

## ONOMATOPOEIC *MIMESIS* IN PLATO, *REPUBLIC* 396b–397c

Two related passages in the discussion of *mimesis* in this part of *The Republic* are in question here:

(a) *Τί δέ; ἵππους χρεμετίζοντας καὶ ταύρους μυκωμένους καὶ ποταμοὺς ψοφοῦντας καὶ θάλατταν κτυποῦσαν καὶ βροντὰς καὶ πάντα αὖ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἢ μιμήσονται;*

(b) . . . βροντὰς τε καὶ ψόφους ἀνέμων τε καὶ χαλαζῶν καὶ ἀξόνων τε καὶ τροχιλιῶν, καὶ σαλπύγγων καὶ αὐλῶν καὶ συρίγγων καὶ πάντων ὀργάνων φωνάς, καὶ ἔτι κυνῶν καὶ προβάτων καὶ ὀρνέων φθόγγους . . .

Commentators and translators generally agree that Socrates is referring to the effect of imitations of such sounds in performances of drama or dithyramb, and that the *mimesis* in question is the result of ‘identification’ on the part of spectators.<sup>1</sup> As Adam puts it: ‘In good acting the spectator identifies himself with the actor through sympathy; and as the actor “imitates” so does he.’ Since several of the sounds mentioned would be difficult to imitate effectively by the human voice, Adam and others suggest that the imitative sounds were produced by musical effects<sup>2</sup> and stage-machines (such as the *βροντεῖον*).<sup>3</sup> They note that the later ‘degenerate’ dithyrambic performances aimed at mimetic effects of this kind; and so too, of course, did Old Comedy. The three main points in this generally accepted interpretation are:

(a) the *mimesis* mentioned here is largely a matter of musical reproduction of the sounds listed;

(b) the *mimesis* consists of direct mimicry of these sounds;

(c) Socrates is referring to dramatic and dithyrambic performances.

There are objections to all of these points. First, against the notion that musical *mimesis* is primarily or mainly intended: up to this point in the discussion Socrates has confined his remarks to literature. He concludes his literary discussion quite specifically in 398b: ‘Now it looks as if we have completed our survey of the words and myths of *μουσική*.’ Then he explicitly goes on to consider ‘after this’ the remaining matter, namely, the right kind of *ᾠδή* and *μέλος* for the education of the Guardians. It is true that he refers to *ἁρμονίαι* at an earlier point in the discussion (397b–c). But the word cannot be rendered as ‘musical tunes’ there in view of the use of the word *λέγειν* three times in connexion with it and of the specific reference to *λέξις*. It must therefore be translated there as ‘speech-melodies, intonations’ as sometimes elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The same is true of *Republic* 601a, *ἐὰν . . . τις λέγη ἐν μέτρῳ καὶ ῥυθμῷ καὶ ἁρμονίᾳ*.

<sup>1</sup> E. A. Havelock (*Preface to Plato*, Oxford 1963, especially in chapters 2, 3 and 9), describes the deep-seated causes for psychosomatic participation of classical Greek audiences in poetic performances or recitals. But he accepts (p. 22) the conventional interpretation that Socrates is referring to the imitation of ‘the growls and squeaks of animals’ in the passages under discussion here. See further in note 13 below.

<sup>2</sup> An example of this not cited by editors is in the fragment of Diphilos cited by Athenaios, *Deipn.* 14, 657e where pipe-players are said to cackle like geese (*χηρρίζειν*).

<sup>3</sup> Such *ex machina* solutions are not required in view

of Aeschylus’ reference to the thundering sound of drums in a fragment of his *Edonoi*: *ταυρόφθογγοι ὑπομυκῶνται/ ποθεν ἐξ ἀφανοῦς φοβεροὶ μίμοι τυπάνου δεικῶν ὅσθ’ ὑπογαίου/ βροντῆς φέρεται βαρνηταρβής*. Cf. *LSJ* at *μυκάομαι* (last entry).

