

Plato, *Collected Dialogues* (Princeton UP, 1961)

'Ion' trans. Lane Cooper

ION

In this little dialogue Plato is amusing himself. Socrates talks with Ion whose profession is to give recitals of Homer on special occasions and who is convinced that he is the greatest artist in that line throughout Greece. His naïve and complete self-satisfaction is amusingly contrasted with Socrates' very gentle irony. Ion is no antagonist to draw down upon him anything more drastic. Socrates treats him most gently and he feels as self-satisfied at the end as he did at the beginning.

The real interest in the conversation—it cannot be called a discussion—is what Socrates says about art. Heretofore in all the arts in Athens the emotions and the intellect had worked together. There was a balance of power. That is the uniqueness of Greek art; it is an intellectual art. In the Ion Socrates disputes the possibility of such a balance. Art, he says, is not dependent upon the emotions; it belongs to the realm of knowledge. "Each separate art has had assigned to it by the deity the power of knowing a particular occupation," as the art of the physician or the sculptor, but poetry is not art; it is not guided by rules as art is. It is inspiration, not knowledge. Poets and their interpreters like Ion are "not in their senses," but "a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him."

The dialogue by itself is proof that the balance between opposites which had made the Periclean Age possible was passing away and had already passed to such a degree that the greatest of the Athenians had to put his effort into counteracting the rapidly growing disorder in a state ruled more and more not by the mind, but by the emotions.

530 **SOCRATES**: Welcome, Ion! And whence come you now to pay us a visit? From your home in Ephesus?

ION: No, Socrates, I come from Epidaurus and the festival of Asclepius.

SOCRATES: What! Do the citizens of Epidaurus, in honoring the god, have a contest between rhapsodes too?

ION: Indeed they do. They have every sort of musical competition.

SOCRATES: So? And did you compete? And how did you succeed?

ION: We carried off first prize, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well done! See to it, now, that we win the Panathenaea also.

ION: It shall be so, God willing.

SOCRATES: I must say, Ion, I am often envious of you rhapsodists in your profession. Your art requires of you always to go in fine array, and look as beautiful as you can, and meanwhile you must be conversant with many excellent poets, and especially with Homer, the best and most divine of all. You have to understand his thought, and not merely learn his lines. It is an enviable lot! In fact, one never could be a rhapsode if one did not comprehend the utterances of the poet, for the rhapsode must become an interpreter of the poet's thought to those who listen, and to do this well is quite impossible unless one knows just what the poet is saying. All that, of course, will excite one's envy.

ION: What you say is true, Socrates; to me, at all events, this aspect of the art has given the most concern. And I judge that I, of all men, have the finest things to say on Homer, that neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus, nor Stesimbrotus of Thasos, nor Glaucon, nor anyone else who ever lived, had so many reflections, or such fine ones, to present on Homer as have I.

SOCRATES: That is pleasant news, Ion, for obviously you will not begrudge me a display of your talent.

ION: Not at all. And, Socrates, it really is worth while to hear how well I have embellished Homer. In my opinion I deserve to be crowned with a wreath of gold by the Homeridae.

SOCRATES: Another time I shall find leisure to hear your recitation. At the moment do but answer me so far. Are you skilled in Homer only, or in Hesiod and Archilochus as well?

ION: No, only in regard to Homer; to me that seems enough.

SOCRATES: Is there any point on which both Homer and Hesiod say the same thing?

ION: Indeed, I think so; there are many cases of it.

From *Phaedrus, Ion, Gorgias, and Symposium*, translated with introduction by Lane Cooper (Ithaca, New York, 1955; copyright 1938 by Lane Cooper).

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SOCRATES: In those cases, then, would you interpret what Homer says better than what Hesiod says?

ION: In the cases where they say the same, Socrates, I should do equally well with both.

SOCRATES: But what about the cases where they do not say the same? For example, take the art of divination; Homer and Hesiod both speak of it.

