



Art and Inspiration in Plato's *Ion*

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Plato's *Ion* is of interest because it formulates a unique version of the critique of poetry under the guise of a critique of the rhapsode's art. The dialogue gives special attention to an epistemological critique of poetry, but unlike the argument of *Republic X*, no special metaphysical commitments are invoked in support of it. Instead, the argument rests solely on the question of whether poetry is structured like a *technê*,¹ in terms of what and how it knows. The *Ion* also features an elaborate discussion of the nature of poetic inspiration expressed in images of magnets and bees, which would become a staple of the subsequent poetic tradition. As in the *Phaedrus*, inspiration is presented here as a sort of madness, as a case of possession by the gods, and the ability that comes from it is characterized as divine dispensation [*theia moira*]. The absence of any reference to a theory of ideas suggests that the *Ion* is an early composition, having more in common with the *Euthyphro*, for example, than the *Republic*. But no important conclusion in this essay depends on holding any particular opinion as to the date of its composition. Whether it is early or late, we can detect the seriousness of Plato's inquiry even through the comic character of the conversation he depicts for us. Poetry is indeed to be criticized—it does not know what *we* think it knows. But the case is more complicated than that, since Plato also undermines the very terms of Socrates' argument in such a way as to point to the poet's role in shaping and giving meaning to political life. Thus while it may appear that Socrates offers a sharp distinction between inspiration and *technê* as the basis of an epistemological standard against which poetry must fall short, the examples he invokes only show how inseparable these two ideas

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actually are. When Ion admits to being inspired, what he reveals is the *technical* side of his craft, and when Socrates tries to explain why *technai* know what they do, he presents this as a gift of the gods. The upshot of this is that far from banishing the poets from the city, the paradoxes inherent in Socrates' argument in this dialogue reveal the decisive role poetry must play in political life. But this only becomes clear to the extent that, as readers, we take those paradoxes as so many provocations and challenges issued to us by Plato and respond accordingly.²

The *Ion* has not received much attention in the scholarly literature, but what there is follows the pattern of responses to the critiques of poetry found elsewhere in the Platonic corpus. That is, Plato's view of poetry seems not to find a sympathetic modern audience, and scholarly reaction reflects this by seeking in one way or another to deflect the force of it. Common strategies include: 1) identifying a hidden and ironic poeticism on Plato's part, or 2) locating the critique in the context of a political program or of a set of specifiable metaphysical commitments that can themselves be critiqued;³ or finally 3) interpreting the critique as the assertion of an epistemological standard for literary criticism.⁴ There is some truth that must be recognized in each of these responses. But they are also distorted by a sort of hermeneutic extremism in which the specific terms of the argument Socrates actually presents go unexamined. Terms like *technê* or inspiration are hardly seamless semantic unities simply available for manipulation according to logical rules. The important work of the dialogue (and of its reader) is precisely to sort out what these terms mean and how they relate to each other. In this essay, I hope to focus attention on the terms of the argument to see what Plato thinks of them, as well as what he thinks Socrates' critique of poetry accomplishes.

The ostensible goal of Socrates' argument in the *Ion* is to show that in every case the person in possession of a *technê* will be able to explain poetry better than the rhapsode. Socrates also seems to imply that by comparison to the person with a *technê*, the poet himself does not know the truth of what he speaks about. If he speaks well, it will be because the gods have inspired him, not because of his own knowledge. But one question that is not generally asked concerns *how* Socrates gets Ion to concede these points

so apparently contrary to his personal interest. What exactly does Socrates mean by *technê*? In what sense is a *technê* organized according to some sort of knowledge? And how can it be distinguished from the skills of the poet or the rhapsode? If we consider the examples of *technai* Socrates uses to persuade Ion—prophecy, arithmetic, charioteering, fishing, navigation, generalship, etc.—we can see that this is no simple category. It should be immediately apparent that there is no single epistemic structure common to the so-called *technê* of prophecy and that of navigation, or to arithmetic and fishing. If what distinguishes any *technê* from rhapsody or poetry is knowledge, we would do well to ask *how* a person with a *technê* knows. If no common epistemic thread can be found, we will be hard pressed to exclude rhapsody and poetry from the category of *technai*.⁵ I think that a sober reading of the argument must lead us to conclude that Socrates has not succeeded in making his case by this standard. Why then does Plato depict Socrates making this argument and Ion persuaded by it for us?

