TALKING ABOUT HOMER: POETIC MADNESS, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE BIRTH OF CRITICISM IN PLATO'S ION

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for Charles Bernheimer

> Es ist eine schöne Narretei, das Sprechen; damit tanzt der Mensch über alle Dinge.
>
> Also sprach Zarathustra

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Plato formulated a sustained theory of imitation, the figure of the mad poet has had a singular impact on the Western understanding of poetry. Socrates' postulate that "some of the highest goods have come to us by way of madness" (νῦν δὲ τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνεται διὰ μανίας, *Phaedrus* 244a),[1] i.e., that a state of profound self-alienation can produce the most meaningful expressions of human existence, has proven so pervasive that it has by now become a cliché, informing readings of poetry as well as psychiatric practices and the marketing strategies of popular culture.[2]

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1 Hackforth 1952.

2 The eccentric rock star, in this regard, is as much heir to the tradition of poetic madness as the painter Walla, a psychiatric inpatient, whose works command high prices on the art market.

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This paper will analyze Plato's concept of poetic madness as it emerges in the short dialogue *Ion* where it serves to differentiate the procedures of philosophy and poetry: the controlled and repeatable labor of thought versus the spontaneous production of a text that is by definition unique. The *Ion*, I will further suggest, uses poetic madness to establish the necessity of criticism as a discipline different from poetry. While the dialogue does not explicitly describe the field of criticism as a concrete practice, it argues for the necessity of a discipline devoted to the knowledge of poetry, a discipline that would operate under the aegis of philosophy rather than of poetry.[3]

On a general level, Plato's writings on madness and reason pertain to the ancient question of the status of revelation as a source of knowledge. This study, more narrowly, is specifically concerned with the role that madness plays in what Socrates calls the "the ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry. On philosophy's side, more than on literature's side, this quarrel has been a struggle for identity, marked by an anxiety of contamination. But what exactly would constitute such contamination?

The most prominent question at the beginning of Western philosophy, or rather at the moment of its consolidation *as* philosophy with Socrates, is the question τί ἐστι, what is . . . ?, replacing, in Heidegger's powerful analysis, the question of being itself. In arguably its most significant form, it concerns the nature of philosophy itself. What is philosophy? Socrates attempted many answers, and it is a matter of judgment whether any one can be privileged over the others. But one has

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3 For all the prominence of mad poets in the history of Western culture, very little attention has been paid to the extent to which the notion of poetic madness is fundamental to the self-conception of Western *philosophy*. Foucault's seminal work in *Madness and Civilization* has spawned various studies devoted to the historical, political, socio-cultural, and ideological aspects of the ever-changing perceptions of madness in general, and has informed a good number of critical case studies devoted to mad poets. Almost all of these books, however, are characterized by a curious omission. Taking the alliance of poetry and madness for granted, they rarely stop to consider or question the theoretical assumptions that underlie the concept of poetic or philosophical madness. The term madness, for all its historically and ideologically determined heterogeneity, has a constant element. As Louis A. Sass remarks, "[t]he madman is a protean figure in the Western imagination, yet there is a sameness to his many masks. . . . Nearly always insanity has been seen as what one early-nineteenth-century alienist called 'the opposite to reason and good sense, as light is to darkness, straight to crooked'" (Sass 1992.1). It is also correct, however, as Sass' study itself proves extensively for the period of Modernism, that the Western imagination has at times privileged darkness over light, spirals over straight lines, and madness over good sense.

been persistent: the identity of philosophy lies in its difference from poetry. Socrates' banning of the poets from the philosopher's city is thus an emblematic act in the self-constitution of philosophy.

To say that the identity of philosophy is determined by its difference from poetry, however, creates a multitude of new questions about the nature of this difference. It has often been suggested that philosophy and poetry relate to each other like truthful and fictional representations of the world. While it is remotely possible that Socrates really thought so, it seems deeply dubious that Plato did, for the *Republic* is itself an elaborate, self-conscious master-fiction, a tale containing many tales within, some of them explicitly fictional, some even explicitly mendacious. Socrates does not ban fiction, but the poets, and the telling of lies is not a poet's prerogative. Not only is the lie a requisite tool of the philosopher-king, as in the education of the guardians, but fiction is as indispensable to philosophy as discourse itself. When Glaucon asks Socrates to explain the parable of the cave, Socrates responds (533a):

> You will no longer be able to follow, my dear Glaucon, I said, although there wouldn't be any lack of eagerness on my part. But you would no longer be seeing an image of what we are saying, but rather the truth itself, at least as it looks to me.
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> Οὐκέτ', ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ φίλε Γλαύκων, οἷός τ' ἔσει ἀκολουθεῖν, ἐπεὶ τό γ' ἐμὸν οὐδὲν ἂν προθυμίας ἀπολίποι, οὐδ' εἰκόνα ἂν ἔτι οὗ λέγομεν ἴδοις, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἀληθές, ὅ γε δή μοι φαίνεται.[4]

If philosophy (as opposed to knowledge) were to abandon the image, we could no longer follow it; it would become unteachable and thus, at least for Socrates, cease to be philosophy. While this passage suggests the inevitability of philosophical images and fictions, it also points to the fact that part of philosophy is dedicated to the *problem* of its own fictionality.

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4 This is Allan Bloom's translation of the *Politeia* (Bloom 1991). As it is as controversial as it is helpful, all quotations have been checked against the Greek and against Friedrich Schleiermacher's translation, which is still one of the most accurate ones available (Platon 1991).

The examination of the place and function of the image within philosophy's and poetry's respective enterprises, then, might lead to tentative answers about their differences, and recent literary theory has investigated these in some detail.[5] Under rigorous investigation, the lines that would separate the poetic and the philosophical use of fiction appear to dissolve as well; it is for this as well as for other reasons that poststructuralist theory under the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger can maintain, as Arkady Plotnitsky summarizes, that "[t]he opposition between literature and truth or literature and philosophy becomes undecidable."[6] At least in theory, and for the time being.

It is, at this point, impossible to trace the beginning of the Western idea of poetic madness that was certainly already part of Homer's world. Socrates, however, develops a *theory* of poetic madness. The following pages, therefore, will return to Plato's ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry—not via the *Republic*, but via *Ion*, a text that is deeply involved in creating an identity for philosophy in contradistinction to poetry, with which it competes in the marketplaces of speech.

