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Ion

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Ion

Soc.

Welcome, Ion. Where have you come from now, to pay us this visit? From your home in Ephesus?

Ion.

No, no, Socrates; from Epidaurus and the festival there of Asclepius.

Soc.

Do you mean to say that the Epidaurians honor the god with a contest of rhapsodes also?

Ion.

Certainly, and of music [1] in general.

Soc.

Why then, you were competing in some contest, were you? And how went your competition?

Ion.

We carried off the first prize, Socrates.

Soc.

Well done: so now, mind that we win too at the Panathenaea. [2]

Ion.

Why, so we shall, God willing.

Soc.

I must say I have often envied you rhapsodes, Ion, for your art: for besides that it is fitting to your art that your person should be adorned

[1] "Music" with the Greeks included poetry.

[2] The Athenian festival of the Great Panathenaea was held every fourth year, and the Small Panathenaea probably every year, about July.

and that you should look as handsome as possible, the necessity of being conversant with a number of good poets, and especially with Homer, the best and divinest poet of all, and of apprehending his thought and not merely learning off his words, is a matter for envy; since a man can never be a good rhapsode without understanding what the poet says. For the rhapsode ought to make himself an interpreter of the poet's thought to his audience; and to do this properly without knowing what the poet means is impossible. So one cannot but envy all this.

Ion.

What you say is true, Socrates: I at any rate have found this the most laborious part of my art; and I consider I speak about Homer better than anybody, for neither Metrodorus [3] of Lampsacus, nor Stesimbrotus [4] of Thasos, nor Glaucon, [5] nor any one that the world has ever seen, had so many and such fine comments to offer on Homer as I have.

Soc.

That is good news, Ion; for obviously you will not grudge me an exhibition of them.

Ion.

And indeed it is worth hearing, Socrates, how well I have embellished Homer; so that I think I deserve to be crowned with a golden crown by the Homeridae. [6]

Soc.

Yes, and I must find myself leisure some time to listen to you; but for the moment, please answer this little question: are you skilled in Homer only, or in Hesiod and Archilochus as well?

Ion.

No, no, only in Homer; for that seems to me quite enough.

Soc.

And is there anything on which Homer and Hesiod both say the same?

Ion.

Yes, I think there are many such cases.

Soc.

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[3] A friend of the philosopher Anaxagoras who wrote allegorical interpretations of Homer in the first part of the fifth century B.C.

[4] A rhapsode, interpreter of Homer, and historian who lived in the time of Cimon and Pericles.

[5] Perhaps the Homeric commentator mentioned by Aristotle, *Poet.* 25. 16.

[6] There was a society or clan in Chios called Homeridae (sons of Homer), but the name seems to be used here and elsewhere in Plato for any persons specially devoted to Homer's poetry. See Jebb, *Homer*, p. 78.

Then in those cases would you expound better what Homer says than what Hesiod says?

Ion.

I should do it equally well in those cases, Socrates, where they say the same.

Soc.

But what of those where they do not say the same? For example, about the seer's art, on which both Homer and Hesiod say something.

Ion.

Quite so.

Soc.

Well then, would you, or one of the good seers, expound better what these two poets say, not only alike but differently, about the seer's art?

Ion.

One of the seers.

Soc.

And if you were a seer, would you not, with an ability to expound what they say in agreement, know also how to expound the points on which they differ?

Ion.

Of course.

Soc.

Then how is it that you are skilled in Homer, and not in Hesiod or the other poets? Does Homer speak of any other than the very things that all the other poets speak of? Has he not described war for the most part, and the mutual intercourse of men, good and bad, lay and professional, and the ways of the gods in their intercourse with each other and with men, and happenings in the heavens and in the underworld, and origins of gods and heroes? Are not these the subjects of Homer's poetry?

Ion.

What you say is true, Socrates.

Soc.

And what of the other poets? Do they not treat of the same things?

Ion.

Yes; but, Socrates, not on Homer's level.

Soc.

What, in a worse way?

Ion.

Far worse.

Soc.

And Homer in a better?

Ion.

Better indeed, I assure you.

Soc.

Well now, Ion, dear soul; when several people are talking about number, and one of them speaks better than the rest, I suppose there is some one who will distinguish the good speaker?

Ion.

I agree.

Soc.

And will this some one be the same as he who can distinguish the bad speakers, or different?

Ion.

The same, I suppose.

Soc.

