Plato's attitude to poetry and the fine arts, and the origins of aesthetics

Part II

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Plato’s approach to the topic of education in the Republic and in the Laws does not seem to present significant differences, at least from the present point of view. The education which is illustrated concerns the character and is kept distinct from the intellectual education which is considered in a later part of the first work. (The fact that it concerns character is suggested e.g. in II, 377b, in IV, 441c-442a, and at least implicitly in VI, 498b, where the suggestion is made that the main intellectual studies should come relatively late in life; the fact that it concerns character and thus must be kept distinct from intellectual formation is also suggested by VII, 522a, a passage to which I come back below; the beginnings of intellectual education are described in VII, 536de.) In the Laws he is explicit about the fact that the education of character consists primarily in the appropriate training of the feelings of pleasure and of pain, for the passage quoted above (Part I, ch. 15) of Laws II, 653b-c, is followed by the assertion that “education is a matter of correctly disciplined feelings of pleasure and pain” (653c7-8), so (it is explained) as to hate (= feel pain at) what we ought to hate from first to last and to love (= feel...
pleasure at) what we ought to love (cf. 653c1-2). This point is not made so explicit in the treatment of the Republic, but it is sufficiently clear that he supposes that a training of the feelings of pleasure and pain is obtained through education, for the virtues acquired by the guardians as a result of the education received are regarded as being concerned with the feelings of pleasure and pain (cf. IV, 429c; 430e, 442c), so that one is pleased at what is fine and hates what is ugly or disgraceful (cf. 401e-402a, quoted below).

This is one of the few Platonic doctrines which Aristotle refers to with full approval (cf. Nicomachean Ethics II 3, 1104b9 ff.). For both of them adopting this doctrine implies that “the political philosopher” as Aristotle calls him, has to decide which part of the activities that are, for the untrained, a source of pleasure should be admitted in the education of young people and also later in their life. Clearly among these pleasures are to be considered those which can be called aesthetic: should they be admitted when they are harmless, or only when they are ‘useful’, and which of them are harmless or useful?

Insistence on the training of the feelings of pleasure and of pain should not make one think that the paideia that Plato and Aristotle have in mind consists only in the molding of these feelings through music (in addition to gymnastics), though this is an important aspect of their conception. These feelings are supposed to have a cognitive basis, so that it is a matter of acquiring the right beliefs about reality, including the society to which one belongs and one’s position in it. Plato thinks in fact that the proper attitude concerning pleasure and pain is based on the right belief or opinion that is said to be the one dictated by law (nomos) and obtained through education. The qualification ‘dictated by law’ shows that it is a matter of respecting the norms of the city to which one belongs and the obligations one has towards the community.

Some clarification on Plato’s approach is to be obtained from Republic VII, 522a (referred to above), where he offers a sort of recapitulation. There it is said that the counterpart of gymnastics, that is to say music, ‘trained the guardians through the influence of habit,

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1. There are other passages which show what he adopts it; e.g. X 1, 1112a20-b21 and Politics VIII 5, 1340a14-18 and 6, 1340b38-59.
2. Reference to this role of the political philosopher is made in Nicomachean Ethics VII 11 (12), 1152b1 ff.
3. Notice that in one of the passages referred to above he defines courage for instance as the preservation of the opinion (doxa) about what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, cf. 429c; on right opinion (or the doxa) cf. also 430b6 ff.
4. In the first of the passages referred to.
5. In all the passages in question there is this mention of paideia in the first passage quoted above (i.e. 429c7), and in connection with the passage quoted in n. 3 (i.e. 430b6 ff.), further 429c2, 430a1 and 43a; on the influx of education in the case of temperance cf. 431a7-8, where this is coupled with frequentation – bad company is harmful.
through harmony making them harmonious, through rhythm rhyth-
mical, but not giving them science' (522a3-6). The qualification at the
end of the passage shows that the education of character is kept
distinct from intellectual education. It is added immediately after-
wards that the part of music made up of discourses, 'whether fabu-
lous or closer to the truth', is meant to impress upon them habits
similar (adelphe ethe) to them' (522a6-8), but not in any case to
transmit knowledge (mathema). This passage proposes that dis-
tinction again but is particularly significant because it recognizes a
distinction between the more strictly musical formation and that by
means of discourses, yet regards them as complementary.

What are the main objectives of paideia as formation of charac-
ter? One main objective of paideia is evident in passages like the
one now quoted or IV , 410e ff. and 443d-e (referred to below),
namely obtaining harmony in the character of the person, and har-
mony that goes together with health. The same harmony, extended
to the relationship between the soul and the body, is obtained
through the combination of music and gymnastics (cf. 411e-412a).
This harmony is comparable (it is suggested in the last passage) to
that of a musical instrument, which must have strings that are nei-
ther too lax nor too tight but that are well tuned. In presenting the
nature of those who are apt to practice philosophy at the begin-
ing of book VI of the Republic it is said it must be charac-
terized by some sort of harmony, which consists in qualities such as
decorum (kos-
miotes, 486b6), measure (emmetria, 486d7) and grace (being
eucbants, 486c9). It can be added that, in the passage of Laws II
referred to at the beginning (i.e. 653a-c), education in the sense of
formation of character is also said to have 'complete virtue' as its
aim, but complete virtue is treated as a concord (sumphonia)
between reason (logos) or right reason and the passions which are
accompanied by the feelings of pleasure and pain. This same motif
is recalled in 659d-e, still talking of such an accord (sumphonia,
659c3), and in III, 689d, where this time wisdom (sophia) is said to
be the finest and greatest accord and is opposed to the contrary
condition of ignorance (amathia) and folly (anoia)(cf.658e), which
constitutes in its turn a condition of discord (diaphonia, 659a7).

The other main objective of paideia is that of forming citizens
that are virtuous in a way that is useful to the city to which they
belong (by being courageous, especially in war, by being just, and so
forth) and are able to meet the public responsibilities for which they
are fit. This objective responds to the principle resulting from the for-
mulations by Aristotle and by Plato quoted above (at the beginning
of ch. 4): that 'each citizen belongs not to himself but to the city
(polis) or that children 'belong more to the polis than to their par-
ents'. It also responds to the requirement formulated in Laws 1,643e,
that the training be such as to produce 'a keen desire to become a
perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled as justice demands’.

The starting point of paideia thus understood is traditional education. It is clear from indications given by Plato himself (esp. Protagoras 526e ff. and Laws VII, 810e-811a)6, by Aristophanes (cf. e.g. Frogs vv. 1054-55), and so forth, that recitation and memorization of large parts of the poems of Homer, of Hesiod and other poets constituted one main feature, if not the main feature, of that education. This happened, to some extent at least, because there prevailed a didactic view of the function of poetry. According to this view familiarity with those poems had beneficial effects, especially in a pedagogic sense, in at least four ways, which I will present schematically:

1) in telling stories about the great heroes and about other men they offered models of behaviour to be imitated;
2) in telling stories about the gods or in speaking about them in other ways they provided a view of the gods that to some extent constituted the basis of polis-religion; 
3) in directly offering ‘precepts (hypothekai) on how one should live’ (Isocrates II 3);
4) more generally, in suggesting, through these ways but also otherwise, e.g. through explicit comment, a certain code of behaviour which concerns the main aspects of human life in the interrelationship among men and in the attitude to be held towards divine entities (e.g. by respecting the traditional rituals)7.

Concerning point (3), that the poets offer practical precepts or counsels is taken as obvious by Plato in Laws IX, 858c-e. Where they are included in the list of those “who have left a written record of their counsel (sumboulé) for the conduct of life” (the formula peri bion, used in d2, is repeated in e2 to the same effect), with the explanation that they are counsels about what is fine, good and right, in view of being happy. Concerning points (1) and (2), he has them manifestly in mind in giving the following survey of the contents of works of poetry regarded as typical like those by Homer: ‘Does Homer tell of other things than all other poets do? Doesn’t he explain many things about war, and the familiar intercourse of good men and bad with one another, and craftsmen and laymen, and about how gods interact with one another and with men in their intercourse with them, and things that occur in the heavens and in the underworld, and the births of gods and heroes?’ (Ion, 531c, Allen’s transl.).

On point (2) in particular one can recall the often quoted passage by Herodotus, II 53, according to whom it was Homer and Hesiod

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6. See also the remark in Republic X, 606c: ‘Homer has been the educator of Hellas’.
7. On this topic see e.g. M.W. Blundell, Helping Friends and Harming Enemies, Cambridge 1989, pp. 11-16. The motive of the code is stressed by E. Havelock in publications to be mentioned below.
who fixed the theology that was current among the Greeks: “they made a theogony for the Greeks and gave the gods their names, distributed to them their honours and skills, and indicated their outward appearance”. The fact that these poets were concerned with the representation of the gods is admitted not only in the very discussion conducted by Plato in the treatment of education in Republic II–III but also in the discourse of Adeimantus in Republic II, 365e, where it is said of the gods that, given that they exist and care about us, we know of them and have heard of them from no other source (allothen) than the laws and the poets who write genealogies (we thus would have the recognition of two of the three branches in which theologia was divided in antiquity⁸, for dearly one source are the practices of the cities regulated by the laws – so this touches upon the civic dimension of religion –, while the other source are the poets who tell myths; the third branch, ‘natural’ (theologia naturalis) or philosophical theology, is to a large extent grounded by Plato himself). As tellers of myths about the gods the poets are mentioned also in Euthyphro, 6b.

One has to stress that one dimension of paideia is ideological, i.e. consists in the transmission of the right beliefs about the gods, about the virtues, about values, especially civic values, and so forth, though the transmission of these beliefs goes also beyond the sphere of paideia in the proper sense, for it is transmitted by the whole community in its religious and other activities. This is how paideia was generally conceived in the Greek world, and does not just reflect the point of view of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Where they differ from the reality of education in cities like Athens is in the requirement that it should be disciplined under public control.

It is sufficiently clear, especially from his treatment in Republic II–III, that Plato requires that the contents of the works of the poets be put under scrutiny on all four counts, with the consequence that much has to be censured. Aristotle’s position on this matter is not so explicit, probably because he would have expressed himself in the part of his treatment of education that has not come down to us, because the Politics is left incomplete. However it is likely that he agreed with Plato on the general principle that censure is necessary, though he probably would not have applied it in the same way (I think he would not have expunged Homer, at least in the case of boys of a certain age). That this is likely is shown by the fact that, concerning the performance or representation of what is indecent (ais-

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⁸ For this distinction of tria genera theologiae, which must have been canonic from Hellenistic times onwards, cf. e.g. W. Jaeger, The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers, Oxford 1947, pp. 1 ff. Unfortunately we cannot be sure of the suggestion here made because there is a textual problem: only one ms. has νόμων, the others have λόγων.
he is rather severe in *Politics* VII 17, saying, among other things, that "we should also prevent the young from seeing indecent pictures and (hearing) indecent speeches … legislation should forbid the young to be spectators of iambics or of comedies" (1336b13-14 and 20-21). (In the case of comedy he must be thinking of Aristophanic or "old" comedy, for in *Nicomachean Ethics* IV 8 [14], 1128a22-25, he shows awareness of the fact that "new" comedy was free of the indecency of language which pervaded the other.)

This far Aristotle’s position does not differ very much from Plato’s. But a substantial difference of position between them emerges when one reads what follows immediately in the Aristotelian passage just quoted: the young should not be spectators of iambics or of comedies "until they have reached the age when they are allowed to share in the practice of reclining and taking wine (= to join the common tables); by that time their education will have made them quite immune from the bad effects of such things". Aristotle is referring here to the conditions in the well-governed city described in the last two books of the *Politics*, but he is manifestly willing to admit (as is implied by what has been remarked above, ch. 13) that an educated adult public who are immune from the bad effects of drama, including Aristophanic comedy, is to be found in most Greek cities of his times. He is not very concerned with what can happen to a non-educated public, but seems to admit that, if fear of Hades is instilled in them by stories told or represented, so much the better, for this will make them more willing to accept law and order (see the passage of *Metaphysics* XII 8 quoted above, ch. 13), while it is not clear whether they can have a share in *katharsis*, though it is likely that for him this process is fully satisfactory only when accompanied by an understanding of what happens on the scene.

Plato on the other hand is inclined to think that only those who possess philosophical knowledge have at their disposal an antidote (*pharmakon*, cf. *Republic* X, 595b) or a counter-charm (*epoide* 608a) against the bad effects of dramatic representation and so forth. Everybody else has been too corrupted by the education given

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9. Not all statements by Aristotle are as clear as the one in *Politics* VII 17 quoted above. In VII 14, 1335b5-6 he talks of the targets in view of which "one must educate both those who are still children and also the other ages that need education", but one can explain the passage as done by Kraut, by taking education in a wider sense, including that which is due to the laws (cf. Aristotle’s *Politics*, books VII and VIII, translation with a commentary by R. Kraut, Oxford 1997, p. 141); that his point of view requires that one can talk of education only for a limited period in the life of a person is asserted, with some discussion of the evidence, by Kraut in op. cit., pp. 205-206, and by D.J. Depew ‘Politics. Music and Contemplation in Aristotle’s Ideal State’, in D. Keyt and F.D. Miller, *A Companion to Aristotle’s “Politics”*, Oxford 1991, (pp. 346-380) pp. 372-73.

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under existing political regimes (cf. 607c7-608a1) and by certain intellectual influences such as those exercised by the sophists to be immune from those bad effects. Even under a good political regime such as the one described in the Republic the guardians who are not admitted among the philosophers, and those who are admitted but have not reached the stage of full philosophical knowledge, are not supposed to have obtained that sort of immunity. The consequence is that political control is needed all the time. One way in which this control is exercised concerns the contents of the works that are submitted to censure: what is left out is left out for everybody, whether young or old (cf. Republic II, 380b6-c3, and III, 387b4, perhaps also 378b1-2 and 411 and 391e). Another way is by excluding from the city a certain type of poet and of other imitators (cf. Republic III, 398a, 399d, and 401b). There is no substantial difference between the education that is given to the young and the regime that is to be respected by everybody when adult, with the only qualification that the philosophers will respect this regime spontaneously (this, as noticed above, seems also to be the position adopted in the Laws).10

Having a closer look at the practical consequences of the political control to which Plato wants to submit both the poets and their products, we get the following picture. Concerning their products, at least one literary form, tragedy, is to be excluded altogether, for both its bad emotional effects and the ideology it reflects. Comedy on the other hand, in spite of the similarity to tragedy in its emotional effects, can be tolerated within strict limits; in particular, it cannot be an object of performance by the guardians or by the citizens of the city described in the Laws. (On this discrepancy between the treatment of tragedy and that of comedy cf. below, ch. 33.) With regard to poetry in general, one has to make a distinction between existing products, due to the poets of the past, such as the epical works by Homer, and the future products by the poets who are admitted in the well-governed city. Existing products can only be submitted to some sort of selection or censure, sometimes also to some degree of rewriting, in so far as they can be admitted in an educative curriculum (but Plato does not seem to want to make a difference in the case of adults). All this is envisaged in a sufficiently explicit way in a passage of the Laws concerning the regulation of music, that is VII, 802a ff. (on this passage cf. above, ch. 9). This in itself is not too surprising, for it seems that the practice of making a selection of passages from the poets for educative purposes was

10 The suggestion made by some interpreters, e.g. by Burnyeat, art. cit., p. 261, that “for the sake of the young, the entire culture must be purged”, does not result from any statement by Plato. It seems more likely that, as I have admitted above, only the philosophers are supposed to have sufficient knowledge to defend themselves from what is harmful in the arts.
rather widespread, as Plato himself testifies in *Laws* VII, 811a, but rewriting does not seem to have been a usual practice.

In the case of new products, which is perhaps what Plato is thinking about in *Republic* X and not only in some passages of the *Laws*, the position is that, apart from the previous selection and education to which the poets are to be submitted, only certain literary genres are to be admitted (in *Republic* X, 607a, only hymns to the gods and praises of good men; something more, such as certain forms of comedy, in the *Laws*; in any case hymns and praises are explicitly admitted also in *Laws* VII, 801e, and VIII, 829d-e). The restriction is also strict on the side of the poets themselves, for he expects that all new literary works be written by authors who have received the right moral education and under the supervision of the government (cf. *Laws* VII, 801b-c, where the solution given is that poets should follow the prescriptions coming from the laws of the city, in addition to being selected on the basis of moral standards; the latter is suggested in VIII, 829c-e, where Plato propounds a strict selection of the poets to be admitted which is accomplished from the point of view of moral virtue, excluding anybody else, however talented, and with the further restriction that they should be at least fifty years old).

Coming back to my survey of the main dimensions or aspects of traditional education, another aspect consisted in gaining familiarity with music in the narrow sense of music played with instruments, expressed with the voice (singing) and/or performed in dancing. For instance Aristophanes, in describing the "old education", says that the children would go to the teacher of music (to the 'chitaristès') and learn there how to sing in tune (and, it is understood, in a choir) the songs passed down by their fathers (cf. *Nubes*, vv. 964-968). It would also be typical of this education to acquire the ability to play a musical instrument, as testified by Plato, in *Protagoras*, 326A-B and also by Aristotle, *Politics* VIII 611. Aristophanes, in *Ranae*, vv. 727-730, presented the best citizens, those who were gentlemen, as having been "trained in music, chorus and palaestra". Theognis before him had summed up the higher life with the following words: "Evermore rejoicing in lyre and dance and song, and keeping my wit high in the company of the good" (lines 790-92, Edmonds' transl.). Plato himself, in *Laws* II, 654b, defines the person who is well-educated as "he who has learned to sing and dance aright", while the uneducated is untrained in choral discipline (*achoreutos*). Choral discipline (*choreia*) in this same dialogue is said to be, in a

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11. Of Alcibiades it is told, by Plutarch, *Life of Alcibiades* 2.4-6, that, though willing to learn from his teachers, he refused to play the *aulós*, but this refusal is manifestly supposed to be in favour of other musical instruments, thus the testimony confirms that learning to play an instrument would be usual practice, at least for well-born people. Per contra, Themistocles' refusal to learn to play any instrument was regarded as exceptional, cf. *Life of Themistocles* 2.1 ff.
way, the whole of education, and is clearly regarded as including singing and dancing (cf. 672c-673a). Details on how dancing should be practiced for educative purposes are introduced in VII, 814d ff. The practice of dancing is explicitly envisaged for the formation of the guardians in *Republic* III, 412b. The insistence, it should be noticed, was on collective performance. It should also be remembered that music would usually accompany words, and is presented in this way by Plato himself (cf. *Protagoras*, 326a, and *Republic* III, 400d). He, in any case, does not approve the practice of playing an instrument just by itself (cf. *Laws* II, 669e).

