

A COMMENTARY ON PLATO'S *ION*

By

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Abstract

This study focuses on testing the five hermeneutic principles set out by Jakob Klein and two of my own. The test consists of writing a commentary on Plato's *Ion* read in accordance with those principles. In summary these principles require paying close attention to the dramatic aspect of the dialogue and reading in a very detailed fashion.

The success or failure of the principles is to be decided on the basis of the quality of the reading they produce. If following the principles produces a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the dialogue then they should be deemed successful.

The principles require that attention be given to the framing details of the dialogue and that an attempt be made to integrate them into the overall understanding. This interpretation thus reaches a somewhat different understanding of Sokrates' purpose in talking to Ion and Plato's purpose in writing the dialogue. Instead of an abstract battle between philosophy and poetry, we have a battle between two particular characters over a real city.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Experimental Hermeneutics

1.1.1 Goal of Thesis

“In the past, for long stretches of time, writing commentaries was a way of expounding the truth. It still may be that” (Klein, *Meno* 3).

And so we have the bold challenge of this writing. To write a commentary that not only engages us in thinking (if, perhaps, writing and thinking are not inherently incompatible) but, even bolder (μᾶ Δίᾱ), expounds (exegetai/leads out) the truth (aletheia/unhidden).

More specifically, my goal is to perform a close reading of Plato’s *Ion* as an experiment in the use of certain hermeneutic principles. I presume that the dialogue concerns Plato’s philo-sophy, a combination of love - which is not impartial - and wisdom - which is not scholarship. The principles might be best seen as a package in that they represent a certain unified way of regarding Plato’s dialogues. The success or failure of these principles might be judged in much the same way as one scientific paradigm becomes regarded as superior to a previous one – they provide richer and more powerful interpretations, in that they include and explain more phenomena.

1.1.2 Hermeneutic Principles

How has the *Ion* been read in the past? John Moore says:

Goethe found its [*Ion*'s] representations of poetry so unsympathetic that he called it "eine offenbare Persiflage" and claimed that "mit der Poesie hat das ganze Gespräch nichts zu thun". Schleiermacher thought it either a puzzling early work or spurious or perhaps an early sketch by Plato later reworked by a student. Ast and Ritter pronounced it spurious, as did Wilamowitz for many years. When Wilamowitz ultimately changed his mind, he still judged it a poor and puzzling piece of work, an intolerant satire more than a dialogue. He found Socrates' lecturing inconsistent with the question-and answer-technique of the early dialogues; he considered it the earliest of the dialogues, one of three written during Socrates' lifetime. Plato's intolerance towards poetry resulted then from his recent conversion by Socrates from poetry to philosophy (421).

What can we make of this supposed conversion of Plato by Sokrates from poetry to philosophy? What is the difference between these two? How are we to read Plato's *Ion*, as a work of philosophy, or as a work of poetry?

But is there a method that we can follow to write a proper commentary on a Platonic dialogue? Plato offers no recipe¹, but we can select a few principles and make an attempt to test those principles. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and so the reader should perform their own experiment in hermeneutics. Test the bold conjectures and see if they are refutable?

As our guiding principles, we start with those enumerated in several places by Jacob Klein. Klein's five principles might be summarized as follows:

1. A dialogue is not a treatise.
2. Seriousness and playfulness are sisters.
3. No dialogue represents what might be called *the* "Platonic doctrine."

¹ Although one might argue that the *Ion* itself provides a sort of recipe of what to avoid in writing a commentary.

4. Each dialogue must be taken as a dramatic whole. “Before we could understand any ‘development’ in Plato’s thinking, it is incumbent on us to understand each dialogue on its own” (*Lectures 309/310*).²

5. Every word in a Platonic dialogue counts, and for somebody in the dialogue to remain silent may count even more. We should not assume that anything in Plato is meaningless, just because we have not understood it. We must not of course take this principle literally in that every word counts equally. However, one must be careful not to approach the dialogue with a presumption that one already knows the theme of the dialogue and therefore can immediately ignore sections as meaningless in order to jump to the meat of the dialogue. Thus, this principle leads to our style of close reading. The dialogue will be examined line by line, slowly attempting to build an understanding; questioning without expecting that answers will immediately be obvious.

To these five, I would add the following two (they are not original to me, but have proven their worth to me in past attempts at interpretation):

6. Plato builds a sort of lexicon. The precise meanings of various Greek terms can be slowly brought into view by closely watching how they are used. Regardless of this, there is still no ‘technical’ terminology of Plato. Even the best translation is an interpretation; an alternative goal is to translate yourself into an ancient Greek by immersion in these Greek authors in order to read as an educated ancient Greek would. This in turn demands one attempt to acquire a thorough knowledge of ancient Greek

² There has been considerable discussion about the order in which the dialogues were written. I hope that these problems have been solved, but I will not make use of any such biographical concerns. Rather I will focus my attention toward understanding this particular dialogue and permitting it to come to life. The notion of the ordering of the dialogues will not be under investigation.

society including the writings of such authors as Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Thukidides, Pindar, Aristophanes, and Euripides.

7. Finally, we have the most fundamental principle that is illustrated in this thesis. As Klein puts it, “it is important to see that all this action clearly anticipates Socrates’ later words about the relation between the spoken and the written word... what happens cannot be separated from what is said and argued about.” (*Meno* 15) There is a connection between the deed - *ergon* - and the speech - *logon*. Thus we will have to pay attention to what Sokrates and Ion do, not merely to what they say. As noted above this includes paying attention to what they do not say - when they are silent.

1.1.3 Why The *Ion*?

Why consider the *Ion*? I have three primary reasons to write a commentary about this dialogue. To the extent that one is concerned about how to interpret a Platonic dialogue, then the *Ion* is relevant because the dialogue itself contains some sort of consideration of the nature of interpretation of a literary work. To some extent, we have a boot-strap problem. We interpret the *Ion*, a dialogue that concerns itself with interpretation, in an attempt to test certain principles of interpretation. This interweaving of the levels can become rather comic.

Secondly, the *Ion* has another advantage of being almost the shortest Platonic dialogue (with the exception of the *Cleitophon*) and so in some ways it is easier to attempt an experiment in hermeneutical principles. One might more easily remember what has happened at the beginning of the dialogue through to the end.

Finally, there has also been some discussion about the authenticity of the *Ion*. At first, I was tempted to merely pass those discussions by. Let us suppose that we could prove that the dialogue was inauthentic. Would we thereby have extracted any truth or meaning from the dialogue, if in fact there were any to extract? But now I wish to put this question also to the test. As I work the dialogue I assume that a master's hand has been at work in the composition. If the parts continue to resist my attempts to bring them together into a coherent whole, I will be very suspicious of the authenticity. This suspicion is based on the experience of working some of Plato's other dialogues and seeing how wonderfully the details in those dialogues cohere and have meaning. My authenticity test is based on detecting Platonic mastery in the composition. We will recall Sokrates' comment to Phaedrus, at *Phaedrus* 264b, about - ἀνάγκην λογογραφικὴν - necessary writing. It is a matter of the selection of the correct words: knowing what words are fitting – πρέπον. This notion of 'fitting' will recur.

1.2 Historical Background

1.2.1 What is a rhapsode?

The rhapsode is: he who sews together [*rhaptei*] the song [*aoide*]. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Sokrates asks Euthydemus what he wishes to achieve by collecting books (συλλέγεις τὰ γράμματα). He wishes to know if Euthydemus, having a complete copy of Homer, wishes to become like a rhapsode:

ἀλλὰ μὴ ραψωδός; καὶ γὰρ τὰ Ὀμήρου σέ φασιν ἔπι πάντα κεκτῆσθαι
Perhaps a rhapsodist, then? They tell me you have a complete copy of Homer.

Euthydemus replies --μὰ Δί' οὐκ ἔγωγ'...· τοὺς γάρ τοι ραψωδοὺς οἶδα τὰ μὲν ἔπη ἀκριβοῦντας αὐτοὺς δὲ πάνυ ἡλιθίους
Oh no, not at all; for your rhapsodists, I know, are consummate as reciters, but they are very silly fellows themselves. (Xenophon *Memorabilia* IV II 10)

Nagy says:

It is simplistic and even misleading to contrast, as many have done, the 'creative' *aidos* [singer] with the 'reduplicating' *rhapsoidos*. Here the argument is more specific: that the rhapsode cannot be viewed as merely 'reduplicating' what Homer had said. The conventional view of the rhapsode as a mere replica of Homer is mainly inspired by Plato's *Ion*, where the rhapsode Ion is metaphorically pictured as the last and weakest link in a long magnetic chain leading all the way back to the real thing, the original magnet, the genius of Homer. This idea of a reperformed composer, as we will see, is contradicted by the more archaic mentality of *mimesis*, which shapes (over a lengthy stretch of time) the alternative idea of a recomposed performer, that is, the idea that performers may persist in appropriating to themselves the persona of the composer.... The words of Homer are supposed to be the recordings of the Muses, who saw and heard exactly what had happened in that remote age; therefore, what Homer narrates is exactly what the Muses saw, and what Homer quotes within his narrations is exactly what the Muses heard...My argument is that the rhapsode is re-enacting Homer by performing Homer, that he is Homer so long as the *mimesis* stays in effect...from the standpoint of *mimesis*, the rhapsode is a recomposed performer: he becomes recomposed into Homer every time he performs Homer (60-61).

Rhapsodes originally, and still to some extent in the age of Ion, were singers who did not follow any set text, but sewed together various songs and formulae to create, for each performance, something new. These pieces of cloth could have been sewn in different ways in different orders. Thus, Nagy's claim is that one must not merely oppose the creative *aidos* with the imitative *rhapsoidos*. Each time they sang, they 'became Homer,' who also was a rhapsode, sewing together myths as told to him by a Muse.

In Homer's *Odyssey* (8: 1 541-657), after dinner, in the court of King Alcinous, Demodocus, the blind bard, sings so well of the battle of Troy that he brings tears to the eyes of Odysseus. But then Odysseus himself then takes a turn and sings the story of his travels from Troy to the island of Phaeacia. Both Demodocus and Odysseus rhapsodize; they sew together new songs of what the Muses saw of Troy and Odysseus' travels.

However, knowing how tricky a fellow Odysseus is one must wonder if his stories are accurate representations of the voice of Muse in his ear.

If we merely studied the historical rhapsode, and took Ion as representative of his kind, we would miss the possibility that Plato's Ion may have been atypical, and that his atypicality is important to Plato's theme. Plato's intent in presenting this particular description of a rhapsode need not have been to give an historically accurate description of the art of the rhapsode. So there need not be any argument whether Plato's depiction is 'correct'. In fact, we may just find that Ion himself claims to be an atypical rhapsode. This difference then might be a clue to an understanding of the *Ion*.

1.2.2 Who are the Muses?

Let us turn briefly to look at the Muses. Who are they? Pietro Pucci says:

(quoting Aristides) "Pindar went so far that in his 'Marriage of Zeus' upon Zeus asking the gods whether they felt the want of anything, the gods demanded that he create for himself some gods, who, by means of words and music, would set in order [katakosmesousi] this great work and his whole creation [of the world]" (31).

The blindness of the creator may appear odd but it is understandable. He is so fully identified with his own creation that he cannot see how strange his creation is for the other gods. In other words, Zeus cannot understand that, whatever he intended his work and arrangement of things to be, his real intentions remain latent. Therefore the gods need an interpreter, a seer as it were, who will bring to light the order, the kosmos, of things.

The myth, therefore, demands interpretation, the meaning and the order of the work are possibly there, but they can become manifest only through the work of the interpreter, for a meaning and an order emerge only after the Muses' song. The myth would then also suggest that the 'meaning' could always be an aftereffect of interpretation and not a fixed structure, a closed-up entity residing in the work and constituting its essence or its informative principle (33).

For, thanks to the Muses, the poet gains access to the things themselves in their totality...The Muses know and control all things past, present, and future, both far and near; their song accordingly manifests things as they are, in their truth. (36).

The Muses interpret the kosmos for the gods and make its order evident. The rhapsode/poet speaks the present tale of the Muses – tell me now – in each performance he relies on them. In the *Ion*, we might be watching to see if there is a Muse at work.

1.3 Conclusion

Plato, in this dialogue, provides a dramatic enactment of a conversation between two people. These people may come to a conclusion with which Plato himself does not agree. Shakespeare need not agree with the conclusions drawn by Lord and Lady Macbeth. Let us consider rather that the *Ion* presents Plato's conclusion concerning how a conversation between characters such as Sokrates and Ion might have gone. The accuracy of such a depiction depends on the depth of the poet's understanding of the souls such characters possess.

Why should we be interested in knowing how such a conversation progresses?
What can we learn by what Sokrates does?

My procedure will be, following Klein, to “watch the text carefully, always remaining aware of the playfulness-the sister of seriousness-which persists in the dialogues and determines the way they proceed. We shall watch how the spoken words produce the dramatic content presented to us. We shall participate in the discussions: the paraphrase of the text of the dialogues will be interwoven with what occurs to us as listeners” (*Trilogy 5*).

2. Close Reading: Setting (530a1 – 3)

ΣΩ. Τὸν Ἴωνα χαίρειν. πόθεν τὰ νῦν ἡμῖν ἐπιδεδήμηκας; ἢ οἴκοθεν ἐξ Ἐφέσου;
(530a1) *Sokrates: Ion welcome! Where have you come from to visit us now? From your home at Ephesus?*

And so we begin this commentary on one of Plato's shortest dialogues: the *Ion*. In typical fashion, Plato immediately thrusts us into a conversation that packs a lot of information into its opening lines.

What, who, when, where, why?

2.1 What?

The dialogue starts immediately with the action. Unlike in Homer, the framing in this case is (conspicuously) absent- no: "Tell me Muses". Unlike some of Plato's other dialogues, such as the *Parmenides*, there is no story within a story, or shell; we are thrust immediately into the present of the conversation. The absence of the shell means that there are no specific details such as the location or the date. However, Plato does not provide a timeless, spaceless, impersonal analytical philosophical discussion. It is a drama of two specific people speaking and there are 'clues', through which we can build some of the other specifics of this drama.

Following Greek tradition, Sokrates offers the sort of welcome that a foreigner is due. Sokrates' usage is formal - χαίρέ, ὦ Ἴων would have been less formal. Sokrates

apparently recognizes Ion immediately and already knows something of Ion, particularly that he is from Ephesus. How much more he knows about Ion we will have to discover.

2.2 Who?

We have already been introduced to the two characters of the dialogue – Sokrates and Ion. Let us examine who they might be.

2.2.1 Sokrates?

A contemporary of Plato's might have had specific knowledge of a real meeting between a real Sokrates and a real Ion. We do not. Can we assume that Sokrates here is Sokrates/R, the Sokrates of the *Republic*, or is it the youngster with the same name, Sokrates/S of the *Statesman*? Even if it is Sokrates/R, is he the youngster of the *Parmenides*, or the aged one of the *Phaedo*? For now, let us presume it is Sokrates/R, the most common character in Plato's dialogues, who also appears in the works of Aristophanes, Xenophon and Aristotle. We will look for further information to see if it can help us determine the dramatic date, and thereby the likely age of this Sokrates. The answers to these questions may seem obvious; however, I ask them as a reminder that we need to be careful and not presume that we already know Sokrates, and thereby fail to read this particular dialogue carefully.

2.2.2 Ion?

A contemporary of Plato's likely would immediately recall the mythical Ion (Ion/M) who lived long before Sokrates. Euripides' *Ion*, concerning the mythical Ion, was

produced at roughly the same time as the likely dramatic date of our dialogue. Ion/M was an important character in Athenian history and the traditional founding of Ionia.

Our Ion also could be connected to the poet named Ion of Chios. But, if that were so, it would make little sense for Plato to cast his Ion as a rhapsode. There even might have been a real rhapsode named Ion. Plato almost always uses real historical personage for Sokrates' interlocutors. However, we have no knowledge of such a rhapsode. Regardless, one ought still to pay some attention to the mythical allusions that would have been available to an Athenian.

Euripides' play, *Ion*, (according to P. Burian's commentary in Euripides, 1996 3) was likely produced in the period 412-410 B.C., which is also a possible dramatic date for Plato's *Ion*. According to Euripides' version of Ion's story (mainly as related at lines 8-75), Ion/M was the son of the Athenian princess Kreousa and Apollo. Kreousa was the daughter of Erechtheus, who was the son of Erichthonius. So Ion/M's great-grandfather was Erichthonius, an Athenian king.

Kreousa, having been raped by Apollo, gave birth secretly and then abandoned her child, putting him in a basket along with a cloth she wove. Kreousa had woven images of snakes into this cloth. Apollo then rescues the baby, Ion/M, and takes him to be raised at his temple at Delphi.

The stories of Ion/M and Erichthonius begin to overlap. Erichthonius, Ion/M's great-grandfather, was the legendary founder of the Athenians, and the son of Mother Earth and Hephaestus. Hephaestus had tried to violate Athena, but she wrestled away and he deposited his seed on her thigh. She wiped her thigh with wool and threw it to the

ground near Athens where it impregnated Mother Earth who was traveling there (Graves 101). The baby, Erichthonius, was saved by Athena and placed in a basket wrapped about with two snakes. Ion/M's mother later recognizes her son, Ion/M, in part, through this cloth he has kept with images of the snakes woven into it, (Euripides, *Ion* l. 1427) and through the snake clasp that retells the story of Erichthonius. Euripides makes very clear he is overlapping Ion/M's and Erichthonius' two stories.

Euripides' version is a play on the more traditional version such as that of Hesiod. In Hesiod's version, Ion/M was the son of Xouthos, a foreign (non-Athenian) mortal. Hesiod's version would have been more the standard myth. Euripides plays with the standard stories in composing his tragedies. Euripides' version makes Ion/M the son of Apollo. Whatever Euripides' meaning is in this tragedy, the notion of Apollo being Ion/M's real father, and Xouthos only the step-father, interconnects the legends in a tighter weave and points to a theme of Athenian autochthonicity, and a divine royal lineage. Euripides' story of Ion/M is clearly connected to the Athenians' apparent self-understanding as an indigenous people.³

We will need to consider if the auspicious name Plato has chosen for the character Ion has any meaning in the dialogue; specifically, we will look for discussion concerning Athenian citizenship and whether it is connected to birth or being able to trace one's origin to a divine source.

We also note the interplay between Apollo and his sister Athena. Ion/M is connected with his father, Apollo. Sokrates, the Athenian, is connected with Athena. On

³ Much has been written recently on the connection of Euripides' *Ion* and autochthony, e.g. Loraux..

the other hand in Plato's *Apology* Sokrates claims his 'mission' is derived from an oracle of Apollo, albeit one that is rather suspect⁴ and one that he is trying to test to see what it means. Peeking further afield, we might yet hear the Platonic Ion complain about the prejudice of Athenians against foreigners, even Ionians from Ephesus who, according to legend, descended from the mythical Ion. The lurking of Apollo is notably a political theme; the Delphic oracle of Apollo was not always the ally of his sister's city, Athens.

2.2.3 Others?

Sokrates says that Ion is visiting *us*. The use of the plural is an indication that others might be present. However, a plural of politeness might also be supposed, as though Sokrates were the Athenian Welcome Wagon - 'We, the Athenians, welcome you the guest-stranger.'

2.3 When?

I identify four time levels for the reading:

1. The immediate conversation of Sokrates and Ion, the dramatic date.
2. The time of Plato's composition, the composition date.
3. The reading by a contemporary of Plato, the performance date.
4. The reading in the 21st century, the interpretive date.

⁴ Sokrates says that the oracle was obtained by Chaerephon from Delphi but Chaerephon is dead so one would need to look to his brothers to verify the oracle. We do not know what the brothers might have said. No where else does Sokrates mention this oracle. So I, at least, am suspicious that it is something Sokrates makes up on the spot. Further, the supposed oracle is somewhat ambiguous as Sokrates calls it a riddle.

2.3.1 Dramatic Date

When does the conversation take place? This question hinges in part on how old we decide that Sokrates is. There is nothing to consider so far except that a certain Sokrates is alive.

Several articles have been written on the dating of Plato's *Ion*. These tend to hinge on the reported recital of *Ion* at Epidaurus and the Panathenaia that *Ion* has come to in Athens, and a time during which Ephesus was under the rule of Athens. These do not appear to be sufficient and so there is still some controversy concerning the dating. John Moore's article notes that a dramatic date of 394-391 B.C. is frequently suggested. The anachronism of dating the dialogue after the death of Sokrates is based largely on the connection of Athens to Ephesus and the supposed dates of a certain Herakleides of Klazomenae. Moore points out that many of the arguments offered are "glaring petitio principii" (429). In any case, Moore argues (I think somewhat convincingly) that a better date might be around 412 B.C. to account for a time when Ephesus was ruled by Athens, but more importantly when Sokrates was alive. Although anachronisms may be possible for Plato, there seems to be no reason yet to postulate any date other than during Sokrates' lifetime. Interestingly Moore's suggested date also coincides with the likely date of the production of Euripides' *Ion*.

J.M.M. MacGregor, in his commentary on the *Ion*, argues for a date of about 405 B.C., but indicates that, for him, the date "is not a point of great importance" (xxi).

Interpreting this dialogue does not seem to hinge on the dating, so I will accept MacGregor's conclusion.

2.3.2 Written Date

When was the dialogue written? It will suffice for our purpose here to assume that it was written by Plato and so, likely, between 402 and 346 B.C. We can discuss later our conclusions concerning this assumption. Moore discusses the common notion that places this dialogue as perhaps Plato's first attempt. Moore concludes, "Here I wish only to suggest...that the *Ion* was not necessarily first or among the first of Plato's works and should not be judged spurious because its mature thought conflicts with an assumed date" (439).

2.3.3 Performance Date

One might presume the dialogue was intended to be presented orally, read out loud by a slave at Plato's academy to the various 'students' assembled there. The reading requires no action, but would require either two slaves, or one slave imitating two different voices. However we are not presuming a date of composition, so it may have pre-dated the academy and merely been performed privately.

2.4 Where?

We roughly have a place for the dialogue – Sokrates welcomes Ion as the host, so presumably they are somewhere in Athens. As we read further this will become evident. Ion, according to Sokrates, is a traveling foreigner from Ephesus, in Asia Minor, the home of the Ionians.

