

## THE PHILOSOPHER AGAINST THE RHAPSODIST. SOCRATES AND ION AS CHARACTERS IN PLATO'S *ION*

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The critique of the poetry in Plato's *Ion* unfolds in a clearly political context in which, in contrast to the old model of knowledge represented by poetry, Plato presents a new model, identified with philosophy, which questions the legitimacy of poets and rhapsodists as competent guides of the polis and citizens. In this critique, the characters and dramatic elements of dialogue are fundamental. Thus in *Ion* and Socrates the Athenian philosopher brings together all the characteristics that describe a real rhapsodist of that time as well as the philosophical activity of the historical Socrates.

**Keywords:** Plato – Ion – Poetry – Rhapsodist – *Téchne* (craft) – *Enthousiasmós* (divine inspiration)

**1. The rhapsodist Ion and the transmission of the tradition.** The *Ion* is one of the shortest Platonic dialogues. With a simple structure, it represents a conversation of about half an hour that takes place between Socrates and the rhapsodist Ion at the gates of the city of Athens. The dialogue takes place at the end of the feast of Asclepius, in Epidaurus, before the start of the Great Panathenaea, in Athens. Its central theme is the relationship between Homeric poetry and knowledge. Although other subjects are dealt with in the dialogue, such as the nature of rhapsodic activity, hermeneutics, the nature of τέχνη, or the nature of divine inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός), the main subject of the dialogue is the epistemic nature of Homeric poetry and of traditional poetry in general, a subject around which the treatment of the other questions revolves. The clarification of the link which exists between poetic creation (and its inseparable public expression: rhapsody) and knowledge holds extremely important implications regarding the educational system of the polis, as poetic expression constitutes the main medium of transmission of traditional values.

It could be added that the background upon which the matter of the link between poetry and knowledge is developed is the Platonic preoccupation with the power of language in establishing values within a society. In this sense, the Platonic *Ion* is, above all, a lucid reflection on the power of language, and also on its limits. It is not at all strange,

therefore, that Plato, on this occasion, chooses a famous and renowned rhapsodist as Socrates' fellow speaker. The fact that there is no historical data which refers to an Ionic rhapsodist called Ion would lead us to conclude that he is a fictitious character, a mere literary resource used by Plato, albeit not lacking in meaning as both the name and certain circumstances in the dialogue are intimately connected to the god Apollo, likewise closely linked to the musical arts.<sup>1</sup> The character appears to illustrate the activity and lifestyle of the rhapsodists of the time with considerable accuracy.<sup>2</sup>

The type of rhapsodist described by Plato in the *Ion* was professional poetry reciter, particularly of Homer, but also of other poets (*Ion* 530b, 531a, *Timaeus* 21b, Isocrates, *Panegyric* 18, 33) and probably of his own poetry. The term ῥαψωδός is recorded in the fifth century by Herodotus (V, 67) and Sophocles (*Oedipus Rex* 391), although the name and practice is much earlier, as paraphrases of the term can be found in archaic authors, such as ῥάψαντες ἀοιδὴν, in pseudo-Hesiod (fr. 357 M.-W.) or ῥαπτῶν ἐπέων ... ἀοιδοί, in Pindar (*Nem.* 2, 1). From the etymology of the term it is possible to deduce its meaning: from ῥάπτειν = to sew, and ᾠδή (contraction of ἀοιδή) = song; the rhapsodist is, therefore, a «stitcher of songs». According to one popular interpretation, ῥαψωδός comes from ῥάβδος (*scholia* to Pindar, *Nem.* 2, 1c 29-30 Drachman), a term which refers to a long rod or sceptre which the rhapsodist carried on the stage, although this interpretation has been rejected in modern philology.

