

Ion

By Plato

translated by Jim Barcelona with Poems in the Appendix, copyright 2004

for Spinoza's Coat, Poets Everywhere, and Mom & Dad

Contents

Introduction

Ion

Appendix: Poems by the Translator

Introduction

I. A new translation of the *Ion*

Presented here is a translation of Plato's *Ion*, a dialogue about poetic inspiration, and whether or not poets create solely through skill or divine inspiration. Plato presents the almost iconic image of the raving, mad and divine poet inspired by the muse. He does this in the conversation that occurs between Socrates and Ion, a rhapsode, which is a professional performer of poetry in ancient Greece. The work also is what would today be called "literary criticism," and a criticism of literary criticism itself. Since poetic inspiration is a kind of magnetism [533d - 534a], anyone who comes within this field of inspiration can be said to be also magnetically charged with inspiration. The literary critic as an audience of poetry likewise becomes inspired in the writing of literary criticism. Therefore, literary criticism is not simply a piecing together of a text for the purposes of making a structured and solely rational interpretation of it. Plato would like to claim that there is something divine, non-objective, and non-reductive about poetry and the arts related to it (literary criticism) that he can only speak about in metaphor.

This translation, started in the Spring of 1992, went through a major revision in the spring of 2003, when I was taking ancient Greek lessons from Ken Quandt, and during December of 2003. Traditionally, the *Ion* is the first dialogue that classics students translate, hence the words of the Spaniard Philosopher, Carlos Norena, "The *Ion* takes me back to my youth." This translation takes me back to a youth, when at 19, divine inspiration was easily believable. Like Descartes, I would not get up until noon. I would start the day either with a run through the green and hilly redwood forests of Santa Cruz, or holding very close to me and showering with wake up kisses like a silly puppy dog my first sweetheart, Alia. Some days would

start with inspiration to do a certain style of painting that I learned from Tom Sosnovec which involved a heavy, poverty-inducing application of paint in order to create a very rich texture.

I first met Alia at a masquerade ball. She was dressed as a gypsy in a black skirt embroidered with flowers, and a billowy white top. She held in her hand a beautiful periwinkle mask peppered along its borders with sequin. On one side were great, long feathers, white and blue; on the other, long, curly ribbons of many colors. She made that mask and had the misfortune of losing that beautiful mask of hers. Being in total sympathy with her and wanting to show some sign of devotion and affection for her I worked on a painting for two weeks of a mask that looked just like the one she lost. I missed classes to work on this painting and went through 2 iterations of the painting. The first painting I threw out in anger for my poor skills, but the second one came very easily and so beautifully that I believed that I was given some divine allotment. I still remember the look of surprise, astonishment, love, and speechlessness on her face when I gave her that painting. Well, it's been more than 10 years since I made that painting of that mask, and since that time the muse of painting has not visited me. I take this to be a confirmation of Socrates' claim that painting is not completely a skill.

The question of how a poet or artist creates still seems to be part of some controversy. There are very strong critiques against the poet as divinely inspired:

1) The *Poetics* of Aristotle can be interpreted as a critique, for the whole work seems to be a how-to manual on how to write tragedies, as if there were a logos for poetry.

2) Another critique comes from biological notions of consciousness. In this age we would rather say that the poet is mad and a candidate for Prozac and Ritalin, or that they write merely because they are alcoholic, or had a bad childhood.

3) Moreover, in the *Republic* Plato severs literary criticism from the chain of magnetically charged inspiration in favor of the rational philosopher that can touch poetry without being at all affected. In the *Republic* [603a - 603b], Plato damns poetry as keeping us away from the better parts of ourselves, as being mere imitation and falsehood, the complete opposite of philosophy, what Voegelin would call a philomythos.

Still, there is a tension in Plato's texts between two poets: the one who is divinely inspired and speaks the truth [534b2], and the poet who neglects the best part of the soul through imitations and lies [605b1]. Can this tension be resolved? Is it one or the other, or is there something in between?