Socrates' argument is puzzling in another sense as well. The inquiry Socrates initiates concerns Ion's ability as an interpreter. He assiduously keeps Ion's other skill as a *performer* of the poet's words, a demonstration of which is always on offer, 'offstage'. What is enviable about being a rhapsode, Socrates says, is that one is obliged to learn the thought [*dianoia*] of the poet and not just his words: "For the rhapsode must become an interpreter [*hermêneus*] of the poet's thought for the audience" (530c). Yet we can hardly help but notice that Socrates subtly shifts the question away from the skill of interpreting the poet's thought and toward the task of judging the accuracy of his words as descriptive of specific facts. In relation to the latter task, it is clearly the case that an expert on a given topic will be a better judge, or even more, that the rhapsode or poet will only be able to judge these things to the extent that they also have this other expertise. Their abilities as poets or rhapsodes will be of no use. But what is not apparent is how this simple truth bears any relevance to the inquiry into the rhapsode's (or the poet's) knowledge. The poet and the rhapsode do not merely report facts in any ordinary sense of the word. Some sort of accuracy may be necessary to poetry, but this is hardly the goal of the poet's work.⁶ By the same token, the rhapsode's interpretation

of the poet's thought cannot be restricted to fact checking without some violence. In this regard, I think we can see that the peculiar examples of *technai* Socrates invokes play an important role in persuading Ion to overlook this discrepancy.

We can see the subtlety of Socrates' technique in the first set of comparisons. Ion has asserted that he is only skilled at interpreting Homer, but not the other poets. Socrates wants to use the singular narrowness of Ion's interest in Homer to highlight the general applicability of the knowledge that is to be associated with *technê*. The starting point for Socrates is to suggest someone who Ion must concede would be better able than he is to interpret relevant passages in Homer and Hesiod. When Socrates asks who "would be better at explaining what these two poets say ... about prophecy [*mantikê*] ... ?" (531b), Ion readily concedes that a seer [*mantis*] would be better than he. Now, it seems unlikely that Ion thinks a seer would explain better what we might call the literary differences between Homer and Hesiod. If the seer has any expertise, its only relevance can be in judging the *accuracy* of the poet's words. This would obviously be true of any *technê*: technical expertise is only relevant to judging the *accuracy* of a poet's account. It can have little to say about the meaning of the poet's thought, or the literary quality of its formal presentation. But even more striking, however, it seems clear enough that *mantikê* is no ordinary skill, perhaps not even a *technê* at all! It hardly seems to embody the hallmarks we associate with crafts or skills generally and particularly not the one we are primarily interested in here, namely knowledge. The *mantis* can hardly be said to *know* what he is talking about, even as he is credited with somehow seeing the future. To the extent that *mantikê* depends upon or culminates in a prophetic vision that emerges in an ecstatic experience, it seems much more like the case of inspiration that Socrates will describe later as an alternative to *technê*.

And yet it seems likely that when Ion concedes that the seer can explain the poets better than he can, he is thinking of the *mantis* as someone who has access to a distinctive sort of experience he himself lacks. In the face of the seer's familiarity with the shape of an ecstatic experience, the distinction between interpreting the thoughts of the poet and judging the



accuracy of his words might well seem to disappear. Moreover, the seer is perhaps the premier example of an interpreter, insofar as he experiences a hidden truth in things that the rest of us cannot see. He sees present events as portents of the future, a gift of the gods that allows him to see the world as they do, if only briefly. A rhapsode might well wonder whether there is something hidden in the seer's experience that must exceed the limits of whatever interpretive skills he may have, and thereby efface the difference between judging the accuracy of the poet's words and interpreting his thought. He would be mistaken in thinking so, though it would perhaps be a natural mistake. But even if *mantikê* is hardly a *technê* in any ordinary sense of the word, and even if interpretation has been reduced to judging the accuracy of the poet's words, Socrates has induced Ion to admit that someone other than a rhapsode is able to interpret Homer.

