

Introduction

Plato's famous, and indeed infamous, criticism of Homer constitutes the climax of a long series of attacks by those we call philosophers on the first and greatest Greek poet Homer, for instance the attacks of Xenophanes and of Heraclitus. It triggers in turn an even longer series of responses attempting either to justify further "the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (Pl. *Resp.* 607b–c), or, in most cases, to reconcile the two great authors. The so-called Plato-Homer problem is in broad outline twofold, with numberless ramifications and sub-issues. Why does Plato repeatedly attack and even exile the greatest cultural authority of the Greek world? And why does he do so while quoting Homer abundantly (more often than any other poet or prose writer) and even incorporating many features of Homeric poetry in his artistically written dialogues?

This volume concentrates on the various kinds of response to the Plato-Homer controversy on the part of Platonically minded writers, while also including a few other kinds of reaction from just outside that circle. Strategies of reconciliation are many, including both allegorical and non-allegorical approaches, involving myth, *mimesis*, inspiration, wisdom, theology, etc. The volume presents original treatments of major figures, such as Porphyry and Proclus, as well lesser-known or researched authors or texts in this context (e.g. Platonic *Dubia* and *Spuria*, etc.), and non-Platonists (Xenophon, Aristotle, scholiasts, etc.) who can serve as enlightening comparative figures.

The recent literature on the Homer-Plato question in Antiquity mostly concentrates on single authors, and very few if any deal with its reception in the Platonic tradition as a whole. This publication is timely as it builds on and goes beyond significant articles and book chapters, such as in Richard Hunter's *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature: The Silent Stream* (2012) and *The Measure of Homer: The Ancient Reception of the Iliad and the Odyssey* (2018), and Christina-Panagiota Manolea's *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Homer from the Hellenistic Age to Late Antiquity* (2022).

The rest of the introduction briefly summarizes each paper in a somewhat different order from the broadly chronological one followed in the volume, dividing them into three groups: 1. Plato's criticism (in part) criticized (3 papers), 2. Compa-

Note: This volume is based, with some additions, on the panel "The Plato-Homer Question in Antiquity: Philosophers and Scholars" held in Athens (online) at the 2021 conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, and co-organised by Christina-Panagiota Manolea and François Renaud, who were kindly joined by Harold Tarrant in the preparation of the volume. Dylan Vaughan has provided valuable help in the revision of the last version of the manuscript.

rative reception (6 papers) and 3. Modes of discourse, allegorical and not (7 papers).

1 Plato's Criticism (in part) Criticized

Michele Corradi in his paper “Ὅσιον προτιμᾶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν: A Hidden Dialogue between Aristotle and Plato on Homer” explores some of Aristotle's allusive responses to his teacher in the *Poetics*, taking up Plato's invitation to Homer's supporters to demonstrate poetry is not only pleasant but also useful (607d–e). Using the term *mimesis* in Chapter 24 with the same meaning Plato gives to it in *Republic* Book 3 (393a–394a), Aristotle defends Homer as the artist *par excellence*, because he knows how to give his characters prominence through direct speech. Aristotle secularizes and defends the notion of inspiration in terms of the poet's nature and human beings' natural disposition to imitate. In considering Homer the exceptional poet capable of composing both tragedy and comedy, Aristotle implicitly follows Socrates' lead in the *Symposium* (223d3–6), where the skilful poet is said to be able to compose in both genres, thus apparently establishing a link between Homer and Plato, who unites tragedy and comedy in his dialogues by following Homer's example.

François Renaud in “The Voice of Homer and That of His Characters: The Criticism of μίμησις (*Resp.* 393d–394e) and Its Varied Reception” examines Socrates' theory of poetic discourses, according to which simple narration is superior to mimetic style, and various reactions to it. First, a scholium defends Socrates' apparent lack of distinction between poet and characters, or the monophonic character of Homeric poetry, underscoring Homer's talents in exhibiting his powers of expression through his characters. Second, Porphyry and Plutarch defend the distinction between poet and characters as a confirmation of, and complement to, Plato's view: Porphyry explains apparent contradictions in Homer by referring to the character who speaks; Plutarch claims Homer judges and corrects the words and behaviour of his characters (see *De Sanctis*' paper). Finally, two grammarians, Aristarchus and Athenaeus, defend the distinction between Homer and his characters in implicit and open opposition to Plato respectively.