Originally, in Homer's time, there were bards (ἀοιδοί) or reciters of epic poetry accompanied by a zither played by themselves (*Republic* 600d, Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1403b22), but they later went on to be accompanied just by a ῥάβδος (Hesiod, *Theogony* 30 and 95). During the fifth and fourth centuries the rhapsodists were familiar characters due to their habitual presence at festivals and games, where they competed for prizes which could be substantial (530b, 535e).<sup>3</sup> The rhapsodists recited from a rostrum (533e), dressed for the occasion in showy colours (530b, 537d) and a golden crown (535d), and they could attract considerable crowds (535d). They were probably very carefully trained, perhaps under the watchful eye of the *Homeridai*, a clan originally from the island of Chios who were supposed descendants of Homer and who appear as the authority and arbiters of the works of Homer (530d). A good rhapsodist was able to feel emotion whilst reciting and to transmit that emotion to the audience (532e, 536a, *Republic* 395a, Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1403b22).

As regards the creative estimation of their activity and its social consideration, the very activity of the rhapsodists in Plato's time has been understood by contemporary scholars in two different ways: as a degraded version of the original creative activity of

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Ion is an Ionic rhapsodist who comes from the festival in honour of Asclepius celebrated in Epidaurus. In Greek mythology, Ion, Asclepius and the muses are children of Apollo, a divinity closely linked to Ionia and Epidaurus. Therefore, it seems that having chosen the name «Ion» for the rhapsodist of his dialogue, Plato aims at linking him with the god Apollo. See Bremer (2005, p. 300).

<sup>2</sup> Brief, useful introductions to the definition of the rhapsodists and rhapsody can be found in West (1970). See also Ford (1988, p. 300-307).

<sup>3</sup> The programme and prize list for the contestants in the Athenian Odeon, partly preserved in an inscription from around 400-350 BCE, can be found in Bremer (2005, p. 150-151).

the Homeric bard, being considered as the mere memorizing and recitation of the poems of others, or as its continuation, under the supposition that it not only involved the reciting of other people's poems, but also the creation and recitation of one's own work. Whilst there are authors who defend the existence of a substantial creative difference between the Homeric bards Phemius and Demodocus and the Platonic ῥαψωδός Ion,<sup>4</sup> the truth is that there is no evidence to support such a distinction, in fact just the opposite.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the different perception of archaic bards and classic rhapsodists is due to the attitude of rejection shown by Plato (*Ion passim*) and by Xenophon (*Symposium* III, 6 and *Memorabilia* IV, 2, 10), and to the negative reputation which they appear to have had for a long time (thus, in the *Suidae Lexicon* we can read: Ῥαψώδημα: ψεῦσμα. Ῥαψωδεῖν: ἄδειν. ... Ῥαψωδία: φλυαρία, λόγων συναφή, ἀδολεσχία). However, Plato himself, who distinguishes between rhapsodists and zitherists, includes Phemius in the rhapsodist group and not in the bard's (533b-c; also *Republic* X, 600d).

Highly debated questions exist concerning the way in which rhapsodic competitions were carried out and the various activities included in the work of the rhapsodist.<sup>6</sup> As far as the first question goes, there is a widespread opinion which claims that, in the case of grand celebrations such as those of Epidauros or the Panathenaea, the correct rhapsodic competition required the existence of an established text from the works of Homer, which could be divided into fragments of similar length, distributed among the rhapsodists via a draw, and recited in the same sequence as the work, until the work was completed.<sup>7</sup> However, a more recent opinion questions whether the works of Homer were recited from start to finish in those competitions, and suggests that rhapsodic recitation may have covered only some episodes from the work, similar to those described in the dialogue (535b).<sup>8</sup> The problem is that in the list offered by Socrates in the dialogue, the length of the scenes varies from a few verses (*Illiad* XXII, 430-36, relative to Hecuba) to several hundred verses (*Illiad* XXIV, 144-717, relative to Priam), which prevents us from knowing the type of fragment or episode with which the rhapsodists could have worked during the competition. What is undoubted is that rhapsodic recitation always took place in a competitive context where the rhapsodists recited «by relay and by cue»,<sup>9</sup> and in which prestige and money were at stake.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., for example, opinions regarding this from Kirk (1962, p. 97, 318-319). See also Wolf (1985, p. 104-107). For a more recent commentary see Powell (2000, p. 96-125).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. comments by Nagy (1996, p. 113). See also Pavese (1998, p. 64). In his classic work, Searley (1957, p. 312-355) had already pointed out that the distinction between poets and mere rhapsodists should be taken with a great degree of carefulness.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Pfeiffer (1968, p. 3-15). See also Velardi (2004, p. 167-218). See also Bremer (2005, p. 129-183).

