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Plato on Establishing Poetry as Art

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I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work carried out is my own and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Gabriele Meloni.

To my beloved friends, because:

Going in tandem, one perceives before the other.

Plato, *Protagoras*, 348d.

‘Let’s go,’ he said. ‘We’ll think about what to say

‘as we proceed the two of us along the way.’

Plato, *Symposium*, 174d.

Abstract:

Plato's attitude on Art has always been hardly debated among scholars, and in recent times the interest on ancient Aesthetics in general and Plato's attitude in particular has been even increased in the philosophical debate. The problem with Plato's position is twofold. On the one hand he expresses hard criticism against poetry and he even banishes the poets from the ideal state he envisages in the *Republic*. That has been usually regarded as an illiberal, totalitarian position. On the other hand, the criticisms he makes of poetry seem to present inconsistencies among the Platonic *corpus* and they could *prima facie* appear to the modern reader odd, paternalistic or moralistic.

Throughout my work I suggest to adopt a new approach, based both on historical and theoretical grounds, according to which it will be possible to resolve the problems that Plato's objections to poetry give rise to. The historical and cultural context will be the focus of the first chapter. It consists of the following points. On the one hand I will first focus on different features that characterize Greek poetry, and on the other I will emphasize the pre-literacy of Plato's contemporaries. I will also highlight how the ethical and political role, along with the educational function, made poetry the privileged source of information and education, and the ultimate reference for everyone in the Athens of the fifth B.C. In the second section of the first chapter I will analyze Plato's teleologism, which I regard to be a fundamental entity in his stance on art. Such a notion, although not as much emphasized by scholars, plays a pivotal role in Plato's arguments on poetry, I contend. This is especially evident in

the *Republic*, where Plato's criticism regards the flaws of poetry in teaching (Resp. II and III) first, and secondly as the main source of knowledge (X).

In the third and last section of chapter one, I will face the complex issue of the alleged existence of the concept of beauty in antiquity. In this occasion I argue in favour of the existence of such an entity, both among average Greeks and for Plato, even though in different ways and degrees of awareness.

After having provided the historical and theoretical frame of my approach, I will then move to textual examination of the *Platonis Opera*. In the second and third chapter I will analyse the so-called 'early dialogues', in order to single out the recurrent features of Plato's stance on poetry. In fact, one of the main goals of my study is to retrace an overall, consistent view on art in general and poetry in particular among the Platonic *corpus*. While the second chapter is mainly focused on the *Apology* and the *Protagoras*, a special emphasis deserves the *Ion*, which is the object of the third chapter. I argue indeed that for the first time in this early dialogue we find a clear theoretical expression of a key-concept of Plato's stance on art. In fact, Plato bases his criticism toward the eponymous rhapsode pointing out that the rhapsode on the one hand lacks the knowledge of the things he (demands to be able to) talk(s) about. On the other hand, the rhapsode lacks the knowledge of what poetry, as well as his trade, is. Such a 'twofold ignorance', as we will see, it is a recurring pattern in Socrates' pupil.

While the fourth chapter is mainly devoted to the analysis and comment of the *Symposium*, the fifth, sixth and seventh chapter present the detailed examination of the Book II, III and X of the *Republic*. They are respectively devoted to the analysis and criticism of the 'middle dialogues', the *Republic* and the 'late dialogues'.

Because of its capital importance for the purpose of my argument, I will analyze Plato's criticism in the *Republic* in details and I will face different approaches to the subject. Afterwards I will confront them with my own theory in order to show that adopting my approach the apparent discrepancies regarding Plato's aesthetics within the *Republic* itself as well as in others Platonic dialogues disappear. (And, on the contrary, this does not happen if the reader accepts the mainstream interpretation on the subject at issue). In essence: I propose to take Plato's criticism of poetry not as an aesthetic attitude, but rather as a justified concern about the pursuit of truth through poetry, as if it were the main source of teaching, moral value, knowledge and information in the ancient Greek society. That is the core of my argument.

The eighth chapter analyses the 'late dialogues', in particular *The Laws*, given the abundant of relevant passages on the matter.

Finally, the ninth and last chapter faces Popper's notorious judgment of Plato as totalitarian scholar. In this section of the study I will contend that Popper's notorious reading of Plato's political system is fallacious. Further, I will reveal that Plato and Popper's stance on mass media essentially correspond. It is my understanding that such a fundamental passage will give the ultimate proof of the rightness of my revolutionary reading of the *vexata quaestio* of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry in Plato.

Finally, the outcome of my investigations will show that Plato does not banish poetry because he is attacking it as a dangerous, free, "fine" Art. On the contrary, I propose to take his attack as the only way to release poetry from its educational and political context and to baptize it into the realm of Fine Art.

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First Chapter.

What is art and what is poetry in the Ancient Greek Society?

Introduction.

As a matter of historical fact, what makes Greek poetry so different from our own is the way in which it was practiced. In an oral culture, the forms of poetry played a major role in the process of learning and memorization. Based on this fact, in this initial section of the work, I will address Greek pre-literacy in the age of Plato, giving historical evidence that, for the average Greek, poetry was the main source of learning and knowledge during childhood. Moreover, since some recent views reject the concept of an ‘oral culture’ in fifth to fourth Athens in the V-IV B. C., I will offer a detailed discussion about the weight and importance of the oral performance of poetry. This discussion challenges such views and gives historical evidence to

support my theory; namely, that since the oral practice of poetry was a regular feature in ancient Greek literature and it had a pivotal role in the process of learning and memorization, Plato's criticism and related censorship aimed to improve such an educational process. Therefore, I will demonstrate that Greek culture was mainly an oral one and that such an oral culture was primarily based on Homeric and Hesiodic epics.

Some authors, such as W. Jaeger¹, E. A. Havelock², A. Nehamas³ and M. Burnyeat⁴ among others, stand in this respect. They are emphasised here because, since Jaeger's *Paideia* and Havelock's *Preface to Plato*, they have given birth to a new course of study. As we shall see soon in more detail, Jaeger, for one, provided new historical and philological evidence showing the huge influence of Greek poetry in the everyday life of the Hellenic world. On the same line of reasoning, Havelock focused on the relation between poetry and Plato, in order to shed light on the real object of Socrates' pupil attack.

These pivotal publications from the first half of the twentieth century allow to Nehamas' and Burnyeat's seminal contributions. The former drew an innovative comparison between Greek poetry and tragedy on the one hand and television on the other. The salient point showed that Plato's (alleged) repressive attitude toward the main mass media of his time actually fit modern concerns on the (bad) effects of

¹ Jaeger W. 1944. *Paideia. The idea of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York.

² Havelock, E. A., 1963. *Preface to Plato*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

³ Nehamas, A., (1988), 'Plato and the Mass Media', *Monist* 71, pp. 214-34.

⁴ Burnyeat, M. F., 'Culture and Society in Plato's Republic', in: Peterson, G. B. (ed.), *Tanner Lectures on Human Values 20*, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 1999, pp. 216-324.

television. With his well known *Culture and Society in Plato's Republic*,⁵ Burnyeat eventually explicitly ratifies what was at least in part *in nuce* in the previous studies: 'But not because they were poets. He banished them because they produced the wrong sort of poetry. To rebut Plato's critique of poetry, what is needed is not a defence of poetry, but a defence of the freedom of poets to write as, and what, they wish.'⁶

Once I have outlined the main literature and references, I shall now give my reasons for pursuit further this line of reasoning. Indeed, one might ask the *ratio* of a new contribution on the matter, especially in the light of the last quote.

First of all, as the never-ending publication of monographs on the matter plainly shows, the *vexata quaestio* of Plato's notorious attitude toward poetry is far from being resolved. Second of all, by the means of an accurate textual examination and by confronting my criticism with different commentators, I will answer *how* and *why* Plato actually released poetry from its subordinate function and baptized it under the auspices of Fine Art. What follows will make analytically clear what I mean.

1.1.0. Historical context: Oral culture and Archaic Greek poetry.

First, let us consider the meaning of 'reading' in ancient Greece since it does not mean what the modern term has come to express. Rather, as I will show in this part of the study, it referred to a completely different practice, in which the main point

⁶ Ibid, p. 255.

was regular oral performance. I will also give evidence that the term ‘reading’ implied an active participation for the ‘reader’ who engaged in the process of learning and memorization. The ancient Greek word for ‘reading’ is ‘αναγιγνωσκω’, but it does not correspond to the contemporary meaning of the English verb ‘read’. Rather, its meaning is closer to ‘reading in a group⁷’ or to ‘recite a poem⁸’. This is due to the fact that the concept of private or individual reading was basically unknown to the ancient Greeks. Burnyeat singles out such an essential difference in the following, enlightening passage that I quote here in full:

Forget about reading T. S. Eliot to yourself in bed. Our subject is the words and music you hear at social gatherings, large and small. Think pubs and cafés, karaoki, football matches, the last night of the proms. Think morning service at the village church, carols from Westminster Abbey. Think popular music in general and, when Plato brings in a parallel from the visual arts, forget the Tate Gallery and recall the advertisements that surround us everywhere. Above all, think about the way all this is distributed to us by television, the omnipresent medium at work in every home. What Plato is discussing in the *Republic*, when he talks about poetry, is how to control the influences that shape the culture in which the young grow up.⁹

On the same line, Havelock points out:

It is not just a matter of selected readings given in public or private nor of annual festivals in the theatre. On the contrary the fact that the situation of the learner on the one hand and of the adult on the other are treated

⁷ For instance, in the philosophical schools of ancient Greece this is the verb used to describe the usual collective reading.

⁸ That is why Socrates as well as the other characters were perfectly capable and even used to recall several passages from Homer and Hesiod to mind.

⁹ Burnyeat, 1999, 257.

without firm distinction implies that the performance of poetry was fundamental in adult recreation: that the two situations in Plato's eyes were somehow serving the same end. The class who sat under the harpist and the audience who attended either an epic recital or a performance in the theatre were patterns in a general and common practice.¹⁰

'The plain conclusion of this is that performance means oral performance.'¹¹ As can be seen from the last remarks, the form by means of which poetry was practiced constituted an active part in the process of learning in virtue of the regular oral performance of Greek epics. This is a very strong assumption to make and Havelock investigates deeper the function of the oral practice:

All memorization of the poetized tradition depends on constant and reiterated recitation. [...] Hence poetry exists and is effective as an educational instrument only as it is performed. [...] His living memory must at every turn be reinforced by social pressure. This is brought to bear in the adult context, when in private performance the poetic tradition is repeated at mess table and banquet and family ritual, and in public performance in the theatre and market place.¹²

Thus, the oral performance constituted a regular feature of Greek poetry. Every time that it took place, it was in a social context, both in large (i.e. theatre) and in limited occasions (i.e. familiar mess table). Therefore, the oral practice of poetry was not just a lack of written forms or simply a different way of 'reading'. It always had social implications, both in its forms – recitation rather than plays – and its contents – epics and dramas that referred to the classic Greek heritage.

¹⁰ Havelock, (1963), p. 37.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 37.

¹² Havelock, (1963), p. 44.

In his excellent work about ancient Greek culture and society¹³, Burnyeat explains the importance of such social occasions for the education as follows:

Symposia and feasts are among the most important places where the culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Singing the Harmodius song is like singing the Marseillaise with its bloodthirsty chorus, “Aux armes, citoyens!” It is at once a celebration and a confirmation, each time it is sung, of a foundational civic tradition. [...] The songs sung there become common currency. [...] At the symposium you hear stories about the gods and heroes from the near or distant past and acquire the group loyalties, values, beliefs, and knowledge which constitute, as my dictionary says, the shared bases of social action. And the main vehicle for this transmission is poetry, sung and performed after the food has been cleared from the tables and the party is reclining comfortably on their couches.¹⁴

In the above preliminary remarks I have tried to draw an overall account of the fundamentals of what the Greeks meant by ‘reading’. I believe those previous points were necessary to introduce Plato’s criticism in the right context. Primarily, it is so because the Athens of the V-IV B. C. was still a preliterate society. Although Plato himself lived in a time of flux, during which the role and the importance of writing was growing, I maintain that the condition of such a society was firmly preliterate. In that respect, one might recall that writing was already present to some extent but the fact that it was present and even that it was gaining *momentum* in that period does not refute the claim that orality had a leading role in such a society.¹⁵ For what

¹³ Burnyeat, M., 1999. ‘Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*.’ *Tranner Lectures on Human Values*, 20.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 48, 50, 235-236.

¹⁵ I will investigate deeper this topic soon.

concerns the Homeric *Corpus* in particular then, (namely the main target of Plato's criticism in the *Republic*), the reader should bear in mind that it was not a literary composition made by a single author but, rather, it was the saga of several ages that was transcribed in a later period, subsequent to its initial creation in the Greek Dark Age. Although this conception is currently widely shared by scholars, this point in general and Havelock's approach to Greek literature in particular has been objected to by some commentators, such as Halverson, in the recent past¹⁶. Halverson's view, along with others, tends to refute Havelock's main theory about Greeks' oral culture. I do not agree with this criticism and in what follows I will present my reasons for rejecting such views and presenting my alternative approach. I will, *a fortiori*, give evidence for my view, which is consistent both with Jaeger and with Havelock's theories. I believe, indeed, that it is useful to discuss this point because, on the one hand, it will clarify the deep difference between our attitude to literature and the Greek and, on the other hand, it will shed light on Plato's criticism.

1.1.1. Pre-literacy and regular oral practice of poetry.

Since the concept of the pre-literacy of the Greeks takes a great deal of my own analysis of Plato's attitude toward poetry, I regard this topic worthy of a devoted section. Moreover, the only way that a reader might try to understand Plato's point of view is by grasping the concept of a "living poetry". As I have point out previously (in reference to Jaeger and Havelock), poetry was the expression of Greek culture.

¹⁶ Halverson, John, 1992, *Havelock on Greek Orality and Literacy*, in *Journal of History of Ideas*, Vol. 53, No. 1, (Jan. – Mar., 1992), pp. 148-163, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, US.

Further, by being rooted in the life of the community, Greek epic had much more than just aesthetic value.¹⁷ This extension beyond aesthetics, toward a ‘living poetry’, was due to the fact that its aims were educational, a sort of cultural conditioning. Burnyeat points out: “I do not mean high culture, but culture in a more anthropological sense - the sense my dictionary defines as “the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action [...] Culture, or civilization, [...] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”¹⁸

As I have already illustrated, such principles – moral, political and social in general – were expressed in the tales and stories that were sung in social occasions. Such tales were based in mythology, which drew upon the whole cultural heritage of the ancient Greeks. Such a conclusion is consistent with Havelock’s definition of culture:

[...] to understand what we mean by a ‘culture’, the Greek included, we have to ask what gives it a structure, what is continuous and so identifiable. This question can be answered by borrowing from the cultural anthropologists the concept of the storage of information for reuse. The information concerned is not merely technological in the narrow sense, but also covers that body of directives which regulates the behavior patterns of individuals who are members of the culture. In a literate culture, it is easy to perceive this kind of knowledge taking shape as a body of law and belief, covering religion and morals, political authority (“the constitution,” as we say), legal procedures of all kinds,

¹⁷ In this respect I use the adjective aesthetic as Jaeger did in the passage quoted in the previous section. I shall face deeper this concept later on in the this study.

¹⁸ Burnyeat, 1999, pp. 217-218.

especially those governing property, and also rights and responsibilities within the family.¹⁹

Each of the different forms of poetry is important in that respect. Once it has been demonstrated that Greek culture was a primarily oral one and that Greek poetry was the means by which it was expressed and preserved, the forms by which poetry was experienced are paramount to understanding the process of cultural transference. In the recent past, some scholars questioned the claim of the pre-literacy of the Greeks. For instance, A. Burns, in his remarkable essay *Athenian Literacy in the Fifth Century B. C.*²⁰, objects to the pre-literacy of the Greeks in general as well as Havelock's approach in particular. He puts forward the theory that:

[...] from the end of the sixth century B. C. the vast majority of the Athenian citizens were literate and that literacy, though not universal, played a major role in Athens's intellectual and cultural development".²¹ In order to prove his claim, he refers to the presence of written words in tables (*ostraca*), book-rolls especially in schools, and vase-paintings in general. He then concludes that, "These pictures are clear evidence that reading and writing were an integral part of music instruction, i. e. the teaching of mousike in the wider Greek sense which includes all forms of music, poetry and the other domains of the Muses."²²

Regarding Greek drama, then, he affirms that: "The written tablet has taken the place

¹⁹ Havelock, E. A., 1971, *The Preliteracy of the Greeks*, in *New Literacy History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Oral Culture and Oral Performance, pp., 369-391, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, US, p. 370.

²⁰ Burns, A., 1981, '*Athenian Literacy in the Fifth Century B. C.*', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, No. 41, pp. 371-387. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, US. I would confine my self in this occasion to discuss only Burn's essay, because as far as I know he summarize the view that tend to confute the preliteracy of the Greeks.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 371.

²² *Ibid*, p. 376.

of Remembrance as the mother of Muses and has become the repository of knowledge. Furthermore, the use of writing in daily life is taken for granted by the dramatists.”²³ On such an approach, Burns concludes that: “Athenian fifth-century society functioned by and large as a literate society. Even if popular literacy was to a certain degree impeded by the absence of standardized spelling and large-scale book production, its pervasive spread had a profound impact on the intellectual life of Athens and on the development of abstract thought.”²⁴

It is worth noticing that Burns himself (rightly) wonders:

This brings us to the crucial question: How far is Athenian literacy from "full literacy"? The answer depends on the definition of full literacy. [...] Obviously, a different standard must be applied to an ancient society. (Even the term "population" needs qualification: in the Athenian context it can include only the free-born male citizens.) The level of literacy which would constitute functional literacy can only be a matter of conjecture. We must try to determine as nearly as possible the most important functions the average fifth-century Athenian had to perform. Perhaps, if we could have asked him, he would have said that his function as a citizen of Athens was the most important. Many reflections of this attitude are implicit in such literary works as the *Eumenides*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Pericles' Funeral Oration*, the *Apology*, etc.²⁵

This is not the place to attempt an ultimate resolution of the problem concerning the exact degree of the (pre-)literacy of the Greeks. However, I would stress some general interpretative factors in this connection. First, the last Greek dramas mentioned by Burns were recited in theatre, and secondly, they took the roots in the

²³ Ibid, p. 377.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 387.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 384.

Greek mythology, a matter that was very well known by the masses.

Tragedy took 115 stories, with few exceptions, from mythology. These stories had been treated by the epic poets, Homer and the Cycle and other epics now lost; and Aristotle, with a sure instinct, regarded the Homeric handling of myth of myth as a prototype of tragedy. But myth had also been treated by poets. It seems that, from an early stage, it had been characteristic of hymns and other type of choral poetry to contain a narrative.²⁶

The same mythological stories were told to the children by nurses, and such tales were told, not read from a book as happens nowadays. Also, even if we accept the claim that most of the freeborn citizens in Athens were literate—whatever degree we assign to this word—it is hard to accept the claim that ‘the written tablet has taken the place of Remembrance as the mother of Muses and has become the repository of knowledge.’ In fact, the function of the Muses was both to educate and to transmit the cultural heritage, and it happened by means of repeated recitations. There is no way of knowing how many Athenians read written tablets but *per contra* we know that “(t)ragedy and comedy were performed before a crowd of 14,000 people at the Great Dionysia and other civic festivals. We hear of 20,000 people attending a recital of Homer. Then there are hymns sung at religious ceremonies and songs at feasts or private symposia.”²⁷ In connection with drama, I would also recall one more

²⁶ Easterling P. E., Knox B. M. W., 1989, *The Cambridge History of Classic Literature*, Vol. I, Part 2, Greek Drama, Cambridge University Press, New York, US, p. 1-2.

²⁷ Burnyeat 1999, p. 255.

reference in order to show how important it was in daily life:

The audience of Attic Drama, as far as we now know, was a “popular” audience in the sense that it was a body fully representative of the great mass of the Athenian people [...] no less than 17,000 people, perhaps more [...] In particular, and though this may be difficult to image today, the drama was considered a realistic representation of the world: we are told, for example, that a number of women were frightened into having miscarriages or into giving premature birth by the entrance of the Euries in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*.²⁸

If we now add the fact that “the Athenians had around 120 festival days a year.”²⁹ I suppose we are able to say that even if such representations are often referred to as literary works, the means by which people experienced them was, undoubtedly, orally. From that it follows that the ‘Remembrance as the mother of Muses and the repository of knowledge’ was mainly held by the oral practice of poetry. However, we can accept the claim according to which literacy ‘had a profound impact on the intellectual life of Athens and on the development of abstract thought’ because it is true that its use was increasing, especially in higher education contexts. However, it does not imply that the transmission of knowledge and information was firmly oral. For the reasons that I will present throughout this chapter, the forms of poetry as well as the contents and its educational aims constituted a whole, and these features made Greek literature in general and Homeric and Hesiodic epics in particular so far and different from our own. Havelock has shown this salient point in his fundamental

²⁸ Nehamas, A., 1999, ‘Plato and the Mass Media’ in *Virtues of Authenticity. Essays on Plato and Socrates*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, pp. 287-288.

²⁹ Burnyeat, 1999, p. 277.

analysis, taking the route started by Jaeger's original approach:

[...] what we call "poetry" is therefore an invention of immemorial antiquity designed for the functional purpose of a continuing record in oral cultures. Such cultures normally follow the practice of reinforcing the rhythms of verbal meter by wedding them to the rhythms of dance, of musical instruments, and of melody. A poem is more memorisable than a paragraph of prose; a song is more memorisable than a poem. The Greeks identified this complex of oral practices by the craft term *mousike*, and correctly identified the Muse who gave her name to the craft as the "daughter of Remembrance." She personified the mnemonic necessity and the mnemonic techniques characteristic of an oral culture. [...] while the act of imprinting, considered psychologically, operates upon individual memories, its social function cannot become effective unless these memories are shared. Oral poetry therefore required for its existence an occasion which could supply a listening audience, large or small, ranging from an entire city to the company at a dinner table. Knowledge hoarded for reuse required not only rhythm, but constant performance before audiences who were invited to participate in its memorization. Truly private communication of preservable information becomes possible only under conditions of developed literacy.³⁰

This last passage is particularly interesting. Havelock points out in a few lines the more important features of Greek poetry and his final remark about the meaning and function of the Muses and the related concept of *mousike* seems relevant in regard to Plato's attitude toward poetry. In fact, in the preamble of the discussion in book II, when Socrates introduced the discourse regarding the right education for the

³⁰ Havelock, E. A., 1971, *The Preliteracy of the Greeks*, in *New Literacy History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Oral Culture and Oral Performance, pp., 369-391, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, US.

guardians, Plato's master speaks as follows with Adeimantus:

'Then we shall begin our education with music before gymnastic, shall we not?'

'Surely'.

'Do you include literature in music, or not?' I said.'

'I do.' (376e).

In light of what has been said so far, I shall argue that the last quotation represents important evidence in Havelock's theory of Greek Literature. It is particularly clear that Plato's introduction to censorship fits Havelock's theory: literature belongs to music and music identifies the whole process of remembering. This textual reference confirms on the one hand that literature had an educational aim, and on the other hand that the educational purpose of literature is aimed to a 'continuing record' by virtue of its belonging to the realm of the Muses. As well as the gymnastic, it constituted an integral part of the process of growth for young persons in ancient Greece.

1.1.2. Homer as the 'Teacher of all Greeks' and *Iliad and the Odyssey* as oral encyclopaedias.

This section of the study emphasizes faces the following main points. First of all I treat Homer, as it was seen in Plato's time, namely the prime source of learning and knowledge for the Greeks (although the these issues are distinct). Secondly, I move to the question of orality, combined with the teaching of educational value by the

means of poetry. Indeed, I believe that for the sake of the study it is vital to emphasize the huge impact and role that Homeric poetry had in Ancient Greece. Further, the question of orality, as to say the key-element that transformed poetry into a never-ending practise, made such a poetry even more central and pervasive among the Greeks. For this reason, it is essential to stress the way in which Homer was perceived among the average Athenians. Such an issue is particularly evident in the case of educational value. Indeed, I argue throughout this section that the above unique features of Greek poetry made the Homeric (as well as the Hesiodic) *Corpus* intrinsically educational for the Greek masses. For what concerns this last topic, I will face it in relation to opposite views on the importance of orality, in order to emphasize that if we underestimate the role and importance historical and sociological context, we are no longer able to make sense of Plato's criticism of poetry.

In the dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus in book III of the *Republic* we find an important clue of the educational dimension of Homeric poetry. In fact, when Socrates' pupil focuses on the forms of poetry, first he notices that all refer to events: events in the past, in the present and in the future. (392d-e). That is why they are based on narration of facts. This is not a trivial remark as could appear *prima facie*.

The point is that in Greek poetry there was no distinction between what we in modern terms call 'fiction' and reality. In fact, after Plato's statement, Adeimantus intentionally replied in the following way: 'What else?' (392d). In my own view, this is a seminal line in connection with our present concern, namely the oral culture of the Greeks. Adeimantus' reply shows that there is no room for mythology, epics and tales that do not refer to events. Every possible value—for instance moral, historic,

or political—was expressed in narrative style, in making reference to events. Every piece of information was handed down through tales. Thus, the tales were the principal way to express any value.

What I am suggesting here is that it is a *non sequitur* to claim that there was no educational value or function to such tales³¹. Rather, the absence of a technical guide or manual confirms that the Homeric *Corpus* was, if not unique, at least the most popular source of whatever kind of knowledge, even practical one. Moreover, as noted above, the repeated and common recitation of poems in social occasions made such poetry a reference for the listeners. Due to the fact that they were easy to recall, thanks to constant and repeated recitation from the very beginning of common people's life, poems composed a sort of oral encyclopaedia.

To that extent, the reader should bear in mind that oral performance had another peculiar feature in ancient Greece: **the listener coincided with the speaker**. As for what concerns the concept of *mimesis*, the process of learning is made much more forcible in virtue of the active participation of the listener in the process of reciting a poem. The reference, through performance, is therefore both taught and learned. This dynamic between the performance and learning will be discussed again, in more detail, further on in this thesis.

In light of these features, I am inclined to believe that a correct approach to the solution of the puzzle regarding 'Homer the educator' (so often quoted both by its advocates and by its detractors), should be by first taking poetry as a whole, comprised of entertainment and educational tales, and setting it into the oral

³¹ Halverson, 1992, p. 153: 'Both Homer and Hesiod suggest that on the contrary the task of the bard was to sing the deeds of men and gods, it is the narrative, the story that come first.'

perspective. This point is made all the clearer when the reader refers to the regular oral performance of poetry. It was educative – not because it was expressly designed only for educational purposes like propaganda is expressly designed – but, *per contra*, the constant oral practise of it made it educational, in virtue of the repeated oral performance of such tales. If we now look back over what has been said in the previous sections, then it should be clearer why Plato argued against poetry. Plato’s criticism focused firstly on the *telos* of the tales, and according to that he criticised their structure. As we will see soon, his criticism against the forms of poetry is consistent with that approach and it follows the same *leitmotiv* he used against the contents of it. In fact, as we will see soon, Plato attacks the forms of poetry that undermined the educational process of his fellow citizens.

Afterwards, Halverson faces two related issues, namely the value of Homer’s works as ‘the educator of the Greeks’ and his works as the ‘Oral encyclopaedia’³², two points that in part I have already illustrated in Havelock’s approach. Halverson assigns just two authorities to Homer in that respect, namely in warfare and historical matters³³. In everything else, he doubts Homer’s importance. For instance, regarding technical issues and practical knowledge, he states: “Havelock would like us to believe it was commonly held that Homer was a master of *technai* – arts, skills technology, practical knowledge but not real evidence is offered.”³⁴ In order to assess his claim, Halverson takes as an example a passage from the *Iliad* regarding navigation, emphasizing the inaccuracy of that. He concludes:

³² Ibid, p. 154.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

As a found of practical knowledge the Iliad and the Odyssey must be accounted pretty worthless. The technical information in them is either too vacuous or too general to be of any real use. Homer's love for concrete detail is unmistakable and a well-known feature of his style. But it is more plausible explained as an adjunct of the narrative, which it vivifies and enrich, than vice versa.³⁵

In reply I argue that a certain degree of lacking technical knowledge does not, in itself, commit the concept of the Homeric works as an oral encyclopaedia for the Greeks to the dustbin. Since technical handbooks were not available, Homeric epics represented a useful source of information for the Greeks, even on technical information. Moreover, I am inclined to think that the common practice of reciting epics made his works a source of information, even a technical one. I shall argue in fact that one who believes that Homeric epics represent just a matter of myths and fantasy fails in grasping the real, dominant value of such an artwork in his own time. In order to defend my claim, I offer brief, historical evidence of my defence of the value and importance of Homer's epic.

My original argument contrasts the view according to which Homer was an author of fascinating tales but lacking in real information. Such a view was quite common among academics until the end of the nineteenth century. Heinrich Schliemann, a businessman without any link with academic world, who discovered Troy and Priam's "treasure" in 1870, soundly debunked such an approach. Due to his autobiographical report of the voyage of discovery³⁶, we know that following

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Schliemann, H., *Ilios: the city and country of the Trojans*. J. Murray, London 1880.

Homer's stories as though they were a war report allowed him to find the ruins of Troy. Instead of considering Homer's epics as just a fantasy mythology like the scholars of his day, *a contrario*, he successfully adopted a faithful approach to Homer's technical information. Reading his memoirs, for instance, we become aware that when he arrived at Burnarbashi (the place that some at the time considered to be the location of Troy), he rightly discarded it as the potential spot of the mythic city. He based this on the fact that Burnarbashi was too far from the sea for the vessels to get to the city twice or more in a day, at least according to what Homer told about the battles for the conquest of Troy. All the same, when he arrived in Hissarlik, he realized that he was in the right place because from the top of that hill it was possible to see Mount Ida, as Homer precisely reported in his writing.

That anecdote indicates that Homer's artworks might have had a real practical value for the Ancients. However, such an account raises the question, what was practical knowledge to the Greeks? Even if we take for granted that the technical accounts of some crafts was too general in his works to be thought of as some sort of manual (but the regular abundance of particulars in his tales could be taken as a counterexample), what I am suggesting here is that Homer provided knowledge that was useful for his listeners.

In addition, people who doubt Homer's value as 'an oral encyclopaedia' do not give any counterexamples of other common sources of information that the ancient Greeks might have used instead of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Now, in this argument, it is pertinent to notice that a necessary and sufficient condition for being an

Deuel, L., *Memoirs of Heinrich Schliemann: a documentary portrait drawn from his autobiographical writings, letters, and excavation reports*. Hutchinson, London, 1978.

encyclopaedia, as a universal source of information for everyone, is to be available and shared. Even if we accept, to some degree, the objections regarding the value of Homer's epic as an origin of knowledge, I shall argue that what made such works the main source of learning were on the one hand the easy access to it and on the other hand the absence of other common sources of learning for most of the people.

Let me draw a parallel in order to show how important an encyclopaedia is in relation to its availability and popularity. In modern society the discussion about the value of the information available online resembles the discussion had on the value of information in the *Homeric Corpus*. I find such a comparison attractive to make because what makes sources like 'Wikipedia' more popular and consequently more useful than the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica' is not the correctness of the information that people find in both, (and surely Encyclopaedia Britannica is much more accurate and without mistakes than 'Wikipedia'), but rather the easy and free access that characterizes Wikipedia. The last point surely makes it an encyclopaedia for most of the people, even in a literate society like our own. The point of the analogy, then, is that the availability of any origin of learning and information constitutes an integral part of its value and such a feature of free and common availability was typical of the Homeric's epics.

In addition, as Halverson himself reports (regarding the Homeric epics as oral encyclopaedias): "But this is no a guarantee of authenticity, for a literate poet could be easily compose new material in the traditional manner just as some of the authors of the Homeric Corpus imitated Homer."³⁷ Conversely, it is important to note that this is one of the main objections raised against the bulk of information available

³⁷ Ibid, p. 152.

online in general and against 'Wikipedia' in particular. In fact, the volume of information available online is continually updated and renewed by anyone who has access to it but this very fact does not confute the value of Internet and his miscellaneous uses, power and common presence in our day's work. Rather, *a fortiori* it confirms that since it so present and important in our own life, it is constantly in the process of being edited and referenced. If it was not useful and a niche product for few people, then why should it be so constantly examined and critiqued?

That is why I shall conclude that the rightness and the accuracy of information in the past as well as in the present is surely a necessary condition but not a sufficient one for being an encyclopaedia, as far as it is not shared and recognized as such from the mass to whom it refers. One might recall that Halverson recognized the value in Homer's depiction of historical and warfare matters. Yet, the accuracy of the information in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* that allowed Schliemann to find the ruins of Troy denotes a practical as well as technical value. Above all, what was more important than the warfare and history of a people in an oral culture characterized by an almost never-ending age of war? In addition, I would emphasize that the term 'History' covers a huge volume of fields and different issues, like traditions, common beliefs, and everything what makes culture of that time a culture. This is evident when we read any historic book but, *a fortiori*, this is even clearer in Homeric epics, where historic events were told in a narrative manner referring to personal, familiar stories. That is why, I would conclude, the transmission of certain fundamental principles was implicit in that epic.

1.2.0. Philosophical Framework: Plato's Teleologism.

This section of the study focuses on a key-concept in Plato's attitude toward poetry – that is, teleologism. The adjective 'teleological' derives from the Greek noun *τελος*, which expresses the aim or the goal of something. In general terms and even nowadays, teleology refers to the study of any object with reference to its purpose or goals.

Although such a concept is a central element of Plato's thought in general, with implications in various directions, for the sake of argument let us analyse Plato's teleologism in relation to art. If my approach has been right so far, then it provides the key to fully grasp his attitude toward poetry.

In order to corroborate this claim, let me quote in full length the following passage from the *Phaedo*. Before (and very briefly after) I shall include W. K. C. Guthrie's illuminating comments, which include the quotation in question:

Now Plato had learned from the Pythagoreans that the essential nature of anything lay not on its matter, but in its form. If matter is the essence, then there is no real difference between a lump of marble forming part of the flank of Mount Pentelikos and a finished statue from the hand of Pheidias. Similarly in the natural world, according to an Ionian monist philosopher, there can be no essential difference between a thankful of water and the delicate organism of a racehorse or a human being. Since both are formed of the same ultimate matter, the cause of their difference

lies elsewhere, and it is there, said Plato, in the principle of organization by which the matter has been differentiated, that the true philosopher will look for his explanation. Plato had also learned, especially from Socrates, to equate form with function. A horse and a man differ in the organization of their matter, and it is important to understand these differences of organization from obvious external facts like the difference between four legs and two, to the internal arrangements of muscles, organs, brain and so forth. These, however, are but the necessary preconditions for an even essential difference, namely that horse and man can do different things. The horse can run faster and further without tiring. The man can reason. Since the physical arrangements are necessary to the performance of these typical functions, it seemed right to many Greek thinkers as it seems right to many today, to describe them as the cause of the functions.

‘As I proceeded, I found my philosopher altogether forsaking mind and making no appeal to any other principle of order, but having recourse to air, and ether and water, and many other eccentricities. I might compare him to a person who began by maintaining generally that mind is the cause of the actions of Socrates, but who, when he endeavoured to explain the causes of my several actions in detail, went on to show that I sit here because my body is made up of bones and muscles; and the bones, as he would say, are hard and have joints which divide them, and the muscles are elastic, and they cover the bones, which have also a covering or environment of flesh and skin which contains them; and as the bones swing in their sockets, through the contraction or relaxation of the muscles I am able to

bend my limbs, and this is why I am sitting here in a curved posture-that is what he would say; and he would have a similar explanation of my talking to you, which he would attribute to sound, and air, and hearing, and he would assign ten thousand other causes of the same sort, forgetting to mention the true causes, which is, that the Athenians have thought it better and more right to remain here and undergo my sentence; for I strongly suspect that these muscles and bones of mine would long ago have been in Megara or Boeotia, borne there by their own idea of what was best, if I did not think it more right honourable to endure any penalty ordered by the state, instead of running away into exile. There is surely a strange confusion of causes and conditions in all this.³⁸

The cause, then, of any object or any natural events it is not to be sought in what preceded it but in what lies before it, the end or purpose at which it aims.³⁹

Now the reason why such a suggestive passage is so important in relation to poetry is tied to Plato's approach in evaluating it. Although the last quotes from Guthrie and from Plato's *Phaedo* imply several issues, I shall argue that we can use that reference now in order to interpret Plato's attitude toward poetry. As well as Plato deals with poetry in virtue of its function, if we consider poetry as literature just because it is made up of lines of verses (usually it was sung and so on), then we totally miss the point. Basically, we make the same mistake that one does who considers a man and a horse equal in virtue of the fact that both are mammalian and, consequently, that both

³⁸ Plato, *Phaedo*, (98 c-e).

³⁹ Guthrie, W. K. C., 1950, *The Greeks and their Gods*, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 337.

present the same morphologic features. Above all, in this way, we miss Plato's approach.

Although I do not want to anticipate what has yet to be demonstrated, I shall briefly recall two key passages from the *Republic* where Plato's teleological approach is evident. Such passages will be properly discussed in Chapter Five, entirely devoted to the *Republic*. They play a pivotal role for two reasons. First, they clearly illustrate both the starting point of Plato's approach as well as his goal when dealing with poetry. Secondly they show a clear application of the teleological principle stated in the *Phaedo*.

The passages are the following:

Republic II:

I answered, Adeimantus, you and I at this juncture are not poets, but founders of a city. The founders ought to know the canons in accordance with which the poets should tell their stories, and which they are not to be allowed to transgress, but they need not themselves compose stories. (378e-379a)

Republic X:

'My dear Homer, if, as you say, you are not thrice removed from truth concerning virtue, a manufacturer of an image, and what we have called an imitator; if you are but twice removed, and can know practices make men better individuals and better citizens, can you not mention a city to which you gave a better government, such as Lycurgus gave to Lacedaemon, and many other persons to many to many cities great and small? Does any city name you a good lawgiver and its benefactor? (599a).

In the first extract, *Republic II* (378e-379a), Plato clearly points out that as rulers, they do not have to invent others, different stories alternative to the classic ones. Nor the founders of the city have to be poets themselves. Rather, the founders of the city

must put forward rules that have to be followed by the poets, too. This passage shows, I urge, that Plato acknowledges poetry as specific art, and in this occasion he approaches the subject as a matter that have to regulated, among many others, in brand new state. Put in another way, the first passage shows that the telos of establishing the best regulations guides Plato

If the former extract highlights Plato's approach, the latter, *Republic X 599a*, points to the teleological approach the leads Plato's criticism of Homer in the last book of the *Republic*. Indeed, Plato emphasizes that Homeric poetry fails in educating people. In this particular case, the failure regards the art of governing, but his final critique, although broader it is grounded on a teleological ground. As we shall see in more details in section of the thesis devoted to the analysis of the last book of Plato's masterpiece, Plato's arguments show that the average Greeks approached Homeric poetry as universal source of truth, although it fails as such.

1.3.0. The Very Concept of Beauty.

This section of the study faces the tricky question of the ancient conception(s) of beauty. I face this problematic subject now before claiming that Plato acknowledges poetry in aesthetic terms. In order to make a compelling argument regarding Plato's view of aesthetic, it is necessary to prove the existence and the peculiarity of such a notion as aesthetics, in general, in classical Antiquity.

As a matter of historical fact, scholars have largely questioned even the existence of an idea of beauty whatsoever in antiquity. In what follows, I tackle such an issue arguing for the existence of a peculiar idea of beauty in the Greek world. Such a concept, I submit, was present among the average citizens as well as in Plato's philosophy, but with distinct features that I will outline throughout the section.

First of all, let me outline the main differences between our own conception(s) of beauty and the Greek one. Such a preliminary passage will serve as the right path in order to contextualize Plato's arguments on poetry, given the particular features of the ancient Hellenic horizon. Due to these features, I will show a fundamental distinction. Indeed, on the one hand, the average Greeks did hold a particular feeling of beauty, as most scholars have largely highlighted but on the other hand, against the thinking of the majority of Platonic scholarship, the *ratio* of Plato's attacks on poetry relies on a very different ground. Namely, Plato held a distinct view from his contemporaries, reading beauty as an autonomous property. Indeed, I do believe that for the average Greek, beauty was just one of the many values at play in the case of classic poetry. Conversely, by the means of textual examination, I will provide

evidence for arguing that Plato singled out beauty as distinct entity, with a theoretical clarity unknown before him.

To this extent, I will put forward an original argument in order to corroborate the claim that Plato did actually have a strictly different view on beauty. The very fact that ancient Greeks did have a very different conception of beauty does not imply by itself that Plato held the same view. On the contrary, I will conclude my analysis by showing that Plato was actually the first scholar to postulate a ground-breaking theory of beauty in western thought. Such a view, in a nutshell, saw beauty as an independent entity among the heterogeneous values at stake in the case of classical poetry. I would also point out since now that the aforementioned stance is quite close to our own way of considering beauty, as a self-standing property.

It is finally worth noting that the advantage of such an approach is to explain the reason why Plato, while criticizing poetry, ignores beauty in the texts he deals with.

However, as I will show by the means of the textual analysis, he is willing to emphasize the ‘kalon’ of the extracts he quotes so often and to value without fail the great poets we still regard as such.

1. 3. 1. Plato and Beauty.

It is uncontroversial that Plato postulates the existence of the Form of beauty; there is evidence of this (e.g. in the *Phaedo* A beautiful thing is beautiful “for no reason at all other than that it participates in that beautiful [form]” (100c)) and in the *Symposium* 210b, 211a:

210b:

First, if the leader" leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realize that the beauty of anyone body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he'd be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same. When he grasps this, he must become a lover of all beautiful I bodies, and he must think that this wild gaping after just one body is a small thing and despise it.

211a:

"First, it always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor is it beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. Nor will the beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge.

Although the literal meaning of the above passages is clear, their interpretation raises difficult challenges, as is often the case with Plato's writings.

Certainly, the problematic issue of Plato's aesthetics in general and his well-known attitude toward poetry in particular is involved. If Plato acknowledges the existence and value of beauty, why does he criticize Homer as well as many other poets for adding beauty to the truth or falsehood of their stories? Put in another way, if Plato admits beauty in the realm of Forms, why does he question the aesthetic value of literature, which is based on the very idea of beauty?

On the other hand, there is the issue of the meaning of the Greek word *kalon* and

Plato's heterogeneous use of it⁴⁰. *To kalon* is usually understood to be the noun for beauty in ancient Greek; *kalon* is also very often associated with 'goodness'. This raises the question of whether beauty was intrinsically related with moral goodness in antiquity⁴¹.

1. 3. 2. What Beauty is for the ancient Greeks and what Beauty is for Plato.

In this section, I want to briefly look at what and how the Greeks thought about beauty and encourage the claim that Plato saw it differently from his own contemporaries. I will also emphasize the main differences between the Greek understanding of it and our own. Finally, I will conclude that the way Plato thinks of beauty is actually closer to modern and contemporary aesthetics. To this extent, I argue that he is actually closer to us than to his own contemporaries. Firstly, however we need to establish whether there is a singular notion of beauty Plato refers to in all the relevant dialogues. I submit we have to distinguish between beauty, which is, I argue, something bestowing a particular property, and the much wider *kalon*. A. Kosman puts it this way: "The question surely has to be whether *kalon* in fact points to something different—whether very different or only slightly different—from

⁴⁰ Riegel, N. *Beauty, To Kalon and its Relation to the Good in the Works of Plato*. 2011, PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, Department of Philosophy, Canada.

⁴¹ On the problematic relation between Aesthetics and Moral Value, not just in antiquity, I suggest the further reading of: Gaut, B., 2007, *Art, Emotion, and Ethics* Oxford University Press, McGinn, C., 1997, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

beauty”. While Plato’s conception of beauty is characteristic of his philosophy, *Kalon* belongs to Hellenic cultural heritage.⁴² *Kalon*, in all its heterogeneous occurrences, covers a much wider, and from time to time semantically different, range of meanings. In a recent monograph on the *Kalon*⁴³, Kosman comments on the relation between *Kalon* and beautiful:

And this concern, which is at the heart of this essay, is related to our earlier questions: if beauty is for us associated with what we think of as art and nature, why is the *kalon* so little associated with these matters? And if *kalon* means “beautiful,” why do Aristotle and Plato treat the *kalon* as morally normative?⁴⁴

My answer to such a central question in the treatment of *ancient beauty* is the following. The very fact that the ancient concept of beauty is different from ours does not imply that Plato held a view that, *tout court*, corresponded to his contemporaries. Otherwise, we are left with the paradoxical claim that Greeks had no concept of beauty, as Kosman rightly points out.⁴⁵ My suggestion intends to give a compelling answer to Kosman’s concern:

I’ve tried to suggest broadly what those differences might be. They leave me with the urge, an urge that I will of course resist, to say that the Greeks had no concept of *beauty*. But this much is right: the concept of *beauty* is sufficiently different from that of the *kalon* to make the urge

⁴² However, I am aware that the two distinct concepts can sometimes overlap; I will explain that in detail later on in the paragraph.