I will suggest that philosophy, in its relation to poetry, essentially defines itself as criticism, as a discourse *about* poetry that poetry itself cannot achieve. This operation depends on a theory of divine poetic madness, a notion, ironically, that poetry itself had cultivated as its mythology. Mad speech is defined as a speaking that eludes the conscious control of the speaker; the mad poet, then, cannot claim authority over his poetry, no matter how great a poem he has produced.

In Plato's presentation of madness, madness appears as a condition that cannot be deliberately controlled—a point Socrates makes more forcefully in the *Phaedrus*. If that is the case, then the poetic text, in every instance, is unique and unrepeatable to its author. Nonetheless, it exists as λόγος and can thus be inserted into philosophy which is, in essence, speech about speech, as the reiterative structure of all Platonic dialogues shows.

II. THE *REPUBLIC* VERSUS *ION*

"Sing to me, Muse . . ."—in the very first line of the Greek song of songs, the first line of what was thought to be, for the longest time,

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5 For two very different studies, cf. Jeffrey Mason 1989, Derrida 1982.

6 Plotnitsky 1993.158.

poetry incarnate, the poet asks for his share of divine madness. Homer sings, but his song appeals to another song: sing, Muse, so that this song can be sung. Homeric song commences as a song about the possibility of singing, and the first thing it says is that song must start somewhere else.

This is a version of poetic madness as poetry's mythology. Socrates' *philosophy* of poetic madness takes its departure from this. One of the central issues of literary theory has always been the question of who or what is speaking when there is speaking, along with the consequences this question entails for artistic production. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various theoretical systems have redefined this issue, amongst them Marxism, Nietzsche's writings, and, most prominently, psychoanalysis. I will, however, step back from the contemporary theoretical scene in order to attempt a somewhat unencumbered look at Plato's writing. There, in one of the earliest sustained critiques of literature available to us, we already find a theoretical formulation of poetry as a process that is fundamentally beyond the poet's control. To the ancient tradition, or to the extent that Socrates can be said to formulate this tradition, the notion of *creative* subjectivity appears to be deeply alien, even more alien perhaps than to psychoanalysis.[7] The notion of divine poetic madness in Ancient Greece, first elaborated *as a theory* by Plato's Socrates, prefigures many of the problems troubling the most recent literary theories. Although the character of Socrates, especially as we have come to see him through Nietzsche's passionate critique, rather seems to indicate the inauguration of what will later become a full-blown theory of subjectivity, Plato's oeuvre also marks the place where the critique of a notion of art as individually controlled representation is already philosophically formulated. It is precisely in this context that *Ion* juxtaposes the question of poetic madness with the question of philosophy.

This is not to suggest, to be sure, that literary theory has merely come full circle since Plato. It is possible, as Foucault suggested, that the idea of a subject as a self-controlled entity that authorizes a work is relatively new and remains, at least in its purest formulations, largely contained in what has been summarily called the Age of Reason. But the

7 Freud, for all his influence on twentieth-century aesthetics, repeatedly stressed that psychoanalysis could not account for artistic creativity. His writings on art leave the notion of Genius more or less intact, even though he throws severe doubt on its conceptual foundation.

figure of the circle, of return, will not do, if only because repeating a state never simply means to return to it. If it is possible to point to certain convergences between Socrates' thought and poststructuralism and related matters, that does not mean that they are, therefore, identical, or even similar.[8] The history, or, in Nietzschean terms, the genealogy of this convergence, cannot be erased. In the wake of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, much critical thought has been given to "Platonism," a homogenizing term covering widely divergent Western philosophies on the grounds that they share a small number of core assumptions. In contrast, I will attempt to isolate Plato from this fiction of "Platonism" as far as possible, in order to focus on those elements of Plato's writings that are uniquely his. A first step in this enterprise is to acknowledge once again a point that frequently has been made, but often much too obliquely: Plato's writing on poetry, a significant portion of his oeuvre, constitutes a scandal that I have never seen repeated in any influential Western work. In Book X of the *Republic*, Socrates says that he was "particularly [right] when reflecting on poetry . . . in not admitting any part of it that is imitative" (μᾶλλον ὀρθῶς . . . οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ ἐνθυμηθεὶς περὶ ποιήσεως . . . Τὸ μηδαμῇ παραδέχεσθαι αὐτῆς ὅση μιμητική, 595a).[9] Socrates' banning of the poets from the ideal state might well be one of the most famous events in Plato's writing. Gadamer calls it "the most difficult challenge posed to the self-consciousness of the German mind in its encounter with the spirit of antiquity."[10] This is a very cautious formulation: Socrates' indictment is alien to the mindset of modern aesthetics, not only the "German mind"; there is ample evidence that the "spirit of antiquity" found it just as strange, lethally strange in the end. Since a poet was one of Socrates' accusers at his trial, poetry is implicated in the execution of Socrates. His poetry embargo, while in itself perhaps not enough of a scandal to warrant his death, nevertheless made him influential enemies, and his death was inflicted, in part, in the name of poetry. He must have been aware of that.

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8 Geertz suggests that "[t]he problem with [an] approach to things . . . which extracts the general from the particular and then sets the particular aside as detail, illustration, background, or qualification, is that it leaves us helpless in the face of the very difference we need to explore" (Geertz 1995.40). I am grateful to Andrew Becker who not only drew my attention to this apposite remark, but provided a generous and immensely helpful reading of this essay.

9 Bloom 1991.277.

10 Gadamer 1968.181.

The ban on the poets, then, positions Socrates in a zone equally remote from "the spirit of antiquity" and the entirety of modern cultural theory and ideology. While the uniqueness of Socrates' vision of a state without poets and the importance of that vision for the whole of Plato's oeuvre can hardly be overemphasized, there is, at the same time, a danger in focussing on this passage too much. Its very prominence has obscured the diversity of Plato's writings on poetry and the poets, and there is a pervasive tendency in the criticism of Plato's work to read every statement on poetry in the light of the *Republic*'s critique of mimesis and poetic ψυχαγωγία.[11]

Even though I, at some points, will refer to the *Republic*, my topic is neither the theory of mimesis nor the overtly political aspects of Plato's literary theory, and the *Republic* will therefore play a subordinated role. Even though the Socrates of the *Republic* does, to a certain extent, link madness and poetry, he does not develop a theory of the mad poet. In the *Republic*, the madness of the tyrant is presented as the breakdown of the proper hierarchy of reason, spirit, and desire (τὸ λογιστικόν, θυμός, ἐπιθυμία); any type of poetry that caters to desire instead of to virtue—that is to say, according to Socrates, almost the entirety of poetry—potentially aids in that breakdown. Poetry in the *Republic*, then, can contribute to moral madness, but it is neither mad itself nor madly conceived. Contrary to *Ion* (and *Phaedrus)*, the *Republic* treats poetry as a skill (τέχνη), comparable with, even though inferior to, the skills and crafts that are useful to the state.