<sup>7</sup> Bremer (2005, p. 145-146) compiles the majority specialist opinion.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Collins 2004, p. 180-181, n. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Collins (2004, p. 169-175) has linked rhapsodic recitation «by relay and by cue» (ἐξ ὑπολήψεως καὶ ἐξ ὑποβολῆς) with the archaic Homeric expression «taking turns with one beautiful voice» (ἀμειβόμενοι ὀπί καλῆ), used when speaking about the Muses' song. In both cases the performance takes place in succession and by turn, each participant partially contributing to the creation of a whole, and where the end goal is to win.

With regard to the activities carried out by the rhapsodists, it seems clear that they were not restricted to the mere recitation of poems, particularly the poems of Homer, but that they also offered some kind of interpretation or commentary on the text (530b-c, 530d, 532b, 535c-d, etc.), which in the case of Ion, the type is not known.<sup>10</sup> Neither is it known whether the commentary or interpretation were included in the recitation or not, and if they were, how exactly they were integrated into it.<sup>11</sup> It is also very probable that a degree of improvisation was included in the rhapsodic performance, such as the creation of the song *in situ*, the insertion of new «Homeric» verses into the pre-existing texts, or the communal production of hexameters together with the other rhapsodists.<sup>12</sup> If, as appears to be so, the rhapsodist's performance included these activities, its distance from the archaic bard leaves it outside the creative plane. But similarly, the fact that the inflexibility of the distinction between the «creative» bard and the «repetitive» rhapsodist should be rejected does not imply that there were no other important differences between them: for example, whilst the Homeric bard formed part of a prince's household, for whom they sang and on whom they were economically dependent, (Phemio of Odysseus' household; Demodocus of Alcinous'), rhapsodists like Ion were free, travelling all over Greece (530a-b) and competing with other rhapsodists in places such as the theatre of Epidaurus or the Athenian Odeon in front of audiences of up to various thousands of people (535d).<sup>13</sup> This supposes, therefore, that the distance between the rhapsodists and their audience was totally different from the close and familiar relationship which existed between the bard and their few listeners. Closely linked to this fact is the far from negligible political role which, thanks to their potential influence over the crowd, rhapsodists like Ion got to play between the sixth and fourth centuries.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> From the vocabulary used by Ion and Socrates in 530c8-d8 (κάλλιστα λέγειν; εἰπεῖν ... πολλὰς καὶ καλὰς διανοίας; εἰς κεκόσμηκα τὸν Ὅμηρον) to refer to the rhapsodist's activity, Desclos (1996, p. 135-136) interprets Ion's hermeneutic superiority as purely aesthetic. However, Socrates' description of the rhapsodist's activity in 530b-c, confirmed by Ion, is that this activity consists of «getting to know his thinking [that of the poet] and not just his words» (τὸ σῶμα κεκοσμηθῆσθαι ἀεὶ, καλλίστοις φαίνεσθαι), (...), «as he would not be a good rhapsodist if he didn't understand what the poet said» (οὐ γὰρ ἂν γένοιτό ποτε ἀγαθὸς ῥαψωδός, εἰ μὴ συνείη τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ) (530b-c). The content of the statement, as with the development of all the later dialogue, seems to indicate that the activity of the rhapsodist transcends the purely aesthetic.

<sup>11</sup> In Plato's time there appear to be various types of commentary on the work of Homer and other poets. Apart from the allegorical interpretation, which supposes the existence of hidden meanings (ὑπόνοιαι) in the poems of an ethical or naturalistic nature, an interpretation apparently held by the authors quoted by Ion in 530c-d, there is also the example of Protagoras's commentary on a famous poem by Simonides (cf. *Protagoras* 338e-339e) and the reference to the *Homeridai*'s explanations included in *Phaedrus* 252b.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Collins (2004, p. 179).