⁴³ *Classical Philology* (On *Kalon*). Vol. 105, No. 4, October 2010. Special Issue: Beauty, Harmony, and the Good. Edited by Elizabeth Asmis. University of Chicago Press.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ I agree, it is surely paradoxical to think that the Greeks had no concept of beauty because how could we explain otherwise why Plato on the one hand prizes Homer and on the other banishes the poets from *Callipolis*?

understandable. We've noticed merely these two features of our notion of *beauty* not found in a comparable sense in the notion of the *kalon*: (1) *Beauty* critically involves the world of Art (2) *Beauty* critically involves the world of nature.⁴⁶

In sum, I argue that Plato acknowledges the value of beauty *as we know it*. What I mean by that is evident in Plato's numerous appreciations of poetry, I maintain. The textual examination of the relevant passages will show this in detail. In addition, I submit that two distinct notions (although sometimes overlapping) such as *kalon* and beautiful coexisted in ancient aesthetics; as *tecné* and art did. In his seminal work on the matter, W. Tatarkiewicz explains:

The Greek also gave a wider significance to the term *tecné*, which we translate as 'art'. For them it meant all skilful productions and included the labors of carpenters and weavers as well as architects. They applied the term to every craft created by man (as opposed to nature) so long as it was productive (and not cognitive) relied on skill (rather than inspiration), and was consciously guided by general rules (and not just routine). They were convinced that in art, skill mattered most and for that reason held art (including the art of carpenter and the weaver) to be a mental activity. They laid stress on the knowledge which art entails and valued it primarily on account of that knowledge. Such a concept of art included the characteristics common not only to architecture, painting and sculpture, but also to carpentry and weaving. The Greeks did not possess a term to cover exclusively the fine arts, that is, architecture, painting and sculpture. Their wide concept of art (which we today perhaps term 'skill') survived to the end of antiquity and had a long career in European languages (which, when stressing the special features of painting or architecture, could not call simply arts, but had to qualify them as 'fine')

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 351.

arts.⁴⁷

In both cases we deal with two ancient broader concepts (*Kalon* and *Tecné*). They are characteristic of a peculiar historical and cultural scenario, and for this reason, they are expressed by distinguished linguistic expressions that the ones we nowadays use. Yet, this very fact does not prevent us from identifying within the aforementioned notions two narrow concepts and related terms (Beauty and Art). The latter two express then, although not necessarily, a remarkably close connection with the way usually *we* think and deal with them. By the same token, I believe we are now in a position to state that when Plato talks about beauty in the way I have just outlined, he does so in the same way we do when we refer to beauty. In fact, Kosman admits:

Actions, institutions, virtues, and the like were said by them to be *kala*; paintings, musical compositions, sunsets, and the like are said by us to be beautiful.⁴⁸

In what follows, Kosman allows the possibility of attributing to Plato a view on beauty different from his own contemporaries:

For example, if we come to realize that for Plato, love's proper object, that toward which *erôs* is per se directed as toward its appropriate end, is *kalon*, or is indeed the *kalon* itself, we should feel no inclination to infer that Plato believes love's object to be what we would call "beautiful." We will have acquired evidence that for Plato the object of love is cousin-german to the beautiful, that it is admirable or fine or noble, or indeed that

⁴⁷ Tatarikiewicz, W, 1970, *History of Aesthetics I: Ancient Aesthetics*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London (2005), p. 26.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 351.

it is good. We may in good conscience continue to speak of the argument as pointing us in the direction of “the beautiful,” but only if we take pains to elaborate a nuanced sense of beauty, a sense that captures the subtleties of the *kalon*.⁴⁹

It is not surprising then to read Kosman’s final remark:

This paper is therefore a prolegomenon; for the really interesting and hard work remains to be done. That is the work required when we go beyond the facile use of “beautiful” here and “fine” there, or beyond the easy acknowledgment that *kalon* somehow “means both good and beautiful,” and ask the question: how so? How are these predicates connected in the concept of the *kalon*?⁵⁰

Kosman’s stance traces in his *prolegomenon* in order to find a coherent picture of Plato’s metaphysics of beauty. Rachel Barney (2010), in her *Notes on Plato on the Kalon and the Good*, raises the issue of how Beauty is connected to proportions and functionality and whether Beauty is essentially linked with them. The end or purpose of something defined as beautiful plays a pivotal role in the functionality of beauty. Her point is that something is beautiful if and only if it serves at best the designed function.⁵¹ But I urge that we cannot simply relegate beauty to the realm of functionality, as to say virtue. Barney seems to be sympathetic with the above stance. A path related to the study of *Kalon* in Plato that I do not want to take is the example of the spoon⁵². Such an account of *Kalon*, stated in *Resp.* 353c–e and also *Republic*

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 352.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The Greek term *arête* would traditionally translate it.

⁵² Kosman illustrate the significance of such an example as follows (and I endorse his reading): ‘It may be that a wooden spoon is more desirable than a golden spoon if it’s better able to perform its spoonly functions. But does it follow that it’s more beautiful? (Pl. *Hp.*

10, (601d) and in the *Hippias Major* (290c-291d), is not relevant for the purpose of the present work, for the reasons I have just outlined. To this extent, it would be at any rate interesting to note the relevance of teleology in Plato's account of *Kalon* in this context.

For measure and proportion manifest themselves in all areas as beauty and virtue. (*Phlb.* 64e).

The *Timaeus* claims that all that is good is beautiful, adding that what is beautiful is “not without measure (87c).⁵³

The Greek term *arête*, usually translated as virtue, is at the core of such a functional account. But this is a very low bar for theories to meet. Indeed, the ambiguities associated with the term *virtue* leave me with the urge to notice that there is no theory of this sort in Plato. The only possible conclusion I can draw is that the wide range of meanings covered by *virtue* only indicates that sometimes, an artwork can be beautiful as well as virtuous. But the two entities, beauty and virtue, are not in a causal relation with each other.

Let us address another issue, Plato does not necessarily relate beauty with proportion and measure. Although there is some textual evidence for such a claim, I do not think that a mere mathematical *ratio* is a sufficient condition for making something beautiful. This Pythagorean claim⁵⁴, it is worth remembering, is the first aesthetic

mai. 291c).’ Kosman, 2010, p. 346.

⁵³ Barney, 2010, p. 365.

⁵⁴ On Pythagoreanism: L. Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, Oxford UP 2012; G. Cornelli, *In Search of Pythagoreanism*, De Gruyter 2013; G. Cornelli, R. McKirahan, C. Macris (eds.), *On Pythagoreanism*, De Gruyter 2013; P.S. Horkey, *Plato and Pythagoreanism*, Oxford UP 2013; C. Huffman (ed.), *A History of Pythagoreanism*, Cambridge UP, forthcoming.

theory ever postulated in the history of western thought. Now it is true that Plato's thought resembles in some ways Pythagoreans' philosophy, but it is equally undeniable that Plato's complex aesthetics is not reducible to it. Pythagoreans held the undisputed merit to have elaborated a specific aesthetics, but that was just the first step in the study of beauty, I urge. It is true that the Pythagorean ideals of aesthetic continued to be quite popular among artists but, once again, it seems clear that Plato made a clear departure from them, because he did not relegate beauty to the real of mathematical ratio, as Pythagoreans did. Indeed, at the base of Pythagorean's aesthetics we find the claim that the essence and nature of beauty relies the mathematical proportion, solely. Although Plato's aesthetics is quite debated among scholars, we can safely assert that Plato never relegate the essence and the nature of beauty to the real of mathematical ratio. In this sense, Plato did make a departure from Pythagoreans, especially form what concerns aesthetics.

However, to this extent, a more central point must be highlighted for the sake of the argument. The very way that the Pythagoreans used in order to elucidate the nature and essence of beauty sheds light on a central matter. Namely, even the Pre-Socratics clearly thought of beauty as a distinct property. Further, they theorized of it in what we would call nowadays 'aesthetic terms'. Such a strong claim is grounded on the consideration that they based the search of beauty in proportions and mathematical ratio⁵⁵. Their paradigm was primarily applied to works of art such sculptures and

⁵⁵ For what concerns Pythagoreans, I suggest the reading of L. Zhmud, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, Oxford UP 2012, G. Cornelli, *In Search of Pythagoreanism*, De Gruyter 2013, G. Cornelli, R. McKirahan, C. Macris (eds.), *On Pythagoreanism*, De Gruyter 2013, P.S. Horky, *Plato and Pythagoreanism*, Oxford UP 2013, C. Huffman (ed.), *A History of Pythagoreanism*, Cambridge UP, 2014.

disciplines like music.⁵⁶ It is also remarkable to note that the seeking for a mathematical theory for beauty presupposes the existence of a ‘form’ of beauty that is objective and independent from any other subject or external goal. The paramount relevance of this presupposition relies on the objections of scholars that the Greek *sensibility* to the idea of beauty can be set aside with no further hesitation. Indeed, the very fact that even the presocratics tried to define beauty, shows a conscious, perception of that. Regardless of the mathematical nature of the presocratic account, what is important here for the purpose of the argument, it is to stress the object of research: beauty.

1. 3. 3. The nature of beauty.

In order to further substantiate the claim that the idea of beauty as an independent property was familiar among the Greeks in general and in Plato’s system of thought in particular, I will refer now to poetry, with special emphasis on the famous poet Sappho. For what concerns the vivid presence of such a fundamental property in the Greek culture, I do endorse N. Riegel’s view about how such an entity was perceived by the average Greek:

But, one might still ask, couldn’t it still be true that the Greeks or at least some of the Greeks felt τὸ καλόν was something like a

⁵⁶ I am very well aware that what we have already said about the tricky noun and related concept of beauty in the ancient world and the contemporary one resembles to some extent the case of *musique*. In particular, the Greek word *musique* points to a broader umbrella of entities and disciplines that the word ‘music’ today refers to.

response-dependent property in a pre-theoretical, implicit way? Isn't it possible, that is to say, that τὸ καλόν was viewed, at least implicitly, as whatever produced a certain reaction, pleasure say, in certain observers, perhaps ideal observers?⁵⁷

It is interesting to note that Sappho expresses the first instance of such a view. The most famous poem usually regarded as putting forward a respond-dependent theory or subjectivism, is the so-called fragment 16:

Οἱ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖς' ἐπὶ γᾶν
μέλαιναν ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅττω τις ἔπαται.

πά]γχυ δ' εὖμαρες σύνετον πόησαι πά]ντι τ[οῦ]τ'. ἄ γὰρ πόλυ
περσκόπεισα κά]λλος ἀνθρώπων Ἑλένα [τὸ]ν ἄνδρα [κρί]νεν
ἄρ]ιστον,

ὄς τὸ πᾶν] σέβασ τροῖα[σ ὄ]λεσσ[ε, κωὺδὲ πα]ῖδος οὔδε [φίλ]ων
το[κ]ήων μᾶλλον] ἐμνάσθη, ἀ[λλὰ] παράγαγ' αὐταν πῆλε φίλει]σαν,

Ἵρος. εὐκ]αμπτον γαρ [ἀεὶ τὸ θῆλυ] αἶ κέ] τις κούφως τ[ὸ πάρον
ν]οήση. οὐ]δὲ νῦν, Ἀνακτορί[α, τ]ὴ μέμναι δῆ] παρειοῖσας,

τᾶ]σ κε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα κ]αμάρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω η
τὰ λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὄπλοισι πεσδομ]άχεντας

εἰ μὲν ἴδ]μεν οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι λῶστ'] ὄν' ἀνθρώποις, πεδέχην δ'
ἄραστῆαι, [τῶν πέδειχόν ἐστι βρότοισι λῶον] [ἧ λελάθεσθαι

Some say thronging cavalry, some say foot soldiers, others call a fleet the
most beautiful of sights the dark earth offers, but I say it's whatever you
love best.

⁵⁷ Riegel, 2011, p. 40.

‘And it’s easy to make this understood by everyone, for she who surpassed all human kind in beauty, Helen, abandoning her husband that best of men went sailing off to the shores of Troy and never spent a thought on her child or loving parents: when the goddess seduced her wits and left her to wander, she forgot them all, she could not remember anything but longing, and lightly straying aside, lost her way. But that reminds me now: Anactoria, she’s not here, and I’d rather see her lovely step, her sparkling glance and her face than gaze on all the troops in Lydia in their chariots and glittering armor.’ (my emphasis)

The above passage is traditionally regarded as the first example of Subjectivism or Projectivism.

It is a reasonable supposition to say that Plato, along with most of the Athenian citizens, was quite familiar with Sappho’s lyrics. Secondly, it is widely sustained that the ancient Greeks used to admire and highly value Sappho’s mastery. I cannot find any other possible ground for such an appreciation but the purely aesthetic one.

Barney says:

In traditional Greek usage, *kalon* and *agathon* are the two most central and powerful terms of approbation, and the overlap between them is considerable. But there is one striking contrast between the two. This is that while it is common to speak of what is *agathon* for someone, using the dative of interest, the same construction is awkward and rare, if not impossible, with *kalon*.⁵⁸

Sappho’s contribution to the question on beauty however, is not confined to the subjectivism reading of her lyrics. As a matter of fact, her poetics expresses more than any other author who sought beauty. Among her compositions, the *Hymn to*

⁵⁸ Barney, 2010, p. 373.

Aphrodite represents the brightest instance of such process, in my view.

Another possible path to take in order to investigate beauty in antiquity would be to appeal to emotions. This is because there is a strong continuity of reasoning in the history of Western culture between art, artworks and the emotions that they raise in both the senses and intellect of who listen to a musical piece or who admire a statue or a painting. The same pattern, of course, applies to writing and reading, dancing, and even to cinema. According to this view, what all of them have in common is to appeal to feelings and thoughts art produces in he/she who experiences art. This is the way D. Konstan⁵⁹ tackles the issue: “The ancient Greeks associated human beauty with erotic attraction, and most people today would agree that beauty can be a stimulus to passion, which is pretty much a synonym for emotion.”⁶⁰ On the same line of reasoning, Nehamas affirms: “Plato and the ancients were not afraid of the risky language of passion because they thought that beauty, even the beauty of lowly objects, can gradually inspire a longing for goodness and truth”.⁶¹

Whether a longing for goodness constitutes an emotion is a further question. There is no doubt, however, that Plato, at least in one phase of his intellectual development, believed that the Forms inspired *erôs*, that is, the desire to perceive directly the transcendent world of ideas, accessible to the mind alone, which is only encumbered by mortal flesh.⁶² Stendhal magisterially expressed this line of reasoning as: ‘Beauty

⁵⁹ ‘Emotions between Greece and Rome: Beauty.’ By David Konstan, unpublished.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Nehamas, A. *Only a Promise of Happiness. The place of Beauty in a World of Art*, Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 2.

⁶² D. Konstan.

is nothing more than a promise of Happiness'⁶³.

Even if the desire of (possession of) beauty from time to time overlaps with beauty itself, I regard them as distinguished. The case of *Eros* in the *Symposium* provides a clear example of that. One thing is the desire (to acquire) something; one thing is a disinterested appreciation of an artwork. Stendhal's famous quote is usually read in a twofold way. One is sexual-oriented and it appeals to an individual interpretation of the desire of possession. It involves possession as the way to pursue the object of appreciation. The second is a broader, more general view and it involves different kinds of values. Nevertheless, as in the case of Beauty and Eros, both raises from the same ground, but the *telos* is different. Konstan says: "If beauty inspires the desire to possess and own its object or to use it for some further purpose, especially if it involves sex, it might seem reasonable to believe that those who value art for its beauty are either philistines or perverts"⁶⁴ Endorsing last remark, I do not think that beauty in antiquity is reducible to emotions. In conclusion, the question about how to qualify beauty in antiquity inevitably remains, as in modern times, inevitably open, at least to some extent. In this regard, Konstan appears to share the view I would go for:

The question at stake then is not whether the Greeks had a concept of Beauty, which I take for granted. Another related assumption I make is that such a concept was very different from the modern one. When I say modern, of course I refer to the (re)-birth and formulation of the concept of 'Aesthetics' in the eighteenth century. But different does not mean

⁶³ Stendhal, M. De l'Amour, ch. 17, footnote (1822)

⁶⁴ Nehamas, 2010, p.11.

contrary, at least not necessarily.⁶⁵

In conclusion, and endorsing Konstan's remark, my thought is that the very fact that the term *kalon* covers an heterogeneous and wider range of *significata* in comparison with the modern term Beauty, does not imply by itself that the Aesthetic declination of such a term/concept was unknown to the Greeks. *A contrario*, I contend, the aesthetic appreciation of Beauty constituted a remarkable part of what is generally designed as *Kalon*.

⁶⁵ Konstan, D. Ibid.

Conclusions.

In the opening chapter of this study, I have faced some preliminary issues that I do regard as vital in order to get a real understanding of Plato's notorious attitude toward art in general and poetry in particular. More precisely, I have first focused on the historical context of Greek poetry in the fifth to fourth Athens B.C. The pre-eminently oral dimension of the practice of poetry shed light on a radically different essence of epic poetry. This subject, along side Plato's Teleologism, provided the reader with the historical and teleological framework on which this study relies on. A further, related question concerns the status of beauty in classical antiquity. Such an issue has been treated in order to emphasize how Plato's stance on beauty differed from (most of his) contemporaries. All the aforementioned elements have been analyzed both in general terms and in connection with Plato's philosophy. Although they could seem *prima facie* heterogeneous they prepared the path to follow in order to make sense of Plato's attacks to Greek poetry and its masters, I maintain. At the beginning of the study, I have intended to substantiate in historical as well as philosophical terms, the right perspective in order to solve the dilemma that Plato's censor and banishment of poetry gives rise to. I am confident that once we have defined the objects and boundaries of my research in Plato's philosophy, the reader is now able to start with better understating the detailed textual analyses of the platonic dialogues in the next chapters.

Second Chapter.

Plato on poetry in the Early Dialogues.

Introduction.

Plato focuses on poetry on several occasions. It is a constant concern in Plato's mind, from the early dialogues until the very latest ones. Nevertheless, it seems hard to find a general account of his attitude toward poetry. This is due to the fact that Plato faces poetry from different perspectives, like education (*Republic* II - III), politics and epistemology (*Apology*, *Republic* X). He also connects poetry with very different issues, like inspiration (*Ion*, *Phaedrus*), pedagogical effects (*Republic* II), and imitation (*Republic* X). He even compares poets to politicians, rhetoricians and sophists. With respect to them, he makes the same sort of objections, more precisely against their supposed wisdom (*Meno*, *Apology*, *Sophist*)⁶⁶. It is also true that, in reading Platonic dialogues, we find discordant statements about poetry: appreciation, hard criticism and even banishment. Indeed, the 'ancient quarrel' between philosophy and literature Plato speaks about in the tenth book of the *Republic* and the

⁶⁶ For a full treatment of the question I suggest the reading of Amiss, E., 1992. 'Plato on Poetic Creativity' in Richard Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 338–364.

consequent banishment of imitative poetry represent the climax of the *vexata quaestio* of Plato's stance toward poetry.

This first section of the study sets out to explore a connection between a number of plausible claims concerning Plato's attitude toward poetry among the so-called early dialogues. More precisely, I will focus with special emphasis on the following dialogues: *Apology*, *Protagoras* and *Ion*. With its deep importance regarding the issues at stake, the analysis of the *Ion* will have a chapter devoted to it alone. The reason why I highlight these dialogues within the cluster of works called 'early dialogues' is based on the fact that they present, in my view, a coherent set of claims and argument toward poetry. I am confident that the rest of the chapter will illustrate, in details, such a line of thought.

2.1.0. The *Apology*:

'poets say many fine things, but they lack knowledge'.

An ambiguity or a sound argument?

In this section of the work I am going to offer a detailed analysis of Plato's treatment of poetry in the *Apology*. My claim is that Plato's criticism in this dialogue does not affect the value of poetry *qua* poetry. Rather, I argue that it mainly regards the very particular way poetry was experienced in the ancient Greek society. I will also show that Plato's argument against poets' (lack of) wisdom is consistent with his appreciation of poetry, (*qua* art of poetry).

Plato faces poetry in the first part of the *Apology*. The relevant passage regards the imminent trial in the court. Since he has been charged with impiety, Socrates has to face a jury. The matter at stake in the beginning of his speech is wisdom. The discussion relies on what wisdom is. Such an investigation quickly turns out to be a hard attack against the most important and revered classes of ancient Greek society: politicians, rhetorician and poets.

Plato has Socrates say:

After the politicians, I went to the poets, the writers of tragedies and dithyrambs and the others, intending in their case to catch myself being more ignorant than they. So I took up those poems with which they seemed to have taken most trouble and asked them what they meant, in order that I might at the same time learn something from them (a). I am ashamed to tell you the truth, gentlemen, but I must. Almost all the bystanders might have explained the poems better than their authors could (b). I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge (c), but by some inborn talent and by inspiration (d), like seers and prophets who also say many fine things (e) without any understanding of what they say (f). The poets seemed to me to have had a similar experience. At the same time I saw that, because of their poetry, they thought themselves very wise men in other respects, which they were not (g). (22c).

The passage above introduces several interesting issues. On the one hand, Plato recognizes that the ‘poets say many fine things’ (22e) and on the other hand, he points out that the authors have neither knowledge nor understanding of what they say (22f). This fact has been interpreted as a harsh critique of poetry as a whole. In a recent work⁶⁷, Halliwell regards as ‘ambivalent attitude to poets’⁶⁸ the fact that Plato both objects to the wisdom and knowledge of the poets and recognizes that they

⁶⁷ Halliwell, S., 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient texts and modern problems*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

say...” they say ‘many fine things’ (22c). Halliwell also notices that we find the same seeming contrast in the *Ion*, which dualism he classifies as the ‘knowledge-inspiration dichotomy’⁶⁹. I will return to it in the next chapter, entirely devoted to the *Ion*, but for the time being let me concentrate on the argument Plato presents in the *Apology*. Halliwell interprets it as a dualism and he calls it ‘the contrast between knowledge and inspiration’⁷⁰. I think such a conclusion is misguided for the following reasons.

The fact that Plato recognizes the poets as capable of saying ‘many fine things’ does not imply a dichotomy with respect to his worries about the process of creation of the poems. Rather, Plato’s worry is twofold. Firstly, Plato is puzzled by a poet’s creation of art, since, he says, poets lack knowledge. He also emphasizes that they lack the wisdom they claim to possess – interestingly, this is what worries Plato more. As a matter of fact, he refers to poets’ lack of wisdom from the beginning of his treatment of poetry (22a) when he explains the reason why he went to the poets. His motivation for researching, it is better to bear in mind, was to find the wisest people of Athens. After an unfruitful search of wisdom by the politicians, he went to the poets. Now, the question becomes: what kind of wisdom Socrates was looking for and, consequently, what kind of wisdom, as he stresses, do poets lack? Conversely, what kind of wisdom did the general populace expect of poets. The simple answer is that two different kinds of wisdom are at stake here in Socrates’ criticism, one is the knowledge that poets show in making poetry and the other is that we have (a lack of) wisdom regarding the subject matters that poets generally treat in their poems.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 41.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 40.

It is possible to find a clue of such a distinction in the first part of the passage above (22a). Plato begins his criticism of poetic wisdom at the source, the poems themselves. Indeed, Plato's criticism relies on the fact that poets are not able to explain what they mean (22a-b). That is to say, they are not able to say what the text means⁷¹. It is also worth noticing, though, that the poems are not worthless according to Plato. That implies that they are worth knowing; they are meaningful. According to the text, it is possible even for a 'bystander' to catch what they meant. Further, Plato even says that any bystander is able to explain them better than a poet (b).

Even though some irony is likely to be present in this sentence, it is anyway worth stressing two key notions, which we are going to see again throughout the *Platonis Opera*. The first notion is poets' inability to explain what a text means. Secondly, Plato acknowledges the existence and the value of 'intention of the text'⁷², that is to say, the meaning or the overall sense that any text expresses. In Plato's view, a text means something, something worth to know. Starting from that, I would argue that his reference to the bystander could be read as textual evidence that Plato is very well aware of the value of literature. He understands and acknowledges the universal strength (see the reference to the bystander) of the written and spoken word. Further, I read the aforementioned inference to the universal strength of poetry as a polemic statement against the *sophoi* -- the wise, learned and skilful men are indeed the object of Plato's attacks. Against them, but above all in opposition to the mainstream view of that time, according to which priests, poets and rhapsodes had the privilege

⁷¹ Even if the last point could seem a repetition of what I have just said, let me emphasise it, because I do believe this is a central point.

⁷² I will return on this concept. *Intentio* of the text or *intentio operis* I believe is a central concept involved in the discussion.

to understand, interpret and let know the truth to common people by divine inspiration, Plato contends that the meaning of the text can be captured by anyone, with no need for doubtful interpretations by people who have no knowledge of the issues in question.

It is important to highlight this last point by virtue of the fact that most of the commentators deny that Plato acknowledged *any* value of poetry. However, in light of what has already been discussed, I contend that in the passage above, there is a true positive evaluation of the value of poetry (22e). Plato's objection relies on the poets' inability to teach what they demand to be expert of. Such criticism is deeper than it would *prima facie* seem. In Plato's view, such lack is serious because the poets, as well as common people, reputed themselves 'very wise' in respects in which they were not (22g). Moreover, as Plato points out since the beginning of the passage, the mass regarded them among the wisest in the whole community (22a).

2.1.1. Why Plato's attack on the poets does not involve a critique of poetry as a whole.

Now that we have established Plato's evaluation of poetry, let us find the reason for Plato's attacks on the cultural establishment of the Greek society. As he singles out at the end of the last extract quoted, common people reputed poets as the wisest, 'because of their poetry' (22g). Now, such statement (22g) could sound ambiguous in so far as it is not clear to whom or what it is directed to. One might say that Plato's goal here concerns poets/poetry in general. Yet, this is not necessarily the case. As described in the previous section, because of the different kinds of knowledge and wisdom at stake, the only way to explain why Plato harshly attacks the poets but still appreciates poetry, is to recall that in ancient Greece, poets among politicians, rhetoricians and sophists demanded to be (and they were commonly perceived as) the wisest persons in the society. What I mean by this is that for Plato the flaw is not poetry in itself but it rather relies in its incorrect use or interpretation. Plato explains it clearly in the subsequent passage:

Finally I went to the craftsmen, for I was conscious of knowing practically nothing, and I knew that I would find that they had knowledge of many fine things. In this I was not mistaken; they knew things I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen seemed to me to have the same fault as the poets: each of them, because of his success at his craft (h), thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had, so that I asked myself, on

behalf of the oracle, whether I should prefer to be as I am, with neither their wisdom (i) nor their ignorance (l), or to have both. (22d-e).

Here, Plato compares craftsmen to poets for two reasons: both have a peculiar art (22h) and both gained success by using some characteristic skills (22h). This is important because Plato indirectly defines poetry as an art, *techne*. (22h). It implies that not only inspired and inborn talents allow the poet the ability to produce poems but also that certain skills and capacities are necessary and sufficient conditions to make poetry. This is confirmed by the fact that Plato concludes his criticism stressing that poets as well as other craftsmen have both the elements already emphasized: wisdom, for what concerns their art (22i) and ignorance for what concerns other respects that they do not know (22l), namely, the various subject matters they mention in the poems⁷³.

The breadth of appeal of this interpretation is further indicated by another passage in the conclusion of the dialogue. At the end of the *Apology*, Plato utters the following words in praise of Homer and Hesiod:

Again, what would one of you give to keep company with Orpheus and Musaeus, Hesiod and Homer? I am willing to die many times if that is true. (41a).

Plato here refers to the greatest poets in the antiquity, Homer and Hesiod. He even says that it is worth dying just to have the chance to speak with them. Once again, one might object that the last passage could be interpreted as an example of the

⁷³ The same pattern applies to Plato's argument against Ion in the homonymous dialogue.

notorious Socratic irony. Yet, I do not think Socratic irony fully explains this passage. Rather, I read it as a sheer tribute to the greatest poets in antiquity.

In order to support my view, I would recall one of the most famous passages in the *Odyssey*. When Odysseus meets Achilles at an entrance to the underworld, the latter says that ‘he would rather be a slave to the worst of masters than be king of all dead’⁷⁴. W. K. C. Guthrie comments this line saying:

Old age was a grievous evil no less than death, which in their eyes was the separation of the life of man, his psyche, from the body. It was not extinction, but meant dragging on an existence deprived of all that made life worth living. Hence the Homeric conception of the dead as strengthless, miserable wraiths, and hence the outburst to Achilles to Odysseus that he would rather be a labourer working for a poor man on earth than rule as a king among the dead.⁷⁵

I believe that what comes to light more clearly from this passage of the *Odyssey* by comparison with Plato’s previous statement is a common element regarding life and the underworld. In both the allegories, the *hade* is taken to be the worst possible scenario for any human being. Yet, Socrates states that it is worth dying if it is the only way to meet Homer and Hesiod. Hence, I suggest interpreting it as further evidence of the great value Plato gives to poetry and to its most authoritative representatives. He could not have paid tribute to them in a greater measure.

⁷⁴ *Odyssey*, XI, 489, ff.

⁷⁵ Guthrie, W. K. C., 1950, *The Greeks and their Gods*, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 122.

In conclusion, the previous point seems to me an additional proof that the right way to see Plato's ostensibly ambiguous attitude toward poets in the *Apology* is as a coherent argument. On the one hand, we have a sincere appreciation of the value of the poems, by means of a suggestive allegory. On the other hand, we find a criticism of the poets, as well as to other supposedly wise people, based on the lack of wisdom that they pretend to teach, by appealing to a fallacious use and interpretation of classic Greek poetry. Finally, it is interesting to notice that the elements I have so far emphasized in the *Apology* foreshadow the issues at the core of the *Ion*.

2. 2. 0. Plato on poetry in the early dialogues:

A general account.

Lysis, Euthyphro, Protagoras.

I can now sum up my interpretation of Plato's attitude toward poetry in the early dialogues. If my approach has been right so far, then I am confident I have shown that, although Plato expresses hard criticism against heterogeneous key figures involved in various degrees and different manners with poetry, it is possible to rebuild an overall, positive account of Plato's on poetry.

To that extent, a key specification is required at this point. When I talk about Plato's positive attitude toward poetry, I refer to poetry in aesthetic terms. In order to make such a strong claim, I highlight, by the means of textual analysis, the recurrent (positive) elements in Plato's positive evaluation of poetry. As we have already seen

formerly, they correspond to stylistic analyses of the poems, to the link with the concept of beauty, as well as the readers' pleasure in reciting them.

As a matter of textual analysis, we have already seen so far that when Plato shows positive evaluation of poetic extracts, he emphasizes the beauty of such passages. At any rate, we are already able to state that Plato's positive evaluations of poetry are independent, in Plato's judgments, from any external contention (i.e. Morality).

Conversely, as the early dialogues highlight, Plato's harsh criticisms toward the poets only regard extra, non-aesthetic entities. More precisely, Plato's arguments are directed toward the following concepts, (in relation to poetry). First of all, Plato argues that the poets lack knowledge, (of the topics they talk about); secondly, he insists that there is no real ground for attributing to poets any kind of wisdom. And his overall criticism contrasts *in toto* with the common opinion. As a matter of fact, Athenian population used to pay a dogmatic respect to the poets as well as to the other categories listed in the *Apology*).

In brief, since the very beginning, Plato shows his awareness of such entities, that I single out as follows:

1. The status of poetry as vehicle of heterogeneous messages and aims.

Nevertheless, his positive evaluations demonstrate he is able to distinguish (and appreciate) the Aesthetic elements in all its instances.

2. He is rather concerned about (and his attacks are directed to) the *status (quo)* of poets as the main truth-holders.

I believe such a claim can be further justified by looking at other early dialogues in which Plato refers to some poetic extracts. Although in the works I am going to analyze there are no extended treatments of poetry like the ones previously faced, I

maintain that we can find important evidence, in full agreement with what we have argued so far.

2.3.1. *Lysis*:

‘Poets are our father in wisdom’.

Discussing with Lysis in the eponymous dialogue, Plato recalls some of the points we have already emphasized. The main discussion focuses on friendship. Plato poses several conceptual problems to both Lysis and Menexenus, his interlocutors in this work. First of all, it is interesting to notice that in the course of the discussion Homer and Hesiod are quoted in abundance. Plato, for instance, pays homage to the aforementioned poets with the following statement:

I think we'd better go back to where we turned off and look for guidance to the poets, the ancestral voices of human wisdom. (214a).

What comes to light clearly from this passage is Plato's plain appreciation of poetry. It means not just a sincere, positive evaluation of well-made verses but it is also interesting to notice the acknowledgement that they express wisdom. The kind of

wisdom Plato mentions is an *ancestral* one. In this way, he qualifies the time-honoured poems as the cultural repository of the civil Hellenic heritage. Their cogency is strong enough to be explicitly pointed to as a valuable reference, despite their antiquity.

I will now focus on other dialogues, which belong to the early period, in which we find other related statements. We will find not just appreciation like in the passage just quoted but also criticisms. Nevertheless, I argue that the passages that I am going to discuss below do not imply an ultimate devaluation of poetry. Rather, in what follows I am going to shed light on the way Plato approaches poems.

2.3.2. *Euthyphro*:

Plato objects poets' tales.

In the *Euthyphro* Plato seems to disagree with what the poets say:

Indeed, Euthyphro, this is the reason why I am a defendant in the case, because I find it hard to accept things like that being said about the gods, and it is likely to be the reason why I shall be told I do wrong. (6a).

Plato meets the eponymous character on his way to stand trial. He is charged with impiety. Although he denies the charges, in the above passage as well as in the following, he doubts the truth of some tales.

For what are we to say, we who agree that we ourselves have no knowledge of them? Tell me, by the god of friendship, do you really believe these things are true? (6b).

Hence, in Plato's reference to poetry in the *Euthyphro* there is not any evaluation or aesthetic discussion. Nevertheless, it is interesting to underline the central role of poetry in that culture and society.⁷⁶ Plato makes an interesting point -- how is possible to know who tells the truth about the gods? So far as it regards tales and poems, such a question could sound trivial and odd to the modern reader. But in ancient Greece, gods as well as poetry played a pivotal role in people's every day life. As W. K. C. Guthrie points out in his monumental study *The Greeks and their Gods*, 'So great was the authority of Homer that much in later Greek belief is either in fact a development of Homeric teaching or was believed to be so by the Greeks.'⁷⁷ In spite of that, Plato's concern seems to be fully justified.

And do you believe that there really is war among the gods, and terrible enmities and battles, and other such things as are told by the poets, and other sacred stories such as are embroidered by good writers and by representations of which the robe of the goddess is adorned when it is carried up to the Acropolis? Are we to say these things are true, Euthyphro? (7a).

I disagree with the poet. Shall I tell you why?

Please do.

I do not think that "where there is fear there is also shame," for I think that many people who fear disease and poverty and many other such things feel fear, but are not ashamed of the things they fear. Do you not think so? (12b-c);

Plato's treatment of poetry in the *Euthyphro* ends here with no further mention in the rest of the work. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting the repeated presence of such a concern in Plato's thoughts on poetry. Since the early dialogue, Plato shows to be

⁷⁶ For a full treatment of such a question, I suggest the reading of Burnyeat, M., 1999. 'Culture and Society in Plato's Republic'. *Tranner Lectures on Human Values*, 20.

⁷⁷ Guthrie, W. K. C., 1950, *The Greeks and their Gods*, Beacon Press, Boston, p. 117.

worried about the truth and the falsehood about gods' tales. Although such an element has nothing to do with poetry as we know it, inevitably it recurs in the Platonic dialogues. The reason why that happens will be fully revealed in the part of the study devoted to the analysis and comment of Books II and III of the *Republic*.

2.3.3. *Hippias Minor*: Plato on poetry and pursuit of the truth, part one.

In the *Hippias Minor* we find two important elements: how Plato approaches poems and his attitude toward those who use extracts in order to give support to a certain thesis. As Plato points out, he does not criticize Homer. He also does not object the value of its poems. Rather, as he shows in this dialogue, he asks Hippias what he means while quoting Homer:

Let's dismiss Homer, then, since it is impossible to ask him what he had in mind when he wrote these lines. But since you are evidently taking up the cause, and agree with what you say he meant, answer for both Homer and yourself (365c-d).

In this passage Plato clearly shows how he interprets poetic verses. He asks Hippias the reasons why he quotes Homer. Plato continues to pursue this line of reasoning in

the rest of the dialogue. He analyzes the arguments his interlocutor advances. He expresses his attitude as follows:

Hippias, I don't dispute that you are wiser than I, but it is always my custom to pay attention when someone is saying something, especially when the speaker seems to me to be wise. And because I desire to learn what he means, I question him thoroughly and examine and place side-by-side the things he says, so I can learn. If the speaker seems to me to be some worthless person, I neither ask questions nor do I care what he says. This is how you'll recognize whom I consider wise. You'll find me being persistent about what's said by this sort of person, questioning him so that I can benefit by learning something. (369d).

Plato describes his attitude when he questions and discusses with his various interlocutors. One could say that the last passage quoted is not relevant in Plato's attitude toward poetry; however, I would say that Plato here makes clear two things at once. On the one hand, he explains the purpose of his approach toward discussions and on the other hand, he affirms his interest in his interlocutor's own idea, rather than in beating the discussant in debate – which is a peculiar feature of the sophists.

We have already described the huge impact of Greek poetry in the everyday Athenian life in the first chapter. We see now how much in an oral culture like the ancient Greek one, the reference to the myths and poems was the customized practice. If Jaeger⁷⁸ and Havelock⁷⁹ revealed the enormous influence of poetry in historical and philological terms, we see now such factors in action. It is not a case then that Plato along with his many interlocutors quote and discuss Homer so often in every dialogue. In the *Hippias Minor* as well as in the *Protagoras*, for instance, we

⁷⁸ Jaeger W. 1944. *Paideia. The idea of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York.

⁷⁹ Havelock, E. A., 1963, *Preface to Plato*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

find a clear explanation of how Plato deals with poetic extracts mentioned during discussions. In the latter work, he even makes a crystalline example of the hallmark between his attitude and the sophistic one. What it is interesting to notice here is that if the former, Platonic attitude was characteristic of Plato and his followers only, the latter (the sophistic approach to discussions) was much more typical at that time. Indeed, what rhetoricians, poets, priests, *rhapsodes* and, of course, sophists have especially in common is a systematic (although usually not justified) appeal to the myths and traditional tales expressed by poetry. The analyses of the next dialogue will provide a clear evidence of that.

2.3.4. *Protagoras*: Plato on poetry and pursuit of the truth, part two.

It is worth noting that at the beginning of the discussion, Protagoras asks the audience whether they prefer to listen to a myth rather than an exposition of argument. The reason why it is interesting is that the eponymous character affirms that he is able to make his own point in both ways. The role and the meaning of persuasion of a sophist overlap with the poet's proper one. The two roles/professions seem to be perfectly exchangeable in Protagoras's view. Such an element is further evidence of how poems could serve as instruments to give support to any claim and it is consistent with what we have already said about the common perception of poetry.

"I wouldn't think of begrudging you an explanation, Socrates," he replied.
"But would you rather that I explain by telling you a story, as an older man to a younger audience, or by developing an argument?" (320c).

The famous sophist Protagoras then tells a poem by Simonides in order to support his thesis. Socrates explicitly says that there is nothing wrong with poetry. On the contrary, he states that it is the chief part of a man's higher education. That fully corresponds to the historical, common view but the matter relies on the (wrong) usage of poetry. Indeed, Plato points out a contradiction between Protagoras' claim and Simonides thought. The latter is the author of the well-known extracts quoted by Protagoras himself in order to corroborate his claim.

'I consider, Socrates, that the greatest part of a man's education is to be in command of poetry (a), by which I mean the ability to understand the words of the poets (b), to know when a poem is correctly composed and when not, and to know how to analyze a poem and to respond to questions about it. So my line of question now will still concern the subject of our present discussion, namely virtue, but translated into the sphere of poetry. (339a).

The sophist Protagoras quotes the following poem:

Now, Simonides somewhere says to Scopas, the son of Creon of Thessaly:

*For a man to become good truly is hard,
in hands and feet and mind foursquare,
blamelessly built .*

Protagoras' line of reasoning relies on the correct interpretation of such a poem.

Do you know this lyric ode, or shall I recite it all for you?"

I told him there was no need, for I knew the poem, and it happened to be one to which I had given especially careful attention.

"Good," he said. "So, do you think it's well made or not?"

"Very well made."

"And do you think it's well made if the poet contradicts himself?"

'No.'

"Take a better look then."

"As I've said, I'm already familiar enough with it"

"Then you must know that at some point later in the ode he says:

Nor is Pittacus' proverb in tune

however wise a man he was.

Hard it is to be good, he said.

"You do recognize that both these things are said by the same person?"

"I do."

"Well, do you think that the latter is consistent with the former?"

"It seems so to me," I said (but as I said it I was afraid he had a point there).

"Doesn't it seem so to you?" "How can anyone who says both these things be consistent. (347e-348a).

From here to the following ten lines, Plato commits to the denial of Protagoras' claim. In fact, what *prima facie* seemed a contradiction in the poet's verses, turns out to be a coherent thought on virtue. Plato has Socrates say that 'at first I felt as if I had

been hit by a good boxer' (339e). Plato takes his time for replying and with help from another interlocutor, is finally able to reply to Protagoras, showing that the contradiction he previously pointed out was ostensible. Briefly, Plato's argument relies on the difference between 'being' and 'becoming' (340c-d). A few lines later, Plato even offers what he calls 'an interpretation of the poetry' (342a). Further, Plato states his own attitude on writing, clashing with Protagoras:

'What does it mean to fare well in letters; what makes a man good at them? Clearly, the learning of letters. (345a).

Plato's final point is worth mentioning, because it illustrates very clearly his criticism on the instrumental use of the authority of the classic poets.

Ours is such a group, if indeed it consists of men such as most of us claim to be, and it should require no extraneous voices (a), not even of poets, who cannot be questioned on what they say (b). When a poet is brought up in a discussion, almost everyone has a different opinion about what he means, and they wind up arguing about something they can never finally decide (c). The best people avoid such discussions and rely on their own powers of speech to entertain themselves and test each other (d). (347e-348a).

In a few lines, Plato points out several points both on poetry and on his philosophical activity. If the aim of the discussion is to find the pursuit of truth on a certain subject, neither the appeal to a poet nor to any external voice is helpful (a). I believe Plato's first point aims to release poetry for such a theoretical frame. This does not mean that poetry is useless but, rather, as Plato specifies in the next breath, it is impossible to question the author (c) and it can be arbitrary to attribute to him a certain view, without explicit consistent textual ground for it. In addition, there is no possibility to

find a common agreement among the listeners (c). Hence, Plato describes how to achieve the goal of discussing correctly in such a context (d). This kind of discussion is based on the power of reasoning, and it is free of any external influence, like the divine one, i. e..

It is finally worth highlighting that Plato himself quotes Homer in order to clarify how he deals with poetry in conjunction with philosophy. Indeed, discussing with Protagoras, he speaks as follows.

I don't want you to think that my motive in talking with you is anything else than to take a good hard look at things that continually perplex me. I think that Homer said it all in the line,
Going in tandem, one perceives before the other. (348d).

As the last extracts proves then, Plato's concerns regard neither poetry in itself nor its usage alongside philosophical research. Once again, his objections are purely directed at any specious or misleading usage. Such a process takes place, as Plato clearly reveals, whenever a few lines by any poets are called in support of any given claim regardless of the context, the author's intention or simply the meaning of the whole passage. In opposition to that, stands the short extracts first quoted by Protagoras, which is *prima facie* consistent with and corroborative of the sophist's claim. However, after Socrates' analytic examination, it quickly turns out to be inconsistent with the whole poem, contrary to the author's intention and thus, the sophist's usage is fully misleading.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, since this first part of this study is devoted to the analysis of the so-

called ‘early dialogues’, I have emphasized some constant features in Plato’s criticism toward poetry. Indeed, Plato’s criticism relies on a fundamental common misunderstanding of his fellow citizens: the supposed wisest of fifth century BC Athens lack the knowledge of the issue they pretend to be expert of. In the case of poets and *rhapsode* then, they also lack the understanding of their own profession.

Nevertheless, alongside with the aforementioned elements, I have also emphasized Plato’s positive evaluation of poetry. Such appreciations, I argue, are not to be confined to the realm of irony. On the contrary, they represent in my view crystalline evidence that Plato did acknowledge poetry *qua* art.

Such entities constitute a pattern that runs more or less throughout this work and it is, in my view, remarkable to notice that since the very beginning of Plato’s production, we find a coherent set of claims on the matter.

Third Chapter.

THE ION:

Plato on what the poet does

(and what the rhapsode does not know).

Introduction.

The *Ion* is a peculiar case in the Platonic *Corpus*. Over the course of time, Plato's shortest dialogue has been regarded as either a harsh attack on poetry or an *anti litteram*, Romantic attitude toward the poetic creative process⁸⁰. According to the former interpretations, both Plato's criticisms and his 'poetry-making theory' destroy any value in poetry as well as poets' wisdom and skills. On the other hand, the followers of the latter interpretive model read positively that only the divine inspiration appears to be the sole responsible for the making of (good) poetry.

