Plato's Ion *

This lecture is, as you know, about Plato's dialogue entitled Ion. My main purpose is to show how, I think, a Platonic dialogue ought to be read. The lecture will have two parts. The first will present to you what happens in the dialogue; in the second part I shall try to describe the wider frame into which what happens in the dialogue fits.

Socrates meets Ion in Athens. We are inclined to think that Socrates is known to us, to some extent at least, but we might be mistaken. As to Ion, his home is Ephesus, an Ionian city on the shores of Asia Minor. He is well known as a rhapsode. He tells Socrates that he has just arrived from Epidaurus, where he attended - as a rhapsode - the festival in honor of Asclepius, the healing god. What is a rhapsode? A rhapsode (literally: a stitcher of verses) is a man who, at appropriate occasions, recites, or better, declaims poetry majestically and touchingly. Socrates wonders whether the Epidaurians honor the healing god with a contest of rhapsodes also, and Ion confirms this, adding that everything else that belongs to the art over which the Muses preside is involved. We suspect that Socrates wonders what relatinn the declaiming of poetry has to healing. Socrates - and we - learn that Ion won the first prize in that rhapsodic contest, and Socrates urges him to achieve the same result in Athens at the Panathenaean festival celebrated in honor of Athena, the goddess not only of war, but also - among other things - of health. Ion confidently expects this to happen.

Socrates begins his challenge. He says: "I have been often, yes, 530B jealous of you rhapsodes, Ion, because of your art". The English word "art", which I have just used, translates the Greek word τέχνη. It was implied in Ion's use of the word μουσική, the art over which the Muses

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preside. Today, we mean by "art" something highly admired and respected, attributed to "creativity" or to "genius" or, at least, to talent, but also something that is taught to children in school. A similar ambiguity characterizes the word τέχνη , as we shall see in a moment, but what is much more emphasized in it than in the English word "art" is knowledge, the skill, the "know-how", involved in any making, producing, and behaving that men engage in. In continuing his speech Socrates uses the word τέχνη for the second time, right away. He exposes the sources of his jealousy: the τέχνη of the rhapsode, Socrates says, teaches him how to adorn his body so that he should look as beautiful as possible, and it also imposes upon the rhapsode the necessity of passing all his time with the works of many good poets and especially with those of Homer, the best and divinest poet of all of them, so that he would know Homer's thought full well and not only his words. For, as Socrates suggests, there couldn't be a good rhapsode, if he did not <u>understand</u> what the poet says; the rhapsode should be an expounder of the poet's thought to those who listen to him; and it is impossible to be a good expounder, if one does not know <u>what</u> the poet says. It is all this that makes Socrates jealous.

Ion agrees with Socrates. This matter of expounding, says Ion, is certainly the most laborious part of his art; and he thinks that he can speak about Homer better and provide more and better <u>thoughts</u> about Homer than anybody else.

530D "Good news, Ion!" exclaims Socrates. He understands Ion's words to mean that Ion will not grudge him an exhibition of this power. And Ion stresses that it is indeed worth while hearing how well he has adorned Homer, so much so, that he deserves to be crowned with a golden crown by the lovers of Homer. In mentioning his "adorning" of Homer, Ion uses the very word Socrates used with reference to the rhapsode's body.

It turns out that Socrates is not yet ready to listen to Ion's exhibition. Instead he begins to question Ion, and this questioning leads to most comical and, at the same time, most serious results.

The first question is whether Ion is so marvellously skillful about Homer *only* or also about other poets. Ion's reply is: about Homer only, and that is sufficient. Ion agrees that there are things about which Homer and Hesiod, for example, both say the same; in such cases, Ion asserts, he would of course expound equally well both Homer's and Hesiod's words. But what happens, Socrates inquires, if the two poets do not agree, as, for example, about the "art of divination"? Who then would expound better what the two poets say, Ion or one of the good seers? Ion's answer is: one of the seers.