And he will be the man who has the art of numeration?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

And again, when several are talking about what kinds of foods are wholesome, and one of them speaks better than the rest, will it be for two different persons to distinguish the superiority of the best speaker and the inferiority of a worse one, or for the same?

Ion.

Obviously, I should say, for the same.

Soc.

Who is he? What is his name?

Ion.

A doctor.

Soc.

And so we may state, in general terms, that the same person will always distinguish, given the same subject and several persons talking about it, both who speaks well and who badly: otherwise, if he is not going to distinguish the bad speaker, clearly he will not distinguish the good one either, where the subject is the same.

Ion.

That is so.

Soc.
And the same man is found to be skilled in both?
Ion.
Yes.
Soc.
And you say that Homer and the other poets, among whom are Hesiod and Archilochus, all speak about the same things, only not similarly; but the one does it well, and the rest worse?
Ion.
Yes, and what I say is true.
Soc.
And since you distinguish the good speaker, you could distinguish also the inferiority of the worse speakers.
Ion.
So it would seem.
Soc.
Then, my excellent friend, we shall not be wrong in saying that our Ion is equally skilled in Homer and in the other poets, seeing that you yourself admit that the same man will be a competent judge of all who speak on the same things, and that practically all the poets treat of the same things.
Ion.
Then what can be the reason, Socrates, why I pay no attention when somebody discusses any other poet, and am unable to offer any remark at all of any value, but simply drop into a doze, whereas if anyone mentions something connected with Homer I wake up at once and attend and have plenty to say?
Soc.
That is not difficult to guess, my good friend; anyone can see that you are unable to speak on Homer with art and knowledge. For if you could do it with art, you could speak on all the other poets as well; since there is an art of poetry, I take it, as a whole, is there not?
Ion.
Yes.

Soc.
And when one has acquired any other art whatever as a whole, the same principle of inquiry holds through all the arts? Do you require some explanation from me, Ion, of what I mean by this?
Ion.

Yes, upon my word, Socrates, I do; for I enjoy listening to you wise men.

Soc.

I only wish you were right there, Ion: but surely it is you rhapsodes and actors, and the men whose poems you chant, who are wise; whereas I speak but the plain truth, as a simple layman might. For in regard to this question I asked you just now, observe what a trifling commonplace it was that I uttered—a thing that any man might know—namely, that when one has acquired a whole art the inquiry is the same. Let us just think it out thus: there is an art of painting as a whole?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

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

Ion.

Certainly.

Soc.

Now have you ever found anybody who is skilled in pointing out the successes and failures among the works of Polygnotus [7] son of Aglaophon, but unable to do so with the works of the other painters; and who, when the works of the other painters are exhibited, drops into a doze, and is at a loss, and has no remark to offer; but when he has to pronounce upon Polygnotus or any other painter you please, and on that one only, wakes up and attends and has plenty to say?

Ion.

No, on my honor, I certainly have not.

Soc.

Or again, in sculpture, have you ever found anyone who is skilled in expounding the successes of Daedalus [8] son of Metion, or Epeius [9] son of Panopeus, or Theodorus [10] of Samos, or any other single sculptor, but in face of the works of the other sculptors is at a loss and dozes, having nothing to say?

Ion.

No, on my honor, I have not found such a man as that either.

Soc.

But further, I expect you have also failed to find one in fluting or harping or minstrelsy or rhapsodizing who is skilled in expounding the

[7] A celebrated painter who came 488 B.

[8] According to legend, the first sculptor: cf. *Euthyphro* 11, *Meno* 97 D.

[9] The maker of the wooden horse at Troy (Homer, *Od.* 8.493).

[10] A metal-worker (Herodot. 1. 51, 3. 41).

art of Olympus [11] or Thamyras, [12] or Orpheus, [13] or Phemius, [14] the rhapsode of Ithaca, but is at a loss and has no remark to offer on the successes or failures in rhapsody of Ion of Ephesus.

Ion.

I cannot gainsay you on that, Socrates: but of one thing I am conscious in myself—that I excel all men in speaking on Homer and have plenty to say, and everyone else says that I do it well; but on the others I am not a good speaker. Yet now, observe what that means.

Soc.

I do observe it, Ion, and I am going to point out to you what I take it to mean. For, as I was saying just now, this is not an art in you, whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power, which moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, [15] but most people call "Heraclea stone." For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; and they all depend for this power on that one stone. In the same manner also the Muse inspires men herself, and then by means of these inspired persons the inspiration spreads to others, and holds them in a connected chain.

Soc.