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *Laws* 665a where Plato refers to a *τάξις φωνῆς* which is called *ἁρμονία* and consists of acute and grave tones mixed together. Even *μέλος* is used in this sense by Dionysios of Halicarnassos (*De comp.* 11), there also with reference to the Greek pitch-accent: cf. Aristoxenos, *Harm.* 1.18.

It is the chronic ambiguity of words like *μουσική*, *ἁρμονία*, *φωνή* and *μέλος* that makes discussion of literary and musical *mimesis* so complicated. (On

Secondly, all the previous examples of *mimesis* imply some kind of impersonation: the actor and the 'identifying' spectator become like the objects of the *mimesis* in their own personal behaviour. Indeed impersonation seems generally to be essential to *mimesis* in its broader sense (as distinct from simple copying<sup>5</sup>). But when a musician plays an instrument or a stage-hand works a machine there is no impersonation, any more than—to quote an example from Book Ten where *mimesis* means mere copying—when a furniture-maker makes a bed like another bed or like the Form of Bed (596b).

Thirdly, the second passage quoted at the beginning of this essay includes the sounds of musical instruments as objects of *mimesis*. Obviously this cannot mean musical reproductions of musical sounds but must refer to vocal mimicry or to something else.

Fourthly, when Socrates is about to introduce his examples of the kinds of *mimesis* that are unsuitable for the education of the Guardians (395d) he specifies three ways in which these *mimeseis* affect morals and nature—'in relation to body, voice and mind' (κατὰ σῶμα καὶ φωνὰς καὶ κατὰ τὴν διάνοιαν). His first examples illustrate *mimesis* of people whose emotions or minds are in a condition unworthy of Guardians (such as emotional women, slaves, cowards, madmen). Next he exemplifies the kinds of *mimesis* which would involve banausic bodily gestures (*mimesis* of manual workers at work or oarsmen rowing or coxswains coxing). After that one would naturally expect Socrates to exemplify *mimesis* κατὰ φωνὰς. But if the next passage beginning ἵππους χρεμετίζοντας refers mainly to musical performances and to sounds of theatrical machinery, it is not apt for *mimesis* κατὰ φωνὰς in the relevant sense.

There are also two general objections to the view that the passages under consideration refer to the direct mimicry of natural and of mechanical sounds. First, in the examples already cited the *mimesis* has always been of people *doing* something, a process not a simple phenomenon. But if one takes ἵππους etc. as referring simply to the sounds made by horses, etc., the *mimesis* is of a mere sound. In other words the previous examples suggest (and also perhaps the noun-participle word-order of the phrases ἵππους χρεμετίζοντας, etc.) that one should translate it as 'horses whinnying' not as 'the whinnying of horses'. If this view is correct, Socrates is not referring to such a trivial kind of *mimesis* as the imitation of animal cries in Aristophanes, like βῆ βῆ and αὖ αὖ, which are only momentary exclamations (and hardly likely to undermine anyone's morals).

Secondly, as soon as an educated Athenian heard the words ἵππους χρεμετίζοντας his literary associations would probably be directed towards Homeric poetry, and away from drama or dithyramb, since he would recall how Hector's horses μάλα δὲ χρεμετίζον<sup>6</sup> in *Il.* 12.51. So, too, ταύρους μυκωμένους might evoke memories of μεμκωὶς ἤτε ταῦρος in *Il.* 21.237 and uses of μυκῶμαι in *Il.* 18.580, *Od.* 10.413, 12.395 (cf. *Il.* 12.575, *Od.* 12.265). The other less distinctive phrases in 396c could also refer to Homeric passages, as will be shown later. But Homer does not use simple mimicry of animal cries like βῆ βῆ. Therefore if, as the nature of the language in this passage suggests, Homer is in mind, Plato cannot be referring to such sounds as βῆ βῆ (or to musical performances) here. It is true that in the second passage quoted at the beginning of this essay Socrates adds unhomeric objects of *mimesis* such as pulleys and pan-pipes. This does not preclude Homeric associations in the other references. Socrates may just be widening his examples of *mimesis* κατὰ φωνὰς to include some from contemporary literature, including dithyramb. But Homer is the