Where are they in Athens? This is not specified, although we might speculate that it is in the agora. Sokrates is supposed to have spent time talking to others in the common

meeting ground of the agora. We have no reason to suppose that this is not a private dialogue between two people. There is no mention of other people throughout the dialogue or of being in a public place. The lack of specifics of place and time may in fact be deliberate. Plato in other dialogues gives much more specific information concerning time and place. Here, Sokrates and Ion appear to be floating as a cloud free of any particularities. One might interpret this as a ‘hint’ that no historical meeting between Sokrates and Ion occurred; however, such a speculation seems unnecessary, as there are other specifics, such as Ion being from Ephesus, which Plato has chosen to include.

2.5 Why?

We might ask this question at several levels. Why does Plato present a speech between Sokrates and Ion? But we might also ask Sokrates why. Sokrates speaks first and formally welcomes Ion to Athens. Sokrates initiates the dialogue. We might conclude that Sokrates sought out this Ion in order to talk to him. Why would Sokrates apparently search out and greet Ion? What might have attracted Sokrates to such a character? Is Sokrates searching to fulfill his self-appointed quest, recounted in Plato’s *Apology*, to test the oracle and find someone, perhaps Ion, wiser than he? Sokrates does not directly tell us his motivation; there is no framing wherein Sokrates says that he went down to the agora yesterday to talk and to test the newly arrived famous rhapsode. Indeed, our guiding question in this commentary might be just this: Why might Sokrates have sought out Ion:

Does he wish to convince Ion of something?

Does he wish to change Ion in some way?

Does he wish to learn something from or about Ion?

Finally, why did Ion come to Athens? Pondering that question also might give us a clue to Sokrates' motivation.

3. Examination: Rhapsode (530a3 – c7)

3.1 Framing

ΙΩΝ. Ούδαμῶς, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλ' ἐξ Ἐπιδαύρου ἐκ τῶν Ἀσκληπιείων.(530a3)

Ion replies that he has been to Epidaurus, and that he was at the Asklepieia, a 'religious' festival for the god of healing, Asklepios. Ion's reply may be read with a bit of swagger. The word Ούδαμῶς implies that his response is more than a factual statement, more of a: "No way have I just left home, I have been around the world." Indeed Ion is a world traveler and professional rhapsode having just arrived in cosmopolitan Athens, the gathering place for traveling Sophists, metics and other foreigners.

ΣΩ. Μῶν καὶ ῥαψωδῶν ἀγῶνα τιθέασιν τῷ θεῷ οἱ Ἐπιδαύριοι; (530a5)

Sokrates asks if they have a rhapsode contest to honour the god at Epidaurus.⁵ Although rhapsodic contests at the religious festivals apparently were an established tradition in Athens⁶, Sokrates' reply indicates, perhaps feigned, ignorance of, or perhaps disbelief in, such a contest at Epidaurus. The word, 'Μῶν' indicates an expectation of a negative reply.

In Athens, the Athenians celebrated the Panathenaia annually, in honour of Athena, their patron goddess. Every four years, the Great Panathenaia was held, including

⁵ Klein suggests that Sokrates must be wondering what is the relationship between healing and the declaiming of poetry (*Lectures* 345).

⁶ In the course of his ambitious programme, Pericles at that point [the time during which Pericles had immense public works of buildings constructed in Athens] for the first time had a decree enacted that called for a seasonal contest of songmaking [μουσική] to be held at the Panathenaia, and he himself was the organizer. (Plutarch, *Pericles* 180)

contests in music and athletics. Contests between Homeric rhapsodes appear to have started in Athens.

The honour of starting the competition was itself the subject of some competition. Plutarch attributes the introduction of the competitions to Perikles. Another ancient source, the *Hipparchus* by pseudo-Plato, attributes the establishment to Peisistratos' son who "compelled the rhapsodes at the Panathenaia to go through them taking up the cue in turn, as they still do now" (quoted in Nagy 70). Apparently, at Peisistratos' time the performance was regulated in terms of the sequencing of the stories; in Nagy's terms, Homer was more of a 'script', not yet a 'text'. Previously, even the order of the stories was open to the rhapsode's choice.

This local Athenian practise of rhapsodic contests appears to have migrated to Epidaurus, as the worship of Asklepios had migrated to Athens. The contest of rhapsodes reciting Homer occurred at the Panathenaia, the festival of Athena. Similarly, at the festival of Dionysos, there were contests of tragedies and satyr plays. In the *Odyssey*, Athena is Odysseus' constant companion and ally. Asklepios does not figure in. Perhaps Sokrates' shock is that a religious festival given in Athens, for Athena, has in part come to be used in Epidaurus to honour their local deity, Asklepios, Athena's nephew.

ΙΩΝ. Πάνυ γε, καὶ τῆς ἄλλης γε μουσικῆς. (530a7)

Ion says that contests in the rest of music also take place. Plutarch claims that Perikles established contests in μουσική, and that Perikles had instructions for flute playing, zither plucking and singing. The latter may have been the rhapsodic performance of Homer.

only a formal manner of speaking, suitable for Ion's (as we suspect later) rather royal appearance. It does give the air of Sokrates teasing Ion. This manner was initiated in the original formal welcome greeting.

ΙΩΝ. Τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ἄθλων ἠνεγκάμεθα, ὦ Σώκρατες. (530b1)

Ion's reply indicates his choice of which question he wishes to answer, his place in the competition was first. Ion, like Sokrates, uses the first plural in his response. One might imagine him wearing his crown and saying 'First at Epidaurus'; meanwhile we wonder how much Sokrates already knows about where Ion has been and how he has fared. We know that Sokrates does know some things about Ion, we do not know how much. Ion either misses Sokrates' teasing, if in fact that is what is occurring, or he plays along by responding in the plural.

The local 'religious' festival has clearly become an international 'competition' between rhapsodes. The once local, civic binding, religious festival has been drastically altered. Local religious practices and their relation to autochthonous peoples and the nature of what is sacred have shifted. Ion is not rooted in his hometown or in the sacred nature of the local festival. He is a professional rhapsode.

ΣΩ. Εὖ λέγεις· ἄγε δὴ ὅπως καὶ τὰ Παναθήναια νικήσομεν. (530b2,3)

Sokrates says that Ion has done well, Εὖ λέγεις, and urges him to victory in the Panathenaia. Ion has spoken well in revealing what was important to him in Sokrates' question. Sokrates' reply again has the first person plural, but one which identifies him in a group which includes Ion, and re-echoes Ion's use of the first plural. It is difficult to understand how Sokrates could be joining with Ion in the contest at the Panathenaia.

ΙΩΝ. Ἴσται ταῦτα, ἐάν θεὸς ἐθέλῃ. (530b4)

Ion indicates that he may win, but the future is in the hands of the god. Ion's response indicates a certain deference to the gods, but he does not name any particular god. Perhaps only Zeus is meant, but we recall that Ion ignored Sokrates' apparent surprise that Asklepios was being honoured by a contest of rhapsodes. It is more likely a phrase that indicates the outcome is subject to certain contingencies.

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν πολλάκις γε ἐζήλωσα ὑμᾶς τοὺς ῥαψωδοὺς, ὦ Ἴων, τῆς τέχνης· τὸ γὰρ ἅμα μὲν τὸ σῶμα κεκοσμηθῆαι ἀεὶ πρέπον ὑμῶν εἶναι τῇ τέχνῃ καὶ ὡς καλλίστοις φαίνεσθαι, ἅμα δὲ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι ἐν τε ἄλλοις ποιηταῖς διατρίβειν πολλοῖς καὶ ἀγαθοῖς καὶ δὴ καὶ μάλιστα ἐν Ὀμήρῳ, τῷ ἀρίστῳ καὶ θειοτάτῳ τῶν ποιητῶν, καὶ τὴν τούτου διάνοιαν ἐκμανθάνειν, μὴ μόνον τὰ ἔπη, ζηλωτόν ἐστιν. οὐ γὰρ ἂν γένοιτό ποτε ἀγαθὸς ῥαψωδός, εἰ μὴ συνείῃ τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ. τὸν γὰρ ῥαψωδὸν ἐρμηνεῖα δεῖ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τῆς διανοίας γίγνεσθαι τοῖς ἀκούουσι· τοῦτο δὲ καλῶς ποιεῖν μὴ γινώσκοντα ὃ τι λέγει ὁ ποιητὴς ἀδύνατον. ταῦτα οὖν πάντα ἄξια ζηλοῦσθαι. (530b5 – c6)

Sokrates launches into a rather long declaration. In somewhat atypical fashion, Sokrates makes a speech about what he thinks instead of asking a question. We might start to ponder what causes Sokrates to shift modes of discourse.

Sokrates responds to Ion's hope that, god willing, he will win the Panathenaia with a declaration that he finds the rhapsode's τέχνη, often translated as 'art' or 'skill', one that he, Sokrates, says ἐζήλωσα, normally translated as 'I have envied'. Sokrates then proceeds to list some of the elements of this τέχνη. At this point it is difficult to

translate the word τέχνη as either art or skill or what the difference between these might be. We will have to examine how it is used in this dialogue.

In translation, ἐζήλωσα is often rendered as, ‘I have envied’. But could Sokrates actually be serious about being envious of rhapsodes as regards their being good-looking and well dressed? Sokrates has been talking to Ion in what appears to be a somewhat bantering mode. Sokrates moves from this bantering by slowly ascending - saying how much he envies the rhapsodes’ art - from dressing properly, to spending time with many poets, to spending time with Homer, to knowing Homer’s words, to knowing Homer’s thought. The Greek structure is of the sort that is rather common and might be translated as ‘in general x is good, but specifically y is great.’ There is a sort of contrast between x and y . So here we start with dressing properly and end with knowing the thought of Homer. In fact, Sokrates, over the course of the dialogue, will contest with Ion over understanding of the thought of Homer, not over dressing well. To the extent that Sokrates is serious, and not ironic, it might be with respect to his desire to understand the thoughts of Homer.

3.2 Irony

But let us consider the notion of Sokratic irony. To see a comment as ironic often requires looking to an audience outside the dialogue. If Ion does not consider this comment ironic, Sokrates would be making an aside to someone else. In a narrated dialogue, such as the *Politeia*, this is a definite possibility. It would be an aside to the audience of ‘today’ to whom Sokrates is narrating the events of last night in the Peiraeus.

However, in an enacted dialogue such as this one, and there is apparently no one else around, it could only be ironical to Plato's audience. Such a reading seems more like a failure in interpretation. This is not to say that Plato could not have a character in the dialogue make an aside to the audience. The chorus in Greek tragedy often makes comments directly to the audience. However, such a move would break the image of the dialogue as a representation of events. It seems that the first approach should be to understand a comment as having a meaning within the dialogue.

There is a temptation, whenever Sokrates says something puzzling, to merely label it as ironic and continue with the statements that accord with one's preconceived notion of how Sokrates ought to speak and act. Sokrates is presumed to break through his mask to speak directly to us. Let us rather use irony as a last resort and leave open the possibility of learning something new of Sokrates. To interpret an enacted dialogue one ought to be looking for the meaning within the context, for a reason for Sokrates to make such a statement to Ion. In accordance with our fifth principle, that says we should not assume something is meaningless just because we have not understood it, we also need to avoid jumping from a strange comment of Sokrates' to a conclusion of irony.

A second approach, following our principle number seven, might be to consider how Ion responds. Sokrates could be testing Ion's modesty. He has seemed rather boastful till now. Ion is presented with a chap who (assuming that Plato is depicting our normal Sokrates) is bare-foot, snub-nosed, and pot-bellied, wearing an old cloak, who speaks of how he had often envied the well dressed and good looking such as Ion. Will Ion notice the incongruity? Will he respond in some manner that indicates he recognizes

that ‘irony’? That would place the irony within the dialogue where it has a sense.

Likewise for Ion to not recognize the irony might be interpreted as meaning that Ion really believed Sokrates’ flattery.

3.3 Rhapsodic τέχνη

In listing the items he envies, Sokrates notes several requirements for a rhapsode’s τέχνη:

1. it is fitting for a rhapsode, in accordance with his art, τέχνη, to dress in a decorated fashion;
2. it is likewise fitting for a rhapsode to appear as fine, or beautiful, as possible;
3. it is necessary (ἀναγκαῖον) for a rhapsode to spend time or occupy oneself with many good poets,
4. most especially to occupy oneself with Homer, the best and most divine poet,
5. and (the height of the list in the sentence), to learn the thought, διανοία, of Homer not just the words.

Sokrates then claims that no one can be a good rhapsode until he understands (συνείη) the sayings/meanings (λεγόμενα) of the poet for:

1. it is necessary (δεῖ) for a rhapsode to become an ἐρμηνέα or interpreter of the poet’s thought (διάνοια) to his hearers, and finally,
2. to interpret finely is impossible (ἀδύνατον) without knowing (γιγνώσκοντα) what the poet means (λέγει).

Now in closer examination there seems to be a second level of hierarchy in the listing from things that are fitting, to things that are necessary to things without which something is impossible.

3.4 Thoughts and Words

Sokrates has introduced a number of terms in this speech, terms to which we will pay close attention as the dialogue unfolds; we will build a sort of Platonic lexicon.

One thing Sokrates has clearly done is **separate** the poet's words from his thoughts. This seems a reasonable requirement. Merely having the words memorized and being able to recite them would make for an uninspired performance. Knowing when and how to gesture, to speak quickly or slowly, loudly or quietly, to weep, to smile, requires more than knowledge of the words. However, we still might not require an understanding of the poet's intention, merely an understanding of how to use these words effectively.

Before we turn to Ion's response, let us consider how we might have responded. We might laugh at Sokrates' suggestion that he is interested in 'looking good', although that might be considered impolite of Ion. We might ignore the early part of the list and focus on what we could agree with Sokrates, that knowing the thoughts of the poets is the highest value of our τέχνη. Does Ion claim to have knowledge of the poet's thought?

4. Examination: Short Question (530c7-533c9)

ΙΩΝ. Ἀληθῆ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες· ἐμοὶ γοῦν τοῦτο πλεῖστον ἔργον παρέσχευ τῆς τέχνης, καὶ οἶμαι κάλλιστα ἀνθρώπων λέγειν περὶ Ὀμήρου, ὡς οὔτε Μητροδωρος ὁ Λαμψακηνὸς οὔτε Στησίμβροτος ὁ Θάσιος οὔτε Γλαύκων οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς τῶν πρότε γενομένων ἔσχευ εἰπεῖν οὕτω πολλὰς καὶ καλὰς διανοίας περὶ Ὀμήρου, ὅσας ἐγώ. (530c7 – 530d3)

Ion says to Sokrates, ἀληθῆ λέγεις, or you speak true (things), often translated as ‘you are correct’. Sokrates has made several claims, so it is not clear to which of these Ion is referring. We can try to see which he mentions as a hint to what he understood in Sokrates’ list. In addition we will add to our lexicon. Ion here says to Sokrates, ἀληθῆ λέγεις, ‘you are right’; Sokrates has just said to Ion, εὖ λέγεις, ‘well done’. In Greek, there is a noticeable similarity between the phrase εὖ λέγεις, and the phrase ἀληθῆ λέγεις. Plato, at this point in the dialogue, has Sokrates use εὖ λέγεις of Ion, and Ion use ἀληθῆ λέγεις of Sokrates. Although it is common to translate the former as ‘well done’ and the latter as ‘you are correct’, these translations ignore the fact that the Greek has a common word and so to emphasize this we might translate as: ‘well said’ and ‘truly⁷ said’. This interchange would be even more noticeable if the dialogue, as we might expect, was read aloud. There is an echo effect of the phrases. We might consider if the contrast between the two phrases points to some contrast between the interlocutors.

⁷ The term ἀληθῆ is an adjective so one might literally translate as ‘you say true (things)’. The term ἀληθῆ is considered to be the composite of an alpha privative and λήθω, ‘I am unseen’. Thus we could understand ἀληθῆ to mean ‘not unseen’ or ‘revealed’.

It is important to try to maintain in English some connection between the two Greek terms in order to maintain the word play that is going on in Greek.

Turning to what Ion takes from Sokrates' listing, we note that Ion picks up on two terms τέχνη and διανοία and claims he has a τέχνη. He notes that what Sokrates has said is the most difficult part of his τέχνη. One might expect that Ion means, knowing the thoughts of the poets. However, Ion then introduces a second notion of interpretation. He claims that he has fine things to say about Homer - λέγειν περὶ Ὀμήρου. This takes Ion beyond merely providing the audience with a dramatic reading, full of the appropriate actions, but also includes some sort of commentary. Ion claims that he has more fine thoughts, διανοίαι, about Homer, than anyone. Does Ion's τέχνη include understanding the thoughts of Homer? He does not specifically claim to understand Homer's thoughts; rather Ion lays a claim to his own thoughts about Homer. To be charitable to Ion we might assume that he means, although he does not say, that he has thoughts about Homer's thoughts. We will need to see if such a reading can be sustained. Sokrates may try to test Ion further to determine the answer.

Ion then lists three other interpreters of Homer, two foreign and one Athenian, none of whom is considered to have been a rhapsode. Clearly, Ion measures himself as being the best of a cosmopolitan crowd. He has yet to test himself against Sokrates.

ΣΩ. Εὖ λέγεις, ὦ Ἴων· δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι οὐ φθονήσεις μοι ἐπιδείξαι. (530d4,5)

Sokrates responds in a manner that again may have a certain bantering tone responding to Ion's evident bragging. He says that Ion clearly would not begrudge him a demonstration. Sokrates does not say that he would wish such a demonstration. Sokrates

rather will prevent such a demonstration (acting to Ion as Sokrates' daemon does to Sokrates). In the course of the dialogue, Ion is permitted to recite only a few lines of Homer and is not permitted to give any of his thoughts about Homer.

Sokrates says that Ion speaks well, εὖ λέγεις. In this case, translating εὖ λέγεις as 'well done' does not work. In his answer to Sokrates' list Ion reveals something of himself by not responding to what Sokrates considers the most important – the knowledge of Homer's thoughts. Ion has noted that his own thoughts are what he considers important and so has spoken well.

ΙΩΝ. Καὶ μὴν ἄξιόν γε ἀκοῦσαι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὡς εὖ κεκόσμηκα τὸν Ὅμηρον· ὥστε οἶμαι ὑπὸ Ὀμηριδῶν ἄξιος εἶναι χρυσοῦ στεφάνῳ στεφανωθῆναι.
(530d6-9)

Ion responds by exaggerating even further his claims. He brags that his demonstrations, his dressing up of Homer, are so worthy of listening to that he, Ion, is deserving of being dressed up in a gold crown. Ion will later further exaggerate his claim to be deserving of rule!

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν ἐγὼ ἔτι ποιήσομαι σχολὴν ἀκροάσασθαί σου, (530d9)

Sokrates continues in his apparent bantering mode by indicating that he does not currently have the leisure to hear such a demonstration. On the other hand, the dialogue continues for quite a bit longer; so there evidently was enough time for demonstration. What of the possibility of irony here? Within the dialogue, Ion is entitled to notice the difference between Sokrates' comment and his actions. Just so, in the previous supposed ironic statement, Ion is entitled to notice the difference between Sokrates' dress and his

praise of dressing well. We must ask if Ion does, at some point, call into question Sokrates' claim to having no leisure, despite having considerable time for discussion.

Sokrates, by his actions, reveals that he does not want to listen to a demonstration of Ion's interpretive skill. Here we invoke our seventh principle to look at what is done not just what is said. Apparently, the required leisure for that sort of entertainment does not come to Sokrates. His conversation with Ion has another goal.

ΣΩ (continued) νῦν δέ μοι τοσόνδε ἀπόκριναι· πότερον περὶ Ὀμήρου μόνον δεινὸς εἶ ἢ καὶ περὶ Ἡσιόδου καὶ Ἀρχιλόχου; (531a1,2)

Sokrates continues by asking Ion to answer (ἀπόκριναι), and to choose between two alternatives: whether he is clever concerning Homer only, or also with respect to Hesiod and Archilochos. At first this seems like an odd question. Admittedly Ion has so far limited his claims to Homer. Sokrates has specifically not mentioned any other poet. However Sokrates did claim that a rhapsode spends time with many good poets not just with Homer. Sokrates has started an investigation into Ion's τέχνη without listening to its manifestation directly. Ion is called to comment on his own art and not on the art of Homer. But the question might reveal whether Ion actually meets the rhapsode test Sokrates has established, to 'understand the thoughts' of a poet. (Whatever understanding Homer's thoughts might mean.) If he could understand Homer's thoughts then he might be able to compare them to the thoughts of Hesiod.

The question Sokrates asks of Ion's skill uses the term δεινός, perhaps translated as being clever. How does cleverness relate to skill or τέχνη? We will pay attention to these two terms as the dialogue proceeds and attempt to discern how Plato uses them. As

a preliminary hypothesis let us try noting that a skill is related to doing something, whereas cleverness appears to relate to speaking about something. A charioteer has a skill, but a speaker on chariot racing is clever.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐδαμῶς, ἀλλὰ περὶ Ὀμήρου μόνον· ἱκανὸν γάρ μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι.

(531a3,4)

Ion responds that he is clever only concerning Homer because⁸, to him, that seems sufficient. Not only has he chosen, but he judges that it is possible and sufficient to be clever with respect to Homer. But with respect to what standard is it sufficient? We will have to see what standard Ion applies. For example, does his cleverness only extend to being able to make his own comments, without understanding Homer? Apparently it is sufficient to win prizes. That would in turn suggest that what Ion cares about is prizes, and his sort of knowledge of Homer, his ability to dress up Homer, is sufficient for what he cares about.

ΣΩ. Ἔστι δὲ περὶ ὅτου Ὀμηρός τε καὶ Ἡσίοδος ταῦτὰ λέγετον; (531a5,6)

Sokrates asks Ion if there is something on which Homer and Hesiod say the same thing. Now it would appear that Ion to remain consistent must reply that he does not know Hesiod. The ambiguity in the Greek is evident in that one might translate λέγετον as ‘say’ or ‘mean’. So there is a bit of ambiguity between the words and the meanings.

We might separate four levels at this point:

⁸ One might argue that the ‘γάρ’ clause in the Greek is not causal, but merely means ‘and that seems sufficient.’ However such a reading would still have to explain what standard Ion used to judge his knowledge of Homer as sufficient to Ion.

1. Topical: within Homer there may be specific pieces of advice one character gives another, for example on how to race a chariot.
2. Dramatic: A character may win a chariot race following such advice, but reveal himself as a dishonest cheat.
3. Rhetorical: Homer may tell the same story as Hesiod, but his use of language, metaphor, description and so forth may be more effective.
4. Thematic: Homer may tell many stories which focus on the theme of political power and its corrupting impact on chariot racers.