The subsequent comparisons introduce the arts of arithmetic and medicine to show that the same person will be able to distinguish both the good and the bad speakers on any subject, namely the person who has the relevant *technê*. These cases are less troublesome instances of *technai*: they appear to have the hallmarks of a *technê*, namely a traditional set of techniques that can be handed down, and a practitioner who can be said to *know* what he works on. We might quibble about arithmetic that it has no ordinary work, that it depends upon axioms whose truth cannot be examined by arithmetic, and that it is not simply the special province of an expert—most adults already possess arithmetic to some degree. But Ion can overlook these quibbles without sacrificing his own personal right to claim the ability to make judgments about number in Homer—even if he would no longer be making these judgments *as a rhapsode*. The case of the doctor is perhaps more telling, as it forces him to relinquish any claim to authority in judging the poet's words. Though even in this case, we might wonder what and how the doctor knows. He seems to know what treatments are usually effective, but he may not know why they are effective, or what underlying process of the disease they respond to. Thus, while arithmetic and medicine are easily recognizable examples of *technai*, it is clear enough that they do not know what they know in the same way. There is no simple, uniform epistemic structure common to



the *technai* Socrates chooses as examples.

Socrates hopes to draw a general conclusion from these three cases, namely "that the same person will always know, when several people speak about the same subject, who speaks well and who speaks badly" (531e). We can clearly see that Ion has been snookered into accepting this conclusion, since Socrates has not shown the relevance of other *technai* to the task of interpreting the poet's thoughts, nor has he provided any reason to think that all arts behave similarly enough with regard to how and what they know to support such a general claim about them. Socrates' use of the seer is virtually an invitation from Plato to consider the possibility that they do not. With regard to the first problem, it is worth noting that Socrates has introduced the notion of speaking well or badly [*eu legein kai kakôs*] as if to blur the difference between the poet's thought and the accuracy of his words. But we ought to ask ourselves whether even this narrow conclusion is true. Is it the case that the same person will always know who speaks well or badly? Is there no possibility of an overlap among *technai*? Are there not perhaps also gaps where no *technê* is available to make this judgment?⁷ As a side note, however we choose to answer these questions, we can hardly avoid noticing that this work of judging who speaks well or badly describes an activity (I hesitate to call it a *technê* just yet) very close to Socrates' own heart, namely dialectic itself. Here we see one reason why this conversation is with a rhapsode rather than a poet—it allows dialectic to come into view.

If the man with a *technê* always knows both who speaks well and who speaks badly on any given subject, and if all the poets speak on more or less the same subjects, then the fact that Ion has nothing to say about the other poets can only mean one thing: "it is clear to anyone that [Ion is] unable to speak about Homer with *technê* and knowledge [*epistêmê*]" (532c).⁸ This is a straightforward implication of what has already been agreed to. But Socrates immediately expands the generality of this conclusion to include all *technai* by asserting that "the principle of inquiry is the same in all *technai*" (532d). The gist of it is that experience shows us that experts can always judge all the practitioners of a given *technê*, and can always judge both what they do well and badly. The list



of examples—painting, sculpture, flute playing, kithara-playing, singing and finally rhapsody—seems straightforward enough, though it also contains a good bit of wit at Ion's expense. For example, Ion is asked if he has ever met anyone who can explain the works of legendary figures like Daedalus, or Epeius,⁹ but not those of other sculptors. Similarly, has he met anyone who can explain the work of Olympos,¹⁰ or Orpheus, or Phemius,¹¹ but not that of Ion!