ION: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Well then, where they say the same on the art of divination, and where they differ on it, would you interpret better what these two poets say, or would one of the diviners, one of the good ones, do so?

ION: One of the diviners.

SOCRATES: But suppose you were a diviner. If you were competent to explain the passages where they agree, would you not be competent to explain as well the passages where they differ?

ION: Manifestly, yes.

SOCRATES: How is it, then, that you are skilled in Homer, but not in Hesiod or the other poets? Does Homer treat of matters different from those that all the other poets treat of? Wasn't his subject mainly war, and hasn't he discussed the mutual relations of men good and bad, or the general run as well as special craftsmen, the relations of the gods to one another and to men, as they forgather, the phenomena of the heavens and occurrences in the underworld, and the birth of gods and heroes? Are not these the subjects Homer dealt with in his poetry?

ION: What you say is true, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And what about the other poets? Haven't they dealt with these same themes?

ION: Yes, but, Socrates, not in the same way.

SOCRATES: How so? In a worse way than he?

ION: Far worse.

SOCRATES: He in a better way?

ION: Better indeed, I warrant you.

SOCRATES: Well now, Ion darling, tell me. When several persons are discussing number, and one of them talks better than the rest, there will be someone who distinguishes the good speaker?

ION: I agree.

SOCRATES: It will be the same one who distinguishes those who are speaking badly, or will it be another?

ION: No doubt the same.

SOCRATES: And this will be the one who knows the art of numbers?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Tell me. When several are discussing diet, and what foods are wholesome, and one of them speaks better than the

rest, will a given person see the excellence of the best speaker, and another the inferiority of the worse, or will the same man distinguish both?

ION: Obviously, I think, the same.

SOCRATES: Who is he? What is he called?

ION: The doctor.

SOCRATES: We may therefore generalize, and say: When several persons are discussing a given subject, the man who can distinguish the one who is talking well on it, and the one who is talking badly, will always be the same. Or, if he does not recognize the one who is talking badly, then, clearly, neither will he recognize the one who is talking well, granted that the subject is the same.

ION: That is so.

SOCRATES: Then the same man will be skilled with respect to both?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now you assert that Homer and the other poets, among them Hesiod and Archilochus, all treat of the same subjects, yet not all in the same fashion, but the one speaks well, and the rest of them speak worse.

ION: And what I say is true.

b SOCRATES: Then you, if you can recognize the poet who speaks well, could also recognize the poets who speak worse, and see that they speak worse.

ION: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Well then, my best of friends, when we say that Ion has equal skill in Homer and all other poets, we shall not be mistaken. It must be so, since you yourself admit that the same man will be competent to judge of all who speak of the same matters, and that the poets virtually all deal with the same subjects.

c ION: Then what can be the reason, Socrates, for my behavior? When anyone discusses any other poet, I pay no attention, and can offer no remark of any value. I frankly doze. But whenever anyone mentions Homer, immediately I am awake, attentive, and full of things to say.

SOCRATES: The riddle is not hard to solve, my friend. No, it is plain to everyone that not from art and knowledge comes your power to speak concerning Homer. If it were art that gave you power, then you could speak about all the other poets as well. There is an art of poetry as a whole? Am I not right?

ION: Yes.

d SOCRATES: And is not the case the same with any other art you please, when you take it as a whole? The same method of inquiry holds for all the arts? Do you want some explanation, Ion, of what I mean by that?

ION: Yes to you wise men.

SOCRATES: Wise men!

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ION: Yes, Socrates, upon my word I do. It gives me joy to listen to you wise men.

SOCRATES: I only wish you were right in saying that, Ion. But 'wise men'! That means you, the rhapsodists and actors, and the men whose poems you chant, while I have nothing else to tell besides the truth, after the fashion of the ordinary man. For example, take the question I just now asked you. Observe what a trivial and commonplace remark it was that I uttered, something anyone might know, when I said that the inquiry is the same whenever one takes an art in its entirety. Let us reason the matter out. There is an art of painting taken as a whole?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: And there are and have been many painters, good and bad?