<sup>13</sup> In the opinion of Ford, the real distinctive criterion of rhapsody lies in the nature of its performance, which consists of the recitation of a poetic text without musical accompaniment, regardless of originality. Cf. Ford (1988, p. 303-307). In the opinion of Collins (2004, p. 168) however, the distinctive criterion of rhapsody derives from the fact that the rhapsodists compete with each other in front of one big audience, whilst the *bard* sing alone before a small, familiar audience.

<sup>14</sup> In this respect, Collins (2004, p. 142-146).

In this sense, the rhapsodists performed on many occasions at the service of those legislators who supported them, whether it be as ideological vehicles or as a medium to increase their prestige. Thus, it appears that Hipparchus brought the *Homeridai* to Athens (pseudo-Plato, *Hipparchus* 228b-c), that the legislators Lycurgus (Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 4, 4) and Pericles (Plutarch, *Pericles* 13, 6) introduced rhapsodic competitions in Sparta and Athens, and that Solon (D.L. I, 7) and Cleisthenes (Herodotus V, 67) legislated on the form and content of rhapsodic competition. Undoubtedly, the contemptuous attitude of Plato and Xenophon to the rhapsodists can be largely understood as an aristocratic reaction against the mass performances supported by tyrants and democratic governments, so different in nature from the exclusive *symposia* of the aristocratic minority, so well reflected in the work of both writers. It is in this political and educational context that the character of the rhapsodist Ion from the dialogue to which he gives his name should be interpreted, as should the presence of Socrates, as the opposing model.

**2. Socrates and the new philosophical model of knowledge.** Socrates represents a model of citizen far removed from that represented by Ion. In a similar way to what he does in the *Gorgias* with regard to rhetoric or in the *Protagoras* with sophistry, in the *Ion* Socrates subjects the rhapsodist to the critical examination referred to in the *Apology*, in front of the tribunal judging him, where he states:

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. 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. I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge (τέχνη), but by some inborn talent and by inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμός) (22a-c. Translated by Grube, G. M. A.).

Indeed, the whole dialogue is aimed at denying the real competence of the rhapsodists and poets in any area of knowledge, as by depriving them of real knowledge he also deprives them of their pedagogic and political pretensions that justify their enormous presence in the polis.<sup>15</sup> In that sense, it can be claimed that the *Ion* forms part of the verification process of the Delphic oracle, aimed at showing the illusory competence of poets and rhapsodists, in a wider critical context which also includes the pretensions to knowledge of the orators and sophists. On two occasions Ion tries to show Socrates the practical proof of his knowledge (530d and 536d), and both times Socrates avoids the demonstration, postponing it for later, once Ion had clarified what precisely his field of knowledge is (531a and 536d-e), a basic condition of all further demonstrations. Ion's

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<sup>15</sup> Trabattoni (1985, p. 34-35, 48-49) has well underlined that, choosing a rhapsodist as Socrates' conversational partner, Plato probably tries to focus the reader's attention on the educational-normative aspect of poetry.

failure to respond satisfactorily renders unnecessary the practical demonstration which the rhapsodist aims to carry out. In fact, the dialogue ends without Ion having been able to show any demonstration of his supposed knowledge, and without even clarifying the type of commentary that he is carrying out before the auditorium, a question Plato consciously avoids, considering it insignificant.

