strong sense that the relationship between poetry and philosophy (more specifically, their relationship in the soul of the philosophical lover of poetry) remains an unsolved, abiding problem. If we allow the richly metaphorical writing of the epilogue its full weight, we are confronted, as I have tried to show, by an extraordinary series of factors: first, the ambiguities attaching to the language of prosecution and 'defence' (the last thing Socrates wants is to be 'convicted' of insensitivity to poetry); secondly, the deep ambivalence conveyed by Socrates' admission that he himself would welcome a new defence on the part of poetry, and would do so *precisely* because of familiarity with the 'bewitchment' (*kêlêsis*) of listening to poetry like Homer's; thirdly, the implication of Socrates' erotic analogy that he and Glaucon have not really lost their ingrained passion for poetry; fourthly, the double suggestion that Socrates and Glaucon will continue to listen to poetry in the actual world (as opposed to Callipolis)⁴³ but also in the city within their souls; and, finally and most paradoxically, the metaphor of an incantation whose protection against poetry takes the form of Book X's own arguments, arguments which, however, reached their climax with the charge that 'even the best of us' (with very few exceptions) are unable to resist the overwhelming emotional impact of the greatest poetry.⁴⁴ Put all that together, and the upshot of the second critique emerges as one of the most thought-provokingly ambivalent and unresolved conclusions to an argument to be found anywhere in Plato's mature work. In terms of the passage's intertwined strands of imagery, we can say that the 'trial' of poetry has reached a verdict which is only provisionally and uncertainly upheld; that the lover's passion is unlikely ever to die (hence the need for psychological 'force', 607e, to try to detach him from the object of his passion); and that the protective incantation will have to be repeated

description of the persuasive 'magic' (*goêteia*) of the 'incantations' of poetry and rhetoric in his *Helen*, fr. 11.10 DK. The *alexipharmaka* of *Polit.* 279c–d are classed as part of 'magic' at 280d–e.

⁴³ Note the passing indication at *Symp.* 194c of a Socrates who attends the tragic theatre; it would be strained to take this to refer only to attendance at the *proagon* (mentioned just before, 194b).

⁴⁴ The paradoxical equation between Book X's arguments and a non-epistemic incantation does not mean *literally* that Book X's words must be constantly 'repeated': the point, I take it, is that the arguments must be retraced until a more secure verdict on poetry (or perhaps a rescinded verdict) is reached.

every time one comes into the presence of poetry, without ever permanently relieving the soul of the desire to listen to her. There is, in short, no cure for poetry in Plato's *Republic*, only a prescription to counteract a potentially pathological addiction to the emotional needs released by poetry with a commitment to search for a way of rechanneling the *erôs* that drives those needs into forms of poetic experience which harmonise pleasure with truth and goodness.

The analysis presented above has further possible ramifications. They branch in two main directions. On the one hand, Socrates' incantation is a metaphor (though hardly, in this respect, a metaphor at all) for the reading of Plato himself; on the other, it is a challenge to readers to develop new, philosophically anchored justifications of poetry. So, on the first score, one could use the epilogue to Book X's critique as the basis for an approach to Plato's own ongoing, indeed unending, engagement with poetry, an engagement which far from banishing poetry from the 'soul' of his work (least of all the poetry of Homer) constantly evokes and competes with it on every level from verbal texture, via characterisation and thematic development, to the creation of large-scale dramatic, narrative and mythological structures.⁴⁵ Any reader of the dialogues who does not understand why poetry might matter both to individuals and to cities is badly under-equipped to come to terms with the almost pervasive sense in which Plato's own writing 'continues to listen' to the voices of poetry, if always against the background of protective philosophical incantations. Nor could such readers hope to appreciate how the Platonic Socrates is presented as himself a kind of 'bewitcher', a practitioner of the same intensity of verbally mediated seduction that he ascribes to the poets (and has known how to love in them).⁴⁶ More specifically, in at least one work, the *Phaedo*, Plato uses his own quasi-poetic art of writing precisely to show one philosophical way of coming to terms with the 'greatest charge' brought against poetry by Socrates in *Republic X*. In that dialogue he sets himself (and his readers) the challenge of, in both senses of the word, 'containing' the possibility of intense surrender to tragic emotions, by making them available—both to Socrates' companions and to his readers—and yet counteracting and modifying them with an alternative philosophical perspective, namely the transcendence

⁴⁵ This fact and some of its implications have received recognition most recently in Giuliano (2005); cf. Ford (2002) 223–225 on the incantation as the *Republic* itself. For Platonic quotations from poetry, see Halliwell (2000).

⁴⁶ Socratic *kêlêsis*: cf. n. 35 above.

of tragedy which he embodies in the character of Socrates. That is one striking instance of how Plato's own work continues to 'listen' to poetry and to feel a kind of emotional pull towards it, while nonetheless singing a protective incantation against surrender to it.⁴⁷

If in one respect, then, Socrates' epilogue on poetry in *Republic X* is a clue to a whole dimension of Plato's own writing, in another it is a challenge that has elicited responses, both direct (starting with Aristotle's *Poetics*) and indirect, which have constituted much of the history of philosophical aesthetics, a history, after all, which has been extensively preoccupied with the aim of reconciling emotional pleasure with moral truth. As a short coda to this paper, I would like to offer a few very compressed thoughts in further elucidation of this challenge. If I am right, a reader of the *Republic* sympathetic to Socrates' case will continue to listen to poetry and yet will resist the power of poetry at the same time. But how is such a reader to regulate the 'city in the soul' in such a way as to follow Socrates' recommendations? On Socrates' own account, 'good', i.e. poetically successful, tragedy arouses an overwhelmingly emotional response, a flooding of the soul with pity (605c–606b), while other forms of poetry 'carry away' their audience with different but comparably unchecked feelings (606c–d). I restrict myself here to tragedy, which is the focus of the passage and poses the severest test for possible responses to Plato's text. What could it mean to continue to listen to tragedy while performing the incantation supplied by Book X's arguments, especially when, as I have emphasised, those arguments contain a paradoxical combination of judgements about poetry's status? Surely, if one continued to 'surrender' to pity, the incantation would be pointless. And if one sat in the tragic theatre and did *not* succumb to emotion but instead observed events with, say, enlightened impassivity, one would be losing the very 'bewitchment', *kêlêsis*, which motivates Socrates' desire to reconcile poetry and philosophy in the first place.

It is perfectly conceivable, I think, that Plato himself did not believe he possessed a complete, let alone an easy, answer to this dilemma. But I would like just to outline three hypothetical 'solutions' to this dilemma which have left traces in the subsequent history of aesthetics. The first is one which I think (very tentatively) can be detected in certain Stoic accounts of tragedy, particularly those of Epictetus and Marcus Aure-

⁴⁷ On this aspect of the *Phaedo*, as well as the rather different 'rewriting' of tragedy in the myth of Er, see Halliwell (2006), 115–128, Halliwell (2007), 450–452.

lius. Although the psychological dynamics of these accounts are not wholly clear, they do seem to envisage the possibility of being emotionally gripped by tragic theatre and yet learning to see the lives and judgments of the characters involved as irredeemably flawed. Marcus Aurelius speaks of learning not to be moved 'on the greater stage of life' by the sort of events found emotionally enthralling in the theatre, but he does not seem to think one should *stop* being enthralled in the theatre. Epictetus, despite his scathing dismissal of the deluded figures of tragedy, speaks of being prepared to be 'deceived' (an echo, it seems, of the Gorgianic conception of experiencing tragedy) in order to learn the uselessness of externals.⁴⁸ The psychological model at work here seems to posit a degree of emotional yielding to tragedy in the theatre yet requires this experience to be then (re)evaluated from the master-perspective of philosophy. For the Stoics themselves, however, this model appears to amount to a kind of aversion-therapy: we experience emotion in the theatre precisely in order to learn how to extirpate it (and the things which cause it) from our lives. It is hard, therefore, to see what real use the Stoic will have for tragedy, including its poetic 'bewitchment', once its 'lessons' have been learnt. But a weaker version of this position (with partial Stoic antecedents) underwrites the 'fortitude' theory of tragic catharsis held by some theorists in the Renaissance, while a kind of neo-Stoic revision of such a psychology appears much later in a remarkable passage of Nietzsche's *Morgenröte* which takes Greek tragedy to be best made for 'hard' warrior-types who are carried out of themselves in the theatre but who have reservations about the experience afterwards.⁴⁹ We have some reason for seeing something not wholly unlike this as falling within an imaginable Platonic ambit, since I have already suggested that Plato himself attempts to dramatise a transcendence, and in effect a 'redefinition', of tragedy along comparable lines in his own *Phaedo*, by allowing the expected tragic emotions to be hinted at, glimpsed in the background, and partly felt, though ultimately held at bay. Where 'Stoic' theories of tragedy leave unanswered questions about why one should expose oneself to tragic theatre at all, Plato's delicate counterpoint of emotions in the *Phaedo* gives some sense to the philosophical paradox of being simultaneously drawn towards yet resisting tragedy.

⁴⁸ Marcus Aur. *Med.* xi 6, Epictetus *Disc.* I iv 27, with Halliwell (2005a), 405–409.

⁴⁹ On the fortitude theory of catharsis see Halliwell (1998), 351–352; on Nietzsche *Morgenröte* 127, see Halliwell (2003).

Very different is the second hypothetical solution. This is the possibility of enjoying tragedy in an 'aestheticised' state of mind for which the emotions lack their full-blown existential force but are treated in a spirit of 'make-believe', bracketed off from the beliefs and impulses such emotions carry with them in life. As it happens, Socrates himself touches on something of this kind in an intriguing passage of *Republic* III, where, after insisting that the good person (and the young Guardian) could never engage in mimetic enactment of bad characters, he adds the unexplained rider, 'unless in a spirit of play'.⁵⁰ Whether or not this concession refers in context only to a kind of comedy (which is unclear) does not affect the fact that it contemplates the notion of a partly 'aestheticised' experience of dramatic representation. Extrapolating from this to tragedy is not straightforward; yet it does not seem out of the question, especially given that the term 'play' (*paidia*) at 396e is the same one used to characterise *all* mimesis, including tragedy, at 602b. What this might mean in the terms of Book X's epilogue is that a philosophical lover of poetry would cultivate a capacity to experience tragic pity (and other emotions) only in a deliberate spirit of make-believe: as the 'incantation' itself says, this person would somehow retain an underlying sense that 'this is not to be taken seriously', even in the act of enjoying the poetry which prompted the flow of emotions. But while this hypothetical model answers closely to the language of the incantation passage, it also seems intrinsically unstable. What is to stop the make-believe slipping (in the face of sufficiently powerful works) into an uncontrolled psychic 'surrender', which is precisely Socrates' 'greatest charge' against Homer and the tragedians?

We might therefore try, finally, to postulate a stronger solution to Socrates' requirement by positing a mode of experience in which emotion and rationality are *both* at work: in which reason, instead of totally relinquishing its 'guard' over the lower part of the soul (606a), allows the emotions some flow but retains an active, critical judgement of the appropriateness of those emotions, and thus retains ethical integrity for the experience as a whole. I have argued elsewhere that the *Republic* itself leaves space for a whole spectrum of states of mind in which mimetic poetry might be experienced, from severely detached ethical judgement at one end to total, identificatory immersion in characters

⁵⁰ ὅτι μὴ παιδιᾶς χάριν, 396e; for this and similar phrasing, cf. esp. VII, 539b (adolescent elenchos), *Phdr.* 276d (writing), *Politicus* 288c (decorative and mimetic art in general), *Laws* VIII, 834d.

at the other.⁵¹ Book III, with its suggestions for varying and correlating the narrative/dramatic modes of poetry with the ethical status of the characters, certainly makes it feasible to imagine philosophically modified reactions to poetry which temper and align emotion with rational judgement. But it would be a major task in its own right to try to establish whether any such integration of reason and emotion could satisfy both the ethical standards of the *Republic* and the demands of a kind of poetry that could still authentically be called tragedy. One indication of the complexities underlying that question can be found in the platonising treatise of (pseudo-)Longinus *On the Sublime*. Longinus does not overtly reject tragedy but he does reinterpret it so radically as to throw into doubt whether what he approves in it—i.e., moments of sublimely uplifting, heroic affirmation—is still ‘tragic’ at all. Certainly, the sublimity he endorses in tragic texts is something which lies ‘beyond pity.’⁵² Would that be the inevitable outcome of any robust attempt to harmonise tragedy with Platonism? Everything depends on how many kinds of tragedy there are and what makes them tragic. Poetically as well as philosophically, the issues opened up by Socrates’ challenge in *Rep. X* are far-reaching indeed.

One moral to be drawn from the three possibilities briefly sketched above is that there is no simple way of coming to terms with the marked ambivalence of Socrates’ epilogue to the *Republic’s* second critique of poetry and his expressed desire for finding a way of reconciling poetry with philosophy. As I have tried to show, the epilogue invites its readers, as pointedly as anything in Plato, to continue the debate outside the text. Yet it uses its own ‘incantation’ to express hesitation about whether the invitation could ever produce a solution that would meet the highest standards envisaged by Socrates. It does not, however, diminish the significance of the passage—quite the reverse—to conclude that it adumbrates a challenge and a problem to which no definitive solution was (or is) in sight. What Socrates gives voice to is the desire for a new, ethically informed way of ‘listening’ to poetry, but a way which will incorporate the quasi-erotic bewitchment he has felt in his experiences of Homer. He hopes to discover, whether directly from poetry itself or from its advocates, what this new way of listening would entail: he hopes, when all is said and done, not for a ‘cure’ from a sickness but for a justification to nurture a reconfigured *erôs* towards poetic beauty. With all its

⁵¹ Halliwell (2002), 79–85.

⁵² Cf. Halliwell (2005a), 409–411.

uncertainties, that is a hope which can still go some way towards defining what it means to be, in the spirit of the best kind of Platonism, a philosophical lover of poetry.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

POETRY, THUMOS, AND PITY IN THE *REPUBLIC*¹

PIERRE DESTRÉE

Plato famously begins *Republic* X by making Socrates say that the need to banish *mimêtikê* poetry is “still more plainly apparent now that [they] have distinguished the several parts of the soul (*ta tês psychês eidê*)” (595a–b). Banishing *mimêtikê* poetry, as Socrates immediately explains, is the very condition that must be fulfilled if one wants to avoid having one’s own soul destroyed (*lôbê ... dianoiias*), that is the destruction of one’s own soul’s proper order, which consists in the rule of its reasonable part, its *logistikon*. For *mimêtikê* poetry tends, Socrates explains through this second critique of poetry, to overthrow the reign of the soul’s reasoning part by fostering its ‘irrational’ part. There is thus an obvious link between this second critique of poetry and the main theme of Plato’s *Republic*, where justice is defined as the harmony of the parts of the soul, this harmony being provided by the rule of the reasonable part over the irrational part.

Yet, as has long since been noted in pertinent discussion, there is a curious discrepancy between the way Plato seems to conceive of the partition of the soul here, in Book X, and in the rest of the work. For in Book X, Plato only explicitly speaks of an ‘irrational’ (*alogiston*, 604d, or *anoêton*, 605b) part of the soul, where there seems to be no clear distinction between the appetitive part, and the spirited part, contrary to what has been argued for in Book IV and explicitly been repeated in Book IX. More precisely, when speaking of this ‘irrational’ part, which is presented as the lowest part in one’s soul, and the one at the furthest remove from truth, everything indicates that Plato is primarily, if not exclusively, thinking of the appetitive part, whereas there is no explicit mention of the spirited part: the very word *thumoeides* is not at all used in Book X.

¹ Various (and quite different) drafts of this chapter were presented at the Universities of Leuven, Arizona (Tucson), Minnesota, Northwestern, and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. I am very grateful to C. Steel, M. McPherran, E. Belfiore, R. Kraut and C. Calame for their respective invitations, and to them, and their audiences, for their comments, critiques, and further suggestions which forced me to reformulate,

This blatant difference in the presentation of the partition of the soul is certainly a major puzzle in the interpretation of the continuity and consistency of Plato's psychology in the *Republic* (and beyond the *Republic*), but it is also a major interpretive puzzle, I want to add, if we are to understand the continuity between the two critiques against poetry in the *Republic*. For as several scholars have recognized since at least the important work of J.C.B. Gosling, the poetical education the future guardians are to receive in Kallipolis is primarily addressed to the spirited part.² Or more precisely, as regards the guardians, who are representing the spirited part of one's soul: their first 'poetical' education as outlined in Books II and III amounts to the education of the spirited part of one's soul. How is one thus to explain that while in the first critique of poetry the thumoeidetic part of the soul appears to play a major role, it does not seem to play any role anymore in Book X?

In this chapter, I would like to argue that, contrary to first appearance, the thumoeidetic part of one's soul does actually play an important, albeit implicit, role in the second critique of poetry in Book X, and that from the psychological perspective there is no real discrepancy between these two critiques.

1. *Education of the Thumoeides in the First Critique of Poetry*

Before getting on to the role the thumoeidetic part of the soul may have in Book X, I should first like to focus briefly on some relevant features of the first critique of poetry, in Books II and III.

As some recent interpreters have increasingly emphasized, the thumoeidetic part of the soul plays a major role in the very construction and aim of the *Republic*.³ This aim, if one can summarize this very briefly, consists in proving that being just is the only way to attain happiness, while justice is the order between the parts of the soul where reason rules; Socrates must thus ensure that reason can eventually rule, which means, basically, rule over the appetitive desires, i.e. the epithumetic part of the soul. And this can happen if, and only if, I take it, reason can

and hopefully make more persuasive, my interpretation of this issue. Thanks so much to my co-editor Fritz-Gregor for his very careful editorial work on my paper.

² Gosling (1973), see esp. his chapter III: 'Admiration for manliness', 41–51. The classical article on this remains Gill (1985).

³ See esp. Cooper (1984), Kamtekar (1998), Moss (2005), and Richardson Lear (2006).

ensure itself an ally which can fight our appetitive tendencies. As the philosopher-kings need, in Kallipolis, soldiers to maintain order over the working class of the city, reason must be able to prevail over and subsequently rely on spirit in order to fight the appetites, that is, maintain them under control. The spirited part of one's soul is, as Plato once says (at 550b), the 'intermediate' part between reason and appetites in the sense that spirit is the means which reason has to control the appetites. Contrary to a very strong intellectualistic model Plato had adopted in his 'Socratic' dialogues—whether or not this intellectualism corresponds with the views of the historical Socrates—spirit here plays a major role in providing the way Socrates can not only prove that justice pays, but also show how being just, and more generally being virtuous, can be achievable for individuals. There is therefore a very strong reason why one's soul consists of three 'parts' or 'elements': in order to be just, or virtuous, which mainly consists in having one's reason controlling one's appetites, one must have spirit to help reason, or rather to give reason the force it needs to do so. One could, perhaps, say that without spirit, reason would be forceless, and ineffective to do its job properly, whereas spirit would be blind were it not ruled by reason. This is the very reason why courage is spirit's distinctive virtue: in order to be properly ruled by reason, our soul needs first to become courageous. For it needs courage in order to resist the blandishments of the appetites, to fight them victoriously, and to help reason to rule over them.

Now why should this first stage of our soul's moral education need to be a 'poetical' one? One might relate this to the historical fact that in Ancient Greece, Homer, and more generally poetry, was the main vehicle through which values were transmitted. One may recall that young male citizens, that is, people who were supposed to become the *kalokagathoi*, not only learnt to read and write through Homer, but the stories, the 'myths', we find in Homer and in Greek poetry generally, but especially in tragedy, told to the youth in Greece, constituted the equivalent of a written moral code. As Aristophanes famously says: 'Small children have a teacher educating them; for young men there's the poets' (*Frogs*, 1054–1055). But this circumstance certainly does not exhaust our question. For Plato could have just criticized Homer, and tragic poetry, because they transmitted wrong values, and could have proposed a totally different way of educating the youth of his city. But as a matter of fact, poetry, or *mousikê* in a general sense, which includes what we call literature as well as music, remains for Plato the way to educate the soldiers, that is the *thumoeides*, in Kallipolis. But why? First of all, because by providing

role models to be emulated, poetry is the best means by which one can educate the thumoeidetic part into becoming the ally of reason; as I will argue, admiration and, negatively, shame are the two basic emotions through which spirit can acquire the right sort of opinion of what right values consist in and, more importantly, become the courageous ally of reason. As Socrates explains in Books VI and VII, our philosophical education will consist in getting the intellectual understanding of why the *kala*, that is the right ‘values’ are right, or indeed good. But this education must be based on a prior education to these *kala*, and the most efficient way to ‘inculcate’ these values into our soul is poetry.⁴ The central reason, I suggest, is our natural propensity to admire the things and people that appear beautiful, and the fact that poetry is precisely the craft by which one can make things so appear. It is because they appear in a beautiful manner that we admire things and people, and that we therefore ‘love’ them. And it is because of this, that we want to imitate them, and, in the case of persons, to emulate them as our role-models.

The *kala* are the beautiful things that we admire, and the pleasure we get from watching (or hearing) them is the pleasure linked to this emotion.⁵ Now, as Plato repeatedly says, the *thumoeides* is basically the part of the soul whose desire is for honour, which includes competitiveness and desire for self-esteem. But we do not honour something, or somebody, unless we admire it, or her, and Plato himself explicitly links both notions (e.g. 553d). In other words, admiration is, so to say, the specific thumoeidetic emotion by which we honour and esteem—the verb *timân* means both—the *kala*. We could even say that the *kala* are nothing else, in the case at least of literature, than the admirable actions

⁴ One of the most significant passage is *Republic* III, 401e–402a: ‘Then aren’t these the reasons, Glaucon, that musical training is most important? . . . Because anyone who has been properly trained will quickly notice if something has been omitted from a thing, or if that thing has not been well crafted or well grown. And so, since he feels distaste correctly, he will praise beautiful things, be pleased by them, take them into his soul, and, through being nourished by them, become good-and-beautiful. What is ugly or shameful, on the other hand, he will correctly condemn and hate while he is still young, before he is able to grasp the reason. And, because he has been so trained, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.’

⁵ Plato does not seem to want to use the word *hêdonê* in this case, as he uses other words, like the verb *chairein* here, or more poetical words elsewhere, like the adjective ἴλαος (*Symp.* 206d), and the verb γηθεῖν (*Phr.* 251d). The reason is probably that he wants to avoid giving the impression of satisfying the appetitive part of the soul. In the *Laws* though, he will use that word without reservation, by insisting on the fact that one needs to instill this love for the *kala* through pleasure.

the heroes have performed. It is by admiring the persons or characters put on stage by literature that we admire their actions, and the values they instantiate. It is because we admire, and love, the beautiful Achilles (thanks to Homer's beautifully crafted poem) that we also admire, and value, his actions.⁶ This natural propensity is linked to another one: our natural propensity to imitate, that is, to emulate those we take to be our 'heroes', our role-models, and therefore to impersonate their values. Of course this is the main reason why Plato, in Book III, insists so much on mimesis. What youth cannot help doing when reciting Homer, or a tragic, or comic, play, is 'imitating', that is impersonating, characters they more or less identify with. As Plato will rhetorically ask Adimantus (500c): "Or do you think there is any way to prevent someone from associating with something he admires without imitating it?" And this is of course the main reason why, in Books II and III, Plato has such harsh things to say about traditional poetry: if Achilles who is traditionally considered to be the role model of a Greek soldier is in fact wrongly presented by Homer, it is of first importance to correct or replace this presentation. Now if the spirited element needs to be 'poetically' educated in the 'fine things' done by 'fine role models', we come to understand how it can also be the ally of reason in its fight against the appetites. To be habituated to love the *kala* goes along with hatred, and disgust, of 'shameful' or 'ugly' acts and persons (*aischros* meaning ugly in an aesthetic and in a moral sense). We have seen that the 'positive' emotion of the spirit is admiration; through admiration, we can easily impersonate the values incarnated by heroes, and eagerly seek the right self-esteem by emulating them. Here we have the 'negative' emotion of the spirit: disgust, which leads to the movement of shame, when the spirit is unable to resist the appetites, as is the case with Leontios.

⁶ It should be noted that the adjective *kalos* is here used as a general predicate for aesthetic success, and not as a quasi-synonym of *agathos*, even though the two notions are not to be strictly separated, the beautiful being the way something appears to be *agathos*, whether it really is so or not. For such an aesthetical usage, see e.g. V 476a–b, where the spectacle-goers are said to love the beautiful songs, colours etc, and in that case, the spectacles can be morally good or bad. In III 387a, Plato is well aware that the force of Homeric poetry is that it is beautifully written (*ποιητικώτερον*), even if it is morally dangerous. In saying that "we should regard it as of the highest importance that the first things they (= the children) hear should be improving stories, as beautiful as can be (*κάλλιστα μεμυθολογημένα*)" (II 378e, transl. Griffith), I take Plato to mean that children must be educated by tales which show morally good people and actions depicted in the most beautiful way possible, so they can admire and emulate them.

Admiration, and, negatively, shame, are the two basic thumoeidetic emotions through which one can educate the thumoeidetic part of the soul. But what about courage, which is presented as the virtue specific to the *thumos*? Among the moral virtues that a god, or a hero, should show, Plato very much insists on the virtue of courage. Fear of death is to be avoided, and therefore Plato wants to get his future guardians away from all those ‘terrible and fearful things’ that are commonly associated with the poetical representation of Hades. Pity is also to be avoided, and so Plato recommends not having heroes represented lamenting and grieving because of a misfortune. All of this is well known. But why is it obviously so important for Plato to insist on these points? Why must pity and fear stay at the core of his critique against poetry?

As we have already seen, Plato stresses the fact that the function of our *thumoeides* is to be the ally of our reason, if we are to become just and happy. An ally, that is, which is able to resist efficiently against the powerful appetites. At first sight, the reason why (an excess of) pity and fear are to be avoided is that emulating, say, Achilles lamenting in an excessive way just renders warriors not courageous enough to be the sort of ally they ought to be, and Plato greatly emphasizes the idea that experiencing an excess of fear and pity renders the soul, or the individual *μαλακός* and *δειλός*, feeble and cowardly.⁷ Yet how shall this virtue make us resist the lure of the appetites? The only objects of fear (and pity) are death, and more generally misfortune (which includes loss of friends or money or reputation, which are considered as external goods); in a word, to be courageous then is to be able to manage one’s misfortunes. So what is the link between this and the fact that our *thumoeides* must be the ally of reason in her fight against the appetites? I suggest this: the main reason why Plato condemns Homer and the poets is because they are transmitting to the youth of the city a tragic worldview,⁸ which has as a consequence that they will lose any motivation to stick to their competitive eagerness for moral goodness.

⁷ Among many passages, this one is quite interesting because it uses the very strong terms *φοβική* and *φοβίπειν* (already used by Gorgias, which Aristotle will also repeat in *Poetics* 13): “Our worry (Plato is speaking of his worry about the future of his guardians) is that all that shuddering (*φοβική*) will make our guardians more feverish/emotional (*θερμότεροι*) and soft (*μαλακότεροι*) than they ought to be” (387b).

⁸ Here I am indebted to Halliwell (2002) chapter 3, who has demonstrated that Plato clearly sees that the danger of attending tragedies (or Homeric recitals) is that spectators tend to internalise a tragic view of life.

In this tragic world, happiness is impossible, which has the devastating consequence that the desire we all have for happiness is condemned to remain empty and vain, according to the famous expression of Aristotle. But not only that. Since being morally good is the *sine qua non* of happiness, such a tragic worldview implicitly declares that to be morally good is not really worth the effort, because happiness is impossible to reach anyway. Here is, I suggest, the link between courage in the face of death and misfortune, and the *thumoeides* as an ally of reason in its fight against the appetites: it is only when becoming courageous in the sense just described that the *thumoeides* can experience the right shame which prevents the person from indulging his appetites, and the self-esteem needed for that, too. Without courage, it is just impossible to keep one's desire for moral goodness intact, and to cultivate self-esteem. Thus, a tragic worldview is morally flawed if we take seriously the equation between morality and happiness which is of central importance in the whole project of the *Republic*. And transmitting such a worldview to the youth of the city is therefore the worst possible education for them. Banishing tragic poetry is of crucial importance then in the whole project of the *Republic*.

2. *Thumoeides and Appetites in the Second Critique of Poetry*

Poetry, we have just seen, addresses itself to the spirited part of the soul by inculcating the 'fine' or 'noble' values into that part of the soul through the admiration we may feel towards the 'fine' or 'beautiful' actions, and towards the heroes the poets put on stage. Such a poetical education is of the highest importance if one wants to get real 'soldiers', that is a genuine 'spirit' in one's soul, to fight victoriously against the enemies of justice, which are the appetites. Inculcating a tragic worldview is therefore the worst possible education to be given to the spirit since it will render it feeble and cowardly instead of courageous: getting a 'tragic education', as it were, would not allow one's spirit to be the genuine ally of reason to rule over the appetites.

Yet in Book X, this major role conferred to the spirit in that first stage of education seems to have disappeared. As most interpreters have noticed, the part of the soul tragic poetry seems to be addressing is the appetitive one.⁹ When describing the part of the soul this poetry is addressing, Plato

⁹ See esp. Ferrari (1989), and Burnyeat (1999).

stresses the fact that “imitation really consorts with an element in us that is far from wisdom, and that nothing healthy or true can come from their relationship or friendship” (603a–b). It is true that Plato repeatedly says that the thumoeidetic part of one’s soul is by nature irrational, and thus requires the guidance of the *logistikon*. But as we have just seen, it is nevertheless the case that one’s spirited part can be educated, that is, be given access to the *kala* which are in the realm of *doxa*; spirit cannot reach any truth by itself, but Plato could hardly have said that ‘nothing healthy or true can come’ from its relationship, which is typically what he says of the appetites.

There are other, apparently compelling, reasons why one is tempted to consider the appetitive part to be the only ‘irrational’ part to which Plato is referring. A second argument concerns the nature of the desire to grieve and cry, which is presented by Plato as the core desire in tragedy. At first sight, it may seem strange to include this desire in the *epithumêtikon*, since Plato repeatedly says that epithumetic desires are those for food, drink, and sex. There is no problem, though, it has been argued, since Plato himself seems to include in this part such desires as mere curiosity for philosophy, and playing at politics (cf. 561c–d); and since Plato himself recognizes that the appetitive part is ‘multiform’, there is no reason why we should not enlarge the appetitive part much beyond the bare desires for food, drink or sex.¹⁰ Or, alternatively, since epithumetic pleasure can be described as linked to the body, it is quite obvious that the desire for crying can be understood as the way grief naturally expresses itself through the body, and laughter can be interpreted in the same way. And further more, in the case of laughter, Plato says that a worthwhile person should not be represented “as overcome (*kratoumenos*) by laughter” (III, 388e) which indicates, here too, that the desire for laughing is essentially an epithumetic one—the function of the *thumoeides* being to resist (*karterein*) against such overcoming. And more generally, it is Plato’s repeated emphasis on pleasure which makes him see poetry to be addressing the appetitive part of one’s soul. One of the most striking pieces of evidence for this is the famous expression *hêdusmenê Mousa* (X, 607a) This expression means that the Mousa, that is the poet, excites and strengthens pleasure (*hêdonê*) like spices excite the desire for eating, *hêdusma* being the common Greek word for spices (and other taste enhancers such as, perhaps in certain cases, also sugar). Plato has there-

¹⁰ See Burnyeat (1999), 224–225.

fore a very good reason for describing the desire to grieve as a ‘crave’ (*pepeinêkos*, 606a): so, the ‘pitying part’ of the soul, as Plato calls it once (606b), is “craving” as for its ‘food’ for grieving and lamenting, which the tragic poet aims at fulfilling.¹¹

Now, it is not obviously the case that such an interpretation of the way tragedy appeals to one’s soul should contradict the first view on poetry that Plato develops in Books II and III. On the contrary, the description of the pleasure taken in attending tragedies by a virtuous person can be very well explained within the framework of the tripartite theory of the soul. In Book IV, the famous example of Leontios makes Glaucon see the role of the *thumos*: *epithumia* can overwhelm his reason, or *logistikon*, because of the weakness of his *thumoeides*, which is not strong enough to resist (through the shame it provides to his psyche) the appeal of the (most probably, sexual) *epithumia* to look at the pale corpses. In a similar way, as stated at 604a, we here see how an average virtuous person who has lost his son can refrain from grieving in public when “he is being observed by his equals”, but when alone cannot refrain anymore: “But when he is on his own, I imagine, he will not be ashamed to say all sorts of things which he would be ashamed of if anyone else heard him speaking. And he’ll do all sorts of things which he wouldn’t be prepared to have anyone see him doing.” The case is not exactly the same as in the story of Leontios: there we see how a *thumos* can be overwhelmed by an epithumetic desire, which means that *epithumia* wins in its fight against *thumos*; here the case is much more subtle, and therefore much more dangerous: when the virtuous person is alone, he does not have the eyes of others before him, which means he does not have the power of shame provided by his *thumoeides*, and so he can indulge his epithumetic desires. As Plato explains a little further, at 605c–d, the very danger of poetry comes from the fact that we too easily think that watching (or reading) a piece of Homer or tragedy is simply harmless; we therefore take what seems to be a harmless pleasure from it, because we are not on our guard anymore: our *thumoeides* is put on silence as if we did not need it in this case. The greatest reproach against poetry would then consist in the fact that it can evoke and sustain our epithumetic desires, without any fight against our *thumoeides*! However good and strong the education of your *thumoeides* might be, poetry would have the very power of surreptitiously passing

¹¹ It is to be noted that such a way of speaking of the desire for grieving is Homeric; see *Il.* XII, 427–428, or *Od.* IV, 541.

over it, and therefore be able freely to strengthen our soul's appetitive part, and, as a result, turn our soul's proper order upside down.

Attractive as it may seem, this is, I claim, too simple a story. In fact, as some interpreters have noticed, Plato seems beyond doubt to be referring to the *thumoeides* in two passages of Book X. The first one appears to be a sort of generalization of what has been said so far (X, 606d): "And in the case of sexual desires (*aphrodisia*), anger (*thumos*), and all the appetites, . . . the effect of poetic mimesis on us is the same. I mean, it nurtures and waters them when they should be dried up, and establishes them as rulers in us when—if we are to become better and happier rather than worse and more wretched—they should be ruled." *Aphrodisia* and anger must be treated like pity and laughter (or rather contempt which gives rise to laughter) which have just been analyzed: they are further 'passions' that must be 'dried' up if one wants to keep right one's soul's proper order, that is if one is to be morally better, and therefore happier. This mention of sexual desire and anger is very probably to be understood with reference to what Plato said in Book III: the youth of the city is forbidden poetry that represents heroes who are intemperate and very prone to anger, as youth will inevitably tend to 'imitate', that is to emulate such heroes, because of their admiration for them. Now anger, as we have seen, is one of the most obvious manifestations of the thumoeidetic part of one's soul: according to the depiction we find in Homer himself, Achilles is angry with Agamemnon because his honour has been challenged. Plato therefore obviously wants to add that besides appetitive desires, poetry can also excite and strengthen some thumoeidetic desires. After all, the thumoeides is an irrational part of one's soul, and we should then include such kinds of desire as pertaining in the 'irrational soul'.¹² This addition can therefore be interpreted as a sort of reminder of what Plato said in Book III, and also in Book IX. There, Plato makes the famous statement that tragic characters, like Oedipus, Medea, or Thyestes, are poetical representations of the savage and lawless desires that each and every one of us, even morally good people (*metrioi*), can experience when dreaming (572b). And those desires clearly stem both from one's appetitive part, like the desire "to have sex with one's mother, or any one else—man, god or beast," and from the *thumoeides*, like the desire for "committing any foul murder" (571d).

¹² On this, see also Lorenz (2006) 59–73, and Moss (2007).

Yet such an inclusion of irrational, and savage, thumoeidetic desires in this ‘irrational soul’ is not the only thing, I want to suggest, Plato has to say about the *thumoeides* in the context of Book X. As we have seen, the part of the soul which is concerned with tragedy is what Plato calls the ‘lamenting part’ (*to thrênôdes*) whose particular emotion is pity (605 d: *sumpaschein*; 606b: *to eleeinon*). Tragedy therefore aims at representing people whose character Plato calls ‘indignant’ (*to aganaktêtikon*: 604e, 605a), that is heroes “in a state of grief and making long speeches of lamentation, or even chanting and beating (their) breast” (605d). Now what exactly does this typically tragic, ‘indignant’, character refer to? In his old but still very important commentary, James Adam claimed that the expression designates “a degenerate *thumos*”, and some interpreters have rightly suggested that the verb *aganaktein*, to get indignant, is thumoeidetic.¹³ For, as we have seen, the spirited part of the soul is essentially the part, or the faculty, by which we aim at distinguishing ourselves and gaining self-esteem, and its general tendency is aggressiveness, and competitiveness. Now, this natural aggressiveness can be rightly educated, as Plato tries to show in Books II and III, by the mimesis of the right *kala*, and *kaloï* heroes, and thus be turned into eager commitment to moral goodness, and into fierce resistance against the lure of the appetites. But wrong poetry can also excite the *thumoeides* and its aggressiveness in the wrong way, and this in many domains: anger against enemies which leads to the desire for revenge, anger against your commander which leads to the desire for opposition and disorder (*stasis*), and anger against death which leads to the desire for grieving. It is this last domain of anger, I suggest, which Plato here designates with the term of *aganaktein*.¹⁴

It is then quite clear, it seems to me, that Plato repeats here what he has said in Books II and III: by watching such ‘indignant’ characters, and admiring them in one way or another, we, even measured people, tend to let our *thumoeides* get indignant against death, and misfortune, whereas we should remain measured and calm in the face of it. In other words, by attending tragic theatre, we are unconsciously, little by little, transforming our *thumoeides* in the wrong way. This whole passage must be read, I submit, as a sort of waking call for an audience who have

¹³ See Rubidge (1993); Halliwell (1988), 151; and Moss (2008), 42 ff.

¹⁴ It is to be noted that the dialogue where this verb is most used is the *Phaedo*, where the term refers to Socrates’ death (cf. 63b–c, 67e, and 117d). And in the *Phaedo*, as well as in the *Republic*, indignation is linked to tears and crying. It is also to be found in *Phaedrus* 254a where it refers to the indignation coming from the white horse and the charioteer against the black horse.

liked Homer and tragedy since childhood: since they think they are safe beyond the walls of mimesis, such an audience just put down their guard, and do not notice how damaging for their *thumoeides* poetry can be. It is true that Plato says that such people, like Glaucon, are not enough habituated and reasoned, which means they do not have a perfectly well educated *thumoeides* and reason that might prevent them from any damage since after all neither Glaucon nor any other member of the audience has received the education of Kallipolis. But they are nevertheless more or less good people with, presumably, a more or less well educated *thumoeides* and reason, and this is the audience Plato wants to warn of the possible damage poetry can exercise on their soul. Or more precisely, what he wants to alert them to, is that tragic poetry can damage, or make 'degenerate' as Adam says, their *thumoeides*, by melting it down, and exciting it in the wrong direction, with the most terrible consequence that it would make them unable anymore to fight for moral goodness in order to get happiness.

This reading offers, it seems to me, the advantage of making the two critiques of poetry consonant: in both cases, Plato is first of all focusing on the damage poetry causes to one's *thumoeides* by either not educating it in the right way (in the case of young guardians) or not feeding it properly (in the case of adults living in Athens), which is most needed if one wants to fight victoriously against one's appetites in order to become morally good, and happy.

Yet, there are at least two quite obvious problems this interpretation needs to deal with. First, it remains true that Plato describes that desire for grieving and lamenting as appetitive, and that he actually does not use the very word *thumoeides* here, as if he were shifting to a bi-partite conception of the soul. So how could my interpretive proposal explain this? Alternatively, it also seems to be true that the *thumoeides* remains present here, at least implicitly, when Plato mentions the moral habituation that the targeted audience has not undergone to a sufficient degree. But this, too, seems to be creating a problem for my reading: if Glaucon's *thumoeides* is passed over by his appetite for grieving, one can hardly say that such a desire is linked to a 'degenerate' *thumoeides*. According to what Plato says in Book IV about the law of opposites, if one experiences two opposite desires, or tendencies, this means that two different parts of the soul are at stake. Here is then the second difficulty: would my reading not imply that the theatre-goer is experiencing an opposition between his 'good' *thumoeides*, limited as its education may be, and his 'bad' thumoeidetic tendencies which are excited by tragedy?

To the first problem, it should be replied that Plato had probably a very good reason to emphasize the role of the appetites here. In fact, this second critique of poetry must be understood along the lines of the famous depiction of the ‘degeneration’ of the philosopher into a tyrant. The tyrant is the one who because of neglecting the ‘muse’ and philosophy (probably both the right poetical and the philosophical educations) has become the slave of his appetites, being the representation of a person who lives his dreams for real: “Under the tyranny of Eros, what he used to become occasionally in his dreams he has now become permanently while awake, and so there is no terrible murder, no food, and no act from which he will refrain.” (IX, 574e)¹⁵ After the depiction of this ‘degeneration’ of a morally perfect (or almost perfect) inhabitant of Kallipolis into a tyrant, Plato wants to address his Athenian audience with a more direct warning: do not fall into your childish passion for tragedy, he warns them, or you will end up with your soul ruled by your appetites, that is you will become little by little like the tyrant I have just described, who is, you yourself have just recognized it, the most unhappy, and wretched person in the world! Now, in this very vivid depiction, especially in Book IX, Plato is both reminding his readers of his tri-partite theory of the soul and emphasizing that the tyrant’s soul is now totally ruled by his appetites. So this does mean that the philosopher’s *thumoeides* has now come totally under the control of the appetites, and does not at all obey his reason anymore. In other words, the philosopher’s properly educated *thumoeides* has completely ‘degenerated’ into a *thumoeides* that has completely turned amok at the service of his appetites: as Plato famously says, the tyrant’s *thumoeides* has turned from a lion into an ape (590b). Instead of being, like a lion, strongly willing to fight against his appetites, the *thumoeides* of the philosopher turned into a tyrant is now at the service of the appetites to help them make their way. The philosopher’s son (or his soul’s thumoeidetic part) who was described as listening to his father might now even be ready to beat his own parents if need be to satisfy his erotic desires (574a–c)! In other words, his *thumoeides* has simply become almost undistinguishable from his appetites; these two irrational parts of his soul are now ruling over his entire soul, having destroyed (or at least put into silence) its

¹⁵ This degeneration is depicted by Plato as a transgenerational story, but it seems to be obvious that this is a poetical, in fact Hesiodic, way to present how a philosopher, that is a well-educated person, can transform himself into a tyrant. See 574d–e, which clearly implies this.

rational part. It is no surprise then that in fact Plato does not explicitly mention the *thumoeides* by name anymore in his description of the tyrant, as if this part had now completely fused with the appetitive part.