It is unclear what level Sokrates intends his question about what Homer says. But it is also possible that Sokrates is deliberately ambiguous in order to see what direction Ion takes.

ΙΩΝ. Οἶμαι ἔγωγε καὶ πολλά. (531a6)

Ion says he thinks there are many such things. We are still unclear at which level Ion thinks there are agreements between Homer and Hesiod. So we are also unclear on what level Ion agrees with Sokrates.

ΣΩ. Πότερον οὖν περὶ τούτων κάλλιον ἂν ἐξηγήσαιο ἢ Ὅμηρος λέγει ἢ ἂν Ἡσίοδος; (531a6,7,8)

Sokrates questions Ion's ability to interpret, ἐξηγήσαιο, in situations where Homer and Hesiod both say the same. Could he interpret better about Homer or Hesiod? It still remains unclear as to what level this sameness exists. It also leaves unclear what it might mean to interpret, far less to interpret better. The possible confusions multiply. One might suppose that interpretation is Ion's ability to recite the lines in a suitably dramatic

fashion; but it could also be a case of providing extended literary criticism. How could Ion respond to Sokrates' question, since he has already claimed that he is not clever in Hesiod?

One might assume that both Sokrates and Ion are referring to the thoughts of Homer and Hesiod as they may have agreed, although Ion's response was somewhat ambiguous, that knowledge of the poet's thoughts is paramount to the skill of the rhapsode. But in recognizing the ambiguity in Ion's response we must realize that there may be some doubt about the understandings of Ion and Sokrates. These understandings may become clearer as Sokrates continues to test Ion.

ΙΩΝ. Ὁμοίως ἂν περί γε τούτων, ὦ Σώκρατες, περί ὧν ταῦτὰ
λέγουσιν. (531a8,b1)

Ion's response does nothing to resolve the confusion. It would appear that although he has said he is not clever about Hesiod, he now claims that if Hesiod 'says the same thing' as Homer then he could interpret Hesiod at the same high level at which he interprets Homer.

In rhapsodic art there are apt to be formulaic phrases that do repeat, for example, 'Odysseus Polutropos', the many-wayed. However, if one were to take the equivalence literally, there are likely only small cases in which Hesiod and Homer say the same thing – word for word. At a different level, we might argue that both Homer and Hesiod say that we should trust the oracle at Delphi. However, an interpretation might demonstrate that Homer says this in a better fashion than Hesiod, and so they do not say the same thing.

Ion apparently is focusing only on the topical agreement of Homer and Hesiod and ignoring their varying skill in presentation. And this in turn may be a fair thing for Ion to do in that Sokrates has already stated he finds the content, the knowledge of the thoughts of the poet, to be paramount.

ΣΩ. Τί δὲ ὧν περὶ μὴ ταῦτὰ λέγουσιν; οἷον περὶ μαντικῆς λέγει τι “Ὀμηρὸς τε καὶ Ἡσίοδος. (531b1-3)

Sokrates then questions Ion concerning his ability to interpret Homer or Hesiod where they say different things. Sokrates’ example of such a case is μαντική, prophecy or consultation of oracles. What the poets say about prophecy is rather unclear. It seems hard to imagine that one could easily summarize what Homer and Hesiod say about prophecy or in what way they differ.

We shall later also see an example of Homer speaking about prophecy, and the bifurcation that occurs between his words and his thoughts.

ΙΩΝ. Πάνυ γε. (531b3)

Ion merely claims to agree with Sokrates at this point. The confusion remains. Ion perhaps ‘agrees’ without understanding Sokrates.

ΣΩ. Τί οὖν; ὅσα τε ὁμοίως καὶ ὅσα διαφόρως περὶ μαντικῆς λέγετον τῶ ποιητὰ τούτῳ, πότερον σὺ κάλλιον ἂν ἐξηγήσαιο ἢ τῶν μάντεών τις τῶν ἀγαθῶν; (531b3-6)

Sokrates asks Ion if a seer would better interpret the poet’s comments in the cases where the poets agree and disagree about prophecy. Sokrates, thus, tests Ion’s understanding of the level of the agreement or disagreement between Homer and Hesiod.

If Ion sees the difference between the thoughts of Homer and Hesiod as concerning the nature of prophecy, then the interpretation of a seer might be relevant. If however, the difference were in the mode of presentation of Homer and Hesiod, then the seer would not be relevant.

Why ask about prophecy? Well the seer is, like Ion, a sort of interpreter – one who interprets signs and dreams instead of Homer. Sokrates does not speak of the τέχνη of the seer, although the word is μαντική⁹, which includes τέχνη. Yet, the interpretive art of the prophet is also an interesting one. It is not clear what the skill of the seer might be. Themistokles, although not a seer, interprets the Delphic oracle in a creative manner when he regards ‘put your trust in wooden walls’ to mean it is time to leave Athens and go to sea! In this case the interpretation is fortuitous. However, it is clear that the saying in itself is quite ambiguous. The ability to pronounce such cryptic comments seems in this case to be unimportant compared to the way in which Themistokles makes use of it.

ΙΩΝ. Τῶν μάντεων. (531b6,7)

In selecting the seer as being the relevant interpreter, Ion indicates he considers Sokrates to be asking about the topical agreement of Homer and Hesiod. At that sort of level an expert would be able to comment on both poets whether they agree or not. Yet, one might have expected a rhapsode, like Ion, to have expertise with respect to the modes of presentation, at how a particular phrase better conveys a particular content. Thus in ceding precedence to the seer, Ion’s own presumed sort of expertise has disappeared from

⁹ At *Phaedrus* 244c, Sokrates also, punningly, connects madness, manikos, with prophecy, mantikos.

the discussion. We may remember, however, that Ion has claimed his fame is due to his own thoughts about Homer, not to his understanding of Homer's thoughts.

ΣΩ. Εἰ δὲ σὺ ἦσθα μάντις, οὐκ, εἴπερ περὶ τῶν ὁμοίως λεγομένων οἴός τ' ἦσθα ἐξηγήσασθαι, καὶ περὶ τῶν διαφόρως λεγομένων ἠπίστω ἄν ἐξηγεῖσθαι;

(531b7-9)

Socrates presses the point following Ion's understanding of Homer. Socrates asks if Ion were a seer would he also be a better expounder in those cases where Homer and Hesiod differ as well as agree about prophecy. Any difference in content or in mode of presentation between Homer and Hesiod becomes irrelevant in selecting the better expounder, so long as the topic is prophecy.

Yet Ion has claimed he can interpret Hesiod in those cases in which Hesiod and Homer agree and would do so equally well. Although he has claimed to be the best interpreter of Homer, Ion cedes interpretation of parts of Homer to a seer. Is a seer the best expounder of writing about prophecy; is there no art of communication?

ΙΩΝ. Δῆλον ὅτι. (531b10)

Ion continues to agree with this strange interpretation of Homer. A seer, somehow, perhaps magically, looks into the future by means of interpreting oracles and signs. A rhapsode's ability to interpret poets' sayings is a different sort of skill. Ion not only thinks that a seer would have such a skill, but also thinks that it would make the seer a better interpreter of the poet's sayings that include the topic of prophecy. Later in the dialogue we have a few specific examples of seers in Homer and can directly consider who might be the better interpreter.

We might also be mindful of the relationship of skill, τέχνη, to Ion's being clever- δεινός concerning Homer. Is cleverness the same as skill? The skill of rhapsodizing that Sokrates discussed earlier may be one that Ion does not possess. Ion might be merely clever. Specifically, Ion may not know, or care about, the thought of the poet.

ΣΩ. Τί οὖν ποτε περὶ μὲν Ὀμήρου δεινὸς εἶ, περὶ δὲ Ἡσιόδου οὐ, οὐδὲ τῶν ἄλλων ποιητῶν; ἢ Ὅμηρος περὶ ἄλλων τινῶν λέγει ἢ ὥνπερ σύμπαντες οἱ ἄλλοι ποιηταί; οὐ περὶ πολέμου τε τὰ πολλὰ διελήλυθεν καὶ περὶ ὁμιλιῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀνθρώπων ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ κακῶν καὶ ἰδιωτῶν καὶ δημιουργῶν, καὶ περὶ θεῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ὁμιλούντων, ὡς ὁμιλοῦσι, καὶ περὶ τῶν οὐρανίων παθημάτων καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου, καὶ γενέσεις καὶ θεῶν καὶ ἡρώων; οὐ ταῦτά ἐστι περὶ ὧν Ὅμηρος τὴν ποιήσιν πεποιήκεν; (531c1-d2)

Sokrates shifts his mode of questioning and instead of asking a single question, he asks Ion a whole series of questions. We are not sure if Ion is given time to respond but remains silent, or if Sokrates merely fires away. The latter seems most likely. Plato could have been indicated the former by Plato by having Ion at least 'grunting' between questions.

Why the shift in mode? Sokrates' first question appears, at first, to be a non-sequitur. Has Sokrates established a principle under which Ion should be able to interpret both and so reached a contradiction? Could it be that Sokrates is not asking a real question, but is merely restating Ion's strange position? Sokrates has Ion's agreement that

in regards to prophecy, a seer can interpret parts of Homer and Hesiod better than he. He also has Ion's comment that he regards being able to interpret Homer is sufficient. Why does Sokrates now move to wondering why Ion could interpret only Homer and not also Hesiod? What is the nature of the skill that, if it enabled one to interpret Homer, it should also enable one to interpret Hesiod? We note that Sokrates again refers to Ion as having a certain cleverness not a skill.

We might consider the linkage as follows. If a seer were a better interpreter than Ion, it would presumably be with respect to technical content. If Ion understood Homer as only providing content, manuals for prophecy, and if Homer and Hesiod both discussed prophecy, then if Ion were expert on such a work by Homer, why not also on one by Hesiod? The difference between Homer and Hesiod, which difference somehow generates Ion's differing abilities, presumably lies on a level other than with respect to their comments on prophecy. Ion has indicated he has not considered this level. We must ask at what level Ion's expertise could derive, at which different level Homer and Hesiod differ.

Sokrates shifts his mode of questioning and returns to this original question because Ion has refuted himself. Ion has claimed that he is best at interpreting Homer. Ion also claimed that in the cases that Hesiod and Homer agree he would interpret them equally well. Ion agrees that in cases where Homer and Hesiod agree or disagree on prophecy, a seer would interpret better than himself. This pattern repeats throughout the dialogue as Sokrates continues to ask Ion to locate his skill. The discussion keeps returning to the difficulties that arise when one understands Homer only with respect to a

specific technical topic, be it prophecy or chariot riding, without a unifying theme at another level, the real thoughts of Homer. If Ion were skilled at this level it might enable him to also interpret the thoughts of Hesiod.

Sokrates prods Ion to think about his work and perhaps see these differing levels. Sokrates asks if Homer speaks about a comprehensive list of various topics: war, the agreements of men, good and bad, public and private, and with gods and of the gods amongst themselves and the happenings in heaven and Hades and the origins of gods and heroes – not much is left out¹⁰. But Sokrates' list is of the topics of Homer not style. What can we make of this list? It might have made more sense to say that Homer sings about the battle of Troy and the return of Odysseus. But this is not the topic of Hesiod. So Sokrates has selected a general enough list that one can say all poets discuss them.

Sokrates' finally asks Ion if these [the items on the list] are not the things of which Homer made, πεποίηκεν, his poetry.

ΙΩΝ. Ἀληθῆ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες. (531d3)

Ion responds simply to Sokrates' long question by stating that Sokrates is correct and, once again the term ascribed by Ion to Sokrates is ἀληθῆ λέγεις. Although Sokrates has asked several questions, Ion ignores the list. Apparently Ion presumes that Sokrates will be happy to proceed if he receives an answer only to the last question - are these not the topics of Homer's poetry. One might merely note that in other Platonic dialogues it is a common enough occurrence for Sokrates to ask a series of questions and the interlocutor to answer only one; however in accordance with our principle number four,

¹⁰ Bloom notes that the topics come in pairs with the exception of war. Peace is left out (394).

we are trying to avoid using other dialogues to interpret the *Ion*. Thus we need to consider what it here reveals about Ion. Presumably he has no answer to Sokrates' first question other than what he previously stated, that Homer seems sufficient to him.

ΣΩ. Τί δὲ οἱ ἄλλοι ποιηταί; οὐ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων; (531d4,5)

Sokrates asks Ion if the other poets do not speak of the same things. Sokrates reverts to one of the questions in his list that Ion has not yet answered and continues to compare the subject matter of the poets.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί, ἀλλ', ὡς Σώκρατες, οὐχ ὁμοίως πεποιήκασιν καὶ Ὅμηρος. (531d6,7)

Ion points out that the difference between Homer and the other poets is not in their subject matter, but in the making, πεποιήκασιν.

ΣΩ. Τί μήν; κάκιον; (531d8)

Sokrates now asks if the difference is one in which the other poets are worse than Homer. Ion is asked to compare poets and judge them according to some standard. Not only do they differ, but also there is some standard of comparison available.

ΙΩΝ. Πολύ γε. (531d9)

Ion responds that this is in fact the case – the others are much worse. Confusion still abounds. How could Ion make such an assessment – against what standard? Ion has agreed that Homer and other poets discuss the same things; in other words their topics are identical. On the one hand, it is still possible that Homer offers better advice to the would-be seer; on the other hand, it could be that Hesiod and Homer offer the same advice, but Homer does so in a manner that is clearer, more engaging or some such. It could also be that Homer offers a more accurate description of how a seer works. In any

case, Ion's ability to make an assessment is difficult to understand, as the standard is unmentioned. In fact one might later consider that, for Ion, Homer is better in that audiences pay more to hear him.

We note that the judgement is that one is better and the others worse, one can compare these only when we have the two in view. Ion claimed that he is clever only about Homer. How can he rank Homer and Hesiod unless he is familiar with Hesiod on some level?

ΣΩ. "Ομηρος δὲ ἄμεινον; (531d10)

Sokrates asks what appears to be a superfluous question. After all if the other poets are worse, then Homer must be better. But Sokrates continues to press Ion to make comparisons. The comparison requires the poetry to be a one, both poetry about the same topics, and yet two, differing in some respect. Ion has claimed that he is clever only about Homer. Sokrates pushes Ion to note that in calling one better, he calls another worse. He needs to have both, the two side-by-side, and a third, some standard of comparison.

ΙΩΝ. "Αμεινον μέντοι νῆ Δία. (531d11)

Ion responds emphatically that Homer is certainly better, by Zeus¹¹.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν, ὧ φίλη κεφαλή Ἴων, ὅταν περὶ ἀριθμοῦ πολλῶν λεγόντων εἰς τις ἄριστα λέγη, γνώσεται δήπου τις τὸν εὖ λέγοντα; (531d12-e1)

Sokrates then continues his questioning mode starting frequently with the word Οὐκοῦν. Miller notes, "Οὐκοῦν: expects an affirmative answer, 'is it not then the case

¹¹ Although I have not yet done so, I believe it may prove fruitful to consider the instances of Ion's swearing. Is Homer far better due to Zeus?

that?’ (5)” Sokrates praises Ion for following along and in bantering fashion calls him a dear head. After all the logic is rather simple: A is worse, so B is better. Sokrates’ next move is to discuss better and worse with respect to those who discuss number. He asks Ion if when several speakers speak about number, and one speaks better, could someone distinguish who is the good speaker. Now again this sort of comparison appears somewhat problematic. If we are discussing number and ask how much is five and seven, then all who say twelve will be speaking correctly. There will be no distinction between them. The standard of comparison, for speaking well about number, remains unspoken.

ΙΩΝ. Φημί. (531e1)

Ion assents to this claim. It should be pointed out that Sokrates has not made the claim; he has asked Ion a question. It is thus Ion’s claim, not Sokrates’. Ion has been discussing the better and worse poets. He does not make any distinction between the sort of measure one might use to assess a better poet from that used to assess a better speaker about number.

We note also that Sokrates does not use δεινός to describe someone who has a skill in numbers. Nor does he at this point use the term to describe someone who is skilled in speaking about numbers but rather calls them the good speakers, εὖ λέγοντα. ΣΩ. Πότερον οὖν ὁ αὐτὸς, ὅσπερ καὶ τοὺς κακῶς λέγοντας, ἢ ἄλλος; (531e1,2)

Sokrates continues to ask Ion to make comparisons. At this point Sokrates asks whether, if one person can separate the good speakers, then can the same one separate the bad. Again the notion that one might have the ability to identify good speakers seems to be identical with the ability required to identify the bad speakers. That these might be

separate seems a strange notion. If A is better, surely B is worse. To say so, one must put them alongside each other.

ΙΩΝ. Ὁ αὐτὸς δήπου. (531e2,3)

Ion agrees here, but there is no more, by Zeus. One may translate δήπου as ‘perhaps’ and expressing doubt; however, according to Liddell & Scott’s *Lexicon*, in Attic δήπου might be translated as ‘doubtless’ and so express confidence. It seems to me that Ion is losing confidence so I prefer the ‘perhaps’ and believe that the strangeness of Sokrates’ question is beginning to trouble Ion.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ὁ τὴν ἀριθμητικὴν τέχνην ἔχων οὗτός ἐστιν; (531e3,4)

Sokrates asks if the person who is capable of separating good from bad speakers concerning number would be the person with the τέχνη of arithmetic. Unlike the example of the seer Sokrates now uses the term τέχνη. Following our principle number six, we start to build our Platonic lexicon, we see that τέχνη is somehow related to arithmetic but not related to prophecy. It is also reserved for the person who is skilled in numbers and not for the person who speaks about numbers or the person who distinguishes good from bad speakers.

In the seer example Ion asserted that the seer would be the one who could best judge concerning statements about prophecy in Homer and the other poets. Presumably then, an ability in prophecy is identical to an ability to assess speaking about prophecy. But Sokrates asks if those with skill in arithmetic are also those able to separate (not skilled in, or clever at, separating) those who speak well about arithmetic from those who do not.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (531e4)

Ion agrees. Ion fails to distinguish the skill of arithmetic from the ability to speak about arithmetic, which might also differ from the ability to separate good speakers from bad speakers. This mirrors the notion that a seer might interpret passages in Homer better than Ion because the seer has technical knowledge related to a specific passage. One might be an excellent mathematician, but have little ability to speak about mathematics.

ΣΩ. Τί δ' ὅταν πολλῶν λεγόντων περὶ ὑγιεινῶν σιτίων, ὅποιά ἐστιν, εἷς τις ἄριστα λέγη, πότερον ἕτερος μὲν τις τὸν ἄριστα λέγοντα γνώσεται ὅτι ἄριστα λέγει, ἕτερος δὲ τὸν κάκιον ὅτι κάκιον, ἢ ὁ αὐτός; (531e4-7)

Sokrates pushes the discussion by providing a further example of healthy food. He again asks Ion the rather strange question whether the person who distinguishes good speakers about healthy food must also be able to distinguish bad speakers. If one can recognize the standard by which a speaker is judged good then presumably it is that same standard which is used to determine if the speaker is not good. If one can see the standard and can apply it then one is indifferent to whether the speaker is good or bad. The question requires the recognition of an unchanging standard of comparison.

Can Sokrates merely be referring to people who know what they are talking about when they talk about food? That is what Ion apparently takes him to mean. But that interpretation would repeat the notion that a seer is a better interpreter than a rhapsode of those passages in Homer that deal with prophecy. The notion of a skill in communication is missing. In some cases that might be acceptable. However in this case we are looking to discover the skill, if any, of the rhapsode, Ion. One might expect it to be just this skill.

In some sense Sokrates seems to be leading Ion through his questions and so it is unfair to Ion suggest that he fails to mention the missing skill. It is also important to see that, chiefly, Sokrates asks Ion questions and so must follow Ion's responses.

ΙΩΝ. Δῆλον δήπου, ὁ αὐτός. (531e8)

Ion appears to regain some confidence. Although he still uses I suppose, δήπου, it is joined with clearly, Δῆλον. He claims that he has not seen any difference between the ability required to distinguish good speakers and the ability to distinguish bad speakers.

ΣΩ. Τίς οὗτος; τί ὄνομα αὐτῷ; (531e8,9)

Sokrates then again tests Ion's understanding by asking him to name the appropriate person.

ΙΩΝ. Ἴατρός. (531e9)

Ion repeats his notion that the ability to judge speaking about X is identical to the skill of X, and so he claims that it is the doctor who judges about speaking well concerning healthy food.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ἐν κεφαλαίῳ λέγομεν, ὡς ὁ αὐτὸς γινώσεται ἀεὶ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πολλῶν λεγόντων, ὅστις τε εὖ λέγει καὶ ὅστις κακῶς· ἢ εἰ μὴ γινώσεται τὸν κακῶς λέγοντα, δῆλον ὅτι οὐδὲ τὸν εὖ, περὶ γε τοῦ αὐτοῦ. (531e9-532a3)

Sokrates continues his example by asking Ion to attempt to generalize - ἐν κεφαλαίῳ λέγομεν. The point he wishes to generalize is that a person who has the ability to judge good speakers on a subject must also be able to judge bad speakers; that it

is the same person. Sokrates does not here identify that with the skill in the subject as has been done in his examples.

ΙΩΝ. Οὕτως. (532a3)

Ion indicates that he would generalize in this way. He sees no difference between judging good speakers and judging bad speakers. The standard of comparison then makes three items side by side, the standard, the good and the bad.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ὁ αὐτὸς γίγνεται δεινὸς περὶ ἀμφοτέρων; (532a3,4)

Sokrates in some ways repeats his question, but now uses the term clever - δεινὸς. Sokrates has not identified being clever at comparing with the skill of τέχνη. He is concerned with the person who is judging speakers. We note that our preliminary hypothesis is holding. Plato consistently has used the term cleverness with respect to the ability to speak well concerning a skill and to distinguish those who speak well from those who do not. The term skill is reserved for the doing.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (532a4)

Ion again agrees with this notion of δεινὸς. It would be the same cleverness at work.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν σὺ φῆς καὶ Ὅμηρον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποιητάς, ἐν οἷς καὶ Ἡσίοδος καὶ Ἀρχίλοχος ἐστίν, περὶ γε τῶν αὐτῶν λέγειν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁμοίως, ἀλλὰ τὸν μὲν εὖ γε, τοὺς δὲ χεῖρον; (532a4-7)

Sokrates now closes the circle. He sets up a basis for applying the generalization to poetry by noting that Ion has claimed that Homer is better than the other poets and that

they speak on the same subjects. Sokrates again asks his question beginning with, ‘Is it not the case that’, Οὐκοῦν.