Obviously, it cannot be disputed that the rhapsodist possesses a set of rules and knowledge which allow him to do his job more effectively – from taking care of his external appearance to the modulation of his voice. However, that kind of knowledge is not of the slightest interest to Socrates, who tightly limits the track of his argument in order to focus on what really seems to be important to him: the technical content of the poems. In this respect, it should be added that the purely recitative or performative aspect of rhapsody, whilst important, remains in the background in the dialogue, with the question of interpretation or the explanatory commentary of the rhapsodist (ἐρμηνεία, 530c) being what really interests Socrates. This interest is particularly reflected in the vocabulary used, of a clearly epistemic nature (συνιέναι, γινώσκειν, ἐπίστασθαι, φροντίζειν, κρίνειν, εἰδέναι), and in the two fundamental notions that Socrates uses to describe the nature of rhapsody and poetry: τέχνη (technique, art, trade) and ἐνθουσιασμός (divine inspiration). Whilst through the notion of τέχνη Socrates manages to deny rhapsody and Homeric poetry the condition of universal knowledge – as it is not possible to know and comment on one poet whilst at the same time being ignorant of the rest, nor is it possible for rhapsody and poetry to deal with all fields of knowledge – through the notion of ἐνθουσιασμός the philosopher illustrates the irrational nature of both, as their origin does not lie in the possession of technical or scientific knowledge but in the hazardous acquisition of a divine capability, a θεία μοῖρα from outside. In short: both the absence of systematic knowledge and the possession of divine inspiration equal ignorance.

In line with Socrates' strategy, what begins as a cordial, friendly, complicit dialogue in the first person plural (530b: Τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ἄθλων ἠνεγκάμεθα, «First prize, Socrates. We carried it off»); δὴ ὅπως καὶ τὰ Παναθηναῖα νικήσομεν, «let's see that we win the Panatheneans, next») and in which Socrates sets out the motives for his admiration of the rhapsodist (530b-c), takes on a serious tone when Ion, after being forced to postpone the demonstration of his knowledge, states that his condition as an expert is limited to Homer alone (531a). This statement, made at the beginning, constitutes what Menza (1972, p. 29) has called «the catalyzing proposition». From that moment on, through to the end of the dialogue, Socrates unfolds an effective strategy aimed at discrediting rhapsody, stripping Ion of the word, pushing him towards aphasia and, finally, legitimising philosophy as the new discourse of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> In this progressive stripping away of the word, the first step is the denial of a suitable field of competence about which the rhapsodist can judge

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<sup>16</sup> Bettini (1989) has drawn attention to the progressive stripping away of the word that the rhapsodist suffers throughout the dialogue, a reflection of the disparagement of rhapsody and poetry and of the legitimisation of both as vehicles of knowledge. A graphic illustration of the process of appropriation of the word by Socrates can be found in Bremer (2005, p. 103).

who speaks correctly and who does not (531e). This is something shared by the fortune-teller, the mathematician or the doctor, all of whom possess an art by virtue of which they are capable of judging if someone speaks correctly or incorrectly about fortune-telling, numbers or diet.

Through the introduction of the notion of τέχνη, Plato shows the problematic nature of the affirmation made by Ion about his own interpretative capability. The outcome is that the rhapsodist, stripped of a systematic knowledge that guarantees his condition of performer, is discredited before himself and before the listener. Ion opts for a way out, which consists of using his own personal experience, the obvious and undeniable fact to which he only pays attention when Homer is mentioned (532b-c). This allows Socrates to explain his theory of *divine inspiration*, which constitutes the second step in stripping the rhapsodist of the word. Earlier, Socrates takes care to secure his position when establishing that his analysis of τέχνη is valid, without exception, for all τέχνη considered as a whole (532d-e), as shown by examples of painting, sculpture or flute playing, where it is not possible to limit knowledge to just one author. Socrates' famous speech about poetic inspiration has a devastating effect on Ion, as it supposes, in the first place, that the rhapsodist's activity does not depend on a τέχνη, but on a divine force (θεία δύναμις, 533d) which possesses the rhapsodist.

However, secondly, the doctrine of inspiration breaks the link that exists between the rhapsodist and the message, converting the former into a false speaker, so that the rhapsodist is stripped of any merit with regard to the discourse. The rhapsodist becomes a mere channel through which the divinity speaks. The same could be said of the poet, who as «an airy thing, winged and holy» (534b), is reduced to a marginalised being, capable of going beyond human limits, but disconnected from his creation. In a very effective way Socrates has, once and for all, stripped the rhapsodist of the word, marginalised him in aphasia, and the philosopher has meaningfully taken up the word. As Bettini quite rightly says:

The constitution of the figure of the philosopher, as the new wise person, arises from the dissolution of the old figures of wisdom. Socrates and Ion, originally equal in the beginning of the dialogue, become permanently different when the rhapsodist renounces speech. In this way, the legitimation of the old wise person is transferred to the new one. (Bettini, 1989, p. 59. Translated by the authors).