The following reading of *Ion* will predominantly be concerned with issues of philosophical strategy: why is the figure of the mad poet of interest to philosophy? what does it contribute to Plato's theory of meaning? how does it help to accomplish the consolidation of philosophy's independence from, and ultimate hegemony over, other privileged genres of discourse?

III. TALKING ABOUT HOMER

In *Ion*, Socrates converses with the popular rhapsode of that name about the nature of his trade. Ion struggles to preserve an understanding of

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11 Iris Murdoch, to give an example, proclaims that "Plato's . . . view of art is most fully expounded in Books III and X of the Republic" (Murdoch 1977.5).

rhapsody as a skill or craft (τέχνη) and as a knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the product he delivers. Socrates contends that the accomplishments of rhapsody rest on divine inspiration, and that the rhapsode performs in a state devoid of knowledge, sovereign skill, and reason (ἐπιστήμη, τέχνη, νόος). He develops this theory in the famous monologue about the magnetic chain of divine inspiration linking poet, rhapsode, and audience. This speech contains *Ion*'s most famous and often quoted lines: "For the poet is a light thing, winged and sacred, unable to make poetry before he is enthused and out of his mind and intelligence is no longer in him" (κοῦφον γὰρ χρῆμα ποιητής ἐστιν καὶ πτηνὸν καὶ ἱερόν, καὶ οὐ πρότερον οἷός τε ποιεῖν πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων καὶ ὁ νοῦς μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῇ, 534b).[12]

Socrates' argument is based on two major contentions: if rhapsody were a skill encompassing a substantiated knowledge of poetry as such, Ion had to be as good at performing Hesiod and other poets as he is at performing Homer, which he, as he admits, is not. Secondly, if rhapsody were to command true judgment of a text, it would have to include all the skills pertaining to the subject matter in Homer's poems, like mixing drugs, charioteering, fishing, or commanding an army. While Ion readily admits that a physician or a charioteer is superior at judging whether Homer "speaks true" on such matters as medicine or the races, he is less ready to yield the rank of general. When Ion, despite Socrates' intervention, insists on the equivalence of rhapsody and warfare, Socrates somewhat impatiently faces him with a choice: "Choose, then, whether you want to be held by us to be an unjust man or a divine one" (ἑλοῦ οὖν πότερα βούλει νομίζεσθαι ὑπὸ ἡμῶν ἄδικος ἀνὴρ εἶναι ἢ θεῖος). Ion, coerced rather than convinced, answers that "to be held to be divine is far finer" (πολὺ γὰρ κάλλιον τὸ θεῖον νομίζεσθαι, 542a–b). This reply is ambiguous; Ion concedes nothing but his continuing loyalty to the register of appearance and performance. These lines, in fact, might be read to reveal considerable rhetorical skill on Ion's part, indicating that he might not be quite the simpleton he seems to be.

While Socrates' famous speech on divine inspiration and the magnetic chain of poetic power (533c–35a) reverberates through much of Plato's oeuvre, *Ion*, I will argue, is primarily not a text on poetry, but on rhapsody, and the importance of the theme of poetic madness in this dialogue only emerges once the issue of rhapsody is explored alongside it.

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12 Bloom 1987.356–70.

The significance of rhapsody, in turn, becomes clear only if we acknowledge it as a precursor of criticism. To substitute "criticism" for "rhapsody" is, of course, a thoroughly anachronistic move. Rhapsody can only be called criticism *ante rem*, for there is no clearly defined field of practice in Plato's Greece that we could call by that term without some simplification. This changes, however, if we are willing to define criticism, very generally, as the mediating presentation of a literary text to an audience that seeks from this procedure an elucidation of the text's meaning beyond the information the text would provide without a hermeneutic apparatus. There is enough in the dialogue to suggest that this is the task that Ion performs.

While the definition provided above is not enough to delineate criticism as a methodical practice, it is precisely the possibility of such a concerted discipline that *Ion* starts to investigate.[13] In other words, the dialogue presents us with nothing less than the conception of criticism under the aegis of philosophy. In Socrates' scheme, I will argue, poetic madness actually engenders the necessity of criticism. As such, the notion of enthusiasm is the key concept in a strategy that supplants the autonomy of poetry and subjects it, ultimately, to Socratic philosophy.

Like the *Phaedrus*, *Ion* was long regarded one of the "minor" dialogues, possibly a hoax. Even though the authenticity of *Ion* is established by now, the dialogue has never met with the kind of rehabilitation that *Phaedrus* underwent.[14] There are several possible reasons for this: the practice of rhapsody is located in a gray zone between poetry and theater, alien to the modern division of cultural labor, and thus, perhaps, of less interest to latter-day readers of Plato; the dialogue's predominant mood is comical rather than ironic and might thus appear un-Socratic; Ion, unlike Phaedrus, has appeared to many as a weak mind or even a fool—Allan Bloom calls him an "empty reciter of Homer," "the most conventional agent

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13 Hellmuth Flashar, in his afterword to the *Tusculum* edition of *Ion*, is one of its few readers to identify the technique of interpretation as an important concern of the dialogue. Flashar, however, concludes, in my opinion too hastily, that "principally, there can be no rhapsodic knowledge [in the sense of τέχνη]," and he proceeds traditionally to center his reading on Socrates' notion of poetry (Flashar 1963.56).