ION: Yes indeed.

SOCRATES: Now, take Polygnotus, son of Aglaophon. Have you ever seen a man with the skill to point out what is good and what is not in the works of Polygnotus, but without the power to do so in the works of other painters? A man who, when anybody shows the works of other painters, dozes off, is at a loss, has nothing to suggest, but when he has to express a judgment on one particular painter, say Polygnotus or anyone else you choose, wakes up, and is attentive, and is full of things to say?

ION: No, on my oath, I never saw the like.

SOCRATES: Or, again, take sculpture. Have you ever seen a man with the skill to judge the finer works of Daedalus, son of Metion, or of Epeus, son of Panopeus, or of Theodorus of Samos, or the works of any other single sculptor, but, confronted by the works of other sculptors, is at a loss, and dozes off, without a thing to say?

ION: No, on my oath, I never saw one.

SOCRATES: Yet further, as I think, the same is true of playing on the flute, and on the harp, and singing to the harp, and rhapsody. You never saw a man with the skill to judge of Olympus, of Thamyras, or of Orpheus, or of Phemius, the rhapsodist at Ithaca, but is at a loss, has no remark to make concerning Ion the Ephesian, and his success or failure in reciting.

ION: On that I cannot contradict you, Socrates. But of this thing I am conscious, that I excel all men in speaking about Homer, and on him have much to say, and that everybody else avers I do it well, but on the other poets I do not. Well then, see what that means.

SOCRATES: I do see, Ion, and in fact will proceed to show you what to my mind it betokens. As I just now said, this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a power divine, impelling you like the power in the stone Euripides called the magnet, which most call 'stone of Heraclea.' This stone does not simply attract the

iron rings, just by themselves; it also imparts to the rings a force enabling them to do the same thing as the stone itself, that is, to attract another ring, so that sometimes a chain is formed, quite a long one, of iron rings, suspended from one another. For all of them, however, their power depends upon that loadstone. Just so the Muse. She first makes men inspired, and then through these inspired ones others share in the enthusiasm; and a chain is formed, for the epic poets, all the good ones, have their excellence, not from art, but are inspired, possessed, and thus they utter all these admirable poems. So is it also

534 with the good lyric poets; as the worshiping Corybantes are not in their senses when they dance, so the lyric poets are not in their senses when they make these lovely lyric poems. No, when once they launch into harmony and rhythm, they are seized with the Bacchic transport, and are possessed—as the bacchantes, when possessed, draw milk and honey from the rivers, but not when in their senses. So the spirit of the lyric poet works, according to their own report. For the poets tell us, don't they, that the melodies they bring us are gathered from rills

b that run with honey, out of glens and gardens of the Muses, and they bring them as the bees do honey, flying like the bees? And what they say is true, for a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him. So long as he has this in his possession, no man is able to make poetry or to chant in prophecy. There-

c fore, since their making is not by art, when they utter many things and fine about the deeds of men, just as you do about Homer, but is by lot divine—therefore each is able to do well only that to which the Muse has impelled him—one to make dithyrambs, another panegyric odes, another choral songs, another epic poems, another iambs. In all the rest, each one of them is poor, for not by art do they utter these, but by power divine, since if it were by art that they knew how to treat one subject finely, they would know how to deal with all the others too. Herein lies the reason why the deity has bereft them of their senses,

d and uses them as ministers, along with soothsayers and godly seers; it is in order that we listeners may know that it is not they who utter these precious revelations while their mind is not within them, but that it is the god himself who speaks, and through them becomes articulate to us. The most convincing evidence of this statement is offered by Tynnichus of Chalcis. He never composed a single poem worth recalling, save the song of praise which everyone repeats, well-nigh the finest of all lyrical poems, and absolutely what he called it,

e an 'Invention of the Muses.' By this example above all, it seems to me, the god would show us, lest we doubt, that these lovely poems are not of man or human workmanship, but are divine and from the gods, and that the poets are nothing but interpreters of the gods, each one possessed by the divinity to whom he is in bondage. And to prove