This 'fusion' of these two irrational parts can also be explained from Plato's reluctance to avoid the second difficulty I have just mentioned. If Plato had mentioned by name the *thumoeides* in this passage on grieving and lamenting, he himself would have gone against his own law of opposites, as if the theatre audience were experiencing two opposite desires from the same part or faculty of their soul. And this is also to be found in the description of the chariot in the *Phaedrus* where the black horse, that is the *epithumiai*, expresses anger (*orgè*) against the charioteer (the reason), and the white horse (the *thumoeides*), as if it were indignant against them because they are trying to restrain it from fulfilling its erotic desires: it "bursts into a torrent of insults as soon as it has caught its breath, accusing its charioteer and yokemate of all sorts of cowardice and unmanliness for abandoning their position and their agreement" (254c). The way Plato depicts how the black horse reacts and talks to the charioteer and its mate is obviously a sort of parody of thumoeidetic reaction: the black horse feels betrayed by his yokemate, and it accuses him and the charioteer of being cowards! This means, I suggest, that Plato clearly sees here that the appetites have managed to use a typical thumoeidetic tendency for their own purposes. And this seems to indicate that in fact, perhaps, against Plato's own grain, the *thumoeides* might be better seen not as a monoeidetic part of the soul, as it were, but rather as a sort of 'bunch' of various aggressive, and competitive tendencies which can be in opposition to one another. The *thumoeides*, as Plato says, is an intermediate part which can make its alliance either with the appetitive part or with reason. But being intermediate, it can be pulled by both other parts at the very same time.

With this more qualified picture, we end up, I have suggested, with both a more consistent psychological theory, and a stronger, and more consistent critique of poetry throughout the *Republic*. Since Glaucon, like the audience, has not been sufficiently habituated into virtue, and has not obtained a perfectly shaped *thumos*, he is still in danger of having some of his thumoeidetic tendencies easily excited, and thus of making alliance with his appetites. And this is very easily done by tragic poetry because he so naively thinks he is safe behind the doors of *mimesis*. So tragedy, according to Plato, aims at making this well-educated *thumoeides* disap-

pear, as it were, and be completely overwhelmed by its anger against destiny and fate, so that the individual will not be able to find the courage to fight for moral goodness anymore.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SOUL DIVISION AND MIMESIS IN *REPUBLIC X*

RACHEL SINGPURWALLA

1. *Introduction*

It is well known that in the *Republic*, Socrates presents a view of the soul or the psyche according to which it has three distinct parts or aspects, which he calls the reasoning, spirited, and appetitive parts. Socrates' clearest characterization of these parts of the soul occurs in *Republic IX*, where he suggests that they should be understood in terms of the various goals or ends that give rise to the particular desires that motivate our actions. In *Republic X*, however, Socrates uses the phenomenon of cognitive conflict about matters of fact to show that the soul has only two parts, the rational and the irrational. Moreover, he characterizes these parts in terms of cognitive tendencies, such as forming beliefs on the basis of reason versus forming beliefs on the basis of perceptual appearances. In this chapter, I explain how these divergent accounts of the soul and its parts are legitimate alternative characterizations. A consequence of my argument is that we should not think of the divided soul as primarily a division of desires, but rather as a division of cognitive attitudes towards the world, each of which yields different sorts of desires.

In the first section I lay out Socrates' two accounts of the soul, and I raise a puzzle or problem for harmonizing the two accounts. In section two, I consider and reject one possible solution to the puzzle. In section three, I provide my own alternative solution to the puzzle and I outline how my solution suggests a new conception of the ultimate nature of the parts of the soul.

2. *The Puzzle*

In *Republic IV*, Socrates argues that the soul has three parts, or sources of motivation, which he calls the reasoning, spirited and appetitive parts (435e1–441c8).¹ Socrates thinks that we need to posit these parts in order

¹ In fact, Plato shies away from using the term 'parts' (*merê* or *moria*) to refer to the

to explain the phenomenon of motivational conflict, or the phenomenon of both wanting and not wanting the same object. He begins his argument by stating that it is impossible for the same thing to do or undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time. Accordingly, if we find this happening in the soul, we must infer that the soul has more than one part (436b8–c1). He then goes on to argue that this very phenomenon occurs with respect to the soul. For example, sometimes a person is thirsty and so wants to drink. But at the same time he determines that it is best not to drink, and so wants not to drink. Since the same thing cannot have opposite inclinations towards the same thing with the same part of itself, there must be two parts of the soul: the part with which it thirsts, lusts, hungers and experiences all manner of appetites, which Socrates accordingly calls the appetitive part, and the part which desires on the basis of rational calculation, which he calls the rational part (539c2–d8).

Socrates uses different examples of motivational conflict to show that there is yet a third part of the soul. Socrates provides, for example, the case of Leontius. Leontius has an appetitive desire to look at corpses. But at the same time he is angry and disgusted at his own desire. Again, Socrates thinks that this shows that there are distinct parts of the soul: the appetitive part, and the part that is angry at the subject's desire to perform actions that are ignoble or shameful, which he calls the spirited part (439e2–440a6).²

But how exactly should we conceive of these parts? And how do they explain motivational conflict? Perhaps Socrates' clearest characterization of these parts of the soul occurs in *Republic IX*, where they are distinguished from one another by their distinct goals or loves. Socrates states, for example, that the reasoning part of the soul is always aimed at knowing the truth, and so is appropriately called learning- and wisdom-loving (581b5–10). The spirited part is wholly dedicated to the pursuit of victory and honor, and thus is called victory- and honor-loving (581a9–b3). And

various motivational sources in the soul. Instead, he refers to these using (i) the article with the relative clause, (ii) adjectives, and (iii) other nouns (*genê* and *eidê*).

² Socrates goes on to ascribe a wide variety of motivations to the spirited part of the soul, including indignation at the perception that you have been treated unjustly (440c7–d3), irrational anger (441b2–c2), and the desire for victory and honor (581a9–b3). Determining what, if anything, unifies the diverse motivations that Socrates attributes to the spirited part is a matter of some controversy and lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

finally, the appetitive part is the source of intense desires for food, drink, and sex, but since such desires are most easily satisfied by money, it can be called the money-loving part (580d10–581a7). Socrates goes on to say that each individual is ruled by one of these parts of the soul, and thus that there are three kinds of people: philosophic, victory-loving, and profit-loving. In sum, then, Socrates characterizes each of the parts of the soul as an attitude of love towards a certain object; and he thinks that when a part of the soul steadily rules in an individual, that individual organizes his or her life around the pursuit of the object that that part of the soul loves. All of this suggests that we should think of the parts of the soul in terms of the values from which our desires to take particular actions arise.³ It is the fact that we have these different ends or goals that explains the phenomenon of motivational conflict.

In *Republic X*, however, Socrates provides a very different conception of the parts of the soul. More specifically, Socrates uses the phenomenon of cognitive conflict, or of having conflicting beliefs about the same thing, to show that there are distinct parts of the soul, and he characterizes the parts in terms of cognitive tendencies. This conception of the soul is introduced during the course of Socrates' critique of the imitative arts, and in particular, in his discussion of the effect of painting on the soul.

Socrates begins this argument by drawing attention to the fact that the appearance of something can vary with the different perspectives we can have of it. The same object, for example, can appear to be different sizes depending on whether we are near or far from it, and something can look crooked when seen in water and straight when seen out of it, or concave when it is one color and convex when another (602c7–d1). Socrates notes that in these situations we use rational calculation—measuring, counting and weighing—to attain the true conception of the object (602d6–e2). Nonetheless, he argues that sometimes we can have the following experience:

But when this part [the reasoning part] has measured and has indicated that some things are larger or smaller or the same size as others, the opposite appears to it at the same time ... And didn't we say that it is impossible for the same thing to believe opposites about the same thing at the same time? ... Then the part of the soul that forms a belief contrary

³ Socrates does suggest that there may be more than these three parts of the soul (443c9–444a1).

to the measurements couldn't be the same as the part that believes in accord with them ... Now, the part that puts its trust in measurement and calculation is the best part of the soul ... Therefore, the part that opposes it is one of the inferior parts in us.⁴ (602e4–603a8)

Painting comes under Socrates' attack because he thinks it uses tactics, such as tricks of color, and shading, etc., that make things appear to be a way that they are not. Thus, painting appeals to that part of us—the inferior part—that puts its trust in the way things appear as opposed to the way things are.

This characterization of the soul poses a puzzle for how we ought to understand Socrates' conception of the soul and its parts, for it is not at all clear how this account harmonizes with the account introduced in Book IV, and elaborated on in Book IX. In the first place, Book IX describes the soul as having three parts, while Book X describes it as having two. Is the so-called inferior part meant to refer to the appetitive part, the spirited part, or some combination of the two? But perhaps more importantly—and this is the issue that I focus on in this chapter—Book IX characterizes the parts of the soul in term of the various ends or goals that motivate our actions, while Book X characterizes the parts of the soul in terms of beliefs based on calculation versus beliefs based on appearances. The puzzle here is not simply that Book X attributes beliefs to the appetitive (and perhaps spirited) part of the soul, for there is evidence throughout the *Republic* that suggests that Socrates thought that the appetitive part is capable of having beliefs about *value* (I discuss this claim in more detail later in the chapter). The serious problem is that Book X characterizes the appetitive part as the source of beliefs about descriptive matters of fact that seem to have nothing to do with what we value or how we should act. So, while it might make sense to say that the appetitive part may lead me to think that the object of its desire would be good to pursue, it is much stranger to think that the appetitive part would have anything to do with, for example, the thought that a straight stick is bent. As one commentator, Alexander Nehamas, puts the issue: 'why should our *desire* tell us that the immersed stick is bent?'⁵ Why would

⁴ Τούτω δὲ πολλάκις μετρούσαντι καὶ σημαίνοντι μείζω ἅττα εἶναι ἢ ἐλάττω ἕτερα ἐτέρων ἢ ἴσα τἀναντία φαίνεται ἅμα περὶ ταυτὰ (...) Οὐκοῦν ἔφαμεν τῷ αὐτῷ ἅμα περὶ ταυτὰ ἐναντία δοξάζειν ἀδύνατον εἶναι (...) Τὸ παρὰ τὰ μέτρα ἄρα δοξάζον τῆς ψυχῆς τῷ κατὰ τὰ μέτρα οὐκ ἂν εἴη ταυτόν (...) Ἀλλὰ μὴν τὸ μέτρον γε καὶ λογισμῶ πιστεῦον βέλτιστον ἂν εἴη τῆς ψυχῆς (...) Τὸ ἄρα τούτω ἐναντιούμενον τῶν φαύλων ἂν τι εἴη ἐν ἡμῖν. All quotes from the *Republic* are from the Grube/Reeve translation.

⁵ Nehamas (1999/original publication 1982), 265.

Socrates have linked together a certain kind of desire and beliefs about matters of fact based on optical illusions?

One response to this puzzling passage is to think that Socrates is just being careless. This is Julia Annas's conclusion. She says:

Plato presumably fails to see that his argument will not work, that desire has nothing to do with optical illusions, because he thinks of the lower part of the soul as being merely the trashy and reason-resisting part. In this passage he always refers to it simply as the worthless part, keeping in the background the fact that to be consistent with its roles elsewhere it would have to be the desiring part.⁶

Perhaps Annas is right that the resolution to this problem lies in seeing that Socrates is simply being overly impressionistic here. But it is worth exploring other options before we conclude that the appetitive part of the soul is simply the grab bag for anything Socrates finds disdainful.

There are at least two other options worth considering. First, we might think that Socrates' characterization of the parts of the soul in terms of beliefs based on reasoning versus beliefs based on appearances is not meant to completely overlap with his division of the soul in terms of different ends or values. So, for example, Neville Murphy and Alexander Nehamas argue that Socrates' division of the soul into the part that forms beliefs based on calculation versus the part that forms beliefs based on appearances marks a unique division in the soul—a division within the rational part itself.⁷ I consider and reject this interpretation in the next section. Second, we might think that Socrates intends the characterization of the parts of the soul in terms of beliefs based on reasoning versus beliefs based on appearances to refer to the rational and appetitive (and perhaps spirited part), but that he has a principled reason for linking certain ends, goals, or values with certain modes of cognition. I defend this option in the final section of the chapter.

3. *Republic X: A Division within the Rational Part of the Soul?*

One solution to the puzzle that we have been considering is to argue that a distinct division of the soul is at play in *Republic X*. Commentators such as Murphy and Nehamas argue that in Socrates' critique of painting, where he characterizes the parts of the soul in terms of beliefs based

⁶ J. Annas (1981), 339–340.

⁷ Murphy (1951), 239–243; Nehamas (1999/original publication 1982), 264–269.

on reasoning versus beliefs based on appearances, Socrates deploys a division not previously discussed in the *Republic*: a division within the rational part itself into its superior and inferior aspects. More specifically, they argue that *Republic X* depicts a division between the uncritical or careless acceptance of the evidence of the senses and vigilant rational reflection on such evidence. There are two primary pieces of evidence for this interpretation. The first is that it resolves the puzzle: we do not have to explain how appetites tell us what to believe about size issues, because appetites do not tell us what to believe in that regard. Instead, it is a lower part of reason itself that is the source of beliefs about matters of fact. Second, this interpretation nicely accords with the most natural reading of the Greek, according to which Socrates attributes the conflicting beliefs to the reasoning part of the soul. Recall that Socrates says, ‘But when this part [the reasoning part] has measured and has indicated that some things are larger or smaller or the same size as others, the opposite appears to it at the same time . . . And didn’t we say that it is impossible for the same thing to believe opposites about the same things at the same time?’ (602e4–9).⁸ According to the principle of opposites expressed in *Republic IV*, if some one thing is the subject of conflicting attitudes, then it is that thing which must be said to have parts. As Nehamas puts it, ‘Our principle does not allow us to introduce a distinct object, appetite, and attribute to it one of the two conflicting beliefs.’⁹

Although the thought that the division of the soul in *Republic X* is really a characterization of the parts of reason provides a nice solution to the worry about the relation between appetites and optical illusions, and is consistent with the most natural, although not only, reading of the Greek,¹⁰ I will now argue that this interpretation of the division presented

⁸ Τούτω δὲ πολλάκις μετρήσαντι καὶ σημαίνοντι μείζω ἅττα εἶναι ἢ ἐλάττω ἕτερα ἐτέρων ἢ ἴσα τάναντία φαίνεται ἅμα περὶ ταῦτά (. . .) Οὐκοῦν ἔφαμεν τῷ αὐτῷ ἅμα περὶ ταῦτά ἐναντία δοξάζειν ἀδύνατον εἶναι.

⁹ Nehamas (1999/original publication 1982), 265.

¹⁰ There are two ways of reading this passage, both revolving around the proper reference of τάναντία. On the first, it refers to a pair of opposites both of which appear to the calculating part of the soul. This leads Murphy and Nehamas to argue that it is the rational part of the soul that is divided. On the second reading, due to Adam (1969), 407–408, and 466–467, and defended by Lorenz (2006), 66n16, it refers to the opposites of those properties that appear to the senses. On this reading, the opposite of what appears to the senses appears to reason, and so the division is between reason and some other part of the soul (i.e. the part that is associated with sense perception). See also Halliwell (1988), 134. I do not decide between these two interpretations here, since, as I go on to argue, both readings could be construed as consistent with my interpretation of the moral psychology of the *Republic*.

in *Republic* X is not supported by the text. To see why, we need to consider the remainder of Socrates' critique of the imitative arts. Following his critique of painting, Socrates argues that poetry also appeals to the inferior part of the soul. Socrates argues that poetry imitates human actions and the results of these actions in terms of the characters' beliefs about their well-being and their experience of pleasure and pain (603c4–8). But, according to Socrates, we are often conflicted in these matters (603c10–d7). For example, someone may have conflicting reactions to the fact of losing a child: he may want to lose himself in grief, but also realize that he must stop grieving and pull himself together and continue with his life (603e3–604a8). Socrates says that it is reason and law that encourage him to resist his pain, while his experience of it tells him to give in (604a10–b1). Again, these conflicting inclinations suggest that there are two parts of the soul: the best part, which is willing to follow rational deliberation, and an irrational part, which leads us to dwell on misfortune and grief (604b3–604d10).

Socrates then states that poetry almost always imitates people being ruled by the inferior part of the soul (after all, that's much more interesting than watching people behave rationally), and thus it appeals to and strengthens this inferior part of the soul (604e1–605a6). While my aim in this chapter is not to provide a rational reconstruction of Socrates' critique of poetry, we might conjecture that one explanation for Socrates' claim that poetry strengthens the irrational part of the soul is that poetry encourages us to empathize with the character's point of view. But Socrates describes such characters as seeing things from the point of view of experience (*pathos*) or the way things appear to them. Thus, poetry, like painting, encourages us to see things from the point of view of appearances, and thus strengthens the irrational part of the soul.

But what part of the soul does poetry appeal to? There are strong textual reasons for thinking that poetry appeals to the appetitive (and perhaps spirited part of the soul) discussed in Books IV–IX of the *Republic*. The passage just cited seems to be referring to the familiar distinction between motivations that are based on reasoning about what is best and motivations that are more like intense emotional reactions. In addition, Socrates describes the effects of poetic imitation as follows: 'And in the case of sex, anger, and all the desires, pleasures, and pains that we say accompany all our actions, poetic imitation has the very same effect on us. It nurtures and waters them and establishes them as rulers in us when they ought to wither and be ruled, for that way we'll become better and happier rather than worse and more wretched' (606d1–8). So, Socrates

thinks that poetic imitation nurtures and waters sex, anger and all of the desires, pleasures and pains that accompany our actions. But sex, anger, and all such desires and pleasures are clear references to the desires of the appetitive (and perhaps spirited) part of the soul. And so Socrates must think that poetry appeals to the appetitive (and perhaps spirited) part of the soul.

Nehamas acknowledges this evidence for the claim that poetry appeals to the appetitive (and perhaps spirited part of the soul). Accordingly, he argues that Socrates makes use of two distinct divisions of the soul in the course of his attack on the imitative arts. In his critique of painting, where Socrates characterizes the parts of the soul in terms of beliefs based on reasoning versus beliefs based on appearances, Socrates deploys a division not previously discussed in the *Republic*, a division within the rational part into its superior and inferior aspects. In his critique of poetry, however, Socrates makes use of the familiar division of the soul into the rational and appetitive (and perhaps spirited) elements. Thus, Nehamas thinks that Socrates' critique against the imitative arts should be understood analogically: just as painting is bad for the soul because it appeals to an inferior part of reason, so poetry is bad for the soul because it appeals to an inferior part of the soul (i.e. the appetites and perhaps spirit).¹¹

This move, however, fails, since there is textual evidence for thinking that painting and poetry appeal to the same part of the soul. Socrates describes the poet as follows: '... an imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images that are far removed from the truth and by gratifying the irrational part, which cannot distinguish the large and the small but believes that the same things are large at one time and small at another' (605b6–c3). In this passage, Socrates describes poetry as appealing to the part that forms its beliefs about the relative size of objects on the basis of appearances, which he earlier described as the part to which painting appeals. Thus painting and poetry appeal to the same part of the soul.

To sum up, then, Socrates thinks that (i) painting appeals to the part that forms its beliefs on the basis of appearances; that (ii) poetry appeals to the appetitive part of the soul; and that (iii) painting and poetry appeal to the same part of the soul. It follows, then, that the part that forms beliefs on the basis of appearances is the appetitive part of the

¹¹ Nehamas (1999/original publication 1982), 267.

soul, and thus we should reject the idea that Socrates is introducing a new division—a division within the rational part itself—in his critique of painting. This still leaves us with the puzzle with which we began, however, namely, explaining why the appetitive part of the soul, the part that is the home of a host of desires, could also be the part that hastily forms beliefs about matters of fact on the basis of appearances.

4. *Appetites and Appearances*

Perhaps the first step in trying to solve this puzzle is to come to a clearer understanding of the appetitive part of the soul as described in *Republic IV–IX*. In fact, in *Republic IX*, Socrates describes the appetitive part as markedly different from the spirited and rational parts of the soul, for while Socrates says that the latter have a single goal (e.g. honor, wisdom), the former is depicted as multiform (580d10–581b10). This feature of the appetitive part is emphasized in Socrates' metaphorical description of the soul in *Republic IX*. Socrates characterizes the soul as being composed of the following creatures, all joined into one: a multi-colored beast with a ring of many heads, a lion, and a human being (588c7–e1). Socrates thinks that the human represents the rational part, the lion represents the spirited part, and the multi-form beast represents the appetites.

But why does Socrates characterize the appetitive part as multi-form? One explanation is that this characterization is due to the fact that the appetitive part can desire such a wide variety of things. We have already seen that the appetitive part desires food, drink, and sex (439d4–8, 580d10–581a1). But Socrates also characterizes a person who is ruled by the appetitive part as desiring a far wider range of objects, including activities like listening to the flute, physical training, philosophy, politics and military pursuits (561c6–d7).

Thus, the appetitive part can aim for a wide variety of objects, including those associated with the other parts of the soul. We can explain all of this with the claim that the appetitive part does not really have a single, unified goal, or a fixed end, but pursues whatever it simply experiences as attractive or desirable. John Cooper captures this thought nicely when he states that appetites 'have their ultimate origin simply in facts of experience, in the fact that the person in question happens to get a certain pleasure from doing these things . . .'¹² The fact that we have certain

¹² Cooper (1999/original publication 1984), 199.

appetites is, in Cooper's language, simply a 'brute fact' about our way of being affected by the physical world.¹³ That is, sometimes, things just occur to us as appealing, or strike us as attractive. Thus, the appetitive part of the soul is the source of desires for whatever seems appealing or attractive to us. Since any number of things could strike us this way, Socrates describes the appetitive part as multi-form.

But how should we understand these desires for whatever strike our fancy? Are they blind desires—simple feelings of attraction that propel us towards their object? Or do the appetites involve beliefs about the value of their object? There is ample evidence that suggests that the appetites do involve beliefs about value. In the first place, in *Republic* VI, Socrates states that 'every soul pursues the good and does whatever it does for its sake' (505d11–e1). But if we always pursue what we believe is good, then this suggests that even when we are motivated by the appetitive part, we are motivated by beliefs about the good, which in turn suggests that appetitive motivations involve beliefs about the good.

There is further evidence that appetites crucially involve beliefs about the good. In *Republic* VIII, Socrates describes the process by which an individual comes to be ruled by his appetites. Socrates describes the appetites as follows: 'seeing the citadel of the young man's soul empty of knowledge, fine ways of living, and words of truth . . . they [the appetites] finally occupy that citadel themselves . . . And in the absence of these guardians false and boastful words and beliefs rush up and occupy this part of him' (560b7–c3). In this passage, Socrates describes the appetites as capable of affecting our reasons, or our beliefs about value, and this suggests that they are at the least representations of value, and perhaps beliefs about value themselves.

Finally, Socrates thinks that reasoning can affect our desires, and this again suggests that appetites involve beliefs about value. Socrates is critical of people who do not use their reason, but rather force, to quell their appetites. He criticizes the individual who relates to his appetites that he does not want to act on in the following way: 'he holds them [his appetites] in check, not by persuading them that it's better not to act on them or taming them with arguments, but by compulsion and fear . . .' (554c12–d3). But if Socrates is critical of individuals who do not use reason and arguments to quell their appetites, then he must

¹³ Cooper (1999/original publication 1984), 198–199.

think it is possible to use reason and argument to quell the appetites. And if appetites are the sort of thing that that can be eliminated through rational persuasion, then they must involve our beliefs about value. More specifically, they must be either dependent on or constituted by our beliefs about value.

To sum up, Socrates thinks that we are always motivated by our beliefs about the good, and that appetites are capable of affecting our reasons and being affected by our reasons, or our beliefs about value. All of this in turn implies that the appetites cannot be purely feeling states, or blind desires, for it is difficult to explain how such states could both affect and be affected by our evaluative beliefs. We ought to conclude that the appetites involve beliefs about value.¹⁴

Socrates seems to think, then, the following things about the appetitive part of the soul:

It is the source of desires based on a variety of unbidden experiences of attraction (from the multi-form beast and the individual who is ruled by his appetites).

¹⁴ It might be objected here that there is strong evidence that Socrates does *not* think that the appetites involve beliefs about value, but instead are blind desires. The primary evidence for this claim comes from *Republic IV*, where Socrates describes the appetites as being solely for their natural object; so, for example, thirst is for drink, and hunger is for food (437d8–e8). Socrates proceeds to say that we should not be dissuaded from this conception of the appetites by the view that everyone desires good things (438a1–5). Commentators such as Irwin (1995), 209, Penner (1990) and Reeve (1988), 134–135 have taken this to be a direct repudiation of the thesis, defended in other Platonic dialogues, such as the *Protagoras* (358c6–d4) and the *Gorgias* (468a5–b4), that we always desire what we believe to be good. Thus, these commentators have taken this to mean that Socrates thinks that the appetitive part is the source of blind desires, while the rational part (at least) is the source of desires for what we believe to be good. But this passage does not provide conclusive evidence that the appetites are independent of our beliefs about value. In the first place, Socrates is cautioning his audience against the idea that the claim that all desires are for good things constitutes an *objection* to the claim that appetites are distinguished from other sorts of desires by being solely for their object. This leaves wide open the possibility that Socrates thinks that the claim that we all desire what we believe to be good is true, but just does not provide an objection to the thesis on the table. And he would be right to think so: for even if we all desire what we believe to be good, it does not follow that there are not different kinds of desires. So, for example, as *Republic IX* suggests, desires might be classified in terms of their various objects. Or, they might be classified in terms of their origins: Socrates might think that some desires arise as a result of a process of reasoning about value, while some desires do not arise due to a process of reasoning. Neither of these options precludes the idea that each of these different kinds of desire may involve beliefs about value. For other commentators who defend the idea that appetitive desires are not independent of our beliefs about value see Bobonich (2002), 243 ff., Carone (2001), Lesses (1987), and Price (1995), 49–52.

It is a source of beliefs about value (from the fact that Socrates says that we always pursue what we believe to be good, and from the fact that appetites affect and are affected by our reasoning, or by our beliefs about value).

It is prone to form judgments based on appearances (from *Republic X*).

How can we synthesize these apparently disparate features of the appetitive part?

A reasonable way to synthesize these features of the appetitive part of the soul is to say that experiences of attraction are appearances of value; and the appetitive part is the part of us that is prone to form beliefs or judgments of value on the basis of these appearances of value; and these beliefs about value are the appetites.¹⁵

This account of the appetitive part of the soul nicely resolves the puzzle with which we began. We wanted to know why Socrates thought that it was legitimate to characterize the appetitive part of the soul—the part that is the source of a host of appetites—as the part that forms its beliefs on the basis of appearances. But now that we have seen that brute experiences of attraction are appearances of value, and that appetites are beliefs about value based on appearances, we can understand why Socrates thought that the *Republic X* characterization was a legitimate alternative way of characterizing the appetitive part of the soul.

This interpretation suggests a new way of conceiving of the appetitive part of the soul, and, as a consequence, of the parts of the soul in general. If this account is correct, then we should not think of the appetitive part as fundamentally the source of a host of blind desires, but rather as fundamentally a cognitive tendency—the tendency to form beliefs on the basis of appearances. The fact that the appetitive part of the soul is appearance-responsive in this way explains Socrates' claim that it is both the source of beliefs about matters of fact that have nothing to do with value, and the source of the appetites, which are beliefs about value.

On this view, Socrates thinks that the fact we have certain cognitive tendencies *explains* the fact that we have certain ends, goals or values. So, the fact that the appetitive part is appearance-responsive, or forms its judgments on the basis of appearances alone, explains why Socrates characterizes it as not really having a fixed, single end. For this part of the soul gives rise to appetites on the basis of appearances alone, or on the basis of whatever simply appears good. But recall that appearances

¹⁵ See Moss (2006) and (2008) for an alternative but similar account of the appetites and the parts of the soul.

of value just are attractions. Thus, there are as many appearances of value as there are interests and attractions. And if we go no further than the appearances in choosing our actions, then it follows that we may (depending on the strength and consistency of our attractions) have a wild variety of ends.

The claim that Socrates thinks that the fact that we have certain cognitive tendencies explains why we have certain ends is supported by Socrates' famous allegory of the cave. In the cave allegory, Socrates likens our human condition to that of prisoners chained so that they are facing the wall of the bottom of a cave. Moreover, these prisoners mistake the shadows that they see on the wall in front of them for reality; that is, they form beliefs about the world on the basis of how things appear alone. These prisoners, then, cannot get beyond the appearances (514a1–515c2).

Socrates describes the journey out of the cave—the journey towards freedom from dependence on the appearances—as an intellectual journey. He says that we should compare the journey to the image of the line, which outlines increasingly sophisticated kinds of reasoning, and thus that we should 'interpret the upward journey [out of the cave] and the study of things above [the forms] as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm' (517b4–6). But Socrates also says that the individual who makes this journey undergoes a radical transformation of values. He no longer values the things that are considered desirable in the cave, nor does he care to be held in honor in the cave, and indeed he pities the people who live there (516c4–d7). Instead, his desire is focused on the sun, which we should understand as the form of the good, the real good (517c7–d2).

Thus, the cave suggests that Socrates thinks that using increasingly sophisticated modes of reasoning to understand the world, including what is truly valuable, affects our choice of goals.¹⁶ This, again, supports the view that Socrates thinks that the parts of the soul are fundamentally cognitive tendencies towards more and less sophisticated forms of reasoning, and that it is this feature of them that explains why the various parts are associated with their respective ends, goals or values.

¹⁶ This view flows naturally from three Platonic tenets: (i) we have a motivational orientation towards the good, and (ii) there is a real good, and (iii) reason discovers the good.

Now, someone might object here that this cannot be the complete picture, since Socrates thinks that it is our appetites that affect the way we think and conceive of the world, and not the other way around.¹⁷ There is evidence for this view in the cave allegory. Recall that Socrates states that the prisoners in the cave are chained such that they cannot see anything other than the shadows, and that they mistake these shadows for reality. In short, they are trapped in the world of appearances. Later, Socrates suggests that we should think of the prisoner's soul as chained by its appetites; he says, 'feasting, greed, and other such pleasures . . . like leaden weights, pull its vision downward' (519b1–3). This implies that it is our experiences of attraction, or our urges, that keep us focused on the world of appearances, and so affect the way that we think.

And indeed, this view has some psychological plausibility. It seems plausible that strong attractions prevent us from looking past the appearances, or from engaging in more sophisticated forms of reasoning about the value of the object of our attraction. If I find a piece of chocolate cake very appealing, then this urge might lead me to focus on the appearances alone, and not entertain thoughts about how the cake might be harmful and not really good. This in turn makes me prone to assent to the appearances. Strong wants do tend to narrow our attention and thus affect our judgments.

We should not, however, accept the claim that Socrates thinks that it is the ends or goals of a part of the soul that are fundamental and thus that explain its cognitive tendencies, for this view cannot explain the fact that the appetitive part has beliefs about size issues that have nothing to do with what we desire or what to value. Again, to return to our earlier question: what desire or want could possibly make me believe that a straight stick in the water is bent or that a large object in the distance is small?

This does not, however, mean that we should ignore the insights of this objection—the insight, that is, that our attractions can affect how we reason. What all of this suggests is that Socrates probably thinks that there is some kind of a feedback loop. That is, focusing on appearances leads me to have appetitive goals, which then keeps me focused on the world of appearances, which then leads me to have appetitive goals, and so forth

¹⁷ Reeve (1988), 95–100 defends a variant of this view. He is interested in mapping different ends or goals onto the cognitive faculties described in the line in *Republic VI*; and he argues that the different ends determine the sort of cognitive faculties used in their pursuit.

and so on. Nonetheless, since it is the claim that the appetitive part is first and foremost a cognitive tendency that can explain Socrates' claim that the appetitive part forms beliefs based on visual appearances, we ought to conclude that the appetitive part is first and foremost a cognitive tendency, or a way of seeing and thinking about the world, where this explains, at least in part, why we adopt certain ends.

A consequence of the view that we should understand the parts of the soul as primarily a division of cognitive attitudes is that in a sense, Nehamas and Murphy may have been right: *Republic X* does point us in the direction of the idea that Socrates is interested in dividing reason into its superior and inferior aspects. The division of reason is, however, also at the same time the familiar division into the reasoning and appetitive (and perhaps spirited) part of the soul. If I am correct about this, then the picture of the soul in the *Republic* should be moved much closer to that given in the *Protagoras*, where the soul is depicted as having two primary sources of motivation, one due to the measuring art, and one due to the power of appearances (356c–357e).¹⁸

Of course part of what determines whether or not this is the correct conception of the soul in the *Republic* is whether it can explain why Socrates attributes certain goals to the spirited and rational parts of the soul. Thus, on the likely assumption that the inferior part of the soul in *Republic X* includes the spirited part, we need to show how focusing on appearances might lead one to adopt spirited ends, and in what way this process is distinct from the adoption of appetitive goals.¹⁹ Similarly, we need to see how the mode of reasoning associated with the rational part might lead one to adopt the goals that Socrates associates with the reasoning part of the soul. I do think, however, that the arguments presented here provide strong reason for adopting the view that the appetitive part of the soul is first and foremost a certain sort of cognitive

¹⁸ I provide an interpretation of the moral psychology of the *Protagoras* that coheres with the account of the moral psychology of the *Republic* presented here in Singpurwalla (2006).

¹⁹ We should note that in the *De Anima*, Aristotle divides the soul into the rational and non-rational parts; and he assigns rational wish to the rational part, and appetitive and spirited desires to the non-rational part (432b6). Additionally, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* likens the soul to the union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer. It is, of course, reasonable to think that the chariot driver represents the rational part, and the two horses represent the spirited and appetitive elements (246a ff). This picture coheres nicely with the claim that rational desires belong to their own part of the soul (the rational part), while spirited and appetitive desires belong to another (the non-rational).

tendency, and thus give support for thinking that Plato's conception of the ultimate nature of the soul and its parts should be understood in these cognitive terms.²⁰

²⁰ I am indebted to many friends and colleagues for comments on earlier versions of this paper, including Anne Margaret Baxley, Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, Rachana Kamtekar, Chris Kelly, Farid Masrou, Michelle Montague, Michael Morgan, Cindy Schossberger, Clerk Shaw, Christopher Shields, and Shelley Wilcox. I would also like to thank audience members at the Tenth Annual Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy in 2006, and the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Maryland at College Park, and Wesleyan University in 2007.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IMAGE-MAKING IN *REPUBLIC* X AND THE *SOPHIST*: PLATO'S CRITICISM OF THE POET AND THE SOPHIST

NOBURU NOTOMI

1. *Scope of Discussion on Poetry*

The famous phrase, 'the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (*Rep.* X, 607b), represents Plato's critical attitude towards poetry. However, this phrase might mislead us, the modern readers, in multiple ways. I believe it as yet a matter in need of clarification what the real target of Plato's criticism is and how he deals with it. To re-examine his treatment of poetry reveals how Plato conceptualizes his own pursuit, namely philosophy, in contrast to its rivals. Let us first examine the phrase itself.

First of all, the quarrel does not concern 'philosophy versus literature', as often seen in our modern society. 'Literature' is evidently an anachronistic concept which has no equivalent in classical Greek. It is misleading not only because literature includes more than poetry, for example, novels and essays, but also because poetry played a much wider role in ancient Greece: to provide encyclopedic knowledge, wisdom for life, and civic education. Philosophy and poetry compete with each other in the cultural, social, and political areas, as the *Republic* as a whole indicates.

Next, despite Plato's clear declaration, the quarrel might not be 'ancient', since 'philosophy' (*philosophia*) was a relatively new discipline. It was Plato who attempted to establish it as a supreme pursuit or discipline. Recent studies reveal Plato's strategy to raise the status of 'philosophy' by placing it against the traditional authority of 'poetry'.¹ According to this view, the 'ancient quarrel' is read not as an objective report of a long history, but as Plato's invention of antagonism between the two genres.

So far scholars of ancient philosophy are more or less aware, but they do not usually recognize the other aspect, namely that the counterpart of philosophy, i.e. 'poetry' (*poiêtikê*), was not an old concept, either.

¹ See Nightingale (1995), Ch. 2, Ford (2002), 46–47, and Most in this volume.

Whereas singing in verse had had a long tradition since Homer and Hesiod, the generic concept of 'poetry' (*poiêsis* or *poiêtikê* in Greek), as the class which comprehends various existing genres, such as epic, elegy, iambus, dithyramb, tragedy, and comedy, was new. These poetic genres were of different origins and performed on each social and religious occasion.² Although Plato was not an inventor of the concept, he made full use of the new, generic concept of 'poetry' which came into use probably in the late fifth century BCE. Unless we appreciate Plato's conscious treatment of this new concept, we will miss the real target of his criticism.

Further, we should note that the term '*poiêsis*' in the sense of verbal composition covers a wider range than verses sung by poets. It sometimes means prose-writing, for instance, Lysias' speech, and accordingly includes the activity of rhetoricians and sophists. When Plato criticizes poetry as a special kind of 'making' (*poiêsis*), he aims not only at the poets, but also at those professionals. We need to widen the scope of examination to include the other intellectual activities of rhetoric, prose-writing, and sophistry, along with poetry.

Thus, the alleged antagonism towards the traditional art of poetry is too narrow for considering Plato's criticism. 'Plato versus Homer' sounds symbolic,³ but may not be a correct understanding of the situation. Plato's criticism of poetry in *Republic X* should be placed in a broader, and proper, context. The later dialogue, *Sophist*, in which Plato tries to define the sophist and finally treats him as an image-maker, supplements the earlier criticism of the poet.⁴ In light of the definitional inquiry into the sophist, we can better understand why and how the poet is to be criticized. On the other hand, as will be argued, we may suspect that Plato examines the poet in *Republic X* with a view to criticizing the tougher enemy, namely the sophist.

In this chapter I first examine the concept of '*poiêsis*' in its historical context. I will show that the general term of 'making' (*poiêsis*) was relatively new in the time of Plato, which had just come to be used for

² Genres in the archaic and classical literature are a major focus of recent studies; see Ford (2002), 10–22.

³ 'Plato gegen Homer: das ist der ganze, der echte Antagonismus' (F. Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887), III.25).

⁴ Here I assume, as most scholars do (except Else (1972); cf. note 80 below), that the *Republic* was written earlier than the *Sophist*. I take the chronological order of the relevant dialogues as follows: *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Timaeus*.

the specific activity of poetry (Section 2). The word contains a wider sense of making of *logos*, so that it sometimes includes prose-writing (Section 3); and I examine the relation between the sophist and the poet whose activities and contents of teaching overlap (Section 4). Next I examine the obvious correspondences between the criticism of the poet in *Republic X* and the definition of the sophist in the *Sophist*. The examination reveals that Plato treats them as complementary, or presents the latter as the ontological basis of the former (Section 5). 'Making' (*poiêsis*) is the key in both cases, by which the activities of the two can be analyzed to show what is wrong with them (Section 6). The very concept of 'making' is treated and saved against the sophistic counter-attack based on Parmenides' position in the *Sophist* (Section 7). Finally I examine different treatments of 'image-making' in the two dialogues (Section 8).

Although the *Sophist* contains no single reference to the poet or poetry, it intends to deepen the earlier critical consideration of poetry in an ontological way. Plato's criticism of the poet can properly be understood together with the other criticism of the sophist. This intellectual context in classical Greece illuminates why Plato has to examine both severely.

2. *The New Concept of 'Poetry'*

What we call 'poetry' had a long history already at the time of Plato; the two poets, Homer and Hesiod, were respected and of great authority in Greek civilization. However, '*poiêsis*' and its cognate Greek words came to mean 'poetry' etc. relatively late in the history.⁵ Homer and Hesiod never described their activities and products in terms of 'poetry' (*poiêsis*), 'making poems' (*poiein*), 'poem' (*poiêma*), 'poet' (*poiêtês*), and 'poetic' (*poiêtikos*). Judging from the extant literature, it was probably in the mid or late fifth century BCE that these words came into use.⁶ Before

⁵ Schmid & Stählin (1929), 10, n.1, Gentili (1988), 3, 50, Nagy (1989), 23–24, and Dover (1997), 184–185, briefly point out this fact; Ford (2002), 131–139, collects and analyses the extant evidence in full.