In “Poetic Enthusiasm: The (Mis)Fortune of a Platonic Image” Carlotta Capucino analyses and criticizes Plato's subversion of the traditional meaning of poetic inspiration in separating it from knowledge, and the long-lived tradition of misunderstandings following this separation. Plato's novelty, notably in the *Ion*, consists in making the poet's enthusiasm a passive state, as opposed to its source, the Muse's knowledge. While poetic enthusiasm would be irrational and passive, coming from without, philosophic inspiration would be intellectually active and from

within. Plato sees a continuum uniting poet, rhapsode, rhetorician and philosopher, but regards the philosopher's inspiration alone as having cognitive value. Cicero will later defend the traditional conception of the poetic inspiration as divine, but follow Plato in linking poetry with rhetoric, verse recitation with speech delivery. Likewise, Horace will combine human skill and divine inspiration, but considers the divine gift as natural talent and inspiration mere metaphor. Surprisingly, both seem to attribute to Plato himself the fortune of the traditional image of the inspired and wise poet. Over the centuries, inspired poetry will be highly praised, but severed from knowledge, and linked to the imagination instead of reason, as is typically found in the Romantic conception.

2 Comparative Reception

Francesca Pentassuglio's "Homer at the Banquet: Xenophon's *Symposium* and Plutarch's *Symposiaka*" offers a complex intertextual reading of Homer in the social context of the symposium as portrayed in Xenophon's eponymous work and Plutarch's *Table Talks*. Xenophon criticizes Homer's alleged encyclopaedic knowledge and its presumed usefulness, while reinterpreting and adapting Homeric references in various argumentative contexts. Plutarch refers to Homer and Xenophon separately, since he quotes Homer regarding questions, while Xenophon does so about jokes. Plutarch occasionally adopts toward Homeric poetry a critical posture influenced by Plato, but mostly uses it as literary canon and as source of moral *exempla* (see De Sanctis' paper). In Xenophon's *Symposium* Homeric poetry is not criticized *per se*, but as the object of memorization of an alleged encyclopaedic knowledge, while he draws freely upon it on such subjects as on *eros*. Unlike Xenophon's *Symposium*, Plutarch in *Table Talks* presents Homer's encyclopaedism in exclusively positive terms, quoting Homer as an authority on historical, scientific, metaphysical, psychological, and ethico-political matters.

Marta Antola in "The Way of Acting as Homer's Odysseus: A Response to the Plato-Homer Question from Plato Onwards" identifies and analyses, in Plato and Plotinus, a particular use of Homer which she calls "erotic strategy," exemplified by Odysseus. This strategy allows Odysseus to survive dangers of physical *eros* in favour of a non-physical *eros*, notably when facing Calypso and Circe as forces of seduction or physical *eros* ("physical" broadly conceived as bodies and body-related discourse), thus yielding instead to his *eros* for his fatherland. Socrates adopts the erotic strategy with various characters in the Platonic dialogues (Charmides, Protagoras, Thrasymachus, etc.). Similarly to Odysseus, he resists physical *eros* to contemplate the meta-physical, namely Beauty and the Good, conceived as a return home (*Tht.* 176a–b, *Phdr.* 246d–e). Finally, Plotinus in the *Enneads* explicitly refers

to Odysseus' episodes with Circe or Calypso, exhorting himself and his companions to "put out to the sea, as Odysseus did" and so "fly to our dear country," taking these Homeric episodes as having hidden meaning (8.16–21). He appears to escape the pull of physical *eros* and return to the "home of the soul," following the pull of an *eros* of things meta-physical, himself (in Porphyrius, *Vita Plotini* 22–23. Odysseus, Socrates, and Plotinus thus take on a comparable erotic strategy in favour of meta-physical *eros*, allowing them to survive and overcome the obstacles to their goal.