Apart from the humor in these exchanges, we should also be struck by the peculiar question with which Socrates introduces this argument: "the art of poetry is in some way a whole, isn't it?" (532c). Ion answers meekly: "Yes." But what can this question mean? It's clear enough that Socrates hopes an affirmative answer will ground his claim that the same person can always judge all practitioners of an art. This claim certainly seems to imply that every art is somehow "a whole." But how can it be true? Was poetry a whole before the historical emergence of tragedy? Or of New Comedy? Was geometry a whole before the discovery of incommensurable magnitudes? Was arithmetic a whole before the development of algebra? If so, were these developments somehow already latent in them? It is difficult to know how to answer these questions, or even what they signify. Oddly enough, for the purposes of Socrates' argument, it makes no difference how we choose to answer. Whether we say that arts are not wholes, or that they are, but only in the sense of a latent, eidetic wholeness, the consequence is the same, namely that nobody can possess any *technê* as a whole. Here we see that Ion meekly goes along with Socrates just where we would have to disagree.

We are thus left with the peculiar fact that Ion speaks without *technê* and yet "is the best among men at discussing Homer ... and everyone says that [he] speaks well, though concerning the other poets he does not" (533c). Socrates' explanation of this fact is the centerpiece of the entire dialogue and deserves careful attention. It consists of two lengthy speeches by Socrates and a couple of exchanges with Ion in which what looks like a theory of inspiration is worked out. Socrates tells Ion that he speaks well about Homer not because of any *technê* he might possess, but because of a divine power [*theia de dunamis*] [533d]. This power is like that



of the magnet, which both attracts iron rings and empowers them to attract other rings. The muse is a sort of magnet, and Homer and Ion have been magnetized and magnetize others. The point is that the poets speak “not from *technê*, but because they are inspired and possessed” (533e). Socrates speaks quite beautifully in the first speech, perhaps even poetically, and this has tempted many readers to hear in this passage a latent poeticism on Plato's part. Ion himself responds to it as if to a poem, saying “Somehow you touch my soul with your words, Socrates, and the good poets do seem to me to interpret for us the words of the gods by divine dispensation [*theia moira*]” (535a). That Ion reacts in this way should give us some pause before taking Socrates' poetic speech at face value, and especially before presuming to find in it a wink and a nod toward poetry.¹²

After a brief interlude in which he probes Ion's personal experience as a rhapsode for confirmation of the notion that he is somehow out of his senses when he speaks, Socrates reiterates the central points of the first speech. But this time he speaks much more bluntly, much less *poetically*. He also expands the image of the magnet to include all sorts of ancillary performers. And this time Ion responds rather differently: “You speak well, Socrates, but I will be surprised if you can speak well enough to persuade me that I am possessed and mad when I praise Homer” (536d). Ion is no longer carried away by the power of Socrates' imagery. Now he sees the consequence for him of Socrates' extravagant ideas about inspiration. If Ion is merely inspired, his distinction as the best rhapsode evaporates. He will be unable to distinguish himself not only from the other rhapsodes, but also from that crowd of ancillary performers. In the first speech, the florid imagery invited him to compare himself to the poets, while the second speech relegates him to a much more derivative position. The precariousness and absurdity of his position is brought out in the interlude, in which Socrates induces him to agree that he is both moved and unmoved by the emotional energy of the poetry he performs. His eyes fill with tears, his hair stands on end, his heart flutters, depending on the passage. But at the same time, he carefully scans the audience for the same reactions: “I have to pay careful attention to them, for if I make them cry, I laugh for the money I make, but if they laugh, I myself cry for

the money lost" (535e). The point is not that Ion is a fraud. The duality he expresses is in the very nature of his performance.¹³ But it is clear enough that however inspiration organizes his performance, it can hardly serve to ground his interpretive claims in some sort of knowledge.

To make this last point a little clearer we can distinguish between Ion's claim to be an interpreter of poetry and his claim to be a performer. It is clear from his own account that *as a performer* he is anything but "possessed and mad." He seems instead to be the very image of self-possession; able to control his own visceral reactions to the material he performs so as to create a particular effect in his audience. As a performer he displays at least some of the hallmarks of *technê*, at least if we still think we can recognize a *technê*. *As an interpreter* of poetry the situation seems to be similar. He is hardly likely to be inspired. And yet he seems equally unlikely to have the sort of theoretical self-possession that could provide an independent foundation for his insights. Nothing we have heard from him in this dialogue suggests any other conclusion about him. It is also clear that we have in the case of the rhapsode two rather distinct functions each one of which implies distinctive skills and abilities, but which also imply some overlap between them. The performer cannot help but work out an interpretation of some sort to guide him through his performance, just as the interpreter imagines a performance in which the tonality and register of the speeches are concretely determined. If rhapsody were a *technê*, it could not be a whole to the extent that it is not a simple unity.