ΙΩΝ. Καὶ ἀληθῆ λέγω. (532a7,8)

Ion again responds by agreeing that it is the case. Again he responds using the phrase, ἀληθῆ λέγω. For the first time Ion uses this term about himself. Ion is happy to be back on familiar territory and emphasizes his claim that Homer is better than the other poets. He now has a generalization that supports his earlier assertion.

At this point we must revise our hypothesis that the terms ἀληθῆ λέγω and εὖ λέγεις refer only to certain characters. The only distinction now possible would be with respect to speaking the truth or speaking persuasively. In the early part of the dialogue then Sokrates would be characterized as speaking the truth whereas Ion is the one who is convincing regardless of the verity of his comments.

In addition we must then take note of the shift and ask why at this point Ion is portrayed as claiming now to speak the truth. It is with respect to the claim that Homer and the other poets speak on the same topics but that Homer does it better. We might see if Sokrates also shifts or if he continues to say only that Ion speaks well.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν, εἴπερ τὸν εὖ λέγοντα γινώσκεις, καὶ τοὺς χεῖρον λέγοντας γινώσκοις ἂν ὅτι χεῖρον λέγουσιν. (532a8-b2)

Sokrates then completes the analogy and asks if similarly Ion could distinguish the worse speakers.

ΙΩΝ. Ἐοικέν γε. (532b2)

Ion answers with far less confidence. Does he see a trap coming?

ΣΩ. Οὐ χαλεπὸν τοῦτό γε εἰκάσαι, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ἀλλὰ παντὶ δῆλον ὅτι τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη περὶ Ὀμήρου λέγειν ἀδύνατος εἶ· εἰ γὰρ τέχνη οἷός τε ἦσθα, καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ποιητῶν ἀπάντων λέγειν οἷός τ' ἂν ἦσθα· ποιητικὴ γὰρ πού ἐστιν τὸ ὅλον. ἦ οὐ; (532c5-9)

Socrates then claims that it is easy to explain Ion's experience; it is due to the fact that with respect to Homer he has neither τέχνη nor ἐπιστήμη. Socrates can of course permit Ion to retain being clever δεινός.

Socrates claims that the proof of this is that if Ion had τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη he would be able to speak on other poets as well. Presumably this is due to the fact that τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη are involved in pulling apart good speakers from bad speakers.

In any case, before Ion can respond, Socrates continues to question the nature of poetry; he says there is a skill concerning all of poetry - ποιητικὴ and asks Ion if he agrees.

Socrates here points away from the subject matter of the poets to their skill in making poetry. This level has been conspicuously absent until now.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (532c10)

Ion ignores the Socratic claim of his lack of τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη, in favour of responding to the final question. He says there is some such skill. One might wonder on what basis Ion, who is not good at Hesiod, could generalize about poetry. How could he see a whole, a unity of poetry?

Such an admission by Ion would also generate a concern for his claims to be skillful at Homer. If there were such a skill and he understood it, then he could apply that understanding to all poetry. If skill and cleverness are separate then he might revert to only claiming cleverness, but how would he have knowledge of the unity of the skill of poetry?

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴν λάβη τις καὶ ἄλλην τέχνην ἠντινοῦν ὅλην, ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος τῆς σκέψεως ἔσται περὶ ἀπασῶν τῶν τεχνῶν; πῶς τοῦτο λέγω, δέη τί μου ἀκοῦσαι, ὦ Ἴων; (532d1-3)

Socrates continues in a somewhat cryptic fashion, and so asks Ion if he needs further explanation. Socrates asks whether, if one acquires any other τέχνη as a whole then the same manner, ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος, of investigation, σκέψεως, would apply to the whole τέχνη. First one must posit a skill concerning a whole subject area. Secondly one must posit that in any skill the manner of investigation of each aspect of the skill is consistent throughout. Socrates also introduces another term we will try to add to our Platonic lexicon, σκέψεως. Socrates does not here use the term δεινός. Let us turn from what he is saying here to what he does. Socrates has started to move from specific cases to generalizing. Is Ion capable of such generalizing? How would that be related to a manner of investigating that posits some consistent skill throughout an art?

ἼΩΝ. Ναὶ μὰ τὸν Δία, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἔγωγε· χαίρω γὰρ ἀκούων ὑμῶν τῶν σοφῶν. (532d4,5)

Ion, agrees that he needs Sokrates to explain further. He says that he does need further explanation for he is pleased to listen to the wise, such as Sokrates. However, we must note the term σοφῶν has implications of the traveling sophists. Ion uses the term after Sokrates has started to speak in generalizations and in the abstract. Is that what Ion expects of the wise/sophists? Is he jesting?

ΣΩ. Βουλοίμην ἂν σε ἀληθῆ λέγειν, ὧ Ἴων· ἀλλὰ σοφοὶ μὲν πού ἐστε ὑμεῖς οἱ ῥαψῳδοὶ καὶ ὑποκριταὶ καὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ᾄδετε τὰ ποιήματα, ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τὰ ληθῆ λέγω, οἷον εἰκὸς ἰδιώτην ἀνθρώπων. ἐπεὶ καὶ περὶ τούτου οὗ νῦν ἠρόμην σε, θέασαι ὡς φαῦλον καὶ ἰδιωτικόν ἐστι καὶ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς γινῶναι ὃ ἔλεγον, τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι σκέψιν, ἐπειδάν τις ὅλην τέχνην λάβῃ. λάβωμεν γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ· γραφικὴ γάρ τίς ἐστι τέχνη τὸ ὅλον; (532d6-e5)

Sokrates appears to pick up the joke and responds that it is the rhapsodes and their ilk who are wise/sophists; whereas he merely speaks the truth as a private man. Sokrates then restates his question to Ion; when one has acquired a whole art, is the mode of investigation the same? Sokrates then asks specifically with respect to painting whether there is an art of painting as a whole.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (532e5)

Ion says that it is. Ion might be answering only with respect to Sokrates' example of painting and so has not quite entered into the abstract level that Sokrates introduced. Ion might be thinking about what the particular mode of investigation might be in his own art, but he follows Sokrates' lead.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν καὶ γραφῆς πολλοὶ καὶ εἰσὶ καὶ γεγόνασιν ἀγαθοὶ καὶ φαῦλοι;

(532e5-7)

As a further question, Sokrates asks Ion if there both are and have been many painters, good and bad. He does not state his standard.

ΙΩΝ. Πάνυ γε. (532e7)

Ion feels confident in asserting there are and have been good and bad painters. This is a less abstract question and so Ion can feel more confident in his answers.

ΣΩ. Ἦδη οὖν τινα εἶδες, ὅστις περὶ μὲν Πολυγνώτου τοῦ Ἀγλαοφῶντος δεινός ἐστιν ἀποφαίνειν, ἃ εὖ τε γράφει καὶ ἃ μὴ, περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων γραφέων ἀδύνατος; καὶ ἐπειδὴν μὲν τις τὰ τῶν ἄλλων ζωγράφων ἔργα ἐπιδεικνύη, νυστάζει τε καὶ ἀπορεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἔχει ὅτι συμβάληται, ἐπειδὴν δὲ περὶ Πολυγνώτου ἢ ἄλλου ὅτου βούλει τῶν γραφέων ἐνὸς μόνου δέη ἀποφήνασθαι γνώμην, ἐγρήγορέν τε καὶ προσέχει τὸν νοῦν καὶ εὐπορεῖ ὅτι εἴπη; (532e7-533a5)

Sokrates asks Ion if he knows anyone who is clever at declaring what the painter Polygnotos paints well and what not well, but who drops into a doze when other painters are exhibited. This is of course what Ion has claimed happens to himself; he drops off to sleep when poets other than Homer are discussed. Sokrates also asks about cleverness, δεινός, in declaring what is good and what is not, not about τέχνη, skill, in painting.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, οὐ δῆτα. (533a6)

Ion emphatically swears he knows of no one who fits such an analogy in declaring what is good and what is not with respect to painters with respect to his own situation of being clever at only one poet.

We must ask ourselves this point also. What of music critics? Do they only comment on one musician?

At this point we return to our principle number one. A dialogue is not a treatise. If we are expecting a treatise on poetry we might take Ion to be a symbol for poetry. But such a reading makes it almost impossible to notice how truly unusual Ion is. Ion begins to become a special sort of rhapsode, not just a symbol for poetry.

Further we might note that Sokrates' general rule of one art having one mode of investigation seems rather strange. Does it only apply to the secondary ability of separating the good art works from the bad? There is much confusion about the ability to perform and the ability to comment.

ΣΩ. Τί δέ; ἐν ἀνδριαντοποιίᾳ ἤδη τιν' εἶδες, ὅστις περὶ μὲν Δαιδάλου τοῦ Μητίονος ἢ Ἐπειοῦ τοῦ Πανοπέως ἢ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Σαμίου ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς ἀνδριαντοποιοῦ ἐνὸς πέρι δεινός ἐστιν ἐξηγεῖσθαι ἃ εὖ πεποιήκεν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς τῶν ἄλλων ἀνδριαντοποιῶν ἔργοις ἀπορεῖ τε καὶ νυστάζει, οὐκ ἔχων ὅτι εἶπη; (533a6-b4)

Sokrates asks Ion if knows of any analogy in sculpture to his situation - someone who is clever δεινός in explaining, ἐξηγεῖσθαι, with respect to only one sculptor, what the sculptor has made well. Sokrates mentions several famous sculptors, such as Daedalus and Epion, that presumably the person who is clever in explaining would know. Sokrates continues to hammer out the strangeness of Ion's situation.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, οὐδὲ τοῦτον ἐώρακα. (533b4,5)

Again Ion swears very emphatically. He appears to be following Sokrates, but is perhaps rather surprised at the results of this investigation. Once again he knows of no sculpture commentator who sticks to a single sculptor.

ΣΩ. Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ὡς γ' ἐγὼ οἶμαι, οὐδ' ἐν αὐλήσει γε οὐδὲ ἐν κιθαρίσει οὐδὲ ἐν κιθαρῳδίᾳ οὐδὲ ἐν ῥαψῳδίᾳ οὐδεπώποτ' εἶδες ἄνδρα, ὅστις περὶ μὲν Ὀλύμπου δεινός ἐστιν ἐξηγεῖσθαι ἢ περὶ Θαμύρου ἢ περὶ Ὀρφέως ἢ περὶ Φημίου τοῦ Ἰθακησίου ῥαψῳδοῦ, περὶ δὲ Ἴωνος τοῦ Ἐφείου [ῥαψῳδοῦ] ἀπορεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἔχει συμβαλέσθαι ἅ τε εὖ ῥαψῳδεῖ καὶ ἅ μὴ. (533b5-c3)

Sokrates extends his examples of various arts to include fluting, harping, minstrelsy and *rhapsodizing* and their respective commentators. He mentions the experts in these arts, specifically, Olympus, a flautist; Thamyrus, a lyrist; Orpheus, a Thracian lyrist and musician; and Phemis, a rhapsode from Ithaca. As his examples grow ever wider, Ion's unique status becomes clearer. He even notes that those who comment on Ion are also clever commentators, δεινός ἐστιν ἐξηγεῖσθαι, on what other rhapsodes sing well and on what not.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐκ ἔχω σοι περὶ τούτου ἀντιλέγειν, ὦ Σώκρατες· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο ἐμαυτῶ σύννοϊδα, ὅτι περὶ Ὀμήρου κάλλιστ' ἀνθρώπων λέγω καὶ εὐπορῶ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες μέ φασιν εὖ λέγειν, περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων οὔ. καίτοι ὄρα τοῦτο τί ἐστιν. (533c4-8)

Ion recognizes the strangeness of his claim but returns to what he trusts - his personal experience that he speaks better than any other human being about Homer and

that all others agree that he speaks well (but not speaks truthfully) about Homer; whereas he is not a good speaker on the other poets.

Thus, Ion issues a challenge to Sokrates, to bring forth an explanation of his trusted experience. Ion trusts his experience over Sokrates' logos, which as we shall see hinges on whether Ion speaks well concerning Homer by means of a τέχνη. But even then, Ion's ability is rather special as he can think of no other such commentator clever at commenting on only one artist. Sokrates answers Ion by means of mythos.

5. Examination: Magnetic Myth (533c9-536d7)

ΣΩ. Καὶ ὄρῳ, ὧ Ἴων, καὶ ἔρχομαί γέ σοι ἀποφανόμενος, ὃ μοι δοκεῖ τοῦτο εἶναι. ἔστι γὰρ τοῦτο τέχνη μὲν οὐκ ὄν παρὰ σοὶ περὶ Ὀμήρου εὖ λέγειν, ὃ νυν δὴ ἔλεγον, θεία δὲ δύναμις, ἣ σε κινεῖ, ὡσπερ ἐν τῇ λίθῳ, ἦν Εὐριπίδης μὲν Μαγνητικὴν ὠνόμασεν, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ Ἑρακλείαν. καὶ γὰρ αὕτη ἡ λίθος οὐ μόνον αὐτοὺς τοὺς δακτυλίους ἄγει τοὺς σιδηροῦς, ἀλλὰ καὶ δύναμιν ἐντίθησι τοῖς δακτυλίοις, ὥστ' αὐτὴ δύνασθαι ταύτῳ τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὅπερ ἡ λίθος, ἄλλους ἄγειν δακτυλίους, ὥστ' ἐνίοτε ὄρμαθός μακρὸς πάνυ σιδηρίων καὶ δακτυλίων ἐξ ἀλλήλων ἤρτηται· πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις ἐξ ἐκείνης τῆς λίθου ἡ δύναμις ἀνήρτηται. (533c9-e3)

Sokrates says he sees, ὄρῳ, what ‘this’ is and is going to show to Ion what he thinks ‘this’ is. Sokrates embarks on a long speech in which he shows ‘this’ to Ion by means of the famous magnetic metaphor. Note that he starts by claiming that Ion does not speak by means of a τέχνη.

Sokrates presents his first simile, that of magnetism, in an effort to explain the power, δύναμις¹², that enables Ion to interpret. Sokrates’ simile starts with a natural

¹² Although we are trying to look only to the *Ion* in accordance with our principle number four, it is interesting to compare what Sokrates says elsewhere about seeing a power. Sokrates says, in Plato’s *Politeia* 477c7,

In a power (δύναμει) I see (ὄρῳ) no color or shape or anything of the sort as in many other things to which I look (ἀποβλέπω) when I divide one thing from another for myself. With a power I look (βλέπω) only to this - on what it depends (ἐφ’ ᾧ τε ἔστι) and what it accomplishes (ἀπεργάζεται); and it is on this basis that I come to call each of the powers a power; and that which depends on the same thing and accomplishes the same thing, I call the same power, and that which depends on another and accomplishes another, I call another.

force, magnetism, coming from a special stone and analogous to the supernatural power of the Muse.

οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἡ Μοῦσα ἐνθέους μὲν ποιεῖ αὐτή, διὰ δὲ τῶν ἐνθέων τούτων ἄλλων ἐνθουσιαζόντων ὀρμαθὸς ἐξαρτᾶται. (533e3-5)

Sokrates likens a chain of iron rings held by and connected to this special magnetic stone to the chain formed by the power of the Muse to inspire men who in turn inspire other men. Sokrates then applies this notion of inspiration to poets.

πάντες γὰρ οἱ τε τῶν ἐπῶν ποιηταὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ οὐκ ἐκ τέχνης ἀλλ' ἐνθεοὶ ὄντες καὶ κατεχόμενοι πάντα ταῦτα τὰ καλὰ λέγουσι ποιήματα, καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ὡσαύτως, (533e5-8)

Sokrates claims that this inspiration is not a τέχνη, even though he had suggested to Ion previously that there is a τέχνη of poetry. He claims that all good epic poets utter all their fine poems not from skill but inspired and possessed. Apparently the τέχνη of poetry is not the inspiration of the Muse. One might wonder about the requirements for poetry. Does the poet require both skill and enthusiasm or merely enthusiasm? Is there a flaw in the analogy?

ὥσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες ὀρχοῦνται, οὕτω καὶ οἱ μελοποιοὶ οὐκ ἔμφρονες ὄντες τὰ καλὰ μέλη ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴν ἐμβῶσιν εἰς τὴν ἀρμονίαν καὶ εἰς τὸν ρυθμόν, βακχεύουσι καὶ κατεχόμενοι, ὥσπερ αἱ βᾶκχαι ἀρύονται ἐκ τῶν ποταμῶν μέλι καὶ γάλα κατεχόμεναι, ἔμφρονες δὲ οὔσαι οὔ, καὶ τῶν μελοποιῶν ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦτο ἐργάζεται, ὅπερ

αὐτοὶ λέγουσι. (533e8-534a7)

Sokrates generates a second simile for the inspiration of poets, by likening it to the Corybantic dancing under the influence of Bacchus. This time Sokrates draws his likeness to lyric poets whereas the first applied to epic poets. The simile is extended then to a third comparison, which Sokrates says the poets themselves report, a beautiful fantasy of poets, like Bacchantes, gathering honey and milk from a river. They find something wonderful in the ordinary.

We, like many, could be entranced by this image. We might envision Plato's Theory of Poetry in these images. But what can we make of Sokrates and his ability to generate these powerful images? Although this section does not scan into hexameter, it is quite poetic. Is Sokrates gathering honey and milk from a river? Is Plato gathering honey and milk from a river? But then where have these images come from? Is Sokrates possessed or perhaps using a τέχνη? What would be the τέχνη that Sokrates practices? If we can understand Sokrates as acting poetically not philosophically, then it seems clear that one should not characterize this dialogue as a simple battle between philosophy/Sokrates and poetry/Ion.

These beautiful images may appear charming, but there are also disanalogies. Sokrates has just pointed out to Ion how unusual his situation is. Ion has an exceptional ability to speak on only one poet. The similes do not explain why Ion is unique but rather give a sort of explanation that apparently applies to all poets.

λέγουσι γὰρ δήπουθεν πρὸς ἡμᾶς οἱ ποιηταί, ὅτι ἀπὸ κρηνῶν μελιρρύτων ἐκ Μουσῶν κήπων τινῶν καὶ ναπῶν δρεπόμενοι τὰ μέλη ἡμῖν φέρουσιν ὥσπερ αἱ

μέλιτται, καὶ αὐτοὶ οὕτω πετόμενοι· καὶ ἀληθῆ λέγουσι. (534a7-b3)

Sokrates extends the honey image by reporting that the poets also tell us that they bring their songs like sweets gathered from honey-dropping founts in certain gardens and glades of the Muses, using a bit of word play between honey μέλη and the lyric poets οἱ μελοποῖ. Sokrates also claims that what these poets are then telling, about how they merely gather their poems, is ἀληθῆ, true. It is certainly revealing that the poets, who do not know where their poems come from, liken themselves to bees gathering honey they have not made.

κοῦφον γὰρ χρῆμα ποιητῆς ἐστὶν καὶ πτηνὸν καὶ ἱερόν, καὶ οὐ πρότερον οἶός τε ποιεῖν, πρὶν ἂν ἔνθεός τε γένηται καὶ ἔκφρων καὶ ὁ νοῦς μηκέτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐνῆ· ἕως δ' ἂν τουτὶ ἔχη τὸ κτῆμα, ἀδύνατος πᾶς ποιεῖν ἀνθρωπὸς ἐστὶν καὶ χρησμοφδεῖν. (534b3-7)

Sokrates then claims that, for all people, they are unable to generate poetry until they are out of their mind, ἔκφρων. Again we need to consider if Sokrates is also now out of his mind as he generates these poetic images. In accordance with hermeneutic principle number seven, we must look to the action as well as the words.

We have a sort of liar's paradox at play. A Cretan, possibly Epimenides, said that Cretans are always liars (St. Paul's *Epistle to Titus* 1:12-13). Sokrates, poetically and in his right mind, proclaims that all poets are out of their mind. Is Sokrates ironic? Well if so, it would be within the dialogue. Ion is entitled to challenge Sokrates' image as contradictory. So the irony has a meaning within the dialogue as a test of Ion. Alternatively we might merely argue that Sokrates is portrayed as contradicting himself.

That might be explained by suggesting that Plato does not realize the contradiction or that Sokrates is being portrayed as being unable to see his self-contradiction. Presuming that Plato was clever enough to see the contradiction that he has created, we are left with justifying Sokrates' position as being also clever enough to see the contradiction. That cleverness becomes apparent when we observe the effect Sokrates' poetry has on Ion.

ἄτε οὖν οὐ τέχνη ποιοῦντες καὶ πολλὰ λέγοντες καὶ καλὰ περὶ τῶν
πραγμάτων, ὥσπερ σὺ περὶ Ὅμηρου, ἀλλὰ θεία μοίρα, τοῦτο μόνον οἷός τε
ἕκαστος ποιεῖν καλῶς, ἐφ' ὃ ἡ Μοῦσα αὐτὸν ὥρμησεν, ὁ μὲν διθυράμβους, ὁ δὲ
ἐγκώμια, ὁ δὲ ὑπορχήματα, ὁ δ' ἔπη, ὁ δ' ἰάμβους· τὰ δ' ἄλλα φαῦλος αὐτῶν
ἕκαστός ἐστιν. (534b7-c5)

Sokrates concludes that poets utter their fine sayings about things in the same way that Ion utters his fine sayings about Homer – not through a τέχνη, but through a divine portion or fate θεία μοίρα (from μοιράω- to share or divide; also Moira, the goddess of fate). Moreover poets are to be limited to whatever form of poetry the Muses provide them. To our earlier two options of skill and cleverness we must add a third option of divine inspiration.

Where has the analogy broken down? It appears to break down in two ways. It does not explain how Ion cannot comment on any poet other than Homer. Sokrates will have to generate a different magnetic ring image to account for that. The two images are not identical. In addition, Sokrates while generating his poetic images does not appear to be in a frenzy. We may recall an earlier contrast between Apollo and Athena:

Apollo: God of divination (god's knowledge availed of through the dark seeing of a prophet who knows not what he sees)

Athena: God of wisdom, war craft (war fought while preserving one's wits vs. Aries' way) and crafts (man's knowledge)

Apollo is connected to the poet who, in a frenzy, does not know what he sees, and Athena is connected to the craftsman creating by means of skill.