φωνή see M. Leroy in *REG* lxxx [1967] 234-7.) The only safe way of referring to them is to use the Greek terms, since most translations are question-begging. There is also the uncertainty caused by the fact that in antiquity non-lyrical poetry was delivered in a manner intermediate between singing and normal speaking (Aristoxenos, *Harmonics* 1.3, Aristides Quintilianus, *De mus.* 1.4, Cicero, *De oratore* 17, schol. on Dionysios Thrax 744.32B and 746.1).

<sup>5</sup> The evidence is summarised by Havelock (see note 1) pp. 57-60.

<sup>6</sup> This is the only recorded instance of χρεμετίζω in Greek poetry before Plato. (Hesiod uses the shorter form, χρέμισαν, of horses in *Shield* 348.) Herodotus uses it in what looks like an oracular phrase (3, 86 and 87). Aristophanes has the noun χρεμετισμός in a dithyrambic passage (*Knights* 553).

primary target not the dithyrambists, as becomes evident again later in the description of the man who is to be banished (398a) as ‘holy’. This would hardly be apt for, say, Timotheos or Philoxenos.

It seems, then, that some explanation which does not depend entirely on musical performances or simple mimicry is required. Shorey in a brief note to his translation (at 396b) assumes, like other editors, that Socrates is primarily concerned here with the later dithyramb. But he also suggests, that the *mimesis* referred to is that achieved by the use of onomatopoeic language or ‘programme’ music. He quotes Stefan Zweig on the Belgian poet Verhaeren: ‘often in his rhythm can be heard the beat of hammers, the hard, edged, regular whizzing of wheels, the whirring of looms, the hissing of locomotives . . .’, and refers to the cry of a baby in a Strauss symphony and the contortions of the dragon in Wagner’s *Siegfried*. He does not offer any support for this second suggestion. It is proposed to do so in what follows here.

The belief that Plato primarily meant onomatopoeic language, and in particular the onomatopoeic language of Homer was clearly held by some ancient critics. Dionysios of Halicarnassos (*De comp.* 15) discusses the use that poets make of the sound-properties (ἤχοι) of words. He quotes passages from Homer which are μιμητικά τῶν πραγμάτων. The passages describe, and are mimetic of, the roaring of the sea (*Od.* 5.402, *Il.* 2.209–10; cf. *Il.* 17.265 which Dionysios has quoted in chapter 14), the blasts of the wind (*Il.* 12.207), and the hiss of arrows and thud of spears (*Il.* 16.361). He goes on to remark (chapter 16):

The great originator and teacher in these matters is Nature, who makes us inclined to imitate and to assign words (μιμητικούς καὶ θετικούς ἡμᾶς τῶν ὀνομάτων) by which things are pictured, in virtue of certain resemblances which are founded in reason and appeal to our intelligences. It is by her that we have been taught to speak of (λέγειν) the bellowing of bulls (ταύρων μυκήματα), the whinnying of horses (χρεμετισμούς ἵππων), the snorting of goats, the roar of fire, the rushing of winds, the creaking of hawsers, and numerous other similar imitations (μιμήματα) of sound, form, action, emotion, movement, stillness, and anything else whatsoever. On these points much has been said by our predecessors, the most important contributions being by the first of them to introduce the subject of etymology, Plato the disciple of Socrates, in his *Cratylus* especially, but in many other places as well. (Rhys Roberts’ translation.)

Later in the same chapter Dionysios quotes examples of Homeric onomatopoeia for the rushing of rivers (*Il.* 4.452–3, 21.240–2). Subsequently, in chapter 20 where he is discussing appropriateness (τὸ πρέπον) he asserts that the good poet and orator should be μιμητικὸν τῶν πραγμάτων not only in his choice of words but also in their combination. ‘This’, he adds, ‘is the practice of that most divinely inspired (δαιμονιώτατος) Homer.’<sup>7</sup> As illustration he cites the famous description of Sisyphos rolling his stone (*Od.* 11.593–8), which he analyses in detail for sound-effects. Many other similar passages, he says, could also be quoted.