⁶ The earliest examples listed in LSJ are in Herodotus; see note 13 below. Ford (2002), 132–133, mentions two possible references in the archaic period, namely Solon (20 *IEG*) and Theognis (771–772), but it seems to me far from certain that these examples contain technical senses: Solon's '*metapoiêson*' is an application of 'redo' to a song (see also Dover (1997), 185); Theognis' '*poiôn*' seems to indicate a general meaning of 'do' (cf. Ford (2002), 133, n.2). Simonides' famous diction that 'painting is silent poetry (*poiêsis*), and poetry articulate painting' (Plutarch, *Moralia* 346F; cf. 17E–18A, 748A) should be taken not as an early example but as a later paraphrase; cf. Ford (2002), 96, n.12.

the term ‘poetry’ was introduced in the generic sense, the performer and performance had been called ‘singer’ (*aoidos*) and ‘singing’, or ‘song’ (*aoidê*).⁷

The word ‘*poiein*’ previously denoted the ‘making’ of material things, such as building and manufacturing;⁸ the introduction of the new sense of ‘making’ differentiates broad and narrow senses of the word. In the broad sense, ‘*poiêsis*’ means ‘making’ in general,⁹ while it signifies ‘poetry’ in the narrow sense. Since poetic activity was associated with ‘building’, ‘fabricating’, and ‘weaving’ in the earlier period, these images of ‘making’ may have been a bridge between the two senses.¹⁰ Thus we can regard ‘poetry’ (*poiêsis*) as synecdoche. Usually each context tells us in which sense the same word is used, but we should bear in mind that Plato often employs this double meaning in a deliberate way.

In the *Symposium*, following Agathon’s speech, which resorts to the double meanings of ‘*poiêsis*’, ‘*poiêtês*’, and ‘*poiein*’,¹¹ Socrates has Diotima distinguish between the broad and the narrow senses:

‘You know that making (*poiêsis*) is something multiple. For the whole cause of anything moving from *what was not* into *what is*, is making, so that the productions of all arts are makings and their craftsmen are all makers (*poiêtai*).’

‘But still, as you are aware, they are not called makers (*poiêtai*); they have other names, while a single section separated from the whole of making (*poiêsis*)—merely concerning music and metres—is entitled with the name

⁷ For example, when Heraclitus criticized the poets, he used the word ‘*aoidoisi*’ in DK. 22B104; Xenophanes mentioned ‘the tribe of the Greek singers (*aoidaôn*)’ in DK. 21B6. For ‘*aoidos*’, see Ford (2002), 33, 47, 131. Here the relation between ‘singing’ and ‘reciting’ is more complex; see Nagy (1989), 4–8.

⁸ Homer frequently uses the verb ‘*poiein*’ (of building in *Il.* 1.608, 7.435, and of the smith’s work in *Il.* 7.222, 18.482, etc.) and the adjective ‘*poiêtos*’ (of houses and arms, for example, in *Il.* 5.198, 12.470, 18.608, *Od.* 1.333, 436, 13.306), but the other derivative words, ‘*poiêma*, *poiêsis*, *poiêtês*’, are scarcely found before Herodotus.

⁹ For example, the Demiurge is called ‘maker’ (*poiêtês*) of the universe in *Tim.* 28c.

¹⁰ For ‘building’ of a poem, see, for example, Pindar, *Pythian* 3.4–5, 113–114, *Olympian* 6.2–3, cf. Sophocles, fr. 159; ‘fabricating’ of a story, see *Od.* 14.131; for ‘weaving’, see Pindar, *Nemean* 4.44–45, 6.86–87, fr. 179, Bacchylides, 5.9, 19.8, and Sappho, 188. Verdenius (1983), 16–20, examines these in relation to ‘literary form’ and ‘structure’ (*thesis*). The metaphors of ‘building’ and ‘weaving’ have Indo-European origin (cf. the references in Ford (2002), 113, n.1).

¹¹ *Symp.* 196e–197c: Agathon uses the word ‘*poiêtês*’ both for god and for poet; *Erôs* is a *poiêtês* with regard to the art of Muses. The god is engaged in ‘making (*poiêsin*) of all forms of life’ (197a). This passage on Eros alludes to Euripides’ phrase; see below (cf. note 15).

of the whole. This alone is called making (i.e. poetry, *poiêsis*); those who possess this part of the making (*poiêsis*) are called makers (i.e. poets, *poiêtai*).¹² (205b–c)

In this passage the allegedly new meaning is explicated as synecdoche. We shall shortly examine how Plato makes conscious use of this double meaning in the criticism of poetry (as making) in *Republic X*.

The shift of terms from ‘singing’ (*aoidê*) to ‘poetry’ (*poiêsis*) seems to indicate that the oral performance in front of an audience gradually lost its essential role in Greek society. Although singing continued to be a main activity, actual performances of the poets or rhapsodes became no longer the sole occasion for people to listen to poems. Instead, poetry was now preserved, read, and memorized in written form. Together with the new terminology, poetry came to be recognized more as a kind of ‘art’ (*technê*).¹²

Distinct poetic genres—epic, elegy, iambus, dithyramb, tragedy, and comedy—which used to be performed in different social contexts—festivals, symposia, etc.—are integrated under the single category of poetry. Since Herodotus is the earliest writer who occasionally uses the verb ‘*poiein*’, the abstract noun ‘*poiêsis*’, and the person ‘*poiêtês*’, in the senses of poetic composition and composer,¹³ it is probably in the late fifth century that this generic concept of poetry came into common use.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the tragic poets, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides scarcely use those words in the specific sense; it seems that they consciously avoid them.¹⁴ The only exception is a sentence from Euripides’ *Stheneboea*: ‘Eros teaches a poet (*poiêtên*) then, if he before was unmusical (*amûsos*).’¹⁵ The latter half of this line became

¹² Ford (2002), chs. 4 and 5, argues that while Homer and Hesiod did not take their activity as ‘art’ (cf. Svenbro), Simonides and Pindar in the fifth century BCE did; for different views, see Verdenius (1983), 20–24, and Murray (1981/2006), 57–60.

¹³ The verb ‘*poiein*’ is used about 17 times: Hdt. 1.23, 2.53, 116, 3.38, 115, 4.14 (*bis vel ter*, depending on MSS), 16, 32, 35 (*bis*), 5.95, 6.21, 9.43 (*bis*); the objects are epos (2.116, 4.13–16, 32), melos (5.95), dithyramb (1.23), theogony (2.53), hymn (4.35), prophecy (9.43), and tragic drama (6.21). The composer is called ‘*poiêtês*’ in 6 places: 2.23, 53, 156, 3.115, 5.95, 6.52; the names of Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Alcaeus are mentioned. Finally, the noun ‘*poiêtês*’ is used twice: 2.23 and 2.82. Ford (2002), 139–152, suggests that the origin of these new terms lay in Ionian inquiry, in particular, history, of which Herodotus is a representative.

¹⁴ Ford (2002), 137–138, comments that ‘the word for “poet” and its fellows are consistently avoided by all the high poets of the fifth century ... Tragedy, with the exception of a few ironic passages in Euripides, avoids the language and idea of “making” song.’

¹⁵ 663 *TrGF*: the sources are Plutarch, *Moralia* 762B, 405E, and 622C (where the

a vogue: Aristophanes and Menander quote this,¹⁶ so does Agathon in the context where Eros is called the maker (*poiêtês*).¹⁷

Compared with this scarceness in tragedy, the comic writers, Cratinus, Pherecrates, and Aristophanes, provide ample evidence.¹⁸ Judging from this testimony, we can assume that the new group of terms became common when Plato wrote dialogues.

This new terminology made it possible to define ‘poetry’ in general. Gorgias’ epideictic writing, the *Encomium of Helen*, in promoting the overwhelming power of speech (*logos*), enumerates various kinds of *logos* and illustrates its power first with poetry:

‘All poetry (*tên poiêsin hapasan*) I consider and call *logos* with metre. Into those who hear it comes fearful fright and tearful pity and mournful longing, and at the successes and failures of others’ affairs and persons the soul suffers, through *logoi*, a suffering of its own.’

(9, trans. MacDowell, slightly changed)

This passage can be seen as the first definition of poetry in the Western history of literary criticism.¹⁹ Gorgias points to the enormous power exercised on the soul by poetical words as regards the evoking of fear, pity, sorrow, and pleasure. His clear definition shows that poetry is one kind of *logos*, which possesses the same power as rhetoric. The *differentia* of poetry from the other kinds in the genus of *logos* is ‘with metre’.

manuscripts show different readings). Euripides, on the other hand, uses compounds with the ‘-poios’ ending, such as ‘*hymnopoios*’ (*Suppliants* 180, *Rhesus* 651).

¹⁶ Cf. *Wasps* 1074, Menander, fr. 263 (Edmonds), Longinus, *On the Sublime* 39.2.

¹⁷ Cf. *Symp.* 195e.

¹⁸ Already as early as in the *Acharnians* (425 BCE), Aristophanes calls the playwright (apparently himself) ‘*poiêtês*’ in the parabasis, 633, 644, 649, 654. Cratinus, fr. 198 (PCG IV, 222–223; fragment from *Pytinê*, around 423 BCE), uses ‘*poiêma*’; Pherecrates, fr. 155.10 (PCG VII, 180; from *Kheirôn*, 418 BCE), uses ‘*poiêsis*’. For Aristophanes, see also *Frogs* 868 (*poiêsis*), 96, 1030–1031 (*poiêtês*); *Thesmophoriazousai* 153, 157, 193 (*poiein*); fr. 265 (PCG III.2, 153; *Danaïdes*, 413 BCE). Plato Comicus wrote plays entitled ‘The Laconians or the poets (or makers?)’ (*Hoi Lakônes ê hoi poiêtai*, ca. 401 BCE; PCG VII, 69–75), and ‘The poet (or maker)’ (*Ho poiêtês*, ca. 400 BCE; PCG VII, 118–126); also the lost play ‘*Poiêtês*’ is doubtfully attributed to Aristophanes (PCG III.2, 466–467). Yet we know nothing of the content of these plays.

¹⁹ The influence of this definition can be seen in Isocrates, *Antidosis* 46–47, and Plato, *Gorg.* 502c. I assume the composition of the *Encomium of Helen* around 415 BCE, when Euripides produced the *Trojan Women*. The third episode of that play contains the quasi-forensic debate between Hecuba and Helen in front of Menelaus, in which we can find many correspondences with the arguments of Gorgias. It is a matter of controversy among modern scholars whether Euripides responds to Gorgias or vice versa, but the common topics and arguments strongly indicate that the two authors present a defence of Helen in a competitive manner.

3. *Poetry and Prose*

Gorgias' definition of poetry implies that the genus 'logos' (and its power) is common in verse and prose. Indeed the distinction is often blurred in the field of rhetoric. Aristotle calls Gorgias' style 'poetical' (*Rhetoric* III.1, 1404a24–28); Gorgias does not use metres in his speeches, but nevertheless his rhetorical style contains certain rhythms, which make his *logos* sound poetical.²⁰ This casts a strong doubt upon our common assumption that verse and prose are sharply distinguished. Metre alone does not guarantee a special position to poetry.

Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* itself shows an important fusion of the two styles. While the specific genre called encomium was a praise of someone's victory, performed in verse,²¹ Gorgias was one of the first composers of encomia in prose. This genre of prose-writing is followed by Isocrates, and the encomium soon became an important part of the third kind of the art of rhetoric, i.e. what Aristotle classifies as 'epideictic' in the *Rhetoric*.²² Singing with metre becomes no longer essential for praise, since writing in prose can accomplish the same task.²³ The boundary between poetry and prose-writing, especially concerning rhetoric and sophistry, may not be so sharp as modern scholars often assume.

Poetry has something in common with prose-writing. Tragedy and comedy contain many arguments, as rhetoric and philosophy do. Debate (*agôn*) is a stock part of drama; for instance, the argument between Hecuba and Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, which shows some similarities to Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* calls a passage from Euripides 'speech' (*rhêsis*), which indicates its non-lyric character.²⁴ The *Clouds* contains parodies of philosophical inquiry

²⁰ For the full treatment of this point (with references to ancient and modern testimonies), see Schiappa (1999), Ch. 6. Denniston (1952), 10–13, while admitting Gorgias' considerable influence on Greek style, criticizes his style.

²¹ 'Encomia' is one of the ten distinct genres in lyric poetry (attributed to Pindar); see Nagy (1989), 72.

²² Isocrates claims his originality of composing 'encomia' in prose, in contrast with the traditional form in poetry, in *Evagoras* 8–11. For the history of encomium, see Schiappa (1999), Ch. 11 (with D.M. Timmerman), and Nightingale (1995), Ch. 3.I (though she uses the word 'encomium' in a wider sense).

²³ Readers of the *Phaedo* also remember that Socrates in prison heard in a dream Apollo's advice that he do *mûsikê*, and put Aesop's fables into verse (60c–61b). This episode shows people's understanding that the same content can be transformed from prose into verse (and probably vice versa).

²⁴ *Clouds* 1371: cf. Nagy (1989), 69.

and sophistic arguments, and above all the dispute between the good and the evil *logoi*—a particularly poignant example of the comedic *agôn*.

On the other hand, a few great philosophers wrote in verse. Although Xenophanes was probably not a thinker of natural science, but an itinerant rhapsode, his elegiac and iambic verses were read as philosophical message—sceptic or Eleatic—by later philosophers.²⁵ Parmenides' poem succeeds Homeric and Hesiodic epic in style and vocabulary, but his thinking may be put into prose, as his followers, Zeno and Melissus, wrote arguments in prose.²⁶ Finally, Empedocles puts his teachings into beautiful verse. Whether a *logos* is written in verse or in prose may not be so important as its content, as Aristotle suggests in the *Poetics*.²⁷

Gorgias' claim of the supreme power of 'logos' covers poetry, magic, science, philosophy, and rhetoric.²⁸ While the *logoi* (speeches or arguments) of Gorgias and other sophists are mostly given in prose, they are not in sharp contrast with poetry.

The technical word 'rhetoric' (*rhêtorikê*) was not very common yet even in the early fourth century BCE and shows no appearance in the extant literature of the fifth century BCE.²⁹ Instead the sophists and rhetoricians seem to have designated their own specialty as 'the art of speeches' (*logôn technê*).³⁰ This broad appellation naturally covers not only rhetoric (mainly performed in court, assembly, and festival), but also philosophical argumentation, later called 'logic'. Plato's attempt to

²⁵ The earliest inclusion of Xenophanes among philosophers is seen in Pl. *Soph.* 242d, though this might be a source of misleading treatment. For Xenophanes' style, see Notomi (2001).

²⁶ In *Soph.* 237a, the visitor from Elea testifies that Parmenides discussed the same thing both 'in prose and in verse'. Although we have no evidence that Parmenides wrote prose, this remark simply indicates that the style does not matter.

²⁷ Cf. *Po.* 1.1447b17–20: 'Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except metre, so the one is justly called a poet, while the other is called a *physiologos* rather than a poet.'

²⁸ Cf. *Encomium of Helen*, 8–14. See also Notomi (2007a).

²⁹ This is pointed out and discussed by Schiappa (1991), (1999). However, I think it unlikely that Plato coined the term and used it for the first time in the *Gorgias*; the natural use of it in Alcidas' treatise, *On those who wrote the written speeches* or *On the sophists* (which I date around the 380s, between Isocrates' *Against the Sophists* and Plato's *Phaedrus*), strongly indicates the contrary.

³⁰ Cf. *Dissoi Logoi*, DK. 90 8 (1, 3, 5); see also Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.31, Pl. *Phdr.* 260d, 261b, 262c, 266c–d, 267b, d, 271c, 272b, 273d–e (cf. 270a), and Arist. *Rh.* 1.1, 1354a12. For this term, see Guthrie (1971), 177, and Schiappa, (1999), 68–69 (more radical than (1991), 46–47).

dissociate dialectic (the genuine art of argumentation) from sophistry and rhetoric is to be pursued within the field of the art of *logos*.³¹ On the other hand, since poetry also claims art concerning *logos*, that is not alien to those fields, either. Plato's *Phaedrus* 278b–c mentions as the composers of *logos* three kinds of people: namely the logographer Lysias, the poet Homer (and anyone who composes in verse or in prose), and the politician Solon (and those who wrote laws).

The *Phaedrus* is a special dialogue which examines 'logos' in general, and uses the words 'poiêsis', 'poiêtês', and 'poiêtikos' for a wider range than the specific field of poetry. The word 'poiêsis' indicates the works of the rhetoricians Polus and Likymnius, in addition to the traditional poetry of Homer and tragedy.³² Similarly, the word 'poiêtês' refers to such speech-writers as Lysias, besides poets.³³ Finally, the adjective 'poiêtikos' is used both for ordinary poetry and for poetical words of Socrates' speech.³⁴

Plato insists that other specialists should be distinguished from the philosopher and justly called 'poet or writer of speeches or lawgiver' (*Phdr.* 278d–e). This passage probably alludes to Alcidamas' writing entitled *On those who write written speeches or On the sophists*: those who spend much time in writing (a by-product of speech-making) should 'much more justly be described as makers (*poiêtas*) than sophists' (2). Alcidamas again in the final passage mentions 'the maker of speeches' (*poiêtês logôn*) in a pejorative way in contrast to 'rhetor', so that the word 'poiêtês' in both passages evidently denotes not a poet, but a speech-writer like Isocrates. Plato's allusion is interesting particularly when it comes just before Socrates' praise of the young Isocrates.

When Plato discusses the new concept of 'poetry', he is quite aware of the ambiguity of the word of 'making' (*poiêsis*): the generic sense of 'making', and the specific sense of 'poetry'; in between, there is a (slightly broader) specific sense of 'making a *logos*'.

³¹ In contrast to antilogic (i.e. sophistic), philosophy is called 'the art of *logos*', in *Phd.* 89d–91c; see also '*dialectikê epistêmê*' in *Soph.* 253b–e.

³² For 'poiêsis' as rhetoric, see *Phdr.* 267b–c; as poetry, see 245a (*bis*), 268d (tragedy), 278c (Homer). For Likymnius, see Ford (2002), 186.

³³ For 'poiêtês' as a speech-writer, see 234e, 236d, 258b, d, 278e; as a poet, see 247a, c. De Vries (1969), 72, comments on 234e (cf. 236d) that this word indicates the general meaning of 'author'.

³⁴ Cf. *Phdr.* 257a. For poetry, see 245a, 248e, 265b4.

4. *The Sophist and the Poet*

Plato's treatments of the poet and of the sophist appears contrasting. Plato often expresses his appreciation of poets, especially of Homer,³⁵ and his use of poems is not always critical or negative.³⁶ In the *Apology* it is at least admitted that poets speak of many fine and good things (*Ap.* 22a–c.). Since poets were much respected and influential in Greek society, Plato's criticism against them must have sounded challenging and provocative.

On the other hand, Plato's attack on the sophist is ceaseless and merciless. From such earlier dialogues as the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, he keeps examining various aspects of the sophists' activities, and reveals the spuriousness of their education.³⁷ The word 'sophist' almost always bears a negative meaning in the Platonic dialogues,³⁸ and there is no sophist who escapes Plato's criticism.³⁹ However, in spite of the contrasting attitudes toward these two groups, we can find that the poet and the sophist had much in common in their roles and activities in Greek society. Accordingly, even Plato sometimes puts them together in a common examination, as in the *Phaedrus*.

Since sophists appeared relatively late in the mid to late fifth century BCE when poetry was already established, the sophistic movement and the poetic tradition should be deemed distinct. However, the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue, the outspoken protagonist of this movement, declares that the poets, such as Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, were actually 'ancient sophists', though they concealed their skill out of fear

³⁵ See *Ion* 530b, *Rep.* X, 595b–c, 606e–607a, III, 383a; for the relation between Plato and Homer, see Murray (1996), 19–24.

³⁶ Some passages of Homer are recommended (or at least allowed) for education in *Rep.* III, 389e (*Il.* 4.412, 3.8, 4.431) and 390d (*Od.* 20.17–18); cf. Verdenius (1970), 13–14. Also, Plato's *Sophist* quotes the Homeric passages at the beginning (216c–d; *Od.* 9.270–271, 17.483–487) and the end (268d; *Iliad* 6.211) to show a leitmotif: see Notomi (1999), 69–70, 296.

³⁷ However, the crucial and final criticism comes only later in the *Sophist*. For the different modes of criticism of the sophists, see Notomi (1999), 52–54, 60–63.

³⁸ Except a few places where Plato seems to use the word 'sophist' in an old (non-pejorative) sense: the wrestling teacher Mikkos is called 'formidable sophist' in *Lys.* 204a; the word is also used for a person of technical knowledge in *Men.* 85b. Also gods are called 'sophists' in three passages: Eros (*Symp.* 203d), Hades (*Crat.* 403e), and Zeus (*Minos* 319c); cf. Notomi (1999), 16–17.

³⁹ Occasional references to Prodicus as Socrates' teacher (*Prot.* 341a, *Men.* 96d, *Crat.* 384b–c) are no doubt ironical; cf. Burnyeat (1977), 15, n.9. Plato must have in mind not only sophists contemporary to Socrates, but also those of his own time, like Isocrates, Alcidas, and Polycrates; we should also remember that Gorgias (ca. 485–380) was probably still alive in the 380s, when Plato wrote the *Gorgias*.

or resentment.⁴⁰ Although the list of the disguised sophists goes as far as musicians and physical trainers, and is not confined to the poets, Protagoras chiefly regards the poets as employing sophistry, along with composing and reciting poems. It is noteworthy that Protagoras does not count any thinkers of natural inquiry, now called the Presocratics, among the disguised sophists.⁴¹ This feature indicates that Protagoras' self-identification as a sophist is more closely associated with the tradition of poets than with natural scientists (*physiologoi*).

The sophists make much use of poems in their teaching, just as Protagoras begins to examine the poem of Simonides in this way:

'I think, Socrates, that to master poetry is the most important part of a man's education. That is, to be able to apprehend whether the words of the poets are well composed (*orthôs pepoiêtai*) or not, and to learn to distinguish them and give an account in reply to questions.'

(*Prot.* 338e–339a)

This clearly shows that interpretation of poetry is an important skill that the sophist professes to have.⁴² Not only Plato's Protagoras, but also Plato's Hippias is proud of the mastery of poetry, especially of Homer.⁴³ Hippias compiled an anthology of poetic passages selected from Orpheus, Musaeus, Hesiod, Homer and others.⁴⁴

Both the poet and the sophist play a significant role in moral education in Greek society. For instance, Aristophanes has Aeschylus and Euripides express that they make the people better (*beltious te poioumen tous anthrôpous*).⁴⁵ The poems of the poets, such as Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, are often cited and evoked for authority on moral actions.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ *Prot.* 316d–e; cf. 342b; though, it is hardly determined outside Plato that this declaration is historical. Remember also that the poets were originally called 'sophists' (in the old good sense); cf. Guthrie (1971), 29–30.

⁴¹ Cf. Ostwald. (1992), 341.

⁴² Cf. Guthrie (1971), 45.

⁴³ Cf. *H.Mi.* 363a–b, 368c–d. Again, the evidence outside Plato is scanty, but at least Aristotle reports in *Poetics* 19.1456b15 (= DK. 80A29) that Protagoras criticizes Homer for inadequate use of the imperative. Isocrates testifies that some of the sophists contemporary to him discuss Homer, Hesiod, and other poets in the Lyceum, in *Panathnaicus* 18.

⁴⁴ DK. 84B6; for his *Anthology*, see Snell ([1944]/1976), Mansfeld. ([1983]/1990), ([1986]/1990), and Patzer (1986). For example, the citations of Parmenides, DK. 28B13, and Hesiod, *Theogony* 116–117, 120, in Plato's *Symposium* 178b and 195c, almost certainly come from that *Anthology* (cf. Mansfeld ([1986]/1990), 35, 46, 48, 71, n.9, Patzer (1986), 43–48, and Notomi ((2007c), 167).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Frogs* 1008–1012, cf. 1054–1055; for its cultural backgrounds, see Dover (1993), 12–16.

⁴⁶ Havelock (1963), Chs II–IV, argues that poetry is not just inspirational or imagi-

It is partly by citing poems of these poets that the sophist presents his teaching in the form of interpretation. As long as the poets are believed by people to be men of wisdom,⁴⁷ the sophist can call on such authority for support. As an able interpreter of old wisdom, he is also deemed wise.

The difference between poetry and sophistry in terms of *logos* is not great, as we saw in the previous section. In addition to Gorgias' style of speech, which is regarded as 'poetical' by Aristotle, Hippias himself composed an elegy.⁴⁸ Prose-speech given by the sophists in front of an audience, namely *epideixis*, resembles poetry sung and performed by the poet or rhapsode; the sophists even dressed themselves like a rhapsodes,⁴⁹ and they went around from city to city, just as poets did reciting their poems.⁵⁰

The materials chosen for the sophists' teaching can also be presented as similar to the traditional themes of poetry. The sophists often use Homeric figures and the traditional myths taken up by tragedians. The two epideictic speeches of Gorgias deal with Helen and Palamedes. Prodicus wrote the famous story of *Heracles' Choice*, and Hippias was reported to compose a *Trojan Dialogue*.⁵¹ We remember that the myth which Protagoras speaks in Plato's *Protagoras* takes a form of traditional myth, even though it may well be Plato's composition. The inheritance the sophists obtained from poetry is large.⁵² Therefore, criticisms of the two groups should not be considered in stark separation.

Finally, when Plato criticizes Parmenides, Empedocles, and others, for their way of speaking as 'narrating a story' (*mython tina diêgeisthai*), Plato is concerned with the serious issue of how philosophical *logos* is established as genuine art or knowledge.⁵³ Since the poets, sophists, and

native activity, but, as it were, the social encyclopedia of all knowledge; the poets had an institutional status as educators. The educational role of the poets, especially Homer, is examined in Jaeger (1946), 35–56, Verdenius (1970), Gentile (1988), Marrow (1948), 27–39, 75–80, and Murray (1996), 14–24. Ford (2002), 201–206, focuses on the didactic value of 'generalship' in Homer.

⁴⁷ The poet is called 'wise' (*sophos*) in the sense of expert; see Verdenius (1983), 20–24, Dover (1993), 10–24, and Murray (1996), 8.

⁴⁸ DK. 86B1; for the similarity in style between poetry and rhetoric, see O'Sullivan (1992), 14–22.

⁴⁹ DK. 82A9; see also O'Sullivan (1992), 66–67.

⁵⁰ For the sophist's travel, see *Prot.* 315a, *Tim.* 19e; for the poet, see *Rep.* X, 600d–e.

⁵¹ For Prodicus, see DK. 84B1, 2 (*Xen. Mem.* 2.1); for Hippias, see DK. 86A2, 9 (cf. Ford (2002), 201, n.50).

⁵² Cf. O'Sullivan (1996), 117, Schiappa (1999), 77–78, 101–102, and Walker, (2000) 28.

⁵³ *Soph.* 242c–243b. For saving 'logos' in the *Sophist*, see Notomi (2007b), (2007c).

philosophers are all concerned with *logos*, how to dissociate the first two from the last becomes the main and constant concern for Plato's philosophy.

5. *Intertextuality between Republic X and the Sophist*

The *Sophist* is the later dialogue which finally defines the sophist as 'the imitator (*mimêtês*) of the wise' (*Soph.* 268c). While this dialogue does not deal with a poet or poetry in a direct way, it nevertheless examines the foundation of Plato's earlier criticism of poetry in *Republic X*: namely the ontological basis of the art of image-making. Plato's implicit intention can be seen in remarkable correspondences between the two dialogues.⁵⁴

In the beginning of *Republic X*, Socrates confirms the treatment of poets in Books II–III, and proclaims that poetry as imitative art should not be admitted in the Ideal State.⁵⁵ The criticism of poetry consists of two parts, namely the ontological argument from 596a to 602b and the psychological argument from 602c to 607a; we can observe mainly (but not exclusively) in the ontological arguments many features common to the definition of the sophist in the *Sophist*. The poet and sophist are both treated as makers of images.

First, in *Republic X*, Socrates begins with the question, 'Could you tell me what imitation in general is?' (595c). This initial focus on 'imitation in general' (*mimêsis holôs*) governs the whole course of examination. Here the term 'imitation' is used in the broad sense of 'artistic representation', in contrast to the narrow sense of 'mimicking' appearing in the previous treatment of poetry in Book III.⁵⁶ The *Sophist* also focuses on the imitative art in order to grasp the sophist in that field, and divides that art into species (235c ff., 265a–b). This 'imitative art' is equal to 'image-making art' in both contexts.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This section presents a revised form of my analysis of the relation between the two arguments, in Notomi (1999), 126–133. Else (1972), 26–31, 38, also examines the relation between *Republic X* and the *Sophist*, though on a different assumption of chronological order, namely that the *Sophist* comes earlier than *Republic X* (cf. note 80 below).

⁵⁵ *Rep.* X, 595a–b.

⁵⁶ See *Rep.* III, 392c–398b. For the broad and narrow senses of 'imitation', and the shift between them in the *Republic* and *Sophist*, see Notomi (1999), 126, 128–129, 279–282; cf. Sörbom (1966).

⁵⁷ *mimêtikê*, 235c, d, 236b, c; *mimêma*, 235e, *mimoumenoi*, 235e; *eidôlopoiikê*, 258b, 236c. Later in the final definition, the term 'imitation' is used in the specific sense of 'mimicking' and treated as a species of image-making (265a–b, 267a–268a, c).

Secondly, in examining poetry, Socrates constantly appeals to the illustration of painting, chosen as a representative art of imitation.⁵⁸ The *Sophist* also introduces the notion of imitation by the model of painting.⁵⁹ In both cases, the imitator is contrasted with the craftsman.⁶⁰

Third, based on the illustration of painting, both poetry and sophistry are included in the image-making art. As what the painter produces is a picture or an image (*eidôlon*), so the poet and the sophist produce not an object but an image. However, while image-making in general is ascribed to the poet in *Republic X*,⁶¹ the genus of image-making (*eidôlopoiikê*) is divided further into two species, namely likeness-making (*eikastikê*) and apparition-making (*phantastikê*), in the *Sophist*. This division locates the sophist in the latter kind within the art of image-making.

Fourth, just as the painter can make *all* things (*panta*) by his art quickly and easily, the poet makes and recites about *all* things, and the sophist claims to controvert about *all* things easily and quickly.⁶² In particular, both of them are concerned with *all* arts.⁶³ In *Republic X*, the imitative art is said to be far removed from the truth; it can make *all* things because it touches only a small part of each object, namely an image (598b).

Fifth, although both the poet and the sophist are supposed by their audience or pupils to be wise about *all* things,⁶⁴ the poet proves to be ignorant of what he speaks about, and the sophist cannot be omniscient, either.⁶⁵ Their appearance of wisdom is false and illusory.

⁵⁸ *Rep. X*, 596e, 597b, d-e, 597e-598c, 600e-601a, c, 602a, 602d, 603b, 605a-b. Aristotle's *Poetics* repeatedly appeals to the comparison with painting, starting from 1.1447a18-23. For the painter, see Havelock (1963), 32, n.28; Else (1972), 26-27, regards 'the painter' as the middle term to connect the poet in *Republic X* to the sophist in the *Sophist*.

⁵⁹ *Soph.* 233d ff. The painting art (*graphikê technê*) is explicitly mentioned in 234b; cf. 236b-c.

⁶⁰ *Rep. X*, 596c-598d; the imitator and the craftsman are also contrasted with the user in 601c-602a. This contrast with the craftsman is crucial in the *Republic*, since the imitator may violate the one-person-one-role principle in the Ideal State. For the craftsman, see also 'autopoiêtikon' in *Soph.* 266a; cf. 265b; for the architect and the painter, see 266c.

⁶¹ It is noteworthy that *Republic X* uses the word 'eidôlon' only (598b, 599a, d, 600e, 601b, 605c), but never uses 'eikôn' (which appears in the similes of the Line and the Cave in Books VI-VII). 'Appearance' (*phainomenon*) is mentioned in 596e, 598a-b, 601b, 602b, d-e; cf. 'phantasma', 598a. 'Skiagraphia' (602d) may be closer to 'apparition'.

⁶² *Rep. X*, 596c-e (cf. a mirror, 596d-e), 598b; *Soph.* 233d-234c. For quickness in practicing the art, see *Rep. X*, 596d-e, 599a, and *Soph.* 234a.

⁶³ *Rep. X*, 598e; *Soph.* 232d-e. This feature corresponds especially to Homer, the champion of encyclopedic knowledge; cf. Else (1972), 40.

⁶⁴ *Rep. X*, 598c, d ('*passophos*'); *Soph.* 232e, 233c, 234c.

⁶⁵ *Rep. X*, 600e-601c, 602b; *Soph.* 233a-c, 267b-268d. The poet's ignorance of what he says is constantly pointed out in Plato: e.g. *Ap.* 22b-c, *Ion*, *Men.* 99c-d.

Sixth, both arguments refer to the difference of appearances depending on an audience's point of view.⁶⁶ As the painter displays a painting to 'children and foolish adults' or 'ignorant young children,'⁶⁷ the poet and the sophist speak to their audience, namely young and ignorant people.⁶⁸ Imitation is there called 'colourful' (*poikilon*).⁶⁹

Finally, *Republic X* discusses imitation as if deception were essential to it.⁷⁰ The *Sophist* also shows, by illustration of the painter's deception, that the sophist's art deceives his ignorant audience.⁷¹ Deceptiveness is explained in both places with reference to our common experiences of appearance.⁷² Because of such deception, both the poet and the sophist are called 'juggler' (*goês*),⁷³ and their imitative arts are called 'childish play' (*paidia*)⁷⁴ and 'conjuring' (*thaumatopoiia*).⁷⁵

These correspondences, sometimes verbatim, are so striking that they are without doubt intentional. Yet it is not sufficiently discussed by scholars why Plato employs such similar arguments against both the poet and the sophist.

The strategy common in the two is to examine the imitative art in general by using painting as the chief example, and thereby to specify and criticise them as image-making. The lines of these arguments are not parallel by coincidence, but must be due to a certain projection of the criticism of the poet onto the definition of the sophist.

⁶⁶ *Rep. X*, 598a, 602c–d; *Soph.* 235e–236a.

⁶⁷ *Rep. X*, 598c; *Soph.* 234b.

⁶⁸ *Rep. X*, 598c–d; cf. 595b, 601a–b; *Soph.* 234c. The sophist's pupils are mentioned in 233b–c.

⁶⁹ *Rep. X*, 604e–605a; *Soph.* 234b. Plato uses this word negatively, for example, in describing democracy (*Rep.* VIII. 557c, 558c, 559d, 561e) and tyranny (*Rep.* VIII. 568d). It should be noted that Pindar uses 'poikilon' in a positive sense for his skillful products in *Nemean* 8.15, and fr. 194 (Snell-Maehler; cf. Ford (2002), 118, 125). Detienne & Vernant (1974), 25–28, 42, 49, 63, discuss the notion of 'poikilon' in relation to wisdom.

⁷⁰ *Rep. X*, 598b–599a; however, this argument of the *Republic* is often criticized by modern interpreters as invalid. For 'appearance', see Halliwell (1988), 117–118 (on 598a9), 134 (on 602d7).

⁷¹ *Soph.* 234b–c, 240d.

⁷² *Rep. X*, 602c–d; *Soph.* 235e–236b.

⁷³ *Rep. X*, 598d, 602d; *Soph.* 235a.

⁷⁴ *Rep. X*, 602b; *Soph.* 234a–b, 235a. The *Statesman* classifies painting and other imitative arts as 'playthings' (*paignion*), which are done only for the sake of play (*paidia*) (288c–d).

⁷⁵ *Rep. X*, 602d; cf. 'thaumastos', 596d; *Soph.* 235b; cf. 'thauma', 233a, 'thaumastos', 236d. The carrier of puppets who appears in the simile of the Cave is called 'thaumatopoiios' in VII, 514b, and I suspect that this alludes to the role of the sophist in the visible world (cf. Else (1972), 39, n.57).

The concept of imitation (*mimêsis*) appeared relatively late in history, but Plato knew its new meaning as ‘artistic imitation’, which includes music, drama, poetry, painting, and sculpture, already when he for the first time mentions the word in *Republic* II: ‘imitators (*mimêtai*), many of whom work with shapes and colours, many with music: poets and their assistants, rhapsodists, actors, choral dancers, contractors.’⁷⁶ This terminology explains why Plato examines the role of the poet by focusing on imitation, with the illustration of the painter as the chief example of it, in Book X. For the poet’s activity was already associated with imitation.⁷⁷

On the other hand, the sophist was never held to be an imitator in the proper sense of the word.⁷⁸ No other dialogue nor any other writer’s work describes the sophist as an imitative artist before the *Sophist*.⁷⁹ Although the description of the sophist’s art as imitative is very original in this dialogue, its intertextuality with *Republic* X explains the introduction of this way of criticism.

The inclusion of the sophist among imitative artists is a new way of revealing his essence, just as he was regarded in the earlier definitions as a hunter, a merchant, a fighter, or a purifier. The sophist is examined as an imitative artist not because sophistry is already regarded as a branch of

⁷⁶ *Rep.* II, 373b: this provides the earliest extant source of the term ‘*mimêtês*’; cf. Sörbom (1966), 56, n.34. The imitators ‘with shapes and colours’ are painters and sculptors, but not architects, which Jowett & Campbell (1894), Vol. 3, 89, include; for they make *real* houses in an ordinary sense, and are not imitators (cf. *Soph.* 266c). The phrase ‘*poiêtai te . . .*’ does not represent an independent group (*pace* Cornford (1941), Lee (1955), and Grube-Reeve (1992)), but should be read as explanatory or additional to the imitators with music; Jowett (1953), 216, and Shorey (1930), 161–163, put this in parenthesis, and Sörbom (1966), 101–102, follows Shorey’s translation and explains with relevant references why the contractors are included in imitators.

⁷⁷ Poets as ‘imitators’ are mentioned in *Phdr.* 248e and *Tim.* 19d–e, but no example is found in Plato’s dialogues earlier than *Republic* II. For the evidence before Plato, see for example, *Homeric Hymn to the Delian Apollo* 156–164, Pindar, *Pythian* 12.18–21, *Parthenia* 2.6–20, Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae* 850, *Wasps* 1017–1020 (cf. Sörbom (1966)).

⁷⁸ On the contrary, the dialogues generally held to be earlier sometimes contrast the painter as an expert, with the sophist, who has no art: *Prot.* 312c–d, 318b–c, *Gorg.* 448b–c, 453c–d; cf. *Ion* 532e–533b, *Gorg.* 503e–504a.

⁷⁹ The explanation of rhetoric and sophistry in *Gorg.* 462b ff. may be a precursor of the definition in the *Sophist*. According to the *Gorgias*, rhetoric, along with sophistry, seems (*dokei*) to be an art, but is not really (463b, cf. 464a–b). It is rather experience or flattery (cf. *kolakikê* in *Soph.* 222e–223a), or as it were, an image of a part of politics (*eidôlon*, 463d; cf. 463e). For without knowledge but only by guessing, it produces not a really good but a seemingly good condition of the soul; therefore, it pretends (*prospoieitai*) to be real art, and deceives people (464c–d). The *Gorgias*, however, does not discuss ‘imitation’ yet.

the imitative art, in the sense that painting is an imitative art, but because he is to be defined as the one who *imitates* the wise.

Plato presupposes, and expects us readers to remember, his argument against the poet in *Republic X*, when he introduces the imitative art as the genus of the sophist's art in the *Sophist*.⁸⁰ On the other hand, since sophistry is somewhat akin to poetry in relation to philosophy and more difficult to attack, the later examination of the imitative art deepens the earlier ontological arguments. Therefore, when the sophist is critically examined as an imitator, this new strategy casts a light back upon the criticism of the poet in the *Republic*.

Indeed we may see *Republic X* as criticizing the sophist in the course of examining the poet. Although the *Republic* as a whole appears to pay far less attention to the sophist than to the poet,⁸¹ Book X mentions the sophist in a few important places.

First, one ironical phrase in introducing an imitative artist intimates Plato's intention to criticise the sophist for the same fault as the poet. When Socrates presents someone able to make *all* things, on earth, in heaven, and in Hades, Glaucon exclaimed, 'What an amazing sophist you are talking about!' (596d). Although this use of 'sophist' is sometimes thought to retain the original sense of the word, namely 'wise man',⁸² it certainly reminds us of the sophist himself, especially in considering the same claim attributed to him in the *Sophist*.⁸³

Besides, when the common notion that the poets educate (*paideuein*) Greek people and *make* (*poiein*) them better is refuted, this refutation

⁸⁰ Else (1972) is the exception who takes the reverse chronological order; Else argues that the first part of *Republic X*, i.e. 591a1–608b3—separated from the rest—was written after the *Sophist* (cf. 56, 62, 66, 68), since this part assumes the argument of imitative art in the *Sophist*; on this reading he proposes the chronological order as *Rep.* (main part)—*Soph.*—*Rep. X*, 591a–608b (cf. 26–27, 37–39, 41, 68). However, I regard this chronology as implausible, and propose instead that the *Sophist* assumes the argument of imitation in *Republic X*.

⁸¹ *Republic VI* talks about the sophists as those who curry favour with the public and tailor their opinions to 'the public' (493a–e), or educators who do not know the truth (493b–c). What sophists teach is nothing but what is believed by the public (493a; cf. Guthrie (1971), 20–21). On the other hand, the close relationship between the poets and the public is suggested in *Rep.* VIII, 568a–d. Although sophists are probably alluded to in *Rep.* VI, 489d, 490e–491a, 496a (*sophismata*), and 500b, the public, called 'greatest sophists' (492a–b), are much more emphasized (492a–493a).

⁸² For example, Jowett & Campbell (1894), Vol. 3, 441–442: 'in the vernacular sense for "the master of an art or mystery".'

⁸³ See Adam (1902), Vol. II, 389, and Halliwell (1988), 111–112.

seems to aim at the sophist as well.⁸⁴ It was widely believed that poets such as Homer and Hesiod play a central role as educators of the Greeks, but the competing claim for civic education was made by the sophists: education concerning virtue represents the sophist's profession.