οὐ γὰρ τέχνη ταῦτα λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ θεία δυνάμει, ἐπεὶ, εἰ περὶ ἑνὸς τέχνη
καλῶς ἠπίσταντο λέγειν, κἂν περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων· (534c5-7)

Sokrates ignores the previous discussion of Ion's unique status among commentators and draws his conclusion by referring back to the earlier argument that if someone had obtained the skill of poetry one would be able to compose lyric and epic poetry, but in fact poets do not do so. Ion will not challenge this generalization. We may violate our principle number one and accept these similes as Plato's treatise on poetry. At that point we might challenge such a treatise and claim that Plato is wrong about poetry. Or we might agree and say that Plato is correct. Or in accordance with our principle number seven, we might look to what is done also and then wonder at the contradiction between this theory and Plato's depiction of Sokrates, who is comfortable weaving together short question and answer with long metaphorical imagery. We recall another one of the early comparisons of the gods:

Apollo: God of music; presides over the muses.

Athena: Protector of great men and cities; Patron of the crafts especially weaving.

While Apollo is looking after the muses, Sokrates, the Athenian, weaves together his various modes of questioning and myth making

διὰ ταῦτα δὲ ὁ θεὸς ἐξαιρούμενος τούτων τὸν νοῦν τούτοις χρῆται ὑπηρέταις
καὶ τοῖς χρησμοδοῖς καὶ τοῖς μάντεσι τοῖς θείοις, ἵνα ἡμεῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες

εἰδῶμεν, ὅτι οὐχ οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ταῦτα λέγοντες οὕτω πολλοῦ ἄξια, οἷς νοῦς μὴ πάρεστιν, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ὁ λέγων, διὰ τούτων δὲ φθέγγεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς. (534b3-d4)

Sokrates claims that god takes away the mind of the poets in order to speak through them and so that we might know that the work of the poets is not their own but that of the god.

μέγιστον δὲ τεκμήριον τῷ λόγῳ Τύννιχος ὁ Χαλκιδεύς, ὃς ἄλλο μὲν οὐδὲν πώποτ' ἐποίησε ποίημα ὅτου τις ἂν ἀξιώσειεν μνησθῆναι, τὸν δὲ παίωνα ὃν πάντες ἄδουσι, σχεδόν τι πάντων μελῶν κάλλιστον, ἀτεχνῶς, ὅπερ αὐτὸς λέγει, "εὕρημά τι Μοισᾶν." (534d4-e1)

Sokrates claims as his proof the case of Tynnichos who was a one-hit wonder. If Tynnichos had a skill, it would have been evident in other compositions. Tynnichos himself claimed his big success was a discovery of the Muses.

ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ δὴ μάλιστά μοι δοκεῖ ὁ θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι ἡμῖν, ἵνα μὴ διστάζωμεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἀνθρώπινά ἐστιν τὰ καλὰ ταῦτα ποιήματα οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ θεῶν καὶ θεῶν, οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ οὐδὲν ἀλλ' ἢ ἐρμηνῆς εἰσιν τῶν θεῶν, κατεχόμενοι ἐξ ὅτου ἂν ἕκαστος κατέχηται. ταῦτα ἐνδεικνύμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐξεπίτηδες διὰ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου ποιητοῦ τὸ κάλλιστον μέλος ἦσεν· ἢ οὐ δοκῶ σοι ἀληθῆ λέγειν, ὦ Ἴων (534e1-535a2)

Sokrates concludes his poetic depiction of the poets and its argument that because Tynnichos composed one outstanding song and many poor ones, Sokrates is entitled to come to the rather dubious conclusion that this was to be a sign for us that the gods are

the creators of poetry; they could sing the greatest song through the worst poet. This example is to be a proof of Sokrates' simile and the claim that the gods take away the poets' minds in order to speak through them. Tynnichos could only have composed his single hit if his mind were taken away. One might also suppose that there was no such action of the gods and that Tynnichos stole the song.

Sokrates, having generated his poetic images, asks Ion what he thinks of this explanation. It is not yet clear how Sokrates' image of poets who compose through the possession of the muses explains Ion's inability to comment on poets other than Homer.

ΙΩΝ. Ναὶ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἔμοιγε· ἄπτει γάρ πῶς μου τοῖς λόγοις τῆς ψυχῆς, ὧς Σώκρατες, καί μοι δοκοῦσι θεῖα μοῖρα ἡμῖν παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ταῦτα οἱ ἀγαθοὶ ποιηταὶ ἐρμηνεύειν. (535a3-5)

Ion seems unconcerned as to how the image fits his own activity. He does not really seem to think about it. Ion is 'persuaded' by Sokrates' poetic depiction of poetry as words coming from a divine dispensation of the Muses. In fact, Ion is moved by the depiction – it fastens onto his soul. Somehow, Sokrates' discussion about poetry has not put Ion to sleep, despite his claim that in discussion of poets only Homer can keep him awake.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ὑμεῖς αὖ οἱ ῥαψῳδοὶ τὰ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐρμηνεύετε; (535a6,7)

Sokrates asks Ion to draw out the magnetic chain to the next link, the rhapsodes. He asks if the rhapsodes are interpreters of the words of the poets. It is noteworthy that in all of this, the concrete work of art, the poem, seems not to figure. Poets are interpreters of the gods and rhapsodes are interpreters of the poets. A:B as B:C.

ΙΩΝ. Καὶ τοῦτο ἀληθὲς λέγεις. (535a8)

Ion again rather enthusiastically agrees that the rhapsodes are interpreters of the poets. An ambiguity remains; a rhapsode such as Ion works at two levels of interpretation, that of the interpretive performance and that of the commentary. Which one are we to understand as extending the simile?

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ἐρμηνέων ἐρμηνῆς γίγνεσθε; (535a9)

And so Sokrates suggests the simile makes rhapsodes interpreters squared.

ΙΩΝ. Παντάπασί γε. (535a10)

Ion loves it. Both poets and rhapsodes are interpreters. Rhapsodes are doing the same thing and so are elevated to the same level as the ‘divine Homer’.

ΣΩ. Ἔχε δὴ μοι τόδε εἶπέ, ὦ Ἴων, καὶ μὴ ἀποκρύψη ὅ τι ἂν σε ἔρωμαι· ὅταν εὖ εἴπης ἔπη καὶ ἐκπλήξης μάλιστα τοὺς θεωμένους, ἢ τὸν Ὀδυσσεά ὅταν ἐπὶ τὸν οὐδὸν ἐφαλλόμενον ἄδῃς, ἐκφανῆ γιγνόμενον τοῖς μνηστῆρσι καὶ ἐκχέοντα τοὺς οἰστοὺς πρὸ τῶν ποδῶν, ἢ Ἀχιλλέα ἐπὶ τὸν Ἔκτορα ὀρμῶντα, ἢ καὶ τῶν περὶ Ἀνδρομάχην ἐλεινῶν τι ἢ περὶ Ἐκάβην ἢ περὶ Πρίαμον, τότε πότερον ἔμφρων εἶ, ἢ ἔξω σαυτοῦ γίγνη καὶ παρὰ τοῖς πράγμασιν οἶεταί σου εἶναι ἢ ψυχὴ οἷς λέγεις ἐνθουσιάζουσα, ἢ ἐν Ἰθάκῃ οὔσιν ἢ ἐν Τροίᾳ ἢ ὅπως ἂν καὶ τὰ ἔπη ἔχη; (535b1-c3)

Sokrates takes interpretation in the first sense, that of the interpretive performance. He draws out some of the more dramatic points of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* and asks if Ion when he interprets these parts does he not feel transported to the various places in the world they depict. Does his soul get carried away by the enthusiasm into

thinking that it is amongst the things he speaks about? Does Ion's soul now think he is amongst the poets?

ΙΩΝ. ὥς ἐναργές μοι τοῦτο, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ τεκμήριον εἶπες· οὐ γάρ σε ἀποκρυψάμενος ἔρω. ἐγὼ γὰρ ὅταν ἐλείνόν τι λέγω, δακρύων ἐμπίμπλανταί μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί· ὅταν τε φοβερόν ἢ δεινόν, ὀρθαὶ αἱ τρίχες ἴστανται ὑπὸ φόβου καὶ ἡ καρδία πηδᾷ. (535c4-8)

Ion again is carried away by Sokrates' comments. He says, "How vivid is this part of your proof." Ion agrees that in his acting he is transported and his hair stands on end and his heart throbs when he describes a fearful passage. These passages, like Sokrates' myth, are vivid to him.

ΣΩ. Τί οὖν; φῶμεν, ὦ Ἴων, ἔμφρονα εἶναι τότε τοῦτον τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ὃς ἂν κεκοσμημένος ἐσθῆτι ποικίλῃ καὶ χρυσοῖσι στεφάνοις κλάη τ' ἐν θυσίαις καὶ ἑορταῖς, μηδὲν ἀπολωλεκῶς τούτων, ἢ φοβῆται πλέον ἢ ἐν δισμυρίοις ἀνθρώποις ἐστηκῶς φιλίοις, μηδενὸς ἀποδύοντος μηδὲ ἀδικοῦντος; (535d1-5)

Sokrates points to the strange effect acting has on Ion – regardless of his true situation on stage in front of many friendly people – he can still feel terror. He can 'suspend' his knowledge of his actual situation. Sokrates again wants Ion to say if at such a point we should say that the rhapsode is in his right mind ἔμφρονα.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, οὐ πάνυ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὥς γε τάληθές εἰρηῆσθαι. (535d6,7)

Ion again swears that, while acting, he cannot be regarded as sane, ἔμφρονα. He can weep at a fictional sacrifice, and despite the fact he is still wearing his gold crown. He can feel fear despite being in the presence of twenty thousand friendly people.

ΣΩ. Οἶσθα οὖν ὅτι καὶ τῶν θεατῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ταῦτὰ ταῦτα ὑμεῖς ἐργάζεσθε; (535d8,9)

Sokrates then draws Ion towards the next level in the chain and asks if he is aware that the rhapsode's performance has the same effect on the audience. A:B as B:C; but the analogy breaks here as we do not have B:C as C:D. The audience is not meant to be a further interpreter of the rhapsode. The audience is only to be enchanted as the rhapsode is – they are supposed to suspend their knowledge of the true situation and live in the imagined world of the poem.

We might wonder how far the chain can be extended. Can it include the literary critic and the analytic philosopher?

ΙΩΝ. Καὶ μάλα καλῶς οἶδα· καθορῶ γὰρ ἐκάστοτε 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. (535e1-6)

Ion admits that he has the 'intended' effect on his audience, but his effect is the consequence not merely of the magnetic link, but also of his paying close attention to his audience. The chain analogy does not mention any requirement to pay attention to the audience. In fact, paying close attention to the audience might be rather difficult if he were not in his right mind - ἔμφρονα.

Ion, under the charm of Sokratic mythos, has revealed in what way Homer can be sufficient for him. Ion can make sufficient money singing and commenting on Homer.

Now that may not be Ion's sole motivation. But we are entitled to note that Ion does not say that he regards the audience to see if they are having the proper religious experience in a religious festival. Ion chooses to mention the money he will make. In contrast, we might note that Sokrates gives no indication that he was looking for how much money Ion would pay. What is Sokrates' motivation?

We may also recall how far Ion has strayed from the role assigned by Pindar (noted on page seven) to the Muses: to reveal to the Gods the order of Zeus' created kosmos. But Sokrates, in his myth, has revealed to Ion what was hidden about his, Ion's, situation.

ΣΩ. Οἴσθα οὖν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ θεατῆς τῶν δακτυλίων ὁ ἔσχατος, ὧν ἐγὼ ἔλεγον ὑπὸ τῆς Ἡρακλειώτιδος λίθου ἀπ' ἀλλήλων τὴν δύναμιν λαμβάνειν; (535e7-9)

Sokrates embarks on his second long speech extending the simile of the magnetic rings from the muses, the poets, and the rhapsodes to include the audience.

ΣΩ (cont.) ὁ δὲ μέσος σὺ ὁ ῥαψωδὸς καὶ ὑποκριτῆς, ὁ δὲ πρῶτος αὐτὸς ὁ ποιητῆς· ὁ δὲ θεὸς διὰ πάντων τούτων ἔλκει τὴν ψυχὴν ὅποι ἂν βούληται τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀνακρεμαννὺς ἐξ ἀλλήλων τὴν δύναμιν. καὶ ὥσπερ ἐκ τῆς λίθου ἐκείνης ὀρμαθὸς πάμπολυς ἐξήρτηται χορευτῶν τε καὶ διδασκάλων καὶ ὑποδιδασκάλων, ἐκ πλαγίου ἐξηρτημένων τῶν τῆς Μούσης ἐκκρεμαμένων δακτυλίων. καὶ ὁ μὲν τῶν ποιητῶν ἐξ ἄλλης Μούσης, ὁ δὲ ἐξ ἄλλης ἐξήρτηται ὀνομάζομεν δὲ αὐτὸ κατέχεται· τὸ δὲ ἐστὶ παραπλήσιον· ἔχεται γάρ· ἐκ δὲ τούτων τῶν πρῶτων δακτυλίων, τῶν ποιητῶν, ἄλλοι ἐξ ἄλλου αὖ

ήρτημένοι εἰσὶ καὶ ἐνθουσιάζουσιν, οἱ μὲν ἐξ Ὀρφέως, οἱ δὲ ἐκ Μουσαίου· οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ ἐξ Ὀμήρου κατέχονται τε καὶ ἔχονται. (535e9-536b3)

Sokrates alters the analogy emphasizing the nature of the whole chain as nothing but suspended iron rings. The power that passes through them is from the god who moves the souls of men as he pleases. Instead of one chain from the Muse we have many side chains going from the muse to different poets and then down to their individual commentators.

ὦν σύ, ὦ Ἴων, εἷς εἶ καὶ κατέχη ἐξ Ὀμήρου, καὶ ἐπειδὴν μὲν τις ἄλλου του ποιητοῦ ἄδη, καθεύδεις τε καὶ ἀπορεῖς ὅτι λέγης, ἐπειδὴν δὲ τούτου τοῦ ποιητοῦ φθέγγεται τις μέλος, εὐθύς ἐγρήγορας καὶ ὀρχεῖται σου ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ εὐπορεῖς ὅ τι λέγης· οὐ γὰρ τέχνη οὐδ' ἐπιστήμη περὶ Ὀμήρου λέγεις ἢ λέγεις, ἀλλὰ θεῖα μοῖρα καὶ κατοκωχῆ· ὥσπερ οἱ κορυβαντιῶντες ἐκείνου μόνου αἰσθάνονται τοῦ μέλους ὁξέως, ὃ ἂν ἦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξ ὅτου ἂν κατέχωνται, καὶ εἰς ἐκεῖνο τὸ μέλος καὶ σχημάτων καὶ ῥημάτων εὐποροῦσι, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων οὐ φροντίζουσιν· οὕτω καὶ σύ, ὦ Ἴων, περὶ μὲν Ὀμήρου ὅταν τις μνησθῆ, εὐπορεῖς, περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπορεῖς· τούτου δ' ἐστὶ τὸ αἴτιον, ὃ μ' ἐρωτᾷς, δι' ὃ τι σύ περὶ μὲν Ὀμήρου εὐπορεῖς, περὶ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων οὐ, ὅτι οὐ τέχνη ἀλλὰ θεῖα μοῖρα Ὀμήρου δεινὸς εἶ ἐπαινέτης. (536b3-d3)

Sokrates then completes his analysis of the chain by claiming that Ion is in the chain of rings suspended from Homer. The image has become more complicated as there are side chains and some links are suspended in one part of the chain whereas others are suspended in other spans. When other poets are recited, Ion is not connected and he falls

asleep. When Homer is recited he awakes, the connection empowers him, and he has plenty to say about Homer – not just to perform. To complete the analogy, as the Corybants are not in their right mind when they are possessed and have plenty of gestures and phrases about their particular god, so too Ion when he speaks **about** Homer, not just when he performs Homer, is speaking by divine portion, θεία μοίρα, not skill or knowledge, οὐ τέχνη οὐδ' ἐπιστήμη. Sokrates has shifted the analogy from the performance to the commentary.

These side rings explain why Ion is connected to only one poet. There is a single chain from Homer and a separate chain from Hesiod. This revised analogy thus explains why Ion is limited in his commenting to a single poet. However, this analogy has a different problem; if it were correct, the commentators on painting, sculpture, or flute playing would also be limited to a single painter, which Ion and Sokrates agree they are not. The analogy does not explain why Ion's situation is unique.

ΙΩΝ. Σὺ μὲν εὖ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες· θαυμάζοιμι μὲντ ἂν εἰ οὕτως εὖ εἶποις, ὥστε με ἀναπεῖσαι, ὡς ἐγὼ κατεχόμενος καὶ μαινόμενος Ὀμηρον ἐπαινῶ. οἶμαι δὲ οὐδ' ἂν σοὶ δόξαιμι, εἴ μου ἀκούσαις λέγοντος περὶ Ὀμήρου. (536d4-7)

Ion now uses the term εὖ λέγεις of Sokrates. Ion says that Sokrates has spoken well, but incorrectly. Ion himself distinguishes between his usage of the two Greek terms. He says that he does not think Sokrates could speak well enough to convince him of something that he knows by his personal experience to be wrong. Speaking well is connected to ability to persuade. Truth is not necessarily persuasive.

Ion shifts his position. He is no longer entranced by Sokrates' poetic depiction of poetry. Ion may have been willing to permit the notion of rhapsodes as being out of their mind. He is unwilling to agree that his **commentary** is merely by divine portion.

Although he does not claim to have skill, he does claim that when commenting on Homer he is not possessed or held by the magnetic power - κατεχόμενος, nor is he frenzied out of his mind - μαινόμενος. He says that if Sokrates heard him speaking he would not think he was frenzied.

6. Examination: Short Question Revisited (536d8-542b3)

ΣΩ. Καὶ μὴν ἐθέλω γε ἀκοῦσαι, οὐ μέντοι πρότερον πρὶν ἂν μοι ἀποκρίνη τόδε· ὦν Ὅμηρος λέγει περὶ τίνος εὖ λέγεις οὐ γὰρ δήπου περὶ ἀπάντων γε. (536d8-e2)

As we pass the center of the dialogue, we have a repetition of the beginning as Sokrates again refuses to hear a demonstration of Ion's skill. Sokrates, by his actions, in fact prevents such a demonstration.

The following short question and answer section is generated by this little question of Sokrates, on what thing in Homer does Ion speak well. The first half of the dialogue contains a similar section of short question and answer initiated by the question of Ion, if he is clever with respect only to Homer only. In each case, Sokrates is responding to Ion offering to demonstrate his skills.

The first set of questions revolved around the ability of an expert, such as a doctor's ability to speak about nutritious food and to be able to distinguish a good speaker on nutritious food from a bad one. An expert, such as a doctor, was deemed also to be an expert on speeches about medicine, and thus to be an expert in the interpretation of those sections of Homer's poetry that depict doctors in action. The expert could also distinguish when someone was better at making these interpretations from someone who was worse. These experts could discuss the interpretations of any doctor.

This sort of understanding of poetic interpretation violates our first principle of interpretation of Plato. Let us suppose that Homer portrays an incompetent doctor in his poem. The expert would only be able to say that the doctor in Homer's poem is

incompetent. The expert will not thereby be able to interpret Homer's purpose in portraying an incompetent doctor, assuming that Homer intends to do so. Likewise if Plato depicts an argument based on faulty logic the logician may be able to say that the argument is flawed. The logician is not thereby able to interpret Plato's purpose.

But under this understanding of poetry, the experts are capable of commenting on any medical treatise. Ion's inability to discuss Hesiod demonstrated that his work was not based on such a skill.

Ion was unmoved by Sokrates' short question and answer – the sort of thing the medical expert might best relate to. He accepted Sokrates' conclusion, but was unconvinced of its applicability to himself. He preferred to trust his experience over Sokrates' logic. Under the spell of Sokratic poetic composition, Ion gladly accepted that rhapsodes, like poets, are without skill, and out of their minds when they sing or compose. Ion will not accept this position with respect to his commentary on Homer. Further Ion also does not accept the comparison even with respect to his performances during which he pays close attention to his audience to ensure he will be well paid.

Sokrates has made a testing of Ion and revealed Ion's nature. If that were Sokrates' sole motivation then the dialogue could stop here. But Sokrates continues on. Sokrates reverts to his method of brief questions. Let us see where the second set of short questions and answers leads. Sokrates asks Ion on what things in Homer does he, Ion, speak well.

ΙΩΝ. Εὖ ἴσθι, ὦ Σώκρατες, περὶ οὐδενὸς ὅτου οὔ. (536e3)

As expected, Ion again stakes his claim to speak well about all of Homer. His claim is slightly altered in that Sokrates originally asked Ion how many poets he was clever about, whether performing or explaining is unspoken, and Ion claimed only to be clever with respect to Homer. Now Sokrates has asked about which parts of Homer he speaks well and despite Ion's previously ceding sections concerning prophecy to the seer, Ion claims again to speak well on all.

We note that cleverness has disappeared from the dialogue and been replaced with speaking well.

ΣΩ. Οὐ δῆπου καὶ περὶ τούτων, ὧν σὺ μὲν τυγχάνεις οὐκ εἰδώς, Ὅμηρος δὲ λέγει. (536e4,5)

Sokrates then asks about the things of which Homer speaks about which Ion happens not to know. Now Sokrates' questioning of Ion seems rather strange. Ion has just stated he speaks well about all, and presumably that is not due to his not knowing οὐκ εἰδώς. One might have expected Sokrates to first establish that there are parts of Homer on which Ion knows nothing than to ask a question which presumes they exist. To be consistent, Ion would no doubt reply that there are no such parts.

ΙΩΝ. Καὶ ταῦτα ποῖά ἐστιν, ἃ Ὅμηρος μὲν λέγει, ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ οἶδα; (536e6,7)

Ion replies as expected and asks Sokrates to tell him what things Homer discusses about which he has no knowledge.

ΣΩ. Οὐ καὶ περὶ τεχνῶν μέντοι λέγει πολλαχοῦ Ὅμηρος καὶ πολλά; οἶον καὶ περὶ ἠνιοχείας - ἐὰν μνησθῶ τὰ ἔπη, ἐγὼ σοι φράσω. (537a1-3)

Sokrates has established that Ion has no τέχνη and so, where Homer's topic relates to a certain τέχνη, there Ion will not be expert. Sokrates uses the example of chariot riding and claims to be unsure of the quotation.

ΙΩΝ. Ἄλλ' ἐγὼ ἐρῶ· ἐγὼ γὰρ μέμνημαι. (537a3)

Ion, instead of following Sokrates' implication that Ion will not be able to speak about chariot riding, falls for Sokrates' (feigned) memory lapse and jumps at the chance to display his memory of the lines – no doubt intending to quote them with flourish.