In what follows, I argue that none of these interpretations catch the essence of the dialogue. Indeed, my interpretation stands between the two aforementioned, opposite readings. More precisely, the aim is to show that Plato's criticism against *Ion* does not regard the art of poetry (which I maintain he fully recognises as an independent, positive art); instead, I argue that Plato's attacks aim to show the deep misconception of *Ion*'s own profession. Such misleading comprehension relies on the rhapsode's twofold ignorance. Indeed, as Plato demonstrates, on the one hand *Ion*

⁸⁰ This peculiar trait, among other ones, has been rightly pointed out by S. Stern-Gillet in her seminar paper on the *Ion*: "*On (mis)interpreting Plato's Ion*", *Phronesis*, Vol.49. No. 2 (2004), pp. 169-201.

plainly lacks the (necessary) knowledge of the subject matters he talks about. On the other hand, the rhapsode lacks the knowledge of what poetry, as well as his trade, is. In addition, and this is even worse in Plato's view, the rhapsode claims not just to know but, more importantly, to explain, to teach to the masses what he eventually lacks knowledge of. This peculiar feature derives from rhapsode's unique role in Greece. He was indeed a hybrid figure, across the religious and the artistic dimension, whose peculiar role was both to create (new) poems and to teach the classic ones. Thus, the actual nature of Ion resembles a religious and moral guide as much as an artist. The rhapsode's religious traits, as opposed to his artistic traits, were Plato's main concern in his attitude toward Ion. At the end of the paper, I aim to reconstruct a positive account of Plato on poetry. I maintain that such an account is close to our conception of poetry and consistent with my interpretation of his stance toward poetry in the *Apology* as well as in the *Republic*.

3.1.0. Introduction (530a-d): Beyond Ion, who is the rhapsode?

Ia - (Or what a rhapsode does).

The opening of the *Ion* offers, in a very few lines, the blueprint for Plato's criticism throughout the rest of the dialogue. Indeed, from the second statement on, Socrates makes clear the sarcastic attitude⁸¹ he will adopt onward toward the rhapsode:

“Socrates: Don't tell me (a) the Epidaurians hold a contest for rhapsodes in honor of the god (b)?” (530a).

Socrates seems to be surprised (a) that the Epidaurians provided a contest for rhapsodes in order to celebrate the semi-*deus* Asclepius. In Plato's view, a contest for rhapsodes appears to contrast the intent of a festival named⁸² after the scientist regarded as the god of the science of medicine and healing⁸³. Such a mix of surprise and irony will be Plato's *leit motiv* toward Ion in the homonymous dialogue. Indeed, a few lines later, Plato has Socrates say:

⁸¹ I endorse Del Solda's interpretation for what concern owe the reading of this passage. Pietro Del Soldà. «Verità della poesia e ispirazione divina nello *Ione* di Platone». *Dialegesthai. Rivista telematica di filosofia* (2009) World Wide Web: <<http://mondodomeni.org/dialegesthai/>>, [135 KB], ISSN 1128-5478.

⁸² The notion of 'an inextricable link between festival and identity in the Greek world' is largely documented in *Games and festivals in the Greek world*, König, J. P. 2009 Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies. Boys-Stones, G., Graziosi, B. & Vasunia, P. (eds.). Oxford University Press, p. 381.

⁸³ Ibid.

You know, Ion, many times I've envied (a) you rhapsodes your profession (b). (530b).

In the sight of Plato's attacks on the eponymous character throughout the dialogue, I read his declaration of envy (a) as a sarcastic statement rather than a philosophical stance. Instead, the last instance expressed in the passage above deserves closer attention. For the first time, Plato here explicitly recognizes Ion's profession as an art (*techne*) (b). Since such a notion will assume a pivotal role in the dialogue, I will return to it at length in a later section of this chapter. For the time being, let me come back to the third and final instance of Plato's sarcasm in his opening section of the dialogue. It will introduce us to a more detailed analysis of the rhapsodic art. At 530b, Plato dwells on rhapsode's look:

Physically, it is always fitting for you in your profession to be dressed up to look as beautiful as you can (a). (530b).

The vanity emphasized in the passage above is a rhapsode's constant feature. As we have already seen a few lines before, Ion trumpets his victory in the contest that surprised Plato (530b). I highlight it because I do not think such a competitive trait is just a personal feature of the eponymous rhapsode. Rather, this reference clearly shows how much the rhapsodic art was far from being purposeless. On the contrary, the rhapsodes were compelled to create new rhymes as well as new interpretations of the classic texts. As a matter of fact, such a trait was an intrinsic feature of their profession. Further, a jury usually valued their creations. They therefore had to

promote their own art; they were compelled to extol their own products. This is the reason why the modern conception of the independent artist is very far from the reality of the rhapsodic profession in Greece. In this respect, it is crucial to emphasize what the rhapsode states few lines later. In 530b, Ion utters:

‘I’m worthy (a) to be crowned (b) by the Sons of Homer’. (530d).

He does not only exhibit his ability (a) (or his vanity (b)). He is compelled to stress his prime knowledge of the subject he masters, namely Homeric poetry. Once again, Ion mentions a prize, a certification of both his knowledge and ability. He searches neither for a general, regardless appreciation of his work nor for a disinterested expression of his ideas or feelings. Rather, the general acknowledgment of his mastering of Homer appears to be his main concern.

A brief historical digression is required in order to gain a real understanding of the matter at hand. ‘[...] at a time in which oral performance is the dominant mode for the communication of epic, reflection about the poem do not focus on written text but on people: those who perform the poems, those who listen to them.’⁸⁴ It is indeed in conjunction with such historical context that Plato’s criticism must be read if we want to make sense of it as well as properly understand it as part of Plato's work as a whole.

Plato’s attitude toward Ion follows the same sarcastic spirit mentioned at the very beginning. Plato does not just acknowledge the rhapsodic art (tecné), he even gives an account of it at 530 b-c. The description of the rhapsodic activity goes as follows:

⁸⁴ Graziosi, B., 2002. *Inventing Homer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 4.

- and and you have to learn his thought, not just his verses (a)! Now that is something to envy! I mean, no one would ever get to be a good rhapsode if he didn't understand what is meant by the poet (b). A rhapsode must come to present the poet's thought to his audience (c); and he can't do that beautifully unless he knows what the poet means. So this all deserves to be envied.' (530b-c)

In 530b-c Plato singles out the most important features as follows: the good rhapsode has to know the author's thought: the reason why the poet says what he actually says (a). He has to deliver the poems (b). He also has to explain the meaning to the listeners (c). Such features match what has been already pointed out about the rhapsodic art in general. Plato clearly singles them out. Indeed, since the beginning of the dialogue he repeatedly stresses those features:

And at the same time it is necessary for you to be at work with poets-many fine ones, and with Homer above all, who's the best poet (a) and the most divine (b) and you have to learn his thought, not just his verses (c)! (530c).

Plato advances here some of the points he will develop through the dialogue. He qualifies Homer as the best poet (a). But in the next breath he introduces another attribute: 'divine' (b). As we shall see soon, the divine dimension of the poet will be treated at length later on in the dialogue. In the conclusion (c), the third item repeats

one more time that a rhapsode has to learn the author's thought, not just his verse by memory (c). Plato focuses on that:

I mean, no one would ever get to be a good rhapsode if he didn't understand what is meant by the poet (a). A rhapsode must come to present the poet's thought to his audience (b); and he can't do that beautifully unless he knows what the poet means (c). (530c).

Ion sustains the claim according to which it is essential for a good rhapsode to know the author's thought. Plato supports it by saying that knowing an author's thought is a necessary condition in order to be a good rhapsode (a). Further, from the quotation, it seems that delivering the *poet's thought* to an audience is the very essence of rhapsode's art (b).

That's true, Socrates. And that's the part of my profession that took the most work (a). I think I speak more beautifully than anyone else about Homer (b); neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus nor Stesimbrotus of Thasos nor Glaucon nor anyone else past or present could offer as many beautiful thoughts about Homer as I can (c). (530d).

It is worth stressing again that the relation between the rhapsode and the author is not a mere repetition or interpretation – at least, not in the sense in which we intend from, for instance, the theatrical representation of a written text. Ion does not just repeat Homer's verses in front of an audience. Rather, starting from the very knowledge of the original texts, he uses them as a source, in order to produce new

ones, rather than rather than giving interpretations (in prose) of the classic poetic material, (b – c). That is the reason why, as Ion confirms in the passage above, understanding the author’s thought is the hardest part of his work (a). On that ground, he claims to be the best rhapsode on Homer⁸⁵. It is rather vital for the purpose of the present section to single out the important distinctions between poets and rhapsodes. ‘The activities of bards and rhapsodes are distinguishable already in the earliest appearances of the word rhapsodos. However, there are some passages where rhapsodes and composer (whether *aoidoi* or *poietai*) are treated as being essentially similar.’⁸⁶

Since the verses that the rhapsode utters are based on Homeric tales, they sound familiar to the crowd. Eventually, its appreciation determines the success of the *rhapsode*’s performance. Ion confirms it by saying that he is specialized only in Homer, and he does not reproduce Hesiod’s and Archilochus’ poems, (531a). To sum up, Ion claims to be able to explain what Homer says and what Homer means when he talks about certain subjects. Plato picks up these points in order to build up his first criticism.

3.2.0. Plato’s first criticism against Ion (531a-534c).

⁸⁵ (To some extent, I would suggest that part of what Ion does is a kind of *improvisation*. But since that question is not central to my purpose in the present work, I shall not pursue it any further.)

⁸⁶ Graziosi, B., (2002), p. 32.

IIa - What Ion (does not) know(s)?

Plato's first criticism relies on Ion's (lack of) knowledge of his own art. The discussion goes from 531a to 534c. On the one hand it focuses on what kind of art is the rhapsodic one. On the other hand it analyses Ion's understanding of it.

As we have already seen at the end of the last section, Ion admits that 'the most difficult part of his job is to get understanding of an author's thought' (530d). Plato's first criticism relies on this specific point: How well does Ion understand Homer?

In order to answer this question, we shall analyse how the eponymous character justifies his knowledge. And we shall clarify what body of knowledge is at stake too.

At the beginning of the discussion, in a close succession (531a-d), Ion makes the following set of claims:

- i. He proclaims to be an expert on Homer, only, (531a).
- ii. In so far as Homer and Hesiod talk about the same subjects, Ion claims to be able to explain their thoughts, equally well, (531b).
- iii. The expert of the subject matter treated in the poems, will explain better than anyone else the things that the aforementioned poets speak about in a different way, (531b).

The rhapsode's (supposed) mastery of Homer (i) will soon become a tricky point for Ion. As a matter of fact, he will fail to prove his mastery of Homer twice. There is an ambiguity on this point too. On the one hand, as Pappas points out, "Ion does not profess to understand any poet besides Homer: as he freely admits, he has nothing to

say about the rest (531a, 532c)”.⁸⁷ On the other hand, in the next breath (at 531b), he plainly contradicts himself:

Soc: Then, on those subjects, would you explain Homer's verse better and more beautifully than Hesiod's (a)?

531b ION: Just the same Socrates, on those subjects, anyway, where they say the same things (b). (531b).

The latter point deserves close attention. Indeed, herein lies the first mistake the rhapsode makes. His fault is twofold. On the one hand, this claim is inconsistent with the former. On the other hand, and for the first time explicitly, Ion glaringly begins to confuse his knowledge of Homer's literature with the themes in Homer. I will return to this point below. Ion's knowledge is a very debated point. In this regard Pappas argues, “Even when Homer and Hesiod speak about the same subject, such as divination, Ion can only explain the Homeric passage. But an expert in the field, says Socrates, can speak equally well about every instance of divination, and every discussion of it. Ion, then, has no craft-ability (*techne*), nor indeed any knowledge.”⁸⁸ However, Pappas is incorrect since this is not what the rhapsode intends to argue. In the passage above, the eponymous character does say he ‘will speak equally good and beautiful on those subjects Homer and Hesiod say the same things,’ (b). This suggests that the rhapsode mixes up his knowledge of the Homeric poems with the specific knowledge of the topics in them. But the very fact that the rhapsode overlaps

⁸⁷ Pappas, N., *Plato's "Ion", the Problem of the Author*, in *Philosophy*, Vol. 64, No. 249, (Jul. 1989), pp. 382.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 383.

two different subjects does not imply, I argue, that Plato is sympathetic with that. On the contrary, it is my understanding that Plato makes Ion say those things in order to emphasize a common flaw at that time, namely, the fallacious perception of who possessed knowledge and wisdom in the Greek society. I will come back soon on that too.

It is also true, however, as Pappas remarks, that Ion reasserts it (a) at 532c. But I take that such a brief line is neither a claim nor an afterthought. I would rather identify it as a bright sign of Ion's lack of confidence in his knowledge. As the text clearly displays, he constantly wavers and changes his mind, pressured by Plato's compelling questions. Such a *crescendo* of changes of heart, lead the rhapsode to assert at the end of the dialogue the ridiculous claim that at least he has the knowledge on how to be a good general, simply by the means of the rhapsodic art.

In that respect, I would also emphasize that Ion's repetition of (a) and related inconsistency is conversely in full agreement with Ion's baffled answers in this section of the dialogue. Such a stance is the result of Socrates' cogent confutations of Ion's inconsistent claims⁸⁹. The reference to divination in Pappas' reading leads us to Ion's last claim in the beginning of the discussion with Socrates.

3.2.1. The epistemic dichotomy.

At 531b, Ion does not hesitate in answering Socrates' question in the following way:

⁸⁹ I here refer to Ion's claims in the second section of the dialogue, more pricelessly from (531a-534c).

Soc: Well. Take all the places where those two poets speak of divination, both where they agree and where they don't: who would explain those better and more beautifully (a), you, or one of the diviners if he's good (b)? (531b).

Ion: One of the diviners (c).

The text shows that Ion, (and not Socrates!), confuses his knowledge of Homer with the knowledge of the things Homer talks about.

The rhapsode here clearly fails to recognize an important distinction between two very different entities. It is one thing to be an expert of Homer; namely, what he wrote about, how and why. *A fortiori*, his importance, place and role in the history of literature. It is quite another, distinguished matter to be an expert of the subjects that Homer (or any other author) treats in his works. Such confusion between these radically distinctive concepts leads Ion to a faulty comprehension of both his art and profession. This is the reason why Ion affirms that, on any topic given, an expert in the field will speak *better*⁹⁰, (and not equally, as Pappas says), than the poet who will talk about it (c).

The subsequent passage gives us further evidence of Ion's misunderstanding. Indeed, it seems through an analysis of the text that Plato makes a kind of counter-example in order to highlight Ion's fallacy:

Soc: Suppose *you* were a diviner (a): if you were really able to explain the places where the two poets agree, wouldn't you also know how to explain the places where they disagree (b)?

⁹⁰ My emphasis.

Ion: That's clear (c).

Ion's confident (c) answer is the ultimate proof of his misunderstanding. In any given case (b - even when the poets diverge), the expert in the field (the diviner - a) will speak better than any poets.

On this ground, Plato has Socrates start his attack. It is basically a systematic confutation of his interlocutor's claims. It begins with Ion's inability to explain why Homer is better than Hesiod or any other poet (531d). In particular, Plato's argument relies on the following, reasonable principle:

Soc: Now if you really do know who's speaking well, you'll know that the inferior speakers are speaking worse.

Ion: Apparently so. (532b).

Plato supports his argument with two examples: mathematics and medicine. In both cases, as the rhapsode agrees, the expert will be able to recognize both who speaks properly and who does not. Such a pattern is at last explicitly stated at 532a⁹¹, and Ion eventually agrees with that too. In the next breath, Plato applies the very same argument to poetry, (532b). Plato's argument goes this way: if Ion is an expert on Homer as well as on the other poets, he will be able to value all the poets who talk about the same things. Since that, as Plato has Socrates underline, all the poets speak about the same subjects. Nevertheless, Ion is not able yet to explain exactly what he knows about Homer and the other poets.

⁹¹ In this case it is expressed as general rule, with no reference to singular cases as before.

Soc: Anyone can tell that you are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of knowledge or mastery (a). Because if your ability came by mastery, you would be able to speak about all the other poets as well (b). Look, there is an art of poetry as a whole, isn't there (c)? (532c).

After having accomplished the refutation of Ion's claims, Plato is ready to carry out his criticism. It is now clear that Ion's ability to talk about Homer is not based on knowledge of what poetry is (a). Otherwise, as Socrates remarks (b), the rhapsode will be able to speak about *all the other poets too*. In fact, Plato explicitly recognizes the art of poetry as a whole too (c). Plato's argument is actually based on this assumption. This is a most crucial point, which, except for the passage at 532d-e⁹², fills the discussion till the end of the section, (533c). I would now focus on it (c) and argue how such a peculiar point could throw new light on a very debated issue: Plato's acknowledgment of aesthetic value (in art).

3.2.2. Aesthetic value in the *Ion*.

Plato takes painting, sculpture, flute playing, cithara singing, and even rhapsodizing as instances of subjects to master as whole. He dwells in particular on the first two arts listed. First of all it is worthwhile to stress again that Plato one more time acknowledges poetry as well as rhapsody as arts. But it is even more interesting to note that he plainly recognizes aesthetic value to these very different arts. We can

⁹² On which I will come back at the end of this section.

find such evidence, I argue, from the three different passages I list below. All of them belong to Socrates' speech.

- i. Soc: Have you ever known anyone who is clever at showing what's well painted and what's not in the work of Polygnotus, but who's powerless to do that for other painters? Someone who dozes off when the work of other painters is displayed, and is lost, and has nothing to contribute but when he has to give judgment on Polygnotus or any other painter (so long as it's just one). (532e-533a).

- ii. Soc: Well. Take sculpture. Have you ever known anyone who is clever at explaining which statues are well made in the case of Daedalus. (533a-b).

- iii. Soc: And further, it is my opinion, you've never known anyone ever – not in flute-playing, not in cithara-playing, not in singing to the cithara, and not in rhapsodizing – you've never known a man who is clever at explaining Olympus or Thamyris or Orpheus or Phemius, the rhapsode from Ithaca, but who has nothing to contribute about Ion, the rhapsode from Ephesus, and cannot tell when he does his work well and when he doesn't-you've never known a man like that. (533b-c)

What all of the three extracts have in common, I maintain, is a plain reference to a peculiar value. Such a value is common to each art. In the first case, Plato talks about *painted works*. Some of them are *well painted* and some of them are not. By the same token, Plato qualifies Daedalus' famous statues as *well made*. And even in the case of the rhapsodic art Plato acknowledges plain dignity to some works. These passages

are astonishingly left aside by commentators. *Per contra*, I would take these passages as evidence of the fact that Plato acknowledged that certain kind of (art)works, regardless of any possible function or purpose, have full dignity and may even be appreciated. (As he clearly does for Daedalus' statues in the *Ion* as well as in the *Meno*). It is indeed clear from the text that neither the statues nor the paintings have any other reason to be valued but their pure appreciation. What makes those artworks well done or not is something of their own. Put in another way, they do not serve any other external goal or scope. To this extent, I value Plato's mentioning of 'give judgment' (533e) as further evidence acknowledgment of aesthetic value in his thought. What Plato points to in the first case mentioned, is an aesthetic evaluation of any paintings, as Socrates states. The *vexata quaestio* of Plato's acknowledgment of aesthetic value is harshly debated by commentators, not only in the *Ion* but in the Platonic *Opera* in general. Graziosi's remark on the passage above is quite significant: 'Throughout the *Ion*, Plato's strategy is to assimilate Homer to rhapsodes, discredit the latter and thereby damage Homer. By suggesting extreme closeness between Ion and Homer, Plato flatters the rhapsode, who is unlikely to object, but actually present both poet and the rhapsode in an extremely unfavorable light. An example of this flattery is to be found at 533b-c, where Socrates points out that an expert in poetry must be able to talk competently about all four branches of *mousike*: *aulesis*, *kitharis*, *kitharodia*, *rhapsodia* and about their inventors: Olympus, Thamyris, Orpheus and the rhapsode Phemius.'⁹³ Although I disagree with her starting point⁹⁴, she points to something important. As I have already pointed out,

⁹³ Graziosi, B., p. 39.

⁹⁴ Namely Plato's intention to assimilate Homer to the rhapsodes, which I will discuss later.

Plato discredits the rhapsode, but not (in order to damage) Homer too. On the contrary, he constantly values and appreciates Homer as ‘the best of the poets’.

What it is really interesting is Graziosi’s emphasis on Plato’s account of expertise in poetry. Because it encompasses all its forms. In reference to the question of aesthetic value, the significance of such a point is huge. It provides ultimate proof that Plato had a conception of poetry regardless of the topic mentioned in it. The difference with the rhapsode’s view is plain. In the former case the expert in poetry is the one who knows all its instances. In the latter the expert on poetry is the one with specific expertise on the issues treated in the poems, above all.

3.2.3. (*Supposed*) Wisdom and (*True*) Knowledge.

I would now focus on a few lines at 532b.

Socrates: I wish that were true, Ion. But wise? Surely you are the wise men (a), you rhapsodes and actors, you and the poets whose work you sing (b). As for me, I say nothing but the truth (c), as you'd expect from an ordinary man (d). I mean, even this question I asked you look how commonplace and ordinary a matter it is. Anybody could understand what I meant (e): don't you use the same discipline throughout whenever you master the whole of a subject? Take this for discussion painting is a subject to be mastered as a whole, isn't it? (532d-e).

The above dialogue takes place when Socrates’ questioning makes Ion in trouble. The rhapsode’s first attempt to avoid such a compelling examination is by appealing

to the authority of poetry. We already know as a matter of historical fact in the ancient Greece, rhapsodes, actors, poets (all of them, it is worth noticing, were professionally involved in various degrees and manners with poetry), were valued to know the truth, either of the past, the present and the future times. According to the common perception, their wisdom and knowledge derived above all from their exclusivity and higher familiarity with the classic poems.⁹⁵

I believe that the reference is not incidental at all. On the contrary, I do think it sheds light on a wider contrast among so many heterogeneous figures⁹⁶, which harshly contended each other over the right to be regarded as wise ones. Not just philosophers and rhapsodes, but rhetoricians and sophists too, as well as various religious figures and poets, played the same game, overlapping roles. All of them claimed to know the truth, and in most cases, they demanded their superiority by knowing or even by teaching how to grasp such knowledge. The impact of such a cultural confusion was made much more stronger by the absence of a secure, stable source of knowledge. The role and function of these heterogeneous figures sometimes twists each other. In this regard, it is worth highlighting that Socrates refuses to be called wise (*sophoi*) (532d-e). In opposition to that (a), he insists to commits himself only to seek the truth (c). In the passage above, Plato makes three things clear at once.

(i) Rhapsodes and actors are trusted as ‘wise people’.

This happens because of their knowledge of divine affairs and their privileged links with the gods. Such an exclusive familiarity with divine traditions and affairs is at

⁹⁵ We have already treated in deep the relevance of such a topic in the first chapter of this study.

⁹⁶ Asmis, E., 1992. *Plato on Poetic Creativity*. In Richard Kraut (ed.), 1992, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 338–364.

the core of their peculiar status.

(ii) (Conversely) Plato is interested in seeking the truth, only.

Further, the truth Plato refers to is something *per se* knowable by anyone (d); with no need to be explained (or to ask to) a rhapsode: ‘As for me, I say nothing but the truth (c), as you'd expect from an ordinary man’⁹⁷. As a matter of fact, it can (and must) be pursued with the use of the *logos*, or through the means of a rational investigation. Such a way to grasp knowledge is absolutely open (e): ‘Anybody could understand what I meant’.⁹⁸

(iii) While this assertion could be *prima facie* seems just a witticism to the sophists, it is rather the sign of a completely different attitude toward (the search of) knowledge. On the one hand, Ion, as the most representative example of figures like actors, poets, prophets who claimed to be wise, relies on the authority of the classic poems for his knowledge. On the other hand, philosophers like Socrates stand. Instead of appealing to an instrumental, hermetic and ambiguous use of the tradition, the true philosopher committed himself in pursuing a disinterested truth. Unlike the exclusivity of knowledge that artists like Ion relished, the philosopher’s inquiry, was free of charge and available to anyone.⁹⁹ In view of all that, Plato’s harsh criticism derives from his radically different approach in the attainment of knowledge.

Further, I would add that another dimension is involved in Plato’s criticism. To this extent, I find relevant to the passage at stake Dodds’ remark on the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In the following extracts, the prestigious historian points out the moral

⁹⁷ We find a corresponding reference in the *Apology* too.

⁹⁸ See the *Meno* – slave-boy example.

⁹⁹ We have a plain demonstration of such stance in the *Meno*, where Plato successfully makes a slave-boy grasp the truth.

dimension involved in Plato's criticism in the aforementioned dialogues. To this extent, I argue that those criticisms overlap with my comments on the reception of poets and related figures as wise people. Dodds remarks: 'On the other hand, Plato's third proposition—that the gods cannot be bribed—implied a more drastic interference with traditional belief and practice. It involved rejecting the ordinary interpretation of sacrifice as an expression of gratitude for favours to come, "do ut des" a view which he had long ago stigmatised in the *Euthyphro* as the application to religion of a commercial technique. But it seems plain that the great emphasis he lays on this point both in the *Republic* and in the *Laws* is due not merely to theoretical considerations; he is attacking certain widespread practices which in his eyes constitute a threat to public morality. The "travelling priests and diviners" and purveyors of cathartic ritual who are denounced in a much-discussed passage of *Republic* ii, and again in the *Laws*, are not, I think, merely those minor charlatans who in all societies prey upon the ignorant and superstitious. For they are said in both places to mislead whole cities, an eminence that minor charlatans seldom achieve. The scope of Plato's criticism is in my view wider than some scholars have been willing to admit: he is attacking, I believe, the entire tradition of ritual purification, so far as it was in the hands of private, "unlicensed" persons.'¹⁰⁰ Such a notation, I believe, corroborate my reading of the passage examined in this section. Indeed, the relevance of ritual purifiers in the worship of traditional Hellenic divinities shows the complexity of the relationship between gods and humans in Plato's time. Endorsing Dodds' suggestion, I submit that Plato, by the means of his first criticism, wants to release the Hellenic traditional worship from irrational fears,

¹⁰⁰ Dodds, 1951, p. 221.

do ut des relations and all the elements that affect a genuine cult. Gods do not interfere with humans' life, Plato says. The customized practise of ritual purifiers offered by *travelling priests* has nothing to do with humans' personal responsibility, gods goodwill or simply luck, Plato says in his criticism. A fortiori, poets are not at all a medium in the complex relation between humans and gods, despite what the poets told us.

It is finally worth emphasizing that the above position is a consistent continuum in Plato's attitude towards poets and related figures from the early dialogues (*Ion*) to the very last, (*Laws*).

Plato's second criticism (533d-536d).

Divine inspiration as the cause for making good poetry.

3.3.0. Socrates' *reductive account* of poetic creation.

After Socrates proves that Ion's claims are inconsistent about poetry, he advances his own view. He starts a long monologue, (533d-535a), positing the following theory:

As I said earlier, that's not a subject you've mastered – speaking well about Homer; it's a divine power that moves you, as a "Magnetic" stone moves iron rings. (533d).

In his long speech, Plato makes a complex set of claims. I sketch them below in a brief summary.

- i. What makes Ion able to speak masterfully on Homer is not art but it is rather a divine force. (533d).
- ii. Such a divine force works like a chain (the well-know 'Rings allegory', 533d-e).
- iii. The same, divine force invests the poets, the rhapsodes and the audience too.
- iv. Poets, in general, make poetry by virtue of the same divine inspiration too. (533e). (All the good epic and poets are instances of such a process of

inspiration.)

- v. The Muse makes the poets inspired and as out of their minds as *bacchantes*.
- vi. The poets themselves are aware of the divine source of their poems (534a).
- vii. Conversely, in so far as the poet is completely conscious, he is not able to make good poetry (534b). In order to support his claim, Plato recalls what is recognized as the most beautiful of the poems as the incontrovertible evidence of his theory.
- viii. As a matter of empirical fact, the poem by Tynnichus from Chaicis is the only one worth remembering of that author (534d-e).
- ix. The author himself admits that such a poem stems entirely from the Muse.

Ion fully agrees, (535a). He even declares himself sympathetic with Plato's view according to which rhapsodes are 'interpreters of interpreters'. (535a).

Ion: What a vivid example you've given me, Socrates! I won't keep secrets from *you*. Listen, when *I* tell a sad story, my eyes are full of tears; and when I tell a story that's frightening or awful, my hair stands on end with fear and my heart jumps. (535c).

Ion confirms the 'trance-state' in which he exercises his profession. More precisely, Ion seems to describe a process of personification between him and the character he represents. But Ion's performances are much more complex than what they seem. Indeed, a few lines later he goes on in depicting himself on the stage.

Ion: I know very well that we do. I look down at them every time from up

on the rostrum, and they're crying and looking terrified, and as the stories are told they are filled with amazement (a). You see I must keep my wits and pay close attention to them (b): if I start them crying, *I* will laugh as I take their money, but if *they* laugh, I shall cry at having lost money (c). (535e).

It is worth stressing the ambiguity in Ion's speech. On the one hand he says to be fully unaware during his performance. On the other hand he maintains that during his performances he is very well aware of the audience's reaction. Such a discrepancy reveals one more time the vagueness and inconsistency of Ion's claims. We can stem further elements from the passage just quoted.

As Ion candidly admits, he has to terrify the audience in order to be rewarded worthily (a). It is not just a matter of offering a good performance as any actor conventionally should/would do. Ion *must* impress his public until people cry. Here, Ion is not just referring to the process of audience's identification with the characters we have already stressed; rather, I suggest that Plato wants to emphasize the highly competitive trait of such performances. In order to shed light on the nature of such performances, I shall report what J. Koenig writes regarding such representations: "he describes the difficulties a philosophical speaker has in making himself heard above all the other distractions, and all the other less praiseworthy speakers, at a festival, with the implication that the link between festival and intellectual display is now so well known as to attract enormous numbers of speakers, as well as the few genuine like himself"¹⁰¹.

¹⁰¹ *Games and festivals in the Greek world*, Konig, J. P. 2009 Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies. Boys-Stones, G., Graziosi, B. & Vasunia, P. (eds.). Oxford University Press, p. 384.

On this respect, it is useful to remember the depth and complexity inherent in the relation between performers and spectators. ‘There seems to have been a widespread concept of spectating as an active process, a performance of identity on behalf of the spectator not so far removed from modern concept of pilgrimage’, J. Koenig reminds us.¹⁰²

It is not the case that Plato dwells on this point. At 535e he iterates that the crowd is the last ring of the chain of divine possession.

Plato reasserts that there is neither knowledge nor skill when Ion talks about Homer:

Soc: [...] that you have plenty to say about Homer but not about the others-is that it's not mastering the subject, but a divine gift, that makes you a wonderful singer of Homer's praises. (536d).

Such a radical conception of poetry as divine gift is not as odd as it appears *prima facie*. Moreover, as Pappas points out, there is a gulf between being carried away and being out of one's head, and Ion's attitude on that is vague as usual. Such a gulf is open to different interpretations, since it is not clear the weight of the different ingredients in the process of making poetry. However, it is useful to bear in mind that the conception of poetry as divine gifts is doubtless older than Plato. Dodds recalls: ‘Older and more authentic is the repeated claim that minstrels derive their creative power from God. "I am self-taught," says Phemius; "it was a god who implanted all sorts of lays in my mind." The two parts of his statement are not felt as contradictory: he means that’ he has not memorized the lays of other minstrels, but is a creative poet who relies on the hexameter phrases welling up spontaneously as he needs them out of some unknown and uncontrollable depth; he sings "out of the

¹⁰²Ibid, p. 381.

gods," as the best minstrels always do."¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Dodds, E. R. (1951). *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, (1952), p. 11.

3.4.0. (536e – 541b): Ion’s failure.

(Or what knowledge is).

Ion rejects Plato’s claim according to which he speaks about Homer by virtue of divine possession, (536e). Once again, the rhapsode overlaps his knowledge of Homer with the knowledge of the subject matters Homer faces. His epistemological failure relies precisely in not realizing such a dichotomy. Although we have already faced similar fallacy from Ion in the previous sections, it is worthwhile to dwell more on that. Such a notion plays a pivotal role in the dialogue itself as well as in my interpretation. Indeed, both the commentators that praise Plato for his divine inspiration concept of poetry and those who charge him of disowning the essence and the value of poetry take for granted a central point, I argue. Namely, they assume that the epistemological failure mentioned above regards the rhapsode as well as Plato. Put in another way, those readings are based upon the conviction that Plato’s criticism to Ion shows that Plato did not see the dichotomy between to know a poem on the one hand and to know the subject(s) treated in the poem(s) on the other. But what is wrong with this argument is that it presupposes what it claims to show. The very fact that Plato has Socrates emphasize Ion’s misconception in realising such a dichotomy, does not entail by itself that the author of the dialogue himself endorsed such a view. *Per contra*, I argue that the reason why Plato repeatedly¹⁰⁴ attacks the rhapsode on the base of his twofold misconception is exactly to show how far the

¹⁰⁴ The present section of the dialogue devoted to it is a further evidence of that.

rhapsode was from a real understanding of the matters he demanded to be an expert in. Indeed, as we have already emphasized in the course of the present study, the rhapsode lacks knowledge of both his profession and of the subject matters the bards he masters talks about. In this regard, I take Plato's acknowledgment of aesthetic value as evidence that he was very well aware of the aforementioned dichotomy. If my approach has been right so far, the repetition of the arguments we are going to analyse can be read as further evidence that Plato fully acknowledged the dichotomy at stake. The dispute relies on the concept of profession. Ion fails to recognize which domain(s) are exclusively of the rhapsodes. His allegation, though wrong, points to something interesting. It raises indeed the question of 'whether a scientific method is available for criticism of the poetic art'¹⁰⁵.

Alongside others commentators, LaDrière maintains that 'the poet himself is not an expert in any kind of knowledge and, as poet, has not necessarily anything to teach us'.¹⁰⁶ But such a view corresponds to our attitude toward poetry as a fine art. As we have already emphasized, this is not the same subject Plato is dealing with in the *Ion*. Instead, I endorse LaDrière's view on Socrates' poetic theory. He rightly points out that 'it was not the purpose of the dialogue to present a doctrine about poetry contained in this description of it; for it is clear that in making Socrates resume the account of poetry given by 'the poets themselves.' (534a), and accepting this without demonstration or examination as sufficient for his purposes, Plato indicated as plainly as his method permitted that the problem of precisely why and how poetry came to be the scientifically valueless thing it was lay out- side the scrutiny of his

¹⁰⁵ Craig LaDrière (1951). The Problem of Plato's *Ion*, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 10 p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 26.

main inquiry, which is everywhere else so closely reasoned and documented.’¹⁰⁷ He goes further: ‘What must to be denied is that the poetic process is its principal subject.’¹⁰⁸ So far I agree with his reading. What I want to discuss is rather the second point he makes: ‘If the principal subject of the dialogue is not the process of producing poetry, neither is it the process of reciting poems’.¹⁰⁹ *A contrario*, I do think that the complex process of reciting poems is at the core of the dialogue. ‘It is not the part of his performance which the rhapsode shares with the actor that is to be discussed in the dialogue, and the notion of success (or failure) is in any case entirely irrelevant to the discussion.’¹¹⁰ The performing part is vital to the dialogue’s purpose because it is vital to the rhapsodic art. The very fact that we can affirm that the poetic process by itself is not at the centre of the dialogue does not imply that neither is the rhapsodic art. Ion does not see the difference between poetry and rhapsodizing, Plato does. This is the reason why on the one hand the philosopher praises Homer (as well as other poets), and on the other hand he criticises the rhapsode. Moreover, the notion of success (or failure) is absolutely relevant not just to the dialogue, but above all to get understanding of the Greek society as a whole.

Dodds is very clear about the vital role of success (or failure) in the Homeric society: ‘Homeric man's highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *time*, public esteem: ‘Why should I fight, "asks Achilles, "if the good fighter receives no more than the bad? And the strongest moral force which Homeric

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 27.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 27-28.

man knows is not the fear of god, but respect for public opinion, *aidos*, says Hector at the crisis of his fate, and goes with open eyes to his death. The situation to which the notion of *ate* is a response arose not merely from the impulsiveness of Homeric man, but from the tension between individual impulse and the pressure of social conformity characteristic of a shame-culture. In such a society, anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to "lose face," is felt as unbearable. That perhaps explains how not only cases of moral failure, like Agamemnon's loss of self-control, but such things as the bad bargain of Glaucus, or Automedon's disregard of proper tactics, came to be "projected" on to a divine agency.¹¹¹

I am aware that Dodds' remarks relate to the Homeric society specifically and not to the Platonic one. But I argue that the rhapsode's initial reference to the importance of succeeding shows that Dodds' remarks are still central in Plato's own time. Put in another way, as *Ion* confirms at the very beginning of the dialogue, the main goal of his performance is to achieve the success among his audience. This is the reason why I believe that Dodds' remark applies to Plato's own society too.

The distance between my conception of Plato's *Ion* and that of LaDrière's depends upon his radical underestimation of the role and the function of the rhapsodes in Greece. But since such an issue has been already treated at length in the second section on this study, I would confine myself here to notice that he radically ignores the historical significance of such a figure. '[...] the presentation of commentaries on poems. This is a sort of lecturing on poetry, which as we have noticed includes praise and in general judgment of what is well or badly done. [...] To settle this question is

¹¹¹ Dodds, E. R. (1951). *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, (1952), pp. 17-18.

the object of the dialogue. The problem of the *Ion* is not poetry, and not the recitation of poetry, but the criticism of poetry as *Ion* does it; and, by implication, such criticism of all similar art.¹¹² As I said earlier, if we ignore the historical context and the significance of the entities at stake, we are no longer able to make sense of Plato's arguments. Plato was not concerned in the criticism of poetry as we conceive it. Otherwise, I wonder why he would have praised Homer and the other Greek versers and at the same time criticized so harshly the rhapsode?

Thus, I disagree with LaDrière's 'literary' reading of Plato's criticism. My objection depends upon the fact that if the reader ignores the historical perspective, they easily lose the complexity of the entities at hand. Regarding *Ion*'s criticisms of Homer for instance, LaDrière reads them as a product of the inspiration as well. He even regards them as "impressionistic criticism".¹¹³ But as I have already argued at length, what we are dealing with in the *Ion* are neither literary flaws nor artistic interpretations. Rather, what worries Plato is the (lack of) knowledge beyond the recitation (and explanation) of the poems. The huge impact of such peculiar, rhapsodic representations is, of course, part of his concern.

Regarding the second half of the dialogue, LaDrière supports his claim by reference to *Ion*'s lack of *techne* and knowledge in his attitude toward poetry. He even draws the conclusion that: 'And since all that *Ion* could possibly do by system and method he would have to do by some system or method which is not peculiar to a literary or poetic art or science, but is proper to some other art, it is concluded that there is no

¹¹² LaDrière, (1951), p. 29.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 31.

literary or poetic art or science by which criticism can be practiced. The art which Ion professes is simply found not to exist.¹¹⁴

I have already pointed out several counterexamples to this conclusion. Indeed, I shall argue that a different kind of evidence is provided by the text. I would point to the many passages throughout the text, in which Plato explicitly mentions ‘rhapsodic art’ as such. To that extent, it is worth remembering that Plato does not just mention it, but he looks carefully at it. Indeed, in the first section we have stressed how he gives an account of that. An additional quotation in the second half of the dialogue follows the same line:

Ion, since you have more experience with Homer's work than I do, you pick out for me the passages that belong to the rhapsode and to his profession, the passages a rhapsode should be able to examine and to judge better than anyone else (a).

Ion: My answer, Socrates, is "all of them (b)."

Soc: That's not *your* answer, Ion. Not "all of them." Or are you really so forgetful? But no, it would not befit (c) a rhapsode to be forgetful.

Ion: What do you think I'm forgetting? (539d-540a).

Plato makes clear here two things at once. In the first half he singles out the rhapsodic area of expertise. (a). Secondly, Ion’s reply shows how fallacious his understanding is. Even after Plato’s detailed criticism the rhapsode is not able to recognise what he should know and what is not relevant to his own profession/art and knowledge (b). It is finally interesting to notice what Plato says in order to

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 32.

underline the flaws in his interlocutor's answer. Ion asserts how inappropriate to be forgetful is for a rhapsode (c). This peculiar remark can be read as further evidence that Plato acknowledges the rhapsodic art as such. There is no clue of devaluation or presumption toward rhapsodizing *qua* rhapsodic art. When he harshly criticizes Ion it happens because of Ion's misleading comprehension and use of poetry. In that respect, I am sympathetic with LaDrière's comparison:

'And it is in conjunction with Plato's researches into sophistic that this dialogue must be read if it is to be properly understood as part of Plato's work as a whole. The rhapsode in his capacity of public lecturer, as critic, was as much a professional teacher as the sophist, or as the philosopher might be whom Plato envisaged; as such, his particular claims had to be dealt with, specifically. The question in the *Ion* is not, as it is in the *Republic*, of the poet's claim as teacher; that is only incidentally involved.'¹¹⁵

LaDrière's final point regards the difference between the knowledge of a poem and the specific knowledge of the subject matters mentioned in the poems. LaDrière's maintains that Plato does not see such a dichotomy. 'The judgment of poets is judgment of the quasi-scientific or philosophic truth of what the poets say; and such judgment is in the province not of one who professes knowledge of a supposed art of poetics, but of one who has scientific knowledge of the actual things of which the poet speaks. The poet's achievement is to be judged in terms of his fidelity to the realities he reports.'¹¹⁶ He even associates Plato's whole aesthetics to that principle. 'Plato never arrived at this distinction; so he remains our greatest example of the

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 32.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 34.

constantly recurring fact that often those who begin by valuing art because of its assumed power of revealing reality and truth are forced to dismiss it in the end because upon examination they see that its capacity for such revelation is in fact so limited, and its value when judged by such a standard so disappointingly slight.’¹¹⁷ LaDrière’s whole point relies on the assumption that the correspondence between truth and representation is the only criteria Plato uses in order to value artworks. But as we have already showed, this is not the case. Nor LaDrière does not give any evidence in support of his view.

As I said before, the section of the dialogue under examination is a recurrence of Plato’s previous criticism. Ion does not recognize yet the borders of his art nor the epistemological dichotomy mentioned above. Pappas calls it ‘wilful ignorance’.¹¹⁸ The reason is that the rhapsode uses Homer as a key, the vehicle to know anything in the world.

In other words, Ion not only possesses no general knowledge, but also rejects it. On every important issue he turns his back on a search for the truth, preferring to know only what Homer thinks about the issue at stake. He will not aim separately at the truth of the matter. From Socrates' point of view, Ion's attitude is thus a perverse choice of ignorance over knowledge.

One thing is to be out of mentally ill, even regularly and for a brief amount of time, ‘But the repeated conscious choice of ignorance over knowledge is another matter.’

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

¹¹⁸ Pappas, (1989), p. 385.

Pappas reads Plato's attitude toward the rhapsode as a *continuum* in his hostility toward the bards¹¹⁹. As I have already said, I tend to avoid interpreting a dialogue by reference with another one. It presents too many risks, and it leaves always the door open to the question of why one chooses a certain dialogue rather than another one for the comparison. I would rather suggest (and I do try) singling out constant features in Plato's thought as a whole. So far as they solve, (and do not create), further inconsistencies. However, Pappas maintains that two elements recur:

1. Philosophical dissatisfaction with the individual point of view.
2. Simple ignorance of the poets (all pretenders to knowledge disappoint him).

Pappas points them out picking up the parallel with painting in book X on the *Republic*:

“The aesthetic sophistication of which we are so proud consists in knowing that this is not the point of painting. We have learned from not to look for knowledge about the bed on the basis of the painting, but rather to appreciate it as a painting.” But Plato never says that painting's value or task, as well as any another art that today we qualify as liberal/fine art, relies upon its capacity to give us info on the objects of its representations. I thus agree on another issue pointed out by Pappas: “I claim that what bothers Plato most here is poetry's power to fascinate us with the merely particular, or individual, or idiosyncratic.”¹²⁰ I do think that Plato acknowledged such an entity, namely the enormous clout of words, especially in an oral culture like the Athens of the fifth century B.C. However, it is useful to remember, Plato's criticism toward Ion does not rely on that particular point. This is also the reason why I

¹¹⁹ In particular, Pappas draws a comparison between *Republic X* and the *Ion*.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.388.

disagree with Pappas's conclusion. Indeed, in the end he maintains that what Plato abhors about art is its representation. But once again, such a strong claim goes against what Plato has Socrates say regarding paintings, as well as sculpture, at 533a-c. In both the examples, Plato clearly shows to be not at all concerned with the representational features of the aforementioned art forms. It is rather the case that in such an occasion¹²¹, I have already emphasized, it is likely to find hints of aesthetic value in Socrates' speech. Indeed, a closer reading to the passages at stake suggests that the capacity to represent something would play a pivotal, positive role in the process of evaluating artworks. As a matter of fact, In Plato's criticism there is no flaws in the subject matters Ion represents, *qua* represented.

3.4.1. Rem tene, verba sequentur & verba tene, res sequentur.

Poetry now as then. An Appendix.

Throughout the remaining portion of section II (536e-540a) Ion unsuccessfully reiterates his argument. Once again, it relies upon the misapprehension between subject matters and different approaches to it. Such an issue, I shall stress one more time, is at the very centre of the dialogue. But what it is even more interesting is that we find the very same topic in contemporary literary criticism. Let me draw now the following comparison in order to emphasize the importance and actuality of the dialogue at stake. I draw such a comparison for another reason too. As it is to say, to

¹²¹ Section II of the present work, Aesthetic value.

demonstrate that Plato's criticism to Ion implies a conception of poetry as proper, self-stand art. Such a stance is very much consistent with what a XX century literature Noble praise-winner said.

The 1975 Nobel Prize laureate Eugenio Montale once uttered: 'You know, poetry is made by words.' The poet's *prima facie* trivial claim was actually an embarrassed reply to a friend of his. The matter relied on the fact that the poet could not recognize the (real) flower that he described in one of his composition¹²².