Indeed, the sophists, 'Protagoras of Abdera, Prodicus, and many others,' are mentioned in *Republic X* in contrast to the poets, Homer and Hesiod, with a view to proving that the latter are not competent in educating people (600c–e). If Homer had really been able to endow people with knowledge, he would have been admired and loved by many, just as Protagoras and Prodicus were by claiming to give education. We cannot miss the tone of irony in this argument; for even though it is true that some sophists are admired and followed by many young people, that by no means proves that they have knowledge. On the contrary, Plato invariably criticizes their lack of real knowledge.⁸⁵ We can therefore assume that Plato has also the sophist in mind when he criticizes the poet for their ignorance and false education: both are imitators who teach without knowledge.

The ironical reference to Protagoras and others may suggest that the sophists might excel the poets in that the former manage a higher deception than the latter. For it implies that the sophists at least succeed in getting admiration from people. We might detect a certain difference between these two in the final definition in the *Sophist*: the sophist is classified as the 'ironical imitator,' who, having vague awareness of his own ignorance, pretends to possess knowledge; in this division, the other species constitutes the 'simple-minded imitator,' who is characterized by sheer ignorance (267e–268a). If the latter is to be identified with the poet, we may say that the reference to the sophist in *Republic X* indicates the ironical feature of his imitation, in contrast with the poet as a sheer ignoramus.

The criticism of the imitative artist in *Republic X* anticipates, and is proleptic to, the full treatment of the sophist in the *Sophist*. On the other hand, the *Sophist* supplements and develops the argument of the *Republic*. Their common feature reveals why the poet and the sophist should be criticized as imitative artists.

⁸⁴ *Rep. X*, 598d–601b, esp. 599c–d, 600c–d. Halliwell (1988) comments on 599d that the phrase 'make people better' suggests the sophistic education (cf. *H.Mj.* 281b–282b). For the poets' role as educators, see Section 4 above, esp. Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1009–1012 (cf. note 45).

⁸⁵ A decisive verdict is given that the sophist lacks real knowledge but only appears to be omniscient, in *Soph.* 232e–233d, cf. 268a, c.

6. *Poetry As Making*

Plato critically examines the poet and poetry in terms of ‘*poiêsis*’ (making). In *Republic X*, by focusing on the activity of making, Plato allocates to poetry the third rank, twice removed from the top. The ontological arguments depend on the understanding of poetry as a kind of making—not of the original but of an image.

The first ontological argument sets the framework of the whole criticism (596a–597e). Three kinds of making are distinguished: first, the unique original, i.e. the form, is made by the god;⁸⁶ second, the craftsman makes products; third, the imitator makes images. All three kinds of people are called ‘maker’ (*poiêtês*), and all three activities are referred to as ‘making’ (*poiein*).⁸⁷ Among them, the third kind is said to be able to make *all things*; just anyone can make all things with a mirror, a painter and a poet make all things by their arts (598e). Yet what they make is only an image, or what something appears to be. Therefore, this kind of ‘maker’ is called ‘imitator’ (*mimêtês*), i.e. the one who imitates the products of the god and the craftsman.⁸⁸ As the painter should now be called ‘imitator’ rather than ‘maker’ in a proper sense, so the poet (*poiêtês*) is deprived of the proper status as maker (*poiêtês*), which should be attributed to the first and second types of makers only.⁸⁹ This third kind of making aims only at pleasure, so that it should be banished from the Ideal State.⁹⁰

Here Plato makes full use of the double meaning of ‘*poiêsis*’: the broad sense of ‘making’ in general and the narrow sense of ‘poetry’. Socrates says that ‘it is necessary for a good *poiêtês* (maker, or poet), if he is to make well whatever he makes, to make it with knowledge—or otherwise

⁸⁶ The ascription of making forms to the god (597a–d) and description of him as ‘maker’ (*poiêtês*, 597d) may sound awkward, especially when we consider the Demiurge, in *Timaeus* 28c, who is called ‘the maker (*poiêtên*) and father of the universe’, but not of the forms. Yet this may be interpreted as a device in the context of this specific argument to distinguish three kinds of making.

⁸⁷ On the god, see 596b (*poiein*), 597c (*poiein*, *poiêtês*); on the craftsman, see 596b (*poiein*), 597a (*poiein*), d (*poiêtês*); and on the imitator, see 596c–e (*poiêtês*, *poiein*).

⁸⁸ *Rep. X*, 597b; Glaucon claims that the man imitates the products of *both* in 597e.

⁸⁹ See 597d–e, where the word ‘maker’ is equivalent to ‘craftsman’. Later ‘poets’ (*poiêtikoi*) are said to be ‘imitators of images’ (*mimêtai eidôlon*) in 600e; and ‘the maker (or poet) of an image’ (*poiêtês tou eidôlou*) is called ‘imitator’ in 601b.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Rep. X*, 607c: this passage summarizes the psychological argument (602c–607a) and concludes the whole criticism. For poetry’s effect on pleasure, see also 606a–d.

he is unable to make it' (596b–e). This statement can be applied to any maker including the poet.

The poet is called '*poiêtês*', literally, 'maker', but what kind of 'making' is he really engaged in? The answer is: it is the third position, twice removed from the supreme, genuine making. Poetry is an inferior kind of making which produces only images or appearances, easily and playfully. By contrast, the second kind of making, pursued by the craftsman is superior—not to mention the first kind of making, the one performed by the god. Who dares to devote himself to such an inferior activity seriously, if he knows to do the better kinds of making? (599a–b) This is a result of the basic ontological consideration.

Besides, the poet, above all the great Homer, is believed to educate people, that is, to *make* people better.⁹¹ However, Socrates argues, there is scarce evidence that poets have actually made Greeks better. The poets do not even *make* pupils (600c). Therefore, their claim of 'making' in education again turns out to be illusory and false (598d–601b).

Plato then provides another argument that downgrades the status of 'making' itself (601b–602c). The imitator, including a painter and a poet, is this time contrasted with the maker (i.e. a craftsman) and the user; the last proves to have the best knowledge about the usefulness of things made, whereas the imitator is located in the third, since he imitates without knowledge or correct opinion (*orthê doxa*).

These arguments can properly be understood in terms of Plato's intention of examining the notion of 'making'. The poet is ordinarily called 'maker' (*poiêtês*), but he does not deserve this name because he is engaged in the most inferior kind of making, i.e. making images; moreover, he never makes people any better. By focusing on 'making', Plato thus criticizes the poet's activity.

Since Plato's treatments of the poet and of the sophist share a common strategy to re-examine the concept of making, as indicated above, let us observe how 'making' is analyzed in the case of the sophist, and then see its projection upon the poet.⁹²

First, the sophist's art is concerned with speech (*logos*). He teaches the rhetorical skills to use in court, assembly, and other places, and

⁹¹ For the expression 'make people better' (*beltious anthrôpous poiein*), see 599d, cf. 600c (*apergazesthai*). This is what poets are alleged to engage in (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1009–1010, see Section 4, esp. note 45 above), but according to Socrates it is a major role of the genuine politician: cf. *Gorg.* 503c. For the poets' education, see also 606e.

⁹² Notomi (1999), 133–136, discusses how the *Sophist* analyses the structure of 'making' of the sophist's art.

thereby provides his pupils with virtue, i.e. civic and political power. The *logographer*, such as Lysias, is also called *poiêtês* in the sense of a maker of speeches.⁹³ What they make is a *logos*, namely speech, discourse, or argument.

The sophist's art is often said to be 'making a weaker argument stronger'.⁹⁴ This phrase is ambiguous: it may mean to change a weak argument into a really strong one, but it also means to make any argument *appear* stronger. Or it may only suggest the winning in the court, whether it may concern the argument or its appearance.

Second, when the sophist makes the appearance of *logos*, his activity is to produce in his audience or reader's mind an opinion (*doxa*) or appearance through *logos*. This is called persuasion. If the appearance is false and merely seems true, the product of the sophist's making is a false image.

Third, while the appearance is concerned with each particular statement or argument (*logos*), such appearances eventually constitute an image or an opinion of the sophist's wisdom: the sophist *makes* himself appear wise through *logos*. In short, he creates his own appearance as 'wise man'.⁹⁵

Fourth, while the sophist performs and produces *logos* and creates his appearance of wisdom, he *makes* (*poiein*) his pupils as powerful in *logos* as himself. For the sophist proclaims to educate people to acquire the same skills; he *makes* (*poiein*) a pupil out of anyone who willingly pay a high fee. Protagoras is said by Socrates to 'make people strong in speaking', which is equivalent to his main profession to 'educate human beings'.⁹⁶ Plato's Gorgias also proclaims to make others equally powerful in speech.⁹⁷ This aspect of the sophist's education is summarized in the *Sophist* as 'making (people) doing this (i.e. controverting)', and 'making them powerful'.⁹⁸ However, this education does not *make* the pupils truly wise, since the educator himself does not know the truth. What the sophist makes is the mere appearance of wisdom in his pupils, which is the same as his own.

⁹³ Cf. *Phdr.* 234e, 236d, 258b, d, 278e; cf. Section 3, especially n.33 above.

⁹⁴ This skill is often attributed to Protagoras: see DK. 80A21: Aristotle, *Rh.* 2.24, 1402a25 (cf. DK. 80B6b); cf. Schiappa (1991), Ch. 6. But it represents the art of the sophists in general; see Aristophanes, *Clouds* 112–115, and Plato, *Apology* 19b.

⁹⁵ See especially *Soph.* 233c, 268b–c.

⁹⁶ 'poiêsai deinon legein', *Prot.* 312d; 'paideuein anthrôpous', 317b.

⁹⁷ 'allous dynaton einai poiein', *Gorg.* 449b.

⁹⁸ 'poioussi touto dran (i.e. antilegein)', *Soph.* 232c; 'poioussin dynatous', 232c, cf. 232d.

The four-stage nature of the sophist's making is clearly analyzed in the *Sophist*. By focusing on the art of making, Plato examines the essence of the sophist's activity. The treatment of the sophist's art illuminates in a parallel way the poet's activity as making.

First, the poet is counted as a maker (*poiêtês*) because he composes and makes a poem, that is, a *logos* with metre. Recitation of lyric poetry is accompanied by melody, and therefore a poet can also be called 'melopoios', which means the maker of *melos*.⁹⁹ On a smaller scale, a poet composes each metrical line, and on a larger scale, he composes a whole poetical work. Similarly, a prose-writer, like Lysias, composes a speech or argument (*logos*). The poet also makes the story (*mythos*); for example, Homer and Hesiod are said to have made 'theogony' for the Greeks.¹⁰⁰ In *Republic* II, Socrates declares that the poet should make (*poiein*) proper stories for the Ideal State; here making is equivalent to story-telling.¹⁰¹

Secondly, the great poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, exhibit their wisdom through poetical works, and thereby *make* their own appearances as wise men. Strictly speaking, the poets are only a medium of the gods and speak through divine inspiration. Nevertheless, in Greek society they were regarded as the authority to cite for truth and wisdom.

Thirdly, the poet's education through poetry is thought to make people better. For example, memorizing Homer was still regarded as good education in the classical period; Niceratus, the son of Nicias, boasts of his mastering the Homeric works in their entirety, in Xenophon's *Symposium*.¹⁰² Those who learn the poetry of Homer and Hesiod can be said to believe that they possess sufficient knowledge about all things, including technology, wars, politics, and ethics. Although the poet's appearance of wisdom might be simple-minded in comparison with the sophist's ironical pretence,¹⁰³ the poet is more widely and deeply influential in Greek society in respect of wisdom and education.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *melopoios*: *Ion* 533e, 534a (*bis*), *Prot.* 326a; *melopoiia*: *Symp.* 187d, *Rep.* III, 404d. The verb 'poiein' sometimes accompanies epic (*Hdt.* IV, 14) and dithyramb (I, 23); cf. note 13 above.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Hdt.* 1.53.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Rep.* II, 379a; 'mythologeîn', 379a, cf. 392d.

¹⁰² *Xen. Symp.* 3.5–6, 4.6, cf. *Mem.* 4.2.10. In the *Republic*, Niceratus attends the conversation between Socrates and others at Cephalus' house (cf. I, 327c); he becomes a silent witness to Socrates' critical examination of Homeric passages in Books II–III.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Soph.* 267e–268a, where an allusion to the poet can be seen, as discussed in Section 5.

¹⁰⁴ See Section 4, especially the references in note 58 above.

Fourthly, in examining the proper sorts of poetry in the Ideal State, Socrates suggests that the poets should make (*empoiein*) the likeness of a good nature in their poems, so that the guardians grow up surrounded by good and beautiful works.¹⁰⁵ Education by means of good poetry *makes* (*poiein*) a person (and a soul) in a good shape.¹⁰⁶

In this way, the critical analysis of ‘making’ of the sophist corresponds to, and illuminates, the essence of the poet’s art of making.

7. *The Issue of ‘Making’ in the Sophist*

Now that ‘making’ is specified as the common focus of criticisms of the poet and the sophist, we should examine how Plato deals with it in the *Sophist*.

In order to define the sophist by the method of division, the Eleatic visitor first divides the genus of ‘art’ (*technê*) into two species, namely the arts of acquiring and of making (*poiêtikê*).¹⁰⁷ In the course of the inquiry, the genus of the sophist’s art changes from the art of acquiring (in the first five definitions) to that of making in the final definition; there the activity of image-making is ascribed to the sophist.¹⁰⁸ The transitional part carefully introduces the art of ‘making’ with the illustration (*paradeigma*) of a painter.¹⁰⁹ The art of making thus becomes a focus of the inquiry.

At the beginning of division, ‘making’ is defined as ‘to bring what was not before (*mê proteron on*) into being (*ousia*)’,¹¹⁰ whereas ‘acquiring’ is concerned with what *is* or has already come into existence.¹¹¹ This general definition of making appears also in the *Symposium*, where Diotima says that ‘the whole cause of anything moving from *what was not* into *what is*, is making.’¹¹² Here we notice that the concept of ‘making’, in terms of

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Rep.* III, 401b–402a.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Rep.* III, 401d: ‘*poiei euschêmona*’.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Soph.* 219a–c.

¹⁰⁸ The sophist’s art is treated as acquisition in 221c–226a; in between, the art of separation to which the ‘sophist of noble lineage’ (the sixth definition, 226a–231b) belongs appears as independent of these two main genera of art (226b–c). The first six definitions are summarized in 231d–e and 265a–b.

¹⁰⁹ *Soph.* 231b–236d; for the importance of the transitional part, see Notomi (1999), 78–87. The verb ‘*poiein*’ first appears in the sense of ‘making pupils capable of controverting’ in 232b, d, and then the model of a painter illustrates the ‘making’ (*poiein*, 233d) of the sophist’s art.

¹¹⁰ *Soph.* 219b; cf. 265b.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Soph.* 219c.

¹¹² *Symp.* 205b, cited in Section 2 above.

which the sophist is to be defined, involves the problematic concept of *what is not* (*to mê on*).

Concerning *what is not*, Parmenides raises serious issues: in his poem the Goddess tells the young that the truth is confined to the absolute 'is', while 'is not' must be expelled from the inquiry.¹¹³ Parmenides' principle results in two extreme positions: first, it denies the plurality of things as being mere appearance or human opinion (*doxa*), and second, it forbids any becoming (*genesis*) or change (*kinêsis*) as occurring out of *what is not*. These points were made clearer by his successors, Zeno and Melissus: Melissus argues that there is no becoming, since there is no change out of nothing.¹¹⁴

In the *Sophist*, when one species of the image-making art, namely 'apparition-making' (*phantastikê*), is to be ascribed to him, the sophist makes a counterattack by denying the existence of any image. Parmenides' words are quoted as an authority for the prohibition of combination between 'is' and 'is not'.¹¹⁵ To overcome this difficulties, the problematic concepts of appearance, images, falsehood, and *what is not* (*to mê on*) are fully examined in the middle part of the dialogue.¹¹⁶

The sophistic counterattack reveals that the concept of image (*eidôlon*) involves a strange (and apparently impossible) mixture of *what is* and *what is not*.¹¹⁷ However, we must remember that the very art of making also includes these two notions in its definition, so that the concept of 'making' becomes under fire, albeit implicitly in the context of the sophistic counter-attack. It should be noted that 'what comes to be' (*gignomenon*) in general is equated with 'what is made' (*poioumenon*) in the cosmological context.¹¹⁸ Therefore, when the sophist resorts to Parmenides' principle that *what is not* cannot *be*, the possibilities of becoming (or change) and making are also to be saved.

In the *Sophist* Plato confronts the sophistic appropriation of Parmenides' position to deny the possibility of falsehood—for stating (*legein*) a falsehood is stating *what is not*—the two essential issues concern-

¹¹³ Cf. DK. 28B2, 7.

¹¹⁴ Cf. DK. 30B1; cf. B2.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Soph.* 237a–b (cf. 258d), with quotation from DK. 28B7.1–2; Parmenides' principle is used in 237c and 238a, and critically examined later in the argument which might be seen as 'parricide' (241d–242a, cf. 258c–e).

¹¹⁶ *Soph.* 236d–264b; for the analysis of the middle part, see Notomi (1999), chs. 6–7.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Soph.* 239c–240c, esp. 240b–c; for the definition of the image, see Notomi (1999), 155–162.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Phlb.* 27a, *Soph.* 265c, e, 266b–c.

ing Parmenides' monism must lie in the background: first, how plural things *are*, and second, how something comes to be, out of *what is not*. Parmenides' position makes 'making' impossible for the reason that there is no change from *what is not* to *what is*.

The middle part indeed examines the monistic position of Parmenides with quotation of his poem,¹¹⁹ and provides an answer to the first problem with the proof of the combination of the kinds, especially concerning *what is* and *what is not*.¹²⁰ By rejecting the monistic position of Parmenides as improper, Plato first secures the possibility of plurality of beings.

In the inquiry into *what is (to on)*, the issue of becoming also appears. First, in examining the Parmenidean monism, the possibility of becoming (*genesis*) is discussed;¹²¹ although the historical Parmenides and his followers would not worry about the possibility of becoming, this issue is closely tied to the concept of 'the whole' (*to holon*), and therefore cannot be easily dismissed.

Then, the ontological status of becoming in relation to being is further focused on in the imaginary discussion with the materialists who claim that only tangible things *are*.¹²² Their position is described by their enemies, namely the so-called 'friends of forms', as concerning 'becoming' (*genesis*) only.¹²³ The materialist position has to admit the 'power of acting (*poiein*) and being acted upon (*paschein*)' as the criterion of being.¹²⁴ Also, this criterion plays an important role in examining the friends of forms: with reference to the criterion, they are obliged to admit that motion or change (*kinêsis*) should be included in beings; for otherwise the most important things, namely intelligence, life, and soul, cannot exist.¹²⁵ Motion and becoming are eventually proved possible in the examination of *what is* and *what is not*.

In this way, the inquiry in the *Sophist* examines and proves the theoretical possibility of 'making' as the cause of change from *what is not* into *what is*. On the other hand, '*poiein*' is examined in the more fundamental sense of 'acting' as a criterion for something's being.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Soph.* 244b–245e; DK. 28B8.43–45.

¹²⁰ *Soph.* 251a–259d; there the one-many problem is properly solved by proving the proper combination of the kinds.

¹²¹ Cf. *Soph.* 245d.

¹²² Cf. *Soph.* 246a–248a.

¹²³ *Soph.* 246b–c, 248a–c.

¹²⁴ *Soph.* 247d–e: '*poiein*', 247e.

¹²⁵ *Soph.* 248b–249d: '*poiein*', 248c, e; '*poiêma*', 248b, d.

Thus, when the concept of image (of which one species is apparition) is saved against the sophistic counterattack, on the basis of the proper combination of *what is not* and *what is*, the notion of ‘making’ is also secured. It is on this basis that the sophist is finally defined as the imitator of the wise man.

8. Conclusion: The Sophist and the Poet As Image-Makers

Republic X presents the ontological argument to criticise the poet; poetry is treated as a special kind of making, i.e. image-making or imitation. In a parallel way, the *Sophist* defines the sophist as a specific kind of making, i.e. image-making and apparition-making in particular. Finally we should consider some differences between the two treatments of image-making.

First of all, while, as we saw in the previous section, the *Sophist* confronts the difficult challenge concerning the problematic notions of ‘image’ and ‘making’, the *Republic* does not seem to worry about such a metaphysical danger.¹²⁶ Whereas the *Sophist* clarifies the concept of image in the course of defining the sophist, the *Republic* simply uses it.

Further, the *Sophist* divides the art of making in a more complex way: firstly, ‘divine’ and ‘human’ making are distinguished; secondly, in each kind, the making of the original and that of the image are distinguished; thirdly, the art of image-making is divided into two kinds, namely ‘likeness-making’ (*eikastikê*) and ‘apparition-making’ (*phantastikê*).¹²⁷ The latter kind is attributed to the sophist who deals with deceptive images based on false appearances. Let us examine these three divisions.

First, in the final definition, the inquiry returns to the genus of the art of making, and divides it into divine and human kinds.¹²⁸ Natural things, such as animals, plants, metals, and primary bodies (fire and water, etc.), are all made by the god with reason (*logos*) and knowledge; the god also contrives to make images of natural things, for example, dreams,

¹²⁶ This feature may coincide with the naive treatment of *what is not* (*mê on*) in Book V. The problematic concept of *what is not* requires a full discussion in the *Sophist*; see Notomi (2007b).

¹²⁷ It is not explicitly stated whether this division of image-making is also applied to the divine making. Yet the use of the terms of ‘image’ (*eidôlon*, 266b, c) and ‘apparition’ (*phantasma*, 266b) in the explanation of the image made by the god (266b–d) seems to imply that there is a similar distinction in natural images.

¹²⁸ *Soph.* 265b–266d.

reflections, and optical illusions. This procedure of division is important in the sense that human activities and arts are clearly separated from divine.

Second, whereas products of a craftsman are regarded as images of the unique original made by the god in the *Republic*, they are regarded as real objects (*auta*) in the *Sophist*.¹²⁹ Hence the linear order of the products of the god, the craftsman, and the imitator, in the former, is reinterpreted according to the fourfold division of making between divine and human and between original and image, in the latter. Here a house, for example, is deemed an original made by architecture, in contrast to a picture of the house made by the art of painting (*Soph.* 266c).

Third, the *Republic* uses the group of words, ‘image’ (*eidōlon*), ‘likeness’ (*eikōn*), ‘appearance’ (*phantasma*), and ‘shadow’ (*skia*) in different contexts, but does not clearly define them.¹³⁰ I suspect that the articulate and accurate treatment of the three concepts, ‘image, likeness, and apparition,’ in the *Sophist*, does not really match the yet comparatively primitive treatment of them in the *Republic*. In the division of image-making art (*eidōlopoiikē*) in the *Sophist*, likeness-making art (*eikastikē*) is the one kind which represents the right proportions of the original, and apparition-making art (*phantastikē*) is the other kind which makes an image *appear* to be like the original without really being so.¹³¹ Since the latter is ascribed to the sophist in the final definition, we may expect that the other kind, i.e. likeness-making, may represent the activity of its counterpart, namely the philosopher. If this expectation is right, it is not the art of image-making as a whole but only a part of it, i.e. apparition-making, that is to be rejected. If so, it may be implied that the other part, namely likeness-making, plays a positive role in philosophy.

The reason why this more subtle division of image-making becomes necessary in the *Sophist* in contrast with the simpler treatment in *Republic X* can only be guessed:

1. Plato may have developed and changed his views on ‘image’.
2. This may depend on the change—whether abandonment or revision—of the theory of forms. For the argument of *Republic X*

¹²⁹ ‘*autopoiêtikon*’, *Soph.* 266a–d.

¹³⁰ For example, the Simile of the Line in Book VI uses only ‘likeness’ (*eikōn*), while this word never appears in the criticism of poetry in Book X. Plato’s careful usage of these words already anticipates the full treatment in the *Sophist*.

¹³¹ For the full analysis of the distinction between likeness-making and apparition-making, see Notomi (1999), 147–155, especially the figure in 154.

explicitly depends on the theory of forms,¹³² while the *Sophist* does not directly appeal to it in discussing the image.

3. According to each target of criticism, he may shift the focus of argument and provide different devices for analysis. In this case, it certainly matters where the philosopher, distinguished from the sophist, should be located in terms of image-making, since this is the main theme of the *Sophist*.

These three explanations are all possible and may be related to one another. We can observe that the distinction between true and false images becomes essential in order to dissociate the ironical sophist from the philosopher, whereas the poet is banished from the Ideal State in a simpler way. Thus, by widening and deepening the scope of examination and criticism, the *Sophist* puts a firmer ontological basis for the criticism of the poet in the *Republic*.¹³³

[*Republic X*: poet]

God: original (forms)
 Craftsman: image (artifact)
 Imitator: image of image (imitation)

[*Sophist*: sophist]

God: original (nature) / Man: original (artifact)
 image (likeness / apparition) image (likeness / apparition)

¹³² The theory of forms is introduced in Book V, and extensively used in Books VI and VII. Book X resumes it in 596a–b, before the criticism of the poet.

¹³³ I thank Pierre Destrée, Fritz-Gregor Herrmann, Penelope Murray, and Elizabeth Craik for reading and commenting on the earlier versions of this paper.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A TRANSFER OF ENERGY: LYRIC EROS IN *PHAEDRUS*

ELIZABETH PENDER

Introduction

A fundamental theme runs through the three speeches on love in Plato's *Phaedrus*: love's power. In exploring this theme Plato draws on the language of love shaped by the Greek poetic tradition whereby love holds and exercises a dangerous influence upon the lover. The lyric poets in particular offered distinctive portrayals of the overwhelming power of *erôs*, not only in the pain of unfulfilled desire but also in the erotic experience *per se*. Eros is a threatening external force, whose onslaught leaves the lover weakened and disorientated. In *Phaedrus* Plato responds to this vision and through his allusions pays tribute to the lyric poets' achievement in capturing and expressing so vividly the shock of love. He accepts their insights on the power and energy of love but also reshapes and transforms them as he reconfigures the nature of love and self-control in the context of tripartition. By analysing the power-dynamics within a soul experiencing erotic desire Plato creates an intricate picture of how the force and energy of *erôs* is absorbed, transferred and redirected.¹ In *Phaedrus* Plato explores how *mania* and reason can be mutually supportive and how love can function as a unique energy source. I shall demonstrate how poetic insights on the force of love, principally from Sappho, Anacreon and Ibycus, are integral to this exploration. Indeed, Plato's allusions to the poets create an intriguing intertextuality between the dialogue and lyric which challenges the well-established view of Plato as hostile to poetry.

¹ This chapter offers an abbreviated version of the argument set out in 'Sappho and Anacreon in Plato's *Phaedrus*' (Pender 2007b). There I explain how the Ilissus setting, presented as a seduction meadow, sets up a situational allusion to the lyric genre. I explore in full the naming and praise of Sappho and Anacreon at 235c3–4; trace the presence of specific lyric allusions in each of the four main episodes of Socrates' myth and analyse their contribution to the dialogue.

That lyric poetry is present in the text of *Phaedrus* is not in itself a contentious point.² But the interpretation of the poetic echoes and their purpose is more controversial. Further, the extent and details of the allusions have not been sufficiently explored. I shall begin by reviewing lyric language for love's power (§ 1) and then show how this serves as a basis for the first approaches to the theme in Lysias' speech and Socrates' first speech (§ 2). Turning to the narrative of Socrates' second speech, I shall show how specific lyric allusions support the account of tripartition (§ 3). Finally (§ 4) I shall explain how Plato in the final episode of the myth breaks with the poetic tradition to reveal the correct way to convert the energy of *erôs*.

1. Lyric Eros: *The Subduer*

In poem 1 Sappho entreats the goddess of love, as 'mistress' (*potnia*), not to 'overpower' her heart (3–4 *damna*) and uses the same verb (*damnaô*) for Aphrodite's power at 102 (*dameisa*). Theognis at 1388–1389 speaks of Aphrodite as 'overpowering' the minds of men (*damnais*) and adds that no one is strong or wise enough to 'escape' (*phugein*) her. Anacreon similarly hails Eros as the 'subduer' (357 *damalês Erôs*) and again speaks of the lover seeking an escape (346 fr. 4.3–6 *ekphugôn*; 400 *pheugôn*). At 505d Anacreon hails Eros' power over gods and men (*dunastês ... damazei*). Often the poets image love as a hostile, attacking force that invades and through its physical impact destroys the lover. Alcaeus presents himself as felled by Aphrodite's hand (380); while Ibycus 287.1–5 likens the rush of love to a martial attack, where the lover exclaims: 'How I tremble at his onset!'. Anacreon uses a Homeric battle term, *kudoimoi* (literally, 'the roar of battle'),³ to describe the turmoil that Love causes (398). Sappho 47 likens Eros to a violent wind that falls upon trees.⁴ Ibycus develops this image in 286.6–13, where the love that comes from Aphrodite is likened to the 'Thracian Boreas', so powerful is its effect through all the heart. Sappho speaks of love 'shaking' her heart

² See, for example: Robin (1950), on 235c, Fortenbaugh (1966), 108–109, de Vries (1969), 74–75, duBois (1985), 44, 99–100 and (1995), 79–88, Ferrari (1987), 153–154, 265, Nightingale (1995), 133, 149, 158–162, and Foley (1998), 40, 54–68.

³ See e.g. *Iliad* X, 523.

⁴ Sappho 47: Ἔρως δ' ἐτίναξέ μοι / φρένας, ὡς ἄνεμος κατ' ὄρος δρύσιν ἐμπέτων. All texts and translations of Sappho, Anacreon, Ibycus and Alcaeus are from Campbell's edition. The texts of Theognis are from Edmonds' edition.

(130 *donei*), and Anacreon depicts love as a smith's mighty hammer blow (413).⁵ The madness caused by love is a familiar theme in lyric. Alcaeus tells of Helen's madness in her love for Paris (283.5 *ekmaneisa*) and refers to the 'maddened infatuations' of *erôs* at 10b.6–7, while Sappho 1.18 speaks more intimately of her own 'maddened heart' (*mainolai thumôi*). Theognis associates Eros with madness as he portrays him as 'nursed by frenzies' (1231–1232 *maniai*). For Ibycus Aphrodite sends a storm-wind that blazes with lightning and 'parching fits of madness' (286.10–11 *azaleais maniaisin*); while Anacreon 359 gives succinct expression to the lover's plight: 'I love Cleobulus, I am mad about (*epimainomai*) Cleobulus, I gaze at Cleobulus.'

2. *Erôs in the Speech of Lysias and in Socrates' Response*

The established language of lyric forms the background to the terminology for love used by Lysias and by Socrates in his first speech. Lysias' speech considers the behaviour of lovers and for the most part speaks directly of the participants rather than love itself. The problem that concerns Lysias is that lovers lose their self-control. Lysias establishes the familiar idea that the lack of self-control in love is allied with the failure to think properly (231d3–4 *kakôs phronousin*) and pays particular attention to the change occasioned when the lover's desire ceases and he returns to his usual ways of thinking and behaving (232e6; 234a7). The difference between lovers and non-lovers is that while the first act 'under compulsion' (*hup' anagkês*), the second act out of 'their own choosing' (*hekontes*), in line with their self-interest (231a4–5). This representation of the lovers' condition is summed up at 231d2–3 where lovers agree that they are 'sick' (*nosein*) and not 'sound of mind' (*sôphronein*). They accept that their thinking is impaired and that they are no longer 'masters of themselves' (*ou dunasthai hautôn kratein*). Note how the phraseology is shifting subtly: if a lover is not master of himself then who or what is his master? Plato is probing the standard prose vocabulary of self-control in order to lead on to the conception of love as an independent force. And the move is completed at 233b–c. First the noun *erôs* is used in the nominative as the subject of three verbs (233b2–4): *epideiknutai* ('shows'), *poiei* ('makes') and, most significantly, *anagkazei* ('forces'). Love here *compels* the lover to make inappropriate judgements. Second, the power of the self

⁵ Anacreon 413: μεγάλω διήυτέ μ' Ἔρωος ἔκοιφεν ὥστε χαλαρεὺς πελέκει.

is contrasted explicitly with the power of love at 233c1–2, as the non-lover proudly declares his advantage: ‘I am not overcome by love, but master of myself’.⁶ The prose verb *hēttōmenos* (‘be defeated, beaten, overcome’) can be read as a neutral term and the expression seems standard in the context. But the phrase also recalls the martial attack of *erōs* in poetry and looks forward to Socrates’ scrutiny of love’s power.

In his first speech Socrates follows Lysias’ concern with the lover’s poor judgement and decision-making. He employs much of the same standard prose terminology for the experience of being in love. But he begins to press this terminology, nudging familiar formulations towards a more analytical and abstract perspective in order to consider the precise nature of the process whereby a person is ‘overcome’ by *erōs*. Socrates addresses his subject in characteristic style—by seeking a definition of love itself. There is thus a clear shift of attention from the lovers’ behaviour to the force that drives them. The relevant aspect of the *definiendum* is stated within the very question that leads the search: ‘let us establish an agreed definition of love, about what sort of thing it is and what *power* (*dunamin*) it possesses’ (237c8–d1). The chosen angle of love’s *dunamis* soon leads to the idea of inner rulers and forces:

We must next observe that in each of us there are two kinds of thing which rule and lead us, which we follow wherever they may lead, the one an inborn desire for pleasures, another an acquired judgement which aims at the best.⁷ (tr. Rowe) (237d6–9)

The passage then offers in quick succession an array of different terms for love’s exercise of power and control (237d9–238c4). The analysis culminates in the definition of *erōs* as an irrational impulse that has ‘gained control’ (*kratēsasa*) over ‘right judgement’ and takes its name from its ‘force’ (*rhômê*), a playful etymology backed up by the wordplay of *errōmenōs rhōstheisa ... rhômês ... erōs* (238c2–4). The Greek vocabulary of inner powers and forces in this passage includes ‘ruling’ and ‘holding sway’, e.g. *archonte*, *kratei*, *turanneusasa*, *dunasteuousês*, ‘conquering’ (*nikēsasa*); ‘having physical strength’ (*errōmenōs*) and the exertion of physical force in ‘dragging’ (*helkousês*) and ‘pushing on’ (*hormōsês*). The language of political rule used for *erōs* recalls Sappho’s *potnia* and Anacreon’s *dunastês* and is reinforced towards the end of the dialogue

⁶ οὐχ ὑπ’ ἔρωτος ἠττώμενος ἀλλ’ ἑμαυτοῦ κρατῶν.

⁷ δεῖ αὖ νοῆσαι ὅτι ἡμῶν ἐν ἐκάστῳ δύο τινέ ἐστων ἰδέα ἄρχοντε καὶ ἄγοντε, οἷν ἐπόμεθα ἢ ἂν ἄγητον, ἢ μὲν ἔμφυτος οὐσα ἐπιθυμία ἡδονῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ἐπίκτητος δόξα, ἐφιεμένη τοῦ ἀρίστου.

at 265c2 where Socrates speaks directly of Eros as *despotês*. The idea of *erôs* as a conquering force also recalls various lyrics where love is imaged as attacking and defeating the lover, while the physical strength of *erôs* that can here ‘drag’ or ‘push’ objects echoes the lyric conception of love as an external force that can physically impact. This analysis of love’s *dunamis* at 237d3–238c4 establishes for the second part of Socrates’ speech (238d8–241d1) a dual perspective, on the lover’s actions and his inner condition.

After the definition of *erôs* Socrates returns to the external behaviour of the lovers. He speaks of the lover as ‘ruled by desire’ (238e3 *archomênôî*) and tells how in his selfishness the lover seeks to make his beloved weaker and inferior to him. So the lover’s ‘inner ruler’ leads him to try to exert his own rule over the beloved in their relationship. As the speech proceeds, the lover is then spoken of as ‘compelled (*ênagkastai*) to seek pleasure instead of good’ (239c5). Socrates gradually probes further into the various restrictions and lack of choices afflicting both the wretched lover and his beloved, with the vocabulary of ‘compulsion’ becoming persistent in the concluding section.⁸ With the lover thus ‘ruled by desire’ and ‘compelled to seek pleasure’, he has lost self-control. Socrates sums up this unhappy condition as he speaks of the lover as ‘driven by compulsion (*anagkês*) and frenzy (*oistrou*)’ (240c7–d1). Socrates then describes the lover’s subsequent loss of passion as a situation where he actively ‘changes the ruler within’:

he changes in himself and adopts a different ruler and master, sense and sanity in place of love and madness, and has become a different person without his beloved’s realising it.⁹ (tr. Rowe) (241a2–4)

The terms ‘ruler’ (*archonta*) and ‘master’ (*prostatên*) recall the political vocabulary of 237d9–238c4 and the passage thus presents the lover’s change of heart as the establishment of a new inner government—with a changeover in power from *erôs* and *mania* to good sense and *sôphrosunê*. Through this switch (*metabalôn*) in inner ruler the lover changes his very identity, a fact not realised by the beloved until the change starts to affect his behaviour, with *metabalôn* repeated at 241b5 to show how the internal switch causes external turnarounds.¹⁰ Socrates’ first speech thus explains

⁸ 240c4; 240e1; 241b4–7; and 241c2. Socrates sets out the indignities forced upon the lovers by their own behavioural ‘compulsions’ and the ‘necessities’ of the situation.

⁹ μεταβαλὼν ἄλλον ἄρχοντα ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ προστάτην, νοῦν καὶ σωφροσύνην ἀντ’ ἔρωτος καὶ μανίας, ἄλλος γεγωνῶς λέληθεν τὰ παιδικά.

¹⁰ Fortenbaugh (1966), 108–109 regards *Phdr.* 241a–b as a particular allusion to

that the external behaviour of the lover is caused by his own internal experience. The passage on inner rulers and control holds up for scrutiny the opposing tensions within the lover that were implicit in Lysias' speech and frames the lover's changing experiences as the result of a power-struggle between rational self-control and the madness of *erôs*.¹¹ What will follow in his second speech is a much closer analysis of the various internal dynamics and power-struggles occasioned by falling in love.

3. Lyric *Erôs* and the Tripartite Soul (246a6–253c6)

In Socrates' second speech the account of love as a divine madness challenges the preference for sanity and self-control that has so far been taken for granted. In the context of this discussion of the benefits of *mania*,¹² Plato infuses his myth with poetic language of love. In response to the poets' portrayal of the shock of love as an external force, Plato shows how erotic stimulation affects the forces already present and active within the soul and how the lover can and indeed ought to respond. Nevertheless, with remarkable artistry, Plato draws freely on lyric language to support his account.¹³ In this section I shall consider how the myth of the soul alludes to lyric poetry in its motifs of horses, wings, radiance, and bitter-sweet madness.

When Socrates introduces the tripartite soul he uses the striking image of the winged team:

Let it then resemble the combined power of a winged team of horses and their charioteer.¹⁴ (tr. Rowe) (246a6–7)

Sappho 1. Ferrari (1987), 107 sees no specific allusion and notes more generally the adoption throughout this speech of the 'traditional erotic themes of dominance, pursuit, and manipulation'. In support of Ferrari's reading, the familiar madness motif, flight and pursuit can be seen as equally pronounced in other lyrics, for example, Theognis 1299–1304.

¹¹ At the outset of his second speech Socrates uses this critical distinction between the lover as mad and the non-lover as sane (244a5) to summarise the main thesis shared by the first two speeches.

¹² The vocabulary of *mania* begins at 241a4 towards the end of Socrates' first speech and increases and continues throughout his second speech: 244a5; 244a6; 244a7; 244b7; 245a5; 245a8; 245c1; 249d5; 249d8; 249e3; 251a6; 251d8; 253c5; 256b6; 256d6.

¹³ Pender 2007b offers a more detailed reading of the lyric allusions in Socrates' second speech, tracing them through the four major episodes of the myth: the loss of wings (246a6–248e5); the regaining of wings through memory of beauty (248e5–250e1); the stimulus of beauty (250e1–253c6); and the charioteer's control (253c7–256e2).

¹⁴ εὐιζέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου.

The abstract noun *dunamis* recalls Socrates' earlier question on the nature of love: 'what sort of *dunamis* does it have?' (237c8–d1). The phrase 'a naturally conjoined power' (*sumphutôi dunamei*) emphasises the power of the team and this is soon joined by its corollary—the issue of control. When *archôn* (literally, 'ruler') is used at 246b1 as an alternative term for the charioteer, this control recalls the vocabulary of inner rule used in Socrates' first speech (237d7; 238a1; 238e3; 241a3). The particular focus on control is then maintained through the abstract noun *hêniochêsis* (246b4) for the act of charioteering, and through the adjective *euênia* (247b2), which draws attention to the reins that are part of the charioteer's apparatus of command and steering. Later the level of skill of the charioteer is the determining factor in controlling the power of the horses (248a4–6) and in counter-balancing—or not—their downward pull (247b4–5; 248b2).

While at 246e4–6 epic resonances may be uppermost in the depiction of Zeus driving a winged chariot,¹⁵ Plato's image of the chariot is 'lyricised' when it is developed (247b1–248b5) to direct attention to the processes involved in actually controlling the horses. For the lyric images focus on the action of charioteering itself and therefore on how one force can overcome another, which is the chief concern of tripartition. Equestrian imagery for sexual desire and activity is used by various lyric poets.¹⁶ Theognis compares the boy to a horse and the lover to his driver (*hêniochon*) in two similar poems (1249–1252, 1267–1270): 'Boy, you are like a horse, . . . you have come again to my stable desiring a good driver'¹⁷ and 'Boy and horse have a similar mind; for the horse doesn't weep as his driver lies in the dust, but has his fill of barley and carries another later; in the same way a boy loves the one he's with at the time.' Ibycus also uses the image of horse and chariot for a lover unwilling but compelled to re-enter the erotic arena (287):¹⁸ 'Again Love, looking at me meltingly from under his dark eyelids, hurls me with his manifold enchantments into the boundless nets of the Cyprian. How I fear his onset, as a prize-winning horse still bearing the yoke in his old age goes unwillingly with swift chariot to the race.' (tr. Campbell).