In his "Homer in Platonic *Dubia* and *Spuria*" Marco Donato proposes the first systematic study of Homer's presence in all Platonic *dubia* and *spuria* as part of the early reception of Plato's attitude to Homer. Donato identifies all quotations, mentions of Homer or of his poems, and allusions, and classifies them in three types of function: stylistic, argumentative, and critical. The Homeric quotations proper occur in 8 of the 14 dialogues, the most significant of which are found in the *Second Alcibiades* and *Minos*, in which Homeric verses are subjected to a form of exegesis. The *Second Alcibiades* contains no less than 6 of those citations, the most important being associated with remarks on how to interpret poetry, notably Homeric (147b–d): Homer speaks in riddles (αἰνίττεται) and therefore requires some sort of allegorical method (see Section 3 below). The general tendency in the corpus proves to be the use of Homeric references and authority to structure the argument and warrant further inquiry.

Georgia Tsouni discusses in her paper Homer and Plato as Philosophical Authorities in Cicero. Plato is, for Cicero, as for Panaetius before him, *Homerus philosophorum*, as the supreme stylist and the initiator of the Academic-Peripatetic tradition. Homer is for him an early expression of philosophical wisdom (*sapientia*). In *De Finibus*, Ulysses would already embody the value of wisdom for its own sake. While the Homer's Sirens (*Od.* 12) promise both knowledge and pleasure, the interpretation proposed by Piso, the Antiochean spokesperson, underlines intellectual gains alone: as the pioneer of the theoretical life, Ulysses neglects his personal interests, including the return to his country, for the sake of knowledge, an ideal later embodied in Plato and others (*Fin.* 5.49–50). Cicero's portrayal of Ulysses appears to imply an anti-Epicurean polemic, which in turn suggests existing Epicurean interpretations of Homer at the time (cf. Philodemus). This would indicate philosophical interpretations of Homer in Cicero's time could serve diverging philosophical positions.

Dino De Sanctis in "*Exemplum Homeri: Reception and exegesis of the epos in Plutarch's Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*" inquires into Plutarch's Homeric uses (quotations, paraphrases, and allusions) as argumentative and pedagogical support, contributing to legitimating and illustrating the Platonist's own thought. More specifically, Homeric references fulfil the function of *exempla* for both the author and his addressee. Indeed, his complex approach to Homer typically com-

bines quotation with exhortation (parenesis), notably correction (ἐπανόρθωσις), and so exegetical comments with rhetorical device (see Renaud). Plutarch thus adapts parenesis to his addressee in relationship between master and pupil. Similar uses of poetry's pleasing character with ethical-political correction can also be found in Philodemus' *De bono rege secundum Homerum*.

In "War in the *Iliad*: Untruth for Plato, Allegory for Platonists, Truth for Our Times?" Emilie Kutash ventures in a discussion of war in Homer, Plato and Proclus. Homer's realistic depiction of the horrors of war and praise of the warrior hero's *thumos*, Achilles, is opposed to Plato's philosophical hero, Socrates, who values reason (*logos*) above all other goods. Plato excises the passage on the battles of the gods in Homer (*Resp.* 378b) on the ground young persons would not be able to discern any hidden meaning. Proclus does not censor evil in Homer, arguing that war is necessary to overcome disorderly forces and to restore order in the universe through the rule of Intellect. Homer's poetry would conceal the truth, and the allegorical interpretation would reveal the cosmic meaning of these stories. In our times, finally, Simone Weil takes the *Iliad* to be the true account of war as brute force, barbarous reality, devoid of higher meaning. This last reading of the *Iliad* might speak to us the truth about war, as opposed to Plato's idealistic distortion and the Neoplatonists' transcendent transposition. Sigmund Freud's question "Why war?" possibly finds an answer in Heraclitus' view of war as the father of all things.