Music thus understood is regarded by Plato as having a central position in education. He says in fact that “education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony penetrate into the innermost soul and take the strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace (*euschemosune*), if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary” (*Republic* III, 401e). Another reason for this centrality or priority is given in what immediately follows: “And further, because any defect or failure of beauty in products of art or of nature would be most quickly perceived by one who was properly educated in music, and so, feeling distaste rightly he would praise beautiful things and take delight (chaitron) in them and receive them into his soul to foster its growth and become himself beautiful and good (*kalos kagathos*); the ugly (*ta aischrà*) he would rightly disapprove of and hate while still young and yet unable to apprehend the reason (*logos*), but when reason came the man thus nurtured would be the first to welcome it, for by this affinity he would know it.” (401e-402a, Shorey’s transl. modified)

This passage would deserve many comments. What is clear from it is that in the formation of character which consists, first of all, in the training of the feelings of pleasure and of pain so that one feels pleasure at what is beautiful and pain at what is ugly, it is music that

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12. For more details see e.g. H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité*, Paris 1948, pp. 80-81; G.R. Morrow, *Plato’s Cretan City. A Historical Interpretation of the “Laws”*, Princeton 1960, pp. 302-303 and H. and W.D. Anderson, *Ethos and Education in Greek Music. The evidence of poetry and philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1966, ch. on Plato. Marrou remarks that, while we see the Greeks as having contributed mainly to poetry, to the arts, to science and to philosophy, this is not how they saw themselves: “ils étaient, se voulaient d’abord des musiciens” (* Professionnalism must have been increasing, for in the pseudo-

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plays the most important role. Here ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’ manifestly have both an ethical and an aesthetic sense, any discrepancy between them being excluded. Plato had said, a little earlier, and with extension to other arts such as painting and architecture, that “gracellessness and evil rhythm and disharmony are akin (adelpba) to evil speaking and evil character (kakoe[the]ia), but the opposites are the imitations (mimenata) and the kin of the opposites, the wise and good disposition” (401a) (that good speech and good accord and good grace and good rhythm follow a good character, dearly in the moral sense, was suggested already in 400d11-e3; notice that kakoe[the]ia in 1, 348d, was associated to injustice). The philosopher tends to regard the condition of the soul of the good and virtuous person as one of unity, accord and harmony and the condition of the soul of the evil and unjust person as one of disunity, discord and disharmony (see e.g. I, 351d ff. and IV, 443d-e and 444d), and this helps to explain this transition from the sphere of ethics to that of aesthetics, for they are not kept separate from one another (and it would be reductive to talk of an assimilation of aesthetics to ethics).

The educative role which is attributed to music depends on the admission that musical rhythms and harmonies transmit symbolically certain traits of character or qualities of the soul, because they are a sort of ‘imitations’ of them. Those rhythms and harmonies that are nice and graceful reflect good or virtuous traits of character, while the opposites reflect the opposite traits of character. This doctrine, which can be called of ‘ethical mimesis’, and which goes back to Damon, finds some developments in the Laws and in Aristotle, Politics VIII 5 (I shall offer some clarifications about it below, ch. 28). From the educative point of view it is admitted, of course, that familiarity with nice and graceful rhythms and harmonies favours the formation of a good (ethical) character (which is also a harmonious character), while familiarity with the opposite rhythms and harmonies has the opposite consequence. Thus a selection in the rhythms and harmonies to be adopted, and also in the instruments that should be played, is propounded by Plato in Republic III, 398c ff. and also in Laws VII, 812b ff. Aristotle follows him in this approach to a substantial extent.

One significant point of divergence between Aristotle and Plato is that the former is willing to give a place to modes that are inspiring or exciting (enthusiastik[ele] mele) (cf. Politics VIII 7, 1.31.13152 ff.). Aristotle seems to admit that these have a purificatory effect both in the case of people who are particularly susceptible to certain emotions such as fear and pity and in the case of normal people (mentioned at the end of the passage, i.e. 134.2b13-15) and that in either case this is a source of pleasure. The divergence on this point is manifestly parallel to that which there is between them concerning tragedy; for it is
likely that in the Poetics he is thinking of the purification \( \text{katharsis} \) in the case of normal people. The divergence does not concern this point alone, for Aristotle admits that these modes or melodies belong to a use of music that is to be kept distinct from the educative one just because it is purificatory (cf. 1341b38 and ff.). Plato in fact gives the impression of admitting just one main use of music, the educative one, for both young people and for adults. Aristotle cannot accept this extension of education (with its authoritarian implications) to the whole of the life of men. And \text{katharsis} in the case of tragedy must have been taken by him as requiring an understanding of what is being represented, thus to be realized in a satisfactory way only by an educated public. (One difficulty in establishing a connection between the passage of the Politics with that of the Poetics which otherwise seems to be clearly required by what is said in the first, is that it has not always been noticed that Aristotle in the first is not referring exclusively to people in an extreme or nearly pathological condition.)

To complete this picture, it should be pointed out that, as anticipated above, there is an extension of the approach adopted by Plato to music to other fields that are treated as similar to music because in them either harmony and grace are present or their contraries, namely painting, sculpture, architecture, weaving, embroidery, and so forth (cf. IV, 401a ff.). Also for these other fields it is admitted that harmony and grace go together with good character and their contraries with bad character, with an easy transition from the aesthetic to the ethical. Thus the requirement is formulated that any sort of vice and intemperance and meanness and lack of grace be prohibited, and all the artists who are responsible for them be excluded from the well-governed city.

\section*{17. The connection between Plato’s critique of poetry and the fine arts and his critique of democracy}

It is important to see there is a connection between Plato’s critique of poetry and the fine arts and his critique of democracy. It is in fact supposed that the influence the poets and other artists exercise by means of their works, when performed or read, is wholly similar to the influence which is exercised by the rhetoricians; and it is equally supposed that the typical audience or public is constituted by a theatre or democratic assembly, there being a substantial equivalence between the two. The consequence is supposed to be that this public, made up of the democratic multitude, are authoritative in their judgments, and the poets and artists are induced to comply with their wishes in a servile way.

On the first point we find that in Gorgias, 502a-e, poetry, with explicit mention of tragic and other kinds of poetry, is reduced to
a flattery of the public wholly equivalent to demagogic rhetoric (rhētorikē demegoria), the poets being those who make rhetoric (rhētorein) in the theatres, because it has no other purpose than giving pleasure to the public. It has to be remarked that also elsewhere Plato treats poetry as a sort of rhetoric, even if in a less explicit way. On the fact that poetry induces beliefs and ‘persuasion’ one may compare Republic II, 377b, 378d–e, and III, 391d–e. In the discourse of Adeimantus in Republic II what the poets are supposed to communicate is not different from what other people, laymen and writers, communicate: their sayings are quoted as propounding a certain view of the world (esp. the human world). It is not fortuitous if in that discourse there is a reference to the teachers of persuasion who operate by transmitting the sophia demegorikē (cf. 365d). But what all these people say is fundamentally the same as what is said by almost everybody in daily life (cf. 363e ff.): they are giving voice to a generally accepted point of view just as the sophists (as it is said in another passage of the dialogue: VI, 493a) ‘teach nothing but the opinion of the many’. It is also significant that in book VIII he should say (without that this topic be of importance in the context) that the poets of tragedy should not be admitted in our polity because ‘they hymn the praises of tyranny’, adding that with their persuasive voices ‘they draw the polities towards tyrannies and democracies’ (568b–c). The people in a democracy are themselves considered as being tyrannical, and the poets act in the same way as the rhetoricians and the sophists in complying with their wishes, including the sort of views they transmit to them.

The passage of the Gorgias finds a parallel in Laws VII, 817c, where Plato, in telling what the poets should be prevented to do in the well-governed city, is evidently describing what actually happens in other (especially democratic) cities: “let you declaim (demegorein) to women and children and to the mass in general (ton panta ochlon)”, with the purpose of persuading them, with the help of actors “whose fine voices will carry further than ours”, of the contrary to what is true and right. Before having a look at some other relevant passages in this dialogue, attention can be drawn to a passage in the Ion which seems to be to the same effect. In this passage of the dialogue it is Ion who is talking (it should be recalled that at the beginning he tells of his having won a competition). He says of himself that he has to be careful to make his public cry, for, if he fails to do that and makes them laugh, he will himself cry for the money lost, while if he succeeds he will himself laugh for the money he makes (535c). The implication is clearly that his performance is done so as to satisfy the wishes of his public, giving them the pleasure (coming from crying, as is recognized in Republic X, 605-606) they expect.
That the typical audience is made up of a multitude is suggested at least implicitly in some of the passages just mentioned; this is suggested also in Republic X, 602b (the ‘many’ who are ignorant), 604e (where he talks of the ‘various’ men that are assembled in a theatre) and 608a and also in III, 397d. There are also indications that the multitude is itself taken as typical of the democratic regime, in which what prevails is love for variety (cf. Resp. VIII, esp. 557c-e and 561c-e). One particularly significant passage is Republic VI, 492b ff., which will be considered below.

These points receive some development in the Laws. Plato there suggests that most people (hoi pleistoi) affirm that the rightness of music (mousikes orthotes) lies in the pleasure it procures to the souls (cf. II, 655d). In so far as pleasure can be accepted as the criterion, making this concession to the multitude, it should not be the pleasure experienced by any chance person (cf. 658e6-8). The judgment in a competition between works should instead be exercised by a person who distinguishes himself in education and virtue (659a1), and, following an ancient law (or custom), he should sit in judgment as a teacher of the audience and come to a decision that can be in opposition to theirs, ‘if the pleasure they show has been aroused improperly and illegitimately’ (659b). This way of proceeding however is clearly regarded as the opposite of what actually happens, with implicit reference to the democratic regimes. The extreme case is represented by the law that is in force in places in Italy and in Sicily, where the decision is attributed to the mass of the spectators (in a theatre, cf. 659a4 and c2) and they make it by a show of hands. This is regarded as a perversion, which is harmful to the authors, who ‘compose to gratify the depraved tastes of their judges’, and to the audience itself, for ‘they ought to come to experience more elevated pleasures from listening to the portrayal of characters invariably better than their own, but in fact just the opposite happens’ (Saunders’s transl.) (cf. 659b-c). Less extreme, but still typical of democracy (with reference, one has to presume, to Athenian democracy) is the situation in which the judges are selected, but each of them ‘reaches his verdict by listening to the audience and lets himself be thrown off balance by the yelling of the mob and his own lack of training’; further, he can yield to weakness and cowardice and come to a false verdict, expressing it with the same mouth ‘with which he called upon the gods when he undertook office’ (659a-b). The situation in general is one in which there prevails the conviction of ‘the many’ who take part in feasts etc., who ‘say that the man who delights us most and gives us most pleasure should be highly esteemed for his skill, and deserves to be awarded first prize …’ (657e).

It is sufficiently clear that Plato is describing what happens in an artistic competition which takes place in the theatre of a city with...
a democratic regime, and that he thinks there is not much difference between the way preferences are expressed in the theatre and the way decisions are made in a popular assembly (which sometimes could actually take place in a theatre). The same sort of situation is described by him in Republic VI 492b ff., considering what happens when the multitude (boi polloi) are seated together in assemblies or in court-rooms or theatres or camps etc., 'and with loud uproar censure some of the things that are said and done and approve others, both in excess, with full-throated clamour and clapping of hands …' (it is to be noticed that theatres are mentioned on a par with assemblies and court-rooms, which were the typical democratic institutions). The normal reaction of anyone who addresses such an assembly will either be that of being intimidated and, at the same time, carried away 'by the torrent of censure and applause', or (as he suggests a bit later, in 493a ff., with mention of what the sophists usually do) that of flattering the audience by bowing to their preferences. What happens is that the multitude is regarded as the authority (kurious … tous pollous, 493d), which is the attitude that prevails in a democratic regime (boi polloi = bo demos\^14, and the demos is said to be kurtos in a democracy). But the multitude is authoritative in all decisions: not only those about politics but also those concerning fine arts like painting and music and poetry, as is said explicitly in 493d, where it is added that, as a consequence, also the poets will be obliged, whether they want it or not, 'to produce whatever the many praise'.

One can see that Plato regards democracy not just as a political regime but as a way of life that concerns all aspects of the life of the citizens in a democratic city\^15, just as the constitutions he illustrates in the Republic and in the Laws concern all aspects of the life of the citizens of the city which adopted one of them. He is not willing to regard the sphere of entertainment (to use this rather reductive term for the sphere of the consumption of the products of poetry and of the fine arts) as a distinct sphere, to be separated in any case from that of politics, as we would be inclined to do. Probably the Greeks contemporary of Plato shared his attitude to the matter, as for example the entertainment provided by the representation of dramas in a theatre could not be separated from the participation to the religious celebrations to which this representation belonged and from the organization of all this activity in a political way. (It is not merely fortuitous that allusions to festivals etc. are to be found in the epitaphios by Peicles reported by Thucydides and in the Constitution of Athens attributed to Xenophon. The fact that Athens in particular

\^14 Cf. Gorgias 502c9 and other passages quoted above, Part I, ch. 11 (p. 171).

\^15 For politeia = way of life of the polis cf. Aristotle, Politics IV 11, 1295a40 and Isocrates, Areopagiticus § 14.

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offered this sort of entertainment comes out not only from these two texts but also from the observation, in Plato's *Laches*, 183a-b, that anyone in Greece who regarded himself as particularly able in composing tragedies would not go around outside Attica to offer his displays but make straight for Athens.)

Once it is recognized that Plato adopts this attitude, it is understandable that, in the description of the evolution (for him a corruption) of the Athenian democracy he gives in *Laws* III, 700a ff., the attitude which the Athenians had towards music (in the wide sense of the term) is regarded as a decisive fact, while we would be inclined to regard this as a fact which (using Marxist terms) concerns the superstructure and not the structure and thus as a consequence rather than as a cause of changes in history. Music for him does not belong to a sphere of entertainment that is 'superstructural' with relation to something more basic, since it cannot be separated from activities of a political and religious nature and since it reflects (by 'ethical mimesis') the character of the people involved.

Thus it is not superficial or fatuous to describe the evolution of the Athenian democracy by focusing on musical phenomena. According to this description, there was a stage in Athenian democracy when only certain forms or styles of music (of tunes, songs, etc.) were given a place, their number having been fixed, and there was a select public which followed their performance, while the general public, in so far as it was admitted, was 'disciplined and controlled by a stick' and was not free to express his approval or disapproval in a noisy way. Later, as time went on, composers arose who started to set a fashion of breaking the rules and offending good taste. They introduced new forms or styles of music and also mixtures of the old styles, and they justified their innovations by 'claiming that in music there are no standards of right and wrong at all, but that the most 'correct' criterion is the pleasure of the man who enjoyed the performance, whether he is a good man or not'. Through proclamations of this sort they inculcated in the many (*boi polloi*) a disregard for rules in music and the presumption of being competent judges. "The audiences, once silent, began to use their tongues; they claimed to know what is good and bad in music; and instead of a 'musical meritocracy' (aristokratia), a sort of vicious 'theatrocracy' arose." This democracy however was not limited to music, but 'music proved to be the starting-point of everyone's conviction that he was an authority in everything, and of general disregard for the law. Complete license (*eleutheria*) was not far behind." (What follows is a description of this situation from a more political point of view.)

One can see that this description of the two successive stages of Athenian democracy in the sphere of music, the first where the regime is still close to aristocracy, the second where it becomes full (or extreme) democracy, has some relationship to the distinction

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we met above between the situation in which the decision is reserved for judges who are provided with virtue and education and the situation in which the decision is made, either directly or indirectly by the multitude, who expresses its preferences in a noisy way and follows no other criterion than the (non cultivated) pleasure. This second condition constitutes what here is called a ‘theatrocracy’, but where a city is concerned achieving a theatrocracy and achieving a (full) democracy are not different things.

Aristotle’s attitude in this matter, as already indicated above, is not entirely different from Plato’s, for he also admits that the wish of the authors to have success with the public, especially through winning some competition, can pervert their art. But he does not care if representations of this perverted art are offered to the multitude, for he thinks that the educated people are able to make their choices and to defend themselves from the effects of bad representations. It is a different matter when the education of young people is involved, for this (as is shown by the treatment given to this topic in Politics VIII) requires some selection and some surveillance. Plato on the other hand does not admit this discontinuity between the education of young people and the (always educative) influence exercised by the arts on adult people, and is therefore induced to introduce restrictions that are wholly general, raising the question as to whether certain artists are to be admitted at all to the well-governed cities described in the Republic and in the Laws, in addition to prospecting forms of censure about existing works like Homer’s poems. We are inclined to regard this way of proceeding as liberticide. He himself, however, would indeed have admitted that it is a good deal more radical than the way adopted under the democratic regimes he criticizes, but would not have regarded it as wholly different. Some sort of selection is operative also in a town with a democratic regime like Athens, for it is hard to imagine that a drama even by a well-known author could have had any circulation if it was not represented on the occasion of some festival and was not submitted to a competition. A negative judgment by the public would be involved not only in the case of failure in the competition but also in other ways (about Phrynichus we are told by Herodotus, VI 21, that in 493 he produced a piece entitled The Capture of Miletus which induced the Athenians to fine him, in addition to prohibiting any further representation of it, for ‘having reminded the citizens of their own misfortunes’). It is only with Aristotle that it can be taken for granted that a least a small minority of connoisseurs would have access to the dramas preserved in written form.
18. The search for novelty

The passage of the *Laws*, book III, considered above is significant also from another point of view: it offers the description of a development which is motivated by the search for novelty and a taste for breaking rules or for transgression, these being regarded as phenomena that are typical of democracy. These are phenomena that are considered also elsewhere (and disapproved of), putting them in opposition with the practice prevailing in Egypt and (in a less rigid form) in Sparta, in Crete and also in old Athens (according to the description now given). What is at work (and what should be avoided, as happened in Egypt) is the search for pleasure together with the desire to avoid pain (presumably in the sense of tedium, as Saunders translates) which leads to the search for novelty in music (*kainē mousikē*), calling out of date (or ‘archaic’) anything which had been consecrated through time (cf. *Laws* II, 657b). How (it is said) they compose nowadays in (Greek) cities other than Sparta and Crete is as follows: "In dancing and all the other arts (*allen mousiken*) one novelty follows another (*kainà atta aei gignoména*); the changes are made not by law but are prompted by wildly changing fancies (*upo tinon atakton hedonon*) that are very far from being permanent … on the contrary, they are never the same from minute to minute" (cf. II, 660b). Of similar tenour is what is said of democratic Athens in the passage already considered above of book III, where also search for novelty and variety, coupled with a taste for transgression, is motivated by the desire for pleasure (cf. *buph'bedones, 700d6, bedone tou chairesse*).

It is also clear that the invitation, contained in *Republic* IV, 424b-d, to be watchful of innovations in music which run counter to the established rules, for these constitute a form of unnoticed corruption, implies a polemics against a situation in which such innovations were the normal practice. There is a clear connection between this passage and that of *Laws* III just recalled, for both contain the admission that changes in music lead to similar changes in politics (in the passage of the *Republic* Damon is quoted as an authority on this point). A similar allusion to contemporary reality must be present in *Republic* III, 399e, where, at the end of a discussion (between Socrates and his interlocutor) of the musical modes and instruments that should be admitted in the well-governed city, it is remarked that no innovation has been made by their proposals which amount to “preferring Apollo and the instruments of Apollo to Marsyas and his instruments”. Here Apollo, who according to the myth told about their competition, played the lyre, symbolizes moderation and pure harmony, while Marsyas, who played the pipes, symbolizes the search for innovation and for surprise.