We have to note that the first and *only* example chosen by Socrates to illustrate possible disagreement among the two poets, namely the "art of divination", that is, the τέχνη called μαντική, shows clearly the ambiguity of the word τέχνη*. Does the seer, the μάντις, possess any knowledge about his seeing, prophesying, divining? Is the "know-how" of divination at his disposal? Would he be a *seer* if it were?

The next point of Socrates is that *Homer* and *all the other poets* spoke about *the same things*, about war, about the mutual intercourse of men, about the gods in their intercourse with each other and with men, about the heavens and Hades, about the origin of gods and heroes. Socrates does not say whether the poets *agreed* or *disagreed* in speaking about these things. It is Ion who makes the point that the other poets did not treat these things the way Homer did. He asserts that they did it in a far worse way. We remember that Socrates, too, called Homer the best and divinest of all the poets. But now Socrates turns to Ion's

ability to distinguish between good and bad ways of speaking about something. If the talk is about numbers, who will be able to distinguish between the good and the bad speakers? The answer is, Ion has to agree, a man who possesses the art of numbering, the "arithmetical art" the τέχνη ἀριθμητική, that is to say, the "know-how" of counting and of handling numbers. And if the talk is about wholesome food, the man who will be able to distinguish between the good and the bad speakers is a doctor, that is a man who possesses the art of healing (the τέχνη ἰατρική). In summing up, Socrates can now state that, whenever many people talk about the same thing, one and the same man will know who speaks well and who speaks badly. We have to surmise that Socrates means that this man possesses the appropriate knowledge, the appropriate τέχνη. And Socrates concludes that, since Homer and the other poets speak about the same things and Ion knows who among all of these poets speaks well and who speaks in a worse way, he must be marvellously skillful and knowledgeable about all these poets, that is, we understand, must have the suitable τέχνη which in this case ought to be called the rhapsodic art. Socrates, we remember, had spoken of this τέχνη at the beginning of the conversation.

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Ion cannot help accepting Socrates' conclusion and is thereby led to wonder why he "simply" drops into a doze when he hears somebody discuss poets other than Homer and wakes up and pays close attention and has plenty to say himself only when Homer is mentioned. Socrates claims to know the answer. "This is not difficult to guess", he says; and he states explicitly that Ion is clearly unable to speak on Homer with art and knowledge (τέχνῃ καὶ ἐπιστήμῃ), for if he were able to do it with art, that is knowingly, he would be able to speak about all the other poets as well. We have indeed to suppose, Socrates says, that

ἀτεχνῶς- pun on ἀτέχνως

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the whole in question here is the art of poetry (ποιητική), and to speak about it knowingly means to know it as a whole, that is, to know what all the poets said and meant. Socrates asks Ion whether this is so.

All that Ion has to say in answer to this rather puzzling question

532C is "Yes". Socrates is not certain whether Ion understands his point, to wit, that whatever the art, the τέχνη, may be, once it is given as a whole, the way to look at its parts is always the same. Socrates will expound this, therefore, at some length by giving quite a few

532D examples. But before doing that he asks Ion: "are you in need of hearing from me what I mean?" And Ion replies that he certainly is: "for I enjoy listening to you sages". Whereupon Socrates remarks: "surely it is you rhapsodes and actors, and the men whose poems you chant, who are sage; whereas I speak nothing but the plain truth, as a simple layman might". And he adds that what he means is indeed a trivial commonplace, not arrived at by rules of art, but within reach of everyone.

Here are the examples. There is the whole art of painting. It is impossible to find a man capable of declaring which paintings of one painter are good or bad and totally incapable of judging the works of any other painter. The same holds of the art of sculpture, of flute-playing, of harp-playing, of singing to the harp, and of the art of rhapsody. With these examples Socrates changes his point somewhat: the skillful and knowledgeable speaker is not only able to distinguish between the good and the bad artists but also between the good and the bad works of any one of those artists. Could there be a man, for instance, who would be able to talk with understanding about a number of rhapsodes but would be unable to say what Ion of Ephesus does well and what he does badly?