For all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed, and the good lyric poets likewise; just as the Corybantian [16] worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession—as the bacchants are possessed, and not in their senses, when they draw honey and milk from the rivers—that the soul of the lyric poets does the same thing, by their own report. For the poets tell us, I believe, that the songs they bring us are the sweets

[11] One of the mythical inventors of music: cf. *Symp.* 215 E.

[12] A Thracian Bard.

[13] A Thracian Bard.

[14] The minstrel who was forced to sing to the suitors of Penelope (*Od* 1. 154, 22. 330).

[15] Probably referring to Magnesia in Caria, south of which was one of the many places called Heraclea. *Μαγνῆτις λίθος* occurs in a fragment of Euripides' *Oeneus.*

[16] The Corybantes were priests of Cybele or Rhea, mother of Zeus and other Olympian gods, and she was worshipped with wild music and frenzied dancing which, like the bacchic revels or orgies of women in honor of Dionysus, carried away the participants despite and beyond themselves. Cf. Eurip. *Bacchae.*

they cull from honey-dropping founts in certain gardens and glades of the Muses—like the bees, and winging the air as these do. [17] And what they tell is true. For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him: every man, whilst he retains possession of that, is powerless to indite a verse or chant an oracle. Seeing then that it is not by art that they compose and utter so many fine things about the deeds of men— as you do about Homer—but by a divine dispensation, each is able only to compose that to which the Muse has stirred him, this man dithyrambs, another laudatory odes, another dance-songs, another epic or else iambic verse; but each is at fault in any other kind. For not by art do they utter these things, but by divine influence; since, if they had fully learnt by art to speak on one kind of theme, they would know how to speak on all. And for this reason God takes away the mind of these men and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits, but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses us through them. A convincing proof of what I say is the case of Tynnichus, [18] the Chalcidian, who had never composed a single poem in his life that could deserve any mention, and then produced the paean [19] which is in everyone's mouth, almost the finest song we have, simply—as he says himself—"an invention of the Muses." For the god, as it seems to me, intended him to be a sign to us that we should not waver or doubt that these fine poems are not human or the work of men, but divine and the work of gods; and that the poets are merely the interpreters of the gods, according as each is possessed by one of the heavenly powers. To show this forth, the god of set purpose sang the finest of songs through the meanest of poets: or do you not think my statement true, Ion?

Ion.

Yes, upon my word, I do: for you somehow touch my soul with your words, Socrates, and I believe it is by divine dispensation that good poets interpret to us these utterances of the gods.

Soc.

And you rhapsodes, for your part, interpret the utterances of the poets?

[17] A beginning of this comparison appears in Aristophanes' praise of the early tragedian Phrynichus—"he sipped the fruits of ambrosial lays, ever bringing away sweet song." *Aristoph. Birds 750f.*

[18] Nothing else is known of this poet.

[19] A hymn in honor of a god, usually Apollo.

Ion.
Again your words are true.
Soc.
And so you act as interpreters of interpreters?
Ion.
Precisely.

Soc.
Stop now and tell me, Ion, without reserve what I may choose to ask you: when you give a good recitation and specially thrill your audience, either with the lay of Odysseus [20] leaping forth on to the threshold, revealing himself to the suitors and pouring out the arrows before his feet, or of Achilles [21] dashing at Hector, or some part of the sad story of Andromache [22] or of Hecuba, [23] or of Priam, [24] are you then in your senses, or are you carried out of yourself, and does your soul in an ecstasy suppose herself to be among the scenes you are describing, whether they be in Ithaca, or in Troy, or as the poems may chance to place them?
Ion.
How vivid to me, Socrates, is this part of your proof! For I will tell you without reserve: when I relate a tale of woe, my eyes are filled with tears; and when it is of fear or awe, my hair stands on end with terror, and my heart leaps.

Soc.
Well now, are we to say, Ion, that such a person is in his senses at that moment,—when in all the adornment of elegant attire and golden crowns he weeps at sacrifice or festival, having been despoiled of none of his finery; or shows fear as he stands before more than twenty thousand friendly people, none of whom is stripping or injuring him?
Ion.
No, on my word, not at all, Socrates, to tell the strict truth.
Soc.
And are you aware that you rhapsodes produce these same effects on most of the spectators also?

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[20] *Od.* 22.2ff.
[21] *Il.* 22.312ff.
[22] *Il.* 6.370-502; 22.437-515.
[23] *Il.* 22.430-36; 24.747-59.
[24] *Il.* 22.408-28; 24.144-717.

Ion.