The phenomena thus censured are taken as typical of democracy because the typical democratic audience finds pleasure in nov-
clty, variety and transgression. This point is suggested not only by the presentation of such an audience in the passages considered above but also by the description of the typical democratic man in Republic VIII. In fact this description (for which cf. 557b ff.) stresses his finding pleasure in variety, but novelty is clearly included in variety, while transgression is seen as a consequence of this attitude, because it is based on license and license leads to a refusal of any norm (to paraphonioa). 16

There is evidence, beyond Plato’s polemical allusions, that much innovation had taken place in the field of music up till Plato’s own times. 17 An amusing and polemical description of this development is offered in the verses of the comic poet Pherecrates that are quoted in Plutarch’s (or ps.-Plutarch’s) De musica, ch. 30. It is told that in his poem (entitled Cheiron) Music was introduced in the guise of a woman whose whole person has been brutally mauled, and that, having been asked by Justice how she came to suffer such an outrage, she recounted what the musicians, with their innovations, had done to her. For instance of Phrynis she says that she “had a screwbolt all his own, and bent and twisted me to my perdition”. But of Timotheus she tells “he’s been worse than all the other fellows put together: his notes crawl up and down the scales like ants, and when he finds me on a walk alone he tears and breaks me with his dozen strings”. An allusion to “many-stringed and poly-harmonic instruments” is to found in the context of the passage of Republic III referred to above (cfr. 399c-d). A rapid description of this rather undiscriminating search for what is new in music, concentrated on the use of certain instruments like the flute, but as part of a more general propensity for what is new that prevailed in Greek culture following the Persian wars, is given by Aristotle in Politics VIII 6, 1341a28 ff. Probably Plato saw a parallel between these developments in music and those in painting, such as the introduction of skia-graphia and skenographia (on these developments in painting more below). The theatre must have been the place where all the new techniques found their place.

It is clear that Plato is taking sides in a dispute that was taking place in his times between innovators and traditionalists. 18 Expressions of appreciation of novelty in authors contemporary of Socrates and of Plato are to be found for instance in Hippias’ assertion (reported

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16. On other relevant aspects of the description that is given of democracy and of the democratic man see above, ch. 11.
17. Cf. e.g. the ch. on “The ‘New Music’” in M. L. West, Ancient Greek Music, Oxford 1992, pp. 356 ff.
18. It is called by L. Edelstein, The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity, Baltimore 1967, pp. 39-40 the “first Que- relle des anciens et des modernes”, but the topic is also touched upon by P.-M. Schuhl in op. cit., ch. 1 entitled Anciens et modernes.

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by Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV 4, 7): ‘I always attempt to say something new!’, and in Timotheus fr. 21 (= Athenaeus III, 122cd). Frequent allusions to this search for what is new are to be found in Aristophanes (cf. *Clouds* vv. 479-80, 890, 1031, 1369-70, 1597-98, 1421 ff. by antis thesis v. 1468, 1556 ff., 961 ff., 983; *Wasps* vv. 527-28; *Birds* 255 ff.) and in Euripides (*Cyclops*, 250-51). In Thucydides we find an opposition between the capacity for innovation of the Athenians (cf. esp. I 70.2, 7-9, 71.3) as opposed to the immobilism of the Spartans (cf. 71.2, 4). The conviction that what happens in the field of the arts is not connected with what happens in that of politics must not have been exclusive to Damon and to Plato. For instance Pausanias says (cf. III 12, 10) that in Sparta Timotheus had his lyre confiscated for adding to it four new strings (see also the remarks by Cicero, *De legibus* II 38-39).

What Plato has in mind, in censuring this search for novelty, variety and transgression, is what has been called by Gombrich ‘the logic of vanity fair’19. This author points out, among other things, that movements that make the claim to innovate operate on ‘the assumption that departure from a norm will arouse attention’ (art. cit., p. 62), and that also an aspect of competition is involved (cf. pp. 63-64). The fatigue aroused by forms that are seen too often has as a consequence that a stronger stimulus is required, and this is a process that tends to be repeated (cf. p. 65). However this logic characterizes the whole history of art, and has a positive aspect, which lies in the exploration of new possibilities and/or in the acquisition of knowledge of new facts about the human soul and about the world. This search for innovation has an anthropological basis, and the attempt to stop it is illusory, and leads to the adoption of a Close Society (as Gombrich calls it, following Popper). Plato seems to think that its only motivation lies in the desire for pleasure dominating the public to which the works of art are destined, but this is evidently not an adequate account of the changes he condemns. Furthermore, there is an inconsistency20 between adducing this motivation, which constitutes one side of the fatuous preference for variety which characterizes the democratic man, and supposing that the many are not able to conceive any other pleasures than those of the animal type.

19. On the ‘parts’ of a poetical work and on how mimesis operates

What has been said so far concerns, in the main, the conditions under which, according to Plato’s account (as I have tried to reconstruct it), works of art are produced in existing societies (with some

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20. As pointed out above, Part I, ch. 11 in *Études platoniciennes II*, pp. 171-172.
exceptions like Sparta). Little has been said about the nature of the work of art itself and about the ways in which it exercises its influence on the audience. Here, in trying to explain how Plato proceeds in his treatment, our attention must be concentrated on poetical works, and on dramas in particular, for these are his main critical targets and, in general, the objects he is more concerned with.

It will be helpful, I think, if we look first at Aristotle's procedure, which is more systematic and transparent than the procedure adopted by Plato. Aristotle, in his treatment of tragedy in the Poetics, expressly propounds a definition (foros tes ousias) of it, presenting it as 'an imitation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude' (cf. 6.1449b22-25), meaning by 'action' a concatenation of actions (1450a15) which, though being enacted by more than one agent (1449b36-37), present a certain unity. (The qualification of 'serious' is extended to epic in ch. 5 and serves to distinguish them both from comedy.) The fact that what is imitated are people who act was said already at the beginning of ch. 2, apparently with reference to all poetry, adding that these people differ in their characters (ethe), in the first place being either good or bad. He also says that what is (directly) imitated is not men but actions or life, and admits equally that through the actions we grasp the condition of success or failure, or of happiness or unhappiness, in which the men represented find themselves (cf. 1450b2-3 and 1450a16 ff). Actions in any case depend on the character of the person who acts and on what he has in mind (his thought: dianoia) and reflect the sort of person he is in his character and thought (cf. 1449a36-b1).

In so presenting tragedy he distinguishes six main 'parts' (mera) which it must present: (1) the story (muiai) represented, which for him is also the concatenation of actions (1450b4-5) or, as we would say, the plot of the drama; (2) the characters of the personages who play a role in the story represented; (3) the thought (dianoia), which finds its expression in the discourses of the personages and produces the arguments that justify the choices made by the men represented (cf. 1450b4-8 and ch. 19); (4) the expression (lexis), i.e. the language in which the thought is expressed, but which, with limitation to the use of figures of expression (schemata tes lexeos), distinguished from its parts (that are of interest for grammar, though a survey is given in Poetics 20-21), but also from its quality (cf. ch. 22), seems to concern the possible types of discourse one can adopt: give an order, make a prayer, ask a question, give a reply, etc. (cf. ch. 19); (5) the song or melody, of which it is admitted it follows the expression (rhythm and melody are what make the discourse 'garnished', cf. 1449b28-31; further melody is associated to expression taken as the composition of spoken metres in 1449b43-46); (6) the spectacle (or the stage-effect). It is sufficiently clear that the exposition adopted in the Poetics depends in part on these distinctions (chs. 7-
11 are dedicated to the story, 15 to the characters, 19 to the thought, the second half of 19 + 20-22 to expression).

It has to be added that of these 'parts' Aristotle says (in 1450a10-14) that (1), (2) and (3) are the objects of imitation, (4) and (5) are the means of imitation. (6) is the mode of imitation. This distinction concerning how imitation takes place was introduced in ch. 1, 1447a16 ff., and seems to be already present in some form in Plato, who clearly alludes to the object of imitation (see the passage of Republic X, 603c4-8 quoted below) and, at least in Sophist 267a, talks of the instruments (organon) by which or of which an image is constituted, these being certainly the means by which it imitates (on the passage see below, ch. 26).

The example given by Aristotle in ch. 1, namely colours and shapes as means of imitation in the case of painting, seems to fit well with what Plato has in mind (unfortunately the latter does not offer examples). More problematic is the third category, for at the beginning of ch. 3 mode of imitation is illustrated in a way different from ch. 1, having in mind the modes of exposition belonging to different genres of poetry, and this again (as we shall see) finds some recognition by Plato.

In Plato we do not find the explicit adoption of a definition, of a typology like this and of an exposition which follows the typology. However, he has in mind some definition and some typology, and this influences his exposition. It is useful, I think, to attempt to clarify what he has in mind, and also make a comparison with Aristotle's account, in order to see how the same country, as it were, obtains two maps that in part coincide and in part are different.

As to the definition, Plato offers one in stating in general what the object of imitation is, for it applies mainly to tragedy (or to drama in general) and to epics in so far as this is similar to tragedy (or to drama in general). It is the following one: "imitative art (be nimetikê) imitates men who act, and act with actions that are either voluntary or coerced, and who suppose, as a result of their acting, to find themselves doing good or ill, and in all this rejoicing or grieving" (Republic X, 603c4-8). The affinity between this definition and the one given by Aristotle has been noticed by scholars for a long time. Plato's definition however differs from the Aristotelian one because it is limited to the object of imitation, and says nothing about the manner and the consequences. So it must correspond, at best, to 'parts' (1), (2) and (3) in Aristotle's typology.

21. He is playing on the double sense of eu and kakôs prattêin. As to the distinction introduced here between voluntary and coerced actions, it is probably to be understood in the light of what is said in III, 399a-b, where coerced actions are the actions done under pressure because done in war or in other extreme circumstances requiring steadiness, while voluntary are the actions done in peace or in favourable circumstances.

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As to (1), *muthos* is in fact introduced by Plato after having stated, in *Republic* II, that the education of the guardians must include music, and one side of music consists of discourses. Discourses are either true or false, but in education one must start with false discourses, for the tales told to children are on the whole false, though containing some truth (cf. 376e-377a). From what follows, when he refers to Homer and to Hesiod as ‘inventors of myths’, one gets the impression that he makes no difference between the tales told to children and the rest. Before commenting (in ch. 20) on this way of presenting the *muthos* as a false discourse, it should be noticed that in the treatment given in *Republic* II and III it is assumed that the stories told concern, in the main, entities of three types: gods (and demons), heroes, and men (cf. e.g. III, 392a-b). Making this assumption leads to raising the issue as to whether the representation that is given of them is truthful (quite apart from the fact that the stories told about them are fiction). This is another point that requires clarification (also given in the next chapter). For the moment it has to be remarked that the adoption of this point of view is not quite in line with the definition of book X, where it is men, presumably including heroes, who are the main actors. Probably in book II and III Plato takes into account the existence of such works as Hesiod’s *Theogonia*, in which the stories told concern the gods. But in the case of epos and of tragedy the situation is different, for the stories told or enacted concern, at least primarily, men, and the definition reflects this fact. However *muthos*, as we shall see, does not assume for Plato the meaning of plot which prevails in Aristotle.

On the whole Plato does not propound an analysis of drama like the Aristotelian one in terms of actions and of character and thought as their causes or motivations. It was difficult for him to adopt this sort of analysis because of his tendency to deprive the personages in the drama of any autonomy with respect to the poet, who is seen as the only speaker, who speaks either in the first person or as if he were another person (on this point see below, ch. 22). Certainly, he is not wholly consistent in doing so, just as Aristotle (we shall see) is not wholly consistent in postulating the autonomy of the personages. In any case the category of thought receives no recognition (Aristotle himself however seems to regard it as being of interest for rhetoric rather than for poetics, *cfr. Poetics* ch. 19). The category of character on the other hand receives some recognition. This happens, for instance, when he talks of the sort of imitation that is admitted for the guardians: it concerns those characters (*etbe* does not appear in Greek, but it is natural to understand it with the article in the neuter form) which are suitable for them: the courageous, moderate, holy, free, and the like (cf. 395c-d). Similarly in *Laws* II, 659c, it is said that the public should experience more elevated pleasures
(than those to which they are used) from listening to the portrayal of characters (here ethe is used) invariably better than their own.

This recognition of the category of character does not mean that his approach coincides with that adopted by Aristotle. As the passages now quoted show, Plato talks of character in contexts that are mainly normative, having in mind what should be imitated either by performers or by the public. He shows little concern with character as one factor which explains the behaviour of each of the agents who acts in a drama (or about whom a story is told), on the assumption that it has a part to play in the series of events that is represented. This on the other hand is the concern which prevails in Aristotle. He uses the notion of character mainly in a classificatory way, for instance in order to distinguish tragedy and epos from comedy (cf. Poetics ch. 2, end, and ch. 5) or to distinguish different sorts of tragedy, such as those of Sophocles and Euripides (cf. 25, 1460b52 ff.). For him it is a matter of understanding how a tragedy works and how it differs from comedy (or from epos, though not in this case).

As we shall see in the next chapter, what is crucial, from Aristotle’s point of view, is the muthos in the sense of the plot, and everything else (including the personages and their characters) is to be seen in function of the role it has in the muthos that is represented. Any concern with the true representation of the gods and of the heros, as primary or secondary agents that play some role in a drama or in some other story represented, becomes irrelevant from his point of view. It does not matter how the gods are represented, except in so far as they themselves play some role and so must be represented in such a way as to keep the story going. Similarly the heroes are not seen as agents with a special status (because of their paradigmatic role), as they are by Plato, but are treated as all other human agents, and their representation again must be such as to satisfy the requirements of the muthos that is represented. This is so to the point that heroes as such are simply not mentioned in the Poetics. The very fact of their omission shows how the perspective has changed.

In the treatment of Republic II-III the representation of gods and heros by the poets turns out to be false and requires its elimination. But the elimination of what is false in the representation of gods and of heroes leads also, at least implicitly, to the establishment of how one should speak (hos dei legesthai) about them in telling tales (cf. III, 392a4-6). The same question must be raised about men (cf. 392a8). In this case, however, though this point is not made explicit by Plato, it is not a matter of offering a good or bad representation

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22 This attitude of his is evident in Poetics 25, 1460b35-61a1. He shows some disapproval of recourse to the deus ex machina, but for dramatic reasons (cf. Poet 15, 1454b1 ff.).
of them in what they are. In other words, poets, and tragedians in particular, are not censured because they offer an unfaithful image of men as they really are. Their fault is quite different, and lies in the fact that they represent men as being just or virtuous but unhappy or as being unjust or bad but happy (cf. 392a13-6b6). This is a fault that reflects a misconception about what is just and what is unjust or about what is virtuous and what is bad rather than a lack of knowledge about human nature. The supposition that this fault underlies tragic representation has consequences for tragedy, for this (as we shall see) becomes a reason for condemning it as transmitting wrong values and for excluding it from the well-governed city.

The same misconception about what is just and what is unjust or about what is virtuous and what is bad plays a role, as we shall see (cf. ch. 21), in the attitude men have towards the gods, for instance in operating on the basis of the conviction that they can be influenced by bad men. At the same time this is a misconception that favours the adoption of a false view of the nature of the gods. The gods are conceived in such a way as to encourage human behaviour that is based on admitting that what is sufficient is an exterior conformity to what is conventionally regarded as just and unjust, without having to be really just. On the other hand the right conception of what is just and unjust leads also to a true view of the nature of the gods. In other words, there is a close connection between this false view of the gods and the false conception of what is just and unjust that for him prevailed in the society in which he lived.

On all these points, with the exception of the representation of men, Aristotle has rather little to say. In his treatment of tragedy he remarks that the stories represented are traditional ones (cf. 14, 1453b22 ff.) and they concern a small number of families (cf. 13, 1455b17 ff. and 14, 1454a9 ff.), but does so, in the main, to make it evident that there are some conventions to be respected (in the first passage he points out that certain data of the tradition cannot be changed, for instance one cannot avoid making Clytemnestra the victim of her son Orestes). He makes no comments on these stories being either true or false, presumably because he takes for granted that they belong to the realm of fiction. This attitude apparently is extended to the representation of the gods, for, as already remarked above (cf. ch. 13), he believes this representation to be false, but does not regard this as a matter of any importance for poetry.

As to the representation of men, there are some oscillations in what he says, but his prevailing suggestion is that tragedy and epos are imitations of men of value (spoudaioi, cf. 5, 1449b9-10, also ch. 2) or of men who are better than ourselves (ch. 15, 1454b8 ff.) or as they should be (cf. 25, 1460b32-35 concerning Sophocles). This is only apparently along the same lines as what Plato would suggest, for Aristotle claims that the reversal in fortune that is (usually) rep-
resented in a tragedy has its explanation in an error (hamartia, cfr. 13, 1455a9-10) of the agent, but this obliges him to exclude that he be a person of outstanding virtue, while asserting that he does not present any serious fault of character (cf. 13, 1455a7 ff.). This however is precisely what is required by Plato’s position, but the very exclusion that the agent is liable to commit an error makes tragedy impossible – not only from Aristotle’s point of view.

We may say, in synthesizing Plato’s position, that for him the contents of a drama or of an epic poem (the main concern for him as for Aristotle) is constituted by (a) the story told or represented, of which he admits that as a whole it is a fiction; (b) the men who are presented in the choices they make and explain and in the actions which are their consequence; (c) further agents (especially the gods) and other conditions or factors (e.g. destiny) which exercise some influence on the final outcome. Truth and falsity concerns (b) and (c), in the way they are directly represented or in the way the events told are illustrative of what kind of agents they are. The story told certainly constitutes a plot also for him, but it is subordinated to (b) and (c) because its main interest lies in its illustrative function, while its being in itself false rather than true is rather unimportant.

For Aristotle the issue of truth and falsity concerning (b) and (c) is less important, because how the gods are represented matters not in itself but in view of the story enacted or of the plot and because it is the plot as such, not what it illustrates about the agents, that is important. Still, one could be induced to expect that Aristotle be obliged to take position on the issue of the truth or falsity of the contents of tragedies, since he regards them as imitations. However on this point the continuity between Plato’s position and his own is only apparent, for the whole issue of imitation is tacitly shifted onto a different plane. Imitation has not to do with reality any more, either the reality constituted by events in the distant past or the reality constituted by entities such as the gods who exist and possess a certain nature. This becomes clear when Aristotle says, at the beginning of ch. 9 of his Poetics, that “the poet’s task is to speak not of events which have occurred, but of the kind of events which could occur, and are possible by the standards of probability or necessity” (1451a36-38). In what follows, in that chapter, he is induced to propound the well-known opposition between poetry and history, which is based on the fact that the concatenation of events represented in a (good) tragedy has nothing casual and does not concern a historical individual like Alcibiades but a person (even if called by a proper name) of a certain kind of character23. Of the characters themselves he says, in ch. 15, that they must satisfy the same require

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23 This last is not really a point of divergence between Plato and Aristotle, but notice that the latter defends Homer’s representation of Achilles at the end of ch. 13, while this is one of the main targets of the Platonic polemics.
ments of probability or necessity that must be satisfied by events in their concatenation (cf. 1454a33 ff.). Some further developments are to be found in ch. 25, where, in considering some objections that are made to the poets, the fact that the poet has produced impossibilities is regarded as an error that should preferably be avoided, but factual impossibilities are kept distinct from impossibilities intrinsic to the poetic art, and only the latter are considered a serious defect. Among the remarks he makes on this point there is the following: "poetic requirements make a plausible impossibility [= factual impossibility] preferable to an implausible possibility" (1461b11-12).