Dion Chrysostom describes the same aspect of Homer’s diction in his twelfth discourse (§68):

Homer held himself back from no sound but, in short, made *mimeseis* (μιμούμενος) of the voices (φωνάς) of rivers and the forest and winds and fire and the sea and also of bronze and stone and, broadly speaking, of all animals and instruments, both of wild beasts and birds as well as of pipes and pan-pipes. He first invented the terms *καναχάς*,

<sup>7</sup> The favourable view of Homer’s use of onomatopoeia is supported by Demetrios (*De eloc.* 94, cf. 72), the Plutarchan *Life of Homer* 16, and the Homeric scholiasts and Eustathios (see J. Barr, *Index zu den Ilias-Scholien* and the index to the Leipzig edition of Eustathios at *ὀνοματοποιία*, *ἔμφρασις* and *μίμησις*

and cognates). Philodemos (Sudhaus 1.33.14 and 2.257–8: cf. 1.150.15) cites the opposite view that such sound-effects (ἤχοι) distract the attention of hearers from the contents of literature and from the truth (n. 10 below).

βόμβους, κτύπον, δοῦπον, and ἄραβον and gave names to ποταμούς τε μορμύροντας καὶ βέλη κλάζοντα καὶ βοῶντα κύματα καὶ χαλεπαίνοντας ἀνέμους. . . . He had no lack of fearful words and pleasant ones as well as smooth and rough ones. . . .

In a later paragraph (71) Dion speaks of μιμήματα . . . γεγοητευμένα [probably a Platonic echo] μέτροις καὶ ἤχοις. In his fifty-third discourse (§5) he remarks that Plato 'while finding fault with Homer . . . at the same time declares his poetic power to be astonishing since . . . he utters literally all φωνάς, of rivers and winds and waves'.

From the similarity between these passages in Dionysios and Dion and the two in *Republic* 396b–7c it would seem that the two later writers had the earlier discussion in mind and were answering Socrates' objections from the point of view of the poet, while defending Homer's use of onomatopoeia as a poetic device.

Plutarch on the other hand apparently refers to direct mimicry of animal cries and mechanical sounds when he remarks (*Quomodo adolescens* 18c). 'When we hear the cry of a pig or the sound of a pulley and the hiss (ρόζον) of winds and the surge (κτύπον) of the sea we are disturbed and vexed, but if anyone imitates them convincingly (as Parmenon imitated a pig, and Theodoros pulleys) then we are pleased.' But he makes no clear reference to Socrates' arguments in *Republic* 395b ff. Nor is he here discussing the ethical and educational effects of *mimesis*, but rather the relationship between the objects of *mimesis* and the artist's resulting *μίμημα*, emphasizing the difference between the displeasure caused by ugly sounds and the pleasure caused by hearing skilful mimicries of them. Also he omits the 'horses whinnying' and 'bulls roaring', which are common to Dionysios, Dion and Plato. Consequently this passage can hardly be taken as deriving directly from the discussion in *The Republic*.

Some of the ancient commentators on Homer refer to Plato in connexion with onomatopoeia in Homer. Unfortunately the tradition is confused. Commenting on *Il.* 17.263 ff.,

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἐπὶ προχοῇσι διυπετέος ποταμοῖο  
βέβρυχεν μέγα κύμα ποτὶ ῥόον, ἀμφὶ δέ τ' ἄκραι  
ἠΐονες βοῶσιν ἐρευγομένης ἁλὸς ἕξω,

the B scholiast says: 'This representation caused the burning of Plato's poems, because it presented the acoustic element so much more vividly than the visual' (αὕτη ἢ εἰκὼν Πλάτωνος ἔκαυσε τὰ ποιήματα· οὕτως ἐναργέστερον τοῦ ὄρωμένου τὸ ἀκούμενον παρέστησε). But then he adds that a similar story was told about Solon.<sup>8</sup> The A and T scholiasts and Eustathios (on *Il.* 18.392 as well as on *Il.* 17.263 ff.) also vacillate between Plato and Solon, and the tradition is further confused by Diogenes Laertios, *Lives of philosophers* 3.5–6. But at all events the ascription to Plato by the Homeric commentators indicates a belief that Plato was sensitive to Homer's use of onomatopoeic language, and the special reference to Homer's description of a river in flood suggests a connexion with the ποταμούς ψοφούντας of *Republic* 396b.