3 Modes of Discourse, Allegorical and Not

3.1 Non-Allegorical

George Alexander Gazis ("Homeric Scholia and the Platonic Tradition: Πλάτωνα ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν?") analyses a dominating trend in the Homeric scholia about Plato, consisting in elucidating the philosopher's work through the Homeric poetry, while simply assuming the value of the latter. The scholiasts' approach differs from that of the Platonists also in not resorting to allegorical readings. Porphyry's non-allegorical approach in *Homeric Questions* involves philological exegesis akin to the Alexandrian scholars and thus to the Homeric scholia. Gazis examines scholia explicating Homer's masterful narrative strategies in connection with Plato's threefold classification of narrative modes in *Republic* Book 3 (see Renaud's paper). Another scholium assumes that Socrates' cryptic statement in *Apology* 39c is influenced directly or indirectly by his knowledge of Homer. Yet another scholium highlights, from a formal point of view, Homer's influence on Plato's

Laws regarding the appropriateness to train women in military matters. Other scholia further underscore Plato's philosophical debt to Homer, considered the source of every philosophical investigation. All these scholia ignore Plato's criticisms and present Plato as Homer's student.

Graeme Miles in "Allegorical and Non-Allegorical Readings of Homer in Proclus" investigates the latter's somewhat neglected non-allegorical readings. Proclus' reconciling strategies are shown to vary according to the kind of poetry under study: inspired, didactic or mimetic. Only the highest form of poetry, the divinely inspired, must be interpreted allegorically: the allegorical approach is appropriate for myths concerning gods, not about heroes. Miles examines the non-allegorical reading of the violation of the oaths in *Iliad* Book 4, according to which Pandarus is responsible for the breaking of the oaths, not the gods. Gods are not responsible for evil, as is already the case in Plato's myth of Er. Proclus interprets the episode about the deception of Agamemnon by the false dream from Zeus similarly: the gods have created the possibility of self-deception for Agamemnon, in accordance with universal providence. For these episodes involving evil, no recourse is made to allegory, as morality is grounded in ontology, and human free choice is placed within the frame of divine will and providence.

3.2 Allegorical

Selene I. S. Brumana's "Ancient wisdom in Maximus of Tyre" analyses and explicates Maximus' view that Homer is the source of Plato's dialogues, in form and content. Homeric poetry is regarded as "ancient" philosophy, with the power to mitigate through its pleasant form the bitterness of philosophical reasoning. The notion of an ancient philosophy (ἀρχαία φιλοσοφία) would go back to Plato and Aristotle (cf. *Metaph.* A 8.1074a38–b14 on an old tradition regarding the divine handed down in the form of myth). The view that Plato was widely influenced by Homer originates in Hellenistic times and was widespread in the post-Hellenistic age, such as in Heraclitus the Allegorist, Ps.-Longinus, and Ps.-Plutarch (see Gazis' paper). Likewise, Numenius and Porphyry (*On the Cave*) through allegorical readings explicate Homer's hidden philosophical wisdom. Maximus of Tyre too defends a unitary, universal conception of philosophy beyond boundaries, of which Homer is one the first illustrious representatives.

In "Odysseus' Stormy Seas: From Ps.-Plato to Numenius and Beyond" Harold Tarrant explores the allegory of the sea in Numenius (and Porphyry). According to Numenius, not only Homer's but also Plato's doctrine requires interpretation beyond the literal meaning. The *Second Alcibiades* (147c), a Hellenistic creation within the Platonic tradition, already claims that Homeric poetry is expressed in riddles

(see Donato). Tarrant analyses Numenius' reading of the *Odyssey*, especially in fragment 33, regarding Odysseus' travels as an allegory of the soul undergoing incarnations before returning to its heavenly home (see Antola and Tsouni for diverging interpretations of the figure of Odysseus). The various terms for sea (πόντος, θάλασσα/θάλαττα, κλύδων) symbolize matter and the soul's immersion in the material world. In this Numenius finds some substantial agreement between Plato and Homer. Traces of turbulent water thus interpreted might indeed be found in Plato. In *Republic* Book 10, for instance, Plato compares the soul's material existence to the disfigured sea-god Glaukos (611d–e), and the threatening aspects of the sea and its currents (κλύδων) are referred to in the *Laws* (6.758a) and the *Second Alcibiades II* (150b, c).