Umberto Eco picks up this episode in order to 'understand the difference between prose and verse'¹²³, as he puts it. In the former case, the narrator must know both the subject matter(s) and be able to describe what she is talking about. Otherwise, the subject at stake was not necessary for the tale's purpose, the author of *The name of the Rose* concludes. Thus, in Eco's speech, the blueprint for the prose genre is the following: *rem tene, verba sequentur*. Roughly speaking: '*first get firmly the things you want to talk about, and then you will find the proper words*'. Conversely, we find the hallmark of poetry: *verba tene, res sequentur*. As Eco phrases it, '*first you fall in love with words, and then the rest will follow by itself*'. It means, among other things, the in the latter case neither the exact knowledge of the subject matter nor the proper words for describing it are essential for the bards.

Following the same line of thought, we can draw a comparison with Plato's *Ion*.

Indeed, I argue that now as then, the essence of poetry relies upon the words by which prosody is made. Further, I urge that Plato was aware of such a dualism in literature. I would then highlight that the core argument of the *Ion* relies on the very

¹²² Such an anecdote is mentioned in the book *Montale e la Volpe*, by Maria Luisa Saziani, Mondadori, Milano, 2011.

¹²³ Eco U., *La bustina di Minerva*, *L'Espresso* magazine, 23/12/2011, p. 83.

same issue. Unlike Eco however, as I argue throughout this paper, most of the criticisms to Plato does not match the blueprint that he finely singles out. This is the reason why, in the next section, I will focus on the real objects (and purpose) of his criticism.

3.5.0. What is the aim of Plato's criticism? 541b-542b.

Commenting the *Ion*, Halliwell reaches the conclusion that for Plato there is 'only one criterion of poetic merit, systematically informative truth. A corollary of all this is that Socrates appears to rule out the possibility of any kind of fiction, or even of less-than-strictly-veridical poetic statements.'¹²⁴ But Plato's criticism of poets in the *Ion* does not concern the truth of their stories. Indeed, he clearly appreciates the beauty of their poems, without ever mentioning any concern about the truth or the falsehood of their stories¹²⁵. If Halliwell were right in that, I wonder how it is possible to explain Plato's repeated appreciations of poetry in general and Homer in particular in the course of the dialogue. Perhaps, Plato's attitude appears puzzling because he recognizes the poets as being able to say 'wonderful lyrics', even if they have neither knowledge nor understanding of the things they tell about. Yet, what puzzles Plato is the process of creating poetry. If the only canon for evaluating poetry was systematically informative truth, Plato should recognize neither beauty nor any possible value in poetry. But as I have already shown in section II, he clearly does. Moreover, he does praise not just poetry, but plenty of different arts and activities, rhapsody included, (533c).

Halliwell calls Plato's attitude toward poets in the *Ion* 'knowledge-inspiration dichotomy'. Although I believe he is in the right direction in emphasizing one fundamental element on Plato's attack of the poets, I disagree with his conclusions. I

¹²⁴ Halliwell, Stephen, 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient texts and modern problems*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 41.

¹²⁵ The question regarding the truth of the tales is not at stake here. Rather, Plato will dwell on that in the *Republic*. But there is no clue of that in the *Ion*. 5

believe Halliwell sheds light on Plato's criticism, saying, 'If poets are really to be counted as polymathic experts, than their work ought to be able to stand up to just the sort of hand-nosed scrutiny that Socrates applies in the *Ion*.'¹²⁶ Nevertheless, I do not agree with his conclusion: 'That is why the *Ion*, like the *Apology*, is ambivalent as well as undecided about poetry: it both exposes the demands that poetry cannot meet and leaves uncertain the basis of the 'many fine things' that are still to be found in it, while simultaneously intimating, in its central section, that poetic power may be partly rooted in the capacity to arouse intense emotional responses in its audience.'¹²⁷ As well as for what concerns the *Apology*, I do think the *Ion* is neither ambivalent nor undecided about poetry.

In what follows, I contend that there is neither a dichotomy nor a contrast between knowledge and inspiration in Plato's thought. I argue that one thing is stressing the lack of wisdom and knowledge of the poets in order to show that such supposed polymathic experts are wanting of the things they pretend to teach. As we have already emphasized in reference to the historical frame, this is due to the fact that the audience acknowledges what poets/*rhapsodes* said as teaching. Another, different question is to object the value of the poems from an aesthetic point of view, which Plato clearly does not. Rather, I believe that the *Ion* represents a hard attack against poets' authority in the ancient Greek society. This interpretation explains why Plato repeatedly recognizes the beauty of the poems, but on the other hand he repeatedly shows the complete misunderstanding of Ion about his own activity. It also avoids any inconsistency in the text or dichotomy in Plato's thought either. By itself, such a

¹²⁶ *Ib.*, p.41.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 41.

position involves neither a negative account nor a devaluation of poetry. Halliwell rightly points out how inspiration can give a ‘causal hypothesis’¹²⁸ for poetry. But it is hard to demonstrate that this is the only condition for making poetry. Both Halliwell and Woodruff¹²⁹ agree on that. If we take for granted that Plato seriously thinks that inspiration is the sole condition for making poetry, we get more problems than we can resolve following such an assumption. For what concerns the issue of inspiration in the *Ion*, Halliwell comments: ‘But does not and cannot tell us what counts as, or how to appraise, good poetry, nor can it provides a more general understanding of the nature of poetry; inspiration is compatible with more than one criterion of poetic quality.’¹³⁰

On the same line, Woodruff says that ‘the account of inspiration is new in Plato. But it sits poorly with other platonic statements about poetry and poets.’¹³¹ He also singles out three elements that can *go wrong with inspiration* and poets:

- Inspired poetry making is not motivated by the love of the *kalon* (‘the fine’).
- It cannot issue in belief.
- It has no purpose of the sort that would define a *techne*.

I disagree with Woodruff’s interpretation for the following reasons. The lack of the love of the *kalon* is not a part of Plato’s criticism in the *Ion*. As Woodruff rightly

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 42.

¹²⁹ Woodruff, Paul, 1982, *What Could Go Wrong with Inspiration? Why Plato's poets fail*. In Moravcsik and Temko 1982, pp. 137–150.

¹³⁰ Halliwell, 2002, p. 42.

¹³¹ Woodruff, 1982, p. 137.

points out, it is part of the argument Plato advances in the *Hippias Major*, but in the *Ion* this is not mentioned as a fault in poetry making. In addition to that, I tend not to interpret certain dialogue in reference to another.

For what concerns the second claim then, I believe this concerns does not regard poetry in itself. Rather, the matter in Plato's view is that the rhapsode Ion is not able to justify in any way what he does, why and with what purpose. I argue that Woodruff here is adopting toward poetry as whole the stance that Plato takes toward Ion. But the very fact that Plato's criticism remains without answer by Ion does not imply a devaluation of poetry in itself by Plato¹³². This brings us to the third point: is poetry a *techne*? And if so, why?

¹³² I have already illustrated such a point in section II.

3.5.1. Why poetry is art. (*For Plato too*).

According to Woodruff's final point, poetry is not an art. I believe the opposite. In Plato's first criticism we find an important reference-point in support of the view I maintain. When Plato asks Ion how he can establish that Homer speaks better than anyone else, he draws two different comparisons. Firstly, he takes the example of medicine, in order to explain that the doctor - namely the expert in that particular field - is the person who knows better than anyone else who is right or not talking about health. This is a plain account of *techné*, I submit. The second example concerns painting and sculpture. I believe the latter comparison is illuminating in supporting the claim that Plato recognizes poetry as art for the following reason. Plato has Socrates ask whether an expert in such arts is able to discern the value of any sculpture or picture, by anyone.

The truth-value of an artwork is not the matter at stake here. Otherwise a good painter or sculptor should be the man who knows how the subject of any painting is made, in order to represent it well, accordingly to such a reading. But evidently this is not the case for Plato. Indeed, he quotes the most famous artists in order to show that an expert in those fields knows when a statue is well done, and he does not just know one artist's production.

Well. Take sculpture. Have you ever known anyone who is clever at explaining which statues are well made in the case of Daedalus, son of Metion, or Epeius, son of Panopeus, or Theodorus of Samos, or any other

single sculptor, but who's lost when he's among the products of other sculptors, and he dozes off and has nothing to say? (533b).¹³³

What emerges clearly from the passage above is that Plato shows to believe that the goal of arts like sculpture and painting is to make beautiful pictures and statues. In this respect, Ion fails twice because he recognizes neither what kind of art poetry nor what the value of Homer is. Once Plato recognizes that the criteria for judging sculptures and pictures is how beautiful they appear, there is no longer room for a dispute whether the truth-value is the canon for judging whether an artwork is well made or not. There is a further clue that indicates that Plato accepts poetry as a specific art. As Woodruff emphasizes, inspiration is ‘far from being the distinctive condition of poets or artists, inspiration turns out to be a common factor in Plato’s explanation of human success.’¹³⁴ But he also says “That there is no *techne* of poetry is an obvious consequence of Plato’s radical account of inspiration as possession.’¹³⁵ I want to contend such a conclusion for the following reasons. I argue indeed that the reason why Plato criticizes Ion relies on his conception and consequent acknowledgment of poetry as art, which strictly differs from the rhapsode’s one. However, Woodruff is not alone on this line of thought. In her seminal paper, Stern-Gillet starts her treatment emphasizing the Ion possesses neither expertise nor knowledge on the topics he talks about¹³⁶. Further, she urges that it is not clear whether Plato had a conception of art. What she is instead certain about, is that there

¹³³ The same argument is also present at 532e, 533a and 533c.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 139.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 145.

¹³⁶ Stern-Gillet, S., 2004, p. 172.

is no room for such a conception in the *Ion*¹³⁷. More precisely, she asserts that ‘[...] poetry resists classification as a *techne*.’¹³⁸ Further, she argues that ‘Poetry is unlike such traditional *technai* as arithmetic, medicine, painting, and sculpture.’¹³⁹ But neither is clear why that is, nor how the appeal to tradition helps in throwing light on the (alleged) difference among the aforementioned arts. To that extent, Stern-Gillet mentions ‘the very manner’ by which Plato singles out what is (and what is not) an art. Yet she does not say more on what such a manner is. She maintains that Socrates’ main point is the following: “it is not knowledge or expertise that enables us rhapsodes to excel in their function but some form of divine possession.”¹⁴⁰ Well, in response to this criticism I would say that everything depends on what kind of knowledge (and expertise) we talk about. Indeed, Stern-Gillet mentions several different elements in the passage above. There is no doubt that the vehicle to excel in rhapsodizing is not the knowledge of the subject matter. But we have already seen that this kind of knowledge is not the only one at stake in Plato’s speech, as already pointed out.

Besides, Stern-Gillet insists on a completely passive account of creativity by the poets too. In her view, the difference between Democritus and Plato about the role of the author in the creative, poetry-making process is the following: while for the former the poet is “supremely and uniquely gifted”, for the latter he is “merely the recipient of rare good luck.” As I have in part already said, the very fact that Plato

¹³⁷ It is interesting to notice that she grants that in other dialogues, like the *Politicus* for instance, in which we can find an explicit acknowledgment of such an art.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 173.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*. p. 173.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 178.

acknowledges the power of inspiration in art, does not mean that the poet is simply a passive mean. Above all, not all the attacks that Plato addresses to the (singular) Ion correspond to Plato's attitude toward (general) poetry.

Stern-Gillet rightly emphasizes the gulf between Plato's account of poetry and Kant's and the Romantic one. In that respect, I am sympathetic with her view that Plato's stance in the *Ion* is not at all an *ante litteram* Romantic attitude toward the creative process.

For what concerns the issue of the *techne* of poetry, Stern-Gillet is against Janaway, who believes Plato had a conception of a *techne* of poetry. She does not face the parallel problem of a *techne* of rhapsody, which I think is strictly connected with the poetic one.

Stern-Gillet herself mentions the danger of explaining a dialogue by referring to another by Plato. It is quite surprising though; that a few lines later she refers to the *Protagoras* and to the *Gorgias* in order to support her claim that Plato does not recognise poetry as a proper, independent *techne*. However, I endorse such a view, in so far as it regards a single dialogue. Instead, the path I want to take in order to sustain my claim refers not to a single dialogue but to Plato's thought in its entirety.

In the third dialogue Stern-Gillet takes in exams, poetry is no longer assimilated to rhetoric. It gains an independent status, according to Stern-Gillet it happens because in the case of the *Phaedrus* poetry is enriched by knowledge and by "a concern for truth."

From the analysis of the three works mentioned above, Stern-Gillet derives the 'techne standard criteria':

1. It aims at the truth;

2. It embodies general principles on the nature of its subject-matter or defining activity;
3. It derives from such principles standards of excellence;
4. It is concerned with good of its object or recipient;
5. It can give a rational account of itself;
6. It can be imparted by teaching.
7. Each *techne* has an object that is exclusive to itself. (From the *Ion*, each *techne* has a distinctive field.)

Stern-Gillet argues that the lack of knowledge affects in the same way Homer and the rhapsode. But they do not practise the same *techne*. That is precisely the reason why Plato's criticisms are different.

Moreover, Stern-Gillett wonders whether poetry is one single field or not.

She believes it is not. Indeed, she argues, "at the time of writing the *Ion*, [Plato] meant to challenge the traditional status of poetry as *techne*." It is worth to notice that she reads Plato's mention of poetry as a *techne* at 532c8-9 as a tactic rather than a true statement. But it is not clear to me for what purpose Plato had to do that, instead of stating his criticism clearly.

I also do not find convincing her interpretation of an argument *ex silentio* the fact that at no point in the main speech does Socrates explicitly deny the existence of a poetic *techne*. Failure to deny that something exists, it might be said, is compatible with assuming that it does exist'¹⁴¹.

Later on, Stern-Gillett says poetry differs from the other *technai*. From this very fact, she derives that poetry is not a *techne*. I would rather ensue that poetry is a *techne*,

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.189.

with just different goals and consequently with a different status. It explains why technical skills are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for achieving the excellence in poetry. Even if we agree with Stern-Gillett's *techne* standard criteria, the fact that poetry does not match all of them does not imply that it is not a *techne*.

Stern-Gillett rightly emphasizes that the modern notion of inspiration is quite different from the Greek one. (*entheos*).

Nevertheless, she refers to three distinguished figures as R.G. Collingwood, Freud and Jung (At the very end the paper she also mentions the English poet A. E. Houseman, who is very much consistent with the non-rational conception of poetry making).

All of them actually support a kind of non-technical theory of art.

What is certainly quite different from our own time is the conception of deity. This is mainly due to the fact that divine forces and entity had a huge spread impact on the mass. From this very fact, we can say that to some extent the concept of inspiration is not exactly the same. But, in the light of what we have seen so far, I do not think it is so different, especially in Plato.

In the conclusion, Stern-Gillett affirms: "Plato's Socrates' view is that poems come from a source that is other than the poets' intellect and reason." According to her view, Plato sustains such a claim with a twofold argument. On the one hand he attributes to the divine influence the creation of the poems. On the other hand the poets are unconscious, if not even mentally imbalanced, mouthpiece.

Now, we could agree with Stern-Gillett, when she says that the claim according to which Plato's account of poetry-making in the *Ion* is not an *ante litteram* account of

Roman conception of the poet as a creative genius. But this very fact does not entail a complete passive account of the process of artistic creation.

Rhapsodizing.

3.5.2. Why Plato (rightly) criticizes Ion.

I believe a further clarification is required in order to shed more light on Plato's attitude toward Ion in the homonym dialogue. I would also sum up the main points I have presented throughout the paper. The argument I am going to present in this final section on the *Ion* plays a pivotal role in making my point. I argue indeed that Plato's hard criticism against Ion aims to show that the rhapsode is completely mistaken in understanding the essence of his own art. If Plato believed, as Ion does, that an expert speaks better and more beautiful than any poet, he will not define Homer's verses, and even Ion's one, as beautiful. I also argue that from the very same reason we are now able to derive why Plato criticizes Ion. My view is that Plato wants to show that Ion demands to be a good poet and rhapsode claiming to speak 'more beautiful' than anyone else, but he is not able to elucidate what 'more beautiful' means; among the many other things he shows to be misled about.

Plato accepts that Ion speaks more beautifully than anyone else, but he points out that it happens not by virtue of the knowledge he possesses of the subjects about which he speaks, but because of the very nature of poetry. Such an art, as well as painting and sculpture, has its own essence and goal. And Ion fails once again in not recognizing it. He does not grasp that the knowledge of the subjects he treats is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for making (good) poetry.

But as I have already pointed out, there is a further evidence for claiming that Plato acknowledges poetry as art of making beautiful poems regardless of any truth-value. When Plato draws a comparison between poetry and painting and sculpture, Ion is not able to understand that his own art belongs to the same set. What all of them have in common is indeed the goal of making beautiful artworks. Moreover, I suggest that the harshness of Plato's attack is due to Ion's peculiar role. Ion is not just a poet *tout court*, but he is Homer's privileged interpreter. That, I believe, sheds light on why Plato's critique to Ion is harder than his attitude toward poets in general. Ion speaks about everything, without having any knowledge of the subjects he tells about. In Plato's view, what is wrong is that the rhapsode, by means of Homer's legacy and authority, speaks about any issue. The matter is that when he is questioned about what he says, like in the Socratic discussion, his twofold ignorance comes out. On the one hand he ignores the essence of poetry as well as his own art. On the other hand he ignores the subjects he tells about. Further, the rhapsode demands to teach what he eventually lacks knowledge of, by virtue of a misleading appeal to the classical tradition. And it is interesting to notice that since this early dialogue we have a crystalline formulation of this argument. And such a pattern is at the base of Plato's attacks to poets, rhetoricians and various religious figures.

To this extent, an alleged opposite view regarding art must be faced and perhaps reconciled. Indeed, on the one hand Socrates says that the rhapsode (*technē*; 533d) and the poet (533e, 534c) do not speak through art, but on the other hand, sometimes Socrates' pupil seems to hold the opposite view, namely that both the poet and the rhapsode do speak by the means of their own art. However, I would now advance my own theory in order to answer the question whether it is possible, for Plato, to speak

about poetry through art (*techne*), or not. Once such an issue about poetry will be solved, it will shed light on the issue of inspiration too. Which is, I maintain, strictly connected with the theme of Plato's problematic attitude toward art in general and poetry in particular, (not just in the *Ion*). For what concerns the first question, I shall argue that the above inconsistency is actually only an alleged one, for the reasons I am going to present throughout this section. As we have seen in detail in the previous sections devoted to the analysis of Socrates' attacks to the eponymous rhapsode, when Socrates says that the most beautiful poems are not reducible to a matter of *tecné*, he does not deny, I maintain, that art of poetry as such, its importance and value. Neither Plato argues that the art of poetry is useless for making (good) poems, I maintain.

Rather, what he does say, I argue, is that the art of poetry is not enough for making (good) poetry. The famous reference to Tynnichus from Chaicis serves exactly this purpose: a lousy poet composed the most beautiful of the poems because of the Muses' inspiration.

Put in another way, for Plato speaking through art is not a sufficient condition in order to produce beautiful poems. This is due to the peculiar nature of poetry, which is not reducible to a matter of mere *tecné*, according to Plato.

Now comes into play the theme of inspiration, which occupies a good portion of the second half of the dialogue. I endorse Dodds' claim¹⁴², according to which the divine origin of poetic compositions was archaic and shared.¹⁴³

¹⁴² It has already been discussed at page 97.

¹⁴³ Dodds, 1951, p. 11.

However, one might argue that there is textual evidence of Socrates saying both that the rhapsode and the poet do (and do not) speak through art. I do not deny it, but I reply pointing out that the reason why that happens relies on the strategy Plato adopts toward the rhapsode throughout the whole dialogue. Namely, Plato wants to make plain Ion's complete ignorance and unreliability. In order to fully accomplish this task, Plato does Socrates maintain complete opposite views, showing that the rhapsode is willing to endorse, step by step, such inconsistent views on the main features (and even nature) of his own professions. And the rhapsode does follow Socrates' frequent changes of mind. To this extent, Plato's strategy is a successful one, because the rhapsode shows not to even realize he argues for opposite claims from time to time.

Fourth Chapter.

Plato on poetry in the middle dialogues.

Introduction.

The main aim of this chapter is to emphasise the central themes and constant features of Plato's attitude toward poetry in the *Symposium*. As we will see throughout this part of the work, some elements that I have already pointed out in the former sections will recur. But as the case of aesthetic experience in the *Symposium* shows, new, related entities of Plato's aesthetics stand. And they give further evidence that Plato did not have a negative stance to poetry. But, rather, I believe that the elements that we are going to analyse throughout this part of the study contribute to prove that Plato had a consistent, positive attitude in the main dialogues of the middle period of his philosophical production.

4. 1 .0. *Symposium*.

First of all what is remarkable to note for what concerns the *Symposium*, is that the salient points in connection with Plato's aesthetics lies more upon the whole structure of the dialogue rather than what we can find in single passages. Indeed, for what concerns the sake of the study, one point the *Symposium* is all about is people's

private practice of poetry. Two main points worth emphasizing follow the discussion. First, a broader entity stands a part. It relies upon the way average fifth century B.C. Greeks experienced poetry. Although we have already faced the issue at length, the dialogue at stake illustrates a further step in comparison with what we have already highlighted in the first three chapters of this work. As a matter of fact, the main characters of the *Symposium* give us a typical picture of what a private banquet was.¹⁴⁴ Above all, how pervasive the presence and role of (recitation of) poetry was.

Another contingent concern regards the urgency to avoid the tricky matter of Pleasure in Plato. Which is, at any rate in my view, not centrally involved in Plato's aesthetics. Or better say, I argue that pleasure is not in a necessary relation with (the experience of) art or artworks. As we will see very soon in details, pleasure in the *Symposium* is one of the many entities at play. But the role it plays is mainly in relation to aesthetics experience, I submit. Aesthetic experience is a central topic in contemporary aesthetics¹⁴⁵. In what follows, I aim to show that in the dialogue at stake we can find evidence of aesthetic experience in Plato's thought. Moreover, such a notion is in full accordance with the features previously emphasized about

¹⁴⁴ I am of course aware that the people portrayed in this dialogue as well as in others do not represent the majority of the average Athenians. Nevertheless, I would resist the objection of the non-true representation of real ancient Greeks in Plato's works for the following reasons. Given the peculiar hierarchic structure of the ancient Greek society, the quantitative representation is out of the topic. I.e. Slaves for instances, even of they were the majority or at any rate a huge number, were completely put away of city life. Secondly, what Plato deals with (and whom we are interest in, in order to state his attitude toward poetry) are his city life interlocutors. It is true that in the dialogue under examination the participants clearly belong to an elite. But in most of Plato's works, they are expression of the average people that crowded fifth century B.C. Athens.

¹⁴⁵

Plato's stance on poetry. This especially will emerge plainly at the end of the treatment of the *Symposium*, I believe.

4. 1. 1. Textual analysis.

The first relevant topic we meet in the beginning of the dialogue is wisdom. Which is of course a theme we have already seen as often associated with poetry and poets. In this connection, we have also emphasized how Plato, since the *Apology*, has harshly objected such a traditional connection. It is not a case then that Socrates approaches the topic with his well-known irony, starting the discussion with his fellow banqueters. Agathon is the object of Socratic irony in particular. Indeed, according to Socrates, a few days before he showed off his oratory skills in front of thousands of Athenians (*Symp.* 175e). This is the reason why Socrates sarcastically argues that his own little wisdom is not so wide and powerful as Agathon's one. *A fortiori*, it does not work so as Agathon ironically suggests at the beginning of the banquet. (175e). Neither the mere proximity nor the affinity, as later on the dialogue seems to suggest, fills the recipients of wisdom as a flux of water. But the striking example of the flux of water provides a good instance of some of the views we will encounter in the first half of the dialogue. The course of narration however, suddenly changes the minds of the discussants and the central topic turns out to be love, *eros*. Which will become the very subject around which all the participants will devote their own speeches.

More precisely, Phaedrus qualifies *eros* as ‘guidance’ (178d). Such a guidance takes the shape of a *telos*, according to which some actions have to be taken and some others not. It is true that in Agathon’s words that seems to have a moral significance. But such guidance is not confined to the moral domain, I urge. And the rest of the speech too goes in this direction.

The essence of (my interpretation of) the *Symposium* lies then on this particular point, I submit. Plato here does two things at once, I argue. On the one hand, he gives to the reader a picture of how a typical private Athenian banquet was. As to say, abundant drinking and food, important and heterogonous guests. But above all, Plato gives us an account of how a typical private banquet should be like in his own view¹⁴⁶. Namely, moderate assumption of alcohol, various guests who willingly decide to moderate not just the material goods but also the speeches they deliver. It is not the case then, that The flautist, an usual presence for the banquets, is kindly invited to leave the reunion. Indeed, all the speeches share important central features. Among which one stands apart, I submit. Which is the reference to the divinities. It is not only *eros* because of its peculiar features that deserves different treatment by the guests. Rather, each speaker treats all the mythological tales recalled in the dialogue at stake in a very original way. As the course of narration clearly shows, Plato is not at all against appealing to poets or divinities. Socrates himself does that and he never objects the numerous references the other speakers make. What it is really interesting to highlight to this extent is the way the discussion at the centre of the dialogues

¹⁴⁶ A further clue of the plausibility of this interpretation is given in *Law*, I, 639d-e, where Plato highlights how the banquets are always chaotic and without a guide.

takes place. One of the banqueters simply indicates a common topic. Any reference to the mythological material that follows is relevant to the topic and never just instrumental to corroborate any claim, external to the purpose of the discussion. Notwithstanding that, I believe Dodd's above digression makes more sense now. What I mean is that the characters circumscribe the subject matter of their speeches. Of course they present their own view on the matter, but it is not a case I believe, that the speakers present a consistent set of references relevant to their view, instead of a single or unclear quotation¹⁴⁷. The speakers reason around the relevant extracts they quote and *Eros* turns out to be in accordance with virtue and wisdom, one of the topics mentioned at the beginning of the dialogue. More precisely, *Eros* is not the cause of everything could be vaguely connected to it. On the contrary, *Telos* and coherence, as well as its proper manifestations of are connected with *Eros*. Love, as any other divinity, cannot cause what is not relevant to it, Plato insists.

4. 2. 0. Pausanias, on the objects of love.

Pausanias wittily wonders whether there is just one kind of love, or rather two, as he eventually argues for. He first puts clearly that any action must be valued according to its *telos*. But he also advances with vim the claim that the form by which any action is performed will reveal whether it is well done, well expressed or not. Note also that an aesthetic nuance seems to be outlined in the passage at stake. Pausanias' insistence on the 'how' *any* given act is done points to, I suggest, a certain beauty in the acts themselves. Because of an act can be exercised properly or not, according to

¹⁴⁷ Like the sophist Protagoras does with Simonides' extract, as emphasized in chapter II.

its *telos*. Such a features will be picked up and further developed throughout the whole dialogue. Moreover, the final remark on what Pausanias himself classifies as general principle is, (along side *Phaedo* 98c), one of the most glaring expression of teleologism in causal relation in Plato's thought. From 181b to the remaining part of his speech, Pausanias actually discerns between a pure, authentic kind of love and another, which is defined as 'vulgar' (181b). While the former is coherent with the acts it inspires and governs, the latter is inconsistent and produces inappropriate actions, not oriented to the *eros*, but rather to lower and second order goals like physical temporary possession, for instance.

The reason for this applies in the same way to every type of action: considered in itself, no action is either good or bad, honorable or shameful. Take, for example, our own case. We had a choice between drinking, singing, or having a conversation. Now, in itself none of these is better than any other: how it comes out depends entirely on how it is performed. if it is done honorably and properly, it turns out to be honorable; if it is done improperly, it is disgraceful. And my point is that exactly this principle applies to being in love: Love is not in himself noble and worthy of praise; that depends on whether the sentiments he produces in us are themselves noble. (180e-181a).

Pausanias stresses the necessity to single out the proper manifestations of *eros*. The reason of such urgency relies on the need to identify what is caused by *eros* and what it is not. The main reason seems to be to escape an easy, generic as well as misleading desire-based attribution to *eros*. The "real" *eros*, is Pausanias' main point, causes only certain actions that are inevitably directed to the object *eros* itself. Otherwise, different acts that are not directed to such a *telos*, nor are coherent

manifestations of the god,

4. 3. 0. Eryximachus.

Eryximachus, the third speaker, suggests a similar view. First he agrees on the former distinction between the *eros* manifestations and acts of different sort. But above all, at the end of his brief speech in praise of *eros*, he clearly shows to be sympathetic with the features already highlighted by the previous speakers. And although just a few, conclusive lines are worth of textual examination; they are of sparkling importance. Eryximachus utters:

Such is the power of Love so varied and great that in all cases it might be called absolute. Yet even so it is far greater when Love is directed, in temperance and justice, toward the good, whether in heaven or on earth: happiness and good fortune, the bonds of human society, concord with the gods above all these are among his gifts. (188d).

Eryximachus's account of *eros* clearly shows two central points. Goal-directed manifestations and manifestations based on the same nature of *eros*. It is interesting to note the insistence on the word *dinamis*, repeated twice in 188d. This is the very same word we find throughout the dialogue, regardless of who refers to *eros*.

4. 4. 0. Aristophanes' speech.

In the light of what we have already said about the former discussants, the final

passage at 193a seems to resemble the admiration to the perfection of the forms of love. Two main extracts are relevant here:

It's because, as I said, we used to be complete wholes in our original nature, and now "Love" is the name for our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete. (193a).

But I am speaking about everyone, men and women alike, and I say there's just one way for the human race to flourish: we must bring love to its perfect conclusion, and each of us must win the favors of his very own young man, so that he can recover his original nature. If that is the ideal, then, of course, the nearest approach to it is best in present circumstances, and that is to win the favor of young men who are naturally sympathetic to us. (193d).

What it is clear in the text is the reference to the disposition toward an end. And once again, such an end (*telos*) echoes the attribute of perfection that the form of *eros* must have in order to be such.

4. 5. 0. Agathon.

The urgency to recover a consistent account of *eros* and its manifestations is still at the centre of Agathon's thinking. On the one hand he focuses on the qualities, on the other Agathon speaks of *eros* as 'enabling' the recipient to do something.

Now, only one method is correct for every praise, no matter whose: you must explain what qualities in the subject of your speech enable him to give the benefits for which we praise him. (194e).

The perfection of the god causes only manifestations that are sympathetic with the god itself. But this is also the reason why the fifth speaker somehow disagrees with the previous one. His objection is the following:

Those old stories Hesiod and Parmenides tell about the gods-those things happened under Necessity, not Love, if what they say is true. For not one of all those violent deeds would have been done no castrations, no imprisonments if Love had been present among them. There would have been peace and brotherhood instead, as there has been now as long as Love has been king of the gods. (195c).

Agathon reiterates the features of *eros* sketched at the beginning of his discourse. It is first worth highlighting the association with beauty:

Enough for now about the beauty of the god, though much remains still to be said. After this, we should speak of Love's moral character. (196b).

Note that what the translator expresses as 'moral character' is actually virtue. I do not want here to contend the significance of the translation. I would rather confine myself to advance the hypothesis that the term *virtue* would suite the translation better, I submit. Indeed, I do not think that what Agathon says about Eros in the following lines has to be ascribed to the moral domain.

The main point is that Love is neither the cause nor the victim of any injustice; he does no wrong to gods or men, nor they to him. If anything has an effect on him, it is never by violence, for violence never touches Love. And the effects he has on others are not forced, for every service we give to love we give willingly. And whatever one person agrees on with another, when both are willing, that is right and just; so say "the laws that are kings of society. (196c).

Rather, I interpret the above passage as distinguishing a manifestation of *eros* from what it is just an instantiation of a different sort and nature.

In the first place-to honor *our* profession as Eryximachus e did his the god is so skilled a poet that he can make others into poets: once Love touches him, *anyone* becomes a poet, *howe'er uncultured he had been before.*¹⁴⁸

Eros works here like a flux, enabling the recipients to exercise certain capacity (poetry). And even those who are neither professional nor educated poets, are able to produce beautiful poems. This description fits well with the previous ones. Especially because the *eros* implies a teleological activity, (toward the beautiful). As the text emphasizes, *eros* is a *sine qua non* condition in order to produce beautiful poems.

In the conclusive part of his speech, Agathon lists again the features already pointed out and shared by the previous speakers. But he also stresses the attributes of *eros* as causal agent.

But once this god was born, all goods came to gods and men alike through love of beauty. This is how I think of Love, Phaedrus: first, he is himself the most beautiful and the best; after that, if anyone else is at all like that, Love is responsible. I am suddenly struck by a need to say something in poetic meter,

Gives peace to men and stillness to the sea, Lays winds to rest, and careworn men to sleep. (197c).

¹⁴⁸ Euripides, *Stheneboea* (frg. 666 Nauck).

Agathon himself though, expresses himself by the means of the lyric metre in order to corroborate further his claim.

4. 6. 0. Socrates.

Socrates starts his own speech praising the previous speakers, emphasizing the beauty of what he had just heard. But his approach is radically different from the former speakers, both for what concerns the form and the content. Because of he basically reports Diotima's speech first, but also because Plato has Socrates use a distinct approach to the matter. Indeed, although Socrates praises the beautiful words he has just listened to, he declares to be seeking the truth on the matter only, regardless of any aesthetic supplement. Nevertheless, as we will see very soon, what he says is consistent with the characteristics of *eros* already previously outlined.

- I. "He's a great spirit, Socrates. Everything spiritual, you see, is in between a god and a mortal." "What is their function?" I asked. (202e).
- II. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits instead, whether we are awake or asleep. (203a).
- III. And Love is one of them, because he is in love with what is beautiful, and wisdom is extremely beautiful. (204b).

Once again, *eros* is described as a spirit somehow in between god and human beings (I); Secondly *eros* works as a spirit, a flux that has an effect on the soul. Socrates' further claim is that gods do not mix with men. That resembles one of Plato's criticisms on the content of poetry in book II of the *Republic*. But it seems to me to resemble the distinction between over determination and *thumos* postulated at the

beginning of this section too. Finally Socrates repeats the association of *eros* with beauty, (unfortunately without further clarification).

At 205b-d we find a suggestive comparison between *eros* and poetry. Before reading what Plato has Socrates say, I would emphasize that Plato starts his comparison by pointing out that the misleading reading of the nature of poetry relies on a linguistic misunderstanding:

"Well, you know, for example, that 'poetry' has a very wide range.

After all, everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry; and so all the creations of every craft and profession are themselves a kind of poetry, and everyone who practices a craft is a poet."

"True."

"Nevertheless," she said, "as you also know, these craftsmen are not called poets. We have other words for them, and out of the whole of poetry we have marked off one part, the part the Muses give us with melody and rhythm, and we refer to this by the word that means the whole. For this alone is called 'poetry,' and those who practice this part of poetry are called poets."

"True,"

That's also how it is with love. The main point is this: every desire for good things or for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love' in everyone. But those who pursue this along any of its many other ways through making money, or through the love of sports, or through philosophy we don't say that *these* people are in love, and we don't call them lovers. It's only when people are devoted exclusively to one special kind of love that we use these words that really belong to the whole of it:

'love' and 'in love' and 'lovers. (205b-d).

When we refer to Love without further specifications, we point to a whole of things that seems to belong to it, Plato says. But when we refer to *eros*, we point to a distinct entity with specific attributes and a specific end. Plato here draws a distinction between Eros and poetry. The comparison relies on the consideration that *poiesis*, if considered without further specification as Love in general, means any act of producing. But the act of producing poetry is quite different from producing anything else.

Plato reckons that in both poetry and love, the whole is different from the particular, despite of the same terminology involved in both cases. The central relevance of Socrates' point contrasts to the mainstream interpretation of Plato's attitude toward Art in general and poetry in particular. In fact, most of the commentators¹⁴⁹ maintained that the reason of Plato's attacks lies on his incapacity to see the aesthetic value in poetry, and in art in general. But Plato's point above clearly shows that Plato fully acknowledged the poetry is the act of production of any artefact as well as the product of the poets' work specifically. Plato, once again, shows to be fully aware of the artistic, aesthetic peculiarity of the poets' creations. Bass says: 'To make the point that works of art, like flesh-and-blood offspring, evince the human striving for immortality, Plato in the Symposium refers to "the children of Homer and Hesiod", which reference has the incidental merit of suggesting that works of art, again like their biological counterparts, achieve a status independent of their pro-genitors. Undeniably, there are senses in which a painting has a life of its own. Furthermore, if

¹⁴⁹ To same extent this critique is already familiar to the reader. But I will become more evident from the next chapter and beyond, devoted to the analysis and comment of the *Republic*.

the primary justification of art is the aesthetic response it evokes in achieving that response one way or another, what does the intent of the artist matter?¹⁵⁰

Conclusions.

What is *eros* then? Its main features, as being in a strict connection with beauty, teleologism, and a consistent, causal relation with its manifestations, compose a specific cluster of properties, which enable the recipients to exercise certain capacities. The overall result then seems to resemble the striking picture suggested by Alcibiades in the ending of the dialogue. The last commensal draws a comparison between Socrates, whom Alcibiades declares intellectual affection, and the Silenus. Here is what Alcibiades says:

It's a Silenus sitting, his flute or his pipes in his hands, and it's hollow. It's split right down the middle, and inside it's full of tiny statues of the gods. (215b).

What distinguishes Socrates then, is the twofold quality to inspire his interlocutors with unique speeches. But such moving words, or 'divine melodies' (215b), as Alcibiades puts it, are already divine, and directed to the gods.

Whether they are played by the greatest flautist or the meanest flute-girl, his melodies have in themselves the power to possess and so reveal those people who are ready for the god and his mysteries. That's because his melodies are themselves divine. The only difference between you and Marsyas is that you need no

¹⁵⁰ W. Bass, *Seeing the Original*, Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer, 1990), p. 78, University of Illinois Press.

instruments; you do exactly what he does, but with words alone.

The second quality is the capacity of the aforementioned words (and acts) to reveal themselves as having inside the image of the god, like the statues of Silenus that Alcibiades quotes.

But, as Alcibiades rightly says, ‘the resemblance goes beyond appearance, as you’re about to hear.’ (215b).

I argue indeed that the *eros* takes the shape of the Silenus statues that Alcibiades compares to Socrates. It inspires unique words and acts. And for the very same reason, they point to the Form they are direct to, as an end.

Fifth Chapter.

Plato's attitude toward poetry in *Republic II*: banishment as release of poetry.

Introduction.

My purpose in this section is to offer a detailed analysis of Plato's criticisms and consequent censorship of poetry in the first part of the *Republic*. My goal is to show that Plato's educational programme is aimed to promote an autonomous and full development of the individual in the society he envisages. In accordance with this theory, the censorship and the banishment of the poets in the *Republic* are consistent with this claim by virtue of the fact that they regard pedagogical tales and patterns used as textbooks, and because they are aimed to ensure a full intellectual growth. In order to prove my claim, first I present the context in which Plato introduces his criticism against Homeric and Hesiodic poetry. Then, I offer a detailed analysis of Plato's arguments against poetry. Afterwards, I will discuss different contemporary approaches to the subject as well as a comparison with our own educational system and standpoint regarding educational issues and patterns to promote. I am confident such a comparison will reveal the pure pedagogical purposes that lead Plato's criticism to poetry in this part of the *Republic*.

5. 1. 0. Context.

It is worth recalling the context in which Plato deals with poetry in the *Republic*. In Book I, Plato discusses with Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus, the main characters of the dialogue, about what Justice is and whether it is good for itself, for its consequences, or for both. After long discussions, there is no common agreement about the issue at hand. Thus, in the beginning of Book II, Socrates suggests moving the debate into a bigger context because: “(t)hen perhaps justice may exist in greater proportions in greater space, and be easier to discover. So, if you are willing, we shall begin our inquiry as to its nature in cities, and after that let us continue our inquiry in the individual also, looking for the likeness of the greater in the form of the less” (Plat. *Rep.* 368d-369a).

Plato envisages an ideal community in order to find social justice. In his view, the nature of a city is “due to the fact that no one of us is sufficient for himself, but each is in need of many things” (369b). Such notion introduces a central claim in Plato’s *Callipolis*. Since ‘no one is sufficient for himself’, a specialization of works within the community is necessary for the state itself. We must notice the importance of such a principle. In fact, it matches the paradigm of the city: “One man one trade is better” (370b). Julia Annas calls this the ‘Principle of Specialization’: where each individual is responsible for one job as opposed to many.¹⁵¹ The argument for the benefits of specialisation goes as follows:

The proper work or function of a thing is that which it only does, or it does best. Whatever operates does it work well by virtue, and badly by defect or vice. The proper function of the soul is to reason, manage, rule, deliberation and life (soul is the vital

¹⁵¹ Annas, J., 1981. *An introduction to Plato’s Republic*. Oxford University Press, New York, p. 73.

principle). Therefore the virtue of the soul is to reason, management, rule, deliberate well¹⁵².

We must pay attention to the Principle of Specialization, also known as the Proper Work Argument (PWA). It explains how and why the ‘just’ society works: different people with different talents do what their own nature allows them to do best, and the difference in the talents satisfies various peoples’ needs. For the same reason, if the city will need to go to the war (374a) then the city will need soldiers, also. In full accordance with the PWA the ideal city requires full-time soldiers, Plato named them the “Guardians”. Plato’s first treatment of Poetry regards their education.

Because the work of our guardians is the most important of all, it will demand the most exclusive attention and the greatest skill and practice. [...] Then it will be our business to do our best to select the proper persons and to determine the proper character required for the guardians of the city? Yes, we shall have to do this. (374d-375a).

Thus, in Plato’s view, guardians are the soldiers of the ideal city. What features do they have?

Plato answers this question with a comparison:

In many animals, but perhaps best in that with which we compared our guardians. Well-bred dogs, you surely know, are naturally of that disposition – as gentle and possible to their friends and those whom they know, but the very opposite to strangers. (375d).

A few lines further, Plato is even clearer:

Then he who is to be a good and noble guardian of our city will be by nature philosophical and spirited, and quick and strong. (376c).

We must notice that “be by nature philosophical” means, as Plato points out in 376b, “to be fond of learning”. Hence, to be inclined to learn is an important feature for guardians.

¹⁵² Edited by Professor Theodore Scaltsas, *Ancient Philosophical Text 1 lecture notes*. The main treatment of this argument is in *Republic* 325d-354a, but it is present in *Republic* 374a too.

Now let us turn our attention on the subject of learning. In what follows, I shall inquire into Plato's first criticism of poetry, particularly its content (377b-392c).

5. 1. 1. Plato's first criticism against Homeric and Hesiodic poetry.

The starting point of Plato's discussion of epic poetry is the following:

Our first duty then, it seems, is to set a watch over the makers of stories, to select every beautiful story they make, and reject any that are not beautiful. Then we shall persuade nurses and others to tell those selected stories to the children (377c).

Plato stated here the first canon for guardians' primary education: Beauty. However, it is not immediately clear what he means by that. In what follows, I clarify the meaning of Plato's phraseology. Indeed, a few passages later, he expresses his first criticism in more detail, using Socrates as the mouthpiece of his ideas:

Those, I said, that Hesiod and Homer and the other poets have told us, for surely they have composed untrue stories, and have told, and do tell them, to men. But what kind do you mean, and what fault do you find in them? A fault, I said, that deserves immediate and emphatic condemnation, especially if the untruth have no beauty in it (377d).

These passages deserve close attention for several reasons: Plato's attack against Hesiod and Homer lies on the "untruth" of their stories. In passage 377c Plato stated that the stories that are not beautiful are to be rejected but then, according to passage 377d, he seems do admit that some kinds of beauty is possible in untrue stories. Yet, the relation between Truth and Beauty is still quite unclear¹⁵³. We must be careful about the terms "beauty" and "beautiful" in passages 377c-d. Plato used the word "καλος". As J. Annas points out:

¹⁵³ To this extent, I suggest the further reading of: Murdoch, I., 1977. *The Fire & The Sun: Why Plato Banished The Artists*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, Murdoch, I. 1993, *Metaphysics as guide to Moral*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, Gaut, B. (1998). "The Ethical Criticism of Art." In Jerrold Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Plato describes the training of his Guardians' characters in terms that are as much aesthetic as strictly 'moral'. Education is to produce people who are attracted to good and feel repulsion for evil, finding it ugly and vulgar. We must not think that this emphasis in the aesthetic point of view indicates a detached and 'arty' attitude: rather Plato thinks that there is no sharp distinction between aesthetic and moral attitudes. His point is made more forcibly in Greek because the word he uses for 'beautiful' or 'fine', *καλος*, is used for what is admirable and good of its kind.¹⁵⁴

In her remarks on this subject, Annas stresses the strong relation between the Fine and the Good and, furthermore, she emphasizes that 'kalos' objects have the power to improve character: "Goodness or fineness of speech, music, form and rhythm follow on goodness of character, he claims, and lack of form, rhythm, and harmony are akin to poor language and good character (401e, 401a)."¹⁵⁵

We shall hazard a guess that a story could be untrue just in that specific events it describes did not happen (for instance a story about Achilles, if Achilles did not exist) and still be beautiful in that it teaches good lessons. Though, conversely, Socrates seems to be using 'true' to refer not just to factual correctness but also to truth of the underlying moral. We have good reason, therefore, to doubt whether we ought to translate 'καλος' as 'beauty' just in moral contexts. Such a translation seems to cover a too narrow sense of what *καλος* means. Thus, for the time being, let us consider that the passage above does not imply in itself a clear relation between truth and beauty, rather, it seems to admit the possibility of other types of beauty not strictly connected with truth.