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this, the deity on purpose sang the loveliest of all lyrics through the most miserable poet. Isn't it so, Ion? Don't you think that I am right? 535

ION: You are indeed, I vow! Socrates, your words in some way touch my very soul, and it does seem to me that by dispensation from above good poets convey to us these utterances of the gods.

SOCRATES: Well, and you rhapsodists, again, interpret the utterances of the poets?

ION: There also you are right.

SOCRATES: Accordingly, you are interpreters of interpreters?

ION: Undeniably.

SOCRATES: Wait now, Ion; tell me this. And answer frankly what I ask you. Suppose you are reciting epic poetry well, and thrill the spectators most deeply. You are chanting, say, the story of Odysseus as he leaped up to the dais, unmasked himself to the suitors, and poured the arrows out before his feet, or of Achilles rushing upon Hector, or one of the pitiful passages, about Andromache, or Hecuba, or Priam. When you chant these, are you in your senses? Or are you carried out of yourself, and does not your soul in an ecstasy conceive herself to be engaged in the actions you relate, whether they are in Ithaca, or Troy, or wherever the story puts them?

ION: How vivid, Socrates, you make your proof for me! I will tell you frankly that whenever I recite a tale of pity, my eyes are filled with tears, and when it is one of horror or dismay, my hair stands up on end with fear, and my heart goes leaping.

SOCRATES: Well now, Ion, what are we to say of a man like that? There he is, at a sacrifice or festival, got up in holiday attire, adorned with golden chaplets, and he weeps, though he has lost nothing of his finery. Or he recoils with fear, standing in the presence of more than twenty thousand friendly people, though nobody is stripping him or doing him damage. Shall we say that the man is in his senses?

ION: Never, Socrates, upon my word. That is strictly true.

SOCRATES: Now then, are you aware that you produce the same effects in most of the spectators too?

ION: Yes, indeed, I know it very well. As I look down at them from the stage above, I see them, every time, weeping, casting terrible glances, stricken with amazement at the deeds recounted. In fact, I have to give them very close attention, for if I set them weeping, I myself shall laugh when I get my money, but if they laugh, it is I who have to weep at losing it.

SOCRATES: Well, do you see that the spectator is the last of the rings I spoke of, which receive their force from one another by virtue of the loadstone? You, the rhapsodist and actor, are the middle ring, 536 and the first one is the poet himself. But it is the deity who, through all the series, draws the spirit of men wherever he desires, transmitting

the attractive force from one into another. And so, as from the loadstone, a mighty chain hangs down, of choric dancers, masters of the chorus, undermasters, obliquely fastened to the rings which are suspended from the Muse. One poet is suspended from one Muse, another
 b from another; we call it being 'possessed,' but the fact is much the same, since he is *held*. And from these primary rings, the poets, others are in turn suspended, some attached to this one, some to that, and are filled with inspiration, some by Orpheus, others by Musaeus. But the majority are possessed and held by Homer, and, Ion, you are one of these, and are possessed by Homer. And whenever anyone chants the work of any other poet, you fall asleep, and haven't a thing to say, but when anybody gives tongue to a strain of this one, you are
 c awake at once, your spirit dances, and you have much to say, for not by art or science do you say of Homer what you say, but by dispensation from above and by divine possession. So the worshiping Corybantes have a lively feeling for that strain alone which is of the deity by whom they are possessed, and for that melody are well supplied with attitudes and utterances, and heed no others. And so it is with you, Ion: When anyone mentions Homer, you are ready, but about the
 d other poets you are at a loss. You ask me why you are ready about Homer and not about the rest. Because it is not by art but by lot divine that you are eloquent in praise of Homer.