14 The second "Symposium Platonicum" under the auspices of the International Plato Society was exclusively devoted to "Understanding the Phaedrus" (Rossetti 1992). In addition to numerous articles, recent years have seen the publication of several new translations of the *Phaedrus* and several monographs dealing wholly or to a large extent with the *Phaedrus* (White 1993, Price 1989, Ferrari 1987, Griswold 1986, Rowe 1986, Moravcsik and Temko 1982, Burger 1980).

of what is most conventional." Goethe labels him "extremely limited," "an oaf"[15]—unworthy of his interlocutor Socrates, not even a compliant pupil, but one who has to be badgered into acquiescence. One might also say that Plato has treated the central themes of the dialogue more persuasively and with more sophistication elsewhere. I suspect, however, that a significant reason for the rather unappreciative treatment *Ion* has received is that the dialogue has been read as a treatise on *poetry*.[16] As such, however, *Ion* appears inconsistent or even confused, no matter how influential it has been for various theories of *furor poeticus*. Socrates' speech on poetry, habitually read as the dialogue's centerpiece and its only passage of genuine interest, is difficult to evaluate.[17] For even though it is possible to read the speech at face value, it seems at least as likely that it is a casual reiteration, or even, as Goethe suspected, a "persiflage,"[18] of an already established cliché of poetic enthusiasm.[19]

There are at least two aspects of Socrates' speech on enthusiasm that cast suspicion on his sincerity. For one, Socrates claims that he is merely repeating what the poets themselves say about their art (534a–b), a framing device that serves to effectively obscure Socrates' position; secondly, Socrates' choice of words seems uncharacteristically "enthused," pointing to the potentially parodic nature of his account.[20] More importantly, the progression of the dialogue as a whole casts ambiguity on the casual assertion of an inspirational "divine." Ion reacts to *Socrates'* λόγοι in

15 Bloom 1987.371, 373; Goethe 1963.43f.

16 To name three recent publications promoting very different perspectives on Plato's work on poetry: Weissberg 1990.1–33, Nussbaum 1986.200–35, Bloom 1987.371–95.

17 Due to the ambiguity of the speech, the reception of *Ion* roughly divides into two camps: one reads it as a celebration of creative enthusiasm, the other as a denunciation of poetry. To a certain extent, the first school can draw on the *Phaedrus*, but, on the whole, seems informed by modern theories of creativity; the latter school has the authority of the *Republic* and related passages in other dialogues (*Apology, Meno*) behind it. For an overview of the history of the reception of *Ion*, cf. Tigerstedt 1970.

18 Goethe uses the same term in the German, "Persiflage," (Goethe 1963.43).

19 Leon Golden and Kevin Kerrane point out that the "claim that [the poet] is protected and inspired by a divine muse, who enables him to please his audience through stories and words that convey a unique kind of knowledge . . . appears explicitly in the writings of Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar," Golden and Kerrane 1974.3f.

20 Critical categories like "tone" or "atmosphere" are problematic, and infinitely more so when dealing with a language as foreign as Ancient Greek. The following argument, then, might more reliably bear out the point that Socrates' theory of inspiration is delivered tongue-in-cheek.

exactly the same way he is portrayed reacting to divine poetic inspiration: "Yes, by Zeus, . . . somehow you lay hold of my soul with these speeches, Socrates" (Ναὶ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἔμοιγε· ἅπτει γάρ πώς μου τοῖς λόγοις τῆς ψυχῆς, ὦ Σώκρατες, 535a).[21] Socrates, then, has quite effortlessly inserted himself into the "magnetic" process, suggesting that the chain of inspiration, and his chain of argument that rests on that metaphor, might not be a chain after all, or at least not a very tightly linked one. Or, perhaps, Ion is simply a readily impressionable soul, open to skillful ψυχαγωγία not necessarily only of the divine kind. In that case, the passage points to a problem that any theory of divine madness necessarily opens up: how can the presence of divine influence be verified? Not every poet is visited by the gods; inspiration might stem from the Muse or from any clever philosopher roaming the market place. Divine inspiration, despite rituals of evocation, may be sudden and unpredictable: you cannot expect to go mad, not every madness is divine, not every poet is mad, and not even the mad poets are mad all the time. The poets, moreover, are the least reliable witnesses in this matter, mad or not. If they are mad, they cannot account for their madness, and if they are not, they might simulate madness, considering that "to be held to be divine is far finer" than to be thought just another common laborer.

Socrates will investigate this question of diagnosis at some length in *Phaedrus*. In *Ion*, he is not concerned with madness in general, but with rhapsodic inspiration or, more precisely, the relationship between a text, its reader custodian, and the audience of the reading. As it turns out, Ion's enthusiasm is dubious, for during his performance, divine powers do not seem to render Ion senseless at all. Certainly, at first he seems to comply with Socrates' argument: "When I speak of something pitiful, my eyes fill with tears, and when of something frightening or terrible, my hair stands on end from fear and my heart leaps" (ἐγὼ γὰρ ὅταν ἐλεινόν τι λέγω, δακρύων ἐμπίμπλανταί μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί· ὅταν τε φοβερὸν ἢ δεινόν, ὀρθαὶ αἱ τρίχες ἵστανται ὑπὸ φόβου καὶ ἡ καρδία πηδᾷ, 535c). Socrates suggests that this is rather silly behavior in light of the fact that Ion sits safe and adorned in the middle of a favorable audience, and that the only explanation for such irrational affectation must be divine poetic inspiration.

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21 Joel F. Wilcox suggests that in this passage Socrates himself is, or presents himself as, inspired, but there is no textual evidence for this claim unless one wants to subscribe every piece of successful *psychagogia* to divine powers. Cf. Wilcox 1987.155–74.

Ion agrees.[22] This passage is misleading, however, if naively taken at face value. In the next breath, Ion says that while supposedly magnetized by Homeric passion, he keeps close watch of his audience's emotional response (535e):

> For I look down on them each time from the platform above as they are crying, casting terrible looks, and following with astonishment the thing said. I must pay the very closest attention to them, since, if I set them to crying, I shall laugh myself because I am making money, but if they laugh, then I shall cry because of the money I am losing.
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> Καὶ μάλα καλῶς οἶδα· καθορῶ γὰρ ἑκάστοτε αὐτοὺς ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος κλάοντάς τε καὶ δεινὸν ἐμβλέποντας καὶ συνθαμβοῦντας τοῖς λεγομένοις. δεῖ γάρ με καὶ σφόδρ᾽ αὐτοῖς τὸν νοῦν προσέχειν· ὡς ἐὰν μὲν κλάοντας αὐτοὺς καθίσω, αὐτὸς γελάσομαι ἀργύριον λαμβάνων, ἐὰν δὲ γελῶντας, αὐτὸς κλαύσομαι ἀργύριον ἀπολλύς.

Ion, then, is hardly entirely in the grip of divine powers, as the radical formulations of Socrates' earlier speech had suggested. Instead, he is quite conscious of manipulating his audience, and his own passions are diametrically opposed to those of his listeners instead of being "magnetically" related to them. This incongruence unchains the links Socrates had joined. The relationship between poetic text, rhapsodic text, and the passion of the audience emerges as far more complicated than initially asserted.