¹⁵ Slaveva-Griffin (2003), 232 and duBois (1985), 98 see possible epic allusions here to Zeus' chariot ride in Homer's *Iliad* VIII, 41–52 and to the chariot of Parmenides' prologue.

¹⁶ On this imagery in Anacreon and Theognis, see Calame (1999), 27 and 165–166.

¹⁷ These translations are my own.

¹⁸ Rowe (1986), 166 notes the similarity between Socrates' second speech and this poem of Ibycus, adding that 'Plato himself knew the poem well, since he paraphrases it at *Parmenides* 137a'.

Anacreon echoes this equestrian imagery of Theognis and Ibycus. His famous ‘Thracian filly’ poem (417) follows Theognis’ directly sexual use of the image of horse and rider:

Thracian filly, why do you look at me from the corner of your eye and flee stubbornly from me, supposing that I have no skill? Let me tell you, I could neatly put the bridle on you and with the reins in my hand wheel you round the turnpost of the racecourse; instead, you graze in the meadows and frisk and frolic lightly, since you have no skilled horseman to ride you.¹⁹

(tr. Campbell) (417)

But the most striking parallel with Plato’s use of the charioteering image for soul at *Phaedrus* 246a6–7 is found in Anacreon’s haunting poem:

Boy with the girlish glance, I seek you, but you do not notice, not knowing that you hold the reins of my soul.²⁰

(tr. Campbell) (360)

On the distinctive phrase *tês emês psuchês hêniocheueis* Calame explains (1999), 19: ‘love holds the reins that control the vital breath called *psukhê* by the Greeks.’ Although it is more correct to say that it is the boy who holds the reins, the point stands that the control is exerted over the lover’s very life-force. Since the more common site of the impact of *erôs* in lyric poetry is the *phrenes* or *thumos*,²¹ Anacreon’s image stands out as unusual. While the noun *psuchê* in Plato undoubtedly has a different range of meanings, it still retains its links with the standard Greek usage of life-force. Anacreon’s equestrian imagery has been noted, albeit briefly, as an influence on Plato’s vocabulary and image-making for the power-dynamics within the tripartite soul.²²

Plato’s image of tripartite soul as charioteer and horses is further associated with erotic poetry since the team is winged. This initial use of

¹⁹ πῶλε Θρηκίη, τί δή με / λοξὸν ὄμμασι βλέπουσα / νηλέως φεύγεις, δοκεῖς δέ / μ’ οὐδὲν εἰδέναι σοφόν; / ἴσθι τοι, καλῶς μὲν ἂν τοι / τὸν χαλινὸν ἐμβάλοιμι, / ἠνίας δ’ ἔχων στρέφοιμί / σ’ ἀμφὶ τέρματα δρόμου· / νῦν δὲ λειμῶνάς τε βόσκειαι / κοῦφά τε σκιρτῶσα παίζεις, / δεξιὸν γὰρ ἵπποπειρήν / οὐκ ἔχεις ἐπεμβάτην.

²⁰ ὦ παῖ παρθένιον βλέπων / δίζημαί σε, σὺ δ’ οὐ κοεῖς, / οὐκ εἰδὼς ὅτι τῆς ἐμῆς / ψυχῆς ἠνιοχεύεις.

²¹ For *phrenes*, see e.g. Stesichorus 222b; Alcaeus 5; Sappho 3, 47 and 48; Theognis 65, 87, 122, 593, and 657; Ibycus 282c fr.1, fr. 29, and 286; and Anacreon 346. For *thumos*, see e.g. Stesichorus S11 and S148; Alcaeus 34 and 129; Sappho 1, 4, 5 and 60; Theognis 213, 630–631, 645, 695 and 877; and Ibycus 317b.

²² Hackforth (1952), 77 observes that this poem of Anacreon is an ‘early and apposite example’ of ‘the common metaphorical use of *hêniocheuein* and its cognates’ for ruling. On the parallel with Anacreon 417, see Fortenbaugh (1966), 109 and duBois (1985), 44; on the parallel with Anacreon 360, see Ferrari (1987), 265, n.21 and Nightingale (1995), 158, n.51.

the wing is to represent perfection,²³ as is explained at 246d6–7. Since the wing is viewed as having its own natural ‘power’ (*dunamis*) of carrying heavy objects heavenwards, it becomes a mediator between divine and human realms. Inspiration for this motif may have come from lyric, since two notable passages present wings as a means of transport between heaven and earth: Sappho 1 and Anacreon 378. In Sappho 1, a cletic hymn, the goddess Aphrodite responds to Sappho’s prayer for a visitation. The moment of epiphany is described in striking terms:

... with chariot yoked: beautiful swift sparrows whirring fast-beating wings brought you above the dark earth down from heaven through the mid-air, and soon [suddenly] they arrived.²⁴ (tr. Campbell) (1, 8–13)

Aphrodite’s chariot is drawn by sparrows and the verses draw attention to both the rapid movement of the wings and the distance crossed through the space between immortal and mortal worlds. In Anacreon’s poem the journey is from earth to heaven as a frustrated lover is driven to seek out Eros in his heavenly abode:

See, I fly up on light wings to Olympus in search of Love; for (the boy) does not wish to enjoy the fun of youth with me.²⁵ (tr. Campbell) (378)

In these two poems the wings allow movement between human and divine realms but the context is specifically erotic. In Sappho 1 the fast-beating wings of the sparrows drawing the goddess’ chariot give expression to the animated feelings of the lover at the approach of Aphrodite. Calame rightly reads the wing image in Anacreon 378 as an expression of the ‘impact of Eros’ and the lover’s subsequent elation (1999), 22–23. Calame reviews the traditional iconography of Eros as a winged figure and presents plentiful evidence from myth, art and poetry.²⁶ By extension, then, in Sappho 1 and Anacreon 378 the wings of Eros are transposed to the lover’s experience. The same transposition is evident in other lyrics where again the fluttering of wings provides an image of desire and agitation. In Sappho 31.5–6 the fluttering response (*eptoaisēn*) is caused particularly by the sight of the beloved. As Alcaeus

²³ 246b7–c1: τελέα ... οὔσα καὶ ἑπτερωμένη μετεωροπορεῖ. On Plato’s wing image, see Pender 2000, 155–162.

²⁴ ἦλθεσ / ἄρμι’ ὑπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ’ ἄγον / ὄκνεσ στροῦθοι περὶ γᾶσ μελαίνας / πύκνα δίνεντες πτέρ’ ἀπ’ ὠράνωϊθε-/ρος διὰ μέσσω· / αἶψα δ’ ἔξικοντο·

²⁵ ἀναπέτομαι δὴ πρὸς Ὀλυμπον πτερύγεσσι κούφης / διὰ τὸν Ἔρωτ’· οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ (<...> θέλει συνηβᾶν.

²⁶ Calame (1999), 31, 65–66, 81, 156.

in 283.3–5 presents Helen's erotic madness, he says that love has 'excited her heart' (*eptoaise thumon*). In Anacreon 346 fr. 1.11–12 the appearance of the beautiful boy in the seduction meadow excites the desires of the onlookers (*eptoatai*) and in 363 the poet asks a lover preparing for seduction: 'why are you all of a flutter (*peteai*)?'

The wing image in *Phaedrus* initially signals the soul's potential for perfection (246b7–c2) but its erotic connotations are equally developed as the myth proceeds. For when recollection is presented as a divine love story, the wings of the soul are used to convey, through their fluttering and rapid movement, its feelings of excitement and arousal. The process of Recollection is a re-discovery of knowledge and truth through contact with the Forms.²⁷ In the myth of *Phaedrus* this process is presented as the re-attainment of a former perfection, a journey back to origins,²⁸ and an erotic encounter with a beloved. If the philosophical life is chosen three times in succession, the souls become winged (*pterôtheisai* 249a1) and are able to return to perfection. Rationality is presented specifically as the ability to organise perceptions 'from many into one' (249b7–c1) and this collecting together is identified as (c2–3): 'a recollection of those things which our soul once saw when it travelled in company with a god' (tr. Rowe). The journey alongside a god functions as the guarantor of the soul's rational capacities and the interconnectedness of reason, wings and divinity is spelled out (249c4–6): 'Hence it is with justice that only the mind of the philosopher becomes winged: for so far as it can it is [always] close, through memory, to those things his closeness to which gives god his divinity' (tr. Rowe). The wings indicate rationality since their motion upwards allows proximity to the 'very things which' bestow divinity on any divine being. In this remarkable statement Plato establishes the Forms as the most perfect and superior entities that stand as the fixed point for all souls to move towards and so gain access to the knowledge that is the basis for the proper exercise of rationality. By remembering the Forms the human soul is able to make correct judgements about reality. The (human and imperfect) philosopher achieves 'closeness' to the Forms through memory (*mnêmêi*) and making the 'right use of such reminders'. Memory is required since soul has been estranged, since its 'fall', from its divine origins close to truth. By recalling its former existence and level of knowing the human soul re-activates its rational

²⁷ On the theory itself, see Scott (1995), Fine (2003) and Dancy (2004), 221–226 and 253–281.

²⁸ See e.g. 248e6; 249a5; 249a7; 249b2; b4 and b6.

powers and in this process improves its nature, thereby bringing it closer and making it more akin to the 'divine company' of which it was once part.²⁹ At 249d5–e1 the animation of the philosopher remembering the Forms is identified as a specifically erotic arousal. The philosopher on seeing beauty here on earth, remembers truth. He thus 'becomes winged' (*pterôtai*) and 'flutters' (*anapteroumenos*), eager 'to fly upwards' (*anapesthai*),³⁰ but is 'unable to leave the ground'. This plight is identified as love's madness: 'it is when he partakes in this madness that the man who loves the beautiful is called a lover (*erastês*)' (249e3–4). This careful reconfiguring of the memory of truth as a lover's response stirs the root of the word *philosophia* ('love of wisdom'). The transition between the intellectual endeavour of reasoning and the desire of the lover is eased through the feelings of eagerness and excitement generated in both cases.

The account of recollection is supported by a further lyric motif when the Form of Beauty is portrayed at 250b5–6 as a radiant, shining light (*lampron*). In contrast to the likenesses of other Forms in which 'there is no illumination', beauty not only 'shone out' (250d1 *elampen*) in the divine realm but also on earth appears 'gleaming (*stilbon*) most clearly through the clearest of our senses' (250d2–3).³¹ That the sight of beauty causes erotic arousal for the soul is confirmed in significant vocabulary in 250c–e. At 250c7 Socrates draws attention to his own experience as narrator and philosopher. In the act of speaking about the memory of the Forms he has reminded himself of their beauty and so has stirred his own 'longing' for this past life: 'Let this be our concession to memory, which has made me speak now at some length out of longing (*pothôi*) for what was before' (tr. Rowe). He then confirms that the soul's response to beauty is erotic by comparing how the sight of wisdom itself would cause an even greater erotic charge. Wisdom would indeed evoke 'terrible feelings of desire' (250d4–5 *deinous* ... *erôtas*). The Forms are referred to as 'the other objects of love' (*erasta*) and finally the Form of beauty is identified as 'the most evident and the most loved (*erasmiôtaton*)' (250d7–e1). The 'lover of wisdom' is thus revealed as a manic lover of true Beauty, which is in turn characterised as his 'most lovable' beloved. This erotic

²⁹ In Pender 2007b I discuss Plato's presentation of recollection as religious initiation (e.g. 249c7–8 and 250b8–c5) and divine possession (e.g. 252c3–253c6) and argue that these ideas are influenced by the lyric motif of the epiphany of love divinities and the closeness to them of their human favourites.

³⁰ πτερῶται τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπέσθαι.

³¹ διὰ τῆς ἐναργεστάτης αἰσθήσεως τῶν ἡμετέρων στίλβον ἐναργέστατα.

scenario while unusual is nevertheless consonant with the portrayal of intellectual contact with the Forms in other dialogues.³² Contact with truth therefore becomes a type of union with a beloved, where the *telos* of union is achieved through the lover's intimate knowledge of, and emotional engagement with, the object of his desire.³³

In presenting the Form of Beauty as 'shining' Plato uses the motif of the radiance of love familiar in lyric poetry. The sparkling or gleaming appearance of lover and beloved is used by both Sappho and Anacreon. In Sappho 16.18 the lover remembers 'the bright sparkle' of Anactoria's face (*kamaruchma lampron*) and in 96.8–10 the beauty of a girl is compared to the moon shedding its light, with 34 offering a similar comparison of a girl to the 'lovely' shining moon.³⁴ Closely associated with the beauty of the beloved as shining light is a more general connection between love and brightness to express the joy that can attend the experience. Sappho interlaces love, beauty and brightness when she declares in 58.25–27: 'love has obtained for me the brightness and beauty of the sun.' Anacreon also uses this motif in his fragmentary but still striking lines (444): *pothôi stilbôn ... / geganômenos* ('glistening with desire ... gleaming'). As de Vries and Rowe have noted (*ad loc.*) Plato at 234d3 seems to be punning on Phaedrus' name (*phaidros*, 'bright, beaming') through the use of the poetic verb *ganusthai* ('gleam') for the glowing appearance of the excited speech-lover.³⁵ This, I would suggest, is a direct allusion to Anacreon's line, and I find support in the further parallel of the unusual term *stilbôn* ('glistening') at 250d2. The poetic adjective³⁶ serves to align the 'shining' Phaedrus with the glistening quality of the Form of Beauty, since in that which 'glistens' here at 250d2 is revealed the true source of the 'gleaming' at 234d3. The lyric echoes are momentary but highly effective.

³² Nussbaum (1986), 217–220 discusses the erotic quality of this and later passages of the myth. On the link between sexual and intellectual desire here, see also Lebeck (1972), 273 and Foley (1998), 58. As Price observes (1989), 36–38 and 50–54, erotic vocabulary is similarly used at *Symp.* 212a3–5; *Phd.* 79d6; *Tim.* 90c2; *Laws* 904d6; and *Rep.* VI, 490b2–7. On this sexual and procreative imagery, see Pender (1992).

³³ For discussions on the complex relationship between the lovers and the Forms, see Price (1989), chs. 2 and 3; Vlastos (1981); and Kahn (1987).

³⁴ The more fragmentary poem 4 also uses shining within what seems to be a description of a beloved's face (*antilampên ... prosôpon*).

³⁵ Nussbaum (1986), 229 explains the pun and regards it as extended through the formulation *Dios dion* at 252e, which she reads as a hidden allusion to Plato's own beloved, since: 'the name "*Phaidros*" has the same meaning as the name "*Dion*". Both mean "brilliant" or "sparkling."

³⁶ See e.g. *Iliad* III, 392, where it is used of Paris: *kallei ... stilbôn*.

The final motif for consideration is that of bittersweet madness. The influence of lyric poetry is to be heard most clearly in the graphic description of the lover's delirious reactions to the shock of love (251a3–252a1). Here Plato presents an exuberant and thrilling depiction of the lover's madness from the perspective of the inner soul. Images and ideas familiar from lyric poetry proliferate but central is Sappho's voice. For the dramatic situation of the sighting of the beloved and the internal reactions it triggers closely echo Sappho's famous poem 31:

He seems as fortunate as the gods to me, the man who sits opposite you and listens nearby to your sweet voice and lovely laughter. Truly that sets my heart trembling (*eptoaisēn*) in my breast. For when I look at you for a moment, then it is no longer possible for me to speak; my tongue has snapped, at once a subtle fire (*pur*) has stolen beneath my flesh, I see nothing with my eyes, my ears hum, sweat pours (*idrōs kakcheetai*) from me, a trembling (*tromos*) seizes me all over, I am greener than grass, and it seems to me that I am little short of dying (*tethnakēn doligō*).³⁷

(tr. Campbell) (31,1–16)

Plato's description of the lover at 251a3–252a1 constitutes the strongest verbal allusion to Sappho in *Phaedrus*. Nightingale sees this poem as the 'most obvious incursion' of lyric into *Phaedrus* (1995, 158) and duBois speaks of the 'remarkable similarities between descriptions of erotic suffering in Plato's prose and Sappho's verse' (1995, 87). Plato incorporates Sappho's depiction of the feverish lover in poem 31 to express the bewildering effects of love. The influence of Sappho 31 is dominant but other lyrics can also be heard. For in the speed and excitement of the passage Plato runs together familiar lyric elements that include: the *metabolē* between pleasure and pain; extreme shifts in temperature, melting, fear and bittersweet madness.

The critical moment when beauty and love exert their maximum power on the Platonic lover is the sighting of the beautiful beloved. In using the eyes as the most significant points of contact between lover and beloved Plato again follows an established tradition of love lyric.³⁸ But he reshapes the idea to allow the eyes to serve also as the conduit

³⁷ φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν / ἔμμεν' ὄνηρ, ὅτις ἐναντίος τοι / ἰσθάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδου φωνεῖ-/σας ὑπακούει / καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὲν / καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν / ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὡς με φώναι- / σ' οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἵκει, / ἀλλὰ κάμ μὲν γλώσσά (μ') ἔαγε, λέπτον / δ' αὐτίκα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρομήκεν, / ὀπλάτεσι δ' οὐδ' ἐν ὄρημι, ἐπιρρόμ-/ βεισι δ' ἄκουαι, / κὰδ δέ μ' ἴδρωσ κακχέεται, τρόμος δέ / παῖσαν ἄγρει, γλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας / ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδευῆς / φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐτ[α].

³⁸ As Calame explains (1999), 20, the 'favorite medium' of Eros is the gaze, which

between the non-physical Form of beauty and the lover's very soul. When the philosopher sees beauty (251a3), he undergoes a series of changes described as applying first to his whole self and then to his soul. First he is afraid, 'he *shudders* and experiences something of the *fears* he had before' (251a4).³⁹ The verb *phrissô* denotes the sensation experienced in 'goosebumps'—i.e. both the effect of cold ('to shiver') and the effect of fear ('to shudder'). Then there is a sudden and extreme change (*metabolê*) as the chill gives way to a fever:

After he has seen him, the expected change comes over him following the shuddering—sweating and a high fever.⁴⁰ (tr. Rowe) (251a7–b1)

The *metabolê*⁴¹ recalls Sappho's stricken lover in 31 but also Sappho 48 with its image of the beloved who is able through her presence alone to 'cool' the 'burning' of desire. The same transformation from hot to cold appears in Anacreon's forged metal image in poem 413.⁴² The 'trembling' and 'fears' of 251a7 recall Ibycus 287 where the narrator 'fears' the 'onset' of Eros and indeed the general apprehension at the approach of Eros that can be heard elsewhere in lyric, as discussed above. The poetic depiction of *metabolê* continues as the sighting of the beloved stimulates the lover's soul to regrow its wings, a process which in turn causes further shifts between pleasure and pain.

Plato builds upon the notion of erotic heat familiar in lyric by identifying an actual cause of the change in temperature. For the change comes from the entry of the stream of beauty flowing into the lover's soul through his eyes (251b1–2): 'he is warmed (*ethermanthê*) by the reception of the effluence (*aporroên*) of beauty through his eyes' (tr. Rowe). It is by this stream—identified as desire itself (251c7 and 255c1–2)—that the plumage of the lover's soul is 'watered' (251b2–3 *ardetai*) and thus able to 'regrow'. The language of natural growth is further used as the feathers of the soul's wings are spoken of as plants shooting up from their

'operates as a vector of amorous feeling.' See Calame (1999), 20–22 on the association between Eros and the gaze in various Greek poets.

³⁹ This love effect is experienced only by a soul that has recently viewed the Forms or is not corrupted (250e1–251a4). The reference to *tote* (before) is to the soul's existence before incarnation and its viewing of the Forms.

⁴⁰ ἰδόντα δ' αὐτὸν οἷον ἐκ τῆς φοβικῆς μεταβολῆ τε καὶ ἰδρώς καὶ θερμοῦτης ἀήθης λαμβάνει.

⁴¹ Compare the experience of the lover in Socrates' first speech at 241a2 and 241b5: *metabalôn*.

⁴² Anacreon's image of forging red-hot metal is used by Plato at *Rep.* III, 411a5–b4.

roots (251b5–6).⁴³ The warming stream of beauty causes parts of the soul to melt (251b3 *thermanthentos de etakê*), an erotic motif also familiar in lyric. Anacreon 459 speaks of ‘melting Love’ (*takeros d’Erôs*), while Ibycus locates the source of the effect in the gaze of Love (287.1–2): ‘Again Love, looking at me meltingly from under his dark eyelids.’ The motif is also used by Ibycus at 282c (fr. 29.3–5) for Eros’ own desire: ‘he ... had his melting heart completely tinged [coloured/pricked] by his skilled mother with her gift of desire.’

While the stream of beauty at 251b1–7 might suggest a pleasant warming, the change in state within the soul also clearly involves irritation and discomfort (251c1–5). Here Plato’s lover ‘boils’ (251c1, c4) in the beloved’s presence but at 251c8–d1 it is paradoxically this boiling and irritation that is said to relieve the soul, as it experiences relief from its anguish (*odunês*) and is filled with joy (*gegêthen*). The changes of state are rapid as this joy is immediately contrasted with the distress caused correspondingly by the beloved’s absence (251d1): when separated the soul ‘becomes parched’ while parts of it ‘throb’ ‘like pulsing arteries’ and ‘prick’ the surface. The result of this inner tumult is that (251d5–6): ‘the entire soul, stung all over, goes mad with pain’ (tr. Rowe). The pain of separation imaged here as ‘being parched’ recalls the ‘parching madness’ of Ibycus 286, where the adverse effects of love are felt as the blasts of a lightning storm. The painful irritations of love also echo Ibycus’ verse, for where Plato speaks of the sharpness of ‘stings and goads’ (251d5; 251e4; 254a1), Ibycus used terms of ‘biting’ and ‘stinging’ (282a fr. 4 (5169) and 282c (i) col. ii). The next *metabolê*, back to joy, is achieved through the lover’s memory of the absent beloved’s beauty. Plato follows the lyric poets in linking these intense and contradictory experiences with madness, as the soul in turmoil tries to make sense of its confusion:

The mixture of both these states makes it despair at the strangeness of its condition, raging in its perplexity, and in its madness ...⁴⁴

(tr. Rowe) (251d7–8)

The soul’s madness makes it unable to settle and its longing now causes it to ‘run’ in pursuit of ‘the possessor of beauty’ (251e2–3). The headlong

⁴³ On the interaction of plant and other physiological imagery, see Lebeck (1972), esp. 273–275. Like Lebeck, Nussbaum (1986), 217, Ferrari (1987), 154–157 and Nightingale (1995), 160 are alert to the sexual connotations of various aspects of the plant images. Note also that in lyric the beloved’s beauty is often conveyed through the beauty of the natural world: Sappho fr. 94, 96 and 132; Archilochus 25; Anacreon 414.

⁴⁴ ἐκ δὲ ἀμφοτέρων μειγμένων ἀδημονεῖ τε τῇ ἀτοπία τοῦ πάθους καὶ ἀπορούσα λυττᾷ, καὶ ἐμμανῆς οὔσα.

pursuit brings another sighting of the beloved which allows the lover's soul again to 'channel desire' into itself through the reception of the stream of beauty. This welcome sight brings not only relief but also pleasure (251e3–252a1): 'it releases what was pent up before, and finding a breathing space (*anapnoên*) it ceases from its stinging birth-pains, once more enjoying this for the moment as the sweetest pleasure (*hêdonên* ... *glukutatên*)' (tr. Rowe). The superlative *glukutatên* (251e5) amidst the sudden swings between pleasure and pain seems designed to recall Sappho's depiction of *erôs* as *glukupikron* (130).⁴⁵ Plato thus echoes the lyric poets' portrayals of the bittersweet and bewildering experience that is love's madness.⁴⁶

4. Platonic *Erôs* and Self-Control (253c7–256e2)

Thus far in the myth Plato has employed lyric vocabulary in support of his account of the impact of beauty and love on the lover's soul. But in this final episode Plato delivers an emphatic response to the poets through his redefinition of self-control (*sôphrosunê*) and *eros* itself. In Plato's new love story of recollection self-control and *mania* are shown to be equally necessary and mutually supportive. The poetic motif of charioteer and horses is used to offer new perspectives on the dominating power of erotic *mania* and on the lover's own powers to respond to this heightened stimulation. It is in this episode that the aspects of energy and control implicit in the image of charioteer and horses are explored most fully. When the Platonic lover is stimulated by the sight of the beautiful boy, two events are happening: the stream of beauty is entering his soul and he is recalling the Forms. He is thus both passive and active at once.⁴⁷ Plato explores this complex reaction through the perspective of the tension and

⁴⁵ The influence of Sappho's famous compound is evident in other love lyrics, notably Theognis 1353–1356.

⁴⁶ DuBois (1995), 87 and Calame (1999), 188–189 discuss the alternating experiences of the soul in this passage. Ferrari (1987), 107, n.25 compares Plato's idea that the beloved can cure the lover's sickness (252b1) with the alleviation of suffering in Sappho 31.

⁴⁷ Nightingale (1995), 158–160 notes that the Platonic lover is subject to forces that he cannot control, speaking of the philosophic lover as 'permeable' (159) and 'penetrated by a variety of liquid influxes'. Foley (1998), 47 draws the same parallel: 'In archaic love poetry, the lover is typically maddened by the forces of *erôs* from without; streams of beauty from the beloved similarly flow into and arouse to madness the soul of Plato's philosophical lover.'

transfer of forces within the tripartite soul, a perspective which begins from the conception of soul itself as an energy source.

Soul for Plato is a perpetually active and mobile being: at 245c5–9 movement (*kinêsis*) is identified as its very essence. Indeed, as Cornford says, soul is ‘the energy of life itself’ (1971, 128). The tripartite framework further establishes each part of the soul as a set of desires. Moline notes how the parts of the soul are ‘but different ways of channeling one finite, personal stream of energy or desire’ (1981, 78). With desire thus located within the soul Plato transforms Eros/*erôs* from an external divine power affecting the passive lover to an internal force active within the lover’s own soul. On this perspective the power of love is matched by the moving power of the soul itself and the possibility opens up of the soul resisting the domination of erotic *mania* and establishing control over itself. Erotic experience is thus explored from the point of view of the dynamic balance of different forces active within the soul. However, an external stimulus remains a necessary part of falling in love, since one cannot make oneself feel desire by an independent act of will. While in love poetry it is Eros or Aphrodite that transmits the feeling of desire to the lover, for Plato the stimulus of the soul’s desire is the stream of beauty. And when an external stimulus stirs the lover, it is appropriate to view him as passive in the transaction. Hence earlier in the myth the lover’s soul is depicted as watered, warmed and illuminated by the stream of beauty. But when Plato turns to consider the animation and purposive activity within the erotically aroused soul reacting to beauty, the focus shifts away from the soul as passive and towards the three different energies represented in the individual powers of the charioteer and two horses. Embedded in the tripartite image of the team is a normative power-relation: the charioteer, as the leader, is expected to use his reason, physical strength and apparatus to steer the raw energy of the animals. The animals supply the greater physical force but are not capable of making judgements about how that force and energy is best utilised.⁴⁸ The horses’ physical power is expressed in their pushing and dragging against the charioteer and each other as they seek to gallop forwards or pull backwards (253e4–255a1). The charioteer’s power is conveyed through terms for his own movements, both voluntary and involuntary, in tension with those of the horses (254a7–e2). In addition the charioteer uses the apparatus of

⁴⁸ Ferrari (1987), 185–203 gives a useful account of the interaction between the three parts. Nightingale (1995), 144–145 discusses how the forces represent ‘different kinds of *logoi*’.

steering: the ‘whip’ and ‘goad’ are mentioned twice (253e4; 254a3–4), the reins are highlighted at 254c1 and the bit or bridle three times (254c6; 254d7; 254e3).

Within the tripartite soul there is a constant dynamic between different forces and powers. And this dynamic is affected profoundly by the impact of beauty. For the sighting of beauty transmits a new energy that the soul must absorb or convert. To express this transmission of energy, Plato repeats at 253e6–7 images used earlier in the myth—of beauty warming and stimulating the soul. But he then intensifies the moment of impact by introducing a particularly distinctive lyric image for the power of *erôs*: the lightning flash. As a result of drawing close to the boy at 254b4–5, all parts of the soul see his face. The beloved’s face is now described as ‘flashing like lightning’ (*astraptousan*). This image recalls Ibycus 286.8, where the lightning flashes (*steropas phlegôn*)⁴⁹ are caused by Eros appearing as Boreas, the Thracian storm wind. For Plato the lightning flash is a more threatening manifestation of the light of Beauty that featured at 250b5–6. For Ibycus the lover’s heart feels the force of a ‘fearless’ (*athambês*) power; for Plato the charioteer is similarly vulnerable as he is terrified at the sight. ‘Seeing’ the boy makes him ‘see again’ Beauty, since it strikes up his memory of the awe-inspiring Form (254b5–7).

Plato responds to the poets’ vision of *erôs* by depicting what follows the lightning bolt. The charioteer’s first reaction to the flash is simply one of shock as he falls back in reverence (254b8). But by being struck down he is then ‘compelled’ to exert force over the horses:

... and is forced at the same time to pull back the reins so violently as to bring both horses down on their haunches, the one willingly, because of its lack of resistance to him, but the unruly horse much against its will.⁵⁰
(tr. Rowe) (254b8–c3)

The initial energy transfer expressed in the lightning-flash paradoxically immobilises the moving soul but the crash is temporary.⁵¹ The team retreats (254c3–4) and the bad horse, once it gets its breath back,⁵² soon

⁴⁹ LSJ on *steropê*: ‘like *asteropê*, *astrapê*, flash of lightning’

⁵⁰ καὶ ἅμα ἠναγκάσθη εἰς τοῦπίσω ἐλκύσαι τὰς ἡνίας οὕτω σφοδρὰ, ὥστ’ ἐπὶ τὰ ἰσχία ἄμφω καθίσει τὸ ἵππῳ, τὸν μὲν ἐκόντα διὰ τὸ μὴ ἀντιτείνειν, τὸν δὲ ὑβριστὴν μάλ’ ἄκοντα.

⁵¹ The crash of the team parallels their chaos and confusion (*thorubos*) at 248b1, with the first event signalling the crisis of forgetting (248c7 *lêthês*) and this event the crisis of remembering. In the parallel story of the wings, these are the moments of loss and regrowth—the most significant *metabolai* in the narrative.

⁵² Compare 251e4.

resumes its pursuit. The good horse meanwhile experiences an aftershock (*thambos*), with an outbreak of sweat expressive of his trauma (254c4–5). The noun *thambos* means ‘shock, fear’, and recalls Ibycus’ *athambês* for ‘fearless’ Eros, but attention is turned from the external and fearless god of lyric to the internal and fearful reaction of the soul.

After the first retreat, the bad horse forces the team to approach the beloved (254d5) and the confrontation with Beauty is repeated. The same reaction to the sight of his beauty recurs and the outcome for the excited horse is grim:

but the same happens to the charioteer as before, only still more violently, as he falls back as if from a *husplex*; still more violently he wrenches the bit back, and forces it from the teeth of the unruly horse, spattering its evil-speaking tongue and its jaws with blood, and thrusting its legs and haunches to the ground delivers it over to pains.⁵³

(tr. Rowe) (254d7–e5)

The charioteer again falls back violently and his automatic pull on the reins again brings the team crashing down to the ground. The single word *pollakis* (254e6) indicates, chillingly, that this traumatic event is a routine part of the philosopher’s training. For it is only after this violent and bloody subjection is replayed ‘many times’ that the bad horse is finally ‘humbled’ (*tapeinôtheis*, 254e7).

Ferrari’s insight on the charioteer’s loss of balance is most useful (1987), 189–190:

The gesture of mastery seems more like a compulsive reaction of aversion. It is as if the charioteer pulls on the reins only because he is still holding them as he gets thrown backwards.

The involuntary reaction of the charioteer is the crucial moment at which the memory of the Form is exerting the maximum impact on the whole soul. Stunned at the memory the charioteer is thrown backwards by the force of the lightning flash. This energy is then immediately channelled through the reins to the horses with the result that it brings both of them down on their haunches. The whole team is thus felled and their combined power (*sumphutôi dunamei*) capable of such speed and grace is now reduced to an immobile tangle of frustrated force and counter-force. Thus Plato conveys the shock of love on our decision-making processes.

⁵³ ὁ δ’ ἡνίοχος ἔτι μᾶλλον ταῦτόν πάθος παθών, ὡσπερ ἀπὸ ὑσπληγος ἀναπεσών, ἔτι μᾶλλον τοῦ ὑβριστοῦ ἵππου ἐκ τῶν ὀδόντων βία ὀπίσω σπᾶσας τὸν χαλινόν, τὴν τε κακηγόρον γλῶτταν καὶ τὰς γνάθους καθήμαξεν καὶ τὰ σκέλη τε καὶ τὰ ἰσχία πρὸς τὴν γῆν ἐρείσας ὀδύνας ἔδωκεν.

But here lies the paradox. For the charioteer must allow himself to succumb passively and repeatedly to this shock, since he requires the upsurge in power for the effort of training his horses and himself. Thus self-control, a concept in view since the early speeches of the dialogue, turns out to be a highly complex unbalancing and re-balancing of forces. For it is the charioteer's job to channel the god-given charge, stemming from divine Beauty, and redirect it to the lower parts of the soul so that the soul as a whole can benefit from it not only as a catalyst but as a sustaining stimulus for change.⁵⁴ At the critical moment of the memory flash, the charioteer is passive but thereafter he has to take active decisions to invite the replay of this event and so draw strength from it. Thus his own decision-making comes into effect and his actions in directing further approaches to beauty are at one level controlled, deliberate and as conscious as possible of the *mania* that will ensue.

So Plato stresses the need for self-control: physical desire must be resisted in order for the soul to be reunited with its true beloved, the Forms. Within this wider framework and perspective the disabling effect of the sighting of beauty is positive, since it allows the charioteer to establish control over the bad horse. So it is made clear that the harmony and wholeness (256b1 *homonoêtikon*) of the soul ultimately rests on reason's dominance (*sôphrosunê*). But this is an understanding of self-control that recognises a significant need for *mania*. For the *mania* inspired by physical desire is a necessary part of the resistance to it, which means that the opportunities for the stirring of physical desire must still be courted. Since reason's dominance is paradoxically strongest when it submits to the divine force of madness in the experience of desire, the energy of *mania* must be received and transformed by reason in order to create an equal force of self-control. The unlikely synergy between the two is one of the ways that Plato seeks to explain the benefits of love. The madness of erotic desire creates a crisis moment for the soul but through the disciplined and sober reaction of the charioteer the energy can be converted to produce lasting effects.

The stories of the wings and the charioteer combine to show that recollection requires not simply the 'uplift' of remembering beauty or inspiration but also the more mundane development and application of

⁵⁴ Similarly, when the charioteer first receives the force of the 'goad', caused by the sight of Beauty (253e6–254a1), he is passive. When he then actively inflicts his own goad on the bad horse (254a3–4), he becomes part of a chain through which a current of energy is transmitted. Ferrari (1987), 187 notes the transfer of force through the goad.

reason's control. In the imagery that Plato uses for recollection, the force that inspires the wings of the soul to grow must also, simultaneously, be directed at controlling the bad horse. For without this 'harnessing' of the energy through bit and bridle, the upsurge in energy caused by the flashing of the Form of Beauty will ultimately be dissipated. The *mania* of desire and the discipline of self-control are shown as mutually supportive since the narrative unfolds to show how the regrowth of the wing relies not only on erotic stimulation but also on the relentless training of the three parts of the soul. Thus recollection requires both a concentration of energy and insight (imaged in elevation and outwardly directed towards the Forms) and at the same time an increase in control (imaged in bridle and goad and inwardly directed within the soul). In this way the concept of inner rule is shown to be an unexpected balance of forces and energies in which deliberate unbalancing plays a necessary part.

Plato adopts Anacreon's striking poetic images of bridling and the natural power of horses but takes them to an extreme as the horse's brute power is conveyed in such terms as his 'whinnying' and 'champing at the bit', and as the charioteer has to resort to bloody violence and pain to exert his control (254e3–4). Thus the light sexual frisson and the skittishness of Anacreon's horse in 417 are pushed to an ugly conclusion. In the critical moment of the subjection of the bad horse Plato alludes to Anacreon as he draws attention to the natural power of the horse. But the lightness of Anacreon's verse is destroyed as the philosopher parts company with the poets in showing what is really at stake in erotic encounters and their contest of powers. Here the harsher aspects of recollection and desire come to the fore and Plato departs significantly from the poetic vision and the *charis* that defines it. For all the pain and longing of *eros* in lyric, the experience retains an elegance and beauty. The graceful style of lyric poetry fits its subject matter and *charis* becomes a programmatic term within the genre.⁵⁵ But in the conclusion of Plato's myth the experience of desire is given a harder edge in the culminating scenes of power-struggle and violence within the lover's soul. Indeed, the moment of love's impact becomes but one crisis in an on-going struggle, since it is merely the *first* step in a transfer of energies that constitutes the

⁵⁵ For *charis* vocabulary as a signature of lyric, see e.g. Anacreon 402a–c (*charien;* *charienta* ... *charienta*) or 394; and Sappho 2.2. The familiar presence of the Graces (*Charites*) is a further distinctive element of the genre, see e.g. Stesichorus 212; Alcaeus 386; Sappho 44b, 53, 81, 103, and 128; Theognis 15–18; Ibycus 282c fr.1, 288; and Anacreon 346 fr. 3. Phaedrus nods to lyric when he describes the water of the Ilissus at 229b7 as *charienta*.

experience of philosophical love. The clash between madness and reason is productive but unstable, requiring the equal force of self-control to enable improvement.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Plato's allusions to the lyric poets are integral to his account of the soul in love. Plato draws on the lyrics of Sappho, Anacreon and Ibycus in order to incorporate their powerful depictions of the force of *eros*. But he sets *against* them a need for disciplined and tough self-control to redirect the soul's energy away from physical beauty and towards the Forms. Plato rewrites the love experience from the point of view of the tripartite soul, offering a new and unique vision of the power-dynamics involved when a soul responds to the beloved's beauty. Plato tells what ought to happen *after* the initial shock of love—allowing the moment but signalling that it is merely a single crisis in a long-term struggle. Plato's primary concern is the concerted action subsequent to the impact of beauty on the soul, for it is this that is needed to achieve recollection. Recollection in *Phaedrus* is arduous and harsh. It involves a situation where the bad horse is subjected to severe pain; the good horse is terrified, and the charioteer can only enforce his will through the violent jolt he himself receives at the lightning bolt of beauty. Although the results of success will be pleasant—the blessed vision of the Forms is viewed by a 'happy company' (250b6 *eudaimoni chorōi*)—even then diligence, effort and sweat are necessary since the bad horse requires on-going subjugation. Plato's account therefore offers a view of love that is far removed from the poets and the *charis* of lyric love.

In sum: through his love story of recollection Plato pays tribute to the lyric tradition but also directly challenges it by placing *erōs* within a much larger framework of experience and understanding. In this way the destabilising force of love is revealed as surprisingly central to the soul's distribution of energy and the contest of powers that defines human life.

⁵⁶ I follow Nussbaum's view (1986), 213–233 that in *Phdr.* both *mania* and reason are needed for the best human life, a life which is thereby 'unstable' (221) and 'risky' (232). Nussbaum's influential reading shows how *mania* is linked with passivity and receptivity.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MYTH AND POETRY IN THE *TIMAEUS*

GRETCHEN REYDAMS-SCHILS

At the outset of the *Timaeus* Socrates is quite agitated.¹ After having given a summary of an ideal state, he has a 'desire' to see his state in action, a point Plato strongly emphasizes: *peponthôs tugchanô—to pathos—eis epithumian aphikoito—pepontha* (19B). And, even more baffling, Socrates lumps himself together with the poets and sophists, as being inferior to men of experience such as Timaeus, Critias and Hermocrates, all of whom harmonize their deeds to their words and principles (19D–E).

What exactly is unusual in this situation? First, Socrates' desire merits a closer look, even though it could be an instantiation of the right kind of *erôs*, as a striving towards knowledge and truth. Second, the summary at the opening of the *Timaeus* does not easily map onto the *Republic*. The setting of both texts is different, but more to the point here is that the recapitulation covers only part of the *Republic* (up to Book Five), without making any mention of the philosopher-kings.

The third issue is Socrates' motivation for downplaying his abilities, and whether any so-called Socratic irony could be at play here. Such a disavowal of expertise sounds familiar enough based on other instances in Plato's textual universe. In his intellectual autobiography in the *Phaedo*, for instance, Socrates recounts how his hopes of finding answers in the works of Anaxagoras (*Phaedo* 97B–99C) were disappointed. In the *Apology* too Socrates is portrayed as looking for answers in others, including the poets (22A–C). The *Apology*, however, also clearly spells out the crucial advantage Socrates has over the poets, sophists, and other self-declared experts, namely that he is aware at least of his limitations and his ignorance. The *Timaeus* too hints at this advantage (19D1: *emautou men autos kategnôka*; D2–3: *kai to men emon ouden thaumaston*). Yet, the irony thickens in this context. For when it comes to war situations (which are the topic of discussion in the opening of the *Timaeus*) even Plato presents Socrates as in fact having some experience and being able

¹ Reflections on this theme were previously published in Reydams-Schils (2001), 39–51; *ibid* (2002), 265–276. For further bibliographical references, see also those articles.

to claim successes (*Symp.* 219E6 ff.; 221A1 ff.). And an astute reader like Proclus does not fail to point out this feature of Plato's representation of Socrates (*in Tim.* 1.62.15–21).