This interlude also has interesting consequences for Socrates' own theory of inspiration. He has himself moved Ion by his words in the first speech, which suggests that even Socrates in one of his more poetic moments can function as the poet or muse his own theory imagines. But the rest of the passage shows that Ion was hardly out of his mind. That he rejects the same idea when it is presented in less flattering terms in the second speech suggests that he never loses sight of the implications of either speech for his own reputation. Far from an ecstatic experience, this passage is much more an example of self-possession. To the extent that Socrates seeks confirmation for his theory of inspiration in the interlude by probing Ion's experience as a rhapsode, we would have to say that he



does not find it either in that experience or in Ion's opposite reaction to the two speeches. This is hardly a refutation of the theory, but it is also clear that neither is Plato giving it a ringing endorsement. We might well see in this passage not the elaboration of a theory, but an object lesson in the way theoretical opinions function in human discourse. The theory is 'true': the muse does indeed work through Socrates' speech to move Ion. But in its presentation the theory undermines itself: Ion is not moved in any way contrary to his astute sense of his own self-interest.¹⁴ The self-canceling quality of Plato's presentation of this theory of inspiration is underlined by being uttered by the very person who purports to speak only the simple (unmusical?) truth. The muse is at work here precisely in not being at work.

This seems to me to represent the climax of the dialogue, the moment in which all of its intellectual energies come to a head. And in a way that is characteristic of the Platonic dialogues, the climax takes the form of a paradox. The question immediately confronts us as readers: where can we go from here? The rest of the dialogue offers no resolution of this impasse. Ion perversely reiterates his by now discredited position that he speaks best, and is thereby knowledgeable, about all things in Homer. Socrates then reminds him of the bearing of his previous admissions concerning the superiority of the person with a *technê*. Ion is finally reduced to the claim that at least he knows best what a general should say; even that the general's art and the rhapsode's are the same. My own answer to our question would be that this impasse is itself an expression of the conflict between poetry and philosophy, that the conflict is irresolvable and determinative of both parties. But Plato seems to me to point us to a richer answer precisely in this final section of the dialogue. I say this in part because even though the intellectual energy of the dialogue seems to reach a peak in the account of inspiration, the comic energy of the dialogue reaches a peak only afterwards.¹⁵ We catch a glimpse of this in the various passages from Homer Socrates mockingly misquotes. Ion, for his part, responds by stubbornly refusing to give in to Socrates' argument. If we look closely at this section of the dialogue, we may begin to see how Plato understands the significance of this conflict.



Three things stand out in this final section of the dialogue. First, even though Socrates largely reiterates the basic terms of his earlier argument that the person with the relevant *technê* will always know best who speaks well or badly about a given subject, he highlights all of our earlier concerns about *technê* as a category when he says: "And to each of the arts hasn't it been apportioned by god to be able to know a particular business?" (537c). The epistemic correlation of each *technê* and the object of its work [*ergon*] is central to his argument. And yet here Socrates presents it as the result of a divine dispensation—the arts are organized as they are by a sort of *theia moira*. Second, Socrates offers two passages from Homer concerning *mantikê* that are ostensibly chosen to show the seer's interpretive privilege. But it is clear on examining them that no such privilege can exist. In the first passage, Homer tells of the portentous vision Theoclymenus announces to the suitors of their imminent doom. He is startled to see them transfigured as dead souls shrouded in an evil mist. In the second passage, an eagle flies by the Trojan host on the left carrying a writhing snake in its claws. The snake strikes the bird and is dropped in the middle of the army. In the first case, Homer describes an ecstatic experience, the meaning of which is apparent to the reader, but whose import the suitors themselves cannot appreciate. In the second case, the meaning of the omen is clear to all who see it except Hector, namely that the Trojans will not prevail, and will not escape from this battle unbloodied. It seems unlikely that a seer could tell us anything important about the accuracy of these passages. And about the significance of them, especially the way in which the truth of one's situation can suddenly present itself to a man and remain incomprehensible to him, the seer can have no privileged insight. This is a human insight available to any one of us, though the poet brings it to our attention in especially vivid and compelling terms.