Any reading of *Ion* that subscribes to Socrates' initial claim that poets and rhapsodes operate in identical or at least very similar fashion runs the risk of falling into the same trap Socrates sets out for Ion. Valid interpretations of *Ion* that read Socrates' objections to rhapsody as veiled objections to poetry would have to operate on the assumption that poetry

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22 In this passage, *Ion* already projects the danger of alienation through poetry, an aspect Gadamer identifies as Plato's major ground of objection to poetry. Cf. "Plato und die Dichter" op. cit. The following paragraphs argue, however, that Ion is not as alienated as is suggested at first.

and its interpretation proceed in a comparable manner.[23] If the conditions of making poetry were the main concern of the dialogue, however, then Socrates' interaction with Ion after the delivery of his speech would be curiously redundant. We would be left with a rather conventional theory of inspiration, for although the dialogue contains the seeds to challenge an uncritically received view of poetic enthusiasm, it leaves this concept more or less untouched. As a celebration of poetic μανία, a text like *Phaedrus* is far more subtle and profound, and as a denunciation of poetry, the *Republic* gives more sustained and more engaging arguments. Certainly, these two standard approaches are not impossible; the presence of Homer does indeed permeate the dialogue, and the status of poetry undoubtedly is at stake, if only indirectly. To read *Ion* as a sketchy anticipation of the later dialogues' themes, however, buries the very theme, peculiar to *Ion*, that makes this short text so fascinating. This theme, to be sure, is not poetry. Not only does the dialogue carry the name of a rhapsode, but its main concern throughout the dialogical part is the investigation of interpretation or the nature of critical knowledge. Far more space is devoted to the discussion of Ion's trade than to poetry, and, as demonstrated above, Ion himself does not fit the criteria Socrates develops for a poet. We must distinguish carefully between what Socrates says about poetry and what he says about rhapsody, for the magnetic chain may be brittle.

The Ion who, ever mindful of profit, monitors his audience's affective response is not mad, certainly not mad enough to fit the stringent criteria Socrates has established in his speech to describe poetic madness. The implication, I will suggest, is that there is no such thing as a mad critic, or even that criticism *must* not be mad, since it must differ from poetry to perform its task. Up until Socrates, it seems that the poets had provided their own critique, a critique that did not have to take a discursive, a-poetic form, but had consisted of a constant, allusive rewriting of poetic material or in the poetic self-reflection of the lyrics of authors like Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar. Thus, the reworking of Homeric mythos in the tragedies of an Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides constituted the main venue of its

23 Allan Bloom's interpretation (op. cit.) is an example of such a reading; Bloom extracts a complete Socratic position on Homer, tradition, and the way to lead a happy life out of the dialogue, but in order to do so, he is forced to draw extensively on assumptions tacitly lifted from other Platonic dialogues. In Bloom's reading, *Ion* thus loses much of its peculiarity, becoming just another showcase for a general Socratism.

interpretation and re-interpretation. In Socrates' time, however, the poets were already sharing the task of interpretation with a growing number of non-poets. "Talking about Homer" was in the process of becoming a veritable business for those who themselves didn't engage in the making of poetry. The Sophists, Socrates' privileged competitors in the marketplace of knowledge and ψυχαγωγία, are known to have grounded their claims to wisdom to a large extent in a knowledge of the poets. The early dialogue *Protagoras*, for instance, shows Socrates in interpretive contest with the Sophist Protagoras who stresses that "it is an important part of education for a man to be clever about poetry. This, however, consists in being able to understand what the poets say, what is composed well and what not, also to explain it when asked and to give an account" (Ἡγοῦμαι, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐγὼ ἀνδρὶ παιδείας μέγιστον μέρος εἶναι περὶ ἐπῶν δεινὸν εἶναι· ἔστιν δὲ τοῦτο τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν λεγόμενα οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι συνιέναι ἅ τε ὀρθῶς πεποίηται καὶ ἃ μή, καὶ ἐπίστασθαι διελεῖν τε καὶ ἐρωτώμενον λόγον δοῦναι, 338e–39a). In this dialogue, the practice of criticism takes on the character of a philosophical agon when Socrates challenges Protagoras' reading of a poem by Simonides with a close reading of his own. Socrates' counter-arguments are skillful and persuasive, even though he later dismisses the enterprise of competitive interpretation as silly.

In contrast, *Ion* does not engage in the practice of hermeneutics, but begins to develop a *theory* of criticism designed to establish the fundamental difference between the λόγοι of poetry and the λόγοι of philosophy.[24]

To be sure, Plato's dividing line between poetry and philosophy has been redrawn again and again. Aristotle already struggled to integrate Platonic dialogues into his generic paradigms,[25] and to modern readers

24 Nussbaum stresses that "[b]efore Plato's time there was no distinction between 'philosophical' and 'literary' discussion of human practical problems" (Nussbaum 1986.123). In her analysis of "Plato's anti-tragic theater," Nussbaum diagnoses "the origin of a distinctive philosophical style that opposed itself to the merely literary." However, Nussbaum's very terms "theater" and "merely literary" tend to obscure the force and the rigor of the distinction that a pervasive understanding of Plato will establish for more than two millennia to follow. For an interesting tracing of this heritage, cf. Weissberg 1990 passim.

25 Aristotle *Poetics* 1447, Preminger 1974.108–39.

especially, Platonic writings have appeared uncommonly "poetic."[26] It is also true that Socrates does at times investigate formal aspects of philosophical speech and/or different poetic genres in considerable detail. It is all the more important to appreciate that Plato's understanding of "poetry," in contrast to later accounts, does not include the differentiation between figurative and literal language or fictional and non-fictional narratives. The λόγος/μῦθος distinction, to give a prominent example, is clearly post-Platonic, and, in Plato's writings, the two terms cannot be cleanly distinguished.[27] Even in the *Republic*, where questions of poetic genre are of paramount importance, Socrates never advises a ban on *all* poets. Fundamentally, poets are nothing more or less than τοὺς ἐπὶ τυχόντας μύθους (*Republic* 377b), and the making of tales is as indispensable to the ideal state (cf. *Republic* Books II and III) as is the use of images to communicate philosophical ideas. Even though poets are accused of making "false" tales, the education of the guardians proceeds by tales equally false.