Yes, very fully aware: for I look down upon them from the platform and see them at such moments crying and turning awestruck eyes upon me and yielding to the amazement of my tale. For I have to pay the closest attention to them; since, if I set them crying, I shall laugh myself because of the money I take, but if they laugh, I myself shall cry because of the money I lose.

Soc.

And are you aware that your spectator is the last of the rings which I spoke of as receiving from each other the power transmitted from the Heraclean lodestone? You, the rhapsode and actor, are the middle ring; the poet himself is the first; but it is the god who through the whole series draws the souls of men whithersoever he pleases, making the power of one depend on the other. And, just as from the magnet, there is a mighty chain of choric performers and masters and under-masters suspended by side-connections from the rings that hang down from the Muse. One poet is suspended from one Muse, another from another: the word we use for it is "possessed," but it is much the same thing, for he is held. And from these first rings—the poets—are suspended various others, which are thus inspired, some by Orpheus and others by Musaeus [25]; but the majority are possessed and held by Homer. Of whom you, Ion, are one, and are possessed by Homer; and so, when anyone recites the work of another poet, you go to sleep and are at a loss what to say; but when some one utters a strain of your poet, you wake up at once, and your soul dances, and you have plenty to say: for it is not by art or knowledge about Homer that you say what you say, but by divine dispensation and possession; just as the Corybantian worshippers are keenly sensible of that strain alone which belongs to the god whose possession is on them, and have plenty of gestures and phrases for that tune, but do not heed any other. And so you, Ion, when the subject of Homer is mentioned, have plenty to say, but nothing on any of the others. And when you ask me the reason why you can speak at large on Homer but not on the rest, I tell you it is because your skill in praising Homer comes not by art, but by divine dispensation.

Ion.

Well spoken, I grant you, Socrates; but still I shall be surprised if you can speak well enough to convince me that I am possessed and mad

[25] A legendary bard to whom certain oracular verses were ascribed.

when I praise Homer. Nor can I think you would believe it of me yourself, if you heard me speaking about him.

Soc.

I declare I am quite willing to hear you, but not until you have first answered me this: on what thing in Homer's story do you speak well? Not on all of them, I presume.

Ion.

I assure you, Socrates, on all without a single exception.

Soc.

Not, of course, including those things of which you have in fact no knowledge, but which Homer tells.

Ion.

And what sort of things are they, which Homer tells, but of which I have no knowledge?

Soc.

Why, does not Homer speak a good deal about arts, in a good many places? For instance, about chariot-driving: if I can recall the lines, I will quote them to you.

Ion.

No, I will recite them, for I can remember.

Soc.

Tell me then what Nestor says to his son Antilochus, advising him to be careful about the turning-post in the horse-race in honor of Patroclus.

Ion.

" Bend thyself in the polished car slightly to the left of them; [26] and call to the right-hand horse and goad him on, while your hand slackens his reins. And at the post let your left-hand horse swerve close, so that the nave of the well-wrought wheel may seem to come up to the edge of the stone, which yet avoid to touch." *Hom. Il. 23.335 ff.*

Soc.

Enough. Now, Ion, will a doctor or a charioteer be the better judge whether Homer speaks correctly or not in these lines?

Ion.

A charioteer, of course.

Soc.

Because he has this art, or for some other reason?

Ion.

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[26] i.e. one of the two white stones, set up at each end of the course, which had been mentioned six lines before.

No, because it is his art.

Soc.

And to every art has been apportioned by God a power of knowing a particular business? For I take it that what we know by the art of piloting we cannot also know by that of medicine.

Ion.

No, to be sure.

Soc.

And what we know by medicine, we cannot by carpentry also?

Ion.

No, indeed.

Soc.

And this rule holds for all the arts, that what we know by one of them we cannot know by another? But before you answer that, just tell me this: do you agree that one art is of one sort, and another of another?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

Do you argue this as I do, and call one art different from another when one is a knowledge of one kind of thing, and another a knowledge of another kind?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

Since, I suppose, if it were a knowledge of the same things—how could we say that one was different from another, when both could give us the same knowledge? Just as I know that there are five of these fingers, and you equally know the same fact about them; and if I should ask you whether both you and I know this same fact by the same art of numeration, or by different arts, you would reply, I presume, that it was by the same?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

Then tell me now, what I was just going to ask you, whether you think this rule holds for all the arts—that by the same art we must know the

same things, and by a different art things that are not the same; but if the art is other, the things we know by it must be different also.

Ion.

I think it is so, Socrates.