Ion is compelled to accept Socrates' point; but this makes the

experience he has of himself completely incomprehensible to him: he excels all men in speaking on Homer, everybody is in agreement about that (let us not forget: he just won the first prize in Epidaurus), but he cannot speak well on the other poets. How come! It is up to Socrates, Ion says, to see what that means.

Socrates retorts that he *does* see what it means and launches into a lengthy speech. *What* he says and the *way* he says it make this speech the central *event* in the drama which the dialogue presents. Socrates first repeats what he had said before about Ion's ability to speak well on Homer and Homer only: this ability is not due to a τέχνη , to any knowledge that Ion possesses. But Socrates now supplies a positive addition to that statement: this ability of Ion stems from a "divine power"; and Socrates provides a vivid image of this power and of its work. It is like the power in the "magnetic" stone, so called, namely "magnetic," by Euripides, the *poet*. This power not only makes the stone attract iron rings but also infuses itself into these rings so that they can attract other rings and thus form sometimes a long chain of iron rings suspended one from another; the power in all of them stems from that one "magnetic" stone. - The "magnetic" power helps us to understand the power of the Muses which makes some men spellbound and spreads through them to other men so as to hold them all in a chain. It is thus that all *good poets* indite all their beautiful epic or lyrical poems not because they are guided by a τέχνη , by some knowledge, but because they are spellbound and possessed by a Muse, just as the Corybantian worshippers and the bacchants are frantic and possessed and *not* in their senses. The poets tell us, they do, that (I quote)

534B "they bring us songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the

gardens and dells of the Muses - like the bees, and winging the air as these do. And what they tell is true". I keep quoting: "for a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite, to be a poet, until he is spellbound and out of his senses, and his wits are no longer in him". - Socrates sums up: poets compose and utter so many and so beautiful things about the deeds of men - as Ion does about Homer -

534C not by art (by τέχνῃ) but by a "divine allotment" (θείᾳ μοίρᾳ): it is thus that each poet is able to compose well only that kind of poetry to which the Muse has stirred him, but is not good at any other kind of verse. Indeed, if the poets knew by rules of art how to speak well on one thing, they would know how to speak on all. At this point Socrates' speech grows in intensity and straightforwardness. I quote: "That is why the god takes away the wits of these men and uses them as his ministers, just as he does with soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who

34C-D hear them may know that it is not they who utter these priceless words, when they are out of their wits, but that it is the god himself who speaks and addresses us through them". And to confirm this, Socrates finally cites the case of a most mediocre poet, who had never composed a single poem that deserved any mention at all and then produced a hymn which is in everyone's mouth, a song that is - as this man says

534D himself - "simply" "something found by the Muses". The god apparently intended him to be a sign that beautiful poems are not human or the work of men, but divine and the work of gods, and that the poets are merely the expounders of the gods, according as each is possessed by one of

535A them. And Socrates asks: "or do you not think that I speak the truth, Ion?"

535A "By Zeus", Ion exclaims, "I do". And he explains: "You do touch

my soul with your words, Socrates, and it does seem to me that the good poets expound to us what comes from the gods". Whereupon Socrates adds - with Ion's approval - that the rhapsodes expound the poets' words and are thus expounders of expounders.

Let us reflect on what has happened. We do remember that, just a while ago, Socrates called himself a "simple layman" who utters nothing but the plain truth. We might have smiled hearing this, thinking of Socrates' dissembling ways. Yet we do assume that Socrates speaks the truth. But is his long speech a truthful speech? How can he know that beautiful poems are the work of gods? How can he know that this claim of the poets is a true claim? It is certainly not something that could be characterized as plain truth. Is not his speech, which reaches poetic heights and touches not only Ion's soul, but also our souls, dictated by a Muse? Or rather, isn't Socrates playing the Muse himself? Indeed,