Two passages from Plato's own writings should now be considered. In *Laws* 669b–d the Athenian Stranger describes the technical incompetence of poets in comparison with the Muses (who here represent the ideal poet). Two of the blunders that poets make, he says, are, first, to assign inappropriate gestures and μέλος (probably meaning musical melody, not speech-melody, here) and rhythms to their characters, and, secondly, to assign inappropriate music or words to their rhythms. The Stranger goes on to say that poets also spoil the unity of their compositions by combining in a single piece θηρίων φωνάς καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ὀργάνων καὶ πάντας ψόφους ὡς ἔν τι μιμούμενοι. These faults are marks of boorishness (ἀγροικίας, 669e) he asserts, and show an excessive craving for speed, fluency (ἀπταισίας)

<sup>8</sup> The confusion of Solon with Plato here may result from the fact that both of them had a distaste for the 'lies' of drama, if the story of Solon's rebuke to Thespis (Plutarch, *Solon* 29) is true.

and for animalistic sound (*φωνῆς θηριώδους*). Such remarks look like a brief recapitulation of the arguments in *Republic* 395c ff. But the question at issue is different, and the examples are too cursorily stated to show what kind of *mimesis* of animal cries, etc., is intended.

The elaborate examination of word-mimesis in the *Cratylus* (422e–427d) does not clearly help with the interpretation of the passages in *The Republic*, either. Here Socrates says that the kind of *mimesis* he has in mind is not the *mimesis* of those who imitate sheep and cocks and other animals, nor is it the *mimesis* found in *μουσική* (though that, he notes, is a kind of vocal *mimesis*, too), but the *mimesis* of the essence (*οὐσία*) of things such as movement.<sup>9</sup> The examples given are in fact types of onomatopoeia. But they come from colloquial language, not from literary sources, and Homer is not mentioned or hinted at. If any conclusion about Plato's views on vocal *mimesis* can be drawn from this, it might be that he was more interested in onomatopoeic *mimesis* than in musical effects or simple mimicry. So, indeed, one might expect from a serious-minded critic of literature, since onomatopoeia is a device frequently used by poets with far-reaching effects, while the simple mimicry of sounds by vocalists or musicians is more suited to the music-hall than to the theatre or the concert-room, though occasionally even master-musicians indulge in brief moments of that kind—Beethoven, for example, in his *Pastoral Symphony*.

If the preceding interpretations are valid, it would seem that in *Republic* 396b–c Socrates when condemning a certain kind of verbal *mimesis* in the education of the Guardians begins with examples of onomatopoeic language from the Homeric poems and then, in the second passage cited at the beginning of this essay, extends the scope of mimetic language to include direct mimicry. Readers who dislike Plato's attitude to poetry and the poets in *The Republic* may discern another instance of unfairness in Socrates' arguments when in this way he associates a time-honoured and serious device of high poetry with such trivialities as cockadoodledoo and 'Baa Baa black sheep', or

Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo.