Soc.

Then he who has not a particular art will be incapable of knowing aright the words or works of that art?

Ion.

True.

Soc.

Then will you or a charioteer be the better judge of whether Homer speaks well or not in the lines that you quoted?

Ion.

A charioteer.

Soc.

Because, I suppose, you are a rhapsode and not a charioteer.

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

And the rhapsode's art is different from the charioteer's?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

Then if it is different, it is also a knowledge of different things.

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

Now, what of the passage where Homer tells how Hecamede, Nestor's concubine, gives the wounded Machaon a posset? His words are something like this: " Of Pramneian wine it was, and therein she grated cheese of goat's milk with a grater of bronze; and thereby an onion as a relish for drink. " *Hom. Il. 11.639-40* [27] Is it for the doctor's or the rhapsode's art to discern aright whether Homer speaks correctly here or not?

Ion.

For the doctor's.

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[27]The quotation, as Plato indicates, is not accurate. Machaon was the son of Asclepius and physician to the Greeks at Troy. Nothing is known of "Pramneian wine," except that it was "thick and nutritious" (*Athen. 1.10b*).

Soc.

Well now, when Homer says: " And she passed to the bottom like a plummet which, set on a horn " 977) supports Aristotle's view that the horn acted as a sheath to protect the line from being bitten through by the fish. are we to say it is for the fisherman's or for the rhapsode's art to decide what he means by this, and whether it is rightly or wrongly spoken?

Ion.

Clearly, Socrates, for the fisherman's art.

Soc.

Then please observe: suppose you were questioning me and should ask:

"Since therefore, Socrates, you find it is for these several arts to appraise the passages of Homer that belong to each, be so good as to make out those also that are for the seer and the seer's art, and show me the sort of passages that come under his ability to distinguish whether they are well or ill done"; observe how easily and truly I shall answer you. For he has many passages, both in the *Odyssey*, as for instance the words of Theoclymenus, the seer of the line of Melampus, to the suitors:

Soc.

" Hapless men, what bane is this afflicts you? Your heads and faces and limbs below are shrouded in night, and wailing is enkindled, and cheeks are wet with tears: of ghosts the porch is full, and the court full of them also, hastening hell-wards 'neath the gloom: and the sun is perished out of heaven, and an evil mist is spread abroad; " *Hom. Od. 20.351-57* [28] and there are many passages in the *Iliad* also, as in the fight at the rampart, where he says: " For as they were eager to pass over, a bird had crossed them, an eagle of lofty flight, pressing the host at the left hand, and bearing a blood-red monster of a snake, alive and still struggling; nor had it yet unlearnt the lust of battle. For bending back it smote its captor on the breast by the neck, and the bird in the bitterness of pain cast it away to the ground, and dropped it down in the midst of the throng; and then with a cry flew off on the wafting winds." *Hom. Il. 12.200-7* This passage, and others of the sort, are those that I should say the seer has to examine and judge.

Ion.

And you speak the truth, Socrates.

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[28] Melampus, the ancestor of Theoclymenus (cf. *Hom. Od. 15.225-56*), was supposed to have been the first mortal who possessed the gift of prophecy.

Soc.

And so do you, Ion, in saying that. Now you must do as I did, and in return for my picking out and the *Iliad* the kinds of passage that belong severally to the seer, the doctor, and the fisherman, you have now to pick out for me—since you are so much more versed in Homer than I—the kinds which belong to the rhapsode, Ion, and the rhapsode's art, and which he should be able to consider and distinguish beyond the rest of mankind.

Ion.

What I say, Socrates, is—"all passages."

Soc.

Surely you do not say "all," Ion! Can you be so forgetful? And yet forgetfulness would ill become a rhapsode.

Ion.

Why, how am I forgetting?

Soc.

Do you not remember that you said that the art of the rhapsode was different from that of the charioteer?

Ion.

I remember.

Soc.

And you also admitted that, being different, it would know different things?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

Then by your own account the rhapsode's art cannot know everything, nor the rhapsode either.

Ion.

Let us say, everything except those instances, Socrates.

Soc.

By "those instances" you imply the subjects of practically all the other arts. Well, as he does not know all of them, which kinds will he know?

Ion.

Those things, I imagine, that it befits a man to say, and the sort of thing that a woman should say; the sort for a slave and the sort for a freeman; and the sort for a subject or for a ruler.

Soc.

Do you mean that the rhapsode will know better than the pilot what sort of thing a ruler of a storm-tossed vessel at sea should say?

Ion.