Extract 377d seems to suggest that at least a certain kind of beauty is possible in untrue stories. Indeed, it does seem odd that we should find beauty in untrue

¹⁵⁴ Annas, J., *op. cit.*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

stories, especially if beauty has a moralised sense. On the contrary, in the above passage Plato ex admits the possibility of beauty in untrue stories. Such a speculation explains why, and on what ground, Plato praises Homer and Hesiod. He does so by evaluating them on an aesthetic ground. Indeed, I argue that the passage above shows that Plato acknowledges a kind of beauty that is separate from the true-value evaluation as well as from any moral one. Untrue and amoral beautiful stories do exist, Plato admits it at 377d:

Those, I said, that Hesiod and Homer and the other poets have told us, for surely they have composed untrue stories, and have told, and do tell them, to men.

But what kind do you mean, and what fault do you find in them? A fault, I said, that deserves immediate and emphatic condemnation, especially if the untruth have no beauty in it (377d).

But the reason why in this occasion, as to say as ‘founders of a city, not poets’, Plato censures such stories lies on the educational and moral ground that this stories incidentally hold, because they are the ones that are to be told to children. And Plato specifies a few lines later (378d-e) that children are not, because of their age, able to distinguish truth from falsehood and what is right from what is not. But what is even more interesting for the purpose of this section, is to stress how the kind of beauty Plato refers to at the end of 377d differs from other kind. To this extent, I advance the claim that Plato refers here to an aesthetic beauty.

In this connection, it might contribute to the understanding of Plato’s view on truth his argument about essence and representations of the gods. It is on the basis of this that he argues against poetry. Why are such stories untrue? Plato’s argument for his criticism was the following: The divinity is truly good and must be described as such. Nothing that is good is harmful; what is not harmful does not harm, what does no harm, does not do any evil, what does no evil cannot cause any evil, God is beneficial and it causes good fortune and not all things. Then, the divine are responsible for the things that are good, but not responsible for

the evil (379a-c). In full accordance with this theory, Plato defines the troubles in Homer's and Hesiod's poetry since the beginning of his attack:

When any man in describing the character of gods and heroes does it badly, like an artist whose drawing is absolutely unlike the things he wishes to draw.

Well, firstly the poet, who told the greatest of falsehoods of the greatest of beings, told a falsehood with no beauty in it, when he said that Ouranos did what Hesiod said he did, and that Kronos took vengeance on him. And as for the deeds of Kronos, and what he suffered at his son's hands, even if these stories are true, I should not think we could so lightly repeat them to the young and foolish. It were best to be silent about them, or if they had to be told, it should be done under the seal of silence to as few hearers as possible, and after the sacrifice not of the mystic pig but some great and almost unprocurable victim, so that very few would hear the story. (377d-378a).

In the passage above, Plato states not just a literary critique but he also argues that the tales that do not correspond to his canon have to be banned. What is the meaning of that censorship? Is Plato involved in a moralist or even totalitarian position or, rather, is he concerned in the growth of the children and he pursues pedagogical claims? I am inclined to believe that his approach is educational and neither totalitarian nor moralist, and in what follows I will offer my reasons for presenting my alternative approach.

5. 1. 2. Is Plato's first criticism a stern literature critique or he is proposing a new, revolutionary educational pattern?

Now, what is the matter with such untrue stories? Why are they so dangerous in Plato's view? For the modern reader, the falsehood of stories is not a defect in itself or even a factor in what is good or bad in our approach to literature. In that respect, one might reply that factual falsehood is certainly not a determinant but, rather, a falsehood of underlying moral may be. Even if we accept that it is morality and not Truth that Plato objects to, it is

insufficient reason to imply a censorship. Modern libraries and bookstores are full of books with doubtful morals.

However, for Plato any immorality in a story seems a grave fault indeed. Once again, why? Plato gives us an interesting (although not completely compelling answer) in the last passage: stories that emphasise the immoral nature of the divine allow people to justify wrong and bad behaviours. Plato here introduces a new element: such stories should be banned not only because they are not true but also in virtue of their effects on society. Broadly speaking, (false) stories regarding any wicked behaviours of gods are dangerous because common people feel permitted to adopt the same bad conduct. The moral is the following: “if the gods do such things, then why cannot I do the same, at least in similar conditions?” From here until the end of Book II (383c), Plato offers several quotations (four) in order to show how often Homer, Hesiod and Aeschylus, in particular, have drawn untrue and misleading stories about gods.

Before introducing Plato’s quotation in details, I would begin by outlining some of the ways that philosophers have conceived Plato’s first criticism of poetry. In her fundamental book *An introduction to Plato’s Republic*, Julia Annas points out: “Plato suggests that we develop in young children attitudes of attraction to what they will later see as morally good and repulsion to what they will later learn to be morally bad.”¹⁵⁶ Further she emphasises that Plato’s philosophy of education is a training of character rather than “a transfer of knowledge into the soul¹⁵⁷”. But first she defines Plato’s educational program as paternalist¹⁵⁸ and then she argues that Plato’s educational system is authoritarian because it is the only one

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 84.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 86.

¹⁵⁸ Annas, J., op. cit., 85.

available¹⁵⁹ and because “it is undeniable that his educational system aims to impose on children a single set of values in such a way that they will not be seriously sceptical about them either at the time or later in life.”¹⁶⁰ Yet, this is a strong assumption to make and Annas identifies the background for her criticism with a comparison to contemporary educational patterns:

[...] most educational theorists would hold that this cannot be the proper function of education. Education, it is widely held, must aim to produce people who are autonomous in that they can think independently and can ask themselves whether they find it better to continue to hold the values in which they were brought up, or to choose to live by another set of values¹⁶¹.

Taking up Annas’ view, we open up to the theory that ‘Socrates creates a literature that is dangerous precisely because it can be used in the service of politics’ as Naddaff believes.¹⁶²

This view is mistaken, though, and, given a different interpretation of the evidence, it is clear that Plato’s educational program is neither paternalist nor authoritarian. Namely, as opposed to a goal of authoritarian indoctrination, Plato envisages a new systematic education in order to free the mass from superstition and arcane fears. According to such an approach, he pursues his aim in the only possible way -- he expurgates poetry from mendacious and deceptive myths, which to this point had been the chief and most common source of learning for youth and the equivalent of encyclopaedic knowledge for adults. This is the answer to the question of why Plato wants to censor poetry¹⁶³.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 89.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 89.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 90.

¹⁶² Naddaff, R., 2002. *Exiling the Poets: The production of censorship in Plato’s Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 16.

¹⁶³ This is my theory for what concerns book II and III of the dialogue. We will analyse book X at the end of this study.

With respect to censorship, I deeply disagree both with Annas and above all with Naddaff, who replies to this thorny question with two answers. First:

Socrates produces an innovative function of literature as a whole, one that breaks with the tradition: literature is philosophy's supplement that compensates for philosophy's lack of traditional status as *paideia*. As such, censorship constructs literary tales created in the image of a philosophical discourse that follows strict rules of argument. Censorship transforms, for example, the gods of Homer and Hesiod so that they are absolute paradigms of goodness, deprived and depleted of any hint of evil. It ultimately forms a series of philosophical tales that are the necessary fictions by which citizens live'¹⁶⁴.

Secondly:

'Socrates resorts to the censorship of literature as the condition of possibility for the emergence of his ideally just city, his city in speech. From the position of a political censor, he deploys the repressive mechanism of censorship to produce a city that can overcome tradition and convention. [...] It is indeed a serious philosophical and political failure on Socrates' part to rely on censorship to produce virtuous subjects and states.'¹⁶⁵

Since Plato modifies neither the role of poetry in Greek *paideia* nor adds philosophy in it, I do not see how the censorship he makes could produce "an innovative function of literature". Although it is the gods, not the tales, whom Naddaff describes as absolute paradigms of goodness, I do not see how the tales purged by censorship, missing the hint and evil events and bad features regarding the gods, could fill the gap of the lack of philosophy in Greek education or being "absolute paradigms of goodness". Even if we accept the last point, I wonder, do we tell to our children tales underlying bad models? I do not think so. Moreover, since that the only difference between Homeric and Hesiodic poetry and the new one

¹⁶⁴ Naddaff, R., 2002. *Exiling the Poets: The production of censorship in Plato's Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 16-17.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

envisaged by Plato restricts immoral themes and plots in connection with the divine, how could such purged stories “follow strict rules of argument”, like philosophical discourse?

If Naddaff refers to the censorship of the forms as well as the contents, (but she does not explicitly in this occasion), then I argue that the pure narrative exposition of purged tales is not a sufficient condition to imply reciprocity with philosophical works. In fact: how could we define a philosophical discourse? If we consider, for instance, the Platonic *Corpus*, then M. M. McCabe points out:

But should we speak of ‘The’ Platonic dialogue Form? After all, the dialogues come in all sort of difference forms: some are dramatic, others merely formalized discussion (compare the *Phaedro* and the *Statement*); some are in direct speech, others narrated (compare the *Gorgias* and the *Symposium*); some seem to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, whereas others begin, or end, in the middle of the things (compare the *Euthydemus* and the *Philebus*); some have Socrates in the central role, and others are dominated by less engaging, but more authoritative figures (compare the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*). We may miss the complexity of Plato’s ways of writing if we reduce his dialogue to a single and canonical shape. Such reduction might be hopelessly banal (because vastly general), or else simply false.¹⁶⁶

One might well think, of course, that this is quite reasonable if poetry is seen as a source of truth. Naddaff seems to be interpreting it that the poets themselves did not see it this way and that for this reason Plato’s attitude is innovatory. Naddaff therefore interprets Plato’s innovative criticism and censorship as a failure, both political and philosophical, because it is aimed to produce virtuous citizens.

I agree that censorship is a political failure only if it is aimed to limit the freedom and the full develop of the people, as it usually happens in authoritarian regimes. In that case censorship is aimed not to produce virtuous citizens but, rather, citizens that identify themselves in the

¹⁶⁶ M. M. McCabe, 2008, *Plato’s way of writing*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 88.

ideals of the maintenance of the regime. Censorship in a dictatorship is aimed to separate the mass from their full development as thinking individuals, via a lack of information and via propagandistic models that are functional to the power. Also, in our own societies, the legal system consists of a number of bans and even censorship and we accept them because they are supposed to be rules aimed to improve our own community. But I wonder, is it the same case for Plato? I answer in the negative, and, *a contrario*, I shall argue that if censorship is aimed to guarantee the correct growth of the people, it is no more a political and philosophical fail. Rather, it is the rules that make a community a community. We accept censorship, for instance in tales for children, because they are aimed to better growth and education.

Now, the question comes to be, does the censorship of poetry envisaged by Plato ensure better growth and education? In what follows, it is made clear through the evidence that Platonic censorship was beneficial. In the light of censorship (and even if we accept, at least to some extent, Naddaff's claim that such a censorship of poetry produces 'literary tales created in the image of a philosophical discourse that follows strict rules of argument'), I shall argue that an education based not just on tales but also in the active engagement in conversations and dialogues is better than one based just on stories. In order to corroborate my claim, I refer to a recent pedagogical study on the matter.

We find an important clue that Plato's educational programme was more in line with the modern conception of education identified in a recent study published by the *The Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*. According to Zimmerman et al.'s research:

The framing of advice offered to parents may differ depending on how adult speech is understood to foster child language development. If adult speech input is presented as intrinsically valuable, because it serves as a model for language that children intuitively copy, then parents can conclude that the more adult speech the better, even if some of this adult speech comes through television or videos. Many parents have drawn exactly such conclusions. On the other hand, if the primer

value of adult speech is to potentate child speech as part of a trial-and-error, experiential process of language acquisition, then adult speech is valuable inasmuch as it fosters child speech, and either adult speech or electronic stimulus that crowds out child speech may be counterproductive.¹⁶⁷

Thus, not just stories and tales for children, but also conversations with adults is the best way to develop intellectual capacities in the children:

Yet the most effective reading is dialogic reading¹⁶⁸, which involves explicitly soliciting language use by the child. More generally, parents should be taught that although adult speech is valuable, an equally important goal should be to get kids talking as much as possible. [...] Finally, it could be that the child-adult conversations are themselves causing language development. Such a casual conclusion would be consistent with several strands recently introduced in the empirical and theoretical literatures on child language acquisition.¹⁶⁹

Eventually, the overall conclusion of the study is the following:

This research provides strong, albeit not absolute, evidence from naturalistic observations that adult-child conversations are an essential component of child language development. Parents should continue to be encouraged to provide speech input to their children by talking to them, reading them books, and by telling them stories. At the same time, it should be made clear to parents that an important goal of this talk is to elicit talk from the child. Reading and story telling should be punctuated by questions and exchanges, and it may be appropriate to counsel parents to encourage parent-child conversations. Parents should strive to read and talk with children and not merely to them. Parent-child interactions are best when they are a two-way street.

¹⁶⁷ Zimmerman, F. J., Gilkerson, J., Richards A., Cristakis D. A., Dongxin, Gray S., Yapanel U., 2009, 'Teaching by listening: The Importance of Adult-Child Conversations to Language Development.' *Pediatrics, The Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*, p. 343.

¹⁶⁸ My emphasis.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 347.

In the light of the last remark should be now clear that Plato's worries about the oral-based education through tales were fully justified. Above all, because of the strong impact of an oral education, it is clear that Plato's purpose to provide boundaries for such an education is more than legitimated. It is also evident that his intention to modify the traditional educational programme by analysing and discussing the tales is an undoubted improvement for achieving a better intellectual development of the young students. Plato's *prima facie* moralistic position reveals Socrates' pupil as being incredibly close to modern pedagogical trends.

Now that it is evident that Plato's attitude toward poetry is consistent with educational purposes and that his first censorship is neither paternalistic nor authoritarian, I shall now outline his arguments in some details. In fact, I believe that further evidence could be provided by a textual analysis of the objections against Homer and Hesiod made in Book II of the dialogue.

5. 1. 3. Plato as educationalist: textual analysis of his criticism of Homeric and Hesiodic poetry.

In order to provide further evidence that Plato's claims in censoring poetry are aimed to produce the full development of the person, it might be best to begin analysing in detail the arguments he puts forward. A primary clue of Plato's educational grain in censoring poetry is given to us by the criticisms mentioned above; the untrue stories about gods have to be banished because they are "not to our advantage nor self-consistent in the telling" (Rep. 380c). The general idea of Plato's attack is that if we allow representations of gods as responsible for everything that happens to human beings (i) changing their own aspect, (ii) as deceptive and evil and (iii) the overall result will be that humans are going to be fearful,

cowardly and trapped in a daydream of any time and origin. Let us introduce Plato's quotations from Homer and Hesiod and his related criticisms in order to prove our claim, before discussing my reasons for presenting my objections to Annas and Naddaff's view, in the next chapter.

(i) Two tuns of gifts there lie
In Zeus' gate, one of good, one ill,
Which when Zeus mixes for any man
One while he frolics, one while mourns,
But as for the man who gets no mixture but only of the second,
Sad hunger in th'abundant earth doth toss him to and fro
Nor with the statement that Zeus is to us
The Giver both of woe and weal. (Rep. 379e).

Plato's remark on the above quote is the following:

And we shall not praise any one who says that Zeus and Athene were responsible for Pandarus's violation of the oaths and treaties, or that Themis and Zeus caused strife and division among the gods, nor shall we allow the young to hear the words of Aeschylus, when he says
God sends a curse on mortals
When he would utterly destroy a house. (Rep. 380b).

Plato picks up two points here: "[such amoral tales] are neither to our advantage nor self-consistent in the telling" (380c). A reader of this passage will notice that here Plato states again the two kernel points in his criticism: these tales are negative both for their essence and for their effects. This is precisely the *leitmotiv* of his critique against poetry. Furthermore, there is a keyword here that is worthy to notice: advantage. I believe that it deserves a deeper analysis, and therefore I will elaborate on this point later.

Plato's main worries for what concerns such verses are that they portray gods as unpredictable, capricious and wicked beings who have the power to rule in the life of common people. Consequently, human beings are like unfettered boats at the docks – at the

mercy of the waves. A further, peculiar feature that constitutes Plato's criticism is that the gods are drawn as capable and even used in appearing in several and deceitful guises:

(ii) "Like such poor stranger pilgrims do the gods,
All shapes assuming, glide through towns and towers, (381d).

On the last quotation Plato objects:

And we will have nothing to do with the many other lies of that sort. And the mothers are not to be persuaded by the poets into frightening their children with evil stories that forsooth there are certain gods that go about at night in many strange shapes (ii). If they will do, they will both blaspheme the gods and make their children cowardly. (381e).

The cumulative effect is the same; such evil and divine creatures, which are basically unrecognizable and wayward, puzzle humans. More precisely, according to such stories, divine creatures "going about at night in many strange shapes" confound humans, and that is false in Plato's view. Secondly, Plato finds another fault with the effects of this type of stories, because they "make children cowardly".

Thus, once again, Plato stresses two points: the falsehood and the negative effects of stories about amoral deities. I believe that the pedagogic purpose of his critique is manifest with reference to mothers who tell such tales to children. The last quote that Plato offers in the conclusion of Book II makes clear one more salient point (that we shall pick up in more detail later): poetry was experienced as collective reading and not as a private practice. To forget that, I urge, makes Plato's objections simply incomprehensible.

The span of life from sickness free,
And telling all my fate that gods had blest,
He sang a song of gladness to my heart.
I dreamed the lips of Phoebus could not lie
Being divine, touched with the seer's skill.
But the singer, he the wedding guest,
The same who sang these words, is he who slew

My own dear son (383b). (iii).

When anyone says such things about the gods we shall be angry, and shall not give him a chorus (a); nor shall we allow our teacher to use his poems to instruct the young (b), if our guardians are to be god-fearing and godlike so far as may be? (383c).

As can be seen from the last remark, the collective readings (a) practised with the aid of the chorus, and the educational (b) role of the poetry, are manifest. Moreover, Plato's criticism always presents the same objects, the falsehood and the negative effects of the tales told to children.

In the light of the last quotes, it should also be evident that his critique and the related censorship aims to ensure an equilibrate growth of the children. Taken in isolation, from this assumption it follows that Plato's first censorship of poetry can be treated by the same method as question regarding education, and not Aesthetics or Politics. However, Plato's attitude toward poetry is still quite problematic and controversial for several reasons. Thus, in order to show that Plato's attitude is not illiberal but, rather, that it aims to guarantee a full development of an individual, I will offer in the next section a wider analysis and a related discussion with some contemporary interpretations.

5. 1. 4. Plato's philosophy of education in the second book of the *Republic*.

Some contemporary remarks.

As we have already seen in the first section, Plato criticised Homeric and Hesiodic poetry because of the false and misleading representations of the gods. Plato saw this falsehood as damaging to those listening, particularly the children. His criticisms of Truth in poetry underscore wider educational concerns. Plato not only pursued pure pedagogical purposes regarding the first censorship he makes in the *Republic*, but I also submit that such a

ensorship was the sole resort for a guarantee in the correct development of the children. In contrast to the evidence found in the literature, this section tackles Platonic education using some different approaches. Contemporary scholars hold, *a contrario*, that Plato's criticism and the related censorship had political aims (Naddaff, 2002), or a paternalistic or even illiberal connotation (Annas, 1981, Pappas, 2003). In rejecting such views, the breakthrough of Plato's educational pattern can be shown in comparison with our own, modern educational concepts. Finally, I will introduce an issue regarding the role and the function of literature in our own society (borrowing from the ideology of some modern literary critics), in order to emphasize the deep difference between Greek literature, in relation specifically to Homeric and Hesiodic poetry on the one hand, and modern literature in the West on the other hand.

5. 1. 5. Is Plato a modern pedagogue or is he a paternalistic, illiberal censor?

I shall now proceed to a more detailed discussion about how Plato's first criticism and censorship have been faced by contemporary scholars. As indicated by my examples, Plato stated two main canons in order to establish the proper education of young children: first, the truth and second, the behavioural effects of the listeners of the tales. Although Annas is right in stressing that this is the only educational pattern envisaged by Plato, I do not see any authoritarianism in his canons. Annas, in fact, defines as 'authoritarian' Plato's educational pattern by virtue of the fact that it is the only one envisaged in *Callipolis*. However, the notion of 'authoritarian' implies what is "in favour of or demanding strict obedience to authority."¹⁷⁰ In Plato's educational program there is no evidence of programs 'aimed in favour of or demanding strict obedience to authority'. Plato does not change the state of affairs in his time, when the poetry was not just the major, but also the only source of

¹⁷⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, Ed. By C. Soanes, Oxford University Press, New York, Us, 2001.

knowledge. He does not want to replace an artificial source of learning subordinate to an exterior, political claim. *A contrario*, he wants to censor the same poetry that he often praises and takes like a model, from the parts that produce a negative effect in an educational context.

Do we not do the same? In our society we fix a quite rigid system of rules in our children's education that accompanies them from the early childhood until we call them adults. In that respect, we provide for our sons and daughters an educational system full of boundaries and restrictions because we think it is best for children. Just like Plato's purposes, we choose the right things to teach and we do not allow that everything is taught to them but only particularly things we believe to be correct and true.

Annas also stresses that there were not "alternative schools" in ancient Greece but I am inclined to believe that this is not a real objection. The concept of alternative schools is something that belongs to modern societies, and I wonder how much we allow for alternative schools nowadays. Our educational programs are fixed in rules that allow different choices within it, not outside. For instance, Plato refers to the schools where one gets one's basic education as a child. Even in such modern, primary schools there are rules and regulations for what one is allowed to tell to children and what one cannot. In basic schools, there is no room for an utter freedom of speech.

From the age of five- or six-years-old, our children go to an official educational institution that we call 'school'. Explicit and implicit criteria rule those schools and they are the product of both pedagogical and scholastic patterns. What is taught, including how and from what sources, is based in well-known data accessible to teachers, children and parents. This point is even more apparent in reference to modern professional schools where the regulations are rigid and strict. Let me take an extreme case that will clarify this point entirely. We allow doctors to operate on us if they have a degree by our medical schools or an equivalent

recognised by them, for instance. In that respect, our culture is absolutist as well as Plato's one.

Moreover, just like Plato, we adopt the same canons: the seeking of the truth and the efficacy of the technique. Annas says also:

It is made clear that free intellectual inquiry is to be limited to the elite who have come through the long secondary education; nobody else is to be encouraged, or allowed to put forward ideas that have political import. [...] reason is to reinforce the beliefs that have been brought about already, not to introduce a questioning and critical attitude.¹⁷¹

Also, in our society, “elite who have come through the long secondary education” is supposed to be the right people in order to rule us in the best possible way. I agree with Plato that highly educated pupils are generally the best ones to decide for the masses. Obviously, we choose our leaders through free elections and supposedly give a person from any educational background equal chances at leadership.¹⁷²

I agree with Plato that the most important canons have to be the truth, a fixed morality and the beneficial. This is particularly evident in political positions and even more in high-ranking state officials. This last point, in particular, corresponds to the well-educated people that Plato envisages for the government of the ideal community.

Besides, for what concerns Annas's claim that nobody else is encouraged or allowed to have and to promote different political ideas, I do not find any evidence for that in the text (and Annas does not indicate anyone). Rather, the fact that most people are excluded from government might be taken to imply that they are expected to agree with the rulers about what is best. This is not the place to face Plato's political view, which is why I confine myself to address it in connection with the educational issues at stake. In that respect, I

¹⁷¹ Annas, 1981, p. 89.

¹⁷² This particular point is treated further in *Republic* 488 too.

suggest that a comparison between the political condition in the Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries BC with the Platonic ideal state can demonstrate firstly that his state is more open in terms of the possibility to access to the highest classes for anyone (such a condition was granted from the so-called 'Platonic Communism'). Secondly, the difficult and long educational program ensured that only the best persons were in a position to rule.

Surely, the last condition was much more meritocratic than an elite formed by noble descent.

We know, in fact, that:

Democracy at Athens was both more and less democratic than modern Britain or the United States; more, for the reasons just given: the *ekklesia* enjoyed more immediate power than a modern electorate, partly because the number of voters was so much a smaller in Ancient Athens, and less, for a reason also concerned with the number of voters: whose groups – slavers; women; the subject allies, whose lives were affected by many of the *ekklesia*'s decision – were excluded from the franchise. This left some 40,000 adult males who were eligible to vote. Of these perhaps as many as 6,000 (which is nearly the maximum seating of the Pnyx, the *ekklesia*'s meeting place, and was the quorum required for certain kind of decision) may have attended for important debates.¹⁷³

However, just the fact that Plato himself in the *Republic* discusses and proposes an alternative system seems to me good evidence that he does not want to censor free inquiry. Rather, the difference between Plato and modern society is not as great as Annas thinks but perhaps this means that our society is, if not authoritarian, then it is at least 'absolutist' to some extent. In what follows, I will offer some analogies in order to demonstrate this claim.

In addition, this conclusion seems fully corroborated by what Annas herself wrote about the essence of Plato's educational conception:

Now it would be wrong to think that Plato intends education to be a process of brainwashing which will instil the right beliefs and ensure that they are held,

¹⁷³ Boardman J., Griffin J., Murray O., *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World*. Oxford University Press, New York, US, 1988, p.157.

whatever the intellectual state of the person holding them. If all Plato cared about was bringing it about that the right beliefs he held, he would not have thought of education as a training of people's characters, for this would be unnecessary; all that would matter would be the effective implanting of the right moral beliefs in the young, there are more direct and effective ways to do that than the character training Plato recommends.¹⁷⁴

According to this last passage, Annas stresses that Plato does not want to “instil the right beliefs and ensure that they are held”; then, what is Plato's claim in education? Referring to Plato's educational aims, Annas says: “Education is not, Plato says, a transfer of knowledge onto the soul, like putting sight into blind eyes; it is more like turning the eye to the light. (518b).”¹⁷⁵ Thusly, Annas agrees with the author of the dialogue, but she finds something wrong in the way Plato pursues his claim: “Why should people whose early years have been moulded by training in accepting the moral values of their society have preserved the capacity for intellectual rigour and creativity required by these further studies?”¹⁷⁶ My answer is that people educated in the way that Plato envisaged should be more capable at preserving their intellectual inquisitiveness rather than others, in virtue of the theoretical skills and aptitude they possess. Moreover, they are naturally prone to maintain inquisitiveness, in virtue of the education that they received based not on false, deceptive and fearful stories, but rather on tales, which have the aim to bring up people without irrational fears.

In that respect, Annas's approach is simplistic. We do try to instil decent values in our children and, yet, we do not think this removes their capacity for independent thought. Rather, the question of how the capacity for acuity can be fostered is a difficult one. The goal

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 89.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 87.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 87.

of this study is to demonstrate that Plato's censorship was aimed to improve such a capacity. Through this work I analyse Plato's criticism and the peculiar features of Greek poetry in order to show that. For the time being, I shall argue that Plato wants to avoid a sterile educational programme, which has the ending result of producing a person like Polemarchus, who has just "rigid principles and no real understand of them", using Annas' words. Now, how can we avoid the production of people who are incapable of true understanding? Plato's solution is to review what was the only source of available learning – poetry.

Incidentally, the contents and form by which poetry traditionally was assimilated and practised was particularly close to indoctrination, especially due to the way it was practised¹⁷⁷. If my approach has been right so far, then the subjects that Plato adds in Book VII — namely, mathematics, calculation, geometry and dialectic — provide all the necessary theoretical instruments for a full development of the person. Now the question turns out to be: how can we define the full development of the person? According to the PWA, "the virtue of the soul is to reason, management, rule, deliberate well". Like Plato's model, contemporary educators stress both true beliefs, as well as moral and technical skills, in order to make everyone able to make decisions for his or her own life. In virtue of what Annas wrote about Platonic educational policy, I am inclined to concur with her conclusion that:

In America children's education is run on Platonic lines. As far back as 1918 the National Education Association listed seven main objects for education in secondary school 'health, command of fundamental processes [...] worthy home membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, ethical character.'¹⁷⁸

Why is the US educational model so close to the Platonic one? According to Annas, the similarities between the US and Platonic models of education depends on the fact that "Plato

¹⁷⁷ We will offer soon a deeper treatment of the way poetry was practised.

¹⁷⁸ Annas, 1981 p. 86.

is the first thinker systematically to defend the notion of training of character rather than an acquisition of information or skill¹⁷⁹,

Now, I wonder, is it possible to get such a goal without referring to Ethics? Does the reference to Ethics make this approach “paternalist”? Annas wonders: “But this is one thing to protect young children from the bad effects of racism and sexism in their reading, and quite another to forbid an adult, after extensive education, to read D. H. Lawrence: This is, precisely, paternalism, treating adults as though they were children.” Following Annas on this question, Pappas asks: “To what extent does the censorship in fact trim poetry in accord with the truth of the matter? And how far into the community will Plato reach to suppress false or insidious poetry?”¹⁸⁰ These questions raise an important issue: we could accept Plato’s censorship if it regards school books and young children’s general education but, Pappas goes on: “The problem, often overlooked, is that everyone in the city is affected by the censorship.”¹⁸¹ Thus, if we want to free Plato from paternalist accusations, we have to answer these questions. In order to solve the problems arising from these questions, first of all, we must keep in mind the elementary difference between ancient and modern society’s perception of literature. In fact, based on their positions here, the fundamental assumption on which both Annas’ and Pappas’s objections depend is that a common adult in ancient Greece could enjoy literature with any external concern just like us, today.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 86.

¹⁸⁰ Pappas, N., 2003. *Plato and the Republic*, Routledge, London, p. 68.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 70.

5. 1. 6. What kind of literature Plato is talking about?

It is crucial to realize the fact that discussing the ancient perception of literature as though the ancients had similar access to it as we do today is based on a misleading comparison with Homeric and Hesiodic poetry in the age of Socrates. If we miss this central point, then we are led to believe that “Plato has no serious interest in thinking about Art”¹⁸² or even that “the censor Plato created a literature so potent and dangerous that it could transform individual behaviours and beliefs and the social and cultural order, not to mention the discursive practice of philosophy itself.”¹⁸³ Rather, the problem now becomes how ancient Greeks experienced poetry. In fact, today’s reader is perfectly aware of the distinction between literature for children and other kinds of literature. *A fortiori*, the modern reader is able to decide what type of literature she or he likes best. It is assumed that the reader is capable of distinguishing aesthetic values from any source of learning and general knowledge in virtue of the unlimited number of books available to everyone. However, were such conditions present in ancient Greece as well? This question now becomes crucial for our purposes in understanding the real object of Plato’s criticisms.

In fact, the whole of Annas, Naddaff and Pappas’s analysis and criticisms are based on the comparison between modern literature and ancient Greek poetry. Upon such an assumption, Annas argues: “but it is one thing to protect young children from the bad effects of racism and sexism in their reading, and quite another to forbid an adult, after extensive education, to read D. H. Lawrence”.¹⁸⁴ In a similar fashion, B. Aune raises a question regarding the difference between aesthetic values and moral or practical values:

¹⁸² Naddaff, R. A., 2002, p. xi.

¹⁸³ Ibid, xii.

¹⁸⁴ Annas, 1981, p. 85.

[...] one of the most exemplary novelists and poets of our century, Vladimir Nabokov, at the end of a course of lectures on European literature, made a special point of emphasizing the non-didactic character of dramatic literature. The novels he had discussed in the course will not teach you anything, he said, ‘that you can apply to any obvious problems of life. They will not help in the business office or the army camp or in the kitchen or in the nursery.’” The knowledge about the novels that he had been trying to share with his students was, he said, ‘pure luxury’: style and structure — glorious style and structure — are the essence of a literary work of art; great ideas, he said, are [aesthetic] hogwash. Substantially, the same view of literature has recently been expressed by Professor Harold Bloom in his seminal book *The Western Canon*¹⁸⁵. Although he defends what used to be called “the great writers” of the Western literary tradition against their current critics, he rejects the position of neo-conservative defenders of those writers who emphasize the moral value of imaginative literature. In his view (and I quote) ‘Reading the very best writers--let us say Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Tolstoy--is not going to make us better citizens. Art is perfectly useless according to the sublime Oscar Wilde, who was right about everything.’¹⁸⁶ In expressing his agreement with Wilde on this matter Bloom did not mean to imply that art is a frivolous endeavour that has no serious value. It does have such value, in his view; but the value is aesthetic, not practical. Art enriches our lives, but it does not instruct us or improve our understanding. It is not, *qua* art, science or philosophy; and it does not compete with them. If we want instruction in morals, political theory, or social matters, we should not look for it in imaginative literature. We should look elsewhere. I doubt that most people concerned with the arts would agree with Nabokov and Bloom.¹⁸⁷

Thus, Annas, Aune and Bloom raise questions about the difference between aesthetic and practical values, and they based the analogy on modern literature. However, in the light of what we have already seen, it is clear that the object of the above scholars’ speculations is not

¹⁸⁵ Bloom, H. *The Western Canon. The Books and School of the Ages*. 1994, Harcourt Brace, New York, US.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁸⁷ Aune, B., *Plato’s objections to mimetic art*.
<http://www.umass.edu/philosophy/PDF/Aune/PlatoonMimArt.pdf>

the same as Plato's critique. Rather, if we want to make sense of Plato's attitude toward poetry we must not lose sight of the real object of such a critique.

Aune disagrees with Nabokov and Bloom about whether literature has a purely aesthetic value, as Nabokov and Bloom maintain, or whether it has moral significance. Let us concentrate on the last question before turning to Aune's own view at the end of the work. I will compare Bloom's and Nabokov's views with the intrinsic educational value of Greek poetry. In his articulated analysis, Jaeger focuses on the distinctive features of Greek epics, in order to clarify its preeminent and structural educational role in the Greek society. As he points out, "Greeks [...] were the first to recognize that education means deliberately moulding human character in accordance with an ideal."¹⁸⁸ According to Jaeger, Greek educational models are based on the assumption that the world as a whole includes the individual as something that belongs to it. This concept, where the individual is a possession of the whole is fundamental to the understanding of ancient Greek thinking because it means that the discovery of universal laws that rule for is a fresh factor with powerful implications. Like all principles, these universal laws give the people knowledge about the world and, therein, moral modes of conduct thanks to the constitutive link between the community and the individual. As Jaeger states, "[...] the distinguished and effortless ease of the Greek mind was produced by their lucid realization of the fact (concealed from earlier nations) that the world is governed by definite and comprehensible laws."¹⁸⁹

The reliance of the people on universal laws is why poetry was an all-embracing source of learning. Poetry became the main, privileged reference for every possible answer for common people since it communicated these universal laws.

In fact, poetry's presentation of the universal laws will be the first answer to Bloom, who

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., xxii.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., xx.

singles out the discriminating factor between art and science or philosophy, in instructing us or improving our understanding of the world. The link between the world and the community was a constitutive feature and function of Greek poetry. Jaeger remarks:

By discovering man, the Greeks did not discover the subjective self, but realized the universal laws of human nature. The intellectual principle of the Greeks is not individualism but ‘humanism’, to see the world in its original and classical sense [...] the essence of education is to make each individual in the image of the community. [...] The Greek mind owes its superior strength to the fact that it was deeply rooted in the life of a community. [...] That is what lifts classical Greek literature out of the category of pure aesthetics, in which many have vainly tried to understand it, and gives it the immensurable influence on human nature which it exercised for thousands of years¹⁹⁰.

Thanks to the elucidation of poetry’s position as a medium for the conveyance of universal laws, Plato’s position on censorship should be clearer. It is true that censorship of poetry goes beyond education, but the point is that poetry was not just the source of learning for children but also the main source of knowledge for the masses. It expressed and transmitted the fundamentals of Greek culture. That is why the whole of the *Republic* is based on the idea that education is an integral part of the establishment of the State.

The position of education in the *Republic* is evident indeed in the title of the dialogue: πολιτεια. This Greek noun, πολιτεια, expresses both the individual’s citizenship and the whole of the laws that constitute the state. That is why on the one hand, Plato’s worries about poetry and education, in general, have been given significant space in the dialogue, and on the other hand, as Havelock remarks, “[...] only about a third of the work concerns itself with statecraft as such.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. xxv-xxvi.

¹⁹¹ Havelock, 1963, p. 3.

In light of the last remarks, we are led to read Plato's attempt to establish a fixed educational program as well as a bowdlerized poetry as an integral part of the constitution process of *Callipolis*, the ideal city he envisages, as something peculiar to Greek culture and conception of a State, rather than an authoritarian attitude, which is usual in modern dictatorships. In fact, answering to Adeimantus about what stories should be told in the ideal city in Book II, Plato clearly points out the nature of his approach:

I answered, Adeimantus, you and I at this juncture are not poets, but founders of a city. The founders ought to know the canons in accordance with which the poets should tell their stories, and which they are not to be allowed to transgress, but they need not themselves compose stories. (378e-379a)

Plato here makes it clear that he does not deal with poetry from an aesthetic perspective because of its particular role of founders on the State. That does not imply he ignores the aesthetic value of the educational tales. Rather, it is not a matter statesmen should be primarily concerned with. If they were concerned in it, then the stance of those statesmen would appear totalitarian. On the contrary, from the analysis of the passage, it is evident that Plato is worried about the practical and moral values because they are implicit in Homeric and Hesiodic poetry in its structure as well as in its practise.

This is a controversial point, only if we still consider Homeric *Corpus* as we consider modern literature. *A fortiori*, if we deal with Homeric poetry as an educational model for children as well as an encyclopaedia for adults, we agree with Plato that the most important canons have to be the truth, a fixed morality and the beneficial. However, if we do not recognize these peculiar features of poetry, then we confuse the matter at issue for Plato and we are led to think, as Naddaff does, that such tales "[...] become the means of persuading citizens to believe what perhaps is not natural but is certainly the effect of the uncensored poets' cultural influence – namely the necessity of privileging familiar, social and political obligations over

individual needs and autonomy.”¹⁹² Yet, as indicated before by Jaeger’s analysis, the connection between community and *personas* is congenital in Greek poetry.

This connection is strong evidence that remits Plato’s labelling as a paternalist or even an illiberal. Educational purposes as well as common ideals are firmly in the centre of Plato’s thinking because they were rooted in a poetry that demonstrated universal laws. Therefore, Plato’s concerns about poetry’s role in education and politics, as well as his proposed solutions therein, are not any more paternalistic than the poetry that he reviews. Jaeger goes on: “In this process education becomes culture for the first time: that is: it becomes a process by which the whole personality is modelled on a fixed pattern.”¹⁹³

So, what is the problem with such a pattern in Plato’s view? Havelock, who follows Jaeger’s line, gives a compelling answer:

What guidance, he [Plato] asks himself and his readers, can traditional poetry give us in morality? His answer is: very little; that is, if we take the stories told of the gods, heroes and ordinary men at all seriously. They are full of murder and incest, cruelty and treachery; of passions uncontrolled; of weakness, cowardice and malice. Repetition of such material can only lead to imitation and by unformed and tender minds. Censorship is the sole resort. Plato’s position is not very different, in short, from those who have advocated a similar editing of the Old Testament for younger readers, except that, the condition of Greek mythology being what it was, his proposal had to be more drastic.¹⁹⁴

Thus, according both to Havelock and Jaeger, a strong morality was present and implicit in Greek poetry and Plato’s censorship is “the sole resort” in order to establish a new educational model, which aims to promote a development of a person through narration of tales, which have to be neither misleading about gods, nor harmful for listeners’ behaviours.

¹⁹² Naddaff, 2002, p. 28.

¹⁹³ Jaeger, 1944, p. 21.

¹⁹⁴ Havelock, 1963, p. 10.

This is the essence of Plato's position toward poetry, at least in the first part of the dialogue. In my own view, what makes Plato's approach neither authoritarian nor paternalist but actually enlightening and extremely close to our vision is the lack of any form of political or educational authoritarianism, the strong presence of a new morality, and the aim of a full theoretical development of the individual. Annas points out that:

Such a pure morality has never before been envisaged. What Greece has hitherto enjoyed [...] is a tradition of a half - morality, [...] according to which the younger generation is continually indoctrinated in the view that what is vital is not so much morality as social prestige and material reward which may flow from a moral reputation whether or not this is deserved.¹⁹⁵

Therefore, on the one hand, the contents, the role and – above all – the function of Greek poetry and, on the other, the forms it expressed and the ways it was practised (we shall treat this topic in the next chapter) implies an educational policy. Once we have clarified the object of Plato's attack, we are able to reply to Pappas', Aune's and Annas' worries.

Now, it should be evident that Homeric and Hesiodic poetry was the only source available not just for children, but also for adult for what concerns morality. Annas herself, talking about racism patterns sometimes present in US education, affirms that Plato wants to avoid conflict in morality due to the fact that “[...] these people have been brought up to find the wrong things attractive and repulsive, and the result is a chronic conflict in moral personality.”¹⁹⁶ Now if we apply Plato's arguments against Homeric poetry to educational pattern, we find them still valid and relevant, also according to who criticised him as a literary critical reviewer. Once we have shown that we cannot consider Plato's attitude toward poetry as literary criticism simply because such a poetry and literature were simply absent and unfamiliar to Greek society, we are able to reply both to Aune and Bloom. Do we

¹⁹⁵ Havelock, 1963, p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ Annas, 1981, p. 84.

allow our own children to listen to stories about incest, cruelty, treachery, passions uncontrolled, weakness, cowardice and malice regarding anything, especially the divine? Surely, we do not. In response to Aune, as well as to other scholars on the same line of reasoning, I present here an original argument, ‘The Lolita Argument’.

5. 1. 7. The Lolita Argument.

The famous novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, provides, I believe, an interesting element of comparison. Indeed, I wonder what should be the result of an education based on the repeated and isolated reading of *Lolita*. This is in fact the real matter we are dealing with in the case of ancient Greek poetry in the second book of the *Republic*. More precisely, instead of textbooks, we have a serial of repetition of a certain cluster of tales, having as main characters folk divinities. Further, as Plato emphasizes at length, in most of the stories such divinities commit the worst acts. In addition to that, it must be recalled that ancient Greeks had quite a different conception and relationship with their divinities as Wilamowitz points out: ‘The gods are present. To know and recognize that for the Greeks this is a given fact, a datum, is a first and necessary condition for an understanding of their belief and cult.’¹⁹⁷

For what concerns *Lolita*, there is no doubt that the modern reader finds aesthetic value in the novel and we know that the modern readership is not involved in the risk of repeating what the main character actually does¹⁹⁸. However, once again, the matter at stake is no longer Greek poetry, which is much closer to a regular textbook than what we generally call literature. In this way, one point appears to be particularly relevant. E. Asmis recollects:

¹⁹⁷ Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, Berlin, 1932, pp.17.

¹⁹⁸ McGinn, C., *The Meaning and Morality of Lolita*, *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 30, Issue 1, March 1999, pp: 31–41.

Plato's quarrel with poetry takes its start in the fact that Greek poets had a crucial role in the creation and transmission of social values. It was traditionally believed that poets, like prophets, were inspired directly by the gods with wisdom about the human and divine condition. It was the prerogative of poets to make known the past, present, and future to their contemporaries and future generations by oral performance of their poems.¹⁹⁹

Asmis's fundamental remarks reckon how the average Greeks perceived poets' words. The *Lolita* argument I put forward in this section is based exactly on this ground. Since the radically different nature (transmission of values) and purpose (to make known the truth about the past and the future) of classic Greek poetry, the reader should make a move in order to get a real understanding of Plato's critique of poetry. Instead of referring Plato's arguments to modern literature in general and poetry in particular, we should apply Socrates' pupil concerns to children's textbooks. Conversely, since classic Greek poetry was the only source of learning available, we should wonder whether the isolated oral repetition and representation of Nabokov's masterpiece could work as a vehicle of moral values.

Moreover, once we have shown what the real subject at stake is, then how would we appreciate the reading of *Lolita*, if it was our only available source of learning?

Equally, Plato wants to ban the damaging material because it was the main important source of learning and knowledge. An exhaustive answer to this question appears at the end of the present work. It will be made clear that the purpose of Plato's censorship is to create an educational *techné*, which aims to seek the truth and the beneficial, in distinct contrast to the concept of art for art's sake. Therefore, my goal will be to demonstrate that Plato's censorship in educational and learning patterns was the first step for the birth of literature meant as art for art's sake in Western civilization. But I do not want to anticipate what has

¹⁹⁹ Asmis, Elizabeth. 1992. *Plato on Poetic Creativity*. In Richard Kraut (ed.), 1992, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 338–364, p. 339.

not yet been demonstrated. Thus let us continue our analysis of Plato's arguments in the *Republic*, moving on to the third chapter of the dialogue. This will give us also the opportunity to investigate deeper the ways in which poetry was practised in the age of Plato.

Chapter VI.

Republic Book III.

6. 2. 0. Textual examination of Plato's criticism in Book III.

Continuing from Book II, Plato focuses on the aims of a right education. The aims determine the best way to get a good education (Teleologism). He essentially asks the following: if we want to educate children with no irrational fears and false beliefs, should we allow them to listen to any tales, even if they include stories about incest, cruelty, treachery, passions uncontrolled, weakness, cowardice and malice regarding all of the gods? His answer, as well as ours, I suppose, is that it is not.

Let us now proceed to the textual analysis, in order to demonstrate that Plato's account of art is consistent with the epistemological approach we used to interpret it. In the very beginning of Book III, Plato made even clearer the purpose of his censorship. He expressly used a teleological approach. It primarily refers to Plato's theory of form. Before analysing Homer's lines, he declares the goals he wants to achieve, and according to them, he establishes the proper canons for assessing such claims:

'So much, then,' I said, 'for stories of the gods. We have settled, it seems, which of them our children may hear and which they may not, if they are to grow up to honour the gods and their parents, and to hold friendship dear. (386a).