The third thing that stands out in this final section is Ion's assertion that if he knows nothing else in Homer, at least "he will know what is appropriate for a general exhorting his men to say" (540d). Socrates artfully induces Ion to adopt the more extreme position that there is no difference between the art of the rhapsode and that of the general. This extravagant claim allows him playfully to accuse Ion of being as deceptive



as Proteus, shifting from one *technê* to another “until finally you escape me in the guise of a general” (541e). Thus *Ion* is left to choose between the accusation of being a deceitful possessor of some as yet undisclosed art, or of being an artless divine. At first glance, *Ion*'s claim that as the best rhapsode he is also the best general seems absurd, and Socrates' *ad hominem* argument—why hasn't he been chosen to be a general by any of the Greeks?—seems sufficiently persuasive. But his initial statement—that he would know how a general ought to exhort his men, and that he learned this from Homer—is not so farfetched, and Socrates' reply does not really address it.¹⁶ It is clear enough that there is much about strategy that *Ion* could not learn from Homer, or from any poet for that matter. Only actual military experience and training can teach these things. But as for giving a stirring speech to men about to enter battle, it is not so clear how one should learn this. Even more important, it is clear enough that the man trained in strategy may well have no expertise to bring to bear on the task of judging whether Homer speaks well about how a general should speak to his men. Generalship thus occupies a double role in the argument of the *Ion*—it is clearly a *technê* whose expertise *Ion* cannot simply have, and on the subject of strategy it may well have something more to say about whether Homer has spoken well or badly than *Ion* does. But at the same time, on the subject of exhortation, it is by no means necessary that *Ion* cannot share this expertise, or that he cannot have this expertise as a rhapsode. We might say that in the *technê* of the general, Socrates' claims about the hermeneutic superiority of *technê* in general is both confirmed and undermined.

It is also worth noting that the general's relationship to his men and the dangers they face in battle is not a simple one. In exhorting them to courage in battle he speaks to them as someone who has a dual role. He speaks as a soldier and gives voice to the fears they experience in order to help them overcome them. But he does not feel the same fears, nor does he face precisely the same dangers. It is, of course, possible for a general to fight alongside his men, and he may do so precisely to build their morale. This shows that the distinction is a fluid one. Nevertheless, there is a real difference here. When he exhorts his men, he represents





their confidence to them in his own person, much as Ion represents to his audience the reaction he wants them to have in his own person. If the similarity ended here, however, we would only have a cautionary tale on the dangers of poetic representation: namely that it can usurp even the most indispensable forms of political authority without the appropriate knowledge. Our inability to provide a genuine foundation for the *technical* argument Socrates wants to make about the shortcomings of rhapsodes and poets would then be alarming indeed. This may well be one reason for the sharpness and persistence of Plato's critique of poetry. He sees the political danger posed by the poet's unrestricted authority, but sees no way to curtail it on purely rational grounds. But there is also another side to Plato's thinking about poetry, and this may be the more important result of the dialogue. What I mean is that we can also see in the duality of the general's *technê* a shortcoming that may well require the need of poetic supplementation. The general's exhortation may be even more important than his strategic ability, since it is in exhorting his men to find their own courage in his confidence that he helps them become complete, well-rounded citizens of the city they fight for. The point isn't merely that generals may need to learn something from poets, but that the city itself depends on the poet to craft the basis of its unity in the speeches it uses to bring the citizens to a shared sense of their duties and responsibilities. This, it seems to me, is an under-appreciated aspect of the vision of poetry that Plato entertains in the *Ion*, the one that he has Socrates provoke us to see. Its relevance to the philosophic inquiry undertaken in the *Republic* is clear enough. What is not so clear is what sort of turn Plato's own shift from inspiration, or *theia moira*, towards *mimêsis* as the primary image of poetic activity represents in terms of the two sides of his thinking about poetry. But that is a question for another paper.