The camaraderie which appeared to exist between Ion and the philosopher Socrates at the start of the dialogue is revealed, therefore, as illusory.

**3. The philosopher against the rhapsodist. Dramatic elements.** The main reason for the declarations against the authenticity of the *Ion* is precisely the offensive tone that many authors have perceived in Socrates' treatment of the rhapsodist. In fact, some modern authors consider the *Ion* to be a comic dialogue.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, it should be pointed

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Saxonhouse (1978, p. 888-901). See also Woodruff (1983).

out that the comic nature of the *Ion* is not an exception in the work of the Athenian philosopher, in which irony and humour play an incredibly important role as a vehicle for truth. Greene (1920, p. 63-64) claims that the Platonic Socrates liked to use an irony which «mystified, irritated, and at times enlightened his associates», finds that the dialogues are full of straightforward language which makes the reader feel that «we are listening to the talk of men of flesh and blood», and makes a long list of characters of a marked comic nature.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Goethe himself describes *Ion* as «Aristophanic», which is a perceptive vision of the dialogue, even though *Ion* and Socrates do not exactly correspond to the ἀλαζών (the Impostor) and the εἴρων (the Ironic one) of ancient Comedy.<sup>19</sup> Numerous specialists have later drawn attention to the common elements and even the close link between the work of Plato and that of Aristophanes.<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand, it is clear that, as a literary work of a dramatic nature, the doctrinal content of the *Ion* cannot be detached from its dramatic elements, among which we find a generous dose of humour and a well-worked characterisation of the personages. On the other hand, we also find carefully constructed dialogues, not without argumentative logic but also containing notable fallacies on the part of Socrates.<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, it is *Ion* who

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<sup>18</sup> On the use of irony in Socrates, see the classic work by Greene (1920). Cf. also Vlastos (1987).

<sup>19</sup> To see Goethe's point (Cf. *als Mittgenosse einer Christlichen Offenbarung*, II, 758-762) on this issue, cf. Grumach (1949). An analysis of the dramatic elements of the dialogue and of the Aristophanic nature of the characters in the *Ion* can be found in the interesting work by Ranta (1967), although, in our opinion, he overrates the Aristophanic elements of *Ion* and Socrates. For a general vision of the Attic Comedy, see Cornford (1934).

<sup>20</sup> With regard to this, see the following texts: Adam (1969, p. 201-214); Adkins (1970, p. 13-24); Moors and Kayser (1975, p. 20-24); Saxonhouse (1978, p. 888-901); Rankin (1979, p. 11-18). Saxonhouse points out that both *The Birds* and the *Republic* describe a utopian society formed from a rejection of the conventions of the Athenian society of the time. For his part, Adam sees numerous common elements between the *Assemblywomen* and book V of the *Republic*, among which he notes joint-ownership, women and children and a very similar language. In this respect, Adam feels that the *Assemblywomen* was written before book V of the *Republic*, and Rankin (1979, p. 14) believes that when Plato wrote book V he probably had in mind the *Assemblywomen*. With regard to the negative effect which Aristophanes' work could have on the image of Socrates among his fellow citizens, Adkins indicates that Plato is aware of the damage caused to Socrates' reputation by the comedy *The Clouds*, such that he later attempts to attenuate that damage via humour and irony. Moors and Kayser believe that Aristophanes' attack on Socrates is conscious and effective, as Aristophanes establishes that the philosopher wins through logical argumentation but from a theoretical and morally inferior position. In line with these two authors, the controversy between Plato and Aristophanes has as its origin the disagreement on two fundamental issues: the contribution of poetry and philosophy to the education of Athenian citizens, and the virtues that a virtuous man must possess in order to live a good life.