The awareness of his limited, yet significant experience is not the only feature that separates Socrates from the poets and sophists: unlike them, he does have his own way of aligning his words and deeds. The *Phaedo* and the *Apology*, for instance, show that Socrates in fact practices what he preaches, but that his understanding of such ethical self-consistency differs radically from the common one, and hence requires considerable acumen on the part of his interlocutors. Yet rather than pursuing the inquiry into this model of self-consistency, in the *Timaeus*, Socrates claims actually to have found the expertise which he lacks in Critias, Timaeus, and Hermocrates. Socrates' request, then, has features that make it look like the kind of test to which he would also submit a Euthyphro; it cannot be taken at face value. When we hear Socrates praising his companions' experience in state matters, in addition to philosophy, we can imagine Timaeus seeing through the irony, smiling and shaking his head, whereas Critias takes the bait. But Socratic irony is elusive, so we need more evidence.

What kind of discourse does Socrates request from his companions? What is the object of his desire, and how is it related to truth? Here is how the *Timaeus* formulates the request:

[My feelings are] like those of a man who gazes upon magnificent-looking animals, whether they are animals in a painting or even alive but standing still, and who then finds himself eager to look at them in motion or engaged in some struggle or conflict that seems to show off their distinctive physical qualities.² (transl. D. Zeyl)

This passage reveals two oppositions: one between painting, or depiction, and living reality, which is subsumed under a second opposition, between rest and motion. The structure of the passage implies that the motion also contrasts with the implied static nature of a depiction. Let's examine the role of painting and living things, each in turn, in the context of the opposition between rest and motion.

If Socrates considers the possibility here (*eite . . . eite kai*) of ranging his own previous account with depictions, we are left with the question as to how this would relate to the notorious *Republic* condemnation of paint-

² ... οἷον εἴ τις ζῶα καλά που θεασάμενος, εἴτε ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα εἴτε καὶ ζῶντα ἀληθινῶς ἤσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα, εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἀφίκοιτο θεάσασθαι κινούμενα τε αὐτὰ καὶ τι τῶν τοῖς σώμασιν δοκούντων προσήκειν κατὰ τὴν ἀγωνίαν ἀθλοῦντα ...

ings as twice removed from the Forms (596A–598C). In other words, does Socrates imply that he now considers his contribution inferior and ontologically deficient?

As he does in the *Timaeus* with the poets and the sophists, in the *Republic* Plato's Socrates criticizes painters too for their lack of experience of their subject matter (598B–C). Thus by considering a comparison of his own account to a 'mere' depiction, Socrates already signals and anticipates his subsequent move of grouping himself with the poets and the sophists. Yet at the same time, he alternatively invites a careful listener to reflect on the possible connections between his *kallipolis* and the 'living but still' things. That is, if Socrates' own previous exposition is analogous to a painting, it could be of a different type than the one condemned in the *Republic*.

When Plato attacks the painters in Book X of the *Republic*, he shows more respect for artisans, those who actually make objects such as beds and tables, rather than merely depict them. Craftsmen are only one step removed from the ideal type, because they pay attention to the *idea* in the process of production (596B7, even if only indirectly by following the instructions of a user who has knowledge of the purpose of objects, 601Dff.). In keeping with this distinction between craftsmen and painters, Plato has a tendency in this context to reserve the language of 'paradigm' and 'image' for the relation between Forms and sensible reality, and to apply terms related to *mimêsis* primarily to the relation between sensible reality and art (see also 510B4; but the text is not certain here), with very negative overtones.³

But perhaps Socrates is a painter who can do better. We hear of such painters in the *Republic* when Plato describes the philosopher as someone who looks 'in two directions' when performing his art, keeping an eye on both intelligible and sensible reality at once (501B1; see also 472C–473A).⁴ This superior kind of painter, not surprisingly, is also a craftsman (500D6), and thus manages to overcome the divide between ordinary painters and artisans. The philosopher who imitates by painting in words is also a maker of some kind (of which type we need to examine more closely), not a mere observer. Such an artisan can retrieve poetry as well, and presumably rhetoric too. But the key requirement is always to keep an eye on the eidetic side of reality.⁵

³ Halliwell (2002), 63.

⁴ Schmitt (2001), 32–54; see also Halliwell (2002), ch. 4, 118–147.

⁵ It is worth pointing out the central role which this account of painting and

If we combine these sections of the *Republic* with the opening of the *Timaeus*, we now have at least three senses of ‘painting’ to keep in mind: (i) painting as a rendering of sensible reality, twice removed from the Forms (as in *Republic* X); (ii) painting as an art that also takes eidetic reality into account (as in *Republic* VI); and (iii) painting as a mere ‘representation’ or a sketch as opposed to reality itself (opening of the *Timaeus*). The third designation can apply both to painting in the first and second sense. That is, whether a description of an ideal state takes into account eidetic reality or not, we can still ask to what extent it is a mere hypothetical ideal (cf. *Rep.* 472D), an imaginary rendering, and a sketch, or whether it actually exists in phenomenal reality, that is, in the realm of Becoming, to put it in the language of the *Timaeus*. So, when Socrates makes the comparison between his contribution and a painting, he does not necessarily condemn his speech as inferior in the first sense. But even if this contribution is like a painting in the second sense, it remains legitimate for him to dwell on the possibilities for an actualization of his ideal.

In addition to the question how the previous discussion of an ideal state would relate to painting, the allusion to art works in Socrates’ request can conjure up another issue that is central to the *Timaeus*. In other words, the topic of painting not only refers us back to other Platonic accounts, it also anticipates and sets the stage for what is to follow. A brief detour via Xenophon can elucidate this point. There is a remarkable parallel to this opening passage of the *Timaeus* in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (1.4.4). In a conversation with Aristodemus, Socrates asks: ‘Which do you think deserves the greater admiration, the makers of images (*eidōla*) without intelligence and motion, or those who make living things, with thought and activity?’ The latter is the response, ‘provided they are the outcome not of some chance factor, but of design.’⁶ The entire vignette in which this exchange takes place as well as a twin passage in Xenophon (4.3.2–18) match certain themes of the *Timaeus*, with a focus on divine forethought in the making of the entire universe, but especially of human beings. (I am leaving aside here the question of

philosophy, in 500E, plays in Neoplatonism, see Iamblichus ap. Stob. *Anth.* 3 201.17–202.17; Hierocles ap. Phot. *Bibl.* 251, 464b; ps.-Dionysius *EH* 4, 473c–476a. Cf. O’Meara (2003), 90. On the design of a good state as rivaling with poetry because it imitates the best life, cf. *Laws* 817B1–8.

⁶ Πότερά σοι δοξοῦσιν οἱ ἀπεργαζόμενοι εἶδωλα ἄφρονά τε καὶ ἀκίνητα ἄξιοθαυμαστότεροι εἶναι ἢ οἱ ζῶα ἔμφρονά τε καὶ ἐνεργά;

which account influenced which; they could both testify independently to Socrates' interest in such matters.)⁷

As in Plato's *Timaeus*, Socrates' comparison in Xenophon also mentions static artifacts and living things in motion, leaving aside the 'living things at rest'. The passage helps us to see more clearly how Timaeus' account of the universe could be a response to Socrates' request. In the *Timaeus* Socrates initially phrases the distinction between depictions of objects and living things from the point of view of an observer, not a maker, whether divine or human. But already as observers we, along with Timaeus and his audience, are invited to think about the relation between art and nature. Would it make sense to posit some agency as responsible for the universe? Who could the maker of 'living things in motion' or nature be, and does that maker have a purpose? A divine Demiurge, as a response to these questions, thus would find himself already anticipated by Socrates' terms for the feast of speeches.

If we move on now from painting to 'living things,' these, together with Socrates' distinction between rest and motion, also turn out to be significant for the *Timaeus* as a whole. According to a well-established pattern of interpretation in the Platonic tradition, 'rest' points to the intelligible realm of the Forms and Being, and 'motion' to the flux of Becoming, in reality as we observe it around us. It is this same distinction between Being and Becoming that features prominently in Timaeus' opening words. Timaeus uses 'living' to designate the intelligible realm (as in 30C5–D1; 31B1; 39E1; E8), which resonates with Socrates' 'living things at rest'. Socrates' focus on *living* things, in turn, could well anticipate and justify a discourse on nature, as Timaeus will go on to deliver. So we now have several ways in which Socrates' opening speech and Timaeus' contribution to the feast of speeches are related: first, Socrates invites the question who the maker of living things could be, as analogous to the artisan who makes paintings; second, his interest in living things invites a discourse on nature, as Timaeus will go on to deliver; and third, Timaeus' designation of the intelligible realm as 'living' echoes the 'living things at rest' that figure in Socrates' terms for the conversation.

If we do accept the two sides of reality from Timaeus' proemium, Being and Becoming, as a hermeneutical key to the work in its entirety, we might suppose that Socrates requests an actualization of his political

⁷ To this discussion could also be added other reflections on art in Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10.1–8; of particular interest in this context would be the question asked of the sculptor Cleiton, how he makes his figures more life-like.

model in terms of the phenomenal world or Becoming. He would like to learn more about how a city performs satisfactorily in a situation of conflict, whether through actual warfare or diplomatic negotiations (19C2–8).

The most literal interpretation, positive or negative, of such a request for a reality test would go as far as to attribute political ambition to Socrates and Plato themselves. Thus Proclus, for instance, assumes such ambition as Socrates' motive for his attachment to Alcibiades, and Plato's for his alleged escapades in Sicily (*in Tim.* 1.61.10–20).⁸ Herodicus (2nd century BCE) is another instantiation of such a line of interpretation, presenting a criticism of Plato that accuses him of a misguided ambition and thirst for glory, giving a negative twist to the 'philosopher's passion' of Plato's Socrates (*pathos*), and projecting it onto the author Plato himself (*houtô kagô tous politas hous diagraphô*):

Besides being vile-tempered, Plato was also overly ambitious ...

Who would not admit that wanting to found a city and making laws amount to the passion of excessive ambition?

This is clear from what he says in the *Timaeus*:

‘I experience a feeling towards the [my?] state: just as if a painter would want to see his work in motion and action, so would I with the citizens of my description.’⁹ (Dörrie-Baltes-Mann 43.1= Athenaeus 9, 507DE = FGrHist 594F 7 = Düring, Herodicus 35–36)

But Socrates' request for a 'reality check' for his proposed model of the state actually leaves open a range of options. For one thing, he does not explicitly request a mimetic account, nor a better *mimêsis* than the poets could provide.¹⁰ The poets are the *mimêtikon ethnos*; Socrates asks instead for a *logos* (19C3; 20B3). One possibility of such a *logos* with a connection to reality would be a historical account of actual cities in actual situations, such as we would expect from Herodotus or Thucydides. This is the kind of account Critias thinks he is providing, imitating many features

⁸ See also Olympiodorus *in Alcib.* 2, 18–20, on Plato as the descendant of Solon, lawgiver of Athens.

⁹ Ἦν δὲ ὁ Πλάτων πρὸς τῇ κακοηθείᾳ καὶ φιλόδοξος, ... καὶ τὸ πόλιν δὲ θελήσει κτίσαι καὶ τὸ νομοθετῆσαι τίς οὐ φήσει πάθος εἶναι φιλοδοξίας; δῆλον δὲ ἐστὶ τοῦτο ἔξ ὧν ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ λέγει.

“πέπονθά τι πάθος πρὸς τὴν πολιτείαν, ὡσπερ ἂν εἰ ζωγράφος ἐβούλετο τὰ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργα κινούμενα καὶ ἐνεργὰ ἰδεῖν, οὕτω γὰρ ὁ τοὺς πολίτας οὖς διαγράφω.”

¹⁰ Here my reading differs also from Gill (1977), 288; *ibid* (1979), 73–74; Casertano (1996), 19 ff. Cf. also *Phaedrus* 278C–E.

of the historian's methodology.¹¹ Another option would be what we may deem a mixture of theory and fact, in more anachronistic terms; that is, the exposition proceeds from a theoretical standpoint but uses facts to strengthen its claims. The theme of *erôs* too, for instance, like the one of politics, deals with practical implications, and in the *Symposium*, Pausanias backs up his thesis by referring to the laws and regulations of several existing *poleis* (180C–185E), whereas Eryximachus brings in his medical expertise (186Aff.). Book III of the *Laws* could also fall under this heading, as well as, for instance, Timaeus' detailed descriptions of the human body's functioning. By contrast, Socrates in the *Republic*, while making a number of strikingly specific observations about human behavior, refers only briefly to two existing state forms, the Cretan and the Spartan (544C).¹²

A myth, however, of the right type could also fulfill Socrates' request. Not all myths are mere figments of our imagination. In Socrates' exchange with Critias, we can distinguish three types of discourse: myth, invented story (*plastheis muthos*) and true account (*logos alêthês*). This underscores the point that there exists a kind of probable myth or likely account that stands halfway between an account that matches reality in its two senses of Being and Becoming, and mere invention.¹³ Myths as Plato typically uses them have a connection with reality: they render what *could* be real, even if we cannot verify their actual reality content. Myths can tell us about a past or a future that is outside of our reach and our attempt to collect evidence; they can also tell us about matters divine and about the disembodied soul's connection to the intelligible realm—issues that fall outside the domain of verifiability altogether.

Now that we have a better sense of what is at stake in Socrates' initial request, what is it that he gets in response? Critias, as it turns out (and I have argued at greater length elsewhere)¹⁴ can only hear the most literal interpretation of Socrates' request, much like Plato's detractor Herodicus. Instead of a mere reality test, he gives Socrates more than he asks for by providing an actualization of his model of the state in Athens' glorious past, adding a quite strong nationalist tone to the feast of speeches.

¹¹ On this cf. Gill, (1979) 75; see also *Critias* 110A–B.

¹² Cf. Gill (1977), 300.

¹³ Brisson (1994), ch. 9, especially 127–130. See also Racionero (1998), 29–60; Erler (1997), 86–90; the longer version of this paper appeared as Erler, (1998), 5–28; Mesch (2002), 194–213.

¹⁴ See the references in n. 1.

This patriotic aspect of the speech would not have prevented Plato as author from also using the Atlantis story to criticize imperial Athens of the fifth century. It is not at all uncommon in a play, for instance, that the characters within the plot have a different understanding of a narrative than the one the author can establish with his audience. The author can play on different registers at once, one internal to the artistic representation, the other external. Given the difference between dramatic date and date of composition (regardless of whether we can actually pin those dates down), both Plato as author and the audience of the *Timaeus* would have the benefit of knowing the disastrous outcome of the Peloponnesian wars for Athens in all its consequences, whereas the character Critias within the dialogue does not.

Critias' response is a rhapsodic performance, which he has rehearsed several times in advance;¹⁵ he presents his story as partly memorized, partly improvised, and partly based on some of Solon's notes. Something is amiss with his memory: he has no mind for philosophical arguments, and cannot recall the discussion of the previous day; he is not interested in a philosophical *anamnêsis*, but wants to reproduce a story told to him when he was a child, and which has stayed with him ... 'like the indelible markings of a picture with the colors burnt in'. Yet a 'picture' is precisely what Socrates does not want.

Critias has a crude understanding of what 'truth' entails. For him truth is limited to physical reality and historical categories of space and time; he has no clue of any eidetic dimension of reality, however defined, even after Timaeus' speech.¹⁶ He endorses a stark demarcation between myth and *logos*, seeing in the former mere stories that can easily be allegorized or translated into straightforward *logos*, if need be.¹⁷ According to him, all modes of discourse are necessarily mimetic and are like paintings; hence ... no speech could actually fulfill Socrates' request! On this reading, Critias is a lost soul from a Platonic point of view, much like Euthyphro, and for this reason I would suggest that we take Socrates' praise of Critias with a grain of salt. Critias would be a counter-example to the philosophically gifted interlocutor. Small wonder then, perhaps, that his account caves in on itself and breaks off abruptly: he is an impostor.

¹⁵ See the very fine, and mostly overlooked, contribution on this topic by David (1984), 33–53; see also Nagy (2000), 41–67; Desclos (2006), 175–202.

¹⁶ Pace Pradeau (1997), and Johansen (2004).

¹⁷ Cf. also Osborne (1996), 179–211.

But what is it that Timaeus, by contrast, gets right, and how is his contribution a considerable improvement? Timaeus patiently awaits his turn, and his first words—a prayer—are also the beginning of his account in its entirety. Critias introduces him as ‘the most skilled of the three of us in matters of astronomy and well-versed in knowledge of the nature of the universe’ (27A3–5).¹⁸ Timaeus’ prayers are not to Athena; he is not from Athens, after all, but from Locri, in South-Italy. He invokes the gods and goddesses in general (27C–D), and at the end of his speech he asks for knowledge as the cure of all cures against speaking erroneously (106B4–6).¹⁹ Knowledge, not memorization, is his guiding principle. Timaeus does have his limitations too: as we learn at the outset, his memory is not perfect either. But contrary to Critias he concentrates his efforts on trying to remember the philosophical argument itself, asking Socrates to help him (17B5–9).

What is reality for Timaeus, and how does discourse relate to it? The closing line of a rightly famous passage on different types of discourse (29B3–C3) captures the crucial difference between Timaeus and Critias: ‘what Being is to Becoming, truth is to convincingness’ (transl. Zeyl, or ‘reliable verisimilitude’). Historical events, set in time and space, belong to the realm of Becoming, and so, strictly speaking, do not fall under the scope of truth at all. We use thought and reason to grasp Being, and opinion based on sense-perception to deal with Becoming (28A1–3). From this perspective, history is at best a matter of opinion. Yet, when Timaeus defines the two cognitive functions of the World Soul, he opens up the possibility for a kind of opinion (*doxa*) that can fall under the heading of *logos alêthês*, what he calls there ‘opinions and beliefs that are firm and true’ (37B4–C3).²⁰ But this kind of opinion, as I have argued elsewhere, contrary to its usual, human counterpart, does not rely on the body or sense-perception to deal with the realm of Becoming. Rather it is a cognitive function that gives the World Soul information about the sensible world without the perturbing influences of body and senses.²¹ So, Timaeus’ account is sophisticated enough to leave room for a kind of ‘true opinion’ about physical reality that is firm and essentially rational,

¹⁸ ἄτε ὄντα ἀστρονομικώτατον ἡμῶν καὶ περὶ φύσεως τοῦ παντὸς εἰδέναι μάλιστα ἔργον πεποιημένον.

¹⁹ φάρμακον ἡμῖν αὐτὸν τελεώτατον καὶ ἄριστον φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμην εὐχόμεθα διδόναι.

²⁰ δόξαι καὶ πίστεις . . . βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς.

²¹ Cf. Reydamas-Schils (1997), 261–265.

but that avoids falling into the trap of Critias' reductionist view of truth, which loses sight of Being or the Forms altogether.

In the passage on different modes of discourse, Plato's Timaeus does not use the term *mimêsis*, but mentions two kinds of *logoi* that are both *related* (*suggeneis*) to their subject. The realm of Being is presented as the paradigm (*paradeigma*), and Becoming as the image of that paradigm (*eikôn*). *Logoi* that deal with the image/*eikôn* are at best 'likely' (*eikotas*) in their approach to truth. In the language of the *Republic* poetry as *mimêsis*, being twice removed from Being, would fall under this heading (597E3 ff.; 602C1–2).²² Yet it is quite striking that Timaeus later in his account uses *mimêma* for the copies of Being that constitute Becoming itself, only once removed from Being, and not for imitations of Becoming, twice removed.²³ In other words, Timaeus joins the language of image (*eikôn*) and *mimêsis*. This is one of the startling results of introducing into the discussion a third term, a third *genos*: the notorious 'receptacle'. The third term brings about a shift from the language of participation between sensible things and Forms (47Eff.) to one of imitations of Being inhering in the receptacle. Due to the intervention of the Demiurge *mimêsis* no longer merely indicates loss of ontological perfection, but represents the very striving towards perfection as the closest possible approximation of the paradigm. And hence even the imitation of the motion in the receptacle can have a salutary effect on the human body (88D7).

But, again, even if Timaeus reorients the scope of *mimêsis*, his language of kinship²⁴ for the relations between the two kinds of *logoi* and their respective subjects allows for the possibility of a philosophical *logos* about Being that does not qualify as *mimêsis*, and that, strictly speaking, is not discourse because it is no longer *discursive*. As much as Timaeus allows

²² This implies that in Book X of the *Republic* Plato has a specific meaning in mind for *mimêsis*. As a corollary to that realization, this chapter deals with only one aspect of the relation between *mimêsis*, discourse, and reality, as reflected in the potential connections, as well as the differences, between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*.

²³ In the *Timaeus* Plato uses words related to *mimêsis* at: 19D6–E2 (activity of the poets); 38A7 (time as an imitation of eternity); 39D8–E2 (this world imitation of eternal nature); 40D2–3 (model of the movements of planets); 41C5–6 (lower gods imitating activity of Demiurge; cf. also 42E8; 44D4; 69C5); 47C2 (humans 'imitating' the two divine revolutions of the World Soul through sight); 48E6 (copies of Being in receptacle; cf. also 50C5; 51B6); 80B7 (mortal motions as imitations of divine harmonies; cf. also 81B1–2; 88C7–D1); 88D7 (advantages of human being imitating the motion of receptacle, in order to maintain health).

²⁴ ὡς ἄρα τοὺς λόγους, ὧν πῆρ εἰσιν ἐξηγηταί, τούτων αὐτῶν καὶ συγγενεῖς ὄντας.

for a positive side to *mimêsis* not everything besides Being has to be mimetic.

In contrast to Critias' self-confident truth-claims, Timaeus' epistemic caution is striking throughout his speech. He never claims anything more for his account than its being a 'likely story,' the much debated *eikôs muthos*. There are two main reasons why his account can only be 'likely'. One implicit reason follows from the passage which I quoted: insofar as his exposition deals with the realm of Becoming it can at best be only likely. The second reason he states explicitly to Socrates: it points to the limitations of our human nature (29C8–D1). Moreover, Timaeus calls his account *logos* as well as *muthos*.²⁵ This points toward a much more complex and intricate relationship between *muthos* and *logos* than Critias' straightforwardly strict separation of the two would allow.²⁶

Timaeus, then, explores the possibility of stable true opinion, that is, of a cognitive process dealing with the realm of Becoming without relying on the body and the senses. And he reconfigures the relation between the Forms and physical things by bringing in a 'third kind,' the receptacle, which entails a crucial shift from participation to imitation. But the account that leaves room for true opinion and *mimêsis* in a groundbreaking manner is also a cautionary tale for using both only in their proper place, which posits stringent epistemological and metaphysical conditions.

As if this level of sophistication were not already sufficient to impress his audience, there is even more to Timaeus' contribution. His Demiurge is like the artisans of the *Republic* insofar as he uses Being as his model, in a manner that is analogous to the makers of beds who take the eidetic dimension of Bed or Table into account. Yet the Demiurge is superior both because he knows the purpose of things, like the user in the *Republic* (601D), and because he makes living things.²⁷ Timaeus for his part would be a painter-in-words of the good type in the Socratic-Platonic sense described in the *Republic*: his account does not limit itself to Becoming, but, by 'looking in both directions,' anchors Becoming in Being. This philosophically inspired painter approaches the artisan, because he directs his gaze towards the Forms: he transforms our understanding of physical reality, and does not merely render it.

²⁵ Brisson (1992), 70–71; see also Hadot (1983), 113–133.

²⁶ Rowe (1999), 263–278.

²⁷ On striking parallels in expression between Book VI of the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, and *Gorgias* (503D5–504E5) cf. Herrmann (2003), 77–80.

At the same time, however, Timaeus is even more powerful than the philosophers of the *Republic*. First, he describes *phenomenal reality* in motion, as undergoing movement and change, along the lines of Socrates' request. Second, his account is on the verge of rising above *representational* discourse altogether. As the opening of the *Critias* would have it, Timaeus' speech is in truth a performative speech-act that duplicates the Demiurge's divine action. Timaeus prays 'to that God [i.e. the universe] who has just now come into being *by our speech*, although *in reality* long ago' (*Critias* 106A).²⁸

Timaeus with his philosophical aptitude, or better, Plato as a poet in his *Timaeus*, dismembers the features of traditional poetry by giving us, for instance, a direct speech of a god that is not set in meter; he paints, but with words;²⁹ he remolds the familiar for us like an artisan, so we get to see it as different; he borrows the rhetoricians' tool of persuasion, but in order to shape physical reality and our souls by redirecting them towards truth and Being. The poet becomes like the painter, the painter becomes like the artisan, the human artisan like the divine maker, and all of this converging in Plato's speeches rendered in the written word, both through myth and *logos*. Perhaps there is something, after all, to the Platonist tradition's historical interpretation of Plato's political ambition and to Herodicus' criticism, in the sense that Plato intends the *Republic* not only to redirect souls, but to transform the reality of politics, as a performative speech-act in its own right. By the very fact that he writes the *Republic*, Plato changes reality.

²⁸ πρὶν μὲν πάλαι ποτ' ἔργω, νῦν δὲ λόγοις ἄρτι θεῶ γεγονότι προσεύχομαι.

²⁹ On the correlation between painting and poetry in Plato cf. *Crat.* 423C–D, *Euthyphro* 6B–C, *Laws* 2.667C–669B, 10.889D, *Polit.* 288C, 306D, *Prot.* 311E, *Sophist* 224A (Halliwell, 2002, 42n.15); see also Alcidas *Sophist* 27 ff., Simonides in Plutarch *Aud. Poet.* 17f–18a, *Quomodo Adul.* 58b, *Glor. Ath.* 346f., *Qu. Conv.* 748a.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

'CORRECTNESS' AND POETIC KNOWLEDGE: CHORIC POETRY IN THE LAWS

ANTONY HATZISTAVROU

In the second book of the *Laws*, Plato provides an account of the nature and function of choric poetry. Plato's account of choric poetry takes place in the context of a discussion about the function of the Dionysiac chorus. The members of the Dionysiac chorus are responsible for selecting and performing those songs which are most suitable for the education of the youth and in general most beneficial to the city. Plato recognizes that choric poetry and in general any type of artistic mimesis has supreme educational value in moulding the souls of the citizens. In this chapter, I explore two aspects of his account. The first concerns his views about the aesthetic value of choric poetry, i.e. what makes a choric poem beautiful. The second concerns his views about the content of the knowledge of the choric poet, i.e. what kind of knowledge the choric poet possesses *qua* choric poet.

Plato treats choric poetry as a species of mimesis. Mimesis belongs to the class of activities which are normally accompanied by some sort of grace or charm (*charis*) and pleasure (*hêdonê*) (667c9–d3). Plato raises the question about what makes mimetic activities 'worthy of consideration' or 'great' (*spoudaia*) and suggests that it must be some kind of correctness (*orthotês*) (668a9–b7). I argue that for Plato a work of art is 'correct' *qua* species of mimesis if and only if it successfully represents a beautiful original. I further argue that for Plato the aesthetic value of any work of art depends exclusively on its correctness *qua* species of mimesis. So, a work of art is beautiful if and only if it successfully represents a beautiful original.

In the *Laws*, Plato distinguishes the correctness of a work of art *qua* species of mimesis from its correctness *qua* object of the intention of the artist (*orthotêta tês boulêseôs*, 668c7–8). A work of art is correct *qua* object of the intention of the artist if and only if it successfully represents the object which the artist intends to represent. There is no requirement here that the intended object of representation is beautiful. So, a work of art may be correct *qua* object of the intention of the artist but not beautiful.

Turning to the issue of the knowledge of choric poets, I argue that the content of the artistic knowledge of choric poets differs from the content of the artistic knowledge of other artists like painters. The latter know both what paintings are correct *qua* species of mimesis (and thus beautiful) and how to create beautiful paintings. The choric poets however lack not only knowledge of which poems are correct *qua* species of mimesis but also first-person authority on what they themselves intend to represent. In many cases they mix the basic elements of choric songs, i.e. rhythm and harmony, in a manner which makes their created whole incapable of representing anything. In other words, the choric poets fail to understand the representational function of choric poetry and thus do not treat it properly as a species of mimesis. They habitually know nevertheless both what metres and tunes produce rhythms and harmonies respectively, and how to produce rhythms and harmonies. Further, under appropriate guidance, their artistic intention can be directed towards producing songs which actually represent something, and in fact beautiful originals.

My chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, I examine the psychological effects of artistic mimesis on the souls of the young as described in the *Laws*. In the second, I analyse Plato's account of the correctness of artistic creation *qua* species of mimesis. In the third, I focus on the correctness of a work of art *qua* object of the intention of the artist. In the last section, I explore Plato's views about the artistic knowledge choric poets possess.

The Effects of Poetry on the Souls of the Young

In the *Republic*, 'mimesis' has a double meaning. On the one hand, Plato uses it to refer to a wealth of human activities and experiences ranging from mere behavioural imitation of (*homoia poiein*, 388a2) to psychological assimilation to (*aphomoioioun heautous*, 396a4) certain imaginative or real characters (the 'objects' of mimesis). Not only poets, or artists in general, but also their audience participate in this type of activities and experiences. For example, the poets psychologically assimilate to certain imaginative characters and express their psychological condition in verses. Their audience psychologically assimilates to the condition of these characters. To cover both the merely behavioural and the primarily psychological aspects of this kind of mimesis, I shall call it 'experiential' mimesis.

On the other hand, 'mimesis' refers to the relation between the product of the experiential mimesis of the artists and the imaginative or real characters which are the objects of their experiential mimesis. This is roughly a relation of representation. For example, a poem may be a representational mimesis of Achilles' anger against Agamemnon. Or a painting may be a representational mimesis of a chair. Plato focuses on this sense of representational mimesis in the tenth book of the *Republic*. He is interested primarily in the ontological and epistemological status of representational mimesis and considers it to be three-stages away from reality and virtue (*Republic* 599d2–e1).¹

Experiential mimesis has an important educational function. Those children who have the necessary natural endowment to become guardians of the perfect city should behaviourally imitate only virtuous acts and psychologically assimilate to only virtuous characters (395b8–d1; cf. 401b1–4). Behavioural imitation of virtuous acts eventually leads to the performance of virtuous acts in real life scenarios which in turn generates harmony in the soul (443c9–444a2 and 444c10–d1).

Further, through psychological assimilation to virtuous characters, the agent's soul is also appropriately moulded so as equally to achieve inner harmony. This is best exemplified by the effect of music on the souls of the young: 'musical rhythm and harmony enter deep into the soul and get hold of it most powerfully and bring good shape to it' (401d6–8). So, experiential mimesis of virtuous acts and agents leads to proper 'habituation' in virtue. Plato sums up the effects of experiential mimesis as follows: '... imitations [i.e. instances of experiential mimesis], if they continue from early childhood onwards, turn into habits and nature of one's bodily gestures and one's tone of voice and one's state of mind ...' (395d1–3).²

Given the importance of experiential mimesis for moulding the personality of the individuals Plato urges that poetry and in general any artistic creation which triggers relevant mimetic activities and experiences should have a specific content. The artists should not be allowed to represent anything of evil character (*kakoêthes*), wicked (*akolaston*), unfree (*aneleutheron*) and ugly (*aschêmon*). They should put only the image of the character of goodness (*tên tou agathou eikona êthous*) in

¹ For an analysis of Plato's use of mimesis in the *Republic* see, Asmis (1992), Belfiore (1984), Murray (1996) and the chapter of Marušič in this volume.

² I explore further the effects of the educational dimension of experiential mimesis in Hatzistavrou (2006) 106–113.

anything they create (401b1–7). The result of allowing only artistic creations which successfully represent the nature of beauty and good shape is that the young will live in an environment which provides them with only healthy aesthetic experiences (401c4–d4).

In the second book of the *Laws*, by contrast, Plato does not use the term ‘mimesis’ (in its experiential sense) to describe the habituation of the young in virtue. However, the importance of poetry and artistic activity in general for moulding the souls of the young is recognized in the *Laws*, too. The key concept in the *Laws* is that of habituation in the correct type of pleasures.³

Habituation in the correct type of pleasures is a necessary constituent of education. Education is defined as ‘the drawing and direction of children towards the doctrine which both the law states is correct and the fairest and eldest of men confirm to be correct on the basis of their experience’ (659d1–4). The drawing and direction of the soul of children is a kind of habituation which results in the children’s failing to find pleasure and pain in anything contrary to the law. They instead find pleasure and pain in accordance with the law and in the same things as the eldest do (659d4–e1). The best means for this type of habituation in the correct pleasures are the songs of the chorus which are really ‘incantations’ (*epôidai*) of the soul (659e1–2). Songs are pertinent to this stage of habituation because they are like games, and children are not ready for any other serious means of education (659e2–5). Choric poetry in particular is apposite for two reasons. On the one hand, it allows children to express two tendencies present in the nature of all young beings: the incessant bodily movement and the constant making of sounds (664e4–6; cf. 653d5–654a6). On the other, it puts these two natural tendencies in order. The ordering of these two tendencies is a unique feature of human nature (664e6–7). The order of the bodily movement is called ‘rhythm’, while the order of the vocal sounds is called ‘harmony’ (664e8–665a3).

Plato’s use of ‘order’ (*taxis*) is normative but not evaluative. He believes that there are rhythms which represent unfree characters and even that the choric poets may produce rhythms and harmonies which may fail to represent any human characters or states of mind (669b5–670a3). So, he believes that there are rhythms and harmonies which are not conducive to the habituation of the young in the correct pleasures. His theory seems

³ For Plato’s account of pleasure in the *Laws*, see Irwin (1995), 342–345, and Bobonich (2002), 350–373.

to be the following: Choric poetry creates pleasure by satisfying two natural tendencies of the children. The pleasure it creates is 'correct', i.e. in accordance with the law and with what the eldest believe, if the type of order it imposes on these two natural tendencies is correct, that is, if the rhythm and the harmony are constructed in accordance with the law and the views of the eldest. The law prescribes that the rhythms and harmonies include orderly bodily movements (*schêmata*) and orderly vocal sounds (*melê*) of temperate, courageous and, in general, good men (660a5–8).

The proper legislator will try to convince, or compel if he fails to convince, the poets to create choric poetry with such content (660a3–5). He will compel the poets to say that the good man is always happy and blessed and that the unjust always lives a life of misery (660e1–6). In general, he will compel them to say that the 'human' goods like health, beauty, etc. are bad for the unjust and really good only for the just (661a4–c5).⁴ And he will compel them to express such doctrines in the appropriate rhythms and harmonies (661c6–8).

There will be three choruses singing songs with such content for the sake of educating the young, the children's chorus, the chorus of those up to the age of thirty and, finally, the Dionysiac chorus of those between the age of thirty and sixty (664c4–d1). The members of this third chorus, since they are the eldest and the most decent, should choose for themselves the choric songs which they will sing. They follow two criteria in selecting the appropriate songs. The first is that the songs should provide the right incantations to the souls of the young. That is, they will select rhythms and harmonies which represent good characters. The second is that they will choose songs that they themselves find pleasure in singing (since not every rhythm and harmony, even though it may represent good characters, is appropriate for people of their age to sing) (670d4–671a1).

To recapitulate, the main function of choric poetry is to habituate the young in correct pleasures, that is, pleasures allowed by the law and the eldest. Choric poetry produces pleasure because it satisfies two natural tendencies of the young, their tendencies for incessant bodily movement and continuous production of vocal sounds. It habituates them in correct pleasures because the lawgiver and the members of the third chorus allow the poets to imitate only good characters and

⁴ These human goods are distinguished from the divine goods, that is, the virtues (see 631b6–d2).

present the good characters as living the happiest and pleasantest life. Habituation in the correct pleasures leads to virtue because one becomes assimilated (*homoioústhai*) to the character one enjoys coming in contact with (656b1–7) and, by singing in a chorus, one imaginatively comes in contact with the human characters the songs are imitations of (655d5–7).

Naturally, one expects that once one becomes assimilated to a certain character one will behave like that character. So, one who is habituated to correct pleasures becomes assimilated to virtuous characters and thus will behave like these characters. In this respect the psychology of one who is habituated in correct pleasures is similar to the psychology of one who is habituated in the correct type of mimesis. Plato—despite not spelling out the details of this mechanism in the *Laws* in terms of experiential mimesis—seems to describe a similar psychological mechanism of habituation in both the *Republic* and the second book of the *Laws*.

*The Standard of the Aesthetic Value of Poetry—Correctness
qua Species of (Representational) Mimesis*⁵

Thus far, I have described the educational function of choric poetry and the psychological mechanism through which it achieves its aims. The main task of the members of the third chorus is to select the songs which will serve this educational function. It is clear that they should choose songs which provide correct pleasures, that is, songs which are both pleasant and imitate good characters. In the process of explaining the conditions which a song should satisfy to provide correct pleasures, Plato gives an account of the aesthetic value of choric poetry.

Plato's account is obscure. He puts forward five theses about which it is unclear how they hang together. The first is that music should be judged on the basis of the pleasure it produces (658e6–7). The second is that the quality of music is determined by its correctness and not by its pleasure (668b4–6). The third is that the correctness of mimesis depends on whether the representation is proportional to the original (668b6–7). The fourth is that great music is music which bears a resemblance to the imitation of the beautiful (668b1–2). The fifth is that only musical representations of the virtue of the soul are beautiful (655b3–6).

If the first thesis implies that the beauty of a piece of music depends exclusively on its pleasure, then it is clearly inconsistent with the second

⁵ In the remainder of this chapter I refer to representational mimesis.

thesis. Similarly, if the third thesis implies that the correctness of mimesis depends exclusively on its being proportional to the original, then it is clearly inconsistent with the conjunction of the fourth and the fifth theses. For the conjunction of these theses entails that great music is only music which imitates the virtue of the soul. However, the third thesis allows that a piece of music may be of great aesthetic value even though it fails to represent a virtuous condition of the soul (provided that it accurately represents the condition of the soul it takes as its original).

The first two theses can be reconciled if we take the first to state only a minimal condition that any composition of choric poetry should satisfy if it is to have any aesthetic value. Choric poetry belongs to the type of activities which produce pleasure. And the production of pleasure is, as I have tried to explain, essential to its function. It is reasonable to assume that no composition which fails to produce pleasure, that is, fails to trigger the two natural tendencies of the young, has any aesthetic value. So, the capacity to produce pleasure to the uneducated souls of the young must be a minimal condition that any composition of choric poetry should satisfy. Unless a song produces such pleasure, it cannot be beautiful.⁶ Thus interpreted, the first thesis is not at loggerheads with the second. Though the production of pleasure is a minimal condition of aesthetic value, it is not a determinant feature of aesthetic value. The second thesis identifies the correctness of a composition of choric poetry as the determinant feature of its aesthetic value.

To see how the last three theses may be reconciled, we need to analyze both Plato's views about the beauty of choric poetry and his account of the correctness of mimesis. Plato stipulates: 'All gestures and tunes which pertain to the virtue itself or some likeness (*eikonos*)⁷ of the virtue of

⁶ This, I take to be the gist of the Athenian Stranger's remark that music should be judged on the basis of the pleasure it produces (though this cannot be the sole criterion of pleasure) (658e6–7). Note that, on the proposed interpretation, a) the pleasure with the value of which I am concerned is the pleasure felt by the young (and not the pleasure felt by the members of the third chorus) and b) the value of this type of pleasure depends on the judgement of the members of the third chorus.

⁷ England (1921, 281) takes the contrast between virtue itself and some likeness of it to be the contrast between the actual virtue in the original and the virtue exhibited in a representation of the virtue in the original. For example, the good movements and sounds of a brave man in battle are contrasted with the good movements and sounds of an actor representing a brave man in battle. I find this interpretation problematic. If correct, Plato would have produced a circular definition. He would in fact have said that what makes representations good is that they pertain to good representations. In the second book of the *Laws*, Plato wants to define which representations are good, that is, he wants to identify what makes the movements and sounds of an actor representing a brave man in

the soul or the body are beautiful, while all those which pertain to the vice [itself or a likeness of the vice of the soul or the body] are entirely the opposite' (655b3–6).⁸ Given that choric poetry imitates primarily characters rather than bodies, one can safely infer that beautiful songs are those which imitate good characters. So, the beauty of rhythm and harmony depends on their representational content, namely, on the type of characters they imitate. Plato's point is that songs are beautiful only if they represent virtuous states of the soul; if they represent vicious states, they are ugly.⁹

Let me now turn to Plato's views about the correctness of mimesis. Plato remarks that the value of anything that is accompanied by some sort of grace or charm (*charis*) depends on either its charm itself, or its correctness, or its benefit (667b5–7). He defines this charm as the pleasure this thing produces (667b9). He is not clear, however, about the distinction between correctness and benefit.

In his first two examples, 'correctness' and 'benefit' are treated as co-extensive. The first example is the value of food (667b8–c3). According to Plato, the correctness and benefit of food consists in its being wholesome

battle good. Given this aim, it is legitimate for him to say that what makes the movements and sounds of that actor good is that they represent the movements and sounds of a brave man (i.e. they pertain to virtue itself). But it is not legitimate for him to say that what makes the movements and sounds of that actor good is that they are good movements and sounds (i.e. they pertain to good representations). I suggest that a likeness (*eikôn*) of virtue itself is not an artistic representation of the virtue of an original but rather an approximation of perfect virtue. In this sense, Achilles' bravery, for example, is an approximation of true bravery given that, since Achilles is not fully wise, he cannot qualify as an example of perfect bravery. Achilles nevertheless qualifies as brave; so, a choric poet may praise and represent his bravery in a song. A song representing the bravery of Achilles may be beautiful, though not, of course, as beautiful as a song representing perfect bravery (i.e. that of a fully wise person). So, the contrast between virtue itself and a likeness of virtue is the contrast between perfect virtue and an approximation of perfect virtue.