ION: Well put, I grant you, Socrates. And yet I should be much surprised if by your argument you succeeded in convincing me that I am possessed or mad when I praise Homer. Nor do I think that you yourself would find me so if you heard me speaking upon Homer.

SOCRATES: And indeed I wish to hear you, but not until you
 e have answered me as follows. On what point in Homer do you speak well? Not on all points, I take it.

ION: I assure you, Socrates, I do it on every point, without exception.

SOCRATES: Yet not, I fancy, on those matters of which you happen to be ignorant, but Homer tells of?

ION: And the matters Homer tells of, and I do not know, what are they?

537 SOCRATES: Why, does not Homer in many passages speak of arts, and have much to say about them? About driving a chariot, for instance; if I can recollect the lines, I'll repeat them to you.

ION: No, let me do it, for I know them.

SOCRATES: Then recite for me what Nestor says to Antilochus, his son, where he warns him to be careful at the turning post, in the lay of the horse race in honor of Patroclus.

ION:

b Thyself lean slightly in the burnished car
 To the left of them, then call upon the off horse
 With goad and voice; with hand give him free rein.

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And at the post let the near horse come so close
That the nave of the well-wrought wheel shall seem
To graze the stone. Which yet beware to strike!¹

SOCRATES: That will do. Now, Ion, in these lines, which will be more capable of judging whether Homer speaks aright or not, a doctor or a charioteer?

ION: The charioteer, no doubt.

SOCRATES: Because that is his art, or for some other reason?

ION: No, because it is his art.

SOCRATES: Each separate art, then, has had assigned to it by the deity the power of knowing a particular occupation? I take it that what we know by the pilot's art we do not know by the art of medicine as well.

ION: No indeed.

SOCRATES: And what we know by medical art we do not know by the builder's art as well.

ION: No indeed.

SOCRATES: Well, and so it is with all the arts? What we know by one of them, we do not know by another? But before you answer that, just tell me this. Do you allow a distinction between arts? One differs from another?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now with me the mark of differentiation is that one art means the knowledge of one kind of thing, another art the knowledge of another, and so I give them their respective names. Do you do that?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: If they meant simply knowledge of the same things, why should we distinguish one art from another? Why call them different, when both would give us the same knowledge? For example, take these fingers. I know that there are five of them, and you know the same as I about them. Suppose I asked you if we knew this same matter, you and I, by the same art, that of arithmetic, or by different arts. I fancy you would hold that we knew it by the same?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then tell me now what just a little while ago I was on the point of asking you. Does that seem true to you of all the arts—that, necessarily, the same art makes us know the same, another art not the same, but, if it really is another art, it must make us know something else?

ION: That is my opinion Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well then, if one does not possess a given art, one

¹ *Iliad* 23.335.

will not be capable of rightly knowing what belongs to it in word or action?

b ION: That is true.

SOCRATES: Then, in the lines which you recited, which will have the better knowledge whether Homer speaks aright or not, you or a charioteer?

ION: The charioteer.

SOCRATES: Doubtless because you are a rhapsode, and not a charioteer?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: The rhapsode's art is different from the charioteer's?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: If it is another art, then, it is a knowledge also about other matters.

ION: Yes.

c SOCRATES: Now what about the passage in which Homer tells how Hecamede, Nestor's concubine, gave the wounded Machaon the broth to drink? The passage runs something like this:

She grated goat's-milk cheese in Pramnian wine,
With brazen grater, adding onion as a relish to the brew.²

On the question whether Homer here speaks properly or not, is it for the art of the physician, or the rhapsode's art, to discriminate aright?

ION: The art of the physician.

SOCRATES: What of this? The passage in which Homer says:

d She plunged to the bottom like a leaden sinker
Which, mounted on the horn-tip from a field ox,
Speeds its way bringing mischief to voracious fish.³

What shall we say? Is it rather for the art of fishing, or the rhapsode's art, to decide on what the verses mean, and whether they are good or not?