Let us have a closer look at Socrates' speech. Ion's rhapsodic art is mentioned at the beginning of the speech, once more briefly in the middle of the speech, and is then taken up again only at the final exchange of questions and answers between Socrates and Ion. Socrates puts at the top of the ladder the divine power, the Muse or the god; one rung below - the poet, the good poet; two rungs below - the rhapsode; three rungs below - the audience, the people who listen to the rhapsode, all of them spellbound. The bulk of the speech deals with the poets, the good poets. But these poets are grouped together with the soothsayers and seers (the μάντεις), whose non-existent τέχνη was mentioned earlier as the one Homer and Hesiod allegedly disagreed about. In composing their poems, the speech asserts, the poets are out

of their senses, and so are the rhapsodes when they declaim those poems. And this is what Ion, spellbound and possessed by the Muse, that is, by Socrates, wholeheartedly accepts. It is hardly possible not to be amused by the double change which has occurred in the dialogue, by that of the Muse into the "simple-minded" Socrates and by that of Socrates into the "magnetic" Muse.

Socrates now proceeds to check whether what he described in his speech, and was agreed to by Ion, actually occurs when Ion declaims Homer's verses. Is Ion, Socrates asks, in his senses or is he carried out of himself when he declaims verses which move his audience; does not his soul, possessed by a god, find herself among the very things he describes? And Ion reports how his eyes are filled with tears when he relates a tale of woe, and how his hair stands on end and his heart throbs when he speaks of horrors. Ion agrees that at such moments he is _out_ of his senses; as Socrates puts it, Ion _weeps_ although not robbed of his precious attire and his golden crowns and he is _panic-stricken_ in the presence of more than twenty thousand _friendly_ people, none of whom is stripping or injuring him. Does Ion know, Socrates then inquires, that the rhapsodes make the spectators in their audience feel the very same way. He knows it very well, Ion replies. Let me quote: "For I have to pay the _closest_ _attention_ to them; since, if I set _them_ crying, _I_ shall

535E laugh myself because of the money I take, but if _they_ laugh, _I_ myself shall cry because of the money I lose". We see: the spell has been broken; Ion now asserts that he is _not_ out of his senses when he declaims and weeps and acts as if panic-stricken; neither the Socratean Muse nor any other Muse possesses him. The contrast between Ion's previous assertion and the words he now uses is as great as it is comical. That does not mean that Ion has changed; it means that Ion has now

revealed what kind of man he as rhapsode truly is. Socrates' questioning and the Muse Socrates was playing have brought this about. The point we have reached lies at the very middle of the dialogue.

Socrates can now abandon the guise of the Muse. We see him indeed repeat what he had said before in his lengthy speech, but what he says now is much shorter and not "poetic" at all. He describes the chain reaching from the god or the Muse down to the audience, but he now adds to the rings mentioned before other rings attached <u>obliquely</u> to the chain; they represent choral dancers and masters and under-masters of the dance. It is indeed not straightforwardness but <u>obliquity</u> that characterizes the new speech. Socrates puns on the term "is possessed" (κατέχεται) and equates it, in view of the image of the rings, with the term "is held" (ἔχεται). Most of the rhapsodes are possessed and held by Homer, as Ion is. And the main point is again that Ion says what he says not by art or knowledge (οὐ τέχνῃ οὐδ' ἐπιστήμῃ) but by "divine allotment and possession" (θείᾳ μοίρᾳ καὶ κατοκωχῇ).

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Ion is not moved now by Socrates' speech. On the contrary, he does not believe that Socrates could convince him that he, Ion, is possessed and mad when he praises Homer. Hearing him speak about Homer, Socrates would not believe that himself. But Socrates again postpones listening to Ion's exhibition. He begins questioning Ion again.

Can Ion speak well about things in Homer of which Ion happens not to have any knowledge? About the art of chariot-driving, for example? It is the charioteer and nobody else who will know best whether Homer is right or not when he speaks about this art, and Ion has to agree. Ion cannot but assent again to Socrates' statement that the ability to know about <u>one definite kind of work</u> has been assigned to <u>each</u> of the arts (and Socrates inserts in a rather strange way: assigned "by the god").