If we analyse the objections that Plato presents, all of them present the same *leitmotiv*: first he stated the aims, and consequently he investigated the best way to accomplish them. In fact, in the next breath, he states that the soldiers must be brave, and consequently he says:

Come, then, if they are to be brave, must they not be told such stories as will make them have no fear of death? Or do you think that any man was ever brave who had this fear in his heart? (386a).

Therefore, he paid attention to the Homeric lines that could be harmful in assessing the claim stated before: to mould brave soldiers. His censorship, as well as in Rep. II, is directly functional to the purpose previously indicated:

Then, it seems, we must prescribe for intending poets concerning those stories also, and tell them that they must not simply abuse Hades, but rather praise it. For their stories, as ordinarily told, are neither true nor useful to those who are to be warriors. (386c).

Henceforth, Plato quotes six extracts from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, describing the afterlife as a terrifying and horrendous place. Plato himself gives evidence that his approach is teleological in the remark he makes after Homer's quotes. In fact, he clearly asserts the goal to accomplish (c):

We shall bid Homer and the other poets not be angry if we strike out these passages and all like them, not that they are not poetic (a), or that they are not enjoyed by most people (b), but that the more poetic they are, the less must they be heard by boys and men who are to be free (c), fearing slavery more than death. (387b).

The last passage deserves close attention because Plato himself admits that the lines he quotes are poetic and most people take pleasure in listening to them. However, the point was that these features do not serve the purpose of a free education and brave training. *A*

contrario they constitute an obstacle to the aim he points out. This is the reason why they have to be censored. Plato adopts the same policy from the subsequent line until the end of the analysis of the contents of poetry (390a). The claim he pursues can be assessed only through a censorship of Homer's lines that make soldiers too emotional. Brave soldiers must be inclined neither to crying nor to laughter. As professional soldiers, they have to be free from external influences.

That is why the harmful extracts were to be banished. As already pointed out, the censorship is 'the sole resort' for obtaining the goal. The only difference between Books II and III is that the first one related to primary education, whereas the second one concerned more guardians' character. At the end of his criticism, he emphasises that such tales were not 'suitable' for the purpose of moulding characters to temperance. The term he uses twice, *επιτηδειος*, is in fact an adjective that expresses the suitability of something:

οὐ γὰρ οἶμαι εἷς γε σωφροσύνην νέοις ἐπιτήδεια ἀκούειν: εἰ δέ τινα ἄλλην ἡδονὴν παρέχεται, θαυμαστὸν οὐδέν. ἢ πῶς σοι φαίνεται; (390a).

οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἦ δ' ὄς, οὐ μοι φαίνεται ἐπιτήδειον. (390c).

And those that follow it, and all the impertinence of private men to rulers, whether actually spoken or related in poetry, are they excellent? (390a).

'On my word', he said, 'I think such stories are not conducive to self-restraint. (390c).

In my own view, the last two quotes constitute important evidence that Plato's approach was teleological rather than moral or even aesthetic. In fact, the repeated use of the term suitable for defining the criteria of the tales demonstrates that the aims establish the canons.

Of course, there is room for debate about that issue. One might say that the fact that this thought was present in Plato's mind does not imply in itself that he used it in his approach to poetry in the *Republic*. Even the fact that Greek poetry was the main source of common knowledge, although a necessary condition, could be insufficient for considering Plato's

approach as epistemological. In fact, the theory of form that we recalled above for interpreting Plato's attitude concerns primarily Plato's metaphysics, rather than epistemology.

From a modern point of view, there is a sharp distinction between metaphysics and epistemology. However, in order to understand the relation of the two subjects in relation to Plato, it will be useful to contextualise the issue. There is a strong connection between epistemology and metaphysics in Plato's thought, as White describes:

For some time philosophers have thought of epistemology and metaphysics as different branches of philosophy, investigating, respectively, what can be known and the basic properties and nature of what there is. It is hard, though, to see any genuine boundaries here. The issues irresistibly overlap. Certainly in Plato there is no such divide. His view about what there is are largely controlled by ideas about how knowledge is takes its character from convictions about what there is that is knowable. As a result his doctrines have a different shape from characteristically moderns ones.²⁰⁰

What is more, and of particular relevance to this topic, is Plato's account of τέχνη in Book I. Some philosophers, though not all, hold the first and last books of *The Republic* as appendices. I shall argue, however, that if we adopt an epistemological approach, it will be evident that the first and last books constitute an integral part of the entire *Republic*.

Furthermore, I believe both the points – on the one hand the continuum between Book I and the whole of the dialogue and, on the other hand, the link between Plato's account of τέχνη and the teleological approach – are made all the clearer when Socrates discusses with Glaucon and Polemarchus about justice. In order to confute Polemarchus' claim, namely that justice consists in 'that to render to every man what is owing is just' (332e), Plato showed

²⁰⁰ White, N. P., 1992, *Plato's metaphysical epistemology*, in 'The Cambridge Companion to Plato', edited by R. Kraut, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, US.

that it was not clear what it means and then moved to define particular crafts like medicine, cookery and navigation in virtue of the aim of such craft. Once again he used the term *τέχνη*, and his ultimate conclusion was the following:

And is not the natural end of the art to seek after and provide this? (341e)

This passage deserves close attention for several reasons. Firstly, it represents an evidence of Plato's approach. Secondly, Plato's criticism is deeper than could be seen *prima facie*. In fact, the origin of Polemarchus' belief was a verse made by the poet Simonides. The problem was that Polemarchus was not able to justify his own statement; he just quoted Simonides, nothing more. He had a general idea, but he was not able to explain why he thought so. After few passages, he himself admits:

[...] but I do not know now what I have said. Still I am in of the same opinion, that justice is to help your friends and harm your enemies. (344b).

Thus, Polemarchus, who gives voice to ordinary people's views, expresses something that he (believes to) knows. Moreover, it is worthy to recall that his knowledge derives from poetry.

Let us conclude this section with an epistemological remark. As D. Pritchard points out:

In his book, *The Meno*, (See 96d-100b), Plato compares knowledge to the statues of the ancient Greek sculptor Daedalus which, it is said, were so realistic that if one did not tether them to the ground they would run away. Plato's point here is that mere true belief is like one of the untethered statues of Daedalus, in that one could very easily lose it. Knowledge, in contrast, is akin to a tethered statue, one that is therefore not easily lost.²⁰¹

As can be seen from the last remark, Polemarchus thought to possess knowledge, when really he had only beliefs. The result is that he loses it very easily. He does not possess knowledge,

²⁰¹ Pritchard, 2006, 2.

but just a confused opinion derived from the authority of a famous poet. And the problem was that, as Socrates pointed out in Book III:

He will, if practise is to follow theory. (389d).²⁰²

In this way, Plato confronted the essential problem with poetry: it fails as source of knowledge. The importance of such a failure is stated in the passage above: people follow (inconsistent) poets' advices about the most important issues without having any real understanding of them. More precisely, they confuse mere beliefs with knowledge. Later in this thesis, I will face this central point more directly. By analysing Book X, I will demonstrate how Plato's attack against poetry became harder without exception and that the poet's lack of knowledge is the basis upon which Plato elaborated his criticism. For now, though, I emphasise that Plato's criticism and related censorship of the contents of poetry is based on educational purposes. In this occasion in fact, Plato treats poetry as a skill that must be evaluated for such a purpose. The criticism and the related banishment derived from the fact that, as Plato shows, the contents of epic poems fails in the purpose of educating people.

²⁰² I used, in this occasion, the translation by Cooper, John, ed. 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett, p. 1027.

6. 2. 1. Plato's objections against the forms of poetry (398c-403c).

The aim of this second part of the chapter is to offer a detailed analysis of Plato's arguments against the forms of poetry in Book III. I will also offer in this section a detailed treatment of the intricate concept of mimesis, which Plato faces first in Book III and second in Book X of the dialogue. This last point will also provide the link for the next paragraph, in which I will treat Plato's criticism against mimesis in detail.

6.2.2. Plato's first treatment of mimesis: What is this thing called *Mimesis*?

In Book III, after his criticism and the related censorship of the contents of the poems, Plato introduces his arguments against the forms of poetry. Analysing Greek epics and mythology, he emphasizes that there are three types of narration: simple, (pure narration without direct discourses); imitative (when the poet speaks as he was the character he is talking about); and a mix of the previous styles (392d). Yet, one feature affects Plato above all: the imitation that sometimes takes place in the last two narrative styles. In order to clarify his view, he quotes the beginning of the *Iliad* before then referring to the rest of the poem as well as the whole *Odyssey* in order to show how often it happens in Homer. It is important to emphasize that the matter at issue here is not just the simple stylistic distinction between the first person style of narration and the third person style. Rather, because of the oral nature of poetry during this period, it is the much more absorbing process of personification that takes place. Here Plato introduces the controversial concept of mimesis, one of the most perennial debates in the history of philosophy. Talking with Adeimantus, he provides a first account of such a process:

But when he speaks in the person of another, shall we not say that he then always makes his style as nearly as possible like that of the man whom he has announced to be speaking? (393c).

But if a man makes himself either in voice or in look like another man, does not he imitate that man? (393c)

I think it is important to emphasize that his worries concern the process of imitation that takes place between the ‘reciter’ and, not only the poet, as I will soon show, but also the characters that she or he represents. Therefore, the matter at issue here is not just whether admitting tragedy and comedy – namely the genres in which this process is more present – into *Callipolis*; rather the question is whether or not to allow such to the guardians, as Plato explicitly asserts:

‘Well, then, that is what I am trying to say, that we must come to an agreement as to whether we should allow poets to make their narrations by means of imitation, or partly by imitation and partly by the other methods, in which case we should have to determine where each method should be used, or whether we should forbid imitation altogether.’

‘I think,’ he said, ‘ that you are considering whether we shall admit tragedy and comedy into the city or not.’

‘Possibly.’ I said, ‘but possibly even more than that. I don’t myself know as yet. We must go where the wind of the argument carries us.’ (394c).

This is an important distinction to bear in mind in order to grasp Plato’s criticism of mimesis. The phraseology once more may tempt the reader to think that mimesis here regards the relation between the spectator and the reader on the one hand and the player or the character on the other hand. For instance, for an individual to feel pity for Hamlet while watching or reading Shakespeare’s classic could be taken as an example of mimesis. Although this phenomenon could be interpreted as partaking into the wide concept of mimesis, this is not the case in Plato’s criticism. By virtue of the regular oral performance of poetry, the process of imitation that worries Plato regards not just the poet who recites epic tales but also the

people who take part in an active way to such a recitation. Textual evidence of that fundamental distinction between our own approach to literature and Plato's is given a few passages later when his pupil introduces his criticism with the following question:

‘Then, Adeimantus, consider whether our guardian ought to be imitative or not.’ (394e).

‘[...] Have you noticed that the practise of imitation, if it is begun in youth and persisted in, leaves its impress upon character and nature, on body and voice and mind?’ (395d).

Thus, the mimesis that Plato defined above is the process of identification between the person who recites a poem and the characters he represents: it is a common practise that involves most of the people in the community due to the usual first person recitation.

In the previous chapters, we gave historical basis for advocating this claim and now we find textual evidence in Plato's analysis and critique. The modern distinction between the spectator and the player is not at stake here. Plato is worried about the effects that imitation leaves in people. For the modern reader, this could seem to be a slightly odd claim. Nowadays, nobody believes that, when one reads a poem or watches a play, she or he become like the characters represented in the artwork. Still, if the practise of poetry is something that from childhood onwards always implies an active participation in the recitation of such poems and it is the usual habit both in big social occasions (theatre) and in small ones (familiar mess table), Plato's claim appears justified. That is why he is not simply concerned with whether or not to admit tragedy into *Callipolis*, rather he wonders whether to allow mimesis to the guardians. And he gives grounds for this claim in virtue of the usual active process of recitation.

6. 2. 3. ‘We must go where the wind of the argument carries us’.

Why Plato criticizes mimesis (394d).

In the light of the last remarks, we are now capable of understanding Plato’s comments about the process of mimesis: ‘if it is begun in youth and persisted in, leaves its impress upon character and nature, on body and voice and mind.’ (395d). Moreover, I believe that it is not perhaps difficult to accept Plato’s worries about mimesis with reference to the importance of Greek epics in proposing itself as a model of behaviour for the listeners. In what follows, I will present the reasons that allow me to think so. For what concerns the link between mimesis and behavioural patterns, S. Halliwell emphasizes:

The crucial link between this first stretch of books 2-3’s critique of poetry and the subsequent introduction of mimesis is provided by the premise that (poetic) narratives induce and shape belief in their audience, a premise reinforced by the consideration that gods and heroes, the central characters in so many myths, have a paradigmatic standing in the value system of the culture [...] This is buttressed by the argument that, because mimesis involves ‘self-likening’ or psychological assimilation, it follows that the young Guardians should be exposed to the mimetic mode of poetry largely for the presentation of virtuous characters.²⁰³

Halliwell here introduces a pivotal point: mimetic poetry is allowed and even recommended to the young Guardians when it represents good and useful characters. At least in part, this is also a controversial point because – as we will see shortly – in Book X Plato seems to disallow poetry entirely within the city. In Book III, however, it is clear that Plato allows such a process to the guardians, when it is aimed to represent good and useful characters.

However, Plato’s attitude on mimesis in Book III is also debated. According to Naddaff,

²⁰³ Halliwell, Stephen, 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient texts and modern problems*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 51.

What Socrates fears most about poetic imitation is its lack of limits. The old-regime poets could imitate anyone, anything, any way. A medium of excess, the uncensored poetry set the stage for the poetic audience's excessive, limitless transformation. At the same time, however, Socrates recognizes the transformative power of this medium, of a mimesis that determines psychological and ethical habits and natures. [...] Limiting the scope of mimetic poetry, Socrates engenders a poetry without limitations, a poetry that recognizes no boundaries between the actions, words and thoughts represented in poetry and those performed in life.²⁰⁴

I agree with Naddaff that Plato's primary concern is the lack of limits in poetic imitation. I also agree that he was aware of the enormous power of mimetic poetry; it was powerful enough to be capable of determining "psychological and ethical habits and natures". Basically, that is exactly the reason why the author of the *Republic* wants to limit it.

However, I do not think that Plato wanted to invent a new poetry without limitations. On the contrary, I believe that his worries concern the fact that mimetic poetry was so common, usual and powerful for the reasons I have already mentioned, that it created in the reciter, 'no boundaries between the actions, words and thoughts represented in poetry and those performed in life.' That is why Plato is so extreme in his criticism. This premise is vital in order to understand Plato's attack upon mimetic poetry. For instance, Halliwell clearly points this out:

Where poetry uses the dramatic mode, the reciter is drawn intensely into, and thereby takes on, the mental and ethical cast of the poem becomes the world of the mind imaginatively (re)enacting it. This point highlights a continuity, at the level of concern over the psychological influences of poetry, between the earlier scrutiny of poetic *muthoi* and the present analysis of poetic 'form'. It ought also to show us that Plato's questions can connect with problems that are still ours.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Naddaff, 2002, 48.

²⁰⁵ Halliwell, 2002, 53.

Paradoxically, I would argue that Naddaff's criticism of Plato is the same as Plato's criticism of poetry, and my main objection is the following: why should Plato aim to create a new, model of poetry without limits, if, in his own view, this was the main fault in Greek epic?

Naddaff affirms that:

Socrates guarantees the efficacy of this education not by excluding poetry as an essential element, but by establishing a deliberate and serious continuity between art and life. Just as this art will imitate the guardians' lives, the guardians' lives will imitate this art. Even more precisely, Socrates' supervision of subjects of poetic imitation transform the poetic experience into a performance in which the guardians, by their mere participation, actively fashion and constitute themselves as virtuous, as finely crafted, works of art.²⁰⁶

As I have already largely illustrated, poetry was not practiced as a passive participation. Besides, that is why Plato focuses one more time on the subjects of mimesis when he examines the forms of poetry, since he had already faced its contents in the previous discussion with Adeimantus. What I mean by this is that the contents were never just a narrative subject but, *a contrario*, they always implied an active participation. That is why the contents became so important when Plato faces the question regarding not just what was to be said, but also how.

In this connection, I agree with Nehamas about Plato's objections to the use of poetry in education:

Plato's attitude toward what young children should recite, read, and learn from (for this is subject at this point) is quite reasonable. The actual discussion of poetry in Book II and III concerned the elementary education of the young Guardians, and Plato, I think, was quite willing to allow imitative poetry to play a crucial role in that enterprise. He consider the use of poetry proper in education [...] since he thinks that imitation can become 'habit and nature'; if, therefore, a child's object of imitation are also example of imitation, he thinks that they will

²⁰⁶ Naddaff, 2002, 50.

be beneficial. His claims about poetry (and the other arts, which he does not here contrast with poetry) at 401a-402 s shows that he is thinking of the very beginning of Guardian's education. He believes that by proper imitation, a child not yet capable of understanding can develop a preference for Beauty and goodness and will embrace understanding in friendship when it does finally arrive (402a3-4).²⁰⁷

Nehamas captures here a salient point: Plato allowed mimesis if it was aimed at developing "a preference for Beauty and goodness and will embrace understanding in friendship when it does finally arrive".

Nehamas' point will be clearer in the next section in particular, when I will treat the proper melody and rhythm but for the time being, let me concentrate on the benefits of the proper objects in children's education. Plato's educational program in general and his criticism of poetry, in particular, were aimed to ensure a full intellectual development of the people. Now we face Plato's position toward mimesis, and in his criticism we find that what worries him the most is the process of identification between the reciter and the characters.

Now, the question emerges: is Plato's attitude toward the objects of mimesis so far from our attitude to the objects of education? When we tell stories to our children, we certainly try to instil decent values in our children and yet we do not think this removes their capacity for independent thought. Rather, our educational programs are aimed to ensure a thorough, intellectual development for the young. What I am suggesting here is that to promote good and useful models is not a sufficient condition to imply an inculcation of certain models. One might say that the process of mimesis itself implies an inculcation of certain patterns but I do not think so. Rather, Plato wants simply to give good models that, as Nehamas rightly emphasizes, the young will recognize as such when they mature. This recognition will come, not because they were brought up to believe faithfully in them, but rather because, once they

²⁰⁷ Nehamas, 1999, pp. 254-255.

have grown up, they are able to distinguish between good and bad things because they are only then intellectually capable.

This is particularly evident in Plato's introduction to the bad models that one must not imitate:

‘Then we must not allow person for whom we say we care, who are men, and men who must grow up good, to imitate a woman, whether she be young or old, either railing at her husband, or striving and vaunting herself against the gods, thinking that she is happy, or overcome by misfortune, or grief, or tears; much less we shall we allow them to imitate one who is ill, or in love, or in labour’ (395e).

In the light of what has been said so far, Plato's concern appears justified. The suggestive motto stated by Plato in the introduction of the treatment of the forms of poetry – “We must go where the wind of the argument carries us’ (394d) – is the key to understand his attitude toward mimesis. The next step of his argument carries us to the treatment of mimesis with reference to the Proper Work Argument.

6. 2. 4. Why does Plato use the Proper Work Argument against Mimesis?

According to Halliwell, “Plato's arguments move from the acknowledged educational status and cultural influence of poetry within his own world to a statement of the need to control poetic content in the interests of ethical ideology, individual psychological development, and the social order as a whole.”²⁰⁸ Halliwell points out here a strong link between mimesis and the social order of the community. It is an interesting point, because Plato uses the Proper Work Argument to limit the guardians' process of mimesis. This is the argument advanced by Plato in reference to mimesis:

²⁰⁸ Halliwell, 2002, p. 53.

‘Does not the answer follow from what we have said already, that each man can practise well one profession but not many, and that if he attempts more, and meddles with many, he will fail in all to attain creditable distinction?’ (394e).

Plato here explicitly mentions the ‘principle of specialization or ‘PWA’, which I have illustrated previously in this study. In the next breath, Socrates applies such a principle to imitation:

‘Then will not the same argument apply to imitation? The same man cannot imitate many things as well as one’ (394e).

This point could sound quite strange to the modern reader. Why does Plato apply a principle that limits a guardian to only one act of imitation? Burnyeat answers this question as follows:

This is not the question whether the Guards should indulge in mimicry at parties, but whether, when free of military duties, they should engage in the poetic “performance” of writing and producing tragedy or comedy, which would involve them in imitating many different characters with no narrative interludes (394e 8-9, 395b) in front of a large audience (397a). No doubt Socrates also means that the Guards should not be mimics at a party, nor enjoy acting in plays. They should not imitate any unworthy character, let alone a whole variety of them (395c-96b); they should imitate only characters they wish to emulate in their own lives. But the primary focus of the argument is on the Guards as themselves mimetic storytellers, impersonating many characters both good and bad. Only later does Socrates raise the prospect of a professional dramatist arriving from abroad and seeking admittance (397c–98a). This interpretation explains why the premise used to outlaw tragedy and comedy is the “one man-one job” principle.²⁰⁹

Thus, on the one hand, Burnyeat’s interpretation explains Plato’s use of the Proper Work Argument in reference to mimesis. On the other hand, it emphasizes that Plato’s prime focus in mimesis are the Guardians and he is not concerned for the moment in professional dramatists. He refers to them in the beginning of his speech but immediately focuses upon the

²⁰⁹ Burnyeat, 1999, p. 271.

guardians (394d). From this assumption, it follows that Plato's first argument against mimesis does not regard poets themselves. I will return to this point shortly but for now I will focus on Halliwell's remark. The connection introduced above by Halliwell, apropos of the link between "poetic contents in the interests of ethical ideology, individual psychological development, and the social order as a whole" appears clearer now. Yet, it does not have negative or authoritarian implications. It is vital to emphasize this factor, because scholars have criticized Plato as a totalitarian because of his criticism of mimetic poetry.

In that respect, Plato's worries about the objects of mimesis should not be read as an interest in promoting certain models that are functional to maintaining social order in the city. Rather, Plato pursues two reasons for censoring mimesis. First, he wants to guarantee the best possible result in any art (τέχνη). Secondly, he is concerned in preserving the guardians' intellectual growth. What is particularly relevant for my purposes here, though, is that Plato argues against mimesis for two major reasons. First, a guardian will not perform his imitation well, because he does not understand the character; second, the guardian will fail in his daily tasks because he has imitated an evil character. Therefore, due to the enormous power of mimesis, people who recite epic poems fail not just in the mundane daily tasks of life but also in performing epic poetry.

In a similar way, in passage 395a, Plato states that the same persons are not able to write successfully both tragedy and comedy, even though they are professional writers. Adeimantus also confirms this fact as basic and unquestioned. Moreover, in passage 395b, Plato notices that different actors usually played tragedy and comedy because the different genres required different talents in order to be represented in the best possible way. I would suggest, then, that the underlying implication of his criticism is the recognition that acting and writing are professions that can only be done well through specialisation.

This point is not as trivial as could appear *prima facie*, for the reason that Plato does not reject their work in writing or playing comedies rather than tragedies. That is, Plato is not attacking players or authors *qua* players or authors. *Per contra*, he refers to them in order to show that even people who write and perform comedy and tragedy do a better job when they focus on one specific area. Therefore, the principle of specialization regards poets and authors too. To sum up, it is worth emphasising the following points in Plato's first treatment of mimesis: i) Plato's main objective was primarily related to the guardians' forming of character; ii) Plato does not attack epic authors, actors or rhapsodists *qua* authors, actors or rhapsodists and iii) he applies the PWA to the mimetic poetry in order to preserve guardians' growth.

Thus, I would disagree with Halliwell's overall conclusion regarding Plato's view of mimesis in Book III where he says:

Distinctions between narrative modes and their points of view have now become the common fare of narratological and related kinds of criticism. But Plato's argument is not focused on technicalities as such: at its heart is an anxiety over the heightened states of mind – the self-likening, absorption, and identification – (allegedly) entailed by participation in the dramatic mode. It is legitimate and instructive, I believe, to read this aspect of the dialogue as a radical attack on the workings of imagination itself, where imagination is to be understood as a

dimension of the mind's capacity to explore the possibility of difference in its own life.²¹⁰

It is important to grasp that what worries Plato is the “habit of making themselves resemble madmen, not the mind's capacity to explore the possibility of difference in its own life”. In a seminal line, Plato clearly expresses this point:

Nor, it would follow, may they imitate bad men or cowards, or men doing actions of the contrary nature to those we described, reviling and caricaturing one another, using abominable language, whether drunk or sober, or committing any other faults of speech or action characteristic of that class of men in their personal demeanour and their relation with others. I think, too, that they must not get into the habit of making themselves resemble madmen, either in word or action. They must know madmen and bad men and women, but they must neither do nor imitate any of their actions? (396a).

It is explicitly asserted that the guardians must not “get into the habit of making themselves resemble man either in word or action”. Although, the guardians still have to know them. The key to understanding the deep difference between “get into the habit of making themselves resemble man either in word or action” and to ban “the mind's capacity to explore the possibility of difference in its own life” is given by the usual first-person recitation of the poems.

Plato's attitude on mimetic poetry does not aim to avoid the possibility of knowing difference in one own life; rather, it was aimed to avoid the contamination derived by mimetic poetry in daily life. Such a contamination of genres, contents and issues affected everyone by a substantial confusion and lack of knowledge about the things they recite. I will explain thoroughly what I mean by ‘lack of knowledge’ in the next section where I will focus specifically on the reference to the full banishment of poetry expressed in Book X of the *Republic*. For the time being, let me quote another extracts of the arguments made by Plato in

²¹⁰ Halliwell, 2002, p. 54.

his criticism of mimesis, in order to corroborate my view that Plato wants to avoid the imitation described above as a substantial confusion and promiscuity of models and characters:

‘Then’, I said, ‘ as for the man of a different character, the more contemptible he is, the more will he imitate everything without discrimination and think nothing beneath him, so that he will attempt in sober earnest, and before a large audience, to imitate everything, as we said a moment ago – thunder and the noise of the wind, and of hail, and of axles and of pulleys; the notes of trumpets and flutes, and the bleating of sheep, and the cries of birds. And so his manner of speech will all involve imitation of voice and form, with possibly a little simple narration’ (397a).

Let me focus on the first part of the quote. (I will return to the second part in the last section of the chapter). Plato objects to both the notion that anyone can imitate anything and that imitation can take place without limiting content and forms, even in front of a big social audience. In light of what we have said so far in relation to the pivotal role of poetry in Greek culture, Plato’s worries are justified. His use of the Proper Work Argument is effective for showing the dangers that lacking limitations of who could represent any character, even in front of a big audience, could have on an oral culture. This is not just a matter of different narrative characters, but rather, important epic figures and models that were taken as examples in common people’s life.

In order to support my view, let us discuss the second part of Burnyeat’s analysis. On passage 397a, he focuses on the difference between being a guardian and being a poet or an actor as distinct crafts (τέχνη):

In the ideal city each man is to devote himself to the practice of one craft is anticipated by Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 130ff., where the tragic poet Agathon assumes in all seriousness the habit and the habits of the women he portrays; at line 156 he calls this mimesis. Note that the disjunctive generalisation

has now been extended to cover imitating the sounds of nonhuman things, animate *or* inanimate; originally it meant imitating people, as is shown by the masculine pronoun at 393c. In ancient Athens the poet was also the producer, as we would call it in Greek, it, because he trained the chorus. No craft or skill is needed to sit and watch a play. Some skill is needed for reciting a speech from Euripides. But much more is required to write and produce a play yourself. The Guards' sole job (395a), their special craft (395b) is defending the freedom of the city (395bc). Hence they must not even to do what cultivated Athenians often did, *combine* their main pursuit with the writing of tragedies (395a 1-2). (In real-life Athens, Sophocles did it the other way round: he served twice as general.) If it is true, as Socrates claims, that no one can successfully combine two imitative crafts, either as a poet of both tragedy and comedy or as an actor in both (395ab), *a fortiori* no one can successfully combine an imitative craft with a military career (395bc). The argument turns on the exclusive demands each craft makes on its practitioners. It is dramaturgy as a craft, much more than amateur theatricals, that Socrates wants the Guards to avoid, so that they concentrate on developing and practising the skills appropriate to their proper task.²¹¹

In full accordance with this interpretation, we are now able to understand why, on the one hand, Plato's overall conclusion about mimesis for the guardians is the following:

‘We shall admit the simple imitator of the good man.’ (397d).

Then we must speak to our poets and compel them to impress upon their poems only the image of the good, or not to make poetry in our city (401b).

On the other hand, Plato rejects a poet who is able to imitate well ‘every conceivable object’, asserting that such a poet is not useful in *Callipolis*.

‘Then apparently if there comes to our city a man so wise that he can turn into everything under the sun and imitate every conceivable objects, when he offers to show off himself and his poems to us, we shall do obeisance to him as to a sacred, wonderful, and agreeable person, but we shall say that we have no such man in our city, and the law forbids there being one, and we shall anoint him with myrrh, and crown him with a wreath of sacred wool, and more austere and less attractive poet and story teller, whose poetry will be to our profit, who will imitate for us the diction of the good man, and in

²¹¹ Ibid, 272.

saying what he has to say will conform to those canons which we laid down originally when we were under-tasking the task of educating the soldiers (398a).

6. 2. 5. Plato's goal in censoring melodies: 'When we have done so, we must make our metre and our melody to suit the words describing such a life, and not make words to suite metre and melody' (400a).

Once Plato has examined 'the branch of music which relates to literature and stories' (398b), he focuses on the songs and melody (398c). Since melody is constituted by words, harmony and rhythm (398d), he faces them all. In analysing the various melodies, he states that he is going to adopt the same attitude used in facing the contents as he does with the forms of poetry (398d). He also states that the modes and rhythms allowed will correspond to the canons of the subjects and manners already analysed. That is why, in accordance with Glaucon, he banishes the plaintive harmonies like the Ionian and the Lydian. The reason why they have to be banned is once again because they are not useful for educating the guardians (399a). Plato also examines the rhythms in the same way. In passage 400a, Plato clearly asserts the following principle:

'When we have done so, we must make our metre and our melody to suit the words describing such a life, and not make words to suite metre and melody' (400a).

It is vital to emphasize this principle. In full accordance with the attitude adopted in criticizing mimesis, Plato is concerned with the harmful effects that certain melodies could invoke in the listeners. This is clearly his primary concern, and is exactly what he wants to avoid.

In his view, the effects are so powerful that they are capable of determining the word *λογος*. The Ancient Greeks used this word for expressing both thought and language. In Homer for

instance, it used to mean only ‘word’ just in two occasions. More generally, it used to express speech, clause, expression, narration, even fame and literature. It characterises humans and that is why, in my own view, it so important in this context.

To Plato, the λογος must be preeminent in people’s growth and life. *A fortiori*, a guardian’s education and life must follow this principle. If this does not happen, the guardians are vulnerable and easily influenced by the melodies. Yet, Plato also states two new interesting canons that must be followed in μουσική: gracefulness and elegance.

6. 2. 6. The New Canons.

It is important to emphasize that Plato states two main guidelines in analysing melodies. First, he clearly affirms that the λογος is more important than the melodies, and that the melodies must follow the word and not vice versa. I believe this is a pivotal concept because the pre-eminence of λογος on the melodies means that the guardians are aware and have the control of what they sing and say. What Plato wants to avoid here is the type of music that could shock and distort guardians’ behaviour. His solution, based on the censorship, is to follow the paradigm of the pre-eminency of the λογος. If the guardians maintain control of what they say, they are able to express themselves and do not lose their own personality.

The comparison between Greek poetry and our own literature is incorrect because the two subjects are deeply different for what concerns their role and weight: we do not have to compare Plato’s censorship of melodies to contemporary music styles. As Burnyeat points out:

And not only music in the narrow sense of rhythm and attunement. Plato’s word covers music and poetry together, because in the ancient world you usually hear

them together, as song. Those rhythms and attunements convey verbal messages to the soul, and Plato is as concerned about their content as about their musical form. In an ideal city, the whole culture must be as ideal as possible, because all of it influences the character of the citizens.²¹²

According to Burnyeat, Plato is concerned with the ‘verbal messages to the soul’, and the solution he finds for educating the guardians is to state the pre-eminency of the word. If the word rules the music, the guardians – *qua* persons who are able to express themselves – rule the music, and not vice versa. With that in mind, the second step is to define the proper features of the songs that, as we have already noticed, have to follow the word.

In defining the proper features of the songs, Plato introduces a new element. From the last line quoted above (400a) until the end of his treatment of education based on μουσική (403c), he states several times the following principles: i) gracefulness corresponds to a good rhythm (and vice versa); ii) the good rhythm is assimilated to a beautiful style (and vice versa) and iii) musical rhythm and musical mode conforms to the words, and not vice versa.

However, the question remains: what does Plato mean by ‘graceless’? Burnyeat argues that,

In Plato’s advocacy of the idea, the key terms are gracefulness and its opposite, gracelessness - gracefulness can be seen both in inanimate things like buildings and furniture and in living things. In a person, gracefulness can show in their physical movements, in their stance or the way they hold themselves, and also in their talk and how they think. If you are sympathetic to the idea that the material environment has effects on the soul (particularly, but not only, when you are young), that over time it influences your character and outlook in all sorts of ways you are not aware of, then gracefulness is a good example of a quality that can be taken in from the material environment and internalized as a quality of mind and spirit. Gracefulness is *attractive*. It is a quality we welcome and would like to have ourselves. Certainly, it can be faked, an outer garment disguising an unjust soul (366b). But true grace is the reflection of virtue in a harmonious soul

²¹² Burnyeat, 1999, 222.

(554e).²¹³

Thus, it is worth noticing that Plato states the quite reasonable idea that rhythm and melodies strongly influence human beings and from that assumption follows the principle that a state must check the quality of them. Therefore, I would agree and conclude with Burnyeat's remark in emphasizing that: "Music is decisive because of its influence on your sense of beauty, your taste, the eighteenth century called it - which in turn guides your response to other things in the environment. In this way, music is included in the same range as material and moral culture."²¹⁴

²¹³ Ibid, 220-221.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 222.

Seventh Chapter.

Republic X: why the Banishment is not Real Banishment.

Introduction.

This chapter is entirely devoted to the treatment of Plato's arguments on poetry and the notorious banishment he postulates in the ending book of the *Republic*. Throughout the chapter I will present a detailed analysis of the text, along side a wide confront with the relevant scholarship on the matter.

7. 1. 0. Why does Plato want to banish poetry?

'I must not honour a man more than I honour the truth' (595d).

In the beginning of Book X, Plato emphasises the pattern by which he will lead the hard attack against mimetic poetry in general and Homer in particular. At passage 595a, firstly, he asserts that there is no room for mimetic poetry in the ideal city. This first argument (595a – 602c) faces mimetic poetry and is based on the imitation that characterises it. Both Plato's account of and his criticism of poetry in Book X are strictly different from the previous ones. In passage 595b, he states that the city should ban mimetic poetry because it referring to the separation of the different parts of the soul. Plato presents his second argument (602c-605c) from a basis firmly set within the bounds of the primary one denouncing poetry. More precisely, Plato tries to demonstrate that the inferior part of the soul – opposed to the reasoning and superior, rational part – accepts at face value the notions expressed by mimetic poetry.

Although it is, perhaps, clear in passages 602c-605c, I am inclined to believe that the answer to why Plato wants to banish mimetic poetry is expressed, though somewhat enigmatically, in passage 595c. In that passage, while talking about Homer, Plato says:

‘I must not honour a man more than I honour the truth’ (Plat. *Rep.* 595c).

This principle is the *leitmotif* of Plato in Book X. In what follows, I will show why and how Plato’s quote above is to be interpreted as a paradigm of his attitude toward poetry in book X. This chapter will also shed light on Plato’s uncompromising attack and banishment in the last book of the dialogue, in order to reveal that his attitude is aimed to release poetry from the educational and political role it had in the classical Greek society.

7. 1. 1. Plato's account of mimesis in Book X. Why does Plato compare painting with mimetic poetry?

First of all, it is crucial to reiterate here the role of Plato's Theory of Forms in order to get some understanding on his first argument against poetry in the last book of the *Republic*.

Here, then, is Plato's Theory of Forms, relevant (if for no other reason) since in Book X they are explicitly expressed in order to explain why the poetry at issue is 'mimetic'. More precisely, Plato faces the question of 'what is imitation?' and he refers to the Theory of Forms in order to define what 'imitation' is.

According to his Theory of Forms, for Plato there are three different types of objects:

- i) Forms of general ideas or real objects. They are perfect, immutable and at the highest level or knowledge. Made by a god (e.g. the *idea* of the bed).
- ii) Individual, real objects, which belong to the real world and are produced by humans by means of knowledge and craft (e.g. a material, physical bed).
- iii) Images, paintings and imitations of real objects and things, imitated by mimetic artists without any knowledge and craft concerning the effective creation of those (e.g. a representation of a bed).

Plato refers to the Theory of Forms in order to argue that there is no real knowledge of the things represented in mimetic art. In fact, he argues that mimetic art does not refer to the essence of the things (the forms) but it refers just to their appearance (598a-b). In Plato's words:

Imitation, then, is far from the truth, and apparently it manages to make all things just because it attacks only a small part of each, and that an image. The painter, for example,

will paint us, we say, a shoemaker, a carpenter, and all other workmen, though he has no knowledge whatever of their crafts. But nevertheless, if he is a good painter, he may paint a carpenter and show the thing at some distance, and so cheat children and stupid men into thinking it is really a carpenter. (599c).

Imitative man has no knowledge of any value on the subject of his imitation; that imitation is a form amusement and not a serious occupation; (602c).

This imitation concerned with something that is third from the truth. (602c).

It is worth noting that Plato connects here ‘imitation’ (without any real knowledge) with painting. The reason is that, on this occasion, mimesis is intended as the literal copy of the appearance of a thing. In that respect, Plato even refers to the use of a mirror and its role in the reflection of things. He makes this comparison in order to emphasize that the painter, as well as one who uses a mirror, represents things without any knowledge of them -- especially the craftsman’s skill required to make such objects.

Yet, why does Plato apply the third principle of his Theory of Forms to poetry? Plato’s criticism appears odd to the modern reader. In fact, we ask neither the painter nor the writer to have a deep and complete knowledge of the things they paint or write. The reason is that, for us, such knowledge is not a hallmark for good or bad painting or writing. Conversely, Plato maintains that it is the biggest fault in mimetic art. Is it really so?

In order to solve the puzzle, I believe it is useful to clarify the real object of Plato’s attack. Even so, the subject of his attack is a controversial point. Nehamas maintains that Book X of the *Republic* is an attack solely upon poetry, not Art as a whole. His argument is that Plato does not banish the artists altogether, only the poets. In this way, Nehamas recalls that painting, like poetry, is imitative. Using the Theory of Forms, Book X makes a parallelism between poetry and painting in order to show the same imitative nature and their remoteness

from the truth. However, as the text clearly shows, Plato banishes the poets only and not the painters. Thus, as Nehamas rightly points out, being imitative is not solely sufficient to explain the banishment from the city. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that Plato does not banish all poetry, but just the imitative one:

In no way we are admitting [in our city] as much of it as is imitative (595a5).

What is wrong with imitation in poetry? Annas believes that Plato's attack in Book X aims to show that "art in general is worthless."²¹⁵ She focuses on the following point in order to explain why Plato refers to painting: "The point to be taken over is that the artist, in whatever medium, produces without knowledge of this product."²¹⁶ She also rejects the comparison between poetry and painting because "Homer cannot be said to copy the appearances of things in anything like the way that the illusionistic painter does."²¹⁷

I disagree with Annas, though. First, it is unclear whether, in Plato's view, "art in general is worthless." Rather, Plato was likely aware of the enormous power of art in general and epics in particular. It is highly likely that, in his view, art was extremely powerful, even dangerous. For this reason, he held that poetry had to be examined and limited. It is useful to contextualize Plato's criticism. In fact, due to Nehamas' previous remark, we are able to say that not mimetic poetry *qua* mimetic art has to be banned. If it was so, also the painters, as well as any other artist within the city had to be banned. In that respect, Plato's comparison with painting aims just to explain the remoteness of poetry from the truth. Plato's main target in Book X is, once again, Homer (and the epic poets). This is evident in the conclusion of the first argument he presents against mimetic art:

²¹⁵ Annas, Julia, 1982. *Plato on the Triviality of Literature*. In Moravcsik and Temko 1982, pp. 1–28, p. 4.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

My dear Homer if, as you say, you are not thrice removed from the truth concerning virtue, a manufacturer of an image, and what we have called an imitator; if you are but twice removed, and can now what practices make men better individuals and better citizens, can you not mention a city to which you gave a better government, such as Lycurgus gave to Lacedaemon, and many other persons to many cities great and small? (599e).

Thus, Plato mentions just epic poets. As Nehamas has emphasized, Plato does not mention any banishment of the painters or any other mimetic artists.

It is also worth noting that imitation in Book X is quite different from that of Book III. Annas points out: “And we cannot apply to book 3 to fill out the sense in which the poet ‘imitates’, for in book 3 mimesis is not what Homer does, but what the person reciting Homer does, when he comes to the bits of Homer that are in direct speech.”²¹⁸ I agree with Annas’ analysis about the difference regarding the definition of ‘imitation’ between Books III and X but I disagree with her conclusion. She says that:

The difficulty about the shift in range of ‘mimesis’ has been noted often enough. One result is that in book X we have no idea of what it is for the poet to imitate, other than that which is given by the comparison with the painter. But, as we have seen, this is the disputable point: Why should the painter provide a good comparison?²¹⁹

In answer to Annas, I argue that Plato’s criticism of imitation in Book X is precise and correct in reference to knowledge.

In order to assess my claim, I refer to the same basis I used in the previous chapters for interpreting Plato’s view on poetry and mimesis. In fact, in the first chapter of this thesis, I

²¹⁸ Ibid, 7.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

explained that Plato's attitude on poetry in Books II and III aimed to guarantee a full intellectual growth of the children first and of the young guardians second. In that respect, his criticism and the related censorship of poetry reflected the primary reason for his critique. As I have already illustrated, this was due to the peculiar features of Greek poetry. Now, in Book X we face a different account of mimesis. It concerns knowledge because Plato holds that poetry was the main cultural source of information for the people. Plato in fact criticises epic poets because they do not have knowledge of the things they are talking about. I shall argue that such a claim is justified if we bear in mind the fundamental role of the poets in an oral culture like Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. At the beginning of the study, I gave historical evidence in order to corroborate such a claim. I think that if we apply this view to Plato's criticism in Book X, we will recognize more clearly why Plato's critique was correct.

7. 1. 2. Knowledge and lack of knowledge in mimetic art.

Or the reason why Plato objects the epistemic value of poetry.

Why does Plato object the lack of knowledge in the poets? My answer is that Plato had in mind that they were the main source of general wisdom and knowledge for the masses. Due to that understanding, he was worried about the type of teaching expressed via poetry. That is why he wonders, above all, about the level of knowledge of the poets. This claim is consistent with Asmis' view on ancient Greek poets: 'Plato's quarrel with poetry takes its start in the fact that Greek poets had a crucial role in the creation and transmission of social values. It was traditionally believed that poets, like prophets, were inspired directly by the gods with wisdom about the human and divine condition. It was the prerogative of poets to

make known the past, present, and future to their contemporaries and future generations by oral performance of their poems.²²⁰

We have already demonstrated that, in Books II and III, Plato analysed and criticised Greek epics because it was not a good and efficient source for educating children and the young guardians. I would argue that, in Book X, Plato adopts the same attitude from a slightly different perspective. Plato's starting-point, which is consistent with our analysis in the previous chapters, is that Greek poetry was the main provenance of learning for the young as well as a major source of knowledge for the adult. That is why, at the end of the first argument against mimetic poetry, Plato asserts:

We must examine tragedy and Homer its leader, since people tell us that tragedians know all arts and all things human that relate to virtue and vice and things divine. For a good poet, they say, if he is to make a beautiful poem on his subject, must do so with knowledge of that subject, or fail altogether. We must then inquire whether these persons have met with the imitators and been cheated, and, on seeing their productions, have failed to perceive that they are at three removes from being, and can easily be made without knowledge of the truth - for their productions are appearances and not realities - or whether there is something in what they say, and good poets really have knowledge of those subjects of which their description are approved by common opinion (598e-599a).

Thus, Plato wonders what degree of knowledge poets hold on the matters that they talk about. Surely we do not ask our poets or novelists a similar question but I suppose we demand a high level of knowledge and competency from teachers and from those who profess themselves experts in the realm they teach. On the same line, Plato makes the following point:

²²⁰ Asmis, Elizabeth. 1992. *Plato on Poetic Creativity*. In Richard Kraut (ed.), 1992, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 338–364, p. 339.

Well, my friend, I imagine that we must come to this conclusion about all these matters. When any one announces to us that he has met a man who knows all handicrafts, and who of all the things known by each separate individual has a more exact knowledge than any of them, to such a person we must reply that he is more or less of a fool, and has apparently met with a wizard and imitator, and been cheated into thinking the man possessed of universal wisdom, all because he could not distinguish knowledge and lack of knowledge and imitation (598d).

In a city where everyone does his or her own job and he or she is supposed to know what they do, there is no room for a man who affirms to know everything and that claims to 'possess universal wisdom'. This is clearly Plato's view. However, the most interesting question becomes whether or not Plato's criticism about knowledge is justified or not. In fact, Plato refers to 'universal wisdom'. As we have seen above, such 'universal wisdom' derived from the general belief that the poets, due to the recitation of their epic poems, possessed and made known past, present and future events.