It is true that Socrates attributes the use of such simple mimicry to 'the inferior person' (397a) only. But 'the balanced man' will not employ even onomatopoeic language of the Homeric type except 'by way of a joke' (*παιδίας χάριν*: 396e). At the end of his argument the impression is that such *mimesis* is unworthy of the *καλὸς κάγαθός*.<sup>10</sup>

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Three objections to this suggestion that Plato is primarily concerned with Homeric onomatopoeia in *Republic* 396b ff. remain to be considered. First it may be felt that the transition from what is apparently a discussion of *mimesis* in drama (395d 5 ff.) to *mimesis* in epic (399a 8) is too abrupt. But in fact, despite the opinion of most editors, the earlier part of the discussion is not confined to drama. 'Women in troubles, in griefs and in lamentations' and 'people abusing and ridiculing one another and using shameful language', and 'a metal-worker at work', and 'oarsmen rowing boats' are portrayed in the Homeric poems as well as in drama. It is true that some of the other activities mentioned cannot be

<sup>9</sup> In 423b an *ὄνομα* is defined as a *μίμημα φωνῆ* which implies an important distinction between a word when it has been accepted as a current term and a word when it is being 'invented' by a 'word-maker', the first being an *ἔργον* a product, the second an *ἐνέργεια* a process, which is often a *mimesis*. Cf. Paul Vicaire, *Platon, critique littéraire* (Paris, 1960) 221. In *Cratylus* 423c Socrates says that both those who mimic other noises and also performers of musical *mimeseis* are not 'word-makers' in the same sense as those who coin mimetic (i.e. onomatopoeic) words.

He goes on to make a subtle analysis (426c–27d) of some of the phonetic elements in speech which underlie onomatopoeic effects. (On early views, going back to Demokritos, about the development of music from imitation of bird-song see T. B. L. Webster, *CQ* xxxiii [1939] 168.)

<sup>10</sup> This prejudice against onomatopoeia survives into modern times, as e.g., when a writer in *CQ* xxxvi (1942), p. 39, remarked, 'The attempt to be onomatopoeic seems just a shade below the dignity of great composition'.

paralleled from Homer and presumably came from drama. But the important point is that the rhapsodes who are mentioned side by side with actors in 395a 8 are not entirely dismissed from attention after that. They, too are responsible for some, at least, of the kinds of *mimesis* mentioned in 395d–6b. So when Socrates moves on in 396b 5 to exemplify *mimesis* κατὰ φωνάς (as mentioned in 395d 3) there was no need for a specific reference to Homer again: as soon as he began his examples with the distinctively Homeric phrase ἵππους χρεμετίζοντας his interlocutors would recognise he was now specifically taking his examples from the *Iliad*. In other words he was intensifying his attack, begun in 386a, on the arch-enemy, the *poeta sovrano*, Homer.

Another objection is that at first sight the use of onomatopoeic language could hardly be ranked with the kind of *mimesis* which consists of behaving like weak or inferior people. But Socrates has already established that except for ‘unmixed’ *mimesis* of a good man (see 395c 2, 396c 8 and 397d 4–5) all *mimesis* is potentially dangerous to goodness and stability of character. He has just implied that to do a *mimesis* of banausic people is reprehensible. Now he argues that to do a *mimesis* of animals or natural phenomena is an equally reprehensible abandonment of one’s own personal identity. More subtly, too, Socrates is leading on to his final condemnation of ‘a man who is able by his technical skill (ὑπὸ σοφίας) to become all kinds of people and to make *mimeseis* of (μιμεῖσθαι) all kinds of things’ (398a), even if he be ‘a holy, wondrous and pleasing person’. We must, Socrates adds, find a more austere and less complaisant kind of poet who will only make the kind of *mimesis* that is fit for an estimable man (ἐπιεικοῦς), *Mimesis* κατὰ φωνάς as a regular practice is fit only for the φαυλότερος (397a) or schizophrenics (μαινομένοις: 396b).