Anna Motta ("Homer, Plato and the Modes of Teaching Exposition") shows how Proclus and the Anonymous *Prolegomena* similarly conceive the harmony between inspired poetry and philosophy in Plato. Receiving the theological traditions of the past, Plato encompasses the four kinds of teaching the divine, namely the dialectical and entheastic modes, involving no concealment, and the symbolic and iconic modes, which use cryptic language. These methods express in different ways the same truth, transmitted by wise men of old such as Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and others (see Brumana's and Tarrant's paper). Plato stands out, however, as the only one using all four methods of teaching. He follows Homer's poetry in its inspired mode, while criticising the mimetic. Plato unifies different traditions through his theology; his superiority lies in the dialectical, demonstrative method, as both Proclus and the Anonymous *Prolegomena* claim.

Laura Marongiu in her "Plato Ὀμηρικώτατος? Proclus on the Muses' Speech (*Resp.* 8.545c–547a)" probes the speech of the Muses and the two Homeric quotations framing it. While these are mostly regarded today as ironic or mere literary embellishment, Proclus takes them seriously in both form and content. The first Homeric citation (*Il.* 16.112–113) is an adaptation (πῦρ, "fire", substituted for στάσις, "civil war"), made to fit the Platonic context, namely political decay. The second Homeric quotation (*Il.* 6.211 = 20.241) is *verbatim* and refers to a hero's noble lineage. The two quotations, together with the mathematical instructions, express the core message of the speech: the disruptive nature of dissension and the cause bringing about dissimilarity of characters or, more generally, the dialectic of similarity and dissimilarity. Plato's mode of teaching in the speech is revelatory as it speaks of the gods, as well as iconic through numbers (see Miles' paper). Plato would thus be inspired by Homer as mouthpiece of the Muses.

Finally, Oiva Kuisma in "Proclus on Plato as an Emulator (*zēlôtēs*) of Homer" explains how Proclus harmonises Homer with Plato about both human and divine matters through allegory when needed, and in what sense Plato is a ζηλωτής of Homer. Historically speaking, Plato's emulation follows the competitive spirit

among the performers of poetry (*Ion* 530b–c). As knowledge is *anamnesis*, Plato *zêlôtês* does not aim at novelty, but at the elaboration of received tradition, stating philosophically that which has been truthfully said in poetic discourse. Plato thus puts religious beliefs in the service of philosophical thinking and practice. The *Ti-maeus* story is presented as a hymnic eulogy, susceptible of a poetic interpretation (21a–d; cf. *Criti.* 113a–b). Plato does not disown poetry entirely as he welcomes it as necessary serious-minded poets and mythmakers (*Resp.* 3.398a–b), singing “hymns to gods and eulogies of good men.” In short, Plato proposes through emulation an alternative theology to the traditional Greek mythology embodied in Homer’s poetry.

Overall, this volume should leave the reader in little doubt that the status of Homer within the Platonic tradition was not just something that arose in discussions of education or of aesthetics or of rhetoric. The strength of any appeals to earlier authorities had become a truly philosophic issue, dependent on epistemological questions about how poets or others might have known or sensed the solutions to specific issues. Homer was ordinarily treated as a repository of ancient wisdom, something that the Greeks might also find in figures like Solon or Lycurgus. This raises a series of questions. Was this wisdom in any way connected with the poet’s relation, via the Muses, to Apollo, whose insights were also thought to inform another key repository of wisdom, the Delphic oracle? If so, was this Homer’s wisdom or that of the Muses, or of Apollo himself? Might Homer himself have been passively receiving and transmitting a wisdom that transcended the rather uncertain wisdom occasionally said to be found among the living? Might Homer thus constitute a route to divine inspiration, and if so, was it really *his* wisdom any longer? And why should not we, if we follow the correct philosophical school, also come to be mouthpieces for something higher? Platonism for the most part was looking for some higher wisdom, something that logical reasoning never contradicted, but never quite reached. What inspired Homer was nearly as important a question as what inspired Plato, and it was not beyond all possibility that the answer could be the same.¹

Bibliography

Hunter, R. 2012. *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature: The Silent Stream*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹ All abbreviations used in this volume follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (OCD), and in the few cases where such abbreviations are not given in the OCD list, full names and titles are used instead.

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