To complete this survey: another important distinction for Plato is the one he draws in Republic III between what should be said (ba lekteon) and how it should be said (hos lekteon), that is to say, between contents of discourse (which can be either true or false) and the way in which one expresses oneself (either the poet himself or the personage). To the field of what should be said belongs all that has been considered so far, such as the representation that is given of gods, of heroes and of men and the moral principles that are suggested. In trying to determine what is included in the other field there are certain complications to take into account which will be discussed below, in ch. 22, where precise references are given to the Platonic passages. For the moment I limit myself to certain points which permit a comparison with Aristotle’s approach. The topic of "how it should be said" is plainly for Plato the topic of diction (or expression or style: lexis), more precisely, the topic of the mode of diction (tropos tes lexeos).

One application of this notion is as follows: what the poets do is to give a narration (diegesis) of events, either past, present, or future, but the narration itself can be (1) either simple narration, (2) narration which takes place through imitation (mimesis), (3) a union of the two. There is simple narration in a poem when the poet himself expounds the events told, as happens in most of Homer’s Iliad; there is mimetic narration when the poet talks through (the mouth of) one of the people involved in the story, as happens in a drama but also when Homer makes one of his personages speak, for example when Odysseus narrates his misadventures in the central books of the Odyssey (for more details see below, ch. 22). This distinction which, one can see, directly concerns narration and not imitation (imitation being what distinguishes one sort of narration from another) leads to a sort of typology of genres of poetry. It is said in fact that, in case (2), when there is a pure alternation of speeches (evidently by different people), there is either tragedy or comedy; in case (1), when the narration happens through the recital of the poet himself, there is, as the best exemplification, the dithyramb, while in case (3) there is the epos and some further poetic genres (cf. 394b-c).
Aristotle has in mind the distinction propounded by Plato at the beginning of ch. 3 of his *Poetics*, but modifies it in some way, first of all because he regards it as concerning imitation (*mimesis*), narration becoming one form of it. He there asserts that it is possible to imitate the same objects and by the same means (1) sometimes by narration either (a) by becoming something else (= becoming a different character), as Homer does, or (b) as being oneself and not changing, or (2) so that those who are imitated (are imitated) as acting and as being in activity (cf. 1448a20-24). Case (2) is clear, for it is expounded in what follows with the suggestion that Sophocles is an imitator in the same way as Aristophanes, since they both imitate people who act (*pratontas*) and do (something) (*drontas*), and this (it is added) according to some is the reason why their works are called dramas (*dramata*), because what is imitated is people who do (something) (*drontas*) (cfr. 1448a27-29). Concerning case (1) the most plausible explanation is that, in spite of the construct adopted, Homer is regarded as representative of both procedure (a) and procedure (b), so that Aristotle is just taking up Plato’s distinction between the poet’s talking through one of his personages and the poet’s expounding the events told.

If this is so, it should be remarked at once that the Stagirite modifies his attitude to Homer in what he says in *Poetics* ch. 24 (see again my discussion in ch. 22), but that already in this account of ch. 3 he distances himself from Plato in keeping case (2) distinct from case (1) (a), evidently attributing to the personages in dramas an autonomy which was not admitted by his master. But another important point of divergence is that (as anticipated above) he regards the various modalities he takes into consideration as variations of the mode of imitation (the *tropos* of the *mimeisthai* or, in the formulation used at the beginning of ch. 3, to *hêsekasta touton mimesaito an tis*). For him they are not modalities of diction or expression (*lexis*), as they are understood by Plato. On the other hand, in Plato there is some shift from talking about narration to talking about imitation, for he has to take into account that imitation in drama concerns acting and not only speaking, so that, from this point of view, the correction made by Aristotle is required by his position as well.

The distinctions which Aristotle himself propounds in the *Poetics* in connection with expression (*lexis*) seem to have little or nothing to do with those propounded by Plato. They are the following: (1) figures of expression (*schemata tes lexes*), which are not understood, as in the successive rhetorical tradition, in the sense of what were called the *figurae elocutionis*, but are what were called (in

24. The passage presents some textual problems, and it is not clear whether *mimoumentous* is to be taken as passive (as I have done), but even in the other case it is likely (as most scholars admit) that the reference is to the agents on the scene, so that the general sense of the passage should not change.
connection with Protagoras, expressly mentioned in Poet. 19, cf. Diogenes Laertius IX 53-54) subdivisions of the logos, namely into question, answer, prayer, exposition, and so forth; (2) parts of speech, meaning the grammatical parts (they are examined in Poet. 20); (3) excellence of expression (aretē tes lexēos), such as clarity and elegance (these are dealt with from the point of view of tragedy in Poet. 22). This last treatment constitutes a beginning of what will become the traditional virtues dicendi (in the plural).

It receives some further development in the Rhetoric. And it is in this other work that becomes evident that, in dealing with one of them, namely appropriateness (to prepon), Aristotle takes into account one issue that Plato seems to have in mind, namely that of the way of speaking and of acting that belongs to a person of a certain character and possessing other traits (sex, social position, etc.) that distinguishes him from other people (this will be illustrated in more detail below, cf. ch. 22).

20. Muthos

One of the 'parts' of tragedy that are distinguished by Aristotle, and indeed its first part, is muthos. Plato also talks of muthos, but does so in a perspective that presents significant differences from the one adopted by Aristotle. I shall start with what he has to say about muthos in an explicit way. We have already seen that Plato treats it as a discourse that must be either true or false, and claims that it is on the whole false, though containing some truth. If his intention were to assert that the tales and legends that are the products of the myth-making or of muthologia in which poets are particularly successful are just fiction, he would not say that they are false. The explanation of this way of treating myths is probably to be found in a passage, towards the end of book II of the Republic, in which he discusses the cases in which there is some justification (because of the consequent usefulness) in telling falsities, in order to exclude that they may be applicable to the gods. One of these cases is precisely that of myth-making, and it is admitted in introducing it that what had been discussed in the preceding part of the text were tales or legends which belonged to the field of muthologia. In this case the justification lies in the fact that 'we do not know where the truth stands about ancient things', hence 'we make falsehood as much like the truth as we can' (382d1-3). On this account then tales and legends are not just fiction, since they intend to give a description of events in ancient times, but, as these events are beyond the
limits of our knowledge, all that can be done is to tell something that is inevitably false but which one tries to make like the truth (since this attempt will have some success, it is admitted that they contain some truth).

After admitting that these tales or legends are on the whole false, Plato asserts that, for educative reasons, the myth-makers must be submitted to a form of supervision, which consists in a selection (we would talk of censorship) by which what is fine (kalon) in their production will be admitted and what is not fine will be excluded (cf. 377b11 ff.). What is not fine or deserving censure is then identified in saying what is false and in saying it in a non fine way, i.e. to no good purpose. This falsity is declared to consist in the fact that, with their discourse, they offer a bad representation (eikazein kakos) of gods and heroes, regarding what sort of entities these are (boioteisin), just as a painter produces a painting that bears no resemblance to the things he wants to portray (cf. 377d-e). Plato does not talk of mimesis in this connection, but, though this is not usually recognized by interpreters, it is natural to admit that he has it in mind. Presumably he would have been willing to admit that some sort of imitation is involved in the tales or legends taken as wholes, but this is not pointed out and he limits himself (as we have seen) to say that they are false. And this is already a reason for keeping these two situations distinct.

The reason why poets like Homer and Hesiod offer a bad and false representation of gods and heroes is quite different from the reason why they are obliged to tell tales or legends that are false, for it has nothing to do with our ignorance of events belonging to a distant past. It is possible in fact to tell tales, which as such remain false (for the reason just stated), without offering a bad and false representation of god and heroes, when they are oriented towards virtue (cf. 378e1-3). These other tales are not just false, for they are impious, harmful for us, and inconsistent with themselves (cf. 380c2-3). The last charge finds no manifest explanation in Plato's discussion of the matter, and some scholars judged it as being wholly ungrounded, but one can suggest that it arises from the consideration that the poets, while telling tales of bad behaviour by the gods,
do try to present them as good and as deserving our respect. In any case this charge, together with the charge of impiety, show that the falsity in question is different from the inevitable one due to our ignorance of events belonging to a distant past. The grounds adduced for saying that the representation of the gods given by poets are false have in fact to do with theology (theologia) and are of a general sort (such as that the gods never do anything bad and never tell lies), without any reference to a distant past. Of course there is some connection between these two situations, for having a wrong conception of a god leads also to telling tales about his behavior that are false as a consequence of attributing him characteristics (such as doing bad things and telling lies) he cannot have. But this is a ground for falsity in the tales that must be kept distinct from the ground on which all such tales are false.

The divergences between Plato and Aristotle go beyond the points touched upon in the last chapter, which include a lack of concern by the latter for the right representation of the gods and of the heroes, with an assimilation of the second category to normal personages in drama. Plato talks of muthos, but does not show any concern about it in the sense of the plot resulting from the interaction of the personages involved. He seems to be aware of the fact that the plot must be elaborated so as to give rise to a certain emotional response in the public, but does not try to clarify how this happens (cf. Republic X, 606a-d, Philebus 48a, and Laws VII, 800d). While Aristotle dedicates various chapters of his Poetics to the requirements that must be satisfied by the muthos in order to be a good plot, Plato has almost nothing to say on this issue. He shows concern with the muthos only in so far as this illustrates a certain conception of the gods, the heroes and the men that are spoken of. In the case of the gods and of the heroes the issue is, as we have seen, what representation is given of them regarding what sort of entities these are (hoioli eisin), and stories are mentioned about them only in so far as these illustrate certain traits of character (such as quarreling and telling falsehoods) which should not be attributed to them. The parallel with painting tends to confirm this impression, for a painting like a portrait (which is what Plato has clearly in mind) does not represent a plurality of episodes which could be taken as a story.\(^{29}\) In the case of men his attitude must be similar, and the parallel with painting is used in their case in Republic X. In their case, then, the impression is that for him the succession of events constituting the plot of a tragedy is only an illustration of the condition of the soul.

\(^{29}\) It is true that Aristotle uses the parallel with painting even in the case of a story, cf. Poet. 25, beginning. However he does so only to point out generally that it can concern what is possible rather than what is existent, not in connection with the fact that muthos involves a plurality of events or episodes. (On this difference between painting and poetry cfr. below, ch. 28.)
of the people involved, so that the issue of truth and falsity arises with respect to what the illustration tells us about that condition. No doubt, in other works Plato points out that the product of poetry, just as any other discourse, must be a complex whole with parts like an animal. He states this in *Phaedrus* 264c, and applies the point explicitly to tragedy, of which he says it must be the "proper arrangement" (sustasis prepousa) of the parts in which it consists (cf. 268d). But he does so for the purposes he has in that dialogue, and not in any way with the purpose of propounding this view (which is not introduced in the relevant parts of the *Republic* as the starting-point for an analysis of tragedy from the point of view of its story seen as a complex plot.

Aristotle's approach is quite different. For him *mythos* in the sense of the plot is the most important part of a drama, and he even comes to prospect the possibility of dramas without characters (cf. *Poetics* ch. 6). On the whole however he recognizes the character as a distinct element of a drama. This is in fact the image that is given by the poet, from a point of view that is not only moral, of each of the agents who act in a drama, or of each of the personages about whom the story is told (in a drama or in an epic poem). There is an obvious connection between the story (or the plot) and the characters, for the sequence of events that is represented or told are the result of the choices of the people involved, and these choices reflect their character (cf. *Poetics* ch. 6 and ch. 15). There are for him requirements of plausibility that must be satisfied (virility is not proper for a woman, etc.), but this very approach shows that he is not concerned with truth and falsity. The characters are in any case seen in function of the story told, so that this must not be understood as an illustration of the condition of the soul of the people involved and judged as true or false from this point of view.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is to a large extent concentrated on the identification and elucidation of the formal features that a tragedy must satisfy in its plot in order to be able to give rise to the feelings of pity and fear in the public. And this is what for him is involved in one of the main elements of a tragedy, its *mythos* (cf. ch. 6), which to a large extent constitutes its contents, just as it constitutes the contents of an epic poem. Thus he specifies that the succession of events is of this type if what is represented is the falling into disgrace of a person who (deservedly, it is understood) enjoys good reputation and is in a flourishing condition (a condition of *eudaimonia*), by exclusion of other possibilities, such as the falling into disgrace and so on.
of a person who deserves this for his bad moral qualities, or a passing from a bad to a good condition of that same person (cf. ch. 15). He also mentions, in this connection, the role that certain special events like peripetia, recognition, and the ‘pathetic event’ (cf. end of ch. 11) have to the same effect of obtaining an emotional involvement of the public. This is all of interest because it makes the drama go, the plot be developed and have its effect on the public. For the same reason Plato does not show any particular interest in this dimension of tragedy.

21. The ideology of the poets

Some of the points touched upon rather synthetically in the previous two chapters must be given closer consideration in the present chapter and in the next few. One first point lies in the fact that the poet, through his work, propounds an ideology, as we may call it, though he may not be fully conscious of this. What sort of ideology it is can be made clear given the determination of a field of what should be said (ba lekeon), which includes the representation that is given of gods, of heroes and of men in a certain poem and the moral principles that are suggested through this representation. (As we shall see, what should be said is kept distinct from ‘how it should be said’ and has to do with the contents of the discourse.)

The fact that a certain ideology is involved is taken for granted in Adeimantus’ speech in Republic II, where he suggests that the poets give support to certain beliefs and in general to a certain attitude to life. What they say concerns the central question which is discussed in the dialogue, whether it is better to live in conformity with justice or injustice (cf. 363e). A first part of what Adeimantus expounds as what is being told by the poets concerns the way in which justice is praised and injustice is censured (cf. 362e). They commend a life conducted according to justice and they deplore the opposite life, but the reasons adduced by them for preferring justice to injustice are, according to the first type of life, such as those conferred by the gods (cf. 362e-363e). Another discourse that is made by poets (not quite consistent with the previous one but based on the same assumption that being virtuous is not desirable in itself) is that living in a just way is honourable but grievous and toilsome and in general less profitable than living in an unjust way. Gods often allot calamity and misery to good men and an opposite destiny to the wicked. Even when they do not do so on their own initiative, there are ways to influence the gods, for instance by sacrifices and charms, so as to obtain their help to harm other people and, at the same time, to avoid any punishment from them (cf. 363e-365a). Furthermore, it is admitted, in general,
that it is the appearance, not the substance, of justice that a person must have, and that so far as he is able to create this delusion in other people he is free to live in an unjust way, this being more beneficial (cf. 365a-367a).

From this exposition (which is briefly recalled in Laws X, 899e) it is sufficiently clear that there is a certain ideology that can be extracted from the works of the poets. Some of the formulations used in this discourse show that what is involved is a discourse that can be regarded as either true or false (e.g. ‘if the poets deserve belief’ [because, it is implied, they speak truly], 365e; ‘the testimony they bear’, 364c and 366b; ‘if anyone is able to show the falsity of these discourses’, 366c). In any case the poets are supposed to speak in certain ways about justice and injustice (cf. 362e, 363e, and 365a), so what they say must be either true or false. That what is in question in the whole matter is knowledge of the truth is suggested, somewhat indirectly in 366c-d. The truth (and relative falsity) that is in question evidently concerns the main virtues, starting with justice and injustice, and the way in which they are achieved in human life. It concerns equally the nature of the gods, who are presented as entities of a certain type, namely as those who can be influenced by men and pay more attention to the appearance than to the reality of virtue.

Ideology is also at issue in the part of books II and III of the Republic which is dedicated to the education of the guardians. There, as we have seen in the previous chapter, after admitting that the stories told by the poets (and not only by them) are on the whole false (because they are, as we would say, fiction), Plato discusses whether they are either true or false from a different point of view, which has to do with the representation given in them of gods and of heroes. It is said that the stories told by them are false (pseudètai), and false in a ‘non beautiful’ way (me kalôs), because their contents consist in a bad representation (eikazein kakôs) of gods and heroes, in what they are (boiotai eisin). In telling these stories they misrepresent in a way similar to that in which an artist paints a picture that bears no resemblance to the things he wants to portray (cf. 377d-e). In what follows some examples are given of such falsehoods, in general excluding as not true (oude gar alethe, 378c1) that the gods are accustomed to quarrelling among themselves. And the requirement is set that god should be rendered as he is (e.g. as good, for in what follows he is said to be good in reality), whatever the sort of poetry, epic, lyric or tragic, in which the representation is given (cf. 379a). A further general rejection of these sto-

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32. Presumably intending: in an immoral way (falsity is not wholly excluded by Plato, who admits it sometimes can have a therapeutic effect, cf. 382c-d).

33. I pointed out above, in notes 26 and 27, with relative text, that mimêsis is at issue in this treatment.
The issue is not only about truth and falsity, for it is suggested in various passages that certain stories are to be discarded not only because they are false but also because they are impious (cf. e.g. II, 380c2, III, 391a3, d2, e1); and, what's more, that they are to be discarded because of their harmful effect on the minds of young men (e.g. III, 386c1, 387c, 391e4 ff.). In fact, they should be discarded even if they were true, because of their being impious and harmful (cf. 377a). But truth and falsity are clearly at issue. The concern is also with the fact that the harmful effect takes place, at least in part, because what the stories suggest about gods and heroes are believed by those who hear them, thus because they are persuasive stories.

How do the poets transmit a certain ideology? Plato does not offer much clarification on this point. His formulations are often of the type: ‘the poet says so and so’, as if the poet communicated his thoughts quite directly, in the same way as an orator (some examples of these formulations are given above). In some of the passages quoted above it is suggested that the poets persuade or make believe and in a passage of the Gorgias (cf. 502c-d, already referred to above, in ch. 17) he suggests that, if we strip poetry of metre, of tune, etc., there only remains a popular or demagogic oratory. And oratory, in that dialogue (cf. 455a ff.), is supposed to be concerned with giving counsels about what is just and unjust, good and bad, thus to influence the attitude the hearers have towards values. It is to be expected that the advice given by the poets remains implicit in most cases, but how it is given is not explained. The impression is that this is supposed to take place in at least two ways. One way consists in suggesting that injustice pays better than justice by manifesting appreciation and admiration for those who are successful though being bad men (cf. II, 364a-b). Another way is involved in the image they give of the gods, of the heroes and of men. Plato is sufficiently explicit on the fact that the poets offer certain representations of the gods and of the heroes, which are comparable to the pictures offered by painters (cf. 377d-e, discussed above, in the present chapter and in ch. 18). Thus if they are to be censured...
for the wrong views they transmit, e.g., about the gods, viz. that these are the cause of bad things for men or that they tell lies or that they have conflicts with one another, it is sufficiently manifest that these views are drawn from the representation actually given of the gods (they are represented when they are in conflict with one another and so forth) rather than from statements made about their behaviour. Since the representation given of men must complete that given of gods and of heroes, the statement he makes in Republic III, 392b ("both poets and writers of prose speak wrongly (kakôs legousin) about men in matters of the greatest importance, (saying) that …"), must regard this representation more than things that are actually said by the poets about men. So what is at issue is the view that one gets of men on the basis of the representation given of them by the poets. Evidently Plato does not keep these situations distinct, for he thinks that the poets do in any case communicate something, inducing their hearers to accept certain beliefs.