⁸ This passage speaks against two basic contentions of Schipper's (1963) interpretation. The first is that the criterion of beauty is inherent in rhythms and harmonies; their beauty depends not on their relation to something external, i.e. the good characters they imitate, but on the order they exhibit, i.e. they are good rhythms and harmonies. The second is that music imitates the Form of Beauty rather than particulars like specific good characters. The passage makes clear both that, for Plato, the beauty of music depends on its relation to something external, i.e. what it represents, and that what it imitates is good psychological states and not the Form of Beauty.

⁹ It is not clear whether Plato treats the distinction between virtuous and vicious states of the soul as exhaustive. If he does not, the most plausible extension of his theory is that representations of states of the soul which are neither virtuous nor vicious are neither beautiful nor ugly.

(*hugieinon*). The second example is the value of lessons. Again, the correctness and the benefit of lessons consist in the same thing, i.e. the truth of the lesson (667c5–7).

Plato's use of the notion of benefit in this context is telling for two reasons. The first concerns the extensional equivalence between 'correctness' and 'benefit'. In both his examples Plato could have differentiated the extensions of 'correctness' and 'benefit'. In the first example, he could have made the benefit of food dependent on whether the body to whose health the food is conducive is that of a good man. In consistency with what he said about the value of human goods, he could have claimed that the food is not really beneficial if the agent is a bad man (in parallel with *Gorgias* 511c7–512b2). In the second example, he could have said that the lessons are beneficial only if they make the soul good. For example, trivial pieces of knowledge, like knowledge of the length of one's nails, or potentially harmful pieces of knowledge, like knowledge of how to go unnoticed when stealing, may not qualify as beneficial. He chose nevertheless to relate their benefit to their truth and not to the effect they have on the soul.

The second is that Plato fails to specify for whom a pleasant activity needs to be beneficial in order for it to be important. I suggest that this is because Plato uses in these examples a functional conception of benefit. On this functional conception of benefit, the benefit of X depends on whether X achieves the function of the kind Y of which X is a specimen. For example, if the function of food is the preservation of health, then the benefit of a dish of pasta, being a specimen of food, depends on whether it achieves the function of food, namely, that it preserves health.

Similarly, if the function of lessons is to help the student understand how things really are, then the benefit of a specific lesson depends on whether it enables the student to reach the truth. On this functional conception of benefit, the proper analysis of 'benefit' is not 'X is of benefit to person, or thing, Z (or x is beneficial for Z)' but rather 'X has benefit (or is beneficial) *qua* (being a specimen of) Y'.¹⁰

¹⁰ On the proposed theory of functional benefit or goodness, 'beneficial' and 'good' function as what Geach (1956) calls 'logically attributive adjectives'. Logically attributive adjectives, like 'big' and 'fat' are distinguished from 'logically predicative adjectives', like 'poisonous' and 'wooden'. 'This is a poisonous mushroom' is logically equivalent to the conjunction of 'this is a mushroom' and 'this is poisonous'. But 'this is a big mouse' cannot split into 'this is a mouse' and 'this is big'. In order for one to understand what it is for something to be big, one needs to know what sort of thing it is. This is why, in order to analyse correctly the meaning of logically attributive adjectives, one has to couple them with the relevant sortal.

The proposed functional conception of benefit is similar to the functional account of goodness presented in the first book of the *Republic* and the definition of 'beneficial' employed in the *Hippias Major*.¹¹ According to this functional account of goodness, the goodness of something depends on whether it performs its function (*ergon*) well. In the first book of the *Republic*, Plato defines the function of a thing as what this thing alone can produce or what this thing can produce in the best way (353a10–11). For example, the function of the eyes is what the eyes alone can produce, that is, seeing (352e5–6). Socrates apparently thinks that, when a thing performs its function well, then it is 'good' (*agathon*). He calls a soul which performs its function well, i.e. lives well, a 'good soul' (353e4–5). On this functional account of goodness, 'X is good' is not analysed as 'X is good for Z' but as 'X is a good specimen of its kind Y'. Something is a good specimen of its kind if it performs the function of the kind well.

'Beneficial' is analysed in a similar manner in the *Hippias Major*. In an attempt to define 'the fine', Socrates identifies it with the useful (*to chrêsimon*). For example, eyes are fine if they are capable of (*dunaton*) and useful for seeing (295c4–7). But to say that something is useful is to say simply that something is capable of performing a certain task (say, seeing) without implying that the relevant task is performed well. And a thing which does not perform its task well cannot be said to be fine.

This inadequacy of 'the useful' as the definiens of the fine leads Socrates to identify the fine with the beneficial (*ôphelimon*). He defines the beneficial as 'what is useful and capable of making something good' (296d8–9).

The notion of 'good' involved in the definition of the beneficial must be related to the functional conception of goodness as described in the first book of the *Republic*. The notion of function is implicit in Socrates' equation of 'the useful' with 'the capable' (*dunaton*). The equation of 'the useful' with 'the capable' does not mean that something is useful if it is capable of producing any sort of thing. For example, the eye is able to blink but it is not in virtue of its ability to blink that Socrates takes the

¹¹ I assume the authenticity of the *Hippias Major* (for a defence of which see Woodruff 1982b). But properly qualified my argument may have some appeal to even those who maintain that it is spurious. The basic premise of this qualified argument is that the author of the *Hippias Major* provides an analysis of the concept of the 'beneficial' related to Plato's functional analysis of the concept of goodness. Plato may operate with a similar analysis of the concept of the 'beneficial' when he treats 'benefit' and 'correctness' as extensionally equivalent in the *Laws*.

eye to be useful. Rather the eye is useful in virtue of its ability to perform the task which Socrates in the first book of the *Republic* identifies with the function of the eye, namely, seeing. Consequently, the definition of beneficial should be understood as follows: 'X is beneficial if it performs its function well'. For example, the eye is beneficial if it sees well. Again, the appropriate formula is not 'X is beneficial for someone or something Z' but rather 'X is beneficial *qua* specimen of kind Y'.

As I have argued in the previous section, the function of choric poetry, and of artistic creation in general, is to habituate the young in correct pleasures (i.e. those allowed by the law and the eldest). Plato claims that artistic creation in general should be judged not according to the pleasure it produces but according to its correctness. Do the criteria of correctness and benefit coincide in the case of artistic creation as it happens in the case of food and lessons? To answer this question we need to understand better how Plato conceives the nature of correctness as a criterion of aesthetic value.

Plato identifies a certain type of activity accompanied by charm whose only criterion of value is the pleasure it produces. It is mere 'play' (*paid-ian*), which has no real purpose; and thus it can neither benefit nor harm (667d9–e8). However, artistic creation is not like play. For Plato, it is mimesis, and its criterion of value is its 'correctness to what it represents in quality and quantity'.

Correctness is described both as 'equality' (*isotês*) in quality and quantity (667d5) and as 'proportionality' (*summetron*) (668a2). As we have seen, the most important artistic creation is the one which bears a resemblance to the imitation of the beautiful. So, the most important artistic creation must be one which bears the relevant relation of equality or proportionality to the beautiful.

The use of 'equality' and 'proportionality' suggests that correctness is basically an isomorphic relation. This isomorphic relation is a relation between two structures, the structure of the original (i.e. the thing imitated) and the structure of the copy (i.e. the thing that imitates). Think, for example, of a painting which is a two-dimensional representation of an original three-dimensional chair. If an isomorphic relation holds between the two, then there is one-to-one correspondence between the relevant spatio-temporal¹² parts of the original chair and its

¹² In the case of painting and sculpture, the isomorphic relations are spatiotemporal. However, they need not be spatiotemporal when the objects of representation are mental states.

representation. The edge of the left leg of the represented chair in the painting corresponds to the edge of the left leg of the original chair, the edge of the right leg of the represented chair in the painting corresponds to the edge of the right leg of the original chair and so on. Of course there is more to a two-dimensional representation of a chair than this basic spatio-temporal isomorphic relation. For example, there is correspondence between the shades of colour of the original chair and the shades of the colour of its representation. It is possible to think of this correspondence as an isomorphic relation of a different level but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore ways in which all representation may be reduced to isomorphic relations. It suffices for the purposes of this chapter that we understand Plato's notion of correctness of mimesis as a conjunction of isomorphic and 'thicker' representational relations (like correspondence of shades of colours) between an original and a copy.¹³

This analysis of the correctness of mimesis holds also for the correctness of choric poetry. We can think that a similar isomorphic relation exists between, say, the joy of a just man when he acts justly and its representation in verses and accompanying music. Components of his joy have isomorphic correspondence with rhythms and musical tunes. (In addition to this, there might be 'thicker' representational relations such as, for example, between the intensity of joy and the intensity of musical tones).

If this analysis exhausts the content of the correctness of mimesis, then, in the case of mimesis, 'correctness' and 'benefit' are not coextensive. A mimesis can be correct while not fulfilling its function which is to habituate the young in correct pleasures. For, on this analysis of correctness, a painting which has the appropriate isomorphic and thick representational relations to an ugly body can be correct. Or a song which has similar isomorphic and thick representational relations to the mental condition of a tyrant can similarly be correct. Neither such paintings nor such songs habituate the young to correct pleasures. For, as Plato's theory of habituation makes clear, not only are the young incapable of telling correct from incorrect pleasures but they seem to find pleasant whatever they come constantly in contact with. This is why the games and in general all the pleasant activities of children who are to exercise a certain craft when they grow up should revolve almost exclusively around that craft. By constantly engaging with it they develop a liking for it (643b4–d4).

¹³ I am indebted for discussions about isomorphism to Demetris Portides.

This holds not only for their developing a liking for a certain craft but also for developing a liking for virtue (643e3–6). So, if they see images of ugly people or listen to songs about criminal dispositions, they may start developing a liking for them. This is especially true in the case of songs of choric poetry since, as we have seen, they trigger the two natural tendencies of the young for incessant bodily movement and constant making of vocal sounds. Since a song about the criminal dispositions of a tyrant may trigger these two natural tendencies, the young might start developing a liking for such criminal dispositions.¹⁴

Furthermore, if correctness understood as the possession of the appropriate isomorphic and thick representational relations to an original were the only criterion of the greatness of a particular instance of mimesis, a painting which faithfully represents an extremely ugly face or a song which faithfully depicts the wickedness of a life of extreme crimes would be works of great art. However, this conflicts with Plato's claim that the greatest work of art resembles the imitation of the beautiful. The latter claim implies that in order for something to be a great work of art, it needs to be an imitation of something beautiful. But, obviously, ugly faces and a life of extreme crimes are not beautiful. For, as we have seen, Plato claims that those postures and tunes which belong to a bad condition of body or soul are ugly.

I suggest that we should understand the correctness of mimesis in a way which both allows that only the mimesis which achieves its function, i.e. habituates the young in correct pleasures, is correct and makes the notion of correctness of mimesis consistent with Plato's claim that the greatest work of art is an imitation of the beautiful. I propose that we ascribe to Plato the following account of the correctness of mimesis:

¹⁴ I am referring here not to songs which represent a tyrant as being happy or living a pleasant life but to songs which faithfully represent the wickedness of a tyrant's life. I think that the former songs would not qualify as having isomorphic and thick representational relations to the original on Plato's account. For, on Plato's account, the life of an evil person is neither happy nor (truly) pleasant. So, a song which praises the life of the tyrant misrepresents such life by ascribing to it features which it lacks, namely, happiness and true pleasantness. Such a song would say, for example, that the tyrant is happy when committing a crime. But no unjust deed has the property of being conducive to happiness. However, even though within the context of a song the tyrant is depicted as living with a tormented soul and in the end pays for his crimes, the mere depiction of his violent character can be harmful for children. It may get children to imitate it. The children may not understand why this kind of life is unhappy, and by engaging with artistic representations of it may develop a liking for it. They might start finding pleasure in the criminal dispositions which determine the character of the tyrannical life.

An artistic creation is correct *qua* species of mimesis if and only if

- a. there are isomorphic and thick representational relations between its structure and the structure of the original, and
- b. the original is beautiful.

Depending on the type of objects an artistic creation represents, the original may be a good condition of the body or a good condition of the soul.

On this account of aesthetic correctness, the correct artistic creation is also beneficial. Since it is mimesis of the beautiful and since only good characters are beautiful, it represents only good characters. So, it habituates the young in correct pleasures, which is the function of mimesis. This means that in the case of mimesis, as in the cases of food and lessons, the standards of correctness and benefit are the same.

We can think of aesthetic correctness as coming in degrees. On the one hand, there may be degrees of beauty of the original. For example, though two bodies may be beautiful, the one may be more beautiful than the other. Or, though two souls may both be courageous, the one may be more courageous than the other. On the other hand, there may be degrees of success of representation.

For example, though two paintings may be representations of the same beautiful body, the one may be a more successful representation than the other. Or though two songs may be representations of the same courageous soul, the one may be a more successful representation than the other. The greatest artistic creation is the one which most successfully represents the most beautiful original.

I will call this kind of correctness of artistic creation 'the correctness of artistic creation *qua* species of mimesis'. On this notion of correctness, a 'correct' work of art is not simply one which bears the appropriate isomorphic and thick representational relations to its original. It is one which, in addition, represents the 'right' original. The original is right only if it enables mimesis to achieve its function, i.e. to habituate the young in correct pleasures. To say that a work of art is 'correct *qua* species of mimesis' is in fact to say that it is a good specimen of its kind, namely, artistic mimesis.

Correctness qua Object of the Intention of the Artist

After Plato has argued that the artistic value of a piece of artistic creation depends on its correctness (*qua* species of mimesis), he proceeds to

analyse the kind of knowledge a correct judge of the aesthetic value of products of mimesis should have. I quote the relevant passage in full (668c4–669b3):

ATHENIAN: Then it seems that the person who is going to make no mistakes about it [i.e. the aesthetic value of a work of art] must know for each one of the artistic creations what it is. For unless one knows what it is, that is, what it intended to represent and of what entity it is really an image, one can hardly figure out whether the intention of the artist has been captured correctly or incorrectly.

KLEINIAS: Hardly. No doubt about it.

ATH.: Is the person who does not know its correctness able to figure out whether it is done well or badly? But I have not been very clear, let me make this point clearer.

KL.: How?

ATH.: If I am not mistaken there are myriads of images which appeal to our sight.

KL.: Yes.

ATH.: What happens, then, if one is ignorant about them as regards what body each one of them represents? Would one know which one of these is correctly done? I mean the following: does it preserve the number and the positions of the bodily parts, how many they are and how they fit together forming an appropriate structure? (The same thing holds for colours and shapes.) Or is it the case that all these are done confusedly? Do you think that one who is totally ignorant about what the represented creature is would ever be able to figure out all these things?

KL.: In no way.

ATH.: What then if we knew that what has been painted or sculpted is a man, and that all his parts and colours and shapes are captured artistically. Is it necessary that the person who already knows these things readily knows as well that thing, namely, whether the artistic work is beautiful or in which respects it is deficient in beauty?

KL.: In this case, stranger, all of us, so to speak, would know which paintings of animals are beautiful.

ATH.: Absolutely correct. So, isn't it the case that the person who is to be a prudent judge about each representation in painting and in music and indeed everywhere else must know three things: first he must know about any of the representations in words and tunes and rhythms what it is [that has been represented], then whether it has been represented correctly and then, thirdly, whether it has been done well or badly?¹⁵

¹⁵ ΑΘ. Δεῖ δὴ καθ' ἕκαστόν γε, ὡς ἔοικε, γινώσκειν τῶν ποιημάτων ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶν τὸν μέλλοντα ἐν αὐτῷ μὴ ἀμαρτήσεσθαι· μὴ γὰρ γινώσκων τὴν οὐσίαν, τί ποτε

According to this passage, the prudent judge of the aesthetic value of a work of art needs to possess three pieces of knowledge. The first piece of knowledge is knowledge of what the thing which the artist intends to imitate is. The second is knowledge of whether the artist has correctly represented the original he intended to represent. The third is knowledge of whether the representation produced is a good one, i.e. whether it is beautiful. On the basis of the argument of the previous section we may safely infer that the representation is beautiful only if it is a representation of the virtue of a body or a soul.

These three pieces of knowledge are related as follows:

Unless one knows what the thing the artist intends to imitate is, one does not know whether the work of art is correct in the sense of capturing the intention of the artist,

and

Unless one knows whether the work of art is correct in the above sense, one does not know whether the work of art is beautiful or not.

βούλεται καὶ ὅτου ποτ' ἐστὶν εἰκῶν ὄντως, σχολῆ τήν γε ὀρθότητα τῆς βουλῆσεως ἢ καὶ ἁμαρτίαν αὐτοῦ διαγνώσεται.

ΚΛ. Σχολῆ· πῶς δ' οὐ;

ΑΘ. Ὅ δὲ τὸ ὀρθῶς μὴ γινώσκων ἄρ' ἂν ποτε τό γε εὖ καὶ τὸ κακῶς δυνατὸς εἶη διαγνώναι; λέγω δὲ οὐ πάνυ σαφῶς, ἀλλ' ὥδε σαφέστερον ἴσως ἂν λεχθεῖη.

ΚΛ. Πῶς;

ΑΘ. Εἰσὶν δὴπου κατὰ τὴν ὄψιν ἡμῖν ἀπεικασίαι μυρία.

ΚΛ. Ναί.

ΑΘ. Τί οὖν εἴ τις καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἀγνοοῖ τῶν μεμμημένων ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶν ἕκαστον τῶν σωμάτων; ἄρ' ἂν ποτε τό γε ὀρθῶς αὐτῶν εἰργασμένον γνοίη; λέγω δὲ τὸ τοιόνδε, οἷον τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἐκάστων τῶν μερῶν τὰς θέσεις εἰ ἔχει, ὅσοι τέ εἰσιν καὶ ὅποια παρ' ὅποια αὐτῶν κείμενα τὴν προσήκουσαν τάξιν ἀπειλήφεν—καὶ ἔτι δὴ χρώματά τε καὶ σχήματα—ἢ πάντα ταῦτα τεταραγμένως εἰργασται· μὴν δοκεῖ ταῦτ' ἂν ποτε διαγνώναί τις τὸ παράπαν ἀγνοῶν ὅτι ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ μεμμημένον ζῶον;

ΚΛ. Καὶ πῶς;

ΑΘ. Τί δ' εἰ γινώσκωμεν ὅτι τὸ γεγραμμένον ἢ τὸ πεπλασμένον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, καὶ τὰ μέρη πάντα τὰ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ χρώματα ἅμα καὶ σχήματα ἀπειλήφεν ὑπὸ τῆς τέχνης; ἄρά γε ἀναγκαῖον ἦδη τῷ ταῦτα γνόντι καὶ ἐκεῖνο ἐτοιμῶς γινώσκειν, εἴτε καλὸν εἴτε ὀπρὸς ποτὲ ἐλλίπες ἂν εἶη κάλλους;

ΚΛ. Πάντες μεντὰν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, ὦ ξένε, τὰ καλὰ τῶν ζῶων ἐγινώσκομεν.

ΑΘ. Ὅρθότατα λέγεις. ἄρ' οὖν οὐ περὶ ἐκάστην εἰκόνα, καὶ ἐν γραφικῇ καὶ ἐν μουσικῇ καὶ πάντῃ, τὸν μέλλοντα ἔμφρονα κριτὴν ἔσεσθαι δεῖ ταῦτα τρία ἔχειν, ὃ τέ ἐστὶ πρῶτον γινώσκειν, ἔπειτα ὡς ὀρθῶς, ἔπειθ' ὡς εὖ, τὸ τρίτον, εἰργασταί τῶν εἰκόνων ἠτισοῦν ῥήμασί τε καὶ μέλεσι καὶ τοῖς ὀρθμοῖς;

Plato uses the example of painting to illustrate these conditionals. He holds that it is not possible for one to know what isomorphic and thick representational relations exist between the structures of the painting and the original unless one knows what the original is. He also holds that it is necessary (*anankaion*) that one who knows what isomorphic and thick representational relations exist between the structures of the painting and the original also readily (*hetoimôs*) knows whether the painting is beautiful or deficient in beauty (669a2–4). We can thus infer that the first two pieces of knowledge provide in fact an analysis of the third piece of knowledge. To know whether a painting has aesthetic value is to know what the painter intends to represent and to know whether he successfully carries out his intention.

Plato speaks of the 'correctness' of a work of art in capturing the intention of the artist (*orthotêta tês boulêseôs*, 668c7–8). This concept of correctness should not be confused with the concept of the correctness of the work of art *qua* species of mimesis (*mimêseôs . . . orthotês*, 668b6–7) which determines its aesthetic value. As I have argued in the previous section, in order for a piece of artistic creation to be correct *qua* species of mimesis, it is necessary that it represents an original which is beautiful (that is, it represents the virtue of body or soul). However, in order for a piece of artistic creation to be correct *qua* object of the intention of the artist, it suffices that it has the appropriate isomorphic and thick representational relations with the original which the artist intended to represent.

By 'object of the intention of the artist' I do not refer to an image in the mind of the artist. I refer to the original itself (an image of which may be in the mind of the artist while he is engaging in a process of artistic creation). I believe that, for Plato, it is the original (for example, Aspasia's body or Pericles' psychological character) which the artist intends to capture in his representation, not an image in his mind. At least this is how I understand Plato's account of how one should assess whether a certain painting correctly captures the intention of the painter at 668d5–669a6. There is no reference in this passage to the image of an original in the painter's mind. The prudent judge of the aesthetic value of a painting of Aspasia, for example, will assess whether the painting has the proper isomorphic and thick representational relations with the body of Aspasia—not with the image of Aspasia in the painter's mind. Assume that a painter has blurred vision and produces a painting which correctly captures his visual image of Aspasia but seriously misrepresents her actual body. I do not think that Plato would say that in this case

the painting correctly captured the intention of the painter. Rather the painter intended to represent Aspasia's body as it really is and thus his painting failed correctly to capture his intention.¹⁶

Though Plato's use of the term 'correctness' (*orthotês*) may create confusion, it is clear that the extensions of these two concepts are different. A painting which represents an ugly body may be correct *qua* object of the intention of the artist if it successfully represents the ugly body the painter intended to represent. But this painting is not correct *qua* species of mimesis since it does not represent a beautiful body. So, a piece of artistic creation may be correct *qua* object of the intention of the artist and lack any aesthetic value.¹⁷

Furthermore, in using these two concepts of correctness, Plato addresses different issues. He uses the concept of the correctness of a piece of artistic creation *qua* species of mimesis to clarify the ontological issue of what determines the aesthetic value of a work of art. The end to which the concept of the correctness of a piece of artistic creation *qua* object of the intention of the artist is employed is different. Plato intends to

¹⁶ What about an artist who intends to represent not Aspasia's body but how this body looks to someone with a blurred vision? It is safe to say that Plato does not have such cases in mind. We can only speculate about what his views on this matter would be. In this case, an artist would not intend to represent a human body but the content of a perceptual state. Plato could perhaps wish to deny that anyone who uses the normal representational means of painting in order to represent anything other than bodies is actually engaging in the artistic process of painting. So, considerations about whether what he produces correctly captures his intention *qua* painter simply do not arise. In fact such painters would resemble the choric poets who are carried away by their virtuosity and fail to represent anything real (see last section of chapter). These poets could also be thought of as attempting to represent images in their minds as opposed to real entities (see also notes 22 and 23).

¹⁷ Is it possible for a piece of artistic creation to be correct *qua* species of mimesis but to fail to capture the intention of the artist? Here is a possible case: Alcestis has a sister, Antigone. The two are similar like identical twins, apart from the fact that Alcestis has green and Antigone has blue eyes. Zeuxippus, while intending to make a portrait of Alcestis, mistakenly thinks that Alcestis has blue eyes and thus paints a portrait which looks like a faithful representation of Antigone. Can we say that in this case Zeuxippus' portrait is correct *qua* species of mimesis while it fails to capture the intention of the painter? Plato's views about mimesis and artistic intention in the *Laws* are not detailed enough to allow us answer this question. For a start, it is not clear how he would describe the intended object of the representation. If Zeuxippus was thinking of a face with blue eyes, is it true that he intended to represent Alcestis? Further, if we assume that Zeuxippus intended to represent Alcestis and thus that the portrait failed to capture Zeuxippus' intention, is Zeuxippus' painting fully intentional? Or else does Plato believe that it is necessary for a piece of artistic creation to be fully intentional in order to count as a species of mimesis?

clarify the epistemological issue of how one proceeds in ascertaining the aesthetic value of a piece of artistic creation. Judging whether a specific representation correctly captures the intention of the artist is a necessary step in this process.

To sum up, a piece of artistic creation may be correct in two ways. On the one hand, it may be correct *qua* species of artistic mimesis, that is, it may be a successful representation of a beautiful original. Its correctness *qua* species of mimesis is the standard of its aesthetic value. On the other, it may be correct *qua* object of the intention of the artist, that is, it may successfully represent whatever the artist intended to represent (irrespective of whether the intended object of representation is beautiful). Knowledge of whether a piece of artistic creation is correct in the latter sense is necessary for assessing its aesthetic value.

The Content of the Artistic Knowledge of the Choric Poet

Plato's discussion of the two senses of artistic correctness paves the way for his discussion of the content of the artistic knowledge of choric poets. He claims that the poets frequently lack knowledge not only of whether their songs are beautiful but of whether their songs correctly represent the objects of their artistic intention. The reason is that in many cases they are carried away by their virtuosity and construct songs which represent nothing. Plato contrasts them with the Muses who would never produce a song which has no representational value (669b7–670a3):

Choric poetry needs the most careful treatment of all [other] cases of artistic representation. For not only does someone who is mistaken about the aesthetic value of choric poetry suffer the greatest harm since he comes to have bad dispositions (*êthê*), but it (i.e. 'aesthetic value') is the most difficult to grasp because the choric poets are inferior to the Muses. The Muses would never make grave mistakes such as giving to a man's words the colour and tune of a woman, or combining the tune and postures of free men with the rhythms of slaves and unfree men, or accompanying free rhythms and postures with a tune or speech which is incompatible with the rhythms, or, what is more, ever combining in one and the same song the sounds of beasts, humans, instruments and every sort of noise, giving the impression that they are imitating a single thing. But the human poets, by entangling such things to a great degree and mixing them up without rationale (*alogôs*), produce an object of laughter for all those whose, as Orpheus puts it, 'ability for delight is in its most beautiful season.' For they see that all these things are in a confused state. Furthermore, the poets separate the rhythm and the postures from the tunes by putting

prose without music and rhythm¹⁸ in metres and by creating tunes and rhythmical bodily postures without words (*rhêmata*) (as a result of their accompanying the bodily postures with tunes played by kithara and aulos alone without words); in these creations the absence of speech (*logos*) makes it most difficult to understand what the rhythm and the harmony intend to represent and to which of the worthwhile representations they are alike. But one [who has good judgment] necessarily finds all instances of this artistic creation full of much barbarism. These creations are so much fond of speed, perfection of technical execution and the power to represent the sounds of animals that they use aulos and kithara on their own and not in order to accompany dance and song. But every use of these instruments on their own bespeaks lack of musical taste (*amouisia*) and is an exhibition of flashy virtuosity (*thaumatourgia*).¹⁹

Plato argues that in some cases it is exceedingly difficult to assess the aesthetic value of choric poetry because it is exceedingly difficult to identify the intended object of representation of choric poets. He singles out two types of case to illustrate the latter difficulty. In the first type of case the poets put together means of representation, for example, rhythms and harmonies, which, taken singly, may represent something in a way which generates a whole which fails to represent any real psychological state.²⁰ For example, a certain rhythm on its own may

¹⁸ *logous psilous* (669d7): I depart from England's suggestion that *psilous* here means only 'prose without music' (England (1921), 327).

¹⁹ ἔπειδὴ γὰρ ὑμνεῖται περὶ αὐτὴν διαφερόντως ἢ τὰς ἄλλας εἰκόνας, εὐλαβείας δὴ δεῖται πλείστης πασῶν εἰκόνων. ἀμαρτῶν τε γὰρ τις μέγιστ' ἂν βλάπτοιτο, ἢ ἢ κακὰ φιλοφρονοῦμενος, χαλεπώτατόν τε αἰσθῆσθαι διὰ τὸ τοὺς ποιητὰς φαυλοτέρους εἶναι ποιητὰς αὐτῶν τῶν Μουσῶν. οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖναί γε ἐξαιμάρτοιεν ποτε τοσοῦτον ὥστε ῥήματα ἀνδρῶν ποιήσασαι τὸ χρῶμα γυναικῶν καὶ μέλος ἀποδοῦναι, καὶ μέλος ἐλευθέρων αὐτῶν καὶ σχήματα συνθεῖσαι ῥυθμοὺς δούλων καὶ ἀνελευθέρων προσαρμόττειν, οὐδ' αὖ ῥυθμοὺς καὶ σχῆμα ἐλευθέρων ὑποθεῖσαι μέλος ἢ λόγον ἐναντίον ἀποδοῦναι τοῖς ῥυθμοῖς, ἔτι δὲ θηρίων φωνὰς καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ὀργάνων καὶ πάντας ψόφους εἰς ταῦτόν οὐκ ἂν ποτε συνθεῖεν, ὡς ἔν τι μιμούμεναι· ποιηταὶ δὲ ἀνθρώπινον σφόδρα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐμπλέκοντες καὶ συγκυκλώντες ἀλόγως, γέλωτ' ἂν παρασκευάζουσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅσους φησὶν Ὀρφεὺς λαχεῖν ὥραν τῆς τέρψιος. ταῦτά γε γὰρ ὀρώσι πάντα κυκώμενα, καὶ ἔτι διασπῶσιν οἱ ποιηταὶ ῥυθμὸν μὲν καὶ σχήματα μέλους χωρὶς, λόγους φιλοῦς εἰς μέτρα τιθέντες, μέλος δ' αὐτῶν καὶ ῥυθμὸν ἀνευ ῥημάτων, ψιλῆ κιθαρίσει τε καὶ αὐλήσει προσχρόμενοι, ἐν οἷς δὴ παγγάλεπον ἀνευ λόγου γιγνόμενον ῥυθμὸν τε καὶ ἄρμονίαν γιγνώσκουσιν ὅτι τε βούλεται καὶ ὅτω ἔοικε τῶν ἀξιολόγων μιμημάτων· ἀλλὰ ὑπολαβεῖν ἀναγκαῖον ὅτι τὸ τοιοῦτόν γε πολλῆς ἀγροικίας μεστόν πᾶν, ὅπόσον τάχους τε καὶ ἀπταισίας καὶ φωνῆς θηριώδους σφόδρα φίλον ὥστ' αὐλήσει γε χρῆσθαι καὶ κιθαρίσει πλην ὅσον ὑπὸ ὄρχησίν τε καὶ ᾠδῆν, ψιλῶ δ' ἑκατέρω πᾶσά τις ἀμουσία καὶ θαυματουργία γίγνοιτ' ἂν τῆς χρήσεως.

²⁰ The relevant means of representation may be wholes of rhythms and harmonies like paeans and dithyrambs (see, Plato's discussion of the predicament of his contemporary Athenian music at 700a7–701b4). In this case, Plato's point is that mixtures of paeans

represent the psychological state of a free man and a certain harmony the psychological state of a slave. But if these two are mixed together in a song, then the resulting mixture fails to represent anything, since there is no single psychological condition which is a defining feature of both a free man and a slave.²¹

In the second type of case the poets put together rhythms and harmonies which fail to represent anything even when taken singly. Plato provides the following example. He describes a song which consists of a series of (a) rhythmical bodily movements which are not accompanied by either melodies or words in metre, (b) words in metre which are not accompanied by either harmonies or rhythmical bodily movements and (c) harmonies which are not accompanied by either rhythmical bodily movements or words in metre. The absence of language in (a) and (c) makes it almost impossible for the listener to understand what the poets intend to represent with the rhythms or the harmonies they use.

In both types of case the poets seem to pay insufficient attention to the representational function of choric poetry. In the first type of case the poets may be accused of unforgivable carelessness in producing representations. But in the second type of case it is doubtful whether the poets even aim at producing representations (of any real entities).²² Rather they seem to be carried away by their virtuosity and possibly a desire to show off and forget that they are involved in a mimetic activity whose function is the creation of representations (of real entities), and in fact of beautiful ones. So, we should not think of these cases as cases in

and dithyrambs, for example, fail to have the relevant representational function, though paeans and dithyrambs taken singly may succeed in representing relevant psychological conditions (cf. note 21).

²¹ What about the representation of the psychological condition of someone who experiences an inner psychological conflict and possesses fully neither the character of a free man nor the character of a slave? Our text does not deal with this issue and we must be content with some speculation about Plato's reply. I think that Plato would deny that a mixture of a rhythm representing the psychological condition of a free man and a harmony representing the psychological condition of a slave would correctly represent the intended object of the representation of the poet. Rather, if one wanted to capture correctly such a complex psychological state one needs to create a means of representation which includes rhythms of both free men and slaves and harmonies of both free men and slaves mixed in an appropriate manner. In any case, however, if my argument in the section on the standard of the aesthetic value of poetry is correct, Plato would prevent a poet from depicting such a character, as the resulting representation would lack any positive aesthetic value and would be harmful to the young.

²² In this case, the poets can be said to represent at most an image in their mind which fails to represent any real entity in the world (cf. note 16).

which the poets intend to represent a human character through means of representation which make it hard to identify their intended object of representation. Rather, there appears to be no intended object of representation as the poets are producing mere exhibitions of virtuosity and do not engage in a proper mimetic activity.²³

It is quite clear that in these cases the poets lack first-person authority on whether their songs correctly capture the objects of their artistic intention, because they do not intend to represent anything. But does Plato believe that it is necessary for the poets to have this kind of first-person authority if good choric songs are to be produced? Plato claims that 'it is pretty much necessary that the poets know about harmony and rhythm' (670e6). Does this required knowledge about harmony and rhythm include first-person authority on the correctness of their own songs *qua* objects of their artistic intention?

I think it does not. The content of the poets' knowledge about rhythms and harmonies must be equivalent to the content of the knowledge about rhythms and harmonies that the members of the Dionysiac chorus should possess (670b1–2). The content of this knowledge concerns the kinds of rhythms and harmonies which fit together (670b3–6). For example, someone who possesses this kind of knowledge knows with which harmony a certain rhythm fits and is able to assess whether a poet has correctly fitted together rhythms and harmonies in their songs.

How would the members of the Dionysiac chorus explain the fittingness of some rhythms with some harmonies? Plato does not directly address this question. However, his theory that all art is representation and his account of the two ways in which his contemporary poets were inferior to the Muses indicate what his answer may be. It is plausible to

²³ At 700a6–701b4, Plato provides an account of how the Athenian music of his day has reached a rather chaotic state by departing from the musical norms of the Muses and allowing the poets to mix different musical styles. The predicament of the Athenian music of his day exemplifies both types of case in which products of musical creation have no representational function (i.e. fail to represent real psychological states). He mentions, for example, mixtures of laments with hymns, or paeans with dithyrambs (700d6–7); these are cases in which the resulting whole fails to represent any psychological states though each of the parts mixed, when taken singly, could represent certain actual psychological states. And he also mentions the use of the lyre to imitate tunes of pipes (d6–7), which is best understood as a case of a tune which even taken singly fails to represent any psychological state (the intended object of imitation is a tune and not a psychological state). Plato stresses that the poets of his day claim that the artistic value of music depends not on its correctness (*qua* species of mimesis) but on the pleasure it provides to the audience (700e1–4).

assume that, for Plato, the relevant fittingness between some rhythms and harmonies is explained by reference to the representational function of the resulting mixture of rhythms and harmonies, that is, the capacity of these mixtures to represent human psychological conditions. What differentiates these mixtures of rhythms and harmonies which fit together from those which do not is the fact that only the former can successfully represent human psychological conditions.

So, it is plausible to assume that the members of the Dionysiac chorus are able to identify the correct mixtures of rhythms and harmonies on the basis of their knowledge of which mixtures of rhythms and harmonies can successfully represent human psychological conditions. But this latter knowledge presupposes that they possess knowledge of the corresponding originals, that is, the nature of the various human psychological conditions. As we have seen in the previous section, for Plato, this in fact involves knowledge of whether the psychological condition which is the original of a relevant song is a virtuous condition of the soul. The members of the Dionysiac chorus rely on knowledge of the nature of human psychological conditions to determine the aesthetic value of songs.

So, the members of the Dionysiac chorus ultimately base their knowledge of which rhythms and harmonies fit together on their knowledge of which psychological conditions of the soul are virtuous. But, obviously Plato does not ascribe such important ethical knowledge to the poets. If the content of the poets' knowledge about harmonies and rhythms is equivalent to the content of the knowledge of which rhythms fit with which harmonies, then on what do the poets base their knowledge?

I suggest that, for Plato, the poets base their knowledge on tradition and experience. Under the guidance of the members of the Dionysiac chorus and the law, they will continuously choose the correct mixtures of rhythms and harmonies and they will develop some kind of relevant habitual knowledge. This habitual knowledge will enable them to identify and use in their songs those rhythms and harmonies which fit together. But they will lack any proper understanding of why these mixtures of rhythms and harmonies fit together.

If my interpretation is correct, then the poets of Plato's day are in a serious predicament. They lack both understanding of which human psychological conditions are virtuous and any sort of reliable guidance by either some wise people or the law which would enable them to choose rhythms and harmonies with representational value. No wonder, then, that they so often go astray in their art.

A further implication of my interpretation is that the poets need not possess any first-person authority on whether their songs are correct *qua* objects of their artistic intention. This is true not only for those poets contemporary with Plato but also for those who would compose choric poetry under the guidance of the members of the Dionysiac chorus and the law. For someone to possess first-person authority on whether his song correctly captures the original that he intends to represent, he needs to know what the original is. But the poets under the guidance of the members of the Dionysiac chorus and the law need not possess such knowledge in order to produce good songs.²⁴

The lack of the relevant first-person authority differentiates the artistic knowledge of the poets from the artistic knowledge of the painters. The latter possess knowledge of the virtue of their originals, for example, they know how a human body looks and when it looks nice.²⁵ Thus, they can judge whether what they have produced correctly captures the original they intended to represent. They can tell whether they have succeeded in capturing the beauty of a human body in their painting. But the poets may not be able to judge whether they have correctly captured a courageous or just character in their songs. For they do not know what courage or justice in the soul are.

To sum up, in order for good songs to be produced, the poets need only possess habitual knowledge of which rhythms fit with which harmonies. They need not have first-person authority on whether their songs correctly represent the originals they intended to represent. And of course they need not know whether their songs are actually beautiful, i.e. whether they correctly represent virtuous conditions of the soul. By contrast, in order for good songs to be produced, the members of the

²⁴ Ferrari (1989, 107) writes: ‘The poet ought certainly to know more than the rote-learning public, for he must at least intend an object for the images that he makes; and if he is to avoid the dramatic hybrids that now bedevil the stage, he should attain to the second level, that of correctly matching image to object. But he can do without reaching the third level, without being able to judge whether or not his image is “fine”. If Ferrari means that the poet ought to be able to have first-person authority on whether he ‘correctly matches image to object’ in order for good songs to be created even under the guidance of the members of the Dionysiac chorus and the law, then I disagree with him. Further, if my interpretation is correct, then all that is required in order to avoid the pitfalls of poetic extravaganza that Plato complains about is the acquisition by the poets of habitual knowledge of which rhythms fit with which harmonies (and a political system which will secure that they will never act against their habitual knowledge).

²⁵ Plato assumes that we are all more or less familiar with the conditions of the body which are the representational content of painting, and thus we have knowledge of what is a beautiful condition of the body (669a5–6) (see also Ferrari (1989), 105).

Dionysiac chorus need to possess knowledge of which rhythms fit with which harmonies, based on their understanding of the nature of human psychological conditions. And they also need to know which songs are beautiful.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LEGISLATION AS A TRAGEDY: ON PLATO'S *LAWS* VII, 817B–D

SUSAN SAUVÉ MEYER

During a discussion of tragedy and comedy in Book VII of Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian envisages an emissary of tragic poets who inquire whether they will be admitted into the city for whom he and his two interlocutors are devising legislation (*L. VII*, 817a2–6). In his famous reply, the Athenian appropriates the title of tragedian for himself and his two co-legislators:

O excellent strangers, we are ourselves to the best of our ability composers of the finest and best tragedy. For our entire constitution (*politeia*) has been fashioned as an imitation (*mimêsis*) of the finest and best life—which in our view at any rate is the truest tragedy. We are poets working in the same genre as yourselves, rival artists with you in the contest for the finest drama, which true law alone is capable of bringing to perfection. Such at any rate is our hope. So don't expect that we shall so readily allow you a stage, give you a public forum to bring in fine-voiced actors to drown us out, and set you loose to harangue our women, children and population at large on the very practices that we ourselves discuss, but on which your claims are different, indeed usually contradictory, to our own.