Needless to say, Socrates freely avails himself of what seem to us "poetic" modes of speech. It is worthwhile noting, however, that Plato's Socrates, unless in quotation, *never* speaks in verse. In fact, the verse/prose distinction might be the sole "formal" criterion that distinguishes his discourse from that of the poets.[28] Aristotle notes right at the beginning of the *Poetics* that the "public classifies all those who write in meter as poets and completely misses the point that the capacity to produce an imitation is the essential characteristic of the poet" (πλὴν οἱ ἄνθρωποί γε συνάπτοντες τῷ μέτρῳ τὸ ποιεῖν ἐλεγειοποιοὺς, τοὺς δὲ ἐποποιοὺς ὀνομάζουσιν, οὐχ ὡς

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26 A prominent example, apart from the Romantic poets, is Kant's essay "Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie." Even though Kant does not criticize Plato directly, he strongly reprimands neo-Platonist attempts to poetize the language of philosophy, "Basically, all philosophy is prosaic; and the suggestion to philosophize poetically again may well be received as well as a similar suggestion to the merchant: that he not write his ledgers in prose but in verse. (Im Grunde ist wohl alle Philosophie prosaisch; und ein Vorschlag, jetzt wiederum poetisch zu philosophieren, möchte wohl so aufgenommen werden, als der für den Kaufmann: seine Handelsbücher künftig nicht in Prose sondern in Versen zu schreiben)," Kant 1958.Bd. III. 397f. Cf. also Weissberg 1990.21–28.

27 Cf. Zaslavsky 1981.11–19.

28 One passage in the *Republic* might serve to illustrate this possibility, even though it is not spoken by Socrates but by Adeimantus: "Socrates, consider still another form of speech about justice and injustice, spoken *in prose and by poets* [emphasis added]" (363e). Allan Bloom adds in a footnote to this passage that the "expression for prose is composed from words meaning 'to speak privately' and could also mean what one says in private. Almost all public speech was written in verse" (Bloom 1991.447, n. 11).

κατὰ τὴν μίμησιν ποιητὰς ἀλλὰ κοινῇ κατὰ τὸ μέτρον προσαγορεύοντες).[29] For Socrates, however, whose conception of μίμησις is at times far more comprehensive than that of the *Poetics*, the "capacity to produce an imitation" is inherent in all speech, not only poetic speech. Language *is* imitation, but in contrast to the imitation in painting or sculpture, "language can also be true" (*Cratylus* 431d).[30] In theory, then, Socrates cannot rule out the possibility that "true" language occurs in poetry and this poses a major problem to Socrates' project of securing the hegemony of philosophy over poetry.

If the criteria neither of form nor of hypothetical truth value can be established to distinguish philosophy and poetry with satisfactory rigor, then another criterion needs to be instituted. It is here that the significance of a concept of poetic madness gains its full force, for it provides the terms by which different modes of speech can be classified according to the nature of their production or conception. The truth of poetry, *Ion* suggests, differs from the truth of philosophy at its source. There is no great poetry as long as the poet holds on to νόος like a *possession* (κτῆμα, *Ion* 534b).[31] Thus, the theory of poetic madness dispossesses the poet, first of his νόος, then, in consequence, of his poetry. In the *Republic*, we learn that "just as poets are fond of their poems and fathers of their children, so money-makers too are serious about money—as their own product" (ὥσπερ γὰρ οἱ ποιηταὶ τὰ αὑτῶν ποιήματα καὶ οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας ἀγαπῶσιν, ταύτῃ τε δὴ καὶ οἱ χρηματισάμενοι περὶ τὰ χρήματα σπουδάζουσιν, ὡς ἔργον ἑαυτῶν, καὶ κατὰ τὴν χρείαν ᾗπερ οἱ ἄλλοι, *Republic* 330c). In the *Republic*, the poets are in charge of their works, and thus they can be held responsible for them. Within the theory of poetic madness as it emerges in *Ion*, however, poems cease to be the product of their poets.

In an important sense, every form of madness entails dispossession. It is the postulate of madness that subverts the first definition of justice

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29 *Poetics* 1447, Preminger 1974.108.

30 The implications of this statement are too far-reaching to be analyzed in any detail here. It should be noted, however, that the tragic "imitation" Socrates condemns in Book III of the *Republic* concerns acting: the imitation of another person's speech, i.e., the imitation of an imitation.

31 The full passage reads: "For the poet is a light thing and winged and holy, and not capable of making poetry until he has become enthused and senseless and *nous* no longer dwells within him. For as long as he holds on to this possession, any man is unable to make poetry or to speak oracles" (κοῦφον γὰρ χρῆμα ποιητής ἐστιν καὶ ἱερόν, καὶ οὐ πρότερον οἷός τε ποιεῖν πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων καὶ ὁ **νοῦς** μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῇ, ἕως δ' ἂν τουτὶ ἔχῃ τὸ κτῆμα, ἀδύνατος πᾶς ποιεῖν ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν καὶ χρησμῳδεῖν, 534b).

the *Republic* offers.[32] In this passage, truth appears as a possession that the speaker can choose either to confer or withhold *as long as he is sane*. Madness cancels the right to this property just as it annuls the legal right to property according to one of Solon's laws. While the notion of intellectual property is not legalized in Greek, it plays a major role in the laws of philosophy.[33]

In the *Ion*, these implications remain unspoken. The problem of property surfaces instead in the question of criticism. To repeat, the term "criticism" is an anachronism, but rhapsody was not simply recital as some readings of *Ion* assume or imply.[34] For while the rhapsodes might have derived their glory from the glory of the texts they treated (and the Greeks, do not forget, venerated Homer beyond any veneration for a literary text imaginable to us today),[35] they were, in their comments, certainly not bound by any pieties to the "sanctity of the text" at their disposal. The rhapsodes were free to paraphrase, embellish, interpret, and comment on it at their discretion. Ion himself stresses this point when he claims that there is no one in his trade more capable of producing "many beautiful meanings" (πολλὰς καὶ καλὰς διανοίας, 530d) out of Homer than he.

Διανοία (thought, intention, meaning—to name just a few possible translations of the word) is one of the key terms of the text. At the outset of the discussion, Socrates had expressed envy of the rhapsodes for their ability to "discern [the poets'] meaning (*dianoia*)" and their task of "mediating the meaning of the poet for the audience" (ἑρμηνέα δεῖ τοῦ

32 Soc.: "[I]f a man takes weapons from a friend when the latter is of sound mind, and the friend demands them back when he is mad, one shouldn't give back such things, and the man who gave them back would not be just, and moreover, one should not be willing to tell someone in this state the whole truth. / What you say is right, he said. / Then this isn't the definition of justice, speaking the truth and giving back what it takes. / It most certainly is, Socrates, interrupted Polemarchus, at least if Simonides should be believed at all" (*Republic* 331c–d).