From all this (and from indications to be found elsewhere) it can be inferred, then, that for Plato poetical works express a certain ideology, both in the sense that (a) they propound a certain view of reality (for having a certain view of the gods has consequences on the view that one has of the rest of reality, at least in so far as it interests men’s destiny) and that (b) they reflect a certain attitude towards values (about justice and injustice, and so forth). What they express is to be considered as an ideology also because those who believe in it tend to transmit it to other people, trying to induce them to share their own beliefs.

I have to be brief about the contents of this ideology, drawing indications from what Plato shows that he wants to exclude. In Republic II, 379a ff., it is pointed out that a god cannot be responsible (aiōtia) for what is bad, unless this badness is a deserved punishment for somebody. “But that they were miserable who paid the penalty, and that the doer of this was a god, is a thing that the poet must not be suffered to say” (380b). In 380d ff. it is pointed out that a god cannot transform himself and deceive men. In particular, a god cannot say what is false in order to deceive the so-called friend, because no one who is foolish is dear to the gods (cf. 382d-e); and he cannot wish to lead us the wrong way (mis-lead: paranēm).

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36. Thus in Republic X the question is raised whether the poet has either knowledge or true belief about the models his work is referring to, but this question has sense only if poetry involves a relationship to reality which it can represent either truthfully or not. The parallel with painting (introduced also in the Laws) is used to this effect. So the assertion, then, that there is an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy has this implication, for there can be a quarrel only if there is some common ground between the two. Indicative is also his treating poetry as a sort of ‘popular rhetoric’, in the passage of the Gorgias mentioned below, and his drawing a parallel between the deception caused by the sophist and that caused by the poet.

Études platoniciennes II
It is implied, from the point of view of men, that they cannot free themselves of their responsibilities by saying that the gods are the cause of everything that happens to us or that we do. The immutability and goodness attributed to the divinity implies equally that what is contemplated more than once in Adeimantus' speech (cf. 364b ff. and 365e ff.), with allusion to practices that sometimes are quite superstitious, namely that through offerings and sacrifices one can propitiate the gods so as to be pardoned for one's misdeeds, has to be excluded as impossible. (The same attitude is described rather contemptuously in the *Euthyphron*, 14e as consisting in the belief that one can have a sort of commercial relationship with the gods.\(^\text{37}\))

From the picture now given it can be inferred that the ideology propounded by the poets concerns, schematically, the following points: (1) the representation that is given of the gods (and of demons), of heroes and of the underworld, regarding what these entities or parts of the world really are (the picture of the underworld is added in book III, cf. the recapitulation in 392a); (2) the representation that is given of the just (or good or virtuous) man and of the unjust (or bad or vicious) man; (3) the conception one has of what is just and unjust, good or bad, virtuous and vicious; (4) the practices (e.g. the 'commercial' practices towards the gods) that are based on (1) and (3)\(^\text{38}\). Behind all this there is the claim made by the poet himself or made by others for him that he possesses knowledge (this is discussed in *Republic* X).

It is of importance to see that for Plato the poets have a rather easy success in persuading their (normal) audience because what they tell them is what the hearers expect to be told or, in other words, because the poets encourage, strengthen and articulate beliefs that are already held by them. In the parallel case of the sophists Plato is explicit in suggesting that they "teach nothing but the opinions of the many, that is to say, the opinions they express in their assemblies; and this is their wisdom" (*Republic* VI, 493A). That their case is parallel is suggested by the fact that, as we have seen, he is willing to treat poetry as a sort of 'demagogic rhetoric' (cf. *Gorgias* 502c-d), but rhetoric is treated by him as being parallel to sophist, the two being close to each other in any case (cf. *Gorgias* 465c). It is also clear, from that same passage of the *Gorgias* (from 502a onwards), that Plato is convinced that poetry, in its various forms, aims at pleasing the public not only in the obvious aesthetic

\(^{37}\) On the fact that Plato is fighting against a widespread belief in contemporary Athenian society, namely the belief that there is a reciprocity between men and gods, see H. Yunis, *A New Creed: Fundamental Religious Beliefs in the Athenian Polis and Euripidean Drama*, "Hypomnemata '91, Göttingen 1998" pp. 50 ff.

\(^{38}\) For this account one should also recall *Ion*, 531c, quoted above, in ch. 16.
sense but also in the sense of telling people what meets their agreement. He says in fact that, if we leave out tune (melos) and rhythm and metre, what remains of poems are discourses, and that, with limitation to this aspect, poetry operates like a demagogic rhetoric. This means that the public are told what is harmful if it is pleasant and are not told what would be useful if it is unpleasant (502b); and, as we find with proper rhetoric, no thought is given to making people better than they are, at the risk of a conflict by telling them what is good and useful for them. This side of poetry thus concerns transmission of beliefs, and makes it quite similar to rhetoric, for the public are told nothing that goes against their wishes and their prejudices.

A connection between poetry and sophistic emerges in a somewhat indirect way also in the Protagoras, for in this dialogue Protagoras presents the interpretation of the works of the poets as the most important part of (‘liberal’) education (cf. 338e-339a), but he himself has a declared interest in education (cf. 328a-b, also 317b4-5). There is the implication of a continuity between the teaching of the poets and that of the sophists, which comes out also in Protagoras’ suggestion that he is openly presenting as sophistic the teaching that other people, including the poets, presented in disguise (cf. 316c ff.).

That the poets give voice to widely shared beliefs is also suggested in Adeimantus’ speech in Republic II, where he remarks that what is said about justice and injustice “is not confined to the poets but is heard in daily life” (cf. 363e-364a); furthermore, there is a continuity in his exposition between what parents and tutors tell their sons and their wards (cf. 362e) and what the poets have to say on the same matters.

A passage in the Timaeus tends to confirm this point by offering an explanation for it. The passage belongs to a speech by Socrates in which he asks that somebody offer a description of the best-governed city (which in fact coincides with that considered in the Republic) not in its static condition but in movement and in the relations it had with other cities (this serves to introduce the history of ancient Athens that will be given in the incomplete Critias). Socrates says of himself that he is unable ‘to sing fitting praise of our city and its men’, but he has come ‘to have the same opinion of the poets, our ancient poets as well as today’s. I have no disrespect for poets in general39, but everyone knows that imitators as a breed are best and most adept at imitating the sorts of things they’ve been trained to imitate. It’s difficult enough for any one of them to do a decent job of imitating in performance, let alone in narrative description, anything that lies outside their training’ (19d3-e2, trans. Zeyl).


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The passage manifestly suggests that, because of the training or education (trophé) the poets received and, presumably, because of the sort of experiences they had, they cannot, in their representations and, in general, in what they narrate, go beyond certain rather restricted limits. These limits must concern their ideology as well, for this cannot be in contrast with the society to which they belong and in which they received their training.

The society that Plato has in mind, for his own times, is a democratic one, as I pointed out in ch. 17. But certainly he cannot believe that the poets give voice to a purely democratic ideology, for a part of the religious beliefs they transmit are clearly panhellenic and some poets were the expression of societies with different political regimes, including the Spartan one. In fact, he never suggests that the religious beliefs he condemns (especially in book II and III of the Republic) are to be put in connection with some political regime. They are rather the beliefs of the common man, who has not been enlightened by philosophy in matters of 'theology' (they are beliefs that reflect a narrow anthropocentric point of view, as I shall point out in chs. 32-33). However the regime in which the common man, the multitude, is best at home is the democratic regime. And this is the regime in which the poets enjoy most favour and are most free the express themselves. Homer was not, himself, of course, a democrat, but a democracy like the Athenian one constituted the most favourable environment for his poems to exercise their influence.

It has to be remarked, finally, that if Plato is able to attribute a relatively compact ideology to the poets, it is because he selects from their works what can give this impression by extrapolating it from its context. In his polemical intent he assumes a unity which is not there. Thus, concerning their view about the gods, he does not quote those assertions like the well-known one, put in the mouth of Zeus at the beginning of the Odyssey, which go in the sense of excluding that the gods are cause of evil, and which, for this reason, should be rather acceptable in his eyes. Equally, he does not attempt (but this would have been more difficult) to understand those beliefs as expressing a point of view that had some plausibility in the eyes of the poet who expressed it.

22. The way of speaking (or of acting) as a manifestation of the character of the person

There is a further dimension of a drama or of an epic poem which is explicitly kept distinct by Plato from its contents, namely what he calls diction or style (lexis) (we have seen it introduced as a distinct topic in Resp.III, 392c). In some passages (i.e. 392c, 394c7-8, and in 398b) this is presented as a distinction between what
should be said (ba lekteon) and how it should be said (bos lekteon).

It is not easy to understand what he has in mind, because the account he gives of it is rather schematic and limited to rather formal features, and because the use of lexis which is made by Aristotle and other authors is (at least partly) different (they are concerned with such questions as the use of figures of speech, this being something that is common to poetry and to rhetoric). It would seem this is a feature that is somehow midway between contents and performance. What seems sufficiently clear is that lexis is an abbreviation for tropos tes lexeos: the way in which a person expresses himself, and that he takes it as a reflection of the character of the person who is speaking (cf. 400d6-7). ‘How it should be said’ presumably means, then: how it should be said or expressed by the poet, when representing a certain person, with a certain character, the implication being that it should be said in a way proper to that person.

Taking a closer look at the passage, we find that Plato starts by saying that everything that is told by poets and tellers of myths is a narration (diegesis) of events, either past, present, or to come. The narration itself can be (1) either simple narration, (2) narration which takes place through imitation (mimesis), (3) a union of the two. There is simple narration in a poem when the poet himself expounds the events told, there is mimetic narration when the poet talks through the mouth of one of the people involved in the story. For instance, when Homer reports (at the beginning of Iliad) that Agamemnon had deprived Chryses, priest of Apollo, of his daughter, this is simple narration; when it is the words of Chryses himself (those in direct speech, which we would put in inverted commas) that are given (of the sort: ‘...but may you give me back my daughter...’), this is mimetic narration. In itself the distinction is simply that between the parts of a poetic work in which the characters themselves speak and which are usually dialogical and the expository parts, and it is clear that a drama consists mainly in dialogical parts (this is in fact recognized in 394c). However Plato means something more than this.

He claims it is always the poet who is the speaker (because he is the narrator), but that he is either speaking for himself (legei autos ho poietes, 393a6) or he is speaking as if he were another person (bos allos tis, 393a7; bos allos tis on, 393c1) and in the second case what happens is that the poet ‘matches his style of speech as much as possible to that of each person whom he announces as about to speak’ (393c1-3). What happens, then, is that the poet makes himself like (bosoioun beauton) to another person, either in voice or in

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40 That (2) is not just imitation, but narration through imitation, is stated in 392d5-6 and repeated in a clear way in 393c8-9; cf. further 394d.
and this constitutes an imitation (mimeisthai) of the person to whom he makes himself like (cf. 393c5-6). It is a sort of transformation of the poet who in some way becomes another person (cf. 393d5-6; said of Homer: ‘as if having become Chryses’) and who adopts a deceptive mask (cf. 393b1-3, said of Homer: ‘he speaks as if he were himself Chryses and tries as far as may be to make us feel that Homer is not the speaker, but the priest, an old man’; and cf., by antithesis, 393a6-7: in pure narrative style the poet ‘does not try to make us think that the speaker is anyone other than himself’, and 393c11: ‘if the poet were at no time to disguise himself’).

At the conclusion of this part of the discussion it is said that the question at issue is whether the poets should be allowed to narrate (tas diageseis poiesthai) in an imitative way, and, if so, whether in whole or in part, and if the latter, in what parts, or whether no imitation should be admitted (cf. 394d). In what follows however there is a shift of ground, since there a further question is raised and discussed, namely whether the guardians should or should not be imitative (mimetikoi) in certain of their activities, while the question of the way in which narration is done (by the poet) becomes secondary. The conclusion drawn there, that multiple imitation should be avoided (because of the principle: one man - one job), is however extended to the typical poet, because he is precisely an example of multiple imitation (cf. 393a-b); the specification that he does this by narration is dropped. An exception is made for the poet or teller of myths who imitated the expression (lexis) of a noble person and who, concerning what is said (ta legomena), respected the norms (those about speaking about the gods etc.) that we have laid down when treating the education of the guardians (cfr. 398a8-b4). (One can see that in this passage the distinction reappears between the lexis in the sense of the way of expressing oneself that characterizes a certain person, and ‘what should be said’, intending those contents which can be either true or false.)

Scholars who have discussed this passage, at least since Havelock, have found some justification for this peculiar way of proceeding adopted by Plato by having recourse to the suggestion that he lived in a society of performance and had performance in mind. Here the performer is the poet himself, and the actor on the stage or the rhapsode are, as it were, “extensions of the poet” (Burnyeat, art. cit., p. 270+). Further, it is supposed that mimesis in the sense of impersonation which appears in this part of the Republic also

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41. That is to say: gesture, posture or pattern of movement, cf. 397b.
42. Burnyeat also remarks: “It is as if actors, like the rhapsode, are mere conduits for the poet’s own voice.”
plays an important role elsewhere. Yet, even admitting that performance is involved, it is not obvious that all the performance is done, directly or indirectly, by the poet himself.

The approach we met in the aforementioned passage of the Republic also seems to be present in Laws IV, 719c-d, where, talking of the poets, after a mention of their inspiration, it is said that their art (teche) is that of imitation (mimesis), "and so the poet is obliged, when he represents men with contrasting characters, to contradict himself, and he does not know which of the opposing speeches contains the truth". It can be said that the poet 'contradicts himself' in such a situation only if he identifies himself in some way with the people represented as being in contrast one with another. Contradicting oneself is clearly a defect, so that this becomes one criticism adduced by Plato against tragedy, which frequently offers the representation of men with contrasting characters. (It can also be noticed that this assumption about the poet makes it easy for Plato to extrapolate single assertions in a drama and ascribe them to the tragedian himself, e.g. those of sympathy for the tyrants attributed to Euripides in Republic VIII, 568a-b.)

The passages now considered give rise to a question for which it is not easy to find an answer. The question is how far Plato, in treating the dramatist as one who, like an actor, impersonates his personages, is following a traditional attitude on the matter from which Aristotle distances himself with some difficulty (the formulations at the beginning of Poetics 5 are not so clear except in keeping distinct drama from other forms such as those to be found in epos). One notices that Aristophanes, in Thesmophoriazusai, vv. 146 ff., tends to make the same assumption. There the speaker Agathon says that the poet must adapt his manners (tropoi) to the drama he is composing; his example being that, if a male poet composes the drama of a woman, his own person must have a share of the manners (tropoi) of a woman. The problem does not arise, he adds, in the case of the drama of a man, for the poet is already endowed with manhood (andreia), but arises in other cases, where it is imitation (mimesis) that permits him to get what he does not possess. He exemplifies this with the dressing and the behaviour of poets like Alcaeus and Phrynichus (who, except in the case of Phrynichus, in fact we re not dramatists). This suggestion in the context is taken quite literally (with salacious allusions to the notorious passive homosexuality of Agathon himself), and there is clearly an excess typical of Aristophanic comedy, but if this sort of idea were not at all current the passage would not be very comprehensible to the public.

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For instance it should be found, as Burneyart suggests, in 605c-d, where there is talk of a tragedian's imitating one of the heroes who is in grief; however there the person who is said to 'deliver a long speech of lamentation' is the hero, not the tragedian, so that mimesis need not have this meaning there, but characterizes the production by the poet. (On this issue cf. below, Part III, ch. 26.)
For us to understand this position we must keep in mind that, in those times, the playwright could play a role in his own play, and that this happened rather often in the earliest tragic performances. For instance, it is likely that Aeschylus played some role (or roles) in his *Persians*⁴⁴. It must equally be kept in mind that actors wore a mask. On both assumptions one can see that the idea that the playwright impersonates his personages and, in doing so, disguises himself is not wholly without foundation. This however does not mean it is a satisfactory account of how a drama works, and exercises its effect on the public. (The contemporary situation in which a director like Woody Allen plays a part in his own film is only partially parallel, because on the one hand he does not disguise himself and, on the other hand, the public could ignore the fact that in addition to being an actor he is also the director of the film.)

One can suspect that Aristophanes is recalling, for satirical reasons, a situation that was typical of a rather archaic stage of development when the poet himself was the performer Plato is doing the same, but some decades later (the *Thesmophoriazusai* were performed in 411), when this was less obvious. He himself proves to be aware that it is actors who normally played the roles represented on the scene, for he treats them as assistants to the poets in *Republic* II, 573b5-8⁴⁵, and seems to assume they are distinct from the poet in III, 595a, and quite clearly in *Ion*, 535e-536a, and in *Charmides*, 162d. In spite of this recognition he is inclined to see in drama a sort of extension of epos, so that he can treat Homer as the first of the tragedians (as he does in *Republic* X), for this poet was regarded as the reciter (‘rhapsode’) of his own poems (cf. there, 600d). However admitting (as he does in *Republic* III, 594c, referred to above, ch. 19) that drama usually involves the ‘alternation of speeches’ leads to an incongruity, for this, to be done in a satisfactory way, requires two actors, and the playwright can only be one of the two (in fact Aeschylus did *not* play all the roles in his *Persians*). Thus there is some artifice in Plato’s approach to drama, which makes one suspect that he is influenced by polemical reasons.

In suggesting in fact that the playwright already deceives his public in speaking ‘as if he were another person’ he prepares the ground for the suggestion that (as we shall see) is developed in *Republic* X, that he deceives his public in giving the impression he possesses competences – those of a general and so forth – which he in fact does not possess. At the same time this permits him to apply to the playwright himself the sort of negative judgement that has traditionally in the case of tragedy and rhapsody, for ‘originally the poets themselves acted their tragedies’⁴⁵. This passage was quoted above, Part I, ch. 6 (p. 142).

⁴⁴ Cf. R. Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, cit., p. 27. Aristotle recalls this situation in *Rhetoric* III 1, 1405b22-24, where, in talking of delivery (*Inojokrisis*), he remarks that this came rather late.

⁴⁵ *Études platoniciennes II*
tionally been expressed about actors. The playwright is in fact presented as 'the man who by his cunning is capable of assuming every shape (or of becoming manifold: pandodapon gignesthai) and of imitating all things' (cf. Republic III, 398a), and this capacity to be polymorphously imitative is seen with suspicion both because it goes against the one man - one job principle that is propounded for the best city and because it involves lack of sincerity and authenticity. One may compare the sort of description that Plato gives of the poet with the one that is given by Rousseau of the actor: "Qu'est-ce que le talent du comédien? L'art de se contrefaire, de revêtir un autre caractère que le sien, de paraître différent de ce qu'on est, de se passionner de sang-froid, de dire autre chose que ce qu'on pense aussi naturellement que si l'on le pensait réellement, et d'oublier enfin sa propre place à force de prendre celle d'autrui." (Lettre à d'Alembert).