The value of such poems was due to the claim that they were directly inspired by the gods. This fact was a serious mistake in Plato's view. How could he accept people who had no understanding or knowledge about the issues upon which they spoke? Even more, they were talking about the most important subject matters of the time without any criticism or discussion.

Based on this, it is necessary to refer to another salient point: Greek mythology was not a rigid and fixed series of stories with defined characters, events and topics like the Bible, for instance (although, it is also worth noting that the Bible itself is a single set of canonical books that belonged to a wider collection of stories and tales, which were quite different even

among themselves). However, Greek epic poetry was a dynamic compendium of tales, figures and events that changed continually. According to Asmis:

The value transmitted in poetry evolved continuously. While many poems – most prominently those of Homer – were passed on with little or no change from one generation to the next, poets and performers were continually reinterpreting the past. Poets not only preserved values but also questioned and subverted the traditions they inherited, and long before Plato's attack on poetry, there were poets who condemned poets. The first known critical attack on poetry was by the poet Xenophanes in the sixth century B. C. In the same epic meter used by Homer and Hesiod, Xenophanes denounced these poets for 'attributing to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among humans – to steal, commit adultery, and deceive one another.'²²¹

Asmis stresses three important points here. First, Greek mythology was a rich source from which the poets took the necessary elements for making poems. The second point emphasizes that there were neither rules nor limits concerning how to use the enormous cultural heritage expressed by epics. The arbitrariness, in this respect, was so wide that the 'ancient quarrel' Plato mentions as the conflict between poetry and philosophy was present among poets themselves, too. Finally, it is important to highlight that the process of 'attributing to the gods everything' was growing and it was something that worried the poets, too.

Personally, I see the breakthrough of Plato's criticism deriving from an epistemological approach. In Book X he wonders whether the poets have knowledge of the things they (pretend to) teach via composition and recitation of their poems. What the poets recite regards the most important issues in people's life such as justice, warfare, virtues and in light of the educational function and encyclopaedic role of Greek epics. That is why Plato wonders

²²¹ Ibid, 339-340.

whether poets have knowledge or not. And whether they should be admitted into the city
under the shape of the sacred voices of the god.

7. 1. 3. Which knowledge is the matter at hand?

Obviously, the general question *apropos* of what ‘knowledge’ is, represents a wide and controversial topic, even in the contemporary philosophical debate. Yet, for the time being, I am concerned only with knowledge in connection with Greek poetry and Plato’s arguments in the dialogue at stake. I may therefore confine myself here to describe the types of knowledge that Plato’s objections imply. Once we have pointed out that Plato’s criticism is consistent with our previous analysis of Greek poetry as universal encyclopaedia, the most interesting bet is to show whether his epistemological objections are correct or not. My own view is that they are correct, and in order to demonstrate that I will use a recent note based on comparisons to contemporary epistemology. Thus, I compare Plato’s arguments against poetry in Book X and the concepts of ‘ability knowledge’ and ‘propositional knowledge’.

Endorsing G. Ryle’s view on the matter from his work, *Concept of Mind*²²², D. Pritchard distinguishes at least two types of knowledge. He starts his analysis with ‘ability knowledge,’ ‘which is often referred to as ‘know-how’ since it involves knowing how to do something such as ride a bike or swim. It is usually contrasted with propositional knowledge, which is knowledge of a proposition. The two types of knowledge are treated differently because, intuitively at least, one might know how to do something, such a swim, without having any relevant propositional knowledge.’²²³ Thus, knowledge as ‘know-how’ is a constitutive element in all the arts that requires certain skills, for instance, making a shoe or making a statue or a poem.

However, there is also another type of knowledge, the ‘propositional knowledge’. Pritchard explains:

²²² Ryle, G. 1949 *The Concept of Mind*. London: Hutchinson's Univ. Libr.

²²³ Pritchard, D., 2006, *What is this thing called knowledge?*, Routledge, London, p. 163.

This is knowledge that something (i.e. a proposition) is the case. It is typically contrasted with ability knowledge, or ‘know-how’. The two types of knowledge are treated differently because, intuitively at least, one might know how to do something, such a swim, without having any relevant propositional knowledge (without, for example, knowing that you can swim, perhaps because you forgot that you could until you fell in water).²²⁴ Thus, on the one hand, we have the knowledge required for producing certain objects (know-how) and, on the other hand, we have the truth of propositions as ‘propositional knowledge’.²²⁵

I would argue that Plato’s first argument against poetry is based on the lack of these two types of knowledge. In passage 599e, Plato wonders whether anyone, following Homer or any poets’ advice, has been able to cure any sick person:

Well, one other question we may give up the idea of calling Homer or any other poet to account, by asking whether any of them had medical knowledge, and was not merely an imitator of medical discourses; where are the people whom any poet, ancient or modern, is said to have restored to health, as Asclepius did; what student of medicine they have left behind them to match the descendants of Asclepius. And so with the other arts we may refrain from such questions, and let be (598e).

This is a clear example of ‘propositional knowledge’. In fact, Plato explicitly refers to ‘the truth of propositions’. In this specific case, he refers to poems that mention medicine and he wonders whether anyone has ever been restored to health according to the information found in the poems. In order to corroborate his criticism, Plato also makes another example

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 179.

²²⁵ Pritchard, D., 2006, *What is this thing called knowledge?*, Routledge, London, p. 163.

regarding the art of government. In this occasion, he wonders whether any city has been ruled successfully, following Homer's suggestions:

But when Homer tries to tell of the mightiest and most noble things, of wars and generalship and government of cities and the education of man, then it is only fair we should question him, and inquire: 'My dear Homer, if, as you say, you are not thrice removed from truth concerning virtue, a manufacturer of an image, and what we have called an imitator; if you are but twice removed, and can know practices make men better individuals and better citizens, can you not mention a city to which you gave a better government, such as Lycurgus gave to Lacedaemon, and many other persons to many to many cities great and small? Does any city name you a good lawgiver and its benefactor? (599a).

Plato adopts the same attitude in this second example. He stresses that no one ever founded a city according to Homer's advice. Thus, he refers to the 'propositional knowledge' of Homer's works.

Afterwards, in the last section of his first criticism, Plato refers to Homer's direct influence and education. He wonders whether Homer had ever educated anyone directly. However, Plato shows that Homer had not, which is why Plato concludes that Homer also fails as an educator, a point which corresponds to 'know-how', or 'practical knowledge':

'Well, if there is not mention, of many inventions, contrivances of use in handcrafts or in any other branch of action, which would show that he was a clever practical man, like Thales of Miletus, or Anarcharsis the Scythian?'

'No, nothing of that kind.'

'Well, if there is no mention of public services, do we hear that Homer in his lifetime was guide and educator to certain individuals, who loved him for the inspiration of his society,

and who handed down to those who came after them a Homeric way of life? Such was Pythagoras. For that master was greatly loved for such reasons, and his successors even up to the present day talk of the Pythagorean manner of life, and seem somehow to be quite distinct from other people' (600a-b).

In the light of the last quote and related comparison, I think, we are now able to answer the question regarding the comparison with painting. In fact, like the painter who imitates the visual aspect of a thing, the mimetic poet is able just to tell about a thing without knowledge of it. He is also removed from the truth because he is not able to express true and precise propositions *apropos* of the things he is talking about (propositional knowledge is seen here with comparison to the painter who is not able to say how to create a real object).

The second degree of remoteness concerns Plato's second objection, as well as the painter who is not able to create the real object he draws: the mimetic poet fails in educating people in his own life. Here, Plato refers to Homer. First, he recalls that there were no Homeric schools like the philosophical ones, i.e., and that Homer did not have direct followers. Second, he mentions that he was famous for not having educated even the persons closest to him:

For if the stories about Homer are true, Socrates, his companion Creophylus, would have an example of education even funnier than his funny name. For they say that Homer was very much neglected in his lifetime, not to speak of what happened afterwards (600b).

One might say that the last objection applies to Homer only. Yet, Plato anticipates such an objection referring to others who had followers for their teaching and he wonders why the same does not happen with other poets. Moreover, this last claim concerns not just education in a narrow sense but also knowledge and rules that allow people to live better or to create a state which follows patterns and ideas expressed by poets:

Why Protagoras of Abdera and Prodicus of Creos and many others can by their private intercourse inspire their followers with the belief that they will be unable to rule either households or their city unless these masters superintend their education, and for this wisdom of theirs they are so devotedly loved, that their disciples almost insist on carrying them about shoulder high (600c).

Thus, Plato wonders whether or not Homer and the other poets possessed knowledge about the things they told. Plato shows that no one has ever been restored to health, nor has anyone ever ruled a city based upon the advice of epic poets (propositional knowledge). Then he wonders whether such poets have ever educated or to improved something in their own life (practical knowledge). The negative answer to both these questions allows Plato to confute the epistemological value of mimetic poetry.

7. 1. 4. Plato's second argument against mimetic poetry.

Plato's second argument spans from passages 602c-605c. In this occasion, his criticism is based on the assumption that the inferior part of the soul – opposed to the reasoning one – accepts at face value what is expressed by mimetic poetry. Plato refers here explicitly to the previous discussion in which he stated that the soul is divided into different parts. This is the reason he offers to explain why there are conflicts and contrary drives in everyone.

In Book X he recalls the claim: “our soul is full of countless simultaneous oppositions” (604e). Then, he wonders about what part of the soul is concerned with poetry. He argues that mimetic poetry appeals to the lower part of the soul because, “all imitation produces its own work quite removed from the truth” (603b). In that respect, he recalls that the element “which relies on calculation and measurement will be the best element in the soul” (603a), because it is the best way to get close to the truth. In order to clarify his view, he refers to painting again. Painting, in fact, is able to produce optical illusions like one-dimensional figures that appear three-dimensional: ‘bent thing appear bent when seen in water and straight when taken out of it, or both concave and convex’ (602c). Plato argues that mimetic poetry, as well as painting, appeals to the lower part of the soul because it relies in things that appeal to the desiring part, opposed to the reasoning one. Plato says:

Imitation, we say, imitates men acting compulsory or voluntary, thinking that in event they have done well or ill, and throughout either feeling pain or rejoicing (603c).

Plato here refers to mimesis in a different way. The comparison made by Plato appears odd. Annas asks, “How can the strength and importunate nature of one’s desires have anything to do with one’s being taken in by optical illusions?”²²⁶ However, it is crucial to realize that, in this occasion, imitation does not directly concern the knowledge of the things imitated but, rather, Plato focuses on the emotions that one feels and the conflict that takes place in the soul when someone feels contrasting drives. He emphasizes that poets cause contrasting emotions with their poems. From this follows his argument that epic tales rely on the lower, desiring part of the soul, which is in conflict with the upper, reasoning one. Plato’s parallelism between painting and mimetic poetry relies on the assumption that both appeal to the lower part of the soul, which is in contrast to the reasoning one.

In that respect, I disagree with Annas, who affirms that:

The argument from painting does not carry over to poetry because the part of the soul distinguished are not the same in both cases; conclusions drawn from the conflict of reason and another part in the one case have no application to the other. [...] this does not avoid the problem that reason’s role does not come out the same in the two cases. And anyway if the parts of the soul appealed to in the two cases are not the same, then Plato has no argument at all; He would have no semblance of justification for claiming that the worthlessness of painting proves anything about poetry.²²⁷

Conversely, I believe that the point of the analogy between painting and mimetic poetry regards the fact that both make a conflict with the different part of the soul.

²²⁶ Annas, 1982, p. 338.

²²⁷ Ibid 339.

This seems to me evident in the conclusion of Plato's second attack on mimetic poetry:

Listen and consider. Take the best of us listening to Homer or any other of the tragic poets, when he is imitating a hero in grief and spinning out a long melancholy lamentation or imitating men singing and disfiguring themselves in grief: you know that he gives us pleasure, and we give ourselves up to following him; we sympathize and are seriously impressed, and prize as a good poet whoever most affects us in this way (605c).

Plato's worries concern once again the dangers for people's capacity to exercise one's mind. In passages 603-694, he refers to the strong emotions that one feels in conditions of pain or misfortune and he notices that such feelings are stronger when one is alone. Conversely, if one is "under observations of his fellows, one fights and contends with his grief much better" (604a). This last point could sound moralistic or even rhetorical; however, Plato is still concerned with the misleading powers and effects of mimetic poetry. In passage 604c-d he asserts:

A man should take thought', I said, 'on what has come to pass, and as we regulate our play by the fall of the dice, so he should regulate his affairs in the light of what has fallen out, as reason ordains will be best. We should not be like children who, when they have stumbled, go on holding the injured part and shrieking, but should always accustom the soul to turn as quickly as possible to the healing and restoring of that which is fallen and diseased making lamentation to disappear before medicine (604c-d).

Thus, this is the main claim to pursue for Plato: the saving of the capacity of people to exercise one's mind. As well as in Book III for what concerned the forms of poetry, Plato's worries regard the fact that imitative poetry influences and enables people to express the word (*λογος*), namely the thought, the language²²⁸.

7. 1. 5. Why the Banishment is not a real Banishment.

In this final section of the chapter devoted to the analysis of Book X of the *Republic*, it is now time to recall further evidence that what *prima facie* seems a banishment is not actually a real one. In order to strengthen my argument, I would focus now on an extract from *Republic* Book V, where we find a passage strangely neglected by scholars.

Therefore certain festivals and sacrifices will be established by law (a) at which we'll bring the brides and grooms together, and we'll direct our poets (b) to compose appropriate hymns for the marriages that take place (c) (459e).

It is indeed surprising that Plato explicitly plans certain festivals with dedicated rhymes by the poets. It forcibly calls for reassessment of the traditional view according to which Plato did want to exile the poets from the ideal community he envisages. As a matter of fact, in this emerging picture, two possible readings significantly alter the initial perspective of Plato's attitude toward poetry.

²²⁸ I am of course aware that the debated concept of *akrasia* stands in the background of the present discussion. But I also believe that for the purpose of the study I can just mention the possible, fascinating link between *akrasia* and imitative poetry in this occasion.

Two readings are possible to work out both this apparently enigmatic passage and Plato's overall attitude on poetry.

On the one hand, a reductive account could see poetry either ceremonially or at best as entertainment but, at any rate, as not having aesthetic value. Yet, the aforementioned elements are just the surface of the complex issue at stake. In connection with all the elements and criticisms we have seen so far, we could reasonably infer that festivals, sacrifices and thus at least a good portion of the traditional celebrations are part of the city constitution (*by law*). Plato also refers to "our poets" (b). Now, this seems to manifestly imply that some poets *are resident within* the city. Otherwise, there is no way to explain the adjective in question. Eventually the most perplexing line comes:

to compose appropriate hymns for the marriages that take place (c).

To this extent, I believe that we can assume that Plato definitely acknowledges poetry as art. This is the reason why the rulers of the state ask (*and not order*) the poets to compose *appropriate* hymns. The adjective under examination now is the most intriguing element of the whole passage. For what concerns what Plato meant by the adjective 'appropriate', I argue that there is indeed room for two different readings.

One could say that poets' productions serve merely as a subordinate medium for purely recreational but external purpose. Or we could broaden the focus and emphasize that we can deduce in any case further, perhaps vital elements from the above extracts.

Indeed, Plato, in the above line, clearly admits to the relevance of poetry, regardless of any moral treating or educational concern or purpose. Poets are within the city,

(and not just admitted to it as the adjective 'our' shows, because of what they do). Nothing is demanded to them to do, except to exercise their own art. The very fact that no further specification about the contents of poets' composition rather than the purpose of the representations is a proof, I maintain that Plato does respect the poets as artists, their freedom of speech and the very art they exercise.

A fortiori, the importance of this passage relies on the fact that it shows that the banishment is not actually a real banishment. What I mean by this is that if it were the case, how could we explain the fact that on the one hand Plato explicitly mentions the presence of resident poets within the city, but on the other hand he postulates restrictions and even a banishment of mimetic poetry? Moreover, it is worth to stress that Plato did say anything about what the poets should or should not say. It shows, I submit, that when poets exercise their own art with no educational or political purpose, Plato poses no limitations whatsoever to their activity. For all these reasons, I believe that the passage from book V adds to the extracts from book II-III and X, at least two further elements for corroborating the claim that Plato did not want to banish the poets for the ideal state he envisages. First, he shows to take for granted the permanent presence to the poets within the city. Secondly Plato says nothing about how the poets should (or should not) exercise their own art.

Eight Chapter.

Plato on Poetry in the Late Dialogues.

8. 1. 0. The *Laws*.

Plato's concern with education stands in the *Laws* too. Since the very first book, he recalls such a central issue of the *Republic*. What is education then? Plato answers this question in the following way.

But I take it that for the purpose of the present discussion we are not going to treat this sort of thing as 'education'; what we have in mind is education from childhood in virtue, a training which produces a keen desire to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled as justice demands. (*Law*, 643e)

The centrality of the concept of education relies then, above all, in relation to virtue first, and secondly with the condition of citizens. *A fortiori*, justice appears to be the pivotal entity in of the state. Since the first book of the Dialogue at stake, it is evident that the *Laws* represent the *summa* of Plato's thought in many regards. The long discussion around drunkenness that starts from 636d to the end of the first book for instance resembles the reading or the *Symposium* offered in the fourth chapter of the present study. *A fortiori*, the broader treatment of the (right) restrictions of the State immediately recalls the *Republic* overall project. But what is more interesting for the purpose of the present study is to emphasize that at the very beginning of the second

book Plato qualifies the festivals as educational events. Instead of being a break from the everyday life, they appear to be an integral part of the life of the State (653d, but also 6657d. In the third book, Plato reiterates the principle according to which the state shall regulate the forms of music (700b). In the following, long, extracts, we find the same worries Plato expressed in the *Republic*:

Later, as time went on, composers arose who started to set a fashion of breaking the rules and offending good taste. They did have a natural artistic talent, but they were ignorant of the correct and legitimate standards laid down by the Muse. Gripped by a frenzied and excessive lust for pleasure, they jumbled together laments and hymns, mixed paeans and dithyrombs, and even imitated pipe tunes on the lyre. The result was a total confusion of styles. Unintentionally, in their idiotic way, they misrepresented their art, claiming that in music there are no standards of right and wrong at all, but that the most 'correct' criterion is the pleasure of a man who enjoyed the performance, whether he is a good man or not. On these principles they based their compositions, and they accompanied them with propaganda to the same effect. Consequently they gave the ordinary man not only a taste for breaking the laws of music but the arrogance to set himself up as a capable judge. (*Laws*, 700d-701a).

It is interesting to notice that Plato, although putting forward an argument against new poets' innovations, in the above extract first acknowledges that 'they did have a talent'. Then he criticizes them, given the central role in educating treated at length since the first Book of the *Laws*. The overall impression, reading the *Laws*, is that Plato touches pivotal issues he faced in previous works, but in deeper way and explaining at length the reasons for doing so. *Laws IV*, 706a, is an example of that.

I'm going on the assumption that a law is well enacted only if it constantly aims, like an archer, at that unique target which is the only object of legislation to be invariably

and uninterruptedly attended by some good result; the law must ignore everything else (wealth or anything like that), if it happens not to meet the requirements I have stipulated. (*Laws* IV, 706a).

In the aforementioned extract The Athenian²²⁹ illustrates with a clear allegory the *telos* centrally involved in the process of postulating a certain law and how to pursue it, regardless of any other concerns²³⁰.

Plato turns on the topic regarding what the poets should (or should not) say at 719b. In this occasion however, the Athenian mentions the poets just in order to highlight that state of deep inspiration that characterizes the process of production of poetry:

‘There is an old proverb, legislator, which we poets never tire of telling and which all laymen confirm, to the effect that when a poet takes his seat on the tripod of the Muse, he cannot control his thoughts. He's like a fountain where the water is allowed to gush forth unchecked. His art is the art of representation, and when he represents men with contrasting characters he is often obliged to contradict himself, and he doesn't know which of the opposing speeches contains the truth. But for the legislator, this is impossible: he must not let his law say two different things on the same subject; his rule has to be "one topic, one doctrine.’ (*Laws*, 719c-d).

Plato takes for granted the classical view according to which the poets is ‘carried away’, as he did in the *Ion*²³¹. But a further element deserves closer attention in this extract, I maintain. It is the distinction between the role and object of the legislator on the one hand and the role and the goal of the poets. What emerges clearly from this passage is Plato’s acknowledgment of such a central topic for the purpose of the

²²⁹ Namely the main mouthpiece of Plato’s thought in the *Laws*.

²³⁰ *Indem* at 714c.

²³¹ *Ion*, 536d.

discussion. Although we know such a difference was already at play in the *Republic*²³², here in the *Laws* it is developed in a clearer way. Plato does not deny at all the value nor the legitimacy of what the poets does or say while she creates. Plato simply distinguishes between what the poets does and what the legislator should do, given their different aims and roles. Once again, there is no hint of any kind of (negative) evaluation of what the artists do.

However, a deeper treatment of what the poets should or should not do is present in the well-know *Seventh Letter*. At the beginning of Book Seven, the Athenian utters:

And the third law, I suppose, will be this: poets should appreciate that prayers are requests for something from the gods, so they must take great care that they never inadvertently request an evil under the impression that it is a benefit. What a ludicrous calamity it would be to offer that kind of prayer! (801b-c).

According to the above passage, Plato's attitude toward poets expressed in the *Republic* seems to become more severe. A few lines later, the Athenian utters:

That a poet should compose nothing that conflicts with society's conventional notions of justice, goodness and beauty. No one should be allowed to show his work to any private person without first submitting it to the appointed assessors and to the Guardians of the Laws, and getting their approval. (801c-d)

Nevertheless, it is worth to highlight that although Plato postulates restrictions even severer than in the *Republic*, his appreciations of poetry as art become more evident. Indeed, Plato clearly shows to acknowledge the artistic skills of the poets:

²³² *Republic*, 378e.

on the advice of poets and musicians. (Although we shall exploit the creative talents of these people, we shan't-with rare our trust in their tastes and inclinations). Instead, we shall interpret the wishes of the lawgiver and arrange to *his* liking our dancing and singing and chorus performances in general.) Music composed in an undisciplined style is always infinitely improved by the imposition of form, even if that makes it less immediately attractive. But music doesn't *have* to be disciplined to be pleasant. (802b).

Plato first mentions the 'creative talent' proper of the poets. Such talent can produce artworks against the rules of the State. But what it is even more interesting to note is that Plato shows to be fully aware that 'music does not have to be disciplined to be pleasant'. Plato seems to suggest that one thing is the set or rules of the state. Another, completely different (both in essence and in its aim), is the aesthetic value of poetry. If the former poetry, the one proper to the state has to follow certain rules for the State's sake, while the poetry that the poets produces when inspired does not follow the rules of the state. *A fortiori*, such poetry does not have to follow these rules in order to be pleasant for the listeners.

The Athenian's hardest attacks however, is yet to come. In the long passage that I am going to quote below, the main character of the dialogues speaks as follows:

Best foot forward, then. Now, what I say is this. We have a great many poets who compose in hexameters and trimeters and all the standard meters; some of these authors try to be serious, while others aim at a comic effect. Over and over again it's claimed that in order to educate young people properly we have to cram their heads full of this stuff; we have to organize recitations of it so that they never stop listening

to it and acquire a vast repertoire, getting whole poets off by heart. Another school of thought excerpts the outstanding work of all the poets and compiles a treasury of complete passages, claiming that if the wide knowledge of a fully informed person is to produce a sound and sensible citizen, these extracts must be committed to memory and learned by rote. I suppose you're now pressing me to be quite frank and show these people where they are right and where they've gone wrong? (810e-811a).

In full accordance with what Plato has Socrates say in Book Ten of the *Republic*, in the passage above the Athenian objects the value of poems as educative tools. *A fortiori*, the memorization of the poems required by the tradition is an additional concern about the efficiency of an education based on the traditional poems (and in a traditional way, namely orally.). What I suggest to look at with closer attention however, is that although Plato's attacks to poets become more severe, it emerges every page more clearly that what the Athenian is talking about is something quite far from what we call poetry. In fact, the Athenian refers to the education of the children on the one hand and the entertainment for the mass of the population on the other. We have also seen that the severe Athenian acknowledges poets' creative talents and skills. But his positive evaluation does not regard the forms of poetry only:

Well then, in a nutshell, what sort of estimate will do them all justice? I imagine everybody would agree if I put it rather like this. Each of these authors has produced a lot of fine work, and a lot of rubbish too-but if that's so, I maintain that learning so much of it puts the young at risk. (811b-c)

As a matter of fact, the text above refers positively to the content of poets work, not just to the way they express their own art. There is not though, I argue, a devaluation of poetry. Plato even writes that:

Now anyone who means to acquire a discerning judgment will find it impossible to understand the serious side of things in isolation from their ridiculous aspect, or indeed appreciate anything at all except in the light of its opposite. (816d).

Even the poetic representations of the ridiculous genre are important and must be attended. In what follows, we find a fundamental difference with the features of *Callipolis* outlined in the *Republic*. The Athenian does envisage a proper occasion for the comedy:

But if we intend to acquire virtue, even on a small scale, we can't be serious and comic too, and this is precisely why we must learn to recognize buffoonery, to avoid being trapped by our ignorance of it into doing or saying anything ridiculous when there's no call for it. Such mimicry must be left to slaves and hired aliens, and no one must ever take it at all seriously. No citizen or citizens must be found learning it, and the performances must always contain some new twist. With that law, and that explanation of it, humorous amusements usually known as 'comedy' may be dismissed. (816e-817a).

It is true that the Athenian relegates the activity of comedy to strangers and slaves. But we have to bear in mind that the main character is still concerned with poetry in an educational perspective. This is particularly evident in the lines that follow the previous passage:

But what about our 'serious' poets, as they're called, the tragedians? Suppose some of them were to come forward and ask us some such question as this: 'Gentlemen, may we enter your state and country, or not? And may we bring our work with us? Or what's your policy on this point?' What would be the right reply for us to make to these inspired geniuses? This, I think: 'Most honored guests, we're tragedians ourselves, and our tragedy is the finest and best we can create. At any rate, our entire

state has been constructed so as to be a "representation" of the finest and noblest life—the very thing we maintain is most genuinely a tragedy. So we are poets like yourselves, composing in the same *genre*, and your competitors as artists and actors in the finest drama, which true law alone has the nature powers to "produce" to perfection (of that we're quite confident). So don't run away with the idea that we shall ever blithely allow you to set up stage in the market-place and bring on your actors whose fine voices will carry further than ours. Don't think we'll let you declaim to women and children and the general public, and talk about the same practices as we do but treat them differently—indeed, more often than not, so as virtually to contradict us. We should be absolutely daft, and so would any state as a whole, to let you go ahead as we've described before the authorities had decided whether your work was fit to be recited and suitable for public performance or not. So, you sons of the charming Muses, first of all show your songs to the authorities for comparison with ours, and if your doctrines seem the same as or better than our own, we'll let you produce your plays; but if not, friends, that we can never do.' (817a-b-c).

I maintain that the extract that I quoted at full length shows primarily a central element. It is not just a matter of a (legitimate) State regulations on education and entertainment. The fictional dialogues between the lawgiver and the foreign poets show, I believe, that it is a dialogue *inter pares*. Put in another way, the founders of the state have to decide whether the population is going to learn from any poets demanding for speaking inspired by the gods and therefore to say the truth. Or rather, the rulers of the state must put some restrictions for what concerns both the education of the children and the source of entertainment of the adults. It is not a case then that, as indicate at the beginning of this chapter, the Athenian qualifies the festival as an integral part of the public life of the community.

However, I am aware that the reader could still resist the idea at the base of the

present study. Which is, it is useful to remember, that Plato actually released poetry as we know nowadays from the educational and political role that it did have in the Ancient Greek society. For this reason, in the next and final chapter, I will advance a comparison between Popper's receipts to television and Plato's arguments against epic poetry. Such a parallelism will clearly show that once we recognizes the status of poetry as predominant *mass media* system, it will become evident that even one of the greater accuser (Popper) of the author of the *Republic* substantially agrees with Plato's worries and restrictions, in so far as they guarantee a full, balanced development of the children as well as a correct source of information for the adults.

9. 1. 0. Plato and aesthetic value.

Textual evidence.

In this section of the study I am going to sum up the main evidence that establishes that Plato does see aesthetic value in poetry. More precisely I am going to present in one paragraph the main textual proofs that I have analysed in detail in former sections of the study.

First of all, I believe it is necessary to provide an account of aesthetic value, before claiming to find it in Plato's texts. Such a task is a difficult one in contemporary aesthetics too. Given the peculiar features of ancient Greek poetry, which as we have seen is an *unicum* vehicle of transmission of very different values, in the case of Plato's aesthetics it seems to be even more complicated to single out aesthetic value. However, I advance the claim that in the following extracts artefacts are valued for their intrinsic beauty, for their capacity to affect people, and beyond any practical purpose.

Indeed, the main feature shared by the extracts I am going to present lies on the presence of a value of different sort, which is in contrast to purely practical ones. I name such a value, because of its link with beauty, its capacity to impress people and its value free from any practical purpose, Aesthetic value.

9. 2. 0. Aesthetic value in the *Ion*.

In the *Ion*, Plato faces different arts, as painting, sculpture, flute playing, cithara singing, and rhapsodizing. It is interesting to note that Plato considers them as subjects to master as whole. He dwells in particular on painting and sculpture. I argue

that in the following three passages, Socrates' pupil plainly recognizes aesthetic value in both painting and sculpture. We can find such evidence, I argue, in the following extracts, from Socrates' speech:

Soc: Have you ever known anyone who is clever at showing what's well painted and what's not in the work of Polygnotus, but who's powerless to do that for other painters? Someone who dozes off when the work of other painters is displayed, and is lost, and has nothing to contribute but when he has to give judgment on Polygnotus or any other painter (so long as it's just one). (532e-533a).

Soc: Well. Take sculpture. Have you ever known anyone who is clever at explaining which statues are well made in the case of Daedalus. (533a-b).

Soc: And further, it is my opinion, you've never known anyone ever – not in flute-playing, not in cithara-playing, not in singing to the cithara, and not in rhapsodizing – you've never known a man who is clever at explaining Olympus or Thamyris or Orpheus or Phemius, the rhapsode from Ithaca, but who has nothing to contribute about Ion, the rhapsode from Ephesus, and cannot tell when he does his work well and when he doesn't-you've never known a man like that. (533b-c)

What all of the three extracts have in common, I maintain, is a plain reference to a peculiar value. Such a value is common to each art, and it is not related to any external purpose or function. In the first case, Plato talks about *painted works*. Some of them are *well painted* and some of them are not. By the same token, Plato qualifies Daedalus' famous statues as *well made*. And even in the case of the rhapsodic art

Plato acknowledges plain dignity to some works. These passages are astonishingly left aside by commentators. *Per contra*, I would take these passages as evidence of the fact that Plato acknowledged that certain kind of (art)works, regardless of any possible function or purpose, have full dignity and can be appreciated, because of the common value they share. (As he clearly does for Daedalus' statues in the *Ion* as well as in the *Meno*). It is indeed clear that neither the statues nor the paintings have any other reason to be valued but their selfless appreciation. What makes those artworks well done or not, according to Plato, is something of their own. Put in another way, they do not serve any other external goal or scope. To this extent, I value Plato's mentioning of 'give judgment' (533e) as further evidence of acknowledgment of aesthetic value in his thought. What Plato points to in the first case mentioned, is an aesthetic evaluation of the paintings, as Socrates states. Although Plato discredits the rhapsode, Socrates' pupil constantly values and appreciates Homer as 'the best of the poets'.

The difference with the rhapsode's view is plain. In the former case the expert in poetry is the one who knows all its instances. In the latter the expert on poetry is the one with specific expertise on the issues treated in the poems, above all.

Plato, evaluating an artwork, shows to be interested in an artistic, rather than aesthetic evaluation only, regardless of any external concern such as moral, for instance.

That means that here Plato is not interested in anything else but the artwork in itself. A good painting (as well as a good sculpture) is so by virtue of certain intrinsic features. Intrinsic, I say, to *its own* kind of art. From such an approach we can find a peculiar, independent evaluation, which corresponds to an aesthetic judgment.

9. 3. 0. Apology.

In the *Apology*, Plato has Socrates say:

I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say. The poets seemed to me to have had a similar experience. At the same time I saw that, because of their poetry, they thought themselves very wise men in other respects, which they were not. (22c).

I think we'd better go back to where we turned oft and look for guidance to the poets, the ancestral voices of human wisdom. (214a).

Having treated at length the above extracts previously, I would only mention in this occasion that Plato, even when harshly criticizes the poets for their lack of knowledge of the things they talk about, he does recognise the beauty of their words. More precisely, Plato states that the poets say ‘many fine things’.

Further, it is important to highlight to this extent that Plato’s appreciations of poetry do not regard the generic, perhaps formal positive evaluation of the first extract. Indeed, even in the *Apology*, as to say the dialogue where Plato attacks the poets very hardly, he does recognize to them much more than just an formal beauty. Plato suggests to ‘look for guidance to the poets, the ancestral voices of human wisdom.’

9. 4. 0. Republic.

In the Plato’s masterpiece we find not only the vexed banishment, but many aesthetic appreciation of poetry too, I maintain.

Those, I said, that Hesiod and Homer and the other poets have told us, for surely they have composed untrue stories, and have told, and do tell them, to men. But what kind do you mean, and what fault do you find in them? A fault, I said, that deserves immediate and emphatic condemnation, especially if the untruth have no beauty in it (377d).

As stressed before in the study, Plato points in the above extract to a kind of beauty that appears to be independent from the truth value as well as the moral one. Plato reiterates such a concept in the following extract:

When any man in describing the character of gods and heroes does it badly, like an artist whose drawing is absolutely unlike the things he wishes to draw.

Well, firstly the poet, who told the greatest of falsehoods of the greatest of beings, told a falsehood with *no beauty in it*, when he said that Ouranos did what Hesiod said he did, and that Kronos took vengeance on him. And as for the deeds of Kronos, and what he suffered at his son's hands, even if these stories are true, I should not think we could so lightly repeat them to the young and foolish. It were best to be silent about them, or if they had to be told, it should be done under the seal of silence to as few hearers as possible, and after the sacrifice not of the mystic pig but some great and almost unprocurable victim, so that very few would hear the story. (377d-378a).

It is indeed crucial for the purpose of the argument to stress that Plato, before starting his analysis and criticism of the poems, makes clear that in this occasion he adopts the standpoint of a 'founder of a city'. This is important because Plato does not approach poetry in this occasion from an aesthetic and artistic point of view. Such an entity also denotes a sharp distinction in Plato's mind between being an artist and being a statesman.

I answered, Adeimantus, you and I at this juncture are not poets, but founders of a city. The founders ought to know the canons in accordance with which the poets should tell their stories, and which they are not to be allowed to transgress, but they need not themselves compose stories. (378e-379a)

We shall bid Homer and the other poets not be angry if we strike out these passages and all like them, not that they are not poetic (a), or that they are not enjoyed by most people (b), but that the more poetic they are, the less must they be heard by boys and men who are to be free (c), fearing slavery more than death. (387b).

In the above extract, Plato clearly shows to acknowledge the poetic, artistic dimension of poetry as well as its power on affecting people. As the end of the extract indicates, the matter for Plato relies on the huge influence of mimetic poetry on the audience. The final extract from the *Republic* reiterates this concept, and further highlight the pleasure that poetry gives to the listeners.

Listen and consider. Take the best of us listening to Homer or any other of the tragic poets, when he is imitating a hero in grief and spinning out a long melancholy lamentation or imitating men singing and disfiguring themselves in grief: you know that he gives us pleasure, and we give ourselves up to following him; we sympathize and are seriously impressed, and prize as a good poet whoever most affects us in this way (605c).

Tenth Chapter.

Plato and Popper: sorting out a misunderstanding.

“No democracy is safe unless it places television under control” – Karl Popper.

Introduction.

In this section of the study, I will be concerned with two main tasks. On the one hand, I contend that Popper’s notorious reading of Plato’s political system is fallacious. On the other hand, I attempt to prove that Popper’s stance on television is actually remarkably close to Plato’s position on poetry. In order to accomplish the first task, I will conduct a detailed examination of Popper’s arguments in his well-known *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.²³³ The second goal on the other hand, will be reached by the means of an accurate reading of one of Popper’s very last works, *The Power of Television*.²³⁴

²³³ Popper, K., 1945, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Volume One: *The Spell of Plato*. London: Routledge.

²³⁴ Popper, K., 1994, *The Power of Television*, London: Routledge. Original title: *Cattiva Maestra Televisione*, Karl Popper and John Condry, (1994) *Una Patente per tv*, Ed. Giancarlo Basetti, Milan: Reset, pp. 13-25.

First of all, I will analyze Popper's objections to Plato's educational system. This will reveal Popper's substantial incomprehension of two vital factors in Plato's attitude toward poetry: the peculiar cultural context of ancient Greece on the one hand and Plato's teleologism on the other. Since such entities have been largely analyzed in the first chapter of the study, I will not dwell on them in this section. Once Plato's concerns are revealed to be directed toward the prominent *mass medium* of that time (poetry), we will be ready to move to the second step of the study. It will consist of an original comparison between Plato's arguments on poetry and Popper's criticisms on television. Such a *prima facie*, astonishing parallelism leads to a remarkable result. Indeed, I aim to show the substantial equivalence of Plato and Popper on the huge impact, danger and function of the *mass media* system within their society.

To sum up, in this final chapter I provide a refutation of one of Plato's most famous and harsh critics. Secondly, I reveal that Plato's and Popper's stance on *mass media* essentially correspond. It is my understanding that such a fundamental passage will give the ultimate proof of the rightness of my revolutionary reading of the *vexata quaestio* of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry in Plato. This is the reason why the overall outcome of this section is of vital interest for the purpose of the whole study.

10. 1. 0. Is Plato's *Callipolis* an 'Open-System Society'?

This section contains a comparison of two paradigmatic statements made by the two philosophers at the core of the present chapter. It is indeed crucial for the purpose of this section to highlight that since the very beginning Popper's treatment of the first volume devoted to Plato resembles Plato's opening of Book X of the *Republic* in a

remarkably way. Here is what Popper exclaims at the opening of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*:

If in this book harsh words are spoken about some of the greatest among the intellectuals leaders of mankind, my motive is not, I hope, the wish to belittle them. It springs rather from my conviction that, if our civilization has to survive, we must break with the habit of deference to great men. Great men may make great mistakes; and as the book tries to show, some of the greatest leaders of the past supported the perennial attack on freedom and reason.²³⁵

And here is what Plato declares in the very first lines of *Republic X*:

I'll tell you, even though the love and respect I've had for Homer since I was a child make me hesitate to speak, for he seems to have been the first teacher and lender of all these fine tragedians. All the same, no one is to be honored or valued more than the truth. So, as I say, it must be told (Plat. *Rep.* 595c).

If Popper's statement regards 'the great men' of the past generically, Plato is even more precise in naming the masters of his time: Homer and the other tragedians. Yet, what equates the two scholars is the common task they want to pursue. Namely, both of them seek for the truth above anything else, greatest authority included. To this extent, it is interesting to note that Popper himself admits that "Plato believed that the law of historical destiny, the law of decay, can be broken by the moral will of man, supported by the power of human reason."²³⁶ Now, it is hard to see how such (*liberal*) attitude could possibly overlap with the totalitarian one Popper attributes to Plato.

Indeed, what Popper fails to see in the political system outlined in Plato's *Republic*, is that the teleologism is a guide for defining the overall structure and particular roles within the society itself.²³⁷ Instead of taking into account such a fundamental principle

²³⁵ Ibid, Preface to the First Edition, p. 1.

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 18.

²³⁷ Teleologism has been treated in greater details in the first chapter.

for defining Plato's stance on poetry (but not only on poetry, I would say), Popper points to a mixture of historicism and social engineering in Plato's philosophy. It is inconsistent to say that one of the main peculiarities of *Callipolis* is that it "does not change"²³⁸, but to say, a few lines later, that "Plato's belief that it is possible for us to break the iron law of destiny and to avoid decay by arresting all changes, show that his historicist tendencies has definite limitations"²³⁹. When Popper says that *Callipolis* 'does not change', he seems to refer to the restricted social mobility within *Callipolis*. But *Callipolis* does change. Social mobility within *Callipolis* is a clear counterexample to Popper's claim about the supposed fixity of Plato's ideal community. It is true that the Proper Work Argument²⁴⁰ decreases the social mobility within the society. But although such a principle is a limitation, it is also worth remembering that the social mobility within *Callipolis* is aimed to prevent the city-state itself, rather than a particular class of origin or simply the dominant one. Such a goal is accomplished by a rigid, meritocratic system of selection of the citizens and related class.

The 'Noble Lie' is a clear example of Plato's priorities and goals. The concept arises from Plato saying we have to lie to the guardians. He tells that there are three types of people, gold, silver and bronze. He acknowledges it a lie but considers it necessary for

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 19.

²⁴⁰ As stated earlier, "One man one trade is better" (370b). Julia Annas calls this the 'Principle of Specialization': where each individual is responsible for one job as opposed to many.²⁴⁰ The argument for the benefits of specialisation goes as follows: The proper work or function of a thing is that which it only does, or it does best. Whatever operates does it work well by virtue, and badly by defect or vice. The proper function of the soul is to reason, manage, rule, deliberation and life (soul is the vital principle). Therefore the virtue of the soul is to reason, management, rule, deliberate well²⁴⁰.

the Guardians to live the life of deprivation they do. These concepts underlying the Noble Lie show at least two major factors. First of all, Plato is willing to break even moral rules to make the Republic strong in its internal structure. Secondly, social mobility is guaranteed by the state regulations, because of its utility for the state's maintenance.

Now, to guarantee the life and health of a city-state must be one of its first, fully legitimate purposes for the state itself. Secondly, a restricted social mobility, in so far as it is governed according to a clear and meritocratic regulation is more than legitimate, it is useful for the states itself as well as for the citizens. This is true for modern and contemporaries states too, especially democracies. In this regard, R. Robinson comments:

Dr. Popper is mistaken in believing (pp. 139, 497) that *Republic* 547a (the “mystic number”) takes back the earlier position that, if a gold or silver child is born to bronze parents, he is to be transferred to the governing class. This passage forbids the mixing of the metals. Since the child was a different metal from his parents, a mixing of the metals would occur if the child remained with them. The prohibition of the mixing of metals, together with the doctrine that silver children are occasionally born of bronze parents, does not prohibit but on the contrary commands the promotion of such a child. Similarly, Dr. Popper is mistaken in thinking that Republic 434 b-d forbids a man to do work for which his metal is unsuited.²⁴¹

By the same token, Popper objects to the educational system of the ideal community of the *Republic*: “Plato’s educational aim is exactly the same. It is purely political aim of stabilizing the state by blending a fierce and a gentle element in the character of the

²⁴¹ Robinson. R., *Dr. Popper's Defense of Democracy*, The Philosophical Review, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Oct., 1951), pp. 487-507, Duke University Press, p. 489.

rulers.”²⁴² Unfortunately, Popper completely ignores Plato’s teleologism in education, especially in the second and third book of the *Republic*. Since previous chapters have thoroughly addressed the concept of teleologism, the following will be an analysis of Popper’s work, alone. I endorse G. P. Grant’s point on this:

[...] I would holds that Popper’s misinterpretation arises from taking what is secondary in Plato and making it primary. Popper thinks that Plato’s chief interest is in political means. I would say his chief interest is in question of ends, and his chief point about is that man’s end cannot be found in political life.²⁴³

Teleologism and the question of ends beside, there is another central issue involved in what I, among others, consider as Popper’s misunderstanding of Plato. This issue concerns fifth-century Athens’ peculiar cultural scenario and it is strictly related with poetry by virtue of its status of main vehicle of addressing education, politics and ethics, among other values. Grant recalls:

The central factor in Plato’s historical situation (indeed the one Popper misses entirely) was, however, that Greeks polytheism had lost all claims to intellectual respectability, largely because of fifth-century science and philosophy. This polytheism had in general provided the principles of private and public action for the Greeks. But the science which had destroyed these mythological grounds for actions was unable to replace them.²⁴⁴

Although Grant has a point in saying that in Socrates’ age the cultural was in flux, I do not think that philosophy was in such a strong position to undermine the authority

²⁴² Popper, p., 53.

²⁴³ Grant, G. P., *Plato and Popper*. The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue Canadienne d'Economique et de Science Politique, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May, 1954), p. 186.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

of the classic epic heritage or, at least, that that was true for the majority of the Athenian population. However, I endorse his emphasis on the preeminent role of Greek polytheism as a central authority (and such a major authority, it is worth remembering, was promoted by the means of teaching and recitation of poetry both in private and in public).