<sup>21</sup> As stated by Trabattoni (1986, p. 47) even if in some texts Plato shows his Socrates winning in the conversation by means of apparently weak arguments, we should not think that he tries to do the same with the reader. The fact that *Ion* is not able to prevent himself from Socrates discursive tricks, it does not mean that Plato expects to happen the same with the person who reads the dialogue. The reader must consider the dramatic context, but not to simply agree with one or another of the characters. He is expected to surpass the specific dramatic situation and understand the general problem posed by the dialogical construction.

contributes most of the humour, a cordial and affable character but who has an over-inflated image of his activity and knowledge. Ion has no qualms about mentioning, at the beginning of the conversation, his victory in Epidaurus (530b), his exclusive knowledge of Homer (530c-d) and his right to the *Homeridai's* golden crown (530d). Socrates, however, recognises his own admiration and certain envy towards rhapsodists, actors and poets (530b-c) and rejects being considered as a wise man (532d). This initial characterisation of the roles resembles the comic types of ἀλαζών and εἴρων in the Comedy, where one comes across as more than he is while the other as less, in a setting of absurd confrontation in which what is sought is the description of the real virtuous man. It must be noted, however, that in the case of the Platonic dialogue, both roles are characterised in a softer and more toned down way: neither Ion's vanity is as stupid nor Socrates' irony as cruel as it usually is in the Comedy.

Thus, Ion does not appear as an inconsiderate lout who bursts onto the scene, but rather as an approachable man who is cordial with anyone wishing to enter into conversation with him (530a). Ion comes across as receptive and sincerely interested in the company of Socrates whose opinion he is eager to hear (532c). Socrates, for his part, never once uses sarcasm or humiliation, but restricts himself to the practice of his habitual irony and to the application of the argumentative machinery to which certain of the rhapsodist's statements give rise. This does not mean, however, that Ion does not act with extreme slowness in making too many concessions to the opinions expressed by Socrates, nor that Socrates' arguments do not contain frequent, noticeable fallacies.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Ion shows slowness in accepting the debate about poetry in terms of technical knowledge, as if the Homeric poems could be reduced to mere instruction manuals or encyclopaedia, which they are certainly not. Similarly, by not realising that the Homeric poems, like any other object, can be studied from many different viewpoints, just as food can be studied by the doctor, the nutritionist or the chef (531e-ss.). Likewise, in accepting the strange theory that painters and sculptors do not have their own preferences but that everything draws their attention and they have, at any rate, their own views (532e-533b).

Socrates, for his part, displays his most fallacious aspect when suggesting to the rhapsodist the false alternative in which art and inspiration appear as contradictory and exclusive, a suggestion that supposes a real novelty with respect to the previous tradition. Similarly, by forcing him to choose between being an unjust man or a divine man after twice refusing to hear the rhapsodist's commentary about the Homeric poems (541e-542a). But, over and above Ion's slowness and Socrates' fallacies, the greatest mistake shared by both, is the failure to understand that the real world and the poetic world should be appreciated from different criteria, that there is an insurmountable distance between propositional semantics and poetic semantics, that factual knowledge about the real world

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<sup>22</sup> On the use of fallacy in Plato, the work of Sprague (1962, p. 80-87) is of great value, especially her conclusions.

does not work in the context of fictional constructions.<sup>23</sup> Without that prior distinction, which neither Socrates nor Ion seems to perceive, all later analysis of poetic fact is simply a fallacy. Also, vice versa: once we reject the Socratic identification of the Homeric poems with the technical proposals contained in them, we discover that Ion does possess real knowledge, and that this knowledge is made up of the characters, facts and relationships which adorn the fictitious world of Homer. A knowledge that, in any case, neither the fictitious Socrates nor the real Plato are prepared to admit.

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<sup>23</sup> On this question, see the magnificent work of Liebert (2010, p. 179-218). Pointing out in an exemplary fashion the place that the debate on literary knowledge should occupy – which constitutes a fundamental subject of the *Ion* –, this author also indicates the cause of the noticeable fallacies and clumsiness committed by the two characters.

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