That some artifice is present in Plato’s approach to drama also comes out in other ways. In the first place, it is not wholly satisfactory to say that the poet, in simple narration, talks in the first person, for such narration is often conducted in a wholly impersonal way (it is usually only in the proem that the poet marks his presence). Homer, when narrating, does not normally say: 'I, Homer, tell you that the Achaeans were doing so and so …', but rather: "The Achaeans were doing so and so". On the other hand it can happen that some character tells in direct speech of his own adventures, and for this situation it is right to say that he is talking in the first person (as Odysseus does in books IXXII of the Odyssey). In the second place, the distinction between pure narration and narration through a character has a rather relative significance from the point of view of performance, since even the narrated parts of poems like the Homeric ones were recited by rhapsodes, as Plato himself testifies in the Ion. In fact, what he says of the rhapsode in this dialogue tends to exclude any very significant difference between him and the actor, for they are both an intermediate link between the poet and the public (cf. 535c-536a, also 532d). Furthermore, the account given there of the roles of the rhapsode and of the actor does indeed require that they be a sort of "extension of the poet", but, apart from the fact that the poet himself is presented as the mouthpiece of some god, it leaves open the question whether the personages represented in the drama or in the epic poem are equally extensions of the poet.

To say all this is not to deny that there is a kernel of truth in Plato’s suggestion, which lies in the fact that the poet needs to do some work with his imagination, in order to grasp what it would be

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proper for a character to say given the person he is (for instance Chryses is an old man and a priest) and the conditions in which he finds himself (Chryses is a man with a grievance), and he can do this most successfully if, always using his imagination, he manages to put himself in the place of the character he is representing. A poet like Homer will be at his best in his representation of a character like Chryses if he imagines himself to be Chryses and, on this basis, puts into the mouth of the character the words appropriate to the sort of person he is and the circumstances in which he finds himself. But this is manifestly different from actually reciting the part of Chryses, actually talking as Chryses would do, and so forth: this is something which, in a drama, would be the task of an actor. And for this very reason the identification of the poet with his character cannot be complete: he must remain aware that the character is one among other characters (in the next few lines, after Chryses’ talk, it is Agamemnon who talks, and the poet must imagine what is proper for him to say being the person he is and finding himself in the circumstances in which he finds himself). In any case the identification of the poet with his character is something which takes place in his imagination and only involves himself, not his public, who will be aware of the actor, not of the poet.

When one goes beyond this kernel of truth, as Plato does, and claims that the poet disguises himself, becoming his character, or acts like a ventriloquist and in this way deceives the public, one adopts a position which does not seem to respond to any normal experience about drama and other forms of poetry. In a good drama the characters have some life of their own. Plato is in fact obliged to recognize this fact to some extent. In the passage referred above of Laws IV the tendency described above is present, but, on the other hand, it is admitted that drama (he talks of poetry in general, but clearly meaning drama) illustrates people who have (literally: are put in, scil by the poet) opposite dispositions among themselves (enantios allelois anthropous ... diatibomenous), which is to admit that the conflict is among the characters of the drama taken as productions of the poet which (as any production) have some independent existence. Similarly the analysis offered of the reaction to a drama in book X of the Republic (feeling compassion etc.) involves admitting that, at least from the public’s point of view, the characters are not just emanations of the poet, for one can feel ‘sympathy’ for them and so forth (it would not make any sense to feel sympathy for the poet). Thus his attitude to drama is more ambivalent than it appears on the basis of certain of his statements.

Aristotle, as we have seen above (ch. 19), diverges from Plato’s position concerning drama, because he keeps this case distinct from that of narration (in epo) and maintains that it consists in imitating people who act (prattontas) and do (something) (dron tas), thus
attributes some autonomy to the characters of dramatic representation. If the men represented on the stage are imitated in the sense that a portrait is given of them by the poet (as Aristotle admits in 15, 1454b8 ff., but following, it would seem, Platonic doctrine, cf. Resp. X, 603c quoted above) one cannot say that they are nothing but the poet in disguise, for in that case he apparently would be offering different portraits of himself.

In the case of epic Aristotle appears to be in agreement with Plato at the beginning of ch. 3 of his Poetics (in the passage discussed above, ch. 19). But his attitude towards Homer seems to have changed in ch. 24, where he speaks of the great qualities that are possessed by this poet. He meets the requirement that ‘the poet should himself speak as little as possible, since when he does so he is not engaging in mimesis’ (1460a7-8). Homer in fact, ‘after a short preamble, at once brings in a man or a woman or some other figure, all these being fully characterized’ (1460a9-11). This is to suggest that Homeric epic is close to drama, since the persons presented have a life of their own, with an apparent reversal of Plato’s position, which shows the tendency to regard drama as an extension of epic. Aristotle himself expects the best epic to be close to drama also in other respects, such as the unity of the ‘action’ that is narrated (this is clear from his treatment in ch. 25). He certainly regards Homer as rather an exception among epic poets, so that one could explain what he says at the beginning of Poetics 3 as being said in a rather general way, without considering Homer’s poetry in particular, in spite of the express mention of him. The same could also be said of Plato’s account in the Republic. The trouble with this is however that according to Aristotle, in that same passage of Poetics 24, the other epic poets do much narration and little mimesis. And the mimesis in question is that typical of drama, that is to say the imitation of different people who act, not that of ‘narration by imitation’ (accomplished by the poet) as Plato presents it.

It can be argued that in Aristotle’s Poetics performance recedes, so that his perspective must be different from Plato’s for this reason. However, while it is true, on the whole, that Aristotle attributes rather little importance to performance (see my account above, ch. 12), this does not concern his general presentation of drama or of tragedy as a literary genre (for instance he remarks, at the beginning of Poet. 24, that the epic differs from tragedy since it does not include lyrics and spectacle). The true point of difference here is whether the performance involved in drama is the performance of a plurality of persons or of just one person, the poet, who multiplies and transforms himself and thus is a source of deception for the audience already for this reason. Aristotle is sufficiently explicit in suggesting that drama represents not only a plurality of people acting but also their interactions, such as relations of friendship and enmity, so that the plot

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consists in a concatenation of events that result from these interactions (cf. 14. 145b15 ff.)\textsuperscript{47}. It is difficult to avoid the impression that Plato adopts a position that only partly was suggested by traditional views about the poet and that in fact is very reductive. It has to be admitted, then, that this Platonic doctrine is misguided.

This conclusion should not prevent us from trying to ascertain whether there is something to it beyond what makes of it a misguided doctrine. The distinction Plato introduces in this part of the \textit{Republic} between what is said in a poem or drama and the way in which it is said is not in itself deprived of sense. As already remarked, \textit{lexis} is an abbreviation for \textit{tropos tes lexeos}, that is to say, it indicates the way or manner of expression a person has (cf. 400d6-7). But it makes an important difference whether this person is identified with the poet himself or with one of the personages in a drama. In the first case the distinction in the manner of expression leads to a typology of genres of poetry, as we have seen above (ch. 19). It is significant that (as there illustrated) Aristotle takes up this typology, but with important changes, one of which is that of detaching it from any direct connection with \textit{lexis}. In the second case we have a quite different development.

\textit{Lexis} (= \textit{tropos tes lexeos}) can be taken as the way in which the person who speaks gives expression to his character when speaking, or, in other words, as that aspect of speech which has not to do with contents but is a reflection of the character of the speaker. If the expression is given this meaning, the attempt to use it for the poet himself, making all that is said a direct or indirect expression of the poet, turns out to be questionable. If, going beyond Plato's manifest intentions, some autonomy is recognized to the personages, the view changes its meaning and becomes much more plausible. The way of speaking, the style with which the personage expresses himself, must be that appropriate to him. If he is, like Chryses, an old man and a priest (cf. 393b2), then the way in which he expresses himself in the poem must be that appropriate to an old man and a priest. This is what is of importance, and not that the poet himself adopts this way of speaking. Only in this manner can a sufficiently strict connection be found between this part of the treatment and the part in which the question of what the guardians should be allowed to imitate is discussed. There in fact attention is given to the various types of character which people possess and the ways in which these are expressed (in addition to being imitated by those who recite those parts). Noble characters (of men) will have to be kept distinct from those that are base, and it is expected that 'body, voice and mind' be in conformity (cf. 395c-d). In the case of women

\textsuperscript{47} That here there is a point of divergence between Plato and Aristotle was noted by Halliwell, \textit{The "Poetics" of Aristotle}. translation and commentary, London 1987, pp. 171-73, where he makes some interesting comments.
it will be expected, typically, that they quarrel with their husbands, give expression to their afflictions, and so forth (cf. 395d).

*Mimesis* in this part consists in the fact that somebody says or acts like somebody else (cf. on this point the discussion of *mimesis* given below, ch. 26). Thus it is said of the man of orderly life (*meitos aner*) that, when, in the course of the narrative, he comes to some discourse (*lexin*) or act (*praxin*) of a good man, he is willing to manifest (himself) as if he were himself that man (*hos autos on elteinos*) and will not be ashamed of this imitation, especially if it is a matter of imitating the good man when he is acting firmly and wisely, etc. (cf. 396c5 ff.). One can see from this passage that the object of imitation is 'some saying or acting of a good man', clearly intending this as a mode of speaking and of acting that is proper for the good man.

From what had been said just before (in 396b10-c3), namely that there is a sort of style (*lexis*) and of narration (*diegesis*) in which a good man expresses himself when he has anything to say, and another sort, very unlike it, in which a man of an opposite character and education will express himself, it is clear that the *lexis* is the way of speaking (*tropos tes lexeos*) which is proper to the good man or to the man of the opposite character, while the reference to narration is an element of confusion. Further, the first passage shows that it is not just a matter of speaking but also of acting. One can explain the priority given to speaking with the fact that acting in Greek drama is to a large extent expressed through speaking, and because rhythm and melody are expected to play a role and Plato’s requirement is that they be appropriate to the way of speaking. This last point in fact is made in 398d ff. (cf. also 397b-c), and requires precisely that the expression (*lexis*) of a person reflects his character and his sentiments, given that music (as stated there) follows discourse (for further discussion of the connection asserted there between music and discourse see below, ch. 28). One can certainly admit that different forms of music are appropriate to different genres of poetry, but Plato is not thinking of this sort of general distinction but of the fact that a given piece of music closely follows a given piece of discourse.

The clearest formulation of the view that I am explaining is to be found in a passage of the *Ion*, and constitutes a reply by Ion to Socrates' pressing question about the kind of knowledge that is possessed by the poet and, together with him, by the rhapsode. He would know, he replies, "what may suitably be said (ba prepei eipein) by a man … and the sort of thing suitably said by a woman; the sort suitable for a slave to say; and the sort suitable for a freeman; and the sort of thing suitable in the mouth of a ruler; and the sort suitable in that of a subject." (540b3-5) It is not the contents reflecting knowledge or competence in some definite field that is at issue, but the way in which one expresses oneself, thus what Plato (in the
Republic) calls style or diction (lexis), as is shown by the examples used: there is no knowledge or competence for a man as such, for a woman as such, for a slave as such and for a freeman as such. The examples of the ruler and the subject will have to be taken in the same way: it is to be expected that the ruler will express himself in a way typical of a ruler, e.g. by using a commanding language, and that the subject will express himself in a way typical of a subject, e.g. by using a language expressing obedience. The poet or the rhapsode will know the kind of things that it is appropriate for different characters or types of people to say in given circumstances, and this knowledge does not require knowledge about factual or other content belonging to some field of competence.

The suggestion made by Ion is not accepted by Socrates in the discussion which goes on in that dialogue, as we shall see in the next chapter. For the moment I wish to draw attention to the fact that what Aristotle says on the convenience (appropriateness, to prepein) of expression or style in Rhetoric III 7 as part of a treatment of the virtues of lexis (virtutes dicendi) is relevant to this account (I anticipated this point above, at the end of ch. 19). There he suggests that style is such as to give voice to the passions or emotions, so that there will be a style that is proper to the person who is angry, another style that is proper to the person who is indignant, and so forth. He also remarks that the members of the public are inclined to regard the orator as sincere and so to ‘sympathize’ (sunomopathein) with the orator who speaks ‘pathetically’ (cf. 1408a16-25). This point in what follows is extended to other features, such as age, sex and nationality. He there remarks generally that if the speaker uses words appropriate to the disposition, he will bring out character, for the rustic and the educated do not say the same things and do not say them in the same manner (cf. 1408a30-32). This seems to have become current doctrine (if it was not already in Plato’s own times), for Cicero, for instance, attributes concern with decorum to the poets in general, presenting it in the following terms: “Sed [ut] tum seruare illud poetas quod deceat, dicimus, cum id quod quaque persona dignum est, et fit et dicitur…” (De officiis I (28) 97).

23. Plato’s failure to use the distinction between form of speech and contents and his argument against the poets’ claim to possess knowledge

It would seem that the passage of the Ion offers a sensible way for distinguishing the form of speaking from its contents and that the

48. Notice that the cognate verb prepein is used in the passage of the Ion.

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treatment in the Republic should be understood in this light. What is troublesome is that Plato does not make use of the distinction when it appears to be appropriate and that this failure is at the basis of one of his arguments intended to undermine the poets’ claim to possess knowledge. This is what happens in the discussion that follows in the Ion. There Socrates initially gives no attention to the first examples propounded by Ion and thus to the distinction implied in them, but takes as his examples that of the pilot (who is the ruler in a ship) and that of the physician, and expects that what they say expresses competence in their fields. It is easy for him to point out that the poet does not know what orders to give in a thunderstorm or what medicine to prescribe to a person who is ill (cf. 540b-c). Then the first examples propounded by Ion are taken into consideration, but the discussion of what is proper for the slave to say concerns him not qua slave but qua expert in agriculture, and similarly in the case of the woman she is expected to be an expert in weaving (cf. 540c). In these cases again Ion is obliged to admit that the poet and the rhapsode are not experts in these fields and thus do not know what pertains for them to say. With this manoeuvre Ion’s thesis is turned upside down and easily refuted.

This could be regarded as a procedure that is no doubt dialectical, not to say eristic, but that can find its justification in a dialogue in which Socrates is represented as refuting a not very intelligent person like Ion. To suppose that Plato needs this justification for his way of proceeding has a price, for one has to admit that the dialogue is less instructive on its topic than it could have been, but there may be dramatic reasons that could be adduced, for the interlocutors of Socrates were taken from reality and could not be made much more intelligent than they really were. It is difficult however to use this same justification for the discussion in Republic book X, where Socrates’ interlocutors are much more intelligent and are not being submitted to a refutation. Yet the discussion there proceeds in much the same way as in the Ion.

There the starting-point is the parallel between the poet and the painter, which had been introduced and developed in the preceding part of the text. It is said of the painter that he will paint a cobbler, a carpenter, or any other artisan, although he has no knowledge at all of their arts, and, if he is a good painter, he may deceive children or simple people who look at his picture from a distance, inducing them to believe that it is a real carpenter (cf. 598b-c). In what follows from this case the general rule is drawn that, if someone tells us he has found somebody who knows all the arts and, in general, possesses all the available knowledge, and with the highest accuracy,
one has to conclude he is a simple-minded person who has been deceived by some wizard or imitator into believing he is all-knowing, because of his inability to ascertain what is knowledge and ignorance and imitation (cf. 598c-d). The question is then raised if the rule has application to poetry, with explicit mention of tragedy and of its leader, Homer; poets like him have the reputation of knowing all the arts, and, in addition, all things human, where virtue and vice are concerned, and even all things divine, for he cannot be a good poet if he has no knowledge of the products of his composition. It is possible that those who maintain this have been deceived by some imitator and do not realize that imitation is possible (in this case as in that of painting) without any knowledge of the truth because it is appearances that are produced (of course if this possibility is realized the rule has application); it is also possible, on the other hand, that they are right, and that good poets really do know the things about which they seem to speak so well (cf. 598d-599a). It is then argued, quite simply and radically, that if the poets possessed the arts or abilities they are supposed to have, they would have exercised them, leaving a memory of them on this basis, rather than dedicating themselves to imitation. In other words, if Homer or any other poet were able not only to produce phantoms or images which are far from truth and reality but also to produce the things they imitate, they would not dedicate their time to produce the former but would produce the latter. And this could be exemplified by the activity of the physician: if Homer were not merely an ‘imitator of a physician’s talk’ but possessed his art, it would be reported that he had restored some people to health, as it is reported of Asclepius, but this is not the case (cf. 599a-c). However, differently from the Ion, it is said it is better to leave out arts like this one and concentrate the attention on those which concern the greatest and finest things. So this sort of request is made for the field of strategy of government (or administration of cities) and of education. (It would seem that here Plato is assuming a rather conventional distinction between those arts which are regarded as best permitting a display of manly virtue from the other ones, which are more ‘technical.’) Needless to say Homer fails miserably on all three counts: there was no war that was conducted under his command or at least by his counsel; there was no city which received good laws and a good government from Homer as Sparta did from Lycurgus and Athens from Solon; in the field of education he left no trace, as opposed to Pythagoras and even sophists like Protagoras and Prodicus (cf. 599c-600d).

One can see that, even if it is formulated in a rather different way, the argument comes down to the same as that of the Ion, for it is

50. This sort of distinction is to be found, in a relevant context, in Strabo’s Geography, I 2, § 5 (end), where arts like that of the carpenter are dismissed in favour of agriculture, rhetoric and strategy. (I come back to it in Part III, ch. 34).
established that the poet does not have the competences he is supposed to have. But this argument is manifestly paradoxical, not to say misguided. Its being paradoxical becomes particularly obvious when it is asserted that a poet like Homer, if he possessed competence in some field, would have preferred 'to try to leave as memorials of himself works many and fair', and, instead of being the author of encomiums (i.e., instead of celebrating others for the works or deeds done by them), he would have preferred to be the person praised (cf. 599b). Yes, but if all good poets give up writing encomia for others because they want themselves to be praised for their 'works many and fair', who will write encomia? It should also be recalled that this passage goes against the traditional view (apparently accepted by Plato himself in *Symposium* 209d) that the poets, in conferring immortal fame to other people, acquire immortal fame themselves.

If the request the passage implies were justified, it would mean the poets should have admitted that they had mistaken their job in life, dedicating themselves to a completely worthless activity, instead of dedicating themselves to one of the activities of which they were offring an imitation. Apart from the fact that it is rather restrictively unfair to suppose that the imitation done by poets concerns only or primarily activities regulated by some craft, this sort of request is not substantially different from propounding the pure and simple abolition of imitative poetry (or imitative art in general), because it does not produce reality instead of simply re-producing it.