We and any city would be mad if we allowed you to do this without the officials first determining whether your compositions are auspicious and fit to be presented in public. Therefore, O scions of the gentle muses, you must display your songs alongside ours for the officials to compare. If yours turn out to contain the same or a better message than our own, we shall grant you a chorus, but otherwise my friends, we cannot.¹

(*L. VII*, 817b1–d8)

¹ “ὦ ἄριστοι” φάναί, “τῶν ξένων, ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν τραγωδίας αὐτοὶ ποιηταὶ κατὰ δύναμιν ὅτι καλλίστης ἅμα καὶ ἀρίστης· πᾶσα οὖν ἡμῖν ἡ πολιτεία συνέστηκε μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου, ὃ δὴ φαμεν ἡμεῖς γε ὄντως εἶναι τραγωδίαν τὴν ἀληθεστάτην. ποιηταὶ μὲν οὖν ὑμεῖς, ποιηταὶ δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐσμὲν τῶν αὐτῶν, ὑμῖν ἀντίτεχνοί τε καὶ ἀνταγωνισταὶ τοῦ καλλίστου δράματος, ὃ δὴ νόμος ἀληθῆς μόνος ἀποτελεῖν πέφυκεν, ὡς ἡ παρ’ ἡμῶν ἐστὶν ἐλπίς· μὴ δὴ δόξητε ἡμᾶς ὀφειδίας γε οὕτως ὑμᾶς ποτε παρ’ ἡμῖν ἐάσειν σκηνάς τε πῆξαντας κατ’ ἀγορᾶν καὶ καλλιφώνους ὑποκριτὰς εἰσαγαγόμενους, μεῖζον φθεγγομένους ἡμῶν, ἐπιτρέψειν ὑμῖν δημηγορεῖν πρὸς παῖδάς τε καὶ γυναῖκας καὶ τὸν πάντα ὄχλον, τῶν αὐτῶν λέγοντας ἐπιτηδευμάτων περὶ μὴ τὰ αὐτὰ ἄπερ ἡμεῖς, ἀλλ’ ὡς τὸ πολὺ καὶ ἐναντία τὰ πλεῖστα. σχεδὸν γάρ τοι κἂν μαινοίμεθα τελέως ἡμεῖς τε καὶ ἅπανα ἢ πόλις, ἠτισοῦν ὑμῖν ἐπιτρέποι δορᾶν τὰ νῦν λεγόμενα, πρὶν

When the hypothetical tragedians pose their query, the issue of whether tragic poets will be allowed to practice freely in the city is not an open question. In keeping with the general theme of *Laws* VII that the music and dance allowed into the city of Magnesia must be strictly controlled (*L. VII*, 796e4–802e11; cf. II, 656c1–657b8; IV, 719b4–d1) the Athenian has only just finished elaborating the criteria that must be met by the tragic performances to be permitted in the city (*L. VII*, 814d8–816d2). The point of introducing the hypothetical tragedians is therefore not to answer their question but to emphasize the Athenian's affirmation that the legislators are rival tragedians to the poets.

This striking claim, more often quoted than analyzed, has struck some readers as the key to understanding Plato's philosophical writings.² Following Friedländer, many take the passage to affirm that Plato's dialogues supplant the compositions of the tragic poets as the 'truest tragedies,'³ or that the 'philosophical life' is superior to that of the typical tragic hero.⁴ However, the text of our passage makes it clear that it is not the philosopher but the legislator who lays claim to the title tragedian. It is neither Plato's dialogues nor the philosophical life that is here classified as tragic (the latter is not a subject of the discussion in the *Laws* in any case), but rather the body of legislation being devised for the city of Magnesia.⁵ We would do well, therefore, to interpret the famous affirmation in the light of the theory and practice of legislation that constitutes the project of the *Laws*, with special attention to the norms governing education (*paideia*) outlined in Book VII, in whose context the Athenian makes this remark.

κοῦναι τὰς ἀρχὰς εἴτε ῥητὰ καὶ ἐπιτήδεια πεποιήκατε λέγειν εἰς τὸ μέσον εἴτε μή. νῦν οὖν, ὃ παῖδες μαλακῶν Μουσῶν ἔκγονοι, ἐπιδείξαντες τοῖς ἀρχουσι πρῶτον τὰς ὑμετέρας παρὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας ᾠδὰς, ἂν μὲν τὰ αὐτὰ γε ἢ καὶ βελτίω τὰ παρ' ὑμῶν φαίνεται λεγόμενα, δώσομεν ὑμῖν χορὸν, εἰ δὲ μή, ὃ φίλοι, οὐκ ἂν ποτε δυναίμεθα.”

² Kuhn (1941–1942) argues that Plato's own philosophy is continuous with the tragic tradition. Goldschmidt (1948), 19 expounds Plato's views on tragedy as a key to illuminating the central inspiration of Platonism. Gadamer (1980), 71 takes the passage to be Plato's indication that his own writings 'are in jest' and not to be taken seriously.

³ Friedländer (1969), Vol. 1, 122–123; Cameron (1978); Benardete (2000), 221–222.

⁴ Halliwell (1984), 58 and (1996), 338–339, followed by Janaway (1995), 181.

⁵ In this I agree with Mouze (1998), 81–82 and (2005), 332–333 and with Jouët-Pastré (2006), 139, n.2. My interpretation is largely complementary to those of these two scholars; however, I disagree with Mouze on some points of detail (for example, her claim that the *politeia* is like a tragedy insofar as it incorporates necessity and spectacle—Mouze (1998), 90, 98–100) and I point to the relevance of issues in the theory of legislation and *paideia* not mentioned in either account.

It is important to appreciate that in calling his legislation a tragedy, the Athenian is making a metaphor. The point is easy to miss because the terms ‘tragedy’ and ‘tragic’ have acquired in the present day a primary evaluative meaning; to call something a tragedy is to classify it as a great loss, horrifyingly bad, perhaps also inescapable, and so forth—as in the notion of a tragic death or a tragic turn of events. In the 4th century BCE, by contrast, ‘tragedy’ (*tragôidia*) even in its extended senses, makes reference to a genre of theatre. The relevant features picked out by calling something a tragedy vary considerably from context to context. For example, one may liken a piece of discourse to a tragedy on the grounds of its elevated style, as when Socrates teases Meno for preferring a ‘tragic’ (read: ‘theatrical’) account of vision (*Men.* 76e3). Alternatively, it may be a text’s pretension to seriousness, or the sensational nature of the tale it tells that invite the label ‘tragic.’⁶ Nowhere among Plato’s contemporaries is it obviously used in the modern sense of calamitous or lamentable. Halliwell has argued that it is in fact Plato who originates the use of ‘tragedy’ and its cognates in something like the modern sense.⁷ Without taking a stand on this broader claim, my aim in this paper is to establish that this is not how Plato uses the term in our passage. The Athenian is not saying that the legislation he is devising is ‘tragic’ in the sense that it is, for example, unfortunately necessary given the human condition.⁸ He is saying rather that in constructing a *politeia* (constitution) for the Magnesians, he is practicing in the same genre as the tragic poets. In order to understand the import of this remark, therefore, we must appreciate the nature and social significance of the genre as Plato knows it.

Tragedy is one of two forms of theatrical drama prevalent in Plato’s Athens, the other being comedy. It develops into its characteristic form in Athens in the fifth century BCE and continues to have a high public profile and great prestige in the fourth century. Unlike theatre or cinema today, tragedy in Plato’s Athens was neither mere entertainment nor an elite art form. Tragedies were performed as part of grand public religious festivals in Athens—the most important of which was the City Dionysia,

⁶ Demosthenes 18.13, 19.189, 21. 149–150; Wilson (1996), 317–321, 331 n.58; Halliwell (1996), 333–337, 348 n.3.

⁷ Halliwell (1996), 336–340; he interprets *Phlb.* 50b1–4, *Crat.* 408b–d and *Phd.* 115a5–6 as using ‘tragic’ in the modern sense, but does not take the Athenian’s invocation of ‘tragedy’ at *Laws* VII, 817b2–5 in this way.

⁸ As suggested by Laks (2000), 267; (2005), 30–31.

which attracted visitors from around the Greek-speaking world.⁹ At this annual multi-day festival public officials made sacrifices and offerings on behalf of the city, tribute from subject states was on ostentatious display, and the sons of Athenians fallen in battle were presented to the public—all before an assembled audience of Athenian citizens and honoured guests ranged around the theatre according to their civic affiliations (sections for each deme) and social importance (more influential personages to the front) and comprising a very large proportion of the citizenry at large. Later days of the festival were devoted dawn to dusk to the performances of tragedies, comedies, and dithyrambs.¹⁰ The plays were staged not merely as performances but as competitions between rival playwrights, with the winners chosen by judges selected from the audience.

The competitive context of tragic performance is clearly reflected in our passage from the *Laws*, where the Athenian portrays the three legislators for Magnesia and the tragic poets as ‘rival artists ... in the contest for the finest drama’ (*L. VII*, 817b7–8). Indeed, as Morrow has pointed out, the requirement to ‘display your own songs alongside ours’ for comparison by city officials (817d4–5) replicates the procedure by which tragedies were in fact selected for performance at the festivals.¹¹

A further feature of Classical tragedy that is significant to Plato’s project in the *Laws* is its choral nature. The staging of a traditional Greek tragedy is in large part a matter of choral performance—ensemble song and dance performed in closely choreographed movements by the twelve (later fifteen) member chorus. The chorus is the dominant agent in tragic drama, and it is from these singers, called *tragôidoi* (literally goat-singers), that tragedy gets its name.¹² The centrality of the chorus in tragedy explains why the Athenian refers to the compositions of the tragic poets as ‘songs’ (*L. VII*, 817d5). The competition between tragedies at the Dionysian festivals was conceived of as a contest between different choruses. Indeed, to finance and stage a tragedy is, in the standard phrase,

⁹ On the City (or ‘great’) Dionysia, see Pickard-Cambridge (1962) and (1988) and Goldhill (1990).

¹⁰ Dithyrambs (of which very few texts remain) were performed by large (fifty-member) choruses—with each Athenian deme entering one chorus into the competition (Pickard-Cambridge (1962), 38–43).

¹¹ Morrow (1960), 375.

¹² The significance of the goat is disputed, but it is speculated that the genre out of which Athenian tragedy developed was performed by a chorus dressed in goat skins or that a goat was the prize for the winning chorus. See Pickard-Cambridge (1962); Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1972), and Winkler (1990b).

to 'equip a chorus.' Thus the Athenian articulates the issue of whether the tragic poets will be permitted to mount their plays as whether 'we will grant you a chorus' (L. VII, 817d7).

It is as a species of choral performance in a ritual context that tragedy requires strict state supervision, according to the legislative principles articulated by the Athenian in *Laws*. The legislator's primary goal, he insists in Book I, is to inculcate virtue (*aretê*) in the citizens (L. I, 630c2–4, 631b3–d1). This involves cultivating (*paideuein*) the citizens' feelings of pleasure and pain so as to accord with (*sumphônein*) wisdom (L. II, 653a5–c4). The primary vehicle by which this effect is to be achieved, according to the Athenian, is participation by citizens in choral performance at festivals to the gods (L. II, 653c7–654a7). He develops this account of *paideia* (education) at length in Book II and returns to the subject in Book VII. Choral performance, he claims, trains the souls of the citizens to delight in and approve of the actions and character of a good person (L. II, 659d1–660a8; 669b5–c3). Incorporating both song and dance, it straddles the two traditional divisions of *paideia*. As dance, it is a species of physical training (*gymnasia*). Indeed, it is in the context of a discussion of *gymnasia* in general (L. VII, 813a5–817e3) and dance in particular (814d8–816e10) that the Athenian lays claim to the title 'tragedian.' As song, choral performance falls into the category of *mousikê* (music or poetry). Our natural affinity to the rhythm and melody that adorn poetic compositions make it an especially effective medium for driving home a message (L. II, 653d7–654a7; 663e8–665c7)—hence the importance, in the Athenian's eyes, of censoring the content of that message.

When he returns to the topic of choral performance in Book VII (798e4–800b2) it is by stressing its context in religious ritual that he underscores the need to censor its content:

ATHENIAN: Suppose that after a sacrifice and burnt offering have been made in a lawful manner some private person standing next to the altar and the offerings—a son or a brother for example—should break out in a stream of blasphemy. Wouldn't his utterance fill the father and other relatives with dread and evil foreboding?

CLINIAS: How could it not?

ATHENIAN: Well in our part of the world this is what happens in practically every city: An official performs a public sacrifice and right away a chorus comes up—not only one but a whole crowd of them—and standing not far from the altar, or sometimes even right next to it, they fill the offering with utter blasphemy, plucking at the souls of the listeners with language and rhythm and bewitching melodies. The

chorus that is most effective at moving to tears the audience that has just performed the sacrifice is the one that wins the prize.¹³

(L. VII, 800b8–d5)

The Athenian is clearly referring to the performance of tragedies and dithyrambs¹⁴ at the Dionysian festivals. Indeed, he is singling out for criticism the feature of such performances canonized by Aristotle as the signature effect of tragedy: moving the audience to tears.¹⁵ In denouncing this attitude as blasphemous (for reasons that we will explore later), the Athenian here repudiates the very feature of tragedy reflected in the modern conception of the tragic as lamentable and calamitous. Therefore, when he likens his legislation to a tragedy later on in Book VII (again in the context of the need to censor choral performance) it is unlikely that he is intending to classify it as ‘tragic’ in this sense.

In any case, the Athenian is quite explicit in our passage about his reason for calling the joint legislative undertaking a tragedy: the constitution (*politeia*) they are constructing is ‘an imitation of the finest and best life’, which in his opinion makes it the ‘truest tragedy’ (L. VII, 817b3–5). The salient feature of tragedy on this view is neither its plot structure nor the attitudes expressed in its most famous exemplars but its subject matter: a depiction of the best life. This criterion of the tragic reflects the standard demarcation at the time between comedy and tragedy: within the broader genus of choral drama, tragedy is the genre that depicts good and worthy

¹³ θυσίας γενομένης καὶ ἱερῶν καυθέντων κατὰ νόμον, εἴ τῷ τις, φαμέν, ἰδία παραστάς τοῖς βωμοῖς τε καὶ ἱεροῖς, ὕδς ἢ καὶ ἀδελφός, βλασφημοὶ πᾶσαν βλασφημίαν, ἄρ’ οὐκ, ἂν φαίμεν, ἀθυμίαν καὶ κακὴν ὄτταν καὶ μαντείαν πατρὶ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἂν οἰκείους φθέγγοιτο ἐντιθείς;

{ΚΛ.} Τί μὴν;

{ΑΘ.} Ἐν τοίνυν τοῖς παρ’ ἡμῖν τόποις τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν ταῖς πόλεσι γινόμενον ὡς ἔπος εἶπεν σχεδὸν ὀλίγον πάσαις δημοσίαι γὰρ τινα θυσίαν ὅταν ἀρχή τις θύσῃ, μετὰ ταῦτα χορὸς οὐχ εἷς ἀλλὰ πλῆθος χορῶν ἦκει, καὶ στάντες οὐ πόρρω τῶν βωμῶν ἀλλὰ παρ’ αὐτοὺς ἐνίοτε, πᾶσαν βλασφημίαν τῶν ἱερῶν καταχέουσι, ῥήμασί τε καὶ ῥυθμοῖς καὶ γουδεστάταις ἁρμονίαις συντείνοντες τὰς τῶν ἀκροωμένων ψυχάς, καὶ ὃς ἂν δακρῦσαι μάλιστα τὴν θύσασαν παραχρῆμα ποιήσῃ πόλιν, οὗτος τὰ νικητήρια φέρει.

¹⁴ Accompanied by the flute, dithyrambs had the reputation of being highly emotional (Pickard-Cambridge (1962), 9–10). Aristotle speculates that tragedy developed out of the earlier genre of dithyramb (*Poet.* 1449a9–11). The genre itself underwent considerable variation and innovation starting in the late fifth century, including the increasing use of the ‘mixed’ musical styles so deplored by Plato (*Rep.* III, 397a1–e2; *L.* II, 669c3–e4). His antipathy to the flute and to the ‘lamenting’ modes (*Rep.* III 398e1–5, 399d3–e4) also seem to be directed against dithyramb (Pickard-Cambridge (1962), 38–43).

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452a2–3, b30–1453a12. Plato too notes the role of pity and fear in tragedy (*Phdr.* 268c5–d2).

people, while comedy represents low life. Thus epic shares with tragedy the feature of representing good and noble types—hence Socrates' classification of Homer as a tragedian in *Republic* X on the grounds that he depicts heroes (*Rep.* X, 605c10–d1), and the Athenian's distinction between comic and tragic dance on the grounds that the former imitates the movements of 'inferior' people (*L.* VII, 814e4; cf. 816d3–6).¹⁶

That the dramas of the tragic poets are imitations is a familiar doctrine in Plato's *Republic*. As Socrates famously points out in Book III, narrative literature describes people's characters and deeds from a third person perspective, while the first-person voice of dramatic literature makes the recitation of such literature an imitation (*mimêsis*) of those characters and deeds (*Rep.* III, 392c11–394b1). The Athenian in *Laws* agrees. Choral performances, he pronounces in Book II and reaffirms in Book VII, are 'imitations of characters in all kinds of actions and circumstances' (*L.* II, 655d5–6; cf. VII, 798d8–9).¹⁷

The notion of a *politeia* as an imitation is also one that Plato has developed at length in another context. In the *Statesman*, the Eleatic Stranger proclaims that the only genuine *politeia* (here used in the sense of 'constitution') is ruled by expertise; all other varieties are imitations of this one (*Stsm.* 293c5–e5; 297c1–4).¹⁸ Constitutions in which the rulers are subject to the laws are better imitations of the true one, while those in which the rulers are free to disregard the laws imitate it 'for the worse' (*Stsm.* 293e3–5, 300c1–301a3). Here *Republic* X's notion of imitation as falling short of reality is at play (*Rep.* X, 597e1–598c4). The worst imitations of the true *politeia* are so far from the original that their officials are in fact better characterized as pretenders and imposters (*Stsm.* 301b10–c4, 303b8–c5).

The reason why the law-governed *politeia* is only an imitation of the true *politeia* and not itself the best, the Eleatic Stranger explains, is that political knowledge (like most forms of practical expertise) cannot be perfectly captured in general principles (*Stsm.* 294a10–c4). Although the expert ruler, and hence the genuine *politeia*, will use laws as a matter of practical necessity (general rules being the most efficient way of

¹⁶ Cf. Aristotle *Poet.* 1448a16–18, 25–27, 1449a32–34. Thus Plato's contemporary Isocrates uses the verb 'tragôidein' for the memorialization of the deeds of great men (*Antidosis* 15.136, *Euagoras* 9.6; Wilson (1996). 329 n.42).

¹⁷ Aristotle follows Plato in taking imitation of action to be the feature that distinguishes drama per se from epic and other literary forms (*Poet.* 1448a26–28).

¹⁸ I have found no other commentator who notes the relevance of these texts in *Statesman* for the interpretation of the famous claim in *Laws* 817b–d.

communicating guidance or commands to the citizenry—*Stsm.* 294d3–295b5), rigid adherence to such rules will not invariably yield expert results. An expert ruler would be able to recognize cases where the general principles do not apply, and make exception to the laws accordingly (*Stsm.* 295b10–296a2, 300c9–d2). Making exceptions to the rules without expertise, however, is a mark of great folly (*Stsm.* 300d4–e2) and the signature of the pretender and imposter. Thus adherence to the rule of law is a safety measure to be adopted by cities where political expertise is lacking.

On these points the Athenian in the *Laws* is in complete agreement with the Eleatic Stranger. Although political expertise cannot be fully captured by general principles (*L. IX*, 875c3–d2), the rule of law must be adhered to scrupulously in polities where such expertise is lacking (*L. IX*, 856b1–5; 874e8–875d5). Like the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman*, the Athenian uses the vocabulary of imitation to make this point in Book IV of the *Laws*. The best run cities, he says, are imitations (*mimêmata*) of the mythical city ruled by divine wisdom (*L. IV*, 713a9–b4), and it is by adhering to the rule of law that we imitate the life lived in that city (*L. IV*, 713e6–714a2).¹⁹

Of course, we imitate it better to the extent that our laws are better—hence the Athenian’s claim in our passage that ‘true law alone is capable of bringing to completion (*apotelein*)’ (*L. VII*, 817b8) the imitative project of the *politeia*.²⁰ The best laws are those that the expert rulers themselves would devise (*Stsm.* 300c5–7). However, the very condition that mandates the rule of law is the absence of such expertise:

But as things are, when it is not the case—as we say—that a king comes to be in cities as a king-bee is born in a hive, one individual immediately superior in body and in mind, it becomes necessary—as it seems—for

¹⁹ By contrast, Mouze construes the imperfection inherent in the Magnesian *politeia*’s imitative status as based on its ‘second best’ status in relation to the *Republic* (Mouze (2005), 344–345). While it is no doubt in comparison with the *Republic* that the legislation for Magnesia is said to be second best at *Laws* V, 739a6–e7 and VII, 807b3–c1 the Athenian does not use the vocabulary of imitation in these contexts to describe the latter’s shortcomings, and it is specifically the laws concerning private property and the family that he singles out as falling short of the ideal. At *L. IX*, 875d2–5, by contrast, it is the rule of law that renders the Magnesian *politeia* “second best” in relation to the ideal (rule by expertise). This is the relevant imperfection invoked in the *Statesman*, and I submit that it is the one relevant to the imitative status of the Magnesian *politeia* in the *Laws*.

²⁰ The verb (*apo*)*telein* is regularly used by Plato to characterize imitation (e.g. *Stsm.* 288c3, *L. II*, 668b6–7). By contrast, see Mouze (1998), 87–88 and (2005), 346, where the coercive aspect of law is invoked to explain how law ‘brings to completion’ the drama of the *politeia*.

people to come together and write things down, chasing after the traces of the truest constitution.²¹ (*Stsm.* 301d8–e4; trans by Rowe 1995)

Legislation in the real world must be devised without the benefit of an easily identifiable political expert whose credentials are as self-evident as those of the queen bee in the hive. And this is exactly the position in which the three legislators in the *Laws* find themselves. They are ‘chasing after the traces of the truest constitution’ in the sense that they are seeking to formulate the best legislation they can, while at the same time admitting that they fall short of the expertise of the true statesman. Their legislation is at best provisional, a sketch to be filled in, elaborated, and corrected by subsequent generations of legislators (*L.* VI, 769b6–e9).²² The three founding legislators are imitating to the best of their ability (*kata dunamin*—*L.* VII, 817b2) the expert legislator’s composition, and the qualification with which they end their boast—‘or such at any rate is our hope’ (*L.* VII, 817b8–c1)—registers an appropriate modesty in the face of the enormity of the task.

The constellation of views we have just examined in *Statesman* and *Laws* imply that the Magnesian *politeia* is an imitation of the best *politeia*, and that its legislators are attempting to imitate the legislative activity of the expert statesman. One might object that neither of these notions amounts, strictly speaking, to the Athenian’s claim that the *politeia* itself is ‘an imitation of the best life’ (*L.* VII, 817b3–4). After all, it is the law-abiding citizens, not the *politeia*, who are said to imitate the best life at *Laws* IV, 713e6. To be sure, the statutory legislative project embarked upon by the three legislators comprises a fairly detailed script for the lives of the Magnesians. Every milestone of life (birth, upbringing, marriage, death) is the subject of legislation, as are the activities (meals, bedtimes, pastimes) that articulate the round of the day and the military exercises and religious festivals that structure the round of the year—right down to the content, rhythms and melodies of the songs and dances to be performed at these festivals. In this respect, the body of legislation is like the script of a theatrical drama. Nonetheless, one might object, the legislation is not a script in the same sense as the text of a tragedy is.

²¹ Νῦν δέ γε ὁπότε οὐκ ἔστι γινόμενος, ὡς δὴ φαμεν, ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι βασιλεὺς οἷος ἐν σμήνεσιν ἐμφύεται, τό τε σῶμα εὐθύς καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν διαφέρων εἰς, δεῖ δὴ συνελθόντας συγγράμματα γράφειν, ὡς ἔοικεν, μεταθέοντας τὰ τῆς ἀληθεστάτης πολιτείας ἕχνη.

²² On the prospects and criteria for successful legislation in the *Laws*, see Meyer (2006).

While the laws tell a citizen what actions he must perform, they do not constitute the text of his performance.²³ A choral performer who recited the text of legislation would be imitating not the life of a citizen but the activity of legislation.

We might articulate this objection by invoking the criterion of *mimêsis* invoked in *Republic* III, according to which imitative texts are written in the first person (*Rep.* III, 392d5–393c9). Legislation, by contrast, issues its directives in the third person ('Let no citizen ...' 'Any citizen who ... is to ...'). It is significant to note, however, that the 'first person' criterion of *mimêsis* is not invoked in the *Laws*. The extended discussion of imitation in Book II treats it as an attempt not at impersonation (for which the first person voice is necessary) but at accurate representation. The Athenian makes it clear that it is the representational aspirations of a work, not its form or diction, that make it imitative.²⁴ In a passage echoed by his later claims about *mimêsis* in our passage in *Laws* VII, he claims that 'an imitation is correct ... if it completely captures (*apoteleitō*) the proportions and qualities of its model.' (*L.* II, 668b6–7; cf. *L.* VII, 817b8).²⁵ The model in question in the case of tragedy, the Athenian affirms, is the best life. It is therefore as attempts to delimit the best life that the tragedies of the poets count, in the Athenian's view, as 'imitations of the best life.' Indeed, they could hardly count as dramatizations of the best life, given the amount of disaster and misfortune in the typical tragic plot. (As Ruth Padel observes: 'tragedy specializes in things gone wrong.')²⁶ The view of the best life presented in these plays is not enacted by the actors, but expressed by the characters and chorus as they react to the fortunes of the protagonists. In Halliwell's memorable phrase, theatrical tragedy affirms certain values 'in what it mourns and what it grieves.'²⁷ The depiction the good life expressed in tragic theatre is therefore no more 'imitative' than that expressed in the legislation for Magnesia.

Here it is useful to keep in mind that both legislation as conceived of by the Athenian and the dramas written by the tragic poets involve a

²³ Thus Taylor's translation of '*mimêsis*' at 817b4 as 'dramatization' (endorsed by Patterson (1982), 78) is misleading. The Athenian is not claiming that the *politeia* of Magnesia is a dramatization of the best life.

²⁴ On *mimêsis* in *Laws* II, see Ferrari 1989.

²⁵ μιμήσεως γὰρ ἦν, ὡς φαμεν, ὀρθότης, εἰ τὸ μιμηθῆν ὅσον τε καὶ οἶον ἦν ἀποτελοῖτο.

²⁶ Padel (1992), 4.

²⁷ Halliwell (1996), 338.

significant amount of commentary on action. Indeed, this is largely the function of the chorus in Greek tragedy; much of the ‘activity’ of the drama is the chorus’ reaction to and commentary on the actions and fortunes of the protagonists. Legislation too, as the Athenian wishes to reform it, contains commentary on right and wrong. The Athenian insists in Book VI that proper legislation must contain persuasive preambles to recommend the actions being commanded (*L. VI*, 719e7–720e5), a point he reiterates in Book VII (822d2–823a6). The prelude to a properly formulated statute will therefore be not unlike a chorus’s commentary on the actions of a tragic protagonist.

The contest between the tragedies of the poets and those of the legislators is to be decided, in the Athenian’s view, according to how well each achieves the imitative aspirations of the genre. Only if the tragedies of the poets give the same (or a better) account of the good life as the *politeia* of Magnesia will they be permitted to be performed in that city (*L. VII*, 817d6–8; cf. IX, 858c10–859a1). Plato’s reader here is no doubt intended to be reminded of the similar boast made by the Athenian a little earlier in Book VII. After the Athenian notes the educational perils inherent in the traditional practice of memorizing and reciting large amounts of poetry without vetting the content (*L. VII*, 810e6–811b5), Cleinias asks him to provide a paradigm by which the officials of Magnesia can evaluate the poetry on offer (*L. VII*, 811b6–c2).²⁸ He replies, with some self-consciousness and embarrassment, that the very dialogue in which the three of them are engaged constitutes such a paradigm:

Looking back over the discussion with which we have occupied ourselves since dawn, which seems to me to be not without divine inspiration, it struck me in its entirety as very much like a kind of poetry. It is no wonder that a feeling of great pleasure came over me as I contemplated our discussion as a whole, for of all the discourses (*logoi*) I have listened to and learned from, whether in poetry or in the plain speech I’m now using, this one struck me as evidently the most respectable and suitable for the young to hear. So I cannot give a better paradigm than this to the guardian of the laws in charge of education.²⁹ (*L. VII* 811c6–d6)

²⁸ The question is given an alternative introduction at *L. VII*, 810b4–c4 under the heading of ‘teaching not set to music’ (*mathēmata alura* 810b4–5).

²⁹ νῦν γὰρ ἀποβλέψας πρὸς τοὺς λόγους οὗς ἐξ ἔω μέχρι δεῦρο δὴ διεληλύθαμεν ἡμεῖς—ὡς μὲν ἐμοὶ φαινόμεθα, οὐκ ἄνευ τινὸς ἐπιπνοίας θεῶν—ἔδοξαν δ’ οὖν μοι παντάπασι ποιήσει τινὶ προσομοίως εἰρησθαι. καὶ μοι ἴσως οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν πάθος ἐπῆλθε, λόγους οἰκείους οἷον ἀθρόους ἐπιβλέψαντι μάλα ἡσθίηναι· τῶν γὰρ δὴ πλείστων λόγων οὗς ἐν ποιήμασιν ἢ χύδην οὕτως εἰρημένους μεμάθηκα καὶ ἀκήκοα, πάντων μοι μετριώτατοί γε εἶναι κατεφάνησαν καὶ προσήκοντες τὰ μάλιστα ἀκούειν

In contrast with his later claim that the Magnesian *politeia* sets the standard to be met by poetic compositions (*L.* VII, 817d6–8) the Athenian here attributes paradigm status to the larger discourse in which that legislation is embedded (in fact, to the dialogue that Plato is writing!). This difference notwithstanding, the two claims are closely related. After all, the *politeia* identified as a paradigm at *Laws* VII, 817d6–8 is explicitly constructed as an application of the principles articulated in the non-legislative parts of the dialogue. The dialogue as a whole is a proper paradigm for the evaluation of literary content for the same reason that its legislative content is a successful ‘imitation’ of the best life. As he puts the point later in Book IX, the legislator’s advice on how to live is the standard by which the tragedian’s advice is to be evaluated (*L.* IX, 858c10–859a1).

The Athenian’s point here at *Laws* VII, 811c6–d6 is not that the dialogue *Laws* (unadorned with the beauties of rhythm, meter, diction and melody) should be read to the young,³⁰ but rather that its message or content (the *logoi* it contains—*L.* VII, 811d2) is what they should hear in the works of the poets. Its doctrines are the ones that the teachers of the young must understand and approve (*L.* VII, 811e5–812a2), and only those pieces of literature whose content agrees with them shall make it onto the approved curriculum (*L.* VII, 811d7–e5).

The proposal at *Laws* VII, 811c8–10 that the dialogue *Laws* is a poetic composition, divinely inspired in the manner of the poets, is clearly ironic.³¹ Even setting aside its unwieldy length and obviously unfinished organization (which make it among the least ‘poetic’ of Plato’s works) the *Laws* is avowedly lacking the order and adornment characteristic of music: rhythm, diction, and melody. The Athenian aptly classifies its diction as ‘plain speech’ (*L.* VII, 811e3)—that is, ‘written down in the manner of ordinary speech unadorned by rhythm and melody’ (*L.* VII, 810b6–7). Plato is keenly aware of the aesthetic power of rhythm and melody. Indeed it is on this basis that he identifies choral performance by citizens as the premier vehicle of *paideia* (*L.* II, 653c7–654a7, 672c1–673b4). It is because of the enormous power of the aesthetic component of literature—the ability of rhythm and melody to deliver a message effectively and imprint it in our souls (*L.* II, 659a4–660a8, 673a3–5)—

νέοις. τῷ δὴ νομοφύλακι τε καὶ παιδευτῇ παράδειγμα οὐκ ἂν ἔχοιμι, ὡς οἶμαι, τούτου βέλτιον φράζειν.

³⁰ By contrast, Laks (2000), 266 interprets it as inviting schoolmasters to read parts of the *Laws* to their students.

³¹ On the alleged divine inspiration of the poets, see also *L.* IV, 719c1–d1, *Ion* 533c9–535a2, *Men.* 99c7–d5, *Phdr.* 245a1–8, 265b1–c3.

that the Athenian insists on controlling the message that it delivers. Thus even if the teachings contained in the dialogue *Laws* are what the Magnesian citizens must learn and incorporate into their souls, this educational goal will not be achieved without the vehicles of rhythm and melody, and no one is more aware of this than Plato.

Similarly ironic, or at any rate deliberately provocative, is the Athenian's boast in our text in Book VII that the *politeia* articulated in the *Laws* is an instance of 'the truest tragedy' (*L. VII, 817b5*). The *politeia* of Magnesia will function no better than the dialogue *Laws* as a text for choral performance, and the Athenian (or at any rate Plato) can hardly have intended his boast to be interpreted in this way. Indeed, that Plato finds it necessary for the Athenian to explain the sense in which he takes his legislation to be a tragedy suggests that there is no obvious interpretation of his boast on which his intended audience would be expected to understand it. The interpretation he offers is, in fact, explicitly marked as unorthodox:

Our entire constitution (*politeia*) has been fashioned as an imitation (*mimesis*) of the finest and best life—which in our view at any rate (*ge*) is the truest tragedy³² (*L. VII, 817b3–5*)

The restrictive '*ge*' at 817b5 marks this conception of the tragic as one his audience would not find obvious.

We are now in a position to appreciate just how controversial this conception of tragedy would be for Plato's readers. The sole criterion for the tragic that the Athenian invokes, 'imitation of the best life', deliberately strips away the 'aesthetic' elements of tragic composition—the beauty of language, meter, and melody that contribute the lion's share of its aesthetic power and audience appeal and are the basis on which other kinds of discourse might be classified as 'tragic'.³³ As we have seen, he even strips away tragedy's 'dramatic' character, and pares it down simply to its core message—an account of the best life.³⁴ On such a conception of the tragic, any ethical treatise would count as a tragedy!

Why then does Plato have the Athenian lay claim to the title 'tragedian' on behalf of the legislator? His introduction of the hypothetical tragedians as 'our so-called serious poets' (*L. VII, 817a2–3*) provides the

³² πᾶσα οὖν ἡμῖν ἡ πολιτεία συνέστηκε μίμησις τοῦ καλλίστου καὶ ἀρίστου βίου, ὃ δὴ φάμεν ἡμεῖς γε ὄντως εἶναι τραγωδίαν τὴν ἀληθεστάτην.

³³ As at *Men.* 76e3.

³⁴ As Jouët-Pastré (2006), 142 and Mouze (1998), 93 and (2005), 336 point out, we are reminded here of a similar reduction of tragedy to a 'discourse' in *Gorgias* 502b1–c8.

key. Tragedy in Plato's time was generally viewed as the premiere genre that pronounced on serious or weighty subjects (*ta spoudaia*)—a conception preserved in Aristotle's definition of the genre (*Poet.* 1449b24–25). The Athenian himself makes it clear that he interprets the tragedies of the poets as discourses on the best life. So too did many of Plato's contemporaries. Tragedies—especially those of the revered fifth-century playwrights—were widely respected as sources of wisdom, with status and authority comparable to that of scripture in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Fourth-century orators regularly quoted from famous tragedians,³⁵ and canonical copies of the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were deposited in the *polis* archive.³⁶ In this social setting, to appropriate the title tragedian is to lay claim to the status of respected authority on 'serious' matters.³⁷

The question of what is truly 'serious' (*spoudaion*), and the distinction between being serious (*spoudazein*) and playing or jesting (*paizein*) is a major theme of the Athenian's in the *Laws*.³⁸ Most people draw the distinction incorrectly, he insists in Book VII. He shocks his interlocutors by stating that 'human affairs are not worth taking very seriously' (*L. VII, 803b4*). It is rather the divine we must take seriously:

We must be serious about (*spoudazein*) things that are serious (*spoudaion*), but not about things that are not. While god is by nature worthy of a good person's entire serious attention (*spoudê*), a human being (as we said earlier) is fashioned as a kind of plaything (*paignion*) of god—and this is in fact the best thing about him.³⁹ (*L. VII, 803c2–6*; cf. *Rep. X, 604b12–c1*)

In calling a human being the 'plaything' (*paignion*) of the gods, the Athenian underlines humanity's insignificance in the face of the divine; he also explicitly refers back to his famous metaphor in Book I, where he proposes that human beings are puppets (*thaumata*) of the gods (*L. I, 644d7–8*) and explains the puppet metaphor by describing the two different kinds of 'strings' that move us. On the one hand, there is the pull of pleasure and pain and our expectation of these (*L. I, 644c6–d1*); this is the

³⁵ Wilson (1996), 312, 325 n.10.

³⁶ Plutarch, *Vit. Orat.* 841 ff.; Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 100 n.2, Wilson (1996), 316, 328 n.34, n.35.

³⁷ This has been noted also by Patterson (1982), 79; Rowe (1994), 136 and developed at length by Jouët-Pastré (2006), 140–147.

³⁸ For a discussion of the motif throughout the *Laws*, see Jouët-Pastré (2006).

³⁹ Φημί χρῆναι τὸ μὲν σπουδαῖον σπουδάζειν, τὸ δὲ μὴ σπουδαῖον μὴ, φύσει δὲ εἶναι θεὸν μὲν πάσης μακαρίου σπουδῆς ἄξιον, ἄνθρωπον δὲ, ὅπερ εἶπομεν ἔμπροσθεν, θεοῦ τι παίγνιον εἶναι μεμηχανημένον, καὶ ὄντως τοῦτο αὐτοῦ τὸ βέλτιστον γεγόνεναι.

‘iron string’ in our nature (645a3). On the other hand, there is the ‘golden’ pull of divine reason as expressed in law (644d1–3), which we must follow always (645a1–b8). This explains why ‘true law’ alone is able to ‘bring to perfection’ (*apotelein*) the human drama (L. VII, 817b8); insofar as we conduct our lives according to the reason embodied in *nomos*, we are following the divine element in our nature. In accord with our status as playthings of the gods, the Athenian continues here in Book VII, human beings should ‘spend their lives playing at the best possible pastimes’ (L. VII, 803c6–8). In contrast with the usual assumption that pastimes or play (*paidia*) are what we engage in when we have leisure from the serious business of life, the Athenian insists that appropriate leisure activities are in fact the most serious pursuits of all (L. VII, 803d8–804b4). With a play on words exploiting the similarity between play (*paidia*) and education (*paideia*) (L. VII, 803d5–6), he explains that the correct way to live is to spend one’s life in the activities of *paideia*:

A person must spend his life engaging in a certain kind of play (*paizonta tinas paidias*): sacrificing and singing and dancing, so as to be able to win the favour of the gods, ward off enemies, and win battles. The sort of songs and dances he should perform in order to do this have already been sketched.⁴⁰ (L. VII, 803e1–6)

As the excursus on the specialized function (*ergon*) of the citizens makes clear, the leisure from work enjoyed by the citizens of Magnesia is to be devoted to the cultivation of virtue (L. VII, 806d7–808c6; cf. VIII, 846d2–7). Virtually every day of the calendar is to be occupied with the military exercises and religious festivals at which the citizens will engage in choral performance (L. VIII, 828a1–d3, 829b2–830e2). To live out one’s life as a ‘puppet of the gods’ (L. II, 644d7–8) on this view, is therefore to devote one’s life to the choral performances that constitute *paideia* (VII, 803e1–2).

Such choral performance is the most serious business of life because *paideia*, as the Athenian has explained at length, is the process whereby the ‘iron strings’ of pleasure and pain are molded to follow that of reason (L. II, 653a5–b4, 659d1–6), which is the divine aspect in ourselves (L. IV, 713e8–714a2). In devoting our lives to the cultivation of the divine element in ourselves, we ‘take seriously’ the only element in ourselves

⁴⁰ παίζοντά ἐστιν διαβιωτέον τινὰς δὴ παιδείας, θύοντα καὶ ἄδοντα καὶ ὀρχούμενον, ὥστε τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἴλεως αὐτῷ παρασκευάζειν δυνατόν εἶναι, τοὺς δ’ ἐχθροὺς ἀμύνεσθαι καὶ νικᾶν μαχόμενον· ὅποια δὲ ἄδων ἂν τις καὶ ὀρχούμενος ἀμφοτέρω ταῦτα πράττοι, τὸ μὲν τῶν τύπων εἴρηται καὶ καθάπερ ὁδοὶ τέμνηται καθ’ ἕξ ἰτέον.

that is worth taking seriously and thus become like the gods, insofar as we are able (*L. VII*, 792d5; cf. *IV*, 716c1–d4).

This conception of what is truly serious is reflected in the lesson that the legislator is supposed to teach the citizens about the relative priority between what the Athenian calls ‘divine goods’ and ‘human goods’ (*L. I*, 631b3–d6). The divine goods are the virtues of character, all of which are informed by wisdom. The human goods are health, strength, wealth and the like. These ‘depend on’ the divine goods (*L. I*, 631b7–8) in the sense that it is only as informed by the virtues of character that the human goods are good; thus it is only wealth ‘accompanied by *phronêsis*’ (*L. I*, 631c5) that counts as a human good. The divine goods are the most important ones, and a person who secures them will be happy (*L. II*, 660e2–661d4) and thus have no grounds for lamentation.

This lesson from the legislator is quite the opposite to the message conveyed by the tragedies of the poets in Plato’s day. The weeping and lamentation evoked by the tragedies of the poets respond to misfortunes in the human goods—as in the reversal of fortune or downfall that is typical of the tragic plot. Thus the tragic choruses of the poets encourage citizens to take the human goods seriously in their own right—as Socrates complains in *Republic X*, 604b9–c3. This is the ‘blasphemy’ inherent in the tragic choruses maligned by the Athenian at *Laws VII*, 800c5–d5, and it is the basis of the Athenian’s subsequent claim that the poets promulgate doctrines contrary to those of the Magnesian legislators (*L. VII*, 817c6–7). The Athenian’s goal in laying claim to the title tragedian is to repudiate this message, while at the same time displacing the moral authority of the poets who deliver it.⁴¹ If tragedy is the genre that pronounces on serious subjects, then the truest tragedy is the composition whose pronouncements on these subjects are most correct. In Plato’s view, the true tragedian is not the poet who encourages the human propensity to lament our misfortunes, but the legislator who teaches us that the only misfortune that can befall a person is to fail to achieve virtue.⁴²

⁴¹ I follow Janaway (1995), 181 in using the term ‘displacement’.

⁴² I would like to thank Pierre Destrée and Charles Kahn for helpful suggestions and comments.

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