ION: Obviously, Socrates, it is for the art of fishing.

e SOCRATES: Reflect now. Suppose that you were questioning, and asked me, 'Now, Socrates, you find it is for these several arts to judge in Homer, severally, what appertains to each of them. Come then, pick me out the passages concerning the diviner, and the diviner's art, the kind of things that appertain to him, regarding which he must be able to discern whether the poetry is good or bad?' Observe how easily and truly I can answer you. The poet does, in fact, treat of this matter in the *Odyssey* too—for example, when a scion of Melampus, the diviner Theoclymenus, says to the wooers:

539 Ah, wretched men, what bane is this ye suffer? Shrouded in night

² *Iliad* II:639-40. ³ *Iliad* 24.80 sq.

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Are your heads and your faces and your limbs below,
 And kindled is the voice of wailing, and cheeks are wet with tears.
 And the porch is full of ghosts; the hall is full of them,
 Hastening hellward beneath the gloom, and the sun
 Has perished out of heaven, and an evil mist infolds the world.⁴

And he treats of it in many places in the *Iliad*—for instance, in the lay of the battle at the wall. There he says:

For, as they were eager to pass over, a bird approached them,
 An eagle of lofty flight, skirting the host on the left,
 And in its talons bearing a monstrous blood-red serpent,
 Still alive and struggling; nor had it yet forgot the joy of battle.
 Writhing back, it smote the bird that held it, upon the breast
 Beside the neck, and the bird did cast it from him,
 In the agony of pain, to the earth,
 And dropped it in the middle of the throng.
 And, with a cry, himself went flying on the gusty wind.⁵

These passages, I contend, and others like them, appertain to the diviner to examine and to judge.

ION: And, Socrates, you are right.

SOCRATES: And you are right too, Ion, when you say so. Come now, you do for me what I have done for you. From both the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* I picked out for you the passages belonging to the doctor, the diviner, and the fisherman; now you likewise, since you are better versed than I in Homer, pick out for me the sort of passages, Ion, that concern the rhapsode and the rhapsode's art, the passages it befits the rhapsode, above all other men, to examine and to judge.

ION: All passages, Socrates, is what I say.

SOCRATES: Surely, Ion, you don't mean *all*! Are you really so forgetful? Indeed, it would ill become a man who is a rhapsode to forget.

ION: Why? What am I forgetting?

SOCRATES: Don't you remember how you stated that the art of the rhapsode was different from the charioteer's?

ION: I remember.

SOCRATES: Well, and you admitted also that, being different, it had another field of knowledge?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well then, by your own account the art of rhapsody will not know everything, nor the rhapsode either.

ION: The exceptions, Socrates, are doubtless only such matters as that.

SOCRATES: In 'such matters' you must include approximately all the other arts. Well, as the rhapsode does not know the subject

⁴ *Odyssey* 20.351 sq. ⁵ *Iliad* 12.200 sq.

matter of them all, what sort of matters *will* he know?

ION: The kind of thing, I judge, that a man would say, and a woman would say, and a slave and a free man, a subject and a ruler—the suitable thing for each.

SOCRATES: You mean, the rhapsode will know better what the ruler of a ship in a storm at sea should say than will the pilot?

ION: No, in that case the pilot will know better.

c SOCRATES: But suppose it is the ruler of a sick man. Will the rhapsode know better what the ruler should say than will the doctor?

ION: No, not in that case, either.

SOCRATES: But you say, 'the kind of speech that suits a slave.'

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: You mean, for instance, if the slave is a cowherd, it is not he who will know what one should say to quiet angry cattle, but the rhapsode?

ION: Surely not.

SOCRATES: Well, 'the kind of speech that suits a woman'—one who spins—about the working up of wool?

d ION: No.