There are interpreters who tried to show that Plato is not himself really committed to the argument he puts forward. Since however the parallel with painting is introduced to a large extent precisely to establish the conclusion he reaches by this argument, and since the argument remains essentially the same as that found in the *Ion*, it is difficult to accept this sort of proposal. However before taking a closer look at it (see below, Part III, ch. 31), I assume that the argument is convincing in Plato's eyes and come to the obvious question: what has gone wrong?

The first thing to observe is that Plato makes no use of the distinction between contents ('the things to be said') and expression ('how they are to be said'). Some of the formulations he uses ('the things they seem to speak well about to the many', 599a4; 'a mere imitator of a physician's talk' [or 'of medical discourses'], 599c2) put some accent on expression, but this aspect is not developed, and attention is limited to contents. But of course if it is maintained that

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52. This devaluation is explicit in 602b, in saying that the imitator has no knowledge worth mentioning of the things he imitates, but imitation is a sort of play (pæidía) not to be taken seriously, and comes back in later dialogues, as we have seen.
the poet is imitating the doctor not just in his parlance and in other traits which characterise him as a doctor but in what makes him a person who is able to cure an illness, it is inevitable that he be judged a total failure. But why should he be judged from the point of view of the competence which is possessed by a physician, disregarding the fact that he is a poet? Of course if Homer actually claimed to be a good doctor and a good general and so forth, he would have to be judged in this way, but this would mean he would not be judged any more as a poet. Anyhow, not one line from his poems is quoted to show he made those claims.

Aristotle in his Poetics gets rid of this false problem by presenting drama as a representation of people who act and interact. The way they act and speak is taken as an expression of their characters, and the request is that their representation, in what they say and do, be done with verisimilitude (cf. Poet.15). There is no talk on his part of people who have a certain competence and have to be judged on this basis. He gets rid of this false problem also in another way, by insisting on the plot, i.e. on the fact that what is told or put on the scene is a certain concatenation of events. If at some stage a general is introduced (e.g. Agamemnon in the Iliad) a doctor, it is because this is required by the story told or represented, and not because he is actually expected to be the general or the doctor, giving orders to an army (there is no real army) or giving prescriptions to a patient (there is no real patient). To isolate these figures from the roles they play in the whole story is artificial, just as it is artificial to ask what sort of specific competence is required from them to be a real general or a real doctor. For Aristotle this is so obvious that he does not even dedicate any lines to explicitly dismiss Plato’s position, though he may have done so in his lost dialogue On poets. It is quite obvious to us as well. The surprising thing is that Plato reaches the opposite conclusion. But we should also admit the rather obvious fact that he, being a human being, was fallible, and not try to save him from error at all costs. Scholars often make appeal to what is called the principle of charity, but beyond certain reasonable limits this just becomes apologetics.

24. Embellishments

Here is the next step. The passage considered above (in chs.17 and 21) of Gorgias 502c reveals Plato’s attitude to poetry through the suggestion it contains that in the case of a poem we can separate its discourses (logos), in fact its contents, from tune (melos) and rhythm and metre (what remains is demagogic rhetoric, but this is not the point now). The possibility of accomplishing this separation is in fact taken for granted in the treatment given to poetry (as part
of music) in Republic II-III, for, as we have seen, he first examines discourses, thus their content, from the point of view of their being true or false, then he touches upon the topic of tune, rhythm and so forth, thus considers the (strictly) musical side of poetry. This part follows the distinction just discussed between logos and lexis, and in fact a connection is established between the way of speaking (tropos tes lexeos) of a person and the music that should accompany it.

It is admitted that the words used can receive a proper musical accompaniment, that is to say that harmony and rhythm can fit the style or way of speaking of a person. This is the possibility that is prospected by Plato in III, 397b ff. There however he thinks of harmony and rhythm which fit the styles that are to be admitted in the well-governed city described in the work. But this is a point that can easily be generalized, so that all possible varieties of harmony and rhythm fit all possible varieties in style. The expectation in this part is in any case that music will be in accordance with the words. But music has an effect of its own, which can give an appearance of beauty to what, from the point of view of contents, does not possess genuine beauty. The possibility, indeed the actuality (for he is referring to an existing situation), of a discrepancy between the words of poetry and the music which accompanies it is prospected into some detail in Laws II, 669-670.

In this passage an illustration is given of the situation in which harmony and rhythm are not made to fit the style. This is regarded there as a situation of confusion and a mistake, but evidently this can be obtained intentionally. It is said that the Muses would never make the mistake of 'composing the speech of men to a musical idiom suitable for women', or the mistake 'of fitting rhythms appropriate to the portrayal of slaves and slave-like people to the tune and bodily movements used to represent free men'. The fact that this confusion quite often takes place is suggested in that same passage, where the fact that musical instruments be played on their own, without singers, is also deplored. While the discordance thus registered consists in a failure in the fitting together of music (harmony and rhythm) and style, it is possible to have it extended to other aspects of the discourse, especially to those which have more to do with contents. And it is possible to suppose that some deception be at work, more or less intentionally, in an operation that was meant to give a beautiful dressing to a content that is deprived of beauty.

The effect that can be obtained in this way is of embellishment of something not having a beauty of its own. This is noticed in Republic X, where it is observed that, through the adornment of rhythm, metre and harmony, the poets exercise a mighty spell (megale kelesis601b) so as to give the impression of having knowledge of the arts which, in their imitation of them, they dress in their colours (epichnmatizin, 601A), when in fact their only ability
concerns imitation. Once the adornment is taken away nothing of substance remains, just as many faces of young people lose their attraction when the bloom of youth abandons them (cf. 601a-b). The parallel with painting is implied in the very use of the word "colours" (chrmata) to suggest the idea of adornment (cf. 601a4 and b2.55). In fact it is admitted that the deception is obtained by cosmetic devices such as providing a dress similar to that provided by the painter by means of nice colours and shapes (cf. 600e-601a, where there is a reference to those who contemplate the picture produced by the painter on the basis of its colours and shapes). The poem reduced to its bare contents (not just to prose, though this is part of the process) corresponds to a picture in its bare outline; the 'cosmetic' addition of rhythm, metre and harmony (what are called "the colours of music") correspond to colours and shapes in the picture - intending shapes that go beyond the bare outline. (It is the same sort of distinction that Aristotle seems to have in mind in Poetics 6, 1450a39 ff., though he introduces it there in order to propound a quite different analogy than that propounded by Plato: the bare outline corresponds to the plot of a tragedy, the colours to the characters. A parallel for the idea of a 'cosmetic' addition is to be found on the other hand in Rhetoric III 1, 1404a20 ff., where a poetic style like that adopted by Gorgias is said to mask a weakness in contents and, in Aristotle's own time, to impress only those who are defective in education.) To complete this survey, one can notice that what he says of cosmetics (kommotike) in the Gorgias, treating it as a pseudo-art which is a conflation of gymnastics, is quite similar to what he says of poetry here: it is deceptive, and it obtains its deception by means of shapes or figures (schemata) and by means of colours (chrmata) and also with the help of smoothing and dressing (cfr. 465b). It is significant that in this passage the deceptive embellishment that is obtained by means of colours and so forth is called an 'extraneous beauty' (alotriton kallos), in contrast to the proper beauty (oiketion kallos) that is obtained with the practical gymnastics, for the distinction could easily have been used in the passage of Republic X as well (the motive of the counterfeit decorum [kibdelos euchemosune] which is introduced in II, 366b is partly similar). Given that Plato admits there is some affinity between cosmetics as a pseudo-art concerning the body and rhetoric as a pseudo-art concerning the soul - though in that part of the dialogue it is rather cookery that is said to be similar to rhetoric - one has to expect that rhetoric be considered as having a similar effect.

55 The second passage is translated as follows by Murray: "for when the works of the poets are stripped of the colours of music and spoken alone by themselves, I think you know how they appear".
In fact, concerning the 'mighty spell' that is said to be exercised by poetry, a parallel, rather extreme version of it is applied to rhetoric in the *Euthydemus*, where it is said there are two forms of the art of enchantment, one of which consists in the bewitching of wild animals and pests like snakes, poisonous spiders and scorpions, while the other consists in the bewitching and calming down of judges and members of assemblies and other such folk (cf. 289c-290a). It is manifest that the intent here is to render ridiculous an art which is said to be divine and sublime. But the conviction underlying it, that rhetoric can exercise a strong spell on the orator’s audience, is a serious one. Furthermore, in the *Phaedrus* (from 266c to 269c), the artifices that are attributed to rhetoric, such as words and figures of speech chosen to effect, are presumably taken as devices not too dissimilar from shapes and colours and as contributing to make of rhetoric a sort of *psychagogia* (as it is called in 261a)\(^{54}\). The parallel itself has the effect of showing that the poet is similar to the sophist or to the rhetorician in the sort of deception he produces in his audience, thus taking up an association which was already present in the *Gorgias*, in the passage to which reference was made at the beginning (cf. 502a-e)\(^{55}\).

As to the deception that is produced by the sophist, there is a parallel with the deception that is produced by the poet in making people believe he is wise in all things (see above, ch. 23). We find that in the *Sophist* an explanation is given as to why the sophists are able to present themselves as the wisest of all men (the intention of offering it is expressed in 233a-b). The explanation is that, by means of words, the sophists produce phantoms (*phantasmata*) and images (*eidos*) in a way that is wholly similar to the production of imitations (*mimetata*) and ‘homonyms’ of existing things which is accomplished by painting and similar mimetic arts (there is explicit mention of *to mimetikon, scil. eidos*, said to be a particularly ‘artistic’ [*technikoteron*] *eidos* of *paidia*, in 234b). This ‘mimetic’ ability of his renders the sophist a sort of magician (*goes*) whose words cast a spell (*goeteuing*) on the people who hear them (cf. esp. 234c-235a). The whole passage, even in such details as mak-

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\(^{54}\) Notice that elsewhere this ‘psychagogic’ effect is attributed to poetry in general (or to some genre of poetry like tragedy), cf. Plato (?), *Minos*, 321a; Aristotle, *Poetics* 6.1450a33-34; Philemon, *On Poems* I, 109 and passim; Eratosthenes according to Strabo, *Geography* 11, 10; Polybius, II 56, 11 (the last two passages are quoted above, Part I, ch. 15 [p. 186]). One can suspect that Plato is extending to rhetoric a function that was usually regarded as belonging to poetry.

\(^{55}\) One may notice that a polemic against rhetoric of the encomiastic genre, and especially against its Gorgiasnic version, which offers a showing of outward beauty and variety without inner truth, is to be found in the comments Socrates makes in *Symposium* 198b-199b, on the discourse of Agathon and, more generally, on the discourses that preceded his.
ing recourse to the example of the reproduction of things by means of a mirror, is very close to what we find in Republic X, as already pointed out by scholars.

25. Performance and inspiration

Though Plato in his treatment of poetry in Republic X insists on the parallel between it and painting, at some stage he abandons it. This happens when he comes to talk of what he calls "the gravest charge against poetry" (cf. 605c). He had admitted that the parallel with painting concerns not only the (imitative) objects produced but also the fact that they (through their products) consort with the inferior part of the soul, nourishing and strengthening it so as to impair reason (cf. 605a-c). Yet, at least in so far as the parallel with painting remains effective, this is more a matter of deception than of strong emotional involvement (though the deception cannot take place without some emotional involvement, as is suggested by the idea that some sort of sorcery is enacted by people like the sophist, cf. Sophist 254c-255a). A strong emotional involvement must be obtained in some other way, and for this the parallel with painting is not helpful, for a picture does not normally have this effect.

In this part of the treatment of Republic X (that is from 605c to 607a) he gives a description of the emotional involvement which is obtained through poetry, and through drama in particular, saying how poetry can obtain this result through its contents. He does not dwell on the aspect of performance, since he talks of the effect of what the poet represents without referring to the role played by actors and rhapsodes, but this is taken for granted. This happens for instance when he says, in 605c-d, that "the best of us", when hearing a passage of Homer or one of the tragedians "in which he imitates some hero who is in grief and is delivering a long oration in his lamentations, or is singing and beating his breast", delight in giving way to sympathy (xumpaschones): some performance, by an actor or a rhapsode, is involved, for what is done is 'hearing', not reading. The passage is significant also because it contains the suggestion that some 'sympathy' is aroused, i.e. that the audience shares the feelings of the person who is represented.

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56. E.g. by A. Dies in his notes to the French "Bude" ed. and transl. of the Sophist and in his introductory Notice, p. 271.
57. On this point one may compare the observations by Nehamas, Imutation and Poetry, cit., pp. 267-68, though, as already remarked (above, ch. 14), from this distinction he draws conclusions that are not acceptable. (See also below, Part III, ch. 28, for Aristotle's attitude to this matter.)
58. For a presentation of this passage cf. above, Part I, ch. 12 (esp. pp. 175-176).
Drama and epic poetry cannot exercise their effect in full without being performed: a drama by actors on the scene, an epic poem by a rhapsode (high on the tribune [bema]), in front of an audience. It is sufficiently clear from various of the passages we have already met that Plato has in mind a performance in public. And "live performance was the norm in Plato's culture", as rightly pointed out by Ferrari (Plato and Poetry, cit., p. 92). In a number of passages, such as that now referred to of Republic X, Plato regards it as obvious that poetry exercises a strong effect on the audience by means of the proper performance, but does not show in detail how this effect is exercised. It is in the Ion that some description is given of this process.

In this dialogue Ion himself suggests that, when reciting words that excite compassion, he himself is moved to tears, and when reciting words that are fearful, he himself is induced to feel fear (cf. 535c). In the sequel he suggests (in replying to a question by Socrates) that, if he is successful in his performance, the same passions are felt by the audience (cf. 535d-e), i.e. the 'sympathy' is aroused of which there is talk in the passage of Republic X. The point of departure of this process is constituted, however, by the poet, as Socrates had already stated in precedence (cf. 533c ff.). The poets, as composers of verses, are under the inspiration of some divinity, thus are out of their mind, in a condition of possession or ecstasy comparable to that of the oracles-tellers (for this parallel cf. 534b7 ff. and c7 ff.). Another parallel that is drawn there is with the Corybantes and the Bacchants, who use to participate in rites danced in a frenzy (cf. 533e-534a). The poets, on this account, do not make their compositions on their own - thus do not possess a techne -, but are the instruments of the god who is the one who talks, and talks to us through them (cf. 534c-e, esp. 534d3-4: bo theos autos estin bo legon, dia touton de phthegetai pros bemas). Their beautiful poems then are not really human work but divine things made through the intervention of the gods, the poets being only the 'interpreters' of the gods (534e3-5). Still, they are the first link in a chain, which leads to the audience. And all the links in this chain are put in motion by a divinity, for all the people involved are under her inspiration (cf. 533d ff.)

59. That rhapsodes like Ion are in a condition of dependence on a certain poet (Homer in his case) and are themselves inspired by a divinity is restated a little later (cf. 536a ff.). This account implies that the audience, the last link in this chain, are also set in motion by a divinity. In fact this point is made explicitly in 535e ff., where it is admitted that the rhapsodes and the actors constitute the main intermediate link, and that other people, such as

59. Notice that of Ion himself it is said that a divine power moves him, 533d3; and of 'the others' - others with respect to 'enivined' poets - it is said that, through them, they are 'made enthusiasts', 533e4-5.

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singers and dancers, play some role. (That all these are assistants of the poets is suggested in Republic 575b60.) The conclusion of this part of the Ion is ambivalent, for Ion rejects the idea that he is inspired, but apparently does so only in connection with his praising Homer or talking about him, not otherwise (cf. 536d; he had shown his approval in 535a-c)61.

In a culture in which great importance is given to performance, where many people get involved in it, a neat distinction between the position of the performer and that of the public or audience may be difficult to draw. The person who takes part in a choir is also watching the performance to which he is contributing, even if from a different point of view than the audience (in the narrow sense). This is the sort of performance which Plato expressly regards as the most proper for young people in the Laws, but which he must also have in mind for his guardians in the Republic, when he talks of that part of their education which consists in performance (this happens especially in III, 594c ff.; an allusion to choral dances is to be found in 412b). What he admits in this connection is that, in enacting their performance, they imitate the characters (etbe) of other people, and his request is that these should be good people (cf. Laws II, 655d ff. and Republic III, 395c-d and 396c-e). As one can see, this sort of operation involves establishing some sort of relationship with people who are different from themselves, since these are to be imitated. This situation is supposed not to be substantially different from getting familiar, in ordinary frequentation, either with good or with bad people, likening oneself to the character of either of them (this is suggested rather clearly in Laws II, 665b, but an allusion to the effect that our whole environment has on us is to be found in Republic III, 401b-c). But it would seem that, if he believes that attending representations such as dramas has a corrupting effect on our soul, it is because he thinks that being in the position of the audience who merely assist and being in the position of the performer does not make a great difference. What we find in the Ion favours this conclusion, for there some sort of continuity between the performer and the audience is established, with the suggestion that the frenzy with which the performer is taken is transmitted by him to the audience.

Some scholars who noticed that Plato adopts this sort of approach were induced to drawing the conclusion that the identi-

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60. This passage was quoted above, Part I, ch. 6 (p. 142).
61. This distinction tends to be overlooked by the scholars who, in discussing this passage, take it as a general rejection of inspiration. E.g. it is overlooked by E.N. Tigrstedt, Plato's Idea of Poetical Inspiration, "Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum", Societas Scientiarum Fennica, vol. 42, n. 2, Helsinki 1969, pp. 16 and 27. (I share his view that the main topic of the Ion is the nature of poetical inspiration, not specifically the role of the rhapsode, but with the addition that there is an interest in all the 'links of the chain'.)
ification ("making themselves like") which is admitted for the guardians when they are said to 'imitate' the characters of good men is, in his view, to be extended to the reaction of the audience. Hence they are also induced to talk of 'identification' in this connection. (One scholar who does so is G.R.F. Ferrari in his article Plato and Poetry, from which some passages will be quoted below, in the conclusive chapter.) However, there are reasons to resist this conclusion. In the first place, I do not think that this aspect of identification is so central even in the case of the 'imitation' which is attributed to the guardians or to other young people in the passages quoted above (on this point cf. below, Part III, ch. 26 on mimesis). In the second place, it is probably reductive to suppose that Plato wants to eliminate any difference between the position of the performer and that of the (pure) audience, for there is no suggestion that they also are enacting some active imitation as happens in the case of the guardians. In the third place, performance itself is not a simple condition or process, but consists in at least two different conditions or processes, so that, even if one supposes that the public is involved in one of them, one has not to conclude that they are involved in both of them.

One dimension of performance consists in imitation (mimesis). This is treated expressly by Plato, in the Sophist, as a type of production (poiesis) (cf. below, Part III, ch. 26). That a production is going on in composing a drama or in painting a picture is sufficiently obvious. It is less obvious that this is going on in the cases in which the process in question is that of 'making oneself like', but I shall try to offer some reasons why Plato is inclined to extend the paradigm of painting to this sort of situation as well. In any case, whatever the explanation, it seems that Plato is not willing to separate this situation from that involved in the poet's producing his work, for he associates them in Republic III, 392c ff. (he first deals with the poet's 'imitating' and then passes to the guardians' 'imitating'). This dimension of performance must be kept distinct from what may be called its contemplative dimension.