ΣΩ. Εἰπέ δὴ μοι ἃ λέγει Νέστωρ Ἀντιλόχῳ τῷ υἱεῖ, παραινῶν εὐλαβηθῆναι περὶ τὴν καμπὴν ἐν τῇ ἵπποδρομίᾳ τῇ ἐπὶ Πατρόκλῳ. (537a5-7)

Sokrates has a particular passage in mind in which Nestor recommends to his son a strategy to win in the chariot race. We recall also our principle five, that every word counts. Under that principle we must consider whether the selection from Homer was precisely selected by Plato.

ΙΩΝ. Κλιθῆναι δέ, φησί, καὶ αὐτὸς εὐξέστω ἐνὶ δίφρῳ
ἦκ' ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ τοῖιν· ἀτὰρ τὸν δεξιὸν ἵππον
κένσαι ὁμοκλήσας, εἷξαι τέ οἱ ἡνία χερσίν.
ἐν νύσση δέ τοι ἵππος ἀριστερὸς ἐγχριμφθήτω,
ὡς ἂν τοι πλήμνη γε δοάσσεται ἄκρον ἰκέσθαι
κύκλου ποιητοῖο· λίθου δ' ἀλέασθαι ἐπαυρεῖν.

(537a8-b5) (Il. xxiii 335-340)

Ion quotes the passage almost accurately. The first line is slightly altered by a change in the word order. Ion has Κλιθῆναι δέ ... καὶ αὐτὸς εὐξέστω. Homer has αὐτὸς δέ κλιθῆναι. In Homer's version the chariot is εὐπλέκτω = well plaited, well

twisted, well woven, well wickered. Ion's chariot is ἐυξέστῳ = well-planed, well-polished. Why does Plato have Ion make these errors? What could it mean about Ion that he does not distinguish between a well-woven chariot and a smooth one?

There is always the concern that there were various versions of Homer and Ion has made no mistake, or even that Plato is quoting from memory. That may be so. But like the appeal to irony, it ought not to be used as an excuse for failing to try to understand the possibility that Plato deliberately has a character mis-quote Homer. So we do not allow ourselves that option.

There is a noteworthy similarity between the *Ion* and a section of Xenophon's *Symposium* (iv.6). Xenophon has Nikeratos claim that others will be improved by talking to him because he understands the art of the householder, the political leader, and the general through his study of Homer. When questioned by Antisthenes whether he also understands how to play king, Nikeratos responds that he does. Nikeratos also notes that in driving a chariot one should run close to the post. Nikeratos then quotes the first two lines of the exact same passage of Homer that Ion is made to quote. Nikeratos likewise uses the term ἐυξέστῳ. Nikeratos then also quotes a passage concerning onions as relish, which we will see Sokrates soon quote. Further, Nikeratos makes a claim similar to one that Ion will make, that studying Homer has made him an expert in household and military affairs. Now this is not an attempt to interpret Xenophon; however the similarities are striking. Is Xenophon quoting Homer accurately and this is an accepted variant, or is Xenophon having Nikeratos make the same mistake that Ion made, after having read Plato's *Ion*? It is extremely unlikely that the two authors merely happened to

quote the same few passages of Homer in similar circumstances. It is reasonable to conclude that Xenophon is writing with the *Ion* in mind. Thus Xenophon's quotation of Homer would also be a quotation of Plato; and further, the Xenophon passage does not prove that Plato is quoting an acceptable variant of Homer.

ΣΩ. Ἀρκεῖ. ταῦτα δὴ, ὦ Ἴων, τὰ ἔπη εἴτε ὀρθῶς λέγει Ὅμηρος εἴτε μή, πότερος ἂν γνοίη ἄμεινον, ἰατρὸς ἢ ἠνίοχος; (537c1-3)

Socrates says enough, Ἀρκεῖ. He stops Ion at a precise point. We need to consider if there is some reason that this passage has been selected carefully for Ion to recite with an exact beginning and an exact ending in mind.¹³ Socrates asks Ion whether a doctor or a chariot rider would best know if Homer speaks correctly, and Socrates uses a new phrase for speaking correctly - ὀρθῶς λέγει. We have previously seen the phrase εὖ λέγεις used by Socrates with respect to Ion and the term ἀληθῆ λέγεις used by Ion with respect to Socrates. The new term concerns the correctness of Homer's speaking. We continue to watch these terms in our Platonic lexicon.

ΙΩΝ. Ἠνίοχος δὴπου. (537c3)

Ion of course picks the charioteer over the doctor. He does not complain that there should be a third choice concerning the rhapsode or someone who understands Homer's

¹³ Holding onto this passage, we turn to the *Phaedrus* (247b) and the passage concerning the chariot driver with two horses: the good horse on the right and the bad horse on the left. If the bad horse pulls in his direction, as would happen following Nestor's advice, we would come dangerously close to touching the earth in our ride instead of rising up toward the glorious vision above. In the *Phaedrus*, the charioteer and the horses are a metaphor for the soul. Who best judges how to manage those horses? Would not the best judge be a certain kind of soul-doctor? Is this not the sort of concern about Homer of which Ion has no knowledge? Would the soul be best driven by giving the good horse free rein and holding the bad horse tight or would that merely turn the chariot towards earth?

purpose in this passage. Sokrates has limited the choice by Ion to one of two technical experts. Of the two it seems likely that the charioteer will understand the passage better. Sokrates has thereby collapsed the *Iliad* into a manual for chariot riding. The context has disappeared. Nestor is giving advice to his son and it actually gets him into trouble with Menelaus who accuses him of trying to foul his chariot. But Homer is not presenting chariot-riding advice; he is describing the advice that Nestor gives. If it were faulty advice one might 'blame' Nestor, not Homer. If, on the other hand, Hesiod had a passage in which there was better advice to a charioteer, the charioteer would pronounce Hesiod the better poet. The τέχνη of poetry has disappeared. It is this art that unites the various passages of charioteering and the like. There is no question of the ordering and unifying power. The purpose, the telos of the passage has been dropped in our determination of how to interpret the passage of Homer.

ΣΩ. Πότερον ὅτι τέχνην ταύτην ἔχει ἢ κατ' ἄλλο τι; (537c3,4)

Sokrates drives home the point again that the choice of the charioteer as the best judge of Homer's comments at this place is due to the charioteer's τέχνη. Homer's passage also points to what is missing. Nestor tells Antilochos, his son, that the other charioteers know no more tricks of horse riding than he, Antilochos, does. Nestor also notes that some horses run faster and some slower. Nestor concludes that winning the race depends on having an overall strategy.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐκ, ἀλλ' ὅτι τέχνην. (537c4)

Ion agrees that it is possession of a τέχνη that will decide, at least in this case, who is to judge correct speaking. Ion has previously ‘agreed’ that his rhapsodizing occurred when he was not in his right mind and was held like a ring in a chain.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ἐκάστη τῶν τεχνῶν ἀποδέδοται τι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔργον οἷα τε εἶναι γινώσκεις; οὐ γάρ που ἅ κυβερνητικῇ γινώσκομεν, γνωσόμεθα καὶ ἰατρικῇ. (537c5-7)

Sokrates asks Ion then if a τέχνη provides specific knowledge of a certain work – what we know by the art of piloting, we would not know by the art of medicine.

In the first section, we were concerned about separating the notion of rhapsodic performance from commentary. Under Sokratic questioning, Ion finally separated the two and agreed that, although the first was when he was out of his mind and may be the result of a divine portion, his own ability to comment was not. But having separated performance from commentary, Ion is unable to provide any connection or common ground.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ δῆτα. (537c7)

Ion agrees to the separation of the τέχνηαι according to their work.

ΣΩ. Οὐδέ γε ἅ ἰατρικῇ, ταῦτα καὶ τεκτονικῇ. (537c8)

Sokrates provides further examples of separate bodies of knowledge for separate τέχνηαι – medicine and carpentry.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ δῆτα. (537d1)

Ion agrees to the separation. Ion, who had difficulty with comparisons and separations, is now working on ideas that apparently are not mixed.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν οὕτω καὶ κατὰ πασῶν τῶν τεχνῶν, ἃ τῇ ἑτέρᾳ τέχνῃ γινώσκομεν, οὐ γνωσόμεθα τῇ ἑτέρᾳ; τόδε δέ μοι πρότερον τούτου ἀπόκριναι· τὴν μὲν ἑτέραν φῆς εἶναι τινα τέχνην, τὴν δ' ἑτέραν; (537d1-4)

Sokrates infers a general rule concerning the separation of these τέχναι and the knowledge they generate. Thus we could say that if A and B are skills and A and B are their respective bodies of knowledge then,

$$A \# B \Rightarrow A \# B.$$

Sokrates asks Ion again if he would also separate the τέχναι, so that a separate τέχνη produces separate knowledge. We might wonder if Ion thinks that the τέχνη of the rhapsode would be the same as the τέχνη of a charioteer or of a general?

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (537d4)

Ion agrees with Sokrates' separation of τέχναι.

ΣΩ. Ἐπειδὴ ὡςπερ ἐγὼ, τεκμαιρόμενος, ὅταν ἡ μὲν ἑτέρων πραγμάτων ἢ ἐπιστήμη, ἡ δ' ἑτέρων, οὕτω καλῶ τὴν μὲν ἄλλην, τὴν δὲ ἄλλην τέχνην, οὕτω καὶ σύ; (537d4-e1)

Sokrates then generalizes this separation of τέχναι according to their subject matter and knowledge - πραγμάτων ἢ ἐπιστήμη. Sokrates has separated τέχναι on the basis of the knowledge they produce. Sokrates now reverses the generalization. First

we learned that different τέχναι produce different knowledge. Here we go the other direction; different subject matters require different τέχναι.

Now we have $A \# B \Rightarrow A \# B$.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (537e1)

Ion agrees to this sort of separation. He does not appear concerned about where Sokrates is leading. Ion appears to be falling asleep under the short question method.

ΣΩ. Εἰ γάρ που τῶν αὐτῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμη εἴη τις, τί ἂν τὴν μὲν ἑτέραν φαῖμεν εἶναι, τὴν δ' ἑτέραν, ὅποτε γε ταῦτά εἴη εἰδέναι ἀπ' ἀμφοτέρων; ὥσπερ ἐγὼ τε γινώσκω ὅτι πέντε εἰσὶν οὗτοι οἱ δάκτυλοι, καὶ σύ, ὥσπερ ἐγὼ, περὶ τούτων ταῦτά γινώσκεις· καὶ εἴ σε ἐγὼ ἐροίμην, εἰ τῇ αὐτῇ τέχνῃ γινώσκομεν τῇ ἀριθμητικῇ τὰ αὐτὰ ἐγὼ τε καὶ σύ, ἢ ἄλλῃ, φαίης ἂν δήπου τῇ αὐτῇ. (537e1-8)

Sokrates persists in his separations, and moves to what Klein calls the basis of all τέχναι, the ability to count, and the most familiar, to count the five fingers. The ability to count five fingers depends on our ability to recognize a unit, a finger, as one, and to separate the fingers and to count them. This ability requires the dianoia to act. It is not through a magnetic power.¹⁴

Sokrates' example of the five fingers shows that if Sokrates and Ion know the same thing, that there are five fingers, it is because they used the same τέχναι, counting.

¹⁴ See also Klein, *Math* 84 “Thus we see that the dianoia is based essentially on ‘account-giving and counting’.” Also see at *Philebus* 55e, Sokrates says, “For example, if arithmetic and the sciences of measurement and weighing were taken away from all the arts, what was left of any of them would be, so to speak, pretty worthless.”

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (537e8)

Ion again does not acknowledge anything strange in Sokrates' line of discussion. It is not so much that Sokrates is doing anything wrong, but that Sokrates has not explained why he is asking these strange questions about the nature of τέχνηαι.

ΣΩ. Ὁ τοίνυν ἄρτι ἔμελλον ἐρήσεσθαί σε, νυνὶ εἶπέ, εἰ κατὰ πασῶν τῶν τεχνῶν οὕτω σοι δοκεῖ, τῇ μὲν αὐτῇ τέχνῃ τὰ αὐτὰ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι γινώσκειν, τῇ δ' ἑτέρα μὴ τὰ αὐτά, ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἄλλη ἐστίν, ἀναγκαῖον καὶ ἕτερα γινώσκειν. (538a1-4)

Sokrates asks Ion if his two generalizations would hold for all the τέχνηαι. Does Ion notice that Sokrates is talking of an overarching rule for all τέχνηαι? By what τέχνηαι could Ion know that this rule applies to all τέχνηαι? Sokrates has arrived at it largely by asking Ion if he would agree with his assertions. Ion never says that he does not know all τέχνηαι, so he could not answer.

ΙΩΝ. Οὕτω μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες. (538a5)

Ion merely goes along with the inference. (He appears to be really dozing off now.)

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ὅστις ἂν μὴ ἔχη τινὰ τέχνην, ταύτης τῆς τέχνης τὰ λεγόμενα ἢ πραττόμενα καλῶς γινώσκειν οὐχ οἷός τ' ἔσται; (538a5-7)

Sokrates infers a false conclusion that does not follow from his argument, one that collapses knowing the art and knowing how to speak about the art. Sokrates says that someone who does not have a particular τέχνηαι would be incapable of knowing what is

said or done well in a particular τέχνη. This conclusion ignores any skill in communicating, surprisingly – the rhapsode’s skill!

ΙΩΝ. Ἀληθῆ λέγεις. (538b1)

Ion murmurs in his sleep, once again providing the same assessment of Sokrates’ speech, “You are correct”, Ἀληθῆ λέγεις. Should he have said he is not expert in this sort of discussion and so cannot judge? Sokrates almost seems to be pushing Ion to test his ability to follow the argument. Ion does not.

ΣΩ. Πότερον οὖν περὶ τῶν ἐπῶν ὧν εἶπες, εἴτε καλῶς λέγει Ὅμηρος εἴτε μή, σὺ κάλλιον γνώσῃ ἢ ἡνίοχος; (538b1-3)

Sokrates then brings home the conclusion by asking Ion if he or the charioteer would better know if Homer speaks finely in the quoted passage. Now one might argue that the charioteer could comment on the verity of Homer’s passage but its ability to persuade, to speak finely, is not his expertise. This is a repetition of the early short question attack on Ion’s expertise. At 531b Ion agreed that a seer would comment better than he on some passages on prophecy.

ΙΩΝ. Ἡνίοχος. (538b3)

Ion cedes the passage to the charioteer. He was at least awake enough to respond.

ΣΩ. Ῥαψωδὸς γάρ που εἶ ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἡνίοχος. (538b3,4)

Sokrates asks if the charioteer would know better than Ion because Ion is a rhapsode, whatever that may be, and not a charioteer. This being the unspoken premise in the argument. The argument also rests on the generalization that one sort of knowledge, (chariot riding) can only come from one skill (charioteering).

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (538b4)

Ion agrees with this suggestion.

ΣΩ. Ἡ δὲ ῥαψωδικὴ τέχνη ἑτέρα ἐστὶ τῆς ἠνιοχικῆς; (538b4,5)

Sokrates asks Ion if the τέχνη of the rhapsode is different from the τέχνη of the charioteer. But by 532c, Ion is without skill, ἀτέχνος. It has been argued that the skill of a rhapsode does not exist, but is a divine possession. That seems to have been forgotten.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (538b5)

Ion does not quiz the change; he appears to be quite somnolent by now.

ΣΩ. Εἰ ἄρα ἑτέρα, περὶ ἑτέρων καὶ ἐπιστήμη πραγμάτων ἐστίν. (538b5,6)

Sokrates infers, as a τέχνη, and to the extent it is a τέχνη, the τέχνη of the rhapsode has knowledge of different things. Whatever those might be is a mystery.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (538b6)

Ion nods on, unable to contrast the previous discussion with the present inquiry.

ΣΩ. Τί δὲ δὴ ὅταν Ὅμηρος λέγῃ ὡς τετρωμένῳ τῷ Μαχάονι Ἐκαμήδη ἢ Νέστορος παλλακὴ κυκεῶνα πίνειν δίδωσι; καὶ λέγει πως οὕτως -

οἴνω πραμνεῖω, φησὶν, ἐπὶ δ' αἴγειον κνή τυρόν

κνήστι χαλκείῃ; παρὰ δὲ κρόμμον ποτῶ ὄψον· (II. xi 639-40)

ταῦτα εἴτε ὀρθῶς λέγει Ὅμηρος εἴτε μή, πότερον ἰατρικῆς ἐστὶ διαγνώσει καλῶς ἢ ῥαψωδικῆς; (538b7-c5)

Sokrates now 'misquotes' a different passage discussing a different τέχνη, that of medicine. Sokrates hints that he is misquoting by saying it goes something like this.

Sokrates' strategy seems clear. He will separate the poem into sections and bring each of the individual pieces under a different τέχνη, thereby leaving none of the poem for the rhapsode. Having been separated completely, what makes the many passages one poem? Where is the hidden order that the Muses reveal?

In the *Iliad*, Maxaon, the son of Asklepios and the Achaean doctor, is wounded in the right shoulder by an arrow shot by Alexandros. Nestor took the wounded doctor with him to the ships to have the arrow removed. When Nestor and Maxaon arrive at Nestor's tent they have the drink prepared for them by Hekamede, an enemy slave girl who was Nestor's prize when Akhilles plundered Tenedos. A healing potion is prepared for the Achaean doctor by the captured enemy slave. Maxaon and Nestor then continue drinking while the battle rages outside.

What does Sokrates quote wrong? Well Sokrates says they have an onion as relish for the drink. Homer mentioned the onion ten lines earlier. Sokrates leaves out the food, the barley meal, which is also provided. The passage is twisted. Out of context one might consider the suitability of the drink. Sokrates is supposed to be giving an example for which a doctor, as an expert, could say that the healing potion given was suitable. But in Homer's story, Maxaon and Nestor are not receiving medicine, but having a grand feast with a wine in:

A cup of wondrous beauty, brought from Pylos by the old king: golden nails it had for studding, and four handles on it each adorned by a pair of golden doves who perched to drink, with double stems beneath. Another man would strain to budge the cup once full, clear of the table. But not Nestor: old though he was, he lifted it with ease.
(Il. xi 632)

As in the first quotation, the context tends to reverse the meaning of the passage.

ΙΩΝ. Ἰατρικῆς. (538c6)

Ion again cedes the passage to another sort of expert – here the doctor. Further he does not question Sokrates' twisting not just the story but also the words.

ΣΩ. Τί δέ, ὅταν λέγη "Ὀμηρος -

ἢ δὲ μολυβδαίνῃ ἰκέλη ἐς βυσσὸν ἵκανεν,

ἢ τε κατ' ἀγραύλοιο βοὸς κέρας ἐμμεμαυῖα

ἔρχεται ὠμηστῆσι μετ' ἰχθύσι πῆμα φέρουσα· (Il. xxiv 80-82)

ταῦτα πότερον φῶμεν ἀλιευτικῆς εἶναι τέχνης μᾶλλον κρῖναι ἢ ῥαψωδικῆς,

ἅττα λέγει καὶ εἴτε καλῶς εἴτε μή; (538c7-d5)

Sokrates now takes an example from fishing. But is it really something for the fisherman to decipher?

The fishing example is a simile used to describe how quickly the Goddess Iris traveled. Iris went to an underwater cave to summon Thetis to Zeus. Zeus wished to persuade her that her son, Akhilles, should return Hektor's body – as requested by Apollo. Iris apparently went as fast as a sort of weighted cow's horn as it travels to the bottom of the sea. Inside the horn is a hook to catch and destroy the fish. So the choice of expert might rather be an expert on how gods travel.

What mis-quotes does Sokrates make here? Sokrates says that the hook arrives, ἵκανεν, eagerly, ἐμμεμαυῖα, in the midst of, μετ', the fishes and bringing suffering, πῆμα. Homer says the hook moves violently, ὄρουσεν, and steps in, ἐμβεβαυῖα, upon, ἐπ', the fish and bringing death, κῆρα. Homer's image is far more violent than Sokrates' version.

ΙΩΝ. Δῆλον δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅτι ἀλιευτικῆς. (538d6)

Ion cedes again to the fisherman. He does not correct Sokrates' errors.

Sokrates now shifts his mode of questioning again. He takes both parts in the questions and answers and proceeds with a long speech.

ΣΩ. Σκέψαι δὴ, σοῦ ἐρομένου, εἰ ἔροίό με· "Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν, ὦ Σώκρατες, τούτων τῶν τεχνῶν ἐν Ὀμήρῳ εὐρίσκεις ἃ προσήκει ἐκάστη διακρίνειν, ἴθι μοι ἔξευρε καὶ τὰ τοῦ μάντεώς τε καὶ μαντικῆς, ποῖά ἐστιν ἃ προσήκει αὐτῷ οἷω τ' εἶναι διαγιγνώσκειν, εἴτε εὖ εἴτε κακῶς πεποίηται" - σκέψαι ὡς ῥαδίως τε καὶ ἀληθῆ ἐγὼ σοι ἀποκρινοῦμαι. πολλαχοῦ μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἐν Ὀδυσσεΐα λέγει, οἷον καὶ ἃ ὁ τῶν Μελαμποδιδῶν λέγει μάντις πρὸς τοὺς μνηστῆρας,

Θεοκλύμενος· (538d7-e7)

Sokrates asks Ion to look into, σκέψαι, how easily he would answer if Ion were to ask him a certain question. It is the verb Sokrates used before at 532d when he asked if there was not a common method of inquiry for all τέχνηαι.

Sokrates provides a model answer for Ion to follow. In his model Sokrates demonstrates how he would respond if he were asked to pick out passages in Homer for which the seer should be able to judge whether they were well said or not. Sokrates then asks Ion to observe how he would answer easily and truly. Sokrates gives Ion a model to follow which is in some ways an impossible model. There are examples of rhapsode's singing in Homer's work. When Odysseus visits the court of King Alcinous (Il. vii 541-657) the rhapsode Demodocus sings. Ion could pick out such a section as one for the rhapsode to interpret. But if Ion picks those passages then he is effectively limiting his

ability to comment to those small passages. Ion still would like to be able to comment on all of Homer. But Sokrates' model would does not fit that sort of response.