No, the pilot knows better in that case.

Soc.

Well, will the rhapsode know better than the doctor what sort of thing a ruler of a sick man should say?

Ion.

Not in that case either.

Soc.

But he will know the sort for a slave, you say?

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

For instance, if the slave is a cowherd, you say the rhapsode will know what the other should say to pacify his cows when they get fierce, but the cowherd will not?

Ion.

That is not so.

Soc.

Well, the sort of thing that a woman ought to say—a spinning-woman—about the working of wool?

Ion.

No.

Soc.

But he will know what a man should say, when he is a general exhorting his men?

Ion.

Yes, that sort of thing the rhapsode will know.

Soc.

Well, but is the art of the rhapsode the art of the general?

Ion.

I, at any rate, should know what a general ought to say.

Soc.

Yes, since I daresay you are good at generalship also, Ion. For in fact, if you happened to have skill in horsemanship as well as in the lyre, you would know when horses were well or ill managed: but if I asked you,

"By which art is it, Ion, that you know that horses are being well managed, by your skill as a horseman, or as a player of the lyre?" what would your answer be?

Ion.

I should say, by my skill as a horseman.

Soc.

And if again you were distinguishing the good lyre-players, you would admit that you distinguished by your skill in the lyre, and not by your skill as a horseman.

Ion.

Yes.

Soc.

And when you judge of military matters, do you judge as having skill in generalship, or as a good rhapsode?

Ion.

To my mind, there is no difference.

Soc.

What, no difference, do you say? Do you mean that the art of the rhapsode and the general is one, not two?

Ion.

It is one, to my mind.

Soc.

So that anyone who is a good rhapsode is also, in fact, a good general?

Ion.

Certainly, Socrates.

Soc.

And again, anyone who happens to be a good general is also a good rhapsode.

Ion.

No there I do not agree.

Soc.

But still you agree that anyone who is a good rhapsode is also a good general?

Ion.

To be sure.

Soc.

And you are the best rhapsode in Greece?

Ion.

Far the best, Socrates.

Soc.

Are you also, Ion, the best general in Greece?

Ion.

Be sure of it, Socrates and that I owe to my study of Homer.

Soc.

Then how, in Heaven's name, can it be, Ion, that you, who are both the best general and the best rhapsode in Greece, go about performing as a rhapsode to the Greeks, but not as a general? Or do you suppose that the Greeks feel a great need of a rhapsode in the glory of his golden crown, but of a general none at all?

Ion.

It is because my city, [29] Socrates, is under the rule and generalship of your people, and is not in want of a general; whilst you and Sparta would not choose me as a general, since you think you manage well enough for yourselves.

Soc.

My excellent Ion, you are acquainted with Apollodorus [30] of Cyzicus, are you not?

Ion.

What might he be?

Soc.

A man whom the Athenians have often chosen as their general, though a foreigner; and Phanosthenes [31] of Andros, and Heracleides [32] of Clazomenae, whom my city invests with the high command and other offices although they are foreigners, because they have proved themselves to be competent. And will she not choose Ion of Ephesus as her general, and honor him, if he shows himself competent? Why, you Ephesians are by origin Athenians, [33] are you not, and Ephesus is inferior to no city? But in fact, Ion, if you are right in saying it is by art and knowledge that you are able to praise Homer, you are playing me false: you have professed to me that you know any amount of fine things about Homer, and you promise to display them; but you are only deceiving me, and so far from displaying the subjects of your skill, you decline even to tell me what they are, for all my entreaties.

Soc.

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[29] Ephesus.

[30] Nothing else is known of this general.

[31] Captured the Thurian admiral Dorieus, 407 B. C.

[32] Nothing else is known of this general.

[33] Androclus of Attica founded Ephesus as the Ionian city known to the Greeks of Plato's time.

You are a perfect Proteus in the way you take on every kind of shape, twisting about this way and that, until at last you elude my grasp in the guise of a general, so as to avoid displaying your skill in Homeric lore. Now if you are an artist and, as I was saying just now, you only promised me a display about Homer to deceive me, you are playing me false; whilst if you are no artist, but speak fully and finely about Homer, as I said you did, without any knowledge but by a divine dispensation which causes you to be possessed by the poet, you play quite fair. Choose therefore which of the two you prefer us to call you, dishonest or divine.

Ion.

The difference is great, Socrates; for it is far nobler to be called divine.

Soc.

Then you may count on this nobler title in our minds, Ion, of being a divine and not an artistic praiser of Homer.

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