SOCRATES: Well, the rhapsodist will know 'the kind of speech that suits a man'—a general exhorting his soldiers?

ION: Yes! That is the sort of thing the rhapsodist will know.

SOCRATES: What! Is the rhapsode's art the general's?

ION: At all events I ought to know the kind of speech a general should make.

SOCRATES: Indeed, you doubtless have the talents of a general, Ion! And suppose you happened to have skill in horsemanship, along with skill in playing on the lyre, you would know when horses were well or badly ridden, but if I asked you, 'By which art, Ion, do you know that horses are well managed—is it because you are a horseman, or because you play the lyre?' What answer would you give me?

ION: I should say, 'It is by my skill as horseman.'

SOCRATES: Then, too, if you were picking out good players on the lyre, you would admit that you discerned them by your art in playing the lyre, and not by your art as horseman?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: But when you know of military matters, do you know them because you are competent as a general, or as a rhapsode?

ION: I cannot see a bit of difference.

541 SOCRATES: What, no difference, you say? You mean to call the art of the rhapsode and the art of the general a single art, or two?

ION: To me, there is a single art.

SOCRATES: And so, whoever is an able rhapsode is going to be an able general as well?

ION: Unquestionably, Socrates.

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SOCRATES: And then, whoever happens to be an able general is an able rhapsode too.

ION: No, I do not think that holds.

SOCRATES: But you think the other does? That whoever is an able rhapsode is an able general too?

ION: Absolutely!

SOCRATES: Well, and you are the ablest rhapsodist in Greece?

ION: Yes, Socrates, by far.

SOCRATES: And the ablest general, Ion? The ablest one in Greece?

ION: You may be sure of it, for, Socrates, I learned this also out of Homer.

SOCRATES: Then, Ion, how in heaven's name is this? You are at once the ablest general and ablest rhapsodist among the Greeks, and yet you go about Greece performing as a rhapsode, but not as a general. What think you? The Greeks are in great need of a rhapsode adorned with a wreath of gold, and do not need a general at all?

ION: It is because my native city, Socrates, is under your dominion, and your military rule, and has no need whatever of a general. As for yours and Lacedaemon, neither would choose me for general; you think yourselves sufficient to yourselves.

SOCRATES: Excellent Ion, you know who Apollodorus is, of Cyzicus, don't you?

ION: What might he be?

SOCRATES: The man whom the Athenians at various times have chosen for their general, although he is an alien. The same is true of Phanosthenes of Andros, and Heraclides of Clazomenae, also aliens, who nevertheless, when they had shown their competence, were raised to the generalship by the city, and put in other high positions. And Ion of Ephesus, will she not elect him general, and accord him honors, if his worth becomes apparent? Why, you inhabitants of Ephesus are originally Athenians, are you not, and Ephesus is a city inferior to none? But the fact is, Ion, that if you are right, if it really is by art and knowledge that you are able to praise Homer, then you do me wrong. You assure me that you have much fine knowledge about Homer, and you keep offering to display it, but you are deceiving me. Far from giving the display, you will not even tell me what subject it is on which you are so able, though all this while I have been entreating you to tell. No, you are just like Proteus; you twist and turn, this way and that, assuming every shape, until finally you elude my grasp and reveal yourself as a general. And all in order not to show how skilled you are in the lore concerning Homer! So if you are an artist, and, as I said just now, if you only promised me a display on Homer in order to deceive me, then you are at fault. But if you are not an artist, if by lot divine you are possessed by Homer, and so, knowing nothing,

speaking many things and fine about the poet, just as I said you did, then you do no wrong. Choose, therefore, how you will be called by us, whether we shall take you for a man unjust, or for a man divine.

ION: The difference, Socrates, is great. It is far lovelier to be deemed divine.

SOCRATES: This lovelier title, Ion, shall be yours, to be in our minds divine, and not an artist, in praising Homer.

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