Sokrates says he would provide an example, and in fact provides one from each of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Then Sokrates quotes the following words of the seer

Themoklymenos:

δαιμόνιοι, τί κακὸν τόδε πάσχετε; νυκτὶ μὲν ὑμέων
εἰλύαται κεφαλαί τε πρόσωπά τε νέρθε τε γυῖα,
οἰμωγὴ δὲ δέδηε, δεδάκρυνται δὲ παρειαί·
- εἰδώλων τε πλεόν πρόθυρον, πλείη δὲ καὶ αὐλή
ιέμενων ἔρεβόσδε ὑπὸ ζόφονῃ ἥελιός δὲ
οὐρανοῦ ἔξαπόλωλε, κακὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν ἀχλύς·

(539a1-b1) (Od. xx. 351-57)

What errors in quotation does Sokrates now make? He first addresses the men as δαιμόνιοι, heaven sent; Homer calls them δειλοί cowardly. Sokrates talks of their limbs γυῖα, Homer talks of their knees, γοῦνα. Sokrates leaves out the line that says “and sprinkled with blood are the walls, and the fair panels.” Sokrates' version has the seer speaking of the divine men wailing and being unhappy. Homer calls them cowards and spills their blood – a direct reference to their impending slaughter. As in the previous quotation, Sokrates' version is of suffering, whereas Homer's is of violent slaughter.

Is this a good passage for the seer to judge? Does the context matter? The seer Theoklymenos accurately predicts the terrible slaughter that is about to overtake the cowardly suitors of Penelope at the hands of Odysseus. However, the seer does not speak well, in the sense that he is unheeded. He does not manage to convince the suitors, but is as ineffectual as Cassandra. A seer might interpret this passage from Homer by saying

that the seer is a good one and this is a good prediction. However Homer's purpose seems to be more pointed towards showing the nature of Penelope's suitors who do not heed the seer. This quote reveals how wrong the suitors were in ignoring the accurate prophecy of their impending doom.

Sokrates then turns to the *Iliad* for a second example of how he would answer the question of what passages the seer should judge.

πολλαχοῦ δὲ καὶ ἐν Ἰλιάδι, οἷον καὶ ἐπὶ τειχομαχίᾳ· λέγει γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα

ὄρνις γὰρ σφιν ἐπῆλθε περησέμεναι μεμαῶσιν,
αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης, ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ λαὸν ἑέργων,
φοινήμεντα δράκοντα φέρων ὀνύχεσσι πέλωρον,
ζῶον, ἔτ' ἀσπαίροντα· καὶ οὐπω λήθετο χάρμης.
κόψε γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔχοντα κατὰ στῆθος παρὰ δειρὴν
ιδνωθεὶς ὀπίσω, ὃ δ' ἀπὸ ἔθεν ἦκε χαμαῖζε
ἀλγήσας ὀδύνῃσι, μέσῳ δ' ἐνὶ κάββαλ' ὀμίλῳ·
αὐτὸς δὲ κλάγξας πέτετο πνοιῆς ἀνέμοιο. (Il. xii 200-7)

ταῦτα φήσω καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τῷ μάντει προσήκειν καὶ σκοπεῖν καὶ κρίνειν.

(539b2-d3)

Sokrates' second example is of an eagle flying over the battle at the rampart carrying a monstrous snake. The eagle flies over heading to the left side and is bitten by the snake. The eagle then drops the snake amongst the troops and flies away. Poulydamas accurately interprets that the Trojan troops would never make it to the Achaean ships just as the eagle was unable to take the snake to its nest. Poulydamas is ignored by Hektor, just as Penelope's suitors ignored Themoklymenos. In each case the prediction is

accurate, but is ignored by those who are warned. They judge the predictions wrongly.

The context is necessary to understand Homer's thought.

What mistakes does Sokrates make in quoting this passage? None!

ΙΩΝ. Ἀληθῆ γε σὺ λέγων, ὦ Σώκρατες. (539d4)

Ion agrees that Sokrates would have answered the question truthfully, ἀληθῆ.

ΣΩ. Καὶ σὺ γε, ὦ Ἴων, ἀληθῆ ταῦτα λέγεις. ἴθι δὴ καὶ σὺ ἐμοί, ὥσπερ ἐγὼ σοὶ ἐξέλεξα καὶ ἐξ Ὀδυσσεΐας καὶ ἐξ Ἰλιάδος ὅποια τοῦ μάντεώς ἐστι καὶ ὅποια τοῦ ἱατροῦ καὶ ὅποια τοῦ ἀλιέως, οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἐμοὶ ἔκλεξον, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἐμπειρότερος εἶ ἐμοῦ τῶν Ὀμήρου, ὅποια τοῦ ραψωδοῦ ἐστίν, ὦ Ἴων, καὶ τῆς τέχνης τῆς ραψωδικῆς, ἃ τῷ ραψωδῷ προσήκει καὶ σκοπεῖσθαι καὶ διακρίνειν παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους. (539d5-e5)

Sokrates now for the first time says that Ion speaks truthfully. We note however that, according to Sokrates, Ion has spoken truthfully only in saying that Sokrates has spoken truthfully. Sokrates then asks Ion to follow his example, to speak truthfully, ἀληθῆ ταῦτα λέγεις, and to pick out passages that the rhapsode should inquire into and judge in preference to other men.

ΙΩΝ. Ἐγὼ μὲν φημι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἅπαντα. (539e6)

Ion says all and, in a way, would have answered truly if he were a good rhapsodic interpreter of Homer. For the whole of Homer is poetry and to the extent that a rhapsode is an expert in poetry, a rhapsode would be a sort of expert on every passage. The notion that the seer should judge the quoted passages would work if the passage were words

about prophecy. But are they not also, at the same time, about the lack of caution on the part of those who ignore the accurate prophecies?

ΣΩ. Οὐ σύ γε φῆς, ὦ Ἴων, ἅπαντα· ἢ οὕτως ἐπιλήσμων εἶ; καίτοι οὐκ ἂν πρόπει γέ ἐπιλήσμονα εἶναι ῥαψωδὸν ἄνδρα. (539e7-9)

Sokrates notes the contradiction in Ion's claims and asks if he could have forgotten. Ion has just ceded many passages to doctors and seers. Of course there are two parts to the contradiction – one is the memory – the other is the ability to compare the two statements and note their conflict. Sokrates also notes that Ion is a rhapsode who should have a good memory. Ion has failed to quote Homer accurately or to correct Sokrates' errors, but perhaps his greater failing is in his not making comparisons.

ΙΩΝ. Τί δὲ δὴ ἐπιλανθάνομαι; (540a1)

Ion re-awakens to ask what Sokrates thinks he, Ion, has forgotten.

ΣΩ. Οὐ μένησαι ὅτι ἔφησθα τὴν ῥαψωδικὴν τέχνην ἑτέραν εἶναι τῆς ἡνιοχικῆς; (540a2,3)

Sokrates asks if Ion remembers his distinction between the τέχνη of the charioteer and that of the rhapsode.

ΙΩΝ. Μέννημαι. (540a3)

Ion remembers the distinction.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἑτέραν οὔσαν ἕτερα γνῶσεσθαι ὠμολόγεις; (540a3,4)

Sokrates also asks if Ion remembers that he agreed that because the rhapsodic τέχνη is different from that of the charioteer it must know different things.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (540a5)

Ion so remembers.

ΣΩ. Οὐκ ἄρα πάντα γε γινώσεται ἡ ῥαψωδικὴ κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον, οὐδὲ ὁ ῥαψωδός. (540a5,6)

Sokrates then infers that the τέχνη of the rhapsode cannot know all things, nor can rhapsodes.

ΙΩΝ. Πλήν γε ἴσως τὰ τοιαῦτα, ὧς Σώκρατες. (540a6,7)

Ion then again cedes other matters to other experts. Ion responds somewhat ambiguously by phrasing his response as everything except such things. The response could be plausible if Ion means the technical aspect of the technical passage would be for the technical expert to assess, but that the literary critic would assess how those pieces fit.

ΣΩ. Τὰ τοιαῦτα δὲ λέγεις πλήν τὰ τῶν ἄλλων τεχνῶν σχεδόν τι· ἀλλὰ ποῖα δὴ γινώσεται, ἐπειδὴ οὐχ ἅπαντα; (540b1,2)

Sokrates then wonders if Ion could tell him what is left for the rhapsode to know.

6.1 Ion's List

ΙΩΝ. Ἄ πρέπει, οἶμαι ἔγωγε, ἀνδρὶ εἰπεῖν καὶ ὅποια γυναικί, καὶ ὅποια δούλῳ καὶ ὅποια ἐλευθέρῳ, καὶ ὅποια ἀρχομένῳ καὶ ὅποια ἄρχοντι. (540b3-5)

Ion, failing to follow Sokrates' model, introduces a different sort of response. He indicates that the rhapsode should know what is fitting, πρέπει, for a man, a woman, a slave, a freeman, a subject or a ruler to say. The rhapsode knows the fitting speech for each political class. Ion has now moved to a political understanding. The term, ruler,

ἄρχων, is introduced and will be repeated. Ion, perhaps revealingly, only claims to know what they should say – not what they should do. But the argument previously has indicated that the technical expert is the one to judge if a thing is said well.

More charitably, one might think that Ion intends to say that the rhapsode can tell whether each character has been given a realistic voice and is speaking in a fitting fashion. But that would indicate that Ion is laying claim to precisely the level of understanding that suits a rhapsode, something that Ion has consistently failed to do until now.

ΣΩ. Ἔρα ὅποια ἄρχοντι, λέγεις, ἐν θαλάττῃ χειμαζομένου πλοίου πρέπει εἰπεῖν, ὁ ῥαψωδὸς γνώσεται κάλλιον ἢ ὁ κυβερνήτης; (540b6-8)

Sokrates pays attention to a particular skill and asks whether a rhapsode or a pilot would know what is most fitting *πρέπει* for the ruler, *ἄρχων* of a storm-tossed ship to say in the face of a storm. Sokrates has started at the end of Ion's list first, with a ruler. If Ion were to be claiming, as he ought to, with respect to the voice of the character, he could now so indicate. Sokrates' question presumes that he is not making that sort of claim. Sokrates does follow Ion's phrasing and asks what the pilot should say, not what the pilot should do.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐκ, ἀλλὰ ὁ κυβερνήτης τοῦτό γε. (540b8)

Ion cedes to the pilot; he once again does not argue for the kind of expertise the rhapsode might be presumed to have. Of course, that ignores the previous agreement that a rhapsode does not act by some *τέχνη*, but has only an allotted divine portion.

ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' ὅποια ἄρχοντι κάμνοντος πρέπει εἰπεῖν, ὁ ῥαψωδὸς γνώσεται

κάλλιον ἢ ὁ ἰατρός; (540c1,2)

Sokrates then looks to another of his typical examples – the doctor – and wonders whether the ἄρχων of a sick man should know better than the rhapsode what is suitable πρέπει to say.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐδὲ τοῦτο. (540c2,3)

Ion once again cedes to the doctor. Ion does not complain that Sokrates' examples of ruling noticeably miss the most obvious sort of rule, political rule.

ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' οἷα δούλῳ πρέπει, λέγεις; (540c3)

Sokrates moves back along Ion's list and asks Ion to consider if the rhapsode will know what is fitting for the slave to say. We have moved down the political spectrum and no longer worry about the ἄρχων. But Sokrates misses out what is fitting for the ruled in the list. Perhaps Sokrates could think of no skill that matches being ruled.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (540c4)

Ion sticks to his guns and re-iterates his claim concerning the slave.

ΣΩ. Οἷον βουκόλῳ λέγεις δούλῳ ἃ πρέπει εἰπεῖν ἀγριαίνουσῶν βοῶν παραμυθουμένῳ, ὁ ῥαψωδὸς γινώσεται, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁ βουκόλος; (540c4-6)

Sokrates then points to the 'technical' skill a slave who is a cowherd would possess and the knowledge of what is fitting πρέπει to say to pacify unruly cows.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ δῆτα. (540c6)

Ion agrees that it is those with a skill as a cowherd, whether or not they are slaves, who will know what is fitting to say to cows, not the rhapsodes.

ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' οἷα γυναικὶ πρέποντά ἐστιν εἰπεῖν ταλασιουργῶ περὶ ἐρίων
ἐργασίας; (540c6-d1)

Sokrates carries on, relentlessly, moving up Ion's list to women, and asks about the skill of women in spinning. Somehow in his questioning, Sokrates misses what is fitting for the freeman. Ion does not complain.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐ. (540d1)

Ion also agrees that a woman with knowledge of spinning, not a rhapsode, will know what to say about working with wool.

ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' οἷα ἀνδρὶ πρέπει εἰπεῖν γινώσεται στρατηγῶ στρατιώταις
παραينوῦντι; (540d1,2)

Sokrates finally reaches the top of the list to what a man should say. Sokrates asks about the sort of thing that is fitting *πρέπει* for a general to say in exhorting the troops. Sokrates sticks to what it is fitting for the person to say.

6.2 Ion the Strategos

ΙΩΝ. Ναί, τὰ τοιαῦτα γινώσεται ὁ ῥαψωδός. (540d2,3)

Ion at last feels there is a topic on which the rhapsode knows what it is fitting to say.

ΣΩ. Τί δέ; ἡ ῥαψωδικὴ τέχνη στρατηγικὴ ἐστίν; (540d4)

Sokrates asks if these τέχνηαι, of the rhapsode and the general are identical.

ΙΩΝ. Γνοίην γοῦν ἂν ἔγωγε οἷα στρατηγὸν πρέπει εἰπεῖν. (540d5)

Ion appears to limit his claim to some extent in that he only makes it for himself. He does not answer Sokrates' abstract question about the identity of the two arts. He boldly claims that he, at least, would know what is fitting *πρέπει* to say to exhort troops.

The discussion has taken a strange turn. For once Ion does not cede the ability to speak on a technical matter to the technical expert. Ion apparently has at last found the role of the rhapsode. That role connects to the role of the general, the military leader, in exhortation. It is a political role. Noteworthy is the unusual role of the Athenian strategos. He is an elected official and so to the extent that a rhapsode is capable through speech of moving his audience, he may also be able to win an election. The rhapsode Ion claims to be very good at inciting the passions of his audience.

6.2.1 Politics

Turning from this discussion for a brief interlude, let us consider the political element of Homeric poetry.

Nagy points out that in the shift from oral to written tradition, the government had a role. "Lycurgus initiated reforms in the performance traditions of State Theatre in Athens, legislating an official 'State Script' for the tragedies of three poets and three poets only, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides." (Nagy 174) Plutarch says, (using Nagy's translation)

that they were to transcribe their tragedies [that is, the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides] and keep them under control in common possession, and that the recorder [grammateus] of the city was to read them as a model [paranagignosko] to those acting in the tragedies, for otherwise it was not permitted to act them [that is the tragedies]. (174)

Thus the state, under Lycurgus, had taken a strong interest in controlling the theatrical performances. As part of its attempt to educate/control the populace, the government also generated approved (censored) versions of poetry.

The right to interpret ancient verses was regarded as being an important political right of the Eupatrids.

The corpus of ancient verses of Orpheus and Musaeus, or chresmoi, the inspired utterances of oracles and wandering prophets with ritual prescriptions and predictions of future events, collected and written out, was interpreted by individuals of Eupatrid descent or chresmologoi who could thus tie the ancestral law into the framework of the polis...The failure of the Sicilian expedition destroyed their unlimited pretensions to expert knowledge. They were under continued attack from the old comedy poets from 410 to 400 B.C. and following the revision of the laws of Solon in 399 B.C. were probably replaced by official exegetes who were given limited but undisputed authority to expound the non-statutory sacred law. The Eupatridae were stripped of the last tool by which they could exert pressure on political life. Their right to authoritative exegesis was put on a clear basis but their special influence was restricted to the religious and moral fields. (Innis 108)

The power of interpretation of verse was regarded as politically significant especially at a time of dynamism between the old oral culture and the emerging written one.

Rhapsodic performance of Homer was likewise subject to state control by means of an officially approved script. An authoritative Athenian State version of Homer was established, the Athenian Koine or “Vulgate” version of Homer. The state attempted to exercise political control by means of censorship of Homer and the rhapsodes. As we noted on page nineteen, there is a legend from pseudo-Plato that the son of the tyrant Peisistratos produced an edited version, the Peisistratos Recension. Nagy notes that other legends point to Solon as writing a law that ordered the singing of Homer (71). The legend shifts, the foundation myths shifted to support different political institutions. The notion of censorship of Homer and its political significance does not begin with

Adeimantus in Plato's *Politeia*. We will see more of the relationship of Homer and ruling, but let us now return to our close reading.

ΣΩ. Ἴσως γὰρ εἶ καὶ στρατηγικός, ὥ Ἴων. καὶ γὰρ εἰ ἐτύγχανες ἵππικός ὦν ἅμα καὶ κιθαριστικός, ἔγνωσ ἄν ἵππους εὖ καὶ κακῶς ἵππαζομένους· ἀλλ' εἰ σ' ἐγὼ ἠρόμην· "Ποτέρᾳ δὴ τέχνῃ, ὥ Ἴων, γινώσκεις τοὺς εὖ ἵππαζομένους ἵππους; ἢ ἵππεὺς εἶ ἢ ἢ κιθαριστής;" τί ἄν μοι ἀπεκρίνω; (540d6-e3)

Sokrates plays on Ion's previous failing. Ion did not distinguish poetry from the individual content in Homer. To properly understand each of the quotations of Homer requires an understanding of the context of the quote and its role in the poem. Ion failed to see point to any such poetic context or anything that might unify the discussion. So, by analogy, his understanding of the work of a general would presumably consist in the understanding of the various techniques used in war, such as horsemanship.

Sokrates asks Ion if he were skilled in managing horses as he is in playing the kithara, by what skill he would know that horses were being well managed, by his skill as a horseman or his skill as a kithara player. Sokrates returns to his generalization that each body of knowledge comes from only one skill.

ΙΩΝ. ἼΗι ἵππεύς, ἔγωγ' ἄν. (540e4)

Ion of course recognizes the example as fitting the generalization and chooses the skill of horsemanship as giving knowledge of whether horses were well managed.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν εἰ καὶ τοὺς εὖ κιθαρίζοντας διεγίγνωσκεις, ὡμολόγεις ἄν, ἢ κιθαριστής εἶ, ταύτῃ διαγινώσκειν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἢ ἵππεύς; (540e4-6)

Sokrates continues to reinforce his rule so he asks Ion if the ability to distinguish good and bad kithara playing is from his skill as a kithara player not by his skill with horses. We might wonder that although there may be a connection between playing the kithara well and the skill of distinguishing good kithara players, they might not be identical. There seem to be two separate bodies of knowledge even in the manner that Sokrates asks his question. If this is true then based on their generalization they must be produced by different skills. The skill of playing the kithara must differ from the skill of separating good and bad kithara players. But Sokrates only gives Ion two choices and the skill as a horseman seems not to fit.

ΙΩΝ. Ναί. (540e6)

Ion agrees with the example.

ΣΩ. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὰ στρατιωτικὰ γινώσκεις, πότερον ἢ στρατηγικὸς εἶ γινώσκεις ἢ ἢ ῥαψωδὸς ἀγαθός; (540e7,8)

Sokrates then asks Ion in parallel fashion if his skill in knowing things to do with generalship comes from his skill as a general or as a rhapsode.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐδὲν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ διαφέρειν. (540e8,9)

Ion then makes the surprising claim that these two do not differ – he is unwilling to separate them. However Ion's response is rather tentative. He does not say they are the same; he says, "Seems to me, at any rate, there is no difference."

Ion has come to Athens with a surprising claim. He is claiming that he is a skilled military leader, or perhaps skilled in motivating the troops.

ΣΩ. Πῶς; οὐδὲν λέγεις διαφέρειν; μίαν λέγεις τέχνην εἶναι τὴν ῥαψωδικὴν καὶ

τὴν στρατηγικὴν ἢ δύο; (541a1,2)

Sokrates asks Ion if the skill of the rhapsode and skill of the general are one, not two. We might wonder about the question given that Ion has just said that they do not differ.

ΙΩΝ. Μία ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ. (541a2,3)

Ion now explicitly states they seem to him to be one. Ion has agreed with Sokrates that judging differing matters such as kithara playing and horsemanship come from skill in each of these matters respectively. If he is to claim that he is skilled in generalship then it could only be through such a skill. He may have such a skill, but if he wishes to prove his claim based on his success as a rhapsode, he needs to claim they are the same skill.

ΣΩ. Ὅστις ἄρα ἀγαθὸς ραψωδὸς ἐστίν, οὗτος καὶ ἀγαθὸς στρατηγὸς τυγχάνει ὦν; (541a3,4)

Sokrates draws the conclusion that whoever is a good rhapsode is also a good general.

ΙΩΝ. Μάλιστα, ὦ Σώκρατες. (541a4,5)

Ion claims this rule should hold true. His claim is quite strong, “Especially so, Sokrates.” Sokrates has exposed Ion’s desired claim, that he can base his claim to being a good general on his success as a rhapsode.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν καὶ ὅστις ἀγαθὸς στρατηγὸς τυγχάνει ὦν, ἀγαθὸς καὶ ραψωδὸς ἐστίν; (541a5,6)

Sokrates asks Ion about the further conclusion that a good general must also be a good rhapsode.

ΙΩΝ. Οὐκ αὖ μοι δοκεῖ τοῦτο. (541a6,7)

Ion will not agree to this conclusion. He must face his contradiction. His response returns to being rather tentative. This is not what he wishes to claim. The argument is not going in the direction he wishes.

ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' ἐκεῖνο μὴν δοκεῖ σοι, ὅστις γε ἀγαθὸς ῥαψωδός, καὶ στρατηγὸς ἀγαθὸς εἶναι; (541a7-b1)

Sokrates asks Ion if he still holds to his original claim. Thus we have good rhapsode implies good general, but good general does not imply good rhapsode. Does rhapsody include generalship as a proper subset? To the extent that the role of the general is to win a popular election and then motivate the troops, a speaker such as Ion who is capable of inciting the passions of his audience may in fact be a good general.

ΙΩΝ. Πάνυ γε. (541b1)

Ion remains in his claim that good rhapsodes are good generals. He is unmoved by logic and makes no attempt to solve the apparent problem. Either the skills of the rhapsode and the general are different, in which case Ion has no basis for his claim to be a good general; or they are the same, in which case a good general should be a good rhapsode, which Ion realizes is just not true.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν σὺ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἄριστος ῥαψωδός εἶ; (541b2)

Sokrates starts to bring out what is apparently Ion's motivation. He asks Ion if he is the best rhapsode in Greece.

ΙΩΝ. Πολύ γε, ὦ Σώκρατες. (541b3)

Ion confidently asserts that he is, by far, the best.

ΣΩ. Ἡ καὶ στρατηγός, ὦ Ἴων, τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἄριστος εἶ; (541b3,4)

Sokrates also asks Ion if he is also the best general in Greece.