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What we know by the art of piloting we cannot know by the art of healing, what we know by the art of healing we cannot know by the art of carpentry, and so on. - Socrates himself begins quoting from the Iliad and the Odyssey. He does it four times, three times inaccurately and only once accurately. Ion has to agree that it is not for the rhapsode to discern whether Homer speaks correctly or not, but for the doctor in the first case, for the fisherman in the second case, for the seer in the third and fourth cases. (We should not forget, by the way, that the seer's "art" is not a τέχνη at all.) Socrates then invites Ion to pick out passages from Homer, the rightness or wrongness of which the rhapsode alone should be able to discern. Ion claims - what else could he do? - that this holds of all passages. Socrates reminds him of the passages they just went through and which the rhapsode was incompetent to judge. Ion cannot help excluding these passages and the arts they imply. Pressed by Socrates to tell what arts the rhapsode will be competent to judge, Ion assigns to the rhapsode the vast knowledge of things which it is fitting for a man to say, and of those which it is fitting for a woman to say, and again of those for a slave, and of those for a freeman, and of those for him who has to obey, and of those for him who is in command. But it turns out, as Ion has to admit, that the pilot will know better than the rhapsode what the captain of a storm-tossed vessel should say and that the doctor will know better than the rhapsode what he who takes care of a sick man ought to say. If a slave is a cowherd, it is not the rhapsode who will know better what to say about cattle tending. And if a woman is a spinning-woman, it is not the rhapsode who will know better what to say about the working of wool. But what about a man who is a general exhorting his men? What such a man should say, Ion immediately declares, the rhapsode will know. And

when Socrates asks him whether he is knowledgeable about generalship as a *general* or as a *rhapsode*, we hear Ion state that he does not perceive any difference here. He explicitly says that the rhapsodic art and the art of generalship are *one* art, not two. It follows that anyone who is a good rhapsode is also a good general, but Ion cannot admit that anyone who is a good general is also a good rhapsode. He probably assumes - and rightly so - that some generals are not good at exhorting their men. Since Ion considers himself the best rhapsode in Greece, he is also, in his own eyes, the best general in Greece, and Ion adds that he learned to be that from Homer. For a short while the highly amusing question is debated why the Athenians have not chosen Ion to be their general. Socrates then reproaches Ion for not telling in what his knowledge of Homer consists and for finally escaping in the guise of a general so as to avoid displaying his wisdom concerning Homer. If Ion is an artist, that is, a man who *knows*, and deceives Socrates by not telling him *what* he knows, he is wicked. If Ion is *not* an artist but speaks fully and finely about Homer by divine allotment, possessed by Homer, and without any knowledge, he is not doing anything wrong. Here then is the choice: to be *dishonest* or to be *divine*. Ion (I quote): "the 542A difference is great, Socrates; for it is far nobler to be called divine". And Socrates closes the dialogue by assigning this nobler title to Ion: he is to be known as a *divine* and not an artful, that is *knowing*, praiser of Homer.

You realize, I am sure, the utterly comic character of the dialogue and the disparagement of what in this dialogue Socrates calls the θεία μοῖρα , the "divine allotment". But you also realize that the mocking of the rhapsode is meant to cast doubt, above all, on the *poets*, whose works the rhapsodes declaim. And this is a serious and

difficult matter, to which I shall devote the second part of this lecture.