In the case of the audience what Plato suggests is precisely that each of its members is contemplating extraneous sufferings (allotria pathe theoroun, Republic X, 606b1). In this way he could be telling us that the attitude of the performer and that of the audience are different (it is the conclusion that Halliwell tends to draw). But in fact a form a contemplation is supposed to be exercised by the performer as well. This comes out with sufficient clarity in a passage of the Ion, even if in it there is no explicit talk of contemplation. The

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62 One scholar who resists that conclusion by stressing the difference in position between the performer and the audience is Halliwell, The Aesthetics of Mimesis, cit., pp. 76 ff. However the difference he stresses is in part to be brought back to the difference I point out in what follows.
suggestion is made (by Socrates) that a rhapsode like his interlocutor Ion, when he recites verses of Homer such as those in which Odysseus reveals himself to the suitors or in which Achilles rushes at Hector is in some way 'out of himself', because his soul, inspired, supposes that he is 'in the midst of the doings (para tois pragmatis) he is describing in Ithaca or in Troy or in some other place (535b). One must presume that Plato, in this passage, is talking of a contemplation that is accomplished not only by the rhapsode but also by the poet (since they are both said to be inspired) and which precedes the 'imitation' that (according to this account) is done by the poet of what he has contemplated. It can be noticed in fact that it is said of the poet (in 534b5-6) that he is 'unable to create until he becomes inspired (enteos) and 'out of his mind' (ekphron) and with his mind no longer in him'. As Murray points out (in Plato on Poetry, cit., p. 118, but without stressing this implication), "a corollary of being filled with the god … is that the poet's own mind is elsewhere". One can equally presume, because of the continuity that is established between poet, rhapsode and the audience, that the people in the audience who are also responsive to the performance of the rhapsode are transported by their imagination to the place in which the events told take place.

The image that is thus given of the soul of the poet is not to be found, in this precise form, among the poets themselves, unless Pindar's verses, quoted by Plato in Theaetetus, 175e13, about the soul's taking wings to go beyond the sky and beneath the earth, are aimed at the poet. Yet something similar is to be found in some passages by Aristophanes. In his Acharnians there is a passage in which Euripides' servant presents the poet as being both 'inside' and not 'inside' his house: he himself is inside, since he is there composing a tragedy, but his mind (nous) is outside, going around to collect verses (cf. vv. 395-400). Similarly in Birds, vv. 1373 ff., the poet Cinesias sings: "I fly up to Olympus on light wings; I fly from one path of song to another", and then expresses his wish to become a bird, a melodious nightingale. And in Peace, vv. 827 ff., there is an exchange between two people, in which one asks the other whether, when he was up there in the clouds, he could see anyone else going around there, the reply being: "No, except for two or three dithyrambic poets flitting about collecting preludes". Furthermore, the poet is compared to an eagle by Pindar in more than one passage (cf. Nemean III, vv. 80-81; V, vv. 20 ff.; Olympian II, v. 88). The image of the poet given in the Ion, as a 'light thing, winged and sacred' (cf. 53-ib), is clearly along the same lines, as it is the image of him flying like a bee and collecting honey from the gardens of the Muses (ibid.).

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These few words (fr. 292 Snell), only quoted by Plato, come from a lost poem, so the context is unknown.
What is said of the rhapsode and of those in the audience who respond to his performance should not mean that they are not aware that what is represented is fiction. Ion is supposed to be aware of what is happening, for he confesses that if he does not pay close attention to the reaction of his audience but, instead of making them cry, makes them laugh, the result will be that he himself will cry for money lost (cf. 535e). Socrates in his turn had already pointed out that the rhapsode is induced to being afraid himself in telling something fearful without anything fearful going on in reality (he is not afraid of his audience, cf. 535d). In fact, there is never any serious suggestion by Plato that the audience reacts with emotional involvement to what is told or represented because it confuses this with reality. It is only children and fools who can fall into this mistake in the case of a painting (cf. Republic X, 598c), where the error is perhaps easier than in the case of drama. But what is said of the rhapsode and of the public must be true of the poet as well: his ‘flying’ with his imagination need not exclude his consciousness in what he does.

This all brings us to the issue of inspiration. One gets the impression that, when Plato talks of inspiration in the Ion, he has two different views in mind. One of these views is suggested by the parallel with the oracle-teller (mantis) which is propounded (implicitly) in 534c-e, where it is said that the poets are used by the god as his servants or ministers, just as oracle-tellers and divine prophets are used by him and that it is the god himself who talks through them, using them as intermediaries or as ‘interpreters’. On this account the poet does not tell what he has seen himself, or that of which he has had some direct experience, but is the mouthpiece of the god (this passage was already considered above). The other view is that of 535b, where the poet is ‘out of himself’ – and brought to this condition by his ‘enthusiasm’ (thus, it would seem, because of some divine intervention) – not because ‘invaded’ or ‘possessed’ by a god, in the way in which an oracle-teller like the Pythia is possessed, but because he travels with his mind to the place where events happened in the distant past. In this way the poet communicates what he has seen, and what he has seen by divine intervention, but does not directly communicate what the divinity tells him to communicate, using him as a mere instrument or intermediary.

The same ambiguity is probably to be found in Phaedrus, 245a, for on the one hand there is insistence on possession (Bacchic frenzy etc.) and on the parallel between the poet and the oracle-teller, on the other hand the idea that by ‘glorifying the countless deeds of the past it [scil. the inspired mania of the poet] educates the coming generations’ seems to be based on the admission that the poet had a way to grasp those countless deeds he glorifies. (On the first point the Phaedrus takes up the description given in the Ion.
of the divine inspiration of the poet, even using identical or similar words or images, e.g. ‘possession’ [katokocbol] and ‘bacchic frenzy’ - the former word appears in Ion, 556c2.)

Laws III, 681e-682a is more definitely in the second line. It belongs to the historical part of the work, and concerns mainly what Homer has to say about Troy. In praising certain verses for being told ‘according to the god and according to nature’, he adds that ‘the poets as a class (genos) are divinely gifted and are inspired when they sing, so that with the help of the Graces and the Muses they are constantly in touch with numenous events as they really happen (polion ton kat'aletheian gignomenon)’ (682a2-5). In thus suggesting that the poet narrates many events such as they really happened, or according to the truth, because he somehow got in touch with them the passage seems to imply some familiarity on his part with those events.

This passage would seem to be quite different in tenour from another one in the work which also concerns the inspiration of the poets. This other passage was already referred to above (ch. 22) for the fact that it suggests (though not without some ambiguity) that the poet talks for himself and is thus obliged to contradict himself. I now quote it in full (the speech is fictionally put in the mouth of poets): “There is an ancient story, legislator, which we poets never tire of telling and which all laymen confirm, to the effect that when a poet takes his seat on the tripod of the Muse, he cannot control his thoughts64. He’s like a fountain where the water is allowed to gush forth unchecked. His techne is that of mimesis, and so he is obliged, when he represents people with contrasting characters, to contradict himself, and he doesn’t know which of the opposing speeches contains the truth. But for the legislator, this is impossible: he must not let his laws say two different things on the same subject; his rule has to be ‘one topic, one doctrine’65. (IV, 719c1-d3, Saunders’ transl. modified) Here there is again a parallel between the poet and the oracle-teller, as the image of him taking his seat on the tripod and the idea that a flux of words goes through him clearly suggest.

Yet even in the passage now quoted of Laws IV there may be some ambiguity. To present the poet as an inspired mantis is hard to reconcile with the admission that he possesses the techne of mimesis, for mantiké of the inspired type is traditionally supposed to exclude techne – and this also seems to be Plato’s own position. (In the case in fact of divination he makes a distinction between mantiké and oionistiké, by admitting that the former is inspired while the latter involves the use of intelligence, cf. Phaedrus, 244c-e. And in Timaeus, 71e, there is the suggestion that mantiké is active when

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64 Or: he is out of his mind. enunciate one discourse about one thing.
65 More ad litteram: he must always enunciate one discourse about one thing.
phronesis is out of play, while logismós is needed when it is a matter of interpreting what the mantis has said.) It is rather by admitting that the poet, in doing his mimesis, puts himself imaginatively in the place of each of his personages, that one can reconcile the suggestion that he makes use of his techne with the suggestion that he is in some way ‘out of his mind’, since this feat of imagination requires an abandonment of his own self. For instance Homer is not the person Homer any more, but for a while imagines himself to be Chryses and then, for another while, imagines himself to be Agamemnon. This explains why he may ‘represent people with contrasting characters’ and, as a consequence, ‘he is obliged to contradict himself’ (in so far of course as he identifies himself with each of the personages he represents). It may be significant that Aristotle, in the passage of Poetics 17 (considered below) in which he presents the poet as being ‘out of his mind’, does so in connection with the representation of the personages (he remarks that the most convincing writers will be those who can actually make themselves feel the relevant emotions: agitation and rage will be most vividly reproduced by one who is himself agitated or feeling rage).

The two views that I am illustrating have different consequences. One line, that of extraordinary familiarity with events in the distant past, limits the talent of the poet to the telling of those events and leaves open the possibility that he misrepresents some of them (or some persons like the heroes) because of his lack of understanding. If the poet tells of other things, such as the genealogy of the gods and their relationship, he goes beyond his powers, and offers representations that are to be regarded as definitely false. Thus a limitation of poetry is pointed out in the Phaedrus when it said that ‘none of the poets here celebrated or will celebrate in a worthy manner the hyperouranios topos’ (cf. 247c). This account then is compatible with much of what Plato says on these matters, though not with the suggestion of Republic II that the poets’ tales are on the whole false though containing some truth, for (as was pointed out above, ch. 20) this implies that they are fiction. What is stated in the passage of Timaeus, 19d-e (quoted in ch. 21), can give the impression that the poets encounter limits even from this point of view, but the passage contains no mention of inspiration and may concern a type of historical events that is not of interest to them.

The other line, that of treating the poet like the oracle-teller, makes it very hard to reconcile in any way what he says of the poets in these contexts and what he says of them elsewhere, for the oracle-teller, as the mere mouthpiece of a god, has no limitations in the field of events and people (including gods) he talks about and cannot tell any falsity, for the gods (as is argued expressly in Republic II end, and as is stated also in Apology, 21b in connection with oracle-telling) cannot say anything false. This contradiction is particularly
applicable to the passage of Laws IV, 719c-d, for here the poet, in spite of his being inspired, is induced to say contrary things, which admittedly cannot all be true (but the passage, we have seen, is probably not without some ambiguity). In Phaedrus, 245a, the *mania* that comes from the Muses is kept distinct from *techne*, but it seems to be admitted that the poet will need both: it is excluded that *techne* be enough to make someone a good poet, but presumably also *mania* alone, without *techne*, is not enough either.

The supposition that is made is always that, when the poet (as he is described in Ion, 535b) imagines himself to be 'in the midst of the doings he is describing in Ithaca', thus imagines himself to be (at least for some time) Odysseus, he must be in some way 'out of his mind', for, with his imagination, he abandons the condition in which he actually finds himself and even forgets about himself. Now, the supposition that he is in some way 'out of his mind' leads to the idea that the parallel between the poet and the *mantis* works even on this account of the working of the poet, when in fact this is not so. The condition of the inspired *mantis* is rather the condition of the person who is pervaded or even possessed by a god who talks through him, according to the description that is also given in the *Ion* (cf. 534c-e). One may suppose that the poet who makes his 'flights of imagination' needs some help from a god (or from the Muses) to be able to do that in a successful way – especially when the events he describes are in a distant past or wholly out of human reach. Yet this is not the condition of being possessed by a god, and does not exclude some form of intellectual lucidity which permits the poet to exercise his mimetic art.

It is likely, then, that there was some indistinctness between these two models of the working of the poet (favoured, as just stressed, by the idea that in any case the poet is 'out of his mind') and that Plato passes from the one to the other. When he is concerned with pointing out that the poet does not possess a genuine *techne* but works in an irrational way, by some sort of inspiration, it is the model of the poet who is similar to the *mantis* which prevails. When, on the other hand, he is willing to admit that the poet possesses a *techne*, even if it is only an imitative one, and thus works by consciously pursuing a certain result, it is the other model which prevails, that of the poet who has flights of imagination. Inspiration may give way to *techne* when it comes to composing a poem, but this, again, is more compatible with the admission that the poet imagines himself to be present at the events which he narrates, than with the admission that he, like an oracle-teller, is out of his mind when telling them, for only in the first case telling them can be regarded as a distinct process, susceptible to rational control.

It would seem that Aristotle himself embraces this sort of account, for at the beginning of Poetics 17 he regards as the best
poet the one who has what he narrates most clearly in front of his eyes, as if he found himself in the midst of the doings themselves (par’autois gignomenos tois prattomenois). In what follows he adds that the poet is most persuasive when he finds some way of arousing in himself the passions he is representing, with the conclusion that ‘poetry belongs to a gifted man (euphues) or to one affected by foolishness (manikós), for those of the first kind are highly responsive (euplastoi) and those of the second kind are out of their mind (ekstatikós). It is not difficult to see that in this passage Aristotle is taking up Platonic motifs, favouring the position just prospected over the other (this being a confirmation of the fact that it constitutes a legitimate interpretation). Some scholars resist the reading now adopted of the Aristotelian passage, adopting (on the basis of an emendation of the text) the following one: ‘poetry belongs to a gifted man rather than to one affected by foolishness’, on the assumption (that, we shall see immediately, can be extended to Plato himself) that he cannot have approved such a position. Yet we need not take manikós in the strong sense of being afflicted by madness as an illness. Aristotle seems to regard the difference between manikós and being euphues as one of degree (cf. Rhetoric II 15, 1390b27-31), and the two conditions are associated (as due to melancholia) in the pseudoaristotelian Problems XXX 1 on those who are ‘melancholics’, poets being expressly included in the list (with the mention of one who was ekstatikós). Finally, it has to be said that the fact that difficulties arise in connection with inspiration is not sufficient proof that the doctrine itself is not taken seriously by Plato. However most scholars, in recent times, and especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, going against ancient tradition, do not believe that the doctrine of divine inspiration is to be taken seriously. There is some justification for this

66. Cf e.g. D.A. Russell, Criticism in Antiquity, London 1981, pp. 77-79, who misunderstands the passage in supposing that, without correction of the text, it suggests that the poet is like a prophet. S. Halliwell, The Poetics of Aristotle, a translation and commentary, London 1987, in his commentary to the passage (pp. 145 ff.). These and other scholars fail to notice that in Rhetoric III 7, 1408b17-19, poetry is presented (without any reservation) as entwined (euthemos) and, implicitly (by contrast with rhetoric), as inspired.

67. That there are people (with explicit mention of the ‘melancholics’) who are successful by some sort of divine inspiration is admitted by Aristotle also in Eudemian Ethics VIII 2 (esp. 1248a29 ff.).

68. Cf e.g. Russell again, op. cit., pp. 74-76. Janaway, op. cit., pp. 162-65, and the Phaedrus (his suggestion that the passage just contains a celebratory and conventional invocation of the Muses is not convincing) (38c. C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. IV, Cambridge 1975, pp. 204-42, on the Ion. P. Woodruff, “What could go wrong with inspiration? Why Plato’s poets fail”, in Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts, ed. by J. Moravcsik and P. Témenos, Totowa 1982, [pp. 137-150] p. 150. On the other hand I believe that the account of poetic creativity given in Symposium, 209a-c, is not to be taken seriously, but is based on the acceptance of conventional views about the poets (a positive evaluation of this passage is given by E. Assis, Plato on
negative conclusion, for there is no doubt that Plato’s presentation of the poet as an inspired man, especially in the Ion, is often ironical, and ironical in a dismissive way. This irony is applied directly to the rhapsode Ion, who appears as a rather silly person in the whole dialogue, but the connection between the rhapsode and the poet has the consequence that this is applied to him as well. Thus the story of Tynnichus, the ‘worst of poets’, who once in his life produced a lyric whose superb quality and divine origin is vouched for by the fact that everyone is singing it, does not manifestly put poets in a good light. It is in any case hard to believe that the poet is in direct touch with the divinity and, at the same time, is the source of poems which contain falsities and inconsistencies of which he himself has no understanding. Furthermore, the presentation of the poet as a man possessed by a divinity in the manner of a seer does not respond to the previous tradition, and Plato cannot be wholly unaware that his claims to the contrary were without foundation.

Yet, while one may have doubts about Plato’s intentions in the Ion, this doctrine was already propounded in the Apology without any apparent ironical intent, and the parallel between the various forms of mania introduced in the Phaedrus (cf. 244d ff. and 265a-b for a recapitulation) makes it difficult to believe that only one of these forms, the philosophical one, is to be appreciated. It is true that in the context of the passage of the Phaedrus he seems to be making concessions to popular or traditional religion which elsewhere, when he deals declaredly with theologia, he would be unwilling to make, but this is not the only passage in his dialogues in which this happens. The frequent parallel between the poet and the oracle-teller or soothsayer – to be found also in Meno, 99c-d – confirms the seriousness of the doctrine, for the value of oracle-telling is never questioned by Plato, and finds justification in the Timaeus. Certainly, the ‘being out of mind’ of the poet can be taken in two different ways, as I illustrated above, and only one of these two ways justifies a close parallel with the seer. (This fact does not seem to have been sufficiently recognised by the scholars who have treated this matter.) Plato himself however does not show sufficient aware-

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poetic creativity, in The Cambridge Companion to Plato, ed. by R. Kraut, Cambridge 1992, pp. 338-64, esp. pp. 344-47, but she is obliged to admit that this position is rejected in the Republic and to conjecture that the paradigm in that dialogue is not theatrical poetry but love poetry).


ness of the ambivalence underlying his treatment, and probably thought he was forcing to a caricatural extreme the commonly accepted belief in poetical inspiration. His purpose in doing so was to demolish the claim that the poets possess wisdom, for this is incompatible with their being ‘out of their minds’. But he did not need to exclude that the common belief in poetical inspiration had some ground, certainly in a way that was too mysterious to be susceptible of much clarification. It belonged more to the sphere of myths and allegories than to that of rational explanation. Thus I come to a conclusion which is also reached by Tigerstedt (though he also contemplates the more negative alternative that is adopted by other scholars), when he expresses himself with the following words: “That to Plato poetical inspiration is a myth, does therefore not necessarily imply that he regards it as a mere fiction. It does not exclude the possibility of interpreting statements about inspiration as an – admittedly ambiguous and ironical – acceptance of the traditional view of poetry as something more than a purely human phenomenon. But neither does it irrefutably compel us to interpret them in this way.” (Plato's idea of poetical inspiration, cit., pp. 66-67).*

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*I give the following list of errata to be found in Part I:
notes 16 and 17 to be inverted
note 24 (at p. 159): three dots instead of the sigma
p. 150, line 22 instead of “raised” “aroused”
p. 164 end of line 10 insert “in which”
p. 169, line 12 cancel two lines (till Politics VIII) after the (abusive) sigma
some titles (e.g. p. 149, line 6, and p. 159, n. 25) are not in italics
all references to chapters 26 to 34 are to part III (to appear in volume III, 2006), not to part II.

Études platoniciennes II