ΙΩΝ. Εὖ ἴσθι, ὦ Σώκρατες· καὶ ταῦτά γε ἐκ τῶν Ὅμηρου μαθών. (541b4,5)

Ion claims he is the best general and explains that it is due to his learning Homer.

This claim is indeed surprising given all he has so far ceded to other experts and the errors we have noted in recitation. On the other hand, it is not a surprising claim in that other Greeks claimed to be good at things based on their study of Homer. Even

Alexander the Great is said to have slept with a copy of Homer under his pillow¹⁵.

Alexander's expertise as a general was thought to be connected to his study of Homer. Of course, what Alexander might learn from Homer and what Ion might learn are possibly quite different. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, Nikeratos claims,

You may now hear me tell wherein you will be improved by associating with me. 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... should seek my favour, for I understand all these things. (iv 6)

Nikeratos bases his claim to understanding the art of the general on his knowledge of Homer.

ΣΩ. Τί δὴ ποτ' οὖν πρὸς τῶν θεῶν, ὦ Ἴων, ἀμφότερα ἄριστος ὢν τῶν Ἑλλήνων, καὶ στρατηγός καὶ ῥαψωδός, ῥαψωδεῖς μὲν περιιών τοῖς Ἑλλησι, στρατηγεῖς δ' οὐ; ἢ ῥαψωδοῦ μὲν δοκεῖ σοι χρυσῶ στεφάνῳ ἐστεφανωμένου πολλή χρεία εἶναι τοῖς Ἑλλησι, στρατηγοῦ δὲ οὐδεμία; (541b6-c2)

¹⁵ Plutarch, Alexander 8.2, 15.8-9, 26.2

Sokrates asks Ion why he spends his time as a rhapsode when he is in fact the best general. The question presumes that generals' work is far more important than rhapsodes'. Ion does not even address this part of the question – he clearly sees generalship as far more important and must only explain why he is still working as a rhapsode. Sokrates also asks if perhaps Ion supposes the Greeks feel the need of a rhapsode in his golden crown, but not the need of a general.

ΙΩΝ. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἡμετέρα, ὦ Σώκρατες, πόλις ἄρχεται ὑπὸ ὑμῶν καὶ στρατηγεῖται καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖται στρατηγοῦ, ἡ δὲ ὑμετέρα καὶ ἡ Λακεδαιμονίων οὐκ ἄν με ἔλοιτο στρατηγόν· αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἴεσθε ἱκανοὶ εἶναι. (541c3-6)

Ion first claims that he is not a general in his homeland as it is under the ruler and general of Athens and so had no need for its own. Over a period of time the Delian league shifted from being a confederacy to fight against the Persians into an Athenian empire, in which the subject states were not allowed their own military and were forced to pay tribute to Athens to maintain the Athenian military. Ion seems unconcerned about this subjugation of his homeland. They may have needed a general, but were not allowed to have one.

Ion however, does not presume that Athens or Sparta would prefer a rhapsode to a general. He claims they would not hire him for a different reason. Ion claims that neither Athens nor Sparta would make him general of their armies as they think they are already well managed without him. These cities could have believed, falsely, that their current generals were the best available, not being aware of Ion's talents. But perhaps, they also could have judged that Ion's skill in generalship was somehow deficient.

ΣΩ. ὦ βέλτιστε Ἴων, Ἀπολλόδωρον οὐ γινώσκεις τὸν Κυζικηνόν; (541c7,8)

Calling Ion finest, Sokrates asks him if he has not heard of a foreign general in Athens, Apollodoros of Kyzikos.

ΙΩΝ. Ποῖον τοῦτον; (541c9)

Ion does not answer, but asks who Apollodoros is.

ΣΩ. Ὅν Ἀθηναῖοι πολλάκις ἑαυτῶν στρατηγὸν ἤρηνται ξένον ὄντα· καὶ Φανοσθένη τὸν Ἄνδριον καὶ Ἡρακλείδην τὸν Κλαζομένιον, οὓς ἤδε ἡ πόλις ξένους ὄντας, ἐνδειξαμένους ὅτι ἄξιοι λόγου εἰσὶ, καὶ εἰς στρατηγίας καὶ εἰς τὰς ἄλλας ἀρχὰς ἄγει· Ἴωνα δ' ἄρα τὸν Ἐφέσιον οὐχ αἰρήσεται στρατηγὸν καὶ τιμήσει, ἐὰν δοκῇ ἄξιος λόγου εἶναι; τί δέ, οὐκ Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν ἔστε οἱ Ἐφέσιοι τὸ ἀρχαῖον, καὶ ἡ Ἐφεσος οὐδεμιᾶς ἐλάττων πόλεως; (541c10-e1)

Sokrates reverts to a long speech. He claims that Athens has run a sort of meritocracy and has had foreigners as generals and other high officials. He claims that they often chose Apollodoros as general. So Athens could appoint Ion if it deemed him worthy. Ion will get whatever recognition is due, especially since, as an Ephesian, Ion is a citizen of a city established by Athens. Sokrates emphasizes that Ephesus is inferior to no city. Sokrates has claimed that birthplace is not the sole condition for excellence in Athens.¹⁶ The theme of Euripides' *Ion*, autochthonicity, returns. We need to ask if birthplace is not a deciding factor in the rejection of Ion as general, then what else is Ion lacking? Under Sokratic questioning, Ion appeared to regard Homer as a sequence of

¹⁶ One might recall the reply of Themistokles to the man from Seriphos quoted by Kephalus in Plato's *Politeia* 329e3 concerning whether Themistokles owed his fame solely to being born in Athens.

technical treatises with no unifying theme on which the rhapsode could be expert. A general would not be very good who understood the workings of the army as being a sequence of technical exercises. What is missing is the ability to connect these pieces into a fitting whole.

Sokrates has now reached the end of his questioning and initiates a conclusion.

Sokrates continues:

ἀλλὰ γὰρ σύ, ὦ Ἴων, εἰ μὲν ἀληθῆ λέγεις, ὡς τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη οἷός τε εἶ
Ὅμηρον ἐπαινεῖν, ἀδικεῖς, ὅστις ἐμοὶ ὑποσχόμενος ὡς πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ περὶ
Ὅμηρου ἐπίστασαι, καὶ φάσκων ἐπιδείξειν, ἔξαπατᾷς με καὶ πολλοῦ δεῖς
ἐπιδεῖξαι, ὅς γε οὐδὲ ἅττα ἐστὶ ταῦτα, περὶ ὧν δεινὸς εἶ, ἐθέλεις εἰπεῖν, πάλαι
ἐμοῦ λιπαροῦντος, ἀλλὰ ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ ὁ Πρωτεύς παντοδαπὸς γίγνη
στρεφόμενος ἄνω καὶ κάτω, ἕως τελευτῶν διαφυγῶν με στρατηγὸς
ἀνεφάνης, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιδείξης ὡς δεινὸς εἶ τὴν περὶ Ὅμηρου σοφίαν. (541e1-542a1)

Sokrates tells Ion that if he is correct in saying he praises Homer through a skill and knowledge then he has been treating Sokrates unjustly. We return to the question of Ion's supposed skill in Homer. Sokrates for the first time in the second half of the dialogue uses the term clever, δεινὸς to describe Ion's ability. We have come full circle in the story of Ion.

Sokrates continues to complain that Ion would not even tell him what his knowledge was about, far less give a demonstration, despite his entreaties. We, along with Ion, have witnessed the sort of entreaties that Sokrates has employed. Sokrates permits Ion only a brief recitation of a particular piece of Homer. Sokrates also has asked

questions that might not have seemed entirely fair to Ion. As a result of Sokrates' questioning, Ion has not been able to tell Sokrates of anything at which the rhapsode or the commentator might be skilled, until he finally arrives at the art of being a general. What Ion has failed to point to is the importance of the context of passages of the particular skills such as chariot racing.

Sokrates compares Ion to Proteus. Proteus, the King of Pharos who lived in a cave, was famous for appearing in many shapes in order to avoid being caught. Once caught and held however, Proteus, the oracular Old Man of the Sea, would display his prophetic powers. Menelaus on his return from Troy is stuck in Egypt and consults Proteus for a way out of his predicament. Sokrates has had difficulty in holding Ion still in order to get him to display his powers.

εἰ μὲν οὖν τεχνικός ὢν, ὅπερ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, περὶ Ὀμήρου ὑποσχόμενος ἐπιδείξειν ἑξαπατᾶς με, ἄδικος εἶ· εἰ δὲ μὴ τεχνικός εἶ, ἀλλὰ θεία μοῖρα κατεχόμενος ἐξ Ὀμήρου μηδὲν εἰδὼς πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ λέγεις περὶ τοῦ ποιητοῦ, ὥσπερ ἐγὼ εἶπον περὶ σοῦ, οὐδὲν ἀδικεῖς. (542a2-6)

Sokrates says that if Ion is a skilled person, a τεχνικός, then he has deceived Sokrates in not showing this. The alternative, which Sokrates presents to Ion, is that he is not a skilled commentator, but speaks through a divine dispensation.

ἔλοῦ οὖν πότερα βούλει νομίζεσθαι ὑπὸ ἡμῶν ἄδικος ἀνὴρ εἶναι ἢ θεῖος.
(542a6-7)

Sokrates says to Ion that Ion must choose - ἐλοῦ, something Ion has avoided, making comparisons and choosing. But what a choice: he is either skilled and has been

deceiving Sokrates, or he is not skilled and all he does is from a divine power. Further Sokrates does not ask which is true; rather he asks Ion to choose how he wants others to think of him – to select his reputation.

ΙΩΝ. Πολὺ διαφέρει, ὦ Σώκρατες· πολὺ γὰρ κάλλιον τὸ θεῖον νομίζεσθαι.

(542b1,2)

Ion apparently accepts the choices that Sokrates has laid out. He does not actually select one. Ion merely notes there is a huge difference and that it is far nobler to be called divine. Ion avoids actually choosing.

ΣΩ. Τοῦτο τοίνυν τὸ κάλλιον ὑπάρχει σοι παρ' ἡμῖν, ὦ Ἴων, θεῖον εἶναι καὶ μὴ τεχνικὸν περὶ Ὀμήρου ἐπαινέτην. (542b3,4)

Sokrates presumes that Ion has chosen and he says he will consider Ion as being unskilled but divine in his praising of Homer.

7. Conclusion

And so we have reached the end of the *Ion*. What can we say by way of summary?

7.1 Ion Uncovered

First and foremost, it must be said that any such reading is not the final word. We have not uncovered the meaning hidden in the dialogue. To remain true to our first principle, a Platonic dialogue is not a treatise and to say the meaning of the dialogue is ‘A’ would be to interpret it as a treatise. One of the charms of a Platonic dialogue is that it can say different things to different readers. As Fendt¹⁷ says concerning poetry, “if a poem is about some ‘thing’ its subject is not one particular to a *techne*: ‘The real subject of the *Iliad* ... is might,’ Simone Weil writes... ‘A poem does not mean, it is’.” (18) A dialogue has an element of playfulness mixed with the seriousness. As a drama, it hides and reveals. Unlike in a treatise, the ostensible topic of the dialogue need not be its theme. Just as the *Iliad* is not a treatise on chariot riding, the *Ion* need not be read as a treatise on poetry.

There is a temptation to state the moral or conclusion of the dialogue. Fendt has avoided seeing a theory of art in the dialogue. But he is moved to come to a conclusion about a theory of language based on the dialogue. This is not to argue that his theory of language is wrong, merely that it once again changes the *Ion* from a drama to a treatise.

¹⁷ The article by Fendt appears in the book by Fendt and Rozema. However because the article was published previously by Fendt alone in *International Studies in Philosophy* 29:4 (1977), I have referred to it here as Fendt’s interpretation of the *Ion*.

As in reading a drama by Shakespeare, so in Plato I will not attempt to reduce the dialogue. That is not to say that there are no overarching themes, but it is to remain with the understanding that the dialogue is more than those themes.

7.2 Authenticity

Is the *Ion* an authentic Platonic dialogue? This is still a puzzling matter. Our methods here could eventually be persuasive to some, but certainly constitute no proof. Some points that have been noted would need some explanation in a specific test of authenticity. Our chief purpose however has been to test our principles as a means to understanding this dialogue.

In favour of authenticity is the close parallel in Nikeratos' speech in Xenophon's *Symposium*. Nikeratos picks out the same passages from Homer as Sokrates does, a coincidence too big to ignore. The *Ion* appears to have been written by the time Xenophon wrote this passage in the *Symposium*. Secondly the contrast between the magnetic ring myth notion that poetry is by divine inspiration, and the ability of Sokrates to act like the muse and generate the myth are what one might expect from Plato. The use of δεινός is quite precise. If we could see similar usage in other Platonic dialogues, we would have found some evidence in favour of authenticity.

Someone other than Plato could also have written the *Ion*. There are many confusing elements, times that Sokrates' argument seems to lose its way for no apparent reason. In the first half of the dialogue, there is mention of prophecy and medicine. In the second half, Sokrates repeats these examples of skill, but also adds chariot riding and

fishing. The fishing insertion in particular seems to serve no purpose as Sokrates has already made his point with the other examples.

Thus, I make a rather tentative conclusion that this is an authentic dialogue and that it should be possible to come to some understanding of Sokrates' selections of these particular passages from Homer. We have noted various aspects that appear, but why should Sokrates want to mis-quote in order to make two passages less violent? Solving this problem might convince one that this is a genuine Platonic dialogue and that the words meet his criteria of *ἀνάγκη λογογραφικη*.

7.3 Hermeneutic Adventure

What can we say about the interpretive principles that we attempted to employ?

Principle 1: Not a Treatise

First let me clarify what I mean by the notion of treatise. A treatise on chariot riding would deal with the topic in straightforward fashion. It would state things such as in driving the horses one should sit well back in the chariot. It would not embed that discussion in a conversation between two people who may or may not believe what is being said or whose actions may controvert the words. A treatise does not require one to consider the context of the words.

As noted above, this principle is at the heart of the *Ion*. Ion himself continually gets himself into difficulties because he continues to treat Homer as though it were a treatise, for example on chariot driving. Plato reminds us that Homer is not a series of

treatises. To read Plato as a treatise on poetry is to interpret Plato in the manner of an Ion¹⁸.

In following this principle we are forced to consider the context of the words and the character of the speakers.

Principle 2: Seriousness and Playfulness

The dialogue contains much that must be regarded as jesting between the two characters. To have missed this humour is one step in mistaking the dialogue for a treatise. To see the humour is to see the words spoken as having impact on several levels and to allow the characters to come alive. It permits the words to be contradicted by the actions of the speakers. A treatise contains no characters or actions and has no internal context.

Principle 3: Not Platonic Doctrine

One might take Sokrates to be Plato's spokesperson in this dialogue. But that might entail regarding Sokrates as dispensing Plato's doctrine on poetry. That in turn would mean that Sokrates' words are not really spoken to a particular rhapsode, Ion, and the specific drama of the dialogue disappears. If Sokrates were not speaking to Ion, but rather to Protagoras, would he have said the same things? If the point were to explicate Plato's theory of art and it is presented by Sokrates in his myth of the magnetic rings, then there is little point in the second half of the dialogue. But Plato depicts Sokrates as wanting to continue to speak to Ion.

¹⁸ Russon makes this point as well in his commentary. He says, "Essentially, then, we, as readers of Plato, stand in the same relation to Plato as Ion does to Homer" (401).

To extract Sokrates' comments from the *Ion* and treat them as Platonic doctrine would require one to ignore the context of the particular comments. That extraction would create a treatise out that portion of the text. One may find that the process of such extraction yields knowledge with which Plato might agree. But the fact that a character, even Sokrates, said it in a dialogue of Plato's does not mean that Plato does so agree. One might likewise extract sayings of Shakespeare's characters and find things with which Shakespeare would agree. But one might just as easily find things with which Shakespeare disagrees.

This principle requires that understanding words in the dialogue entails paying close attention to how they are bound to the characters of the dialogue. Thus we must understand Sokrates' myth of the magnetic chains by how it impacts the character of Ion, and by what Sokrates so far has seen of Ion.

Principle 4: Each Dialogue a Dramatic Whole

We have made no appeal to stages in Plato's development in this dialogue. Our only appeals to other dialogues are attempts to clarify aspects that are not critical to the understanding of the interaction. In fact, it would seem that the most critical other literature to understand is that of Greek mythology.

There are obvious similarities with the method Sokrates employs in his questioning of Ion and his questioning of Euthyphro and Meno and others. One may find thereby a Socratic method and some typical Platonic themes. We have however attempted to start with just this dialogue by itself. This principle has thus allowed us to concentrate on this particular dialogue and regard how it works.

Principle 5: Every Word Counts

This principle has meant that we are forced to pay very close attention to the fine-grained detail of the dialogue. I have not of course looked to the literal sense of this principle but what I consider to be its intent. We are reading a drama and not only single words, but the silences are important also. The principle is based on the belief that Plato was a very careful writer and that his dialogues will bear fruit when read in a very careful fashion.

In following this principle we have attempted to understand things such as why Plato chooses the reference to the name Ion. These sorts of questions lead to a completely different reading of the dialogue.

We might consider as an example that the mythical Ion connects to Ion's final concern about his possibly becoming a general and about the need for a general to be native born. We are then led to consider the question of the importance of autochthonicity, one of the underlying themes of Euripides. However, in Athens the general is an elected official and non-Athenians have been chosen. We might then wonder what other reason there might be for Ion to be unsuitable as general. The criterion for selecting a general for Athens might be something else, such as caring for Athens. Ion has indicated a willingness to serve either Athens or Sparta as a general, at a time when the two city-states are at war with one another. He does not care for Athens.

Principle 6: Lexicon Building

We have attempted to follow the several Greek words, especially the notion of τέχνη and its meaning in this dialogue. By remaining close to these Greek terms one starts to see a distinction between having a skill, τέχνη and being clever δεινός. One might also start to attach one term to Athena and the other to Apollo.

It must be remembered that the sort of detective work undergone here is not to generate a philologically sound conclusion. My purpose is to observe what is going on in the dialogue. For example in this dialogue Plato appears to use δεινός in a very specific way. A good philological study might then look to the rest of the Platonic corpus and to the writings of his contemporaries. It would also look to cases where the term could have been used by Plato, but was not. Our purpose however has been to note the consistencies in usage in order to assist in understanding the *Ion*. Within that purpose, the observations have some merit and seem to be things that subsequent commentaries would need to explain.¹⁹

In the first half of the dialogue the term ‘clever’ or ‘δεινός’ is connected to how someone speaks about something or the ability to separate good speakers from bad speakers. The actual doing is a skill. In the second half the term ‘δεινός’ disappears until Sokrates final speech comparing Ion to Proteus.

The terms εὖ λέγεις and ἀληθῆ λέγεις at first seem to translate as, ‘well done’, and, ‘you are correct’ and are applied respectively to Ion and Sokrates. In translation and in print, however the obvious play between the terms disappears. We largely follow that

¹⁹ In the history of science the notion of heat was as a flux, a property that flowed from one thing to another. The movements of little particles in a liquid were not considered relevant. Einstein’s notion of heat as the motion of molecules connects these two. Any future theory of heat must now explain Brownian motion.

antiphony to one point, 536d4, where Ion says εὖ λέγεις to Sokrates. Ion says to Sokrates that his image of dancing Corybants is ‘well said, but not true’ as an image of how he praises Homer. Ion himself indicates at this point that speaking well is different from telling the truth. The usage however shifts and it is related not to the individual characters, rather to the mode of speech. We might conclude that a particular mode of speech then is typical of Ion and another typical of Sokrates²⁰.

We conclude that, in accordance with this principle, following subtle differences in the Greek terms can help in the interpretation.

Principle 7: Logon and Ergon

This principle is called upon primarily in the interpretation of the magnetic chain theory of poetry. Sokrates’ logos presents this theory of poetry and it is sometimes taken to be Sokrates speaking as Platonic spokesperson, and presenting the Platonic treatise on poetry. In fact, when we pay attention to Sokrates’ ergon, he does not act like a link in the magnetic chain, but generates his own poetic similes. Sokrates acts like the muse bringing forth the hidden order of things. His actions undercut his supposed theory of poetry.

But then, Ion is also an example of someone who is not attending to the difference between the words and the actions. In the words, Homer gives an apparent lesson on chariot riding; however, the action of the story portrays a different message. Antilochos, in following Nestor’s advice, initiates a conflict with Menelaus.

²⁰ At 17b1 in Plato’s *Apology*, Sokrates says that he has been called a clever, δεινόν, speaker; but he will show that he is only someone who speaks the truth, ἀλήθῃ.

Conclusion

One might say, ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating.’ The best test of the principles is the success of the interpretation. The reader has four basic choices:

1. The principles are successful. The commentary is convincing, or at least opens an interesting new perspective and the success is largely due to the principles employed.
2. The principles might work. The commentary is not convincing; however, this is not due to the principles but their execution.
3. The principles might have worked, but the dialogue is inauthentic and missing Plato’s detailed writing. The detailed attention consequently cannot bear fruit.
4. The principles do not work for various reasons; such as, they force the reader to pay too much attention to meaningless detail.

7.4 Guiding Questions

What of our guiding question: Why does Sokrates seek out Ion? Does he wish to convince Ion of something? Does he wish to change Ion in some way? Does he wish to learn something from or about Ion?

Sokrates, judging by his actions, seeks out Ion to determine whether he is skilled or not in Homer; but also to reveal Ion’s purpose in visiting Athens, to see if he is a potential threat to Athens. Under Socratic questioning Ion reveals that his traveling demonstrations of Homer are based on his desire for money and fame; he has come to Athens to feed off it. Sokrates, during the dialogue, permits Ion to sing only a very

limited part of Homer and prevents him from making his entrancing display. Sokrates thereby protects Athens, by using the craft of Athena, weaving long speech, poetic metaphor and short speech, dialectic question and answer, to protect against the danger of the itinerant rhapsode.

Secondly, Ion is revealed as regarding himself as suitable for exercising military power in Athens. However, Ion does not appear to care about Athens, or Ephesus, and would serve Athens or Sparta as general, even though his native city is under Athenian subjugation. Ion has no apparent loyalty to his home in Ephesus. Ion does not seem able to put the passages of Homer into a context and so he does not bother to get close to Homer's thought and stays at the surface of the poems. We might say he does not really care about Homer either. Sokrates separates the basis of Ion's claim, his success with Homer, from the skill at being general and thereby undercuts Ion's claim to be the best general.

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