In Plato's Phaedrus we hear Socrates describe the greatest blessings

244Aff. as derived from these four kinds of madness: the prophetic, the cathartic, the poetic, and the erotic. In this connection the expression "divine allotment" is used again. The third kind of madness, the poetic, comes about when one is possessed by the Muses. I quote: "he who without the madness of the Muses comes to the doors of poetry, confident

245A that he will be a good poet by art (ἐκ τέχνης), meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the madmen". Does that mean that the Socrates of the Phaedrus is serious about "divine allotment"? The answer to this question depends on our understanding of "madness" (mania, in Greek: μανία) as this word is used in the Phaedrus. It is first mentioned in the description of the first kind of madness, the prophetic one. The men of old who invented names, we read in the text, thought that madness was neither shameful nor disgraceful. I quote: "otherwise they would not have con-

244C nected the very word "mania" with the noblest of arts, that which foretells the future, by calling it the manic art (μανική). No, they gave this name thinking that "mania", when it comes by divine allotment, is a noble thing, but nowadays people call it the mantic art (μαντική), tastelessly inserting a T into the word, 'mantic' instead of 'manic'". Socrates is dissembling: the so-called mantic art is, to begin with, not an art, not a τέχνη, and it is not the alleged insertion of the letter T into the word "manic" which is to be condemned; it is the soothsayers, the seers themselves, who - on the whole, I repeat, on the whole - are contemptible and ridiculous, as Plato often enough implies or even explicitly states in his dialogues. The "divine allotment" dispensed to these seers is an empty fraud. But there are exceptions, and

Socrates is one of them. He does prophesy sometimes. Right here, in the Phaedrus, about to begin his recantation, his palinode about divine madness to defend the lover, he says: "I am, yes, a seer (a μάντις), not a very good one, but - as poor writers might say - it is just sufficient for what I need." Socrates is again dissembling, of course: his prophetic power is clairvoyance; it can be attributed to "divine allotment," but it is not madness. In that same palinode of the Phaedrus, Socrates, summarizing what he said before about the erotic kind of madness, describes the lover as one who, when he sees the beautiful here, on earth, remembers the true beauty, feels his wings growing and would like to fly away, but cannot; like a bird he gazes upward and neglects the things below; and thus, Socrates says, this fourth kind of madness is imputed to the lover. That is to say: the state a true lover is in looks like madness because we are usually insufficiently aware of what loving means. Can this be said also of the state a good poet is in? You remember what Socrates says in the Ion: the ability to know about one definite kind of work has been assigned to each of the arts, and I mentioned that Socrates explicitly and rather strangely inserts that this assignment is made "by the god." Why does Socrates insert these words? The answer is: he inserts them to hint at the wide range of meanings in the expression "divine allotment." This expression might be used farcically as in the case of the rhapsode Ion, it might be applied with seriousness to the knowledge inherent in any τέχνη and with even deeper seriousness, although ambiguously, to the work of ἔρως, of love. The question we face is: in what sense is it applied to a work of poetry? In what sense is a good poet "mad"? Let me be bold, very bold, and try to answer that question by speaking about Homer's Iliad, thus running the risk of becoming a rhapsodic expounder.

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249D-E: αἰτίαν ἔχει ὡς μανικῶς διακείμενος

Disregarding the more or less superficial division into books and even allowing for all kinds of tampering with, and dislocations, of, the original song, there is no denying that the decisive events are crowded into the last third of the Iliad. In the first half events of great significance certainly do occur: the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles which leads to Achilles' withdrawing from the fight; the death and the wounding of many warriors; the Diomedean terror; the wounding of two gods; the encounter of Diomedes and Glaucus; the peaceful scenes in Troy; the unsuccessful embassy to Achilles; inconclusive duels among men and wonderfully treacherous actions on the part of the gods. All these events contribute in varying degrees to the unfolding of the plot. (For there is a plot in the Iliad.) In the main, however, the battle is swaying back and forth all the time until finally the Trojans reach the ships of the Achaeans. During all that time Achilles sits in his tent, sulking, and only occasionally watching the fight. The pivotal event, the death of Patroclus, which changes, which reverses everything, occurs very late in the poem. It is as if the poem took an exceedingly long breath to reach that point and afterwards rushed with breathtaking speed to its end. This is the more remarkable since the entire period of time the poem encompasses is one of 49 days and Patroclus' death occurs on the 26th day, that is, very nearly in the middle of that period.

There are two events - among many others - which I have not mentioned at all. Yet it is these two events that seem to be the two foci from which all light dispersed throughout the poem stems.