33 Thus, one again encounters the analogy between poet/poem and father/son as a relationship of possession at the end of the *Phaedrus*, where it sustains Socrates' arguments about speaking and writing.

34 Goethe, for instance, speaks of Ion as "einem Rhapsoden, einem Vorleser, einem Declamator, der berühmt war wegen seines Vortrags der Homerischen Gedichte (a rhapsode, a reader, a declaimer who was famous for his presentation of the Homeric poems," Goethe 1963.43). The editors of *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism* describe rhapsodes simply as "professional reciters of poetry" (Preminger 1974.236f., n. 1).

35 Gadamer 1968.186 even compares the status of Homer's writing to the status of the bible in Christian societies.

ποιητοῦ τῆς διανοίας γίγνεσθαι τοῖς ἀκούουσι, 530b–c). That this task implies considerable critical intervention on the part of the rhapsode is obvious: "It is surely worth hearing, Socrates, how well I have adorned Homer" (Καὶ μὴν ἄξιόν γε ἀκοῦσαι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὡς εὖ κεκόσμηκα τὸν Ὅμηρον, 530d). Here, Ion, presumably unaware of the analogy, uses the same word Socrates had used to describe Ion's ornamental stage apparel. Ion adorns the texts he recites in the same way he decorates his own body; Socrates tells him that "it befits your art for the body to be always adorned and for you to appear as beautiful as possible" (τὸ γὰρ ἅμα μὲν τὸ σῶμα κεκοσμῆσθαι ἀεὶ πρέπον ὑμῶν εἶναι τῇ τέχνῃ καὶ ὡς καλλίστοις φαίνεσθαι, 530b) and he repeats this point later in the dialogue (535d). Ion, then, presents the body of the Homeric writings on stage, gaudily decked out for the spectacle of the text which becomes, or coincides with, the spectacle of the rhapsode. The text disappears into the performance of the critic, and the epic becomes theater. The critical act cannot be distinguished from its object. Socrates, however, will insist on this distinction.

It is worthwhile noting, by the way, that Ion concedes that the rhapsodes, to legitimize their trade, need to have knowledge apart from any διανοία intrinsic to the text or its performance, even though he has no quarrel with the concept of divine poetic madness per se. It is the rhapsode, after all, not the poet who, he insists, would make a good general. Why is Ion so disinclined to give up the image of the rhapsode as a quasi-military power? What is it in interpretation that may make it comparable to warfare?

Ion makes different claims as to the object of the rhapsode's ἐπιστήμη. Although he has to give up these claims in the face of Socrates' superior argumentation skills, they are worth noting, not the least for a certain compatibility with latter-day notions of criticism. While ready to concede that he is incompetent to judge specific subject matter, he designates, in response to Socrates' question about the rhapsode's proper field of knowledge, the whole of the poem: "Everything, I claim, Socrates" (Ἐγὼ μέν φημι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἅπαντα, 539e). Thus, he hints at the concept of a textual whole different from the sum of a text's parts, and different from the accumulated subject matter it pertains to. Ion does not, as we would wish, elaborate on this embryonic idea of poetic structure. His next attempt to carve out for himself an epistemic niche concerns a knowledge of style, of different registers of diction, "[t]he things that are appropriate, I for one suppose, for a man to say, and the sort for a woman, and the sort for a slave and the sort for a free man, and the sort for one who is ruled and the sort for one who is ruling" (Ἃ πρέπει, οἶμαι ἔγωγε, ἀνδρὶ εἰπεῖν καὶ ὁποῖα γυναικί, καὶ ὁποῖα

δούλῳ καὶ ὁποῖα ἐλευθέρῳ, καὶ ὁποῖα ἀρχομένῳ καὶ ὁποῖα ἄρχοντι, 540b). When Socrates refers Ion back to subject matter—"the rhapsode will know, but not the cowherd, what things it is appropriate for a cowherd who is a slave to say to calm angry cattle?" (Οἷον βουκόλῳ λέγεις δούλῳ ἃ πρέπει εἰπεῖν ἀγριαινουσῶν βοῶν παραμυθουμένῳ, ὁ ῥαψῳδὸς γνώσεται ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁ βουκόλος; 540c)—Ion at first gives in. When Socrates extends the analogy to a general, however, he encounters resistance (540d–41a):

S: Well then, will he [the rhapsode] know such things as are appropriate for a man who is a general to say when exhorting his troops?
I: Yes, the rhapsode will know such things.
S: What? Is the art of rhapsody generalship?
I: I would certainly know such things as are appropriate for a general to say . . .
S: Since you know military matters, do you know them through the art by which you are an expert at generalship or the one by which you are a good rhapsode?
I: For me, at least, there doesn't seem to be any difference.
S: What? You say there is no difference? Do you say that the art of rhapsody and the art of generalship are one or two?
I: To me, at least, it seems to be one.

S: Ἀλλ' οἷα ἀνδρὶ πρέπει εἰπεῖν γνώσεται στρατηγῷ στρατιώταις παραινοῦντι;
I: Ναί, τὰ τοιαῦτα γνώσεται ὁ ῥαψῳδός.
S: Τί δέ; ἡ ῥαψῳδικὴ τέχνη στρατηγική ἐστιν;
I: Γνοίην γοῦν ἂν ἐγὼγε οἷα στρατηγὸν πρέπει εἰπεῖν . . .
S: Ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὰ στρατιωτικὰ γιγνώσκεις, πότερον ᾖ στρατηγικὸς εἶ γιγνώσκεις ἢ ᾖ ῥαψῳδὸς ἀγαθός;
I: Οὐδὲν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ διαφέρειν.
S: Πῶς; οὐδὲν λέγεις διαφέρειν; μίαν λέγεις τέχνην εἶναι τὴν ῥαψῳδικὴν καὶ τὴν στρατηγικὴν ἢ δύο;
I: Μία ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ.

Some of Plato's readers have been inclined to read this passage as a comical interlude or as a psychographic device meant to expose Ion's self-misconception.[36] The image of the general, though, is hardly innocent: Socrates will devote much of his discussion of the perfect state to the education of the military "guardians," and he will prominently implicate the poets in this education. More important, though, is the role of the general within the poetry Ion presents. Socrates suggests that Homer, "as all other poets, too" (ἢ ὥνπερ σύμπαντες οἱ ἄλλοι ποιηταί) deals preeminently with war (531c). If all poetry is about war, then Ion-the-general inserts himself into poetry as its mastermind. In assuming the rank of general, he seizes command of the *Iliad*, taking the place of the (divine and human) commanders who direct the action of the war epic. Certainly, the epic with its central narrator lends itself to this operation more than lyric or dramatic poetry. But it is in this image of violent usurpation that the truth of all criticism surfaces. If the mad do not have a right to property, as we have seen, then poetic speech, and this is true for *all* mad speech, is up for capture. Mad speech is relinquished by its speaker already at the moment of its utterance—it is never his to begin with.