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Notes

- 1 The Greek word *technê* has a broader range of meanings than art, or craft, or skill. In addition to covering both what we would call fine arts and crafts, it also covers the range of skills associated with the various trades and professions, and even some elements of what we would call science. Unlike some uses of the English word art, *technê* usually implies some sort of knowledge, though typically the knowledge is less theoretical than practical, rather like what is called 'know-how.'
- 2 Kathleen Freeman provides an interesting model for this sort of reading (Freeman: 1940, 140-142, 146-148).
- 3 Paul Woodruff makes the best case for this approach (Woodruff, 1982: 138 ff.). Rosamund Sprague also makes a case for this sort of reading (Sprague, 1973: xiv-xv, 1).
- 4 Craig LaDrière argues that in this dialogue, Plato fails to see the true significance of a genuine literary critical technique, a failure he sees as being consistent with "the more extended dissertations of the *Republic*, and with the same great oversight" (Ladriere, 1951: 33). Interestingly, LaDrière also imagines contrasting this oversight with the possibility of a corrective in Aristotle's *Poetics*.
- 5 There is evidence that prior to the 5th century the poets understood themselves as possessors of some sort of knowledge, even as they also paid homage to the muses. Moreover, terms in general usage, like *mousikê* and *poietikê*, imply that poetry was commonly understood to be a sort of *technê*. But there is also some evidence that during the 5th century poets began to be seen as

- more dependent upon the muses as sources both of insight and ability. On the evolution of these distinctions see Havelock's landmark study (1967: 156 ff.), also Murray (1981: 89-92, 94-100). This suggests that the terms of the debate formulated here by Socrates already had some currency. See also Woodruff on the significance of Plato's contrast of inspiration and *technê* (Woodruff, 1982: 144-148).
- 6 As Freeman points out, "the recital of fishing technicalities in the language of the average fisherman would empty the theatre in five minutes" (Freeman, 1940: 141).
 - 7 Sprague also observes the extreme distinctness, or separateness, that Socrates imports into his conception of *technê*, though she comes to a different conclusion about its significance (Sprague, 1973: 11).
 - 8 This is the first time Socrates uses the term *epistêmê*, which, in addition to signifying knowledge in the sense of technical 'know-how', also carries the connotation of a more scientific mode of knowing.
 - 9 Epeius designed the wooden horse at Troy (Od. viii, 493).
 - 10 Olympos is a mythical figure sometimes credited with inventing music.
 - 11 Phemius sings for the suitors in Odysseus' house (Od. i, 154; xxii, 330).
 - 12 I am indebted for much of my sense of the irony of Socrates' two long speeches on inspiration to Jacob Klein, who points out the peculiarity of Socrates' role as inspiring muse to Ion (Klein, 1985: 351-353).
 - 13 For a useful discussion of this seemingly contradictory feature of performance, see Dorter (1973: 71-73), also Henning (1964: 246-247).
 - 14 I am indebted to John White for his discussion of self-cancellation in Plato's thinking about poetry in Book X of the *Republic* (White, 2007: 324ff, 338, 342-346).
 - 15 I am thinking here not merely of the fact that there are still some humorous elements in the last section of the dialogue, but also of the way in which the trajectory of the conversation follows a recognizably comic pattern. Ion's role as an *alazôn*, or blocking character, has not yet been fully expressed, nor has his conflict and reconciliation with Socrates (the *eirôn*) run its course. See Jerrald Ranta for an interesting, preliminary discussion of comic motifs in the *Ion*. He works out some of the important generic details of comedy as they present themselves in the dialogue, especially the significance of Socrates' irony as a mode of the comic *eirôn* (Ranta, 1967: 220-222). Any substantial study of this dialogue ought to account for the significance of the generic elements of comedy that organize it.
 - 16 John D. Moore argues for the plausibility of Ion's claim, at least to a 5th century Athenian audience, on historical grounds (Moore, 1973: 49ff).