The first takes place when Thetis, Achilles' mother, goes up to Zeus to ask for his help on behalf of her son, reminding Zeus of the help he once received from her. She wants Zeus to turn the scales of

the war, to let the Trojans have the upper hand until finally, in the hour of the Achaeans' greatest peril, Achilles, *and only Achilles*, might be able to save *them* from certain defeat, lead them to victory, and thus regain *his* honor, which he allegedly lost through Agamemnon's action. It

I,511-512 is then said: "But Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, said nothing at all to her and sat in silence for a long while (δήν)". An awful silence! Thetis repeats her plea. At last, Zeus consents and nods, a sign of an irrevocable decision. Olympus shakes. Thetis departs, apparently satisfied that she has accomplished her mission. Has she?

XVIII, 165-229 The second event occurs after Patroclus' death, while the battle for Patroclus' body rages before the ships between Hector and the Aiantes and while Thetis is on her way to get new arms for her son from Hephaestus. Hera sends Iris to Achilles to urge him to intervene in the struggle for Patroclus' body. Since Achilles has no arms at this juncture, he is asked by Iris to do nothing but to show himself to the Trojans, to frighten them by his mere appearance. Achilles, "dear

203 to Zeus", obeys and does more than what Hera through Iris asked him to do. Pallas Athene, who is nearby, does her share: she casts the tasseled aegis around his shoulders and she sets a crown in the guise of a golden cloud about his head, and from it issues a blazing flame. Thus he appears - alone, separated from the other Achaeans - in the sight of the foe, a flaming torch. But not only does he appear, he shouts, three times, a terrible shout, clearly heard - and "from afar Pallas

217-18 Athene uttered her voice". Unspeakable confusion and terror seizes the Trojans. Patroclus' body is saved.

What kind of shout is this. Is it one of triumph? Or threat? Is it an ordinary war cry, raised to a very high pitch? It is certainly not

(V,859,863) like the bellowing of the wounded Ares. The verb used to describe that shout has a range of meanings. One of them is "crying out of grief." Why does Achilles shout now, though not urged to do so by Iris? Certainly, to frighten the Trojans, to make them desist from Patroclus' body. But can this shouting fail to express the unspeakable pain that fills his heart, the pain which had just brought his mother to him from the depth of the sea? Here indeed is a terrible sight to behold: a man raised to his highest glory by Pallas Athene, wearing the aegis, crowned by flames, truly god-like — and this same man crushed by grief, miserable in his awareness of having himself brought the immensity of this grief upon himself. The apotheosis of Achilles is the seal of his doom. And it is his voice, his brazen voice, his terrible shouting, which brings terror to the foe, that expresses his misery and his doom. Pallas Athene's voice seems but a weak echo of that of Achilles or is even completely drowned out by the latter's intensity.

ἰάχω (XVIII,228)

XVIII,222

But are not these two events, the long silence of Zeus and the shouting of Achilles, related?

Does not Achilles' shout sonorously echo Zeus' silence? Can we not guess now why Zeus remained silent for a long while? Surely, he had to take account of the susceptibilities of his wife, as any husband would — and in his marital relations Zeus is no exception — but is it only Hera whom he was silently thinking about? Must he not have been concerned about the whimsical nature of Achilles' plight and Thetis' plea? And, on the other hand, how could he have refused to satisfy Thetis in whose debt he was? Is it not right then and there that Zeus decided, in wisdom and sadness, irrevocably too, to accede

to Thetis' demand, to give honor and glory to Achilles, but to do that in a manner which neither Thetis nor Achilles expected? He decided that _Patroclus_ should be _slain_ and — what is more — that his beloved son, _Sarpedon_, should be slain by Patroclus to balance the loss Achilles will suffer by the loss he, Zeus, himself will suffer. There will be a moment when Zeus will hesitate about Sarpedon's death, but Hera will persuade him to let Sarpedon perish. While the tide of the battle is