A further objection remains. Granted that an actor or performer or orator<sup>11</sup> makes a *mimesis* when performing, and granted that members of the audience experience a *mimesis* by identification with the performance, can either the composers or the readers of epic poetry be said to be involved in a similar kind of *mimesis*? Yes, if full allowance is made for the oral nature of both the composing and the private reading of poetry in classical times. Though no clear evidence exists either way, in view of what is still common poetic practice and of the fact that writing-materials for extensive records were still expensive and awkward to handle, most poets probably composed their work while speaking it aloud with appropriate gestures.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, even solitary readers apparently read works of literature aloud as a normal practice until well into medieval times.<sup>13</sup> So, in the terms used by Socrates in the passage under discussion, there was ample opportunity for *μίμησις κατὰ φωνάς* both in composing poetry and in reading poetry. When a reader in Socrates’ time read a phrase like ἡῖόνες βοόωσιν he would be doing a *mimesis* of the sound of cliffs echoing the resonance of a surging sea in much the same way as Homer did when he exploited that onomatopoeia in his description of a ποταμὸς ψοφῶν in *Il.* 17.265.

To sum up: in general what Socrates means in this whole discussion of poetic *mimesis*

<sup>11</sup> The phrase τοῦ τοιούτου ῥήτορος in 396e implies that Socrates is also thinking of ‘the good man’ as a public speaker in contrast with ‘the inferior man’ who will use vocal *mimesis* freely in his speeches.

<sup>12</sup> This seems to be the general sense of Aristotle’s statement in *Poetics* 1455a 21–30 that in poetic composition one must συναπεργάζεσθαι both in diction and in gestures. The passage is much disputed, but the verb could mean ‘working out with’ in the sense both of using appropriate tones of voice in composing the words and of using appropriate gestures when describing actions and emotions. Commentators have noted that Aristophanes may be burlesquing the second process in *Acharnians* 410–14 and *Thesmophoriazousai* 148–67.

<sup>13</sup> For a recent discussion of the evidence see B. M. W. Knox in *GRBS* ix (1968) 421–35. If the prevalence of reading literature aloud, even when reading alone for oneself, is accepted, it removes one of the main difficulties in Havelock’s very proper insistence on the oral nature of Greek poetry down to the fourth century B.C. (see n. 1 above), namely, why does Plato apply the term *mimesis* to the learner or reader of poetry as well as to the poet and the performer (pp. 24 and 37 ff.)? His solution is that in fact the learning and personal enjoyment of poetry remained an oral process, by recital and performance, down to Plato’s time. But he admits that Plato sometimes uses language that implies taking up a manuscript and reading it for oneself (*Repub.* 606c,

seems to be something like this. There are two ways in which poetry can especially corrupt would-be Guardians. In terms of how the action is presented, dramatized poetry (whether epic or theatrical) causes the poet, actor, rhapsode, listener, and reader, to identify himself in mind and gesture with the objects of dramatic presentation, which are often despicable. In terms of diction, mimetic language such as Homer uses causes the same kinds of person (and here Socrates in the second passage adds musicians and mimics) to identify themselves in their voices with animals and natural phenomena. Though these objects are not necessarily despicable in themselves, such mimesis, like the dramatic kind, involves an abandonment of one's personal identity similar to insanity (and 'it is forbidden to the Guardians either to be mad or make themselves like mad people', 396b 8–9). In other words Socrates' indictment of Homer is not allowed to lapse in this part of the argument. Homer is still the supremely guilty man, guilty both in his dramatic *mimesis* and in his vocal *mimesis* (onomatopoeia). Though he is not specifically named in the final decree of banishment (398a), the description points to him and not to the degenerate dithyrambists and musicians whom most commentators have suggested as main perpetrators of vocal *mimesis*. Fortunately for literature, Socrates' objection to mimetic language did not become normative. Virgil was not deterred by it nor Dante, nor Milton, nor Joyce, nor innumerable other honoured adepts in onomatopoeia.<sup>14</sup>

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*Apology* 22b), and his attempts to rebut the strong case made by E. G. Turner (*Athenian books in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.*, London 1951) for some degree of private reading in that period is hardly successful. Yet, whatever the prevalence of literacy may have been at that time, Havelock's main contention, that poetry continued to be an oral and mimetic experience

into the fourth century, remains valid because even the private reading of poetry was normally aloud (not silent as Havelock seems to assume) until long after Plato's time.

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Professors J. V. Luce and D. E. W. Wormell for helpful comments on this article, and to my wife for proof-reading.