At any rate, what is more interesting is that what was not true in the reality of Plato's time was true in the mind of the father of *Callipolis*. What I mean by this is that Plato's education program was aimed to guarantee the full development of a person, regardless of the traditional, moral authorities such as Greek polytheism. Of course, we have to bear in mind, as Grant reckons: "In so far as Plato was a fifth-century Athenian, we cannot expect him to have entirely transcended the limitations of that position, anymore than expect Jesus Christ not have been a Palestine peasant."²⁴⁵

What I want to stress is that, within the boundaries of the time and culture Plato was living in, *Callipolis*' educational reforms actually provide a better intellectual growth of the individual, in comparison with traditional schooling of fifth century BC Athens. Grant ends his analysis of Plato and his *Callipolis* emphasizing that: "He saw that without such knowledge existence must be anguish and impotence. All this is surely true today. Only after finding such knowledge do men have the light to go out and, piecemeal, change the world."²⁴⁶

Proceeding with the reading of the *Open Society and Its Enemies*, we see that the author connects Plato's severe restriction on education with Sparta's political principles of literacy education.²⁴⁷ But Popper gives neither textual nor historical

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 195.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 54.

evidence for the above speculation. A few lines later, his harsh critique clearly shows its anachronistic limit. Basing his criticism on an incompatible comparison between *μουσική* in the Athens of Socrates and *music* of his own time: “Plato even forgets that it is the function of music to make the young more gentle, for he demands such form of music as will make them braver, i.e. fiercer.”²⁴⁸

Both historians and classicists have showed the deep gulf between our conception of music and Hellenistic *μουσική*. The comparison I drew in the first chapter between beauty for Plato and for his contemporaries resembles to some degree the above anachronistic parallelism. That is to say, the same word points to very different, and broader, matter. Greek *μουσική* covers a much wider range of heterogeneous entities when compared to modern *music*. Moreover, Greek *μουσική* is undoubtedly much closer to the overall concept of ‘education’ rather than an (fine) art as music. Indeed, the term *μουσική παιδεία* (*mousikē paideia*) indicates recitation, playing instruments, singing poetry and dance. Yet, that is just a part of the overall *μουσική παιδεία*.

It seems to me that Popper here is referring to a modern conception of music, which Popper is inappropriately combining with the ancient *mousike*. And even if he is not referring to 410c ff. (see especially 411a), where Socrates says that *mousike* and *gymnastike* are both directed to the soul, the one promoting gentleness and the other toughness, I argue that Popper’s criticism to Plato’s *μουσική παιδεία*, does not acknowledge the complex (and deep different) historical *status* of education of Plato’s age.

Such a fundamental misunderstanding of *μουσική* leads Popper to believe that: “The description of a modern writer, who characterizes contemporary totalitarian education

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

as ‘an intensified and continual form of mobilization’, fits Plato’s whole system of education very well indeed.”

R. Robinson emphasizes Popper’s anachronism, not only about *μουσική* but in general, and after a very accurate examination of Popper’s sources and translations, remarks: “The general startling effect, therefore, of Dr. Popper’s translations is not due to his inaccuracy but to his having adopted a fresh and independent approach to Plato.”²⁴⁹

To this extent, such a flaw affects Popper’s view on the educational system of the ideal community outlined in the *Republic*. The very distinct historical and cultural context is actually the real ground upon which the debate between the Plato and Popper takes place. Indeed, even when Popper sometimes attributes to Plato plainly mistaken views, that is mainly due to his lack of historical acknowledgements. That is particularly true in the case of poetry, the major mass media system of Socrates’ age. It is also the reason why, once Popper’s criticism has been put in a correct cultural perspective, they lose their relevance. That is due to the fact that, in a nutshell, what Plato meant by poetry rather than music is something radically different to what Popper refers to, by the same term. Conversely, as shown in the last section of this chapter analyzing Popper’s concerns on television, when the aforementioned criticisms are applied to the main mass media of Plato’s time, they substantially overlap.

Since the following issue has been broadly debated among scholars, it is also interesting to note the reasons why Popper defines *Callipolis* as a totalitarian state: “There must be a censorship of all intellectual activities of the ruling class, and a

²⁴⁹ Robinson, p. 491.

continual propaganda aiming at molding and unifying their minds. All innovation in education, legislation, and religion must be prevented or suppressed.”²⁵⁰

It takes, in effect, a giant associative leap to assert that *Callipolis*' set of rules and restrictions imply the terrifying scenario sketched above.

On the same line of reasoning, Robinson affirms:

I still do not know what he (or anybody else) means by “totalitarian”. The best guess I can make is that he means the whole political character of Hitler's Germany; but, if so, I see no sense in the statement that Plato's political program “can be fairly described as totalitarian” (p. 87).²⁵¹

Although Popper's objections to Plato's educational system are different from Popper's arguments against Plato's political system, they share an important feature. Namely, both of the attacks show how Popper ignores the historical and terminological frame from and *within* which Plato envisages his ideal community. I grant that, for Popper, Plato's stance on education and state's structure *prima facie* could seem authoritarian. Though, in order to determine whether Plato regressed or progressed, with regard to education and politics in comparison with his own time, we cannot dismiss what education was like, because that is the only point of comparison we have for answering that question. This is also the reason why the historical and cultural context inevitably plays a vital role in relation to Plato's writings on poetry. On the one hand, because of education was based on the systematic teaching of epic poems. And on the other hand, because in the IV Century BC, people did not actually *read* poetry, but attended numerous and heterogeneous performances of it at festivals, religious ceremonies and several public occasions. If we miss the absolute relevance

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 92.

²⁵¹ Robinson, 1951, p. 503.

of the historical and cultural context, then we miss any point of reference, and consequently we no longer have a defined ground upon which to answer the objections that the enigmatic features of *Callipolis* give rise to. Ignoring that, leads the reader to hypothesize complete opposite views. M. Lane emphasizes this incorrect reading, saying that if “Popper taught in mid-century that the Republic is openly and avowedly a totalitarian text, a dangerous text which has been sanitized as Utopian ideal by generation of exegetes.”²⁵² Conversely, we find an opposite reading like the following: “Leo Strauss taught some years later that the Republic is secretively and ironically an anti-totalitarian text, a text which warns against the danger of being sanitized by exegetes as a Utopian Ideal.”²⁵³

Concerning Strauss’ reading of the *Republic*, I am sympathetic with Lane’s view:

Strauss instead concentrates on the willingness of philosophers born without power to rule, and his claim, spelled out in *The City and Man*, is that the rule of the philosophers is stymied by a vicious circle. “The philosophers cannot be persuaded, they can only be compelled to rule the cities”²⁵⁴

Given the lack of a correct contextualization, it is clear that both Popper’s and Strauss’ interpretations of the *Republic* misinterpret Plato’s writing. Regarding the latter, I cannot see the reasons for why Plato would have presented a theory in such a paradoxical form. I do not see either the alleged circle pointed out by Strauss. On the contrary, the rigid *corsus honorum*, for all intents and purposes, a qualification for ruling, is designed in order to select the best citizens and to guarantee them the best

²⁵² Lane, M. Plato, *Popper, Strauss, and Utopianism: Open Secrets?* History of Philosophy Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), pp. 119-142. University of Illinois Press, p. 120.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 127. (Strauss p. 124).

education. Such a higher education, it is worthwhile to remember, is a long-running scheme with no trace of indoctrination whatsoever. On the contrary, the strong logical and theoretical training the rulers have to pass implies a liberal and autonomous way of thinking. Robinson is even clearer about this point: “Plato says that the rulers must learn philosophy because ruling can be a science and philosophy is the way to science. Dr. Popper should have examined this rational and explicit argument instead of making an untestable imputation.”²⁵⁵

We might agree or disagree with Plato’s political ideal but it should not be over a matter of utopia or, worse, propaganda. Rather, Plato faces the question of the *necessary* education of the rulers. Still at the centre of the contemporary political debate is the question: should our politicians (the rulers) be simply chosen by the population or should their education and skills be a necessary and sufficient condition for letting them govern? Such an issue has become even more important in the recent debate about the legitimacy of technocrat governments. According to Robinson’s view (which I advocate):

Plato's best and most serious argument for his political proposals, namely that government is a science and science should be left to experts. Plato urges, and Plato sincerely believed, that it is as absurd to govern by popular vote as it would be to conduct medicine or navigation by popular vote. That is the point of the simile of the Ship in Republic 488. The error of democracy, according to Plato, is that it denies the possibility of science in government.²⁵⁶

A strictly connected issue with (the right) governance is of course Justice. The next section in fact, emphasises how different was Justice for the average Greek in

²⁵⁵ Robinson, 1951, p. 499.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 493. (My emphasis).

comparison with our own conception, and How different justice was for Plato, in comparison with his own contemporaries.

10. 1. 1. The case of Justice.

A central issue regards Justice. It is strictly related to *Republic's* alleged authoritarianism and in fact Popper charges Plato with moralism saying that: “The *Republic* is probably the most elaborate monograph on justice ever written.”²⁵⁷ According to *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, “Behind Plato’s definition of Justice stands, fundamentally, his demand for a totalitarian class rule, and his decision to bring it about.”²⁵⁸

First of all, I would not be so sure that Plato had a defined concept of Justice. That is a hotly debated topic among commentators. However, I see neither a definition nor a concept of Justice ascribed to Plato. Rather, I consider the *Republic* as aporetic seeking for a definition of Justice. Second of all, the structure of *Callipolis* itself, as emphasized in previous sections of this chapter, clearly indicates that there is no hint of privilege or conservation for the ruling class. The fact that only the best citizens and not their pupils or sons will be the future rulers is a clear evidence for that.²⁵⁹

Eventually, I will add a more salient point in relation to Popper’s view on Justice in

²⁵⁷ Popper, p. 96.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ I would confine myself to recall just this fundamental trait of *Callipolis*, but both earlier in the chapter that in previous sections of this study devoted to the analyses of the *Republic*, I have presented clear textual evidence of the non-totalitarian structure of Plato’s ideal community.

the *Republic*. On the one hand, that point will reveal a further historical flow in Popper's reading. On the other hand, it will shed light on the non-totalitarian attitude of Plato's stance. Popper affirms: "As a matter of fact, the Greek way of using the word 'Justice' was indeed surprisingly similar to our own individualistic and equalitarian usage."²⁶⁰ But the matter regarding the Greek idea of Justice is a complex one. Traditionally, the mainstream interpretation identifies Trasymachus as the character illustrating the traditional Athenian common view on the matter.

But beside that, I would strongly contrast Popper's claim according to which Greek Justice, the anthropomorphic deity *Δίκη* (*Dike*), was to any degree similar to our own idea of Justice. The following long passage by Guthrie explains the gulf between the Greek *δίκη* and the way we think of justice:

In Homer the will of a great man is his law. He does not so much things because they are right. Rather, since he is in a irresponsible autocrat, they are right because he does the. This can be illustrated very simple by the change in meaning undergone by the commonest of Greek words, *dike*. We translate it "justice", and something akin to that meaning it acquires very early. But whether or not its etymology connects it, as is probable, with the meaning "direction" or "way", the earliest sense of which we have record is that of "customary behavior" of any particular class. [...] This first example shows how far removed it was in the mind of the writer from any sense of "justice". [...] Justice, then, for the Greeks consisted first of all in doing what custom alone had established as being suitable for a particular station in life, whether that of serf (*demos*), king or even god. The gods, however, being the highest class, are also the most free. [...] The kings dictate to his people, and gods to men. Hence *dike* for us is what the gods

²⁶⁰ Popper, p. 97.

will. It is right because they will, and not vice versa.’²⁶¹

Guthrie emphasizes at least two vital factors. First of all, he explains how radically different the concept and usage of *δίκη* is from our own justice. And secondly, he sheds light on the nature of *δίκη*, which is strictly related with the classist structure of the Hellenistic society. Moreover, the fact that what was ordinary or customary often overlapped *tout court* with *δίκη* is a further indication of the challenge undertaken by Plato, in this regard too. Indeed, even if we do not agree with Plato, for the reasons outlined above, I believe we are now in a position to grant to the father of *Callipolis* a genuine seeking for justice. Plato is not satisfied with the traditional conception of justice based on a hierarchic, uncritical customary usage, so he advances a theoretical search for a philosophical account of such a pivotal entity for the structure of the hypothetical state (and its underlying philosophy) that he envisages.

10. 1. 2. Plato’s ‘Open System’ versus ‘Bad Mistress Poetry’.

A brief introduction is required in order to fully understand the reason why the next, apparently discordant text, (in relation to the ones so far treated in this study) is now at stake. Indeed, in what follows, I am going to analyse a concise but fundamental script where Popper’s arguments against television essentially overlap with Plato’s stance on poetry. As we will see, even Popper himself talks about “censorship” of who speaks on television.

According to G. Bosetti, the recipient of the telephone transcript upon which Popper’s *The Power of Television*²⁶² is based, the text focuses on “the subject of television and

²⁶¹ Guthrie, pp. 124, 125.

the harm it causes to children through violence of which it is full.”²⁶³ It is also worth recalling for the purpose of this section that the text at stake, which is one of Popper’s very last ones, was of vital interest for the author himself. The author felt both the importance and the urgency of such a text. According to Bosetti, “Popper said to me explicitly that we must to postpone things any longer because he felt that he did not have much time left.”²⁶⁴

It is also worth recalling two additional, central factors. The subject at the centre of this essay, namely, television and its dangerous effect, is not an interview but rather a “slow and precise dictation”.²⁶⁵ As a matter of fact, the author tackled the issue in other occasions,²⁶⁶ but the one at stake here can be regarded as Popper’s *summa* on the matter. “He wanted to hit the target at all costs”²⁶⁷ because

He feared above all the abbreviated, cut, truncated representations that television had made of it – German television in particular: “They can cut and censor me”, he protested, “and they are scandalized if I speak of “censorship” television.”²⁶⁸

As a matter of fact, Popper himself used the word ‘censorship’ in order to express his attitude toward television. Television had become the dominant mass media during Popper’s life and, especially at the time he focused on it and its possible dangerous

²⁶² Popper, K., 1994, *The Power of Television*, London: Routledge. Original title: *Cattiva Maestra Televisione*, Karl Popper and John Condry, (1994) *Una Patente per tv*, Ed. Giancarlo Basetti, Milan: Reset, pp. 13-25.

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 1.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 414.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 415.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 414.

effects, numerous doubts had been raised about the power of television and its possible limitations.

Popper's *The Power of Television* starts by discussing J. Condry's *Thief of Time, Unfaithful Servant: Television and the American Child*.²⁶⁹ Condry's analysis is based upon two key elements: "the immense power of television and the great amount of time spent by children watching television."²⁷⁰ The conjunct topic of education and television is thus the ground upon which both the aforementioned authors build their own criticism. Indeed, one of Condry's main claims is that "television cannot teach children what they need to know as they grow into adolescence and adulthood."²⁷¹

It is remarkable to note that Condry's starting point corresponds to Plato's opening of treatment of guardians' education in the second book of the *Republic* -- after a brief overview on the decadent status of American children he wonders whether television is responsible for that and to what degree:

It is important to begin with a broad overview of children's needs. How do children become useful member of the society? How is their immaturity used to prepare them for adulthood? How do they spend their time? Time is a useful measure because unlike wealth and opportunity, it is the same commodity for all.²⁷²

Put briefly, Condry calculates an average period of 40 hours per week of exposure to television by American children. Condry emphasizes a further key element regarding the different approach to television by adults and children. While adults watch

²⁶⁹ Condry, J., *Thief of Time, Unfaithful Servant: Television and the American Child*. In *Daedalus*, Vol. 122, No. 1, *America's Childhood* (Winter, 1993), pp. 259-278, MIT Press, USA.

²⁷⁰ Popper, 416.

²⁷¹ Condry, p. 260

²⁷² *Ibid.* .

television because for an entertainment purpose, “most children, while they find television entertaining, watch it because they seek to understand the world.”²⁷³

Indeed, it is not just a matter of *panem et circenses*, as Juvenal put it.

Condry’s statement about television’s purpose is a fundamental hallmark, which is a vital feature of his criticism. The purpose of media was a concern for Plato too, as we saw in the analysis of his criticism in the *Republic*. More precisely, the matter relies on the fact that today, as in ancient times, children “have greater difficulty in separating fact from fictions”,²⁷⁴ unlike adults, who are normally aware of the fictional frame of what they read, listen or watch. This factor was at stake, perhaps even on a larger scale, in the case of ancient Greek poetry, because of the absence of proper textbooks for schooling as well as a formalized structure of education. As a matter of historical fact, the same epic poems that the average Athenians used for schooling, happened to be the very same the material to recite in private occasions. And further, the very same epic material worked as content for theatrical events, religious ceremonies and festivals in general too.

In order to establish the magnitude of the effects of television on American children Condry uses the categories of *exposure* and *content*. Both categories are fully at play in the case of Greek poetry, as we will see soon.

Condry’s central point is that television does not inform children about the world. It is not designed for such a purpose and when it inevitably does inform children about the world, it is inadequate. Television, in Condry’s view, is designed to sell things as opposed to inform children. Besides the fact that, in the case of ancient Greek poetry, advertising was not the goal, the point of the analogy relies on the consideration that

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 261.

the object of Plato's criticism of poetry is remarkably similar to Condry's analysis of television.

A fortiori, two fundamental factors invigorate the resemblance. First, the exposure in Plato's Athens was, as we have already seen, never-ending or, at any rate, it was a much more pervasive exposure in line with the average exposure to television pointed out by Condry. Secondly, given the lack of any kind of proper textbooks, the same contents of such an overexposure overlapped with typical tales used in education. A further element is at stake in the comparison between Plato and Condry. Indeed, Condry emphasises an additional major feature for television. This feature is that "television drama has no reason to be concerned with reality, if distorting reality gains attention, distortion will occur. Winning audience attention is the primary concern of television; even that part said to be "educational"."²⁷⁵

A tale must be interesting to tell or better said: a story must be interesting in order to catch audience's attention. The eponymous *rhapsode* in the *Ion* explicitly admits that a key part of its job is to get people listening to him with engagement (Plat. *Ion* 535c-e). We also know that, historically, audiences were much more emotionally involved in the myths, especially when represented in theatrical stages.²⁷⁶ Otherwise, the *rhapsode* was not successful, and the tragic or comedy author had no chance to win any contest. We do know that the contests corresponded in a major way in the evaluation of epic authors. It was not simply a matter of winning a contest. The authors who won the festival contests in particular obtained great honours and an

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 264.

²⁷⁶ Nehamas, A., 1999, 'Plato and the Mass Media' in *Virtues of Authenticity. Essays on Plato and Socrates*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, p 287.

extraordinary fame. In a competitive society like Socrates' Athens, that was the main goal of any poetic writer²⁷⁷.

Reality and its depiction was one of the very first worries of Plato's criticism in *Republic*, Book II. Plato wondered whether the bloodiest acts told by the epic poets really happened or not. Besides the truth or falsehood of such narrative works, Plato's second concern in this regard relied on whether it was appropriate to tell to the children such stories. The telling of stories was an educational worry for Plato as it is for Coudry. The latter clarifies the strong link between television and education in relation to children:

‘All of these examples suggest that television cannot be a useful source of information for children. Indeed, it may be a dangerous source of information. It offers ideas that are false, unreal; it has no coherent value system, other than consumerism; it provides little useful information about the self. All of this makes television a terrible instrument for socialization. Since it was never meant to be a tool for the socialization of the young, children who use it in this manner face the possibility of growing up absurd.’²⁷⁸

Plato's concern, was even more justified because the main characters of the aforementioned bloody tales happened to be the main divinities, as to say the most important authorities in the moral domain. As Plato emphasized in his criticism, at the

²⁷⁷ P. Cartledge remarks: The Greeks, however, saw nothing odd in theatrical competition either, in which they engaged to the hilt. In the Dionysia and Lenaea festivals there was competition both between the plays or rather groups of plays (and playwrights, actors and liturgist-impresarios) and within the plays (between the leading characters or themes or ideas), and their idea of a one-off performance of a play or group of plays corresponded exactly to the one-off, everything-at-stake character of a Greek pitched battle by land or sea.²⁷⁷ Cartledge, P. ‘Deep Plays’ Theatre as process in Greek Civic Life. In Easterling, P. E., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, 1997, Cambridge, Uk, p 14.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 270.

top of the value structure sat the cruellest agents. Condry endorses the same kind of worry. It is not a case then that his conclusion focuses on the values, as well as the information given to children by the privileged source of learning:

All of these examples suggest that television cannot be a useful source of information for children. Indeed, it may be a dangerous source of information. It offers ideas that are false, unreal; it has no coherent value system, other than consumerism; it provides little useful information about the self. All of this makes television a terrible instrument for socialization. Since it was never meant to be a tool for the socialization of the young, children who use it in this manner face the possibility of growing up absurd.²⁷⁹

We can share Condry's evaluation on television and its use as an educative tool. Yet, I argue that we can extend his criticism to ancient Greek poetry in this regard too. It is possible to base upon the common ground provided by their both being the primary mass media of their times. More specifically, the key features outlined above highlight how not just the role within the society (mass media), but also the essential features of both television and epic poetry substantially overlap. Moreover, the comparison corroborates Plato's concern for additional reason, as Condry points out: "Who teaches values? The schools? The churches? The family? Television certainly does. But are the values of television the only ones we would have our children adopt?"²⁸⁰

If for Condry that was a rhetorical question, for Plato this was simply the factual reality of his time. Therefore, he had to radically change the situation in order to improve children's education. As we will see soon, in more detail, Plato's renovations are surprisingly similar to Popper's proposals for television.

²⁷⁹ Condry 1993, p. 270.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 273.

Popper substantially advocates Condry's detailed examination of television over-exposition and its effects. But, if the latter is more focused on the analysis of the issue, then the former puts forward some original suggestions in order to radically change (and improve) the *status* of television.

Popper starts his own criticism in a similar way to the way Plato ends his last criticism of poetry at the closure of Book X of the *Republic*. Indeed, Popper writes:

I would say that television is of course a terrible force for the bad (a), but that it could be potentially a force for the good (b). It could be, but it is very unlikely to become so. [...] It can only be done by giving them an arresting environment, and a good environment; and by giving them good examples (b1).²⁸¹

In the last book of the *Republic*, Plato, after having criticized poetry and banished it, nevertheless leaves the door open to a possible return of "beneficial" poetry into the city. It is curious to observe that the resemblance between the two passages at issue regards first the harsh criticism (a) and secondly the possible rehabilitation (b) of the primary mass media under investigation. Indeed, Plato writes:

Nonetheless, if the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward that proves it ought to have a place in a well-governed city, we at least would be glad to admit it (b), for we are well aware of the charm it exercises. But, be that as it may, to betray what one believes to be the truth is impious (607b-c-d).

It is also significant to highlight that Popper points to the importance of *good models* to be presented in television. That is exactly one of the main points of the new canons for poetry that Plato indicates in Book III of the *Republic*.

Popper articulates the features of the censorship he envisages:

Many people think that nothing can be done, first of all because censorship is not acceptable, especially not in a democracy. Second, censorship would

²⁸¹ Popper 1994, p. 416.

not be effective: it would come too late. In television is impossible to have everything censored in advance. One could perhaps give the responsible producer a bad mark if he uses too much violence, but one cannot really have censorship in advance.²⁸²

It is now important to face the specific features upon which Popper builds on his own censorship in order to provide a better educative source for children by the means of an accurate curtailment.

Popper first suggests an *inner control*. Such a corporative self-check ought to be complementary to the general law and should be done by the same professionals involved making television programs. In addition, Popper even forecasts a *licence* for anyone who is generically *connected*²⁸³ with television. Such a license presents the following restrictions:

- “This license can be withdrawn for life, if he acts against certain principles;”²⁸⁴
- “The license can be withdrawn from him by a kind of court;”²⁸⁵
- “He is constantly under supervision, and he constantly has to fear that if he does something bad he may lose his license;”²⁸⁶
- A training course is compulsory in order to get the licence;²⁸⁷
- An examination must be passed in order to get the licence.²⁸⁸

²⁸² Ibid, p. 421.

²⁸³ My emphasis on all the term in Italics of this section. My intention is to highlight the impressive correspondence between Plato’s and Popper’s terminology on the one hand, and the key points of Popper’s arguments on the other.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 421.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 422.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

Popper's final remarks explain the reason behind the strong censorship that he proposes. His final remarks illustrate the perspective from which he analyses it, which is also the perspective of the recipient of television, the audience's perspective, regardless of age. Referring to who does television, he writes:

That is what he is doing – whether he likes or not – if he is involved in television. He works as an educator because television is presented very largely both to children and young people but also to adults. So he is involved in adult education: that, too, he has to learn.

If Popper's main point, emerging in the above passage, emphasizes the vital point that whatever an individual does when working in television unavoidably does education. However, at the very end of the quotation, he also singles out a further element involved in the audience's perception of television, which is, once again, a factor pointed out by Plato in the tenth book of the *Republic*.

Popper's statement on perception is as follows:

(Y)et they do not know that their work has a subconscious influence on both children and adults. Of course it depends very largely on the intelligence level of children and adults. They will also learn that all these things they see on television are unreal. But that is not completely true: many things they see on television are real. They see on television not only fiction but also reality, and the mixture of reality and fiction which they see on television is most confusing to children and also confusing to the less intelligent adults.²⁸⁹

Thus, the dangerous mix of reality and fiction is strictly connected with education in Popper's view – the reason relies on the following consideration. Television provides the most heterogeneous material, from true representations of reality to the most absurd fantasy. What is most relevant in connection with education from this realisation is in regard to fiction. Usually the more fiction resembles reality, the more

²⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 423.

it is appreciated. Unless the audience has acquired theoretical skills for distinguishing what is true and what is false, the dangerous mix of reality and fiction could become an explosive mixture since the ability to distinguish between the two derives from previous knowledge.

Popper provides examples of how the mixture of undisclosed factual and fictional stories are dangerous. Notwithstanding the author's previous experience with difficult children, he highlights that *almost always* such children came from violent families. Popper remarks: "My point is that television now produces violence where perhaps there would otherwise be no violence."²⁹⁰ Popper argues then that exposing children to a conspicuous amount of violent fiction stories (that present themselves as real) has the same deleterious effects on children of violent families. If not the goal (selling), Plato's criticism of poetry is remarkably similar to Condry's analysis of television.

Now of course, the issue of censorship remains a vexing one. In the fifth century BC as well as in our own time, it is hard to work out a possible justification for censure of the freedom of speech.

However, I maintain that there is room for discharging both Plato and Popper from being illiberal or even totalitarian. For what concerns the context in which the former lived, S. Halliwell points out: "[...] but a basic discrimination between satire of individuals and of the state remains indispensable."²⁹¹ As a matter of historical fact, it seems undoubted that "there was an old ("Solonian") general law of slander at Athens."²⁹² But the case of slander is intrinsically distinguished (and easy distinguishable) from a general censorship. If the former essentially concerns the case

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 421.

²⁹¹ Halliwell, S., *Comic Satire and Freedom of Speech in Classical Athens* Stephen, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 111 (1991), p. 65.

²⁹² Ibid, p. 51.

of one citizen against another citizen, then the latter regards the case of a (strict) general law, and it is eventually the State *versus* one or more citizens.

Although Halliwell focuses on the genre of comedy solely, we can understand some relevant points useful to address the question of freedom of expression of poets, and whether Plato was aware of such a principle or not, or whether his contemporaries were or not. To this extent, I shall argue that it is vital to emphasize that, in the *Republic*, Plato did not call for any type of law or decree regarding slander in comedies. We do know however that he did it in the *Law* (XI 934d-6b) but as Halliwell points out, even in that occasion:

Plato is not all tied to the cultural practices of his own city, but in this instance he appears to have been curiously influenced by them. He assumes, unsurprisingly, that comic performances will occur in the context of religious festival (936a2) he is therefore recognizing at the same time as his spokesman hypothetically curtails, distinctively license which, as the entire section makes plain, is defined by its exemption from the requirements of customary social relations.²⁹³

I shall argue that it is of particular significance that Plato never mentions any restrictions whatsoever of freedom of the poets regarding festival or religious ceremonies. For what concerns their very own domain, Plato does not say a single word of *what* or *how* artists, in general, and poets, in particular, should operate. He leaves them an absolute legislative liberty. Plato, at least in the society he envisages in the *Republic*, does not even consider the case of slander, unlike the liberal Solonian Athens does. I would also argue that the complete absence of any reference to these occasions strengthens my thesis that Plato did not ever censure poetry *qua* poetry by

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 68.

the means of his banishment. Rather, he wanted to legitimate the art of poets as an independent tool of expression, regardless of any political, pedagogical or informative purpose.

Yet, it is understandable that the modern reader would find odd the idea of censorship – particularly when that censorship is aimed (quite contradictorily) at guaranteeing freedom. Popper, too, feels this worry and he justifies his censorship with the following compelling argument, (which I endorse):

Democracy consists in the control of political power. That is the main point of democracy. There should be nobody uncontrolled in a democracy. Now television has a colossal political power potential; a potential that is almost all-important. It is as if it were God himself who speaks here, if this power is misused. The power is too great for democracy: no democracy can stand up if this power is misused.

Urgency (if the similarity between Popper and Plato holds) seems to be what Plato felt, too, and that urgency gave rise to his censorship.

If Popper makes a point regarding the unlimited power of (those who speak on) television, the comparison illustrated so far, then it sheds light on Plato's banishment of the poets. In Book X of the *Republic*, he expressively refers to the drifter poets that from city to city demand to declare religious, epic poems in the *agoras* they come to (a).

It seems, then, that if a man, who through clever training can become anything and imitate anything, should arrive in our city, wanting to give a performance of his poems, we should bow down before him as someone holy, wonderful, and pleasing, but we should tell him that there is no one like him in our city and that it isn't lawful for there to be (a). We should pour myrrh on his head, crown him with wreaths, and send him away to

another city. But, for our own good, we ourselves should employ a more austere and less pleasure-giving poet and storyteller, one who would imitate the speech of a decent person and who would tell his stories in accordance with the patterns we laid down when we first undertook the education of our soldiers (b).' (Plat. *Rep.* 397a-398b).

Further, as the second part of the extract shows, Plato admits a kind of poetic performance, in so far as it is functional to the guardians' education (b). That it is to say that Plato's banishment of the poets is not unconditional banishment but it is clearly aimed to the educational realm of poetic performances.

If we accept Popper's argument, then the question still lingers: why are only the poets so actively controlled and censored in Plato's ideal community? I would offer an answer to such a thorny problem, in order to fully release Plato from any charge of illiberality.

As a matter of fact, Plato censors and banishes the poets solely and not any other artists like painters, for instance (as Aristotle notoriously does in *Politics* 1336). In that occasion, Aristotle shows to be plainly sympathetic with Plato's curtailments in education. Moreover, he even includes visual obscenity to the state literacy censures, (which is something that Plato never does). Essentially, if Plato really had a totalitarian attitude, he would have banished any of his philosophical opponents from participating in his ideal city. However, not just in the *Republic* but in each of his other dialogues no hint of such a totalitarian inclination exists toward the other philosophical schools, alongside the other (categories of) thinkers that compete against him, like sophists, rhetoricians and eristicists. We also know that, in his writing, Plato did want to distinguish himself (and philosophy in general) from the other opponents. The way he approached his opponents was by the means of rational

investigation, dialectic discourse and his willing to face any kind of interlocutor in open discussions. Of course, it was a hard task to complete in Socrates' time. Also, as Nehamas observes (referring to Isocrates' *Helen*):

These texts indicate that in the eyes of the generation or two following him no less than in the mind of his contemporaries (as the *Clouds* demonstrates), Socrates remained closely connected with those who, at least in Plato's dialogues, are portrayed as his most bitter and dangerous opponents. And, at least for Isocrates, Plato himself was on the sophistic and eristic side of the distinction between philosophy and its early rivals.²⁹⁴

Although the majority of people still regarded such radically different thinkers as part of a similar mind-set, Plato never sought to eliminate from the debate the aforementioned scholars. Even if he did spend his whole life, as had his master Socrates not to mention his pupil Aristotle, distinguishing philosophy as the real way for seeking the truth, from other supposed *sophoi* who, conversely, claimed to already know the truth and being able to teach it, perhaps upon payment. Despite his constant work toward the establishment of his branch of philosophy, Plato did not banish the other thinkers from his ideal city.

The reason, I suggest, relies on the completely different ground upon which the quarrel against them was to be fought. As Popper suggests in the context of modern mass media, when the mass media speaks, it is as if God himself speaks to the audience. That was very much true in the case of epic poetry too. Because of the

²⁹⁴ Nehamas, A., 1990, *Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato's demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry*. *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 7, Num. 1., p. 3, University of Illinois Press.

peculiar features already emphasized, the exhibition of epic poets was not just an *artistic* performance whatsoever. What the poets wrote was the word of the gods. This is exactly the reason why Plato banished such poets from *Callipolis*. He could not have had the possibility to contest poets' tales because ultimately they were based on the authority of Greek polytheism. Both Socrates and Plato, who were very much willing to take part in a conversation with anyone searching for the truth, could not do that with the most authoritative source of truth, values, and general education. Because if the *logos* was the common ground for philosophers and sophists (among others), its analytic and dialectic analysis was useless to both *rhapsodes* and poets because they used to justify their conviction upon the religious authority they demanded to be means of expression²⁹⁵. The philosopher's dialectics then was powerless when applied to the poets.

Further, without a proper regulation, as Popper emphasises it is the main mass media power that censors everybody else, having neither the authority nor any plain regulation in order to censor anybody:

But television censors everybody else. [...] They have censored me; they can censor everybody. They have a completely unlimited power of censorship. [...] But they censor me, so why should not I be involved in censoring them? [...] My thesis is that from a democratic point of view at present the broadcasters are censoring everybody without their having any means of protesting against it.²⁹⁶

Thus, the complete arbitrariness of the mass media system is the main, common flaw

²⁹⁵ Parker, R. *On Greek Religion*, 2011, Cornell University Press, New York. (In particular I suggest the reading of chapter II, 'Religion without a Church: Religious Authority in Greece, pp. 40-63.) . I would also indicate the volume *The Author's voice in Classical and Late Antiquity*, ed. By A. Marmodoro & J. Hill, 2013, OUP, Oxford.

²⁹⁶ Popper, p. 423.

sought both by Plato and Popper. In conclusion I argue that the great value of their thesis lies on the fact that both of them elaborated on an original solution in order to guarantee a well-balanced development of children. Secondly, the two scholars accomplished another great result too. They designed, by the means of the *prima facie* illiberal censorship, an “Open-System Society”, against what Popper defined as a “Bad Mistress” in the title of his work devoted to it. Such a “Bad Mistress” took the shape of poetry in fifth century BC Athens and television in our own time. Yet, these mistresses truly exercised the minds of some great thinkers. The job of those thinkers, both in antiquity as today, is to analytically criticize problem first and secondly to figure out a consistent solution to it.

Conclusions.

An *Anamorphic* interpretation for a philosophical dilemma.

In sum, I believe that it is eventually possible to set aside earlier objections regarding Plato's alleged aversion to the poets. Yet, I also believe that the overall picture of Plato's attitude toward art and poetry could be further clarified by an original comparison I draw in this final section of the study.

For this reason, I would now advance my own general theory by the means of an explicative allegory. I am confident that, especially in the light of the former analysis and comments, we are now in a safe position to recover a consistent, overall picture of the matter at stake. I am confident that Holbein's *Ambassadors* would help the reader to establish what Plato's notorious attitude toward poetry *prima facie* looks, and what such stance actually shows when approached from the right perspective.

To sum up my interpretation of Plato's aesthetics in general and his banishment of the poets in particular, I would draw an original comparison in order to provide an incisive allegory of my interpretation of Plato's stance on poetry. Indeed, I submit that

the most famous example of anamorphic painting effectively illustrates how Plato's stance on poetry must be approached in order to be fully understood and sorted out.

Because I believe that Plato's attitude toward poetry actually works as an anamorphic picture. And *The Ambassadors*, as to say the anamorphic picture I have chosen as term of comparison, clearly explains the right approach we shall adopt toward Plato's aesthetics, I submit.

'Anamorphic images are not just images that transform to reveal hidden secrets or change from one expected view to another. They do both these things, but they do it in particular visual ways according to specific rules or guidelines based on distance point and catoptric perspective practices.'²⁹⁷

Anamorphosis in art then refers to a particular technique whose peculiarity relies in revealing a peculiar trait of a certain image. Such a trait, message, different painting, can be actually grasped by a particular, (usually lateral and anyway not frontal), perspective only. In what follows I argue that exactly the same happens in the case of Plato's philosophy and his problematic attitude toward poetry.

What I mean by this is that in so far as we look at Plato's arguments on poetry regardless of his cultural contest²⁹⁸, we can only grasp a *prima facie* inconsistent (a) and disturbing (b) overall picture. As to say, the Plato's critique and banishment looks different of what they actually are. Plato's arguments seem narrow-minded or even illiberal, and the reader cannot makes sense of them. Mainly, that is due to the fact that what we nowadays term poetry is something intrinsically quite different from what Greeks refers to by the same word. And this is the reason why, if we apply

²⁹⁷ Massey, L. *Anamorphosis through Descartes or Perspective Gone Awry*. Renaissance Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Winter, 1997), p. 1168.

²⁹⁸ As I have argued at length previously the same happens for what concerns Plato's teleologism.

Plato's criticisms to contemporary literature, they appear incoherent (a) with Plato's numerous positive evaluations of poetry, as well as paternalistic (b) in their restrictions or even illiberal: Plato's banishment of the poets i. e. (bI).

Conversely, the reason why I would define my ground-breaking interpretation as anamorphic relies on the fact that I show that approaching Plato's extracts on poetry from Plato's own historical and cultural perspective, they reveal to be very different. More precisely, if we look at Plato's critique bearing in mind that poetry was the main mass media of classic Greece rather than a pure fine art, the same alleged despotic arguments eventually unveil themselves. Plato's criticisms finally do make sense, because they apply to the ancient equivalent of modern broadcasting, as the analogy with Popper's criticism and banishment of television shows.

It happens exactly the same in the painting I recall in this section, I urge.



Because of its peculiar anamorphic frame, in so far as we look at the above painting from the frontal perspective (only), we actually deal with the following problematic issues:

- a) We see in front of us an *inconsistent* (a) object with respect to the rest of the painting.
- b) Such an incomprehensible object at the centre of the figure actually does look like a scratch (b).

A disturbing, inconsistent element in connection with the picture it belongs to.

More precisely, I insist that the skull anamorphically painted actually looks like a visible annoying, distorted element, unsounding with the rest of the painted objects of the picture.

Further, it is curious to note that the allegorical figure the two Ambassadors bear represent '[...] the symbolic tokens of property, accomplishment, and discovery, as if they in their own persons were the bearers of the advanced knowledge and civilization of their own time.'²⁹⁹

Once again, I argue, as in Plato's philosophy overall picture, in front of us stands the most important items. But the overall picture, or, better say, *all the elements of the picture*, can be grasped only by adopting a particular perspective, hidden at a first sight.

Now the reader might ask *why* one might should do that. Or put in another way, one could wonder whether the parallelism I have just sketched is justified or not.

I would answer in reply that such a move, as to say a change of perspective for approaching Plato's vexed attitude on art, is fully justified by the following elements.

²⁹⁹ Harrison, C. *On the Surface of Painting*, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter, 1989), The University of Chicago Press, p. 322.

1. First of all, as I have argued at length previously, the predominant cultural context was significantly distinct, and if we do not bear it firmly in mind; what we get is a distorted overview, not just of a particular (skull), but also of Plato's philosophy in general, I urge.
2. Secondly, since 'anamorphic representation occasionally defines a specific viewing point.'³⁰⁰, through Anamorphosis I submit that we see the philosopher's specific viewpoint. As in the case of the *Ambassadors*, where the skull is actually visible from the point of view that the painter used to look at the painting. More precisely, the only point from which it is possible to see the skull clearly corresponds to the lateral door the painter used in order to enter his study.

It happens the same in the case of Plato, I argue. Once we adopt the philosopher's perspective, we clearly see how poetry was like and Plato's concerns became visible. Therefore, I submit that, as in the anamorphic painting cited, what surfaces from a deep interpretation of Plato's criticisms and consequent banishment of the poets in the *Republic*, is a radically different overall picture from the *prima facie* impression of it. That is the only way, I maintain, we have to adopt in order to gain a real understanding of Plato's condemn of mimetic poetry and his reasons for his censure of poetry and poets' exile. As in an anamorphic picture, if we do not adopt the right perspective, we get confused and we lose the sight of what a *prima facie* inconsistent picture really means.

Otherwise, mainstream interpreters such as Annas and Naddaff, holding that Plato's criticism of poetry is teleological and based on its educational function, lose the

³⁰⁰ Davis, S., Higgins K. M., Hopkins R., Stecker R., Cooper D.E., 2009, p. 4.

sight of the many appreciations of poetry I have emphasized, getting at an inconsistent picture of Plato's aesthetics.

My reading then, differs because according to the mainstream interpreters, Plato does not recognise any other value in poetry, while I hold that he does recognise another aesthetic value in it and so sees it as having value as a fine art. In order to corroborate this claim, I have laid stress on the fact that since the early dialogues till the late ones, Plato shows to appreciate poetry, in so far as it is the object of a disinterested appreciation or experience. The matter is when poets use poetry for political and pedagogical purposes.

Further, the way I have proposed presents a fundamental advantage in comparison with the interpretations and comments faced throughout this work. This study is indeed the only one capable of recovering an overall, consistent explanation of why Plato on the one hand often praises Homer and other poets, and on the other hand he harshly criticize them from *extra*-aesthetic points of view.

One might ask why it is necessary to build a consistent view in order to grasp Plato's message in respect to art in general and poetry in particular. Indeed, I realize that a coherent account is not *per se* a guarantee of rightness. Because of one might object that an overall consistent account of Plato's philosophy in relation specifically with poetry is simply not possible to accomplish. But what I want to stress here is that my account of Plato on poetry combines both the rational and historical reconstruction. Which is, in my view, the right way of proceeding in order to find out what a thinkers of the past really meant. But S. Makin emphasizes the importance of the two entities mentioned above: 'But it would be wrong to oppose historical and rational reconstruction, as if one was showing what a philosopher said, the other what he meant. Historical and rational reconstruction combine to show clearly what P said.

Simply presenting the words P used does not show us what P said. For until we understand the words that P used we gain nothing by knowing that P used them. To understand what P said I have to relate P's words and concepts to my own words and concepts.³⁰¹

On the other hand, one might argue that Plato simply changed his mind, as he certainly did during the course of his life. That certainly happened, as D. Frede, points out: 'it is unconceivable that Plato, who thought, discussed, and wrote philosophy for some fifty years, never changed his mind'³⁰². But, at least in the case of poetry, that would imply that in a certain period he did evaluate positively poetry and subsequently he did not.

But the textual analysis conducted since the very early dialogues till the very last one highlights a consistent set of claims about poetry and poets. It is then possible to say that Plato, did not change his mind about poetry. On the contrary, and in a nutshell, Plato emphasizes (and shows by the means of dialectics) that poets lack the knowledge they believe to possess thanks to the gods influence. But on the other hand, Plato shows sincere appreciation for the most famous authors of the past as well as his own time, when they are not taken to be teaching for the children or source of knowledge for the adults.

Or one might even argue that Plato was inconsistent in his attitude toward poetry. And the fact that in this study I have put forward a theory that reconciles a struggle account of Plato is not by itself a guarantee that my theory is (the) right (one).

³⁰¹ Makin, 1988, p. 125.

³⁰² Frede, D. in *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient*. Ed. by J. Annas and C. Rowe. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London: Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University Press, 2002 . p. 28.

To this extent, a related question would be how can we be sure in attributing a certain view to an author?

S. Makin answers this question too, emphasizing the necessary correspondence between the historical and the rational frame.

‘This will not be objectionable as an account of P's views. It will only appear objectionable if historical and rational reconstruction are confused. But nor will this be a purely rational reconstruction, with no historical component. For, as seen above, rational and historical reconstruction typically go hand in hand, and I seek consistency with the historical evidence concerning P's grounds for C, so far as is possible given my knowledge of what P said concerning C.’³⁰³

Such a coincidence, as indicated since the very beginning of the study, is the obliged path by which our investigation has analyzed Plato's texts. *A fortiori*, throughout this study I have argued that both the historical and the theoretical outlooks are necessary keys in order to make sense of Plato's attitude toward poetry.

But further, Plato himself reinforces the thesis that it is necessary to look for the overall consistent meaning in order to work out what an author really meant. Indeed, in the *Protagoras* Plato has Socrates emphasize with particular clarity the above conviction. Although we have already treated in details in the second chapter, it is useful to recall that in the *Protagoras*, the eponymous sophist recalls a single passage by Simonides in order to (pure instrumentally) corroborate his own claim. Plato rebuts that in order to figure out what a certain author really did want to say, we have to seek for a general, consistent message, instead of looking to a single extract.

Although other interpretations go to different directions, I endorse C. Rowe's reading of the passage of the in question.

³⁰³ Makin, 1988, p. 125.

‘Socrates’ exposition of the Simonides poem in the *Protagoras* is normally taken as a spoof of some kind. But it seems unlikely that Plato would take up six Stephanus pages with a mere *jeu d’esprit*. I suggest, rather, that he/Socrates is starting from the position adopted by the other interlocutors, that the poet is wise and therefore must be telling the truth – with this difference, that he makes the poem express the truths that it *would* be telling if in fact the poet was wise, which Socrates thinks, and we know he thinks, he was not. So it is a kind of spoof, but one with a serious point, and one that gives Socrates an opportunity to expound his own ideas at some length.³⁰⁴

Indeed, Plato cogently postulates that we have to seek for the general, consistent account in order to be sure to attribute the correct, original view to a certain author. Plato himself then, invites us to follow this approach in order to find out the truth. Which is, I insist, that his *prima facie* censorship and even banishment could be read as a release for Art. Because, it is worth to reiterate it, Plato does not banish poetry because he is attacking it as a “fine” Art. On the contrary, he is releasing poetry from its educational context and baptizing it into the realm of Fine Art. The art that we do know and we do appreciate *per se*. Put in another way, poetry as art, because of its freedom from all the external purposes and functions that Plato emphasized as flaws in the Greek epic poetry.

³⁰⁴ Rowe, C. *Socrate e Simonide* in *Il Protagora di Platone Struttura e problematiche* – Ed. By G. Casertano 2004, Napoli, p. 465.

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