VIII,476; XV,64-7 XI,604, 790-804

being reversed, Patroclus' approaching death is announced by Zeus _twice_, the steps which lead to it are carefully pointed out. Achilles will get what he wants, but at the price of the greatest loss — the loss of

XVIII, 79-82

his beloved friend, of his _other self_. In the hour of his triumph he will be the most miserable of men. The coincidence of triumph and misery characterizes a situation as _tragic_, in the strict sense of this much abused word. Achilles grasps Zeus' intent. He says himself:

XVIII,328

"Not all the thoughts of men does Zeus fulfill"; as Homer had said before, commenting on Achilles' prayer before the slaying of Patroclus:

XVI,250

"One thing the father granted him, the other he denied." Zeus denied him the safe return of Patroclus while granting him glory. Achilles' suffering at the moment of his triumph is Achilles' own. It cannot be matched by anything on Olympus. It is as much the prerogative of a mortal as it is the attribute of a hero. This is one of the reasons — perhaps _the_ reason — why we are deeply moved while reading, or listening to, the _Iliad_. And this means that we are, at the same time, pleased and pained beyond words.

We were asking in what sense is the good poet "mad," as Plato makes Socrates claim in the _Phaedrus_. Was Homer "mad" when he indited the _Iliad_? Does not the highly articulated sequence of events in the _Iliad_ depend on the poet's familiarity with human frailty and human

strength and on his masterly skill in presenting them, which skill is but an expression of the knowledge of the rules of art, of the poetic τέχνη, he possesses? But should not, on the other hand, the uniqueness of what is presented to us be understood as something found or spontaneously produced by the poet, beyond anything he might otherwise know, and, therefore, as the result indeed of a peculiar "madness"? It is difficult to deny, I think, that both, sane sobriety and mad exuberance, mark the work of the good poet. This duality, merging into oneness, is hard to grasp. It makes Socrates speak of "divine allotment" in a serious and yet again ambiguous way. And what I said applies, of course, not only to the Iliad, but to all kinds of poetic works. We do understand that without the knowledge inherent in the poetic τέχνη, without serious thought, the poetic "madness" becomes ridiculous, be the madman a rhapsode like Ion or a man who claims, who wants to be a poet, not knowing what poetry requires. Hence the never ceasing flow of so-called poetry and the pretentious, "rhapsodic" way of speaking about "art", prevailing at almost all times and especially today.

It might be useful to remind ourselves at this point of the way Dante, the poet, spoke about poetry. In his Latin treatise De vulgari eloquentia (in English: On vernacular Eloquence) Dante asserts that true poetry must rest on these three pillars: alertness of mind (strenuitas ingenii), steadfastness in the practice of the art (assiduitas artis) and familiarity with the sciences (habitus scientiarum). Only poetry thus endowed and equipped can serve as nourishment to the human soul. And I quote: "Let therefore those who, innocent of art and knowledge, and trusting to genius alone, rush forward upon the highest subjects, which must be sung in the highest style, be confounded in their folly and let them refrain from such presumption".

There is another aspect of poetry, all-important to Plato, I have not touched on so far. The deeply serious background of the _Ion_ cannot be sufficiently gauged, if we do not consider the role epic and tragic poetry plays in the education and nurture of the young. Homer's and Hesiod's verses, well-known and quoted again and again, must have had a deep impact on the _best_ of the young, not only in Plato's time. Plato's concern is the nature of this impact and its relation to our understanding of what is truly noble and unmistakably true. That's why Plato lets Socrates censure the poets wittingly and harshly, especially in the second, third, and tenth book of the _Republic_. What is appropriate to the gods in their intercourse with each other and with men, what should be praised and blamed in the actions of men, how the narration of events and the reporting of speeches ought to be done - all this becomes part and parcel of the criticism of poetic lore.-No less important to Plato is the "mixture" of pleasure and pain which we experience in coping with tragic poetry. I invite you to consider what this "mixture" implies. Plato's _Philebus_ might be of some help.