In this light, *Ion* does not so much raise the question of the legitimacy of poetry (although, naturally, this question is implicated in the question of criticism), as the question of the legitimization of a poem's self-appointed guardians. Socrates early on had posed the question of a text's διανοία as the guiding question of the dialogue. Although Socrates will deny the poets both νόος and ἐπιστήμη, he will never deny that there is διανοία in poetry. It is not the presence of διανοία that is at stake, but the nature of its production. The postulate of enthusiasm, the "god within" poetic speech, entails that διανοία here cannot be read as the poet's intentional thought, but as meaning (somehow) present in the text but not controlled by its author. If criticism, as even Ion readily concedes, should consist of the ascertainment of this διανοία, the critic's operation has to be fundamentally different from poetic production. It is thus that the hypothesis of poetic madness establishes the necessity of criticism.

Ion, however, is neither a competent reader of poetry τὸ ὅλον nor is he truly inspired. Thus, being simultaneously too close and not close enough to the poet, he can neither provide nor understand poetic διανοία. Unlike the physician or the horseback rider, he has no expertise to

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36 Bloom 1987.394.

contribute to Homer's subject matter and, being ἄτεχνος[37] (532c) in the presence of poets other than Homer, he commands no knowledge of poetry in general (532c). Clearly, the latter charge appears the more grave, opening the question of the possibility of a concerted discipline, or τέχνη, of criticism.

To repeat, the theory of divine poetic madness establishes the necessity of a criticism of διανοία. Socrates sets out to prove that the rhapsode is not so much a hermeneut of meaning as a mediator of affect.[38] While Ion cannot account for his virtuosity, there is also no reliable indication that he is a bad interpreter. In fact, Ion seems ready to perform several times, and it is Socrates who holds him back with always yet another question. Socrates is either not able or not willing to distinguish between good and bad criticism before he has constructed a *theory* of criticism that would be different from a theory of poetry. And it is this theory of criticism alone that is at stake in *Ion*, not the theory of mimesis that is habitually associated with Plato's poetological dialogues.

Socrates readily grants the status of τεχνικός to the experts in painting, music, sculpture, flute-playing, and singing to the lyre (532e–33c).[39] His analogies lead up to the art of rhapsody itself (533b–c):

> . . . nor in regard to aulos playing, cithara playing, singing to the cithara, or rhapsody, you never saw a man who is clever at explaining Olympus, or Thamyras, or Orpheus, or Phemius the Ithacan rhapsode but is at a loss about Ion and has nothing to contribute about what in rhapsody he does well and what not.
>
> . . . οὐδ᾽ ἐν αὐλήσει γε οὐδὲ ἐν κιθαρίσει οὐδὲ ἐν κιθαρῳδίᾳ οὐδὲ ἐν ῥαψῳδίᾳ οὐδεπώποτ᾽ εἶδες ἄνδρα

37 In colloquial Greek, the word means "sleepy, disinterested."

38 While this argument disqualifies Ion within the Socratic narrative, obviously it empowers him in other ways. It is Ion's very demagogic skill that renders him a true rival of philosophic ψυχαγωγία. Ion might still be a fool, but, commanding large audiences as indeed a general might command an army, he is not harmless. Many readers of Plato make the mistake of underestimating Ion because he would make a lousy philosopher, but Socrates does indeed face a serious rival in this dialogue, certainly one much more powerful in many ways than Socrates himself.

39 This is significant, of course, because Socrates derives his arguments against poetic μίμησις in the *Republic* from a posited analogy of poetry to painting.

> ὅστις περὶ μὲν Ὀλύμπου δεινός ἐστιν ἐξηγεῖσθαι ἢ περὶ Θαμύρου ἢ περὶ Ὀρφέως ἢ περὶ Φημίου τοῦ Ἰθακησίου ῥαψῳδοῦ, περὶ δὲ Ἴωνος τοῦ Ἐφεσίου ἀπορεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἔχει συμβαλέσθαι ἃ τε εὖ ῥαψῳδεῖ καὶ ἃ μή.

Here, Socrates makes an explicit move towards a meta-criticism where not the text, but the critic, becomes the object of expertise. (In fact, all the rhapsodes mentioned besides Ion are mythical figures, poetic constructions themselves.) The issue now is not Homer, but "talking about Homer," or even talking about the rhapsodes talking about Homer. The question of poetic enthusiasm is less relevant in this dialogue than the question of critical inspiration, and poetic representation less relevant than critical representation. The *adaequatio rei atque cogitationis* of the primary text, the major theme of the poetry discussion in the *Republic*, never directly gets into focus.

In Socrates' argument, the necessity of criticism implies an irreducible difference between criticism and poetry. Again, if divine madness is the sole guarantor of poetry's greatness, then this madness must be *verified*. If there is to be a critic, then he most of all has to be a knower of madness. To know a thing, as Socrates points out again and again, is to know its opposite as well. To know great poetry is to know bad poetry. To know madness is to know sanity (σωφροσύνη).

Criticism, then, divides into at least two different types of ἐπιστήμη. First, it must be a science of the soul. Second, and more importantly, any ἐπιστήμη of poetry must account for the miracle of meaning. In the absence of poetic τέχνη, the presence of poetic meaning cannot be accounted for by the process of poetic production in the same way that the presence of a sturdy table can be accounted for by the process of carpentry (not that the latter case is simple, by any means). The name of divine madness marks this unaccountability. While *Ion* merely establishes the need to pursue the two projects I have outlined, Socrates will devote himself to the science of the soul in other dialogues, most prominently in the *Republic* and in *Phaedrus*. *Phaedrus*, moreover, will provide a tentative answer to the question of the origin of meaning that links it to poetry, to the nature of the soul, and, again, to madness. This time, however, the philosopher, too, will go (a little) mad.

In Platonic theology, poetic meaning is always divine—or, more precisely, the divine is nothing but the ultimately unaccountable presence of

meaning, a meaning philosophy can only point to, but not beget: the glory of sanity is in diagnosis, not in creation.

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