So why a new translation of the *Ion*? My understanding of ancient Greek despite the excellent tutoring I received from Ken Quandt is still incomplete, and I fear that this translation will have quite a few errors and will lead to quite a few

misunderstandings. Isn't that reason enough to not even add a new translation to all those that have been added to the heap for the past 2500 years? First and foremost, the translation of the *Ion* is a gift to my weekly philosophy group Spinoza's Coat. Currently, we are reading Aristotle's *Poetics*, and I thought it would be a complete shame if our group didn't have the opportunity to at least read the *Ion*, so as to get a contrast between the two great thinkers, Plato and Aristotle. I poured over this translation of the *Ion* with Brandon Brown the week of Christmas, 2003 over a bottle of scotch and a bag of pretzels. The insights that we came up with are in the footnotes to the translation, and by themselves are hopefully enough to justify this translation.

The second reason is a bit more personal. I have stacks of stuff that I wrote: 300 or so type-written pages that constitutes my journal, about 500 or so pages of notes on philosophy, rants, literature, music, and poetry. I was thinking to myself that I should somehow organize all those pages in a printed form. When most folks have figured out that I've translated the *Ion*, they ask for a translation. Now I can hand a decent printed form of a translation to them instead of Xerox copies of an even poorer translation made by a 19 year old.

The third reason is even more personal. I really think it's important to break the stereotype of Asian guys as being mere geeky engineers or doctors or careerists or martial arts masters, who have no interest in philosophy or poetry, and are devoid of eroticism. The best way of doing this is through self-expression, which can only help thrust into the world an awareness of the complexities of the people in it.

The fourth reason has to do with the poetry scene in San Francisco. There are so many wonderful and excellent poets in San Francisco. They are humble, too, without the inflated-pride or ego of an *Ion*. What has always amazed me about the poets in San Francisco is their openness to philosophy, political thought, and just plain existence. This is perhaps the reason why the poems I've heard here can jump from Critical Theory, to Iraq, to an ice cold 40 in just a few lines, and beautifully, too. Perhaps, a reading of the *Ion* might encourage all poets out there to seek more opportunities for being attuned to the ground of poetry.

Ion

Dramatis Personae

Socrates, a seeker of truth
Ion, a rhapsode

[530a] Socrates. Hello, Ion. Where are you living now? With us? Or are you going

home to Ephesus?

Ion. Neither, Socrates. I am coming from Epidaurus, from the Asclepiea.

So. The Epidaurians hold contests for rhapsodes[1], too?

Ion. Indeed, and for the other arts as well.

So. Really? Were you competing in something for us? And how did you compete in that something?

Ion. We won the first of the prizes, Socrates. **[530b]**

So. Congratulations! Alright, see to it that we shall win at the Panathenian Festival, too.

Ion. Well, it will be that way, if the god wishes.

So. I must say that, often, I have envied all you rhapsodists of the arts, Ion. The fact that it is one and at the same time fitting to adorn your body with your creativity, and to appear as beautiful as possible, and to also spend time with the other many, and good poets - particular, and above all with Homer, the best and most divine of the poets - and to learn thoroughly the meaning of the whole, not the single verse, is enviable. **[530c]** A good rhapsode did not ever come to be, if he did not understand the sayings by the poet. It is necessary for the rhapsodist, through interpretation, to become the thoughts of the poet for those listening. To make such beauty without knowing what the poet means is impossible. All such things are worthy of envy.

Ion. You speak the truth, Socrates. In my case, this aspect of the arts gave me the most labor, and I think I speak most beautifully out of all men concerning Homer, since neither Metrodorus of **[530d]** Lampsakos, nor Stisimbrotus, of Thasos, nor Glaucon nor anyone of the rest has proved able to say so many beautiful thoughts concerning Homer as much as I have.

So. I'm delighted to hear that, Ion. It is clear that you will not be reluctant to give a display for me.

Ion. All right, and believe me, it's truly worthwhile to hear me, Socrates, how well I have adorned Homer, so that I think I am worthy to be crowned by the devotees of Homer with a crown of gold.

So. Of course, and later I will make some time to listen to **[531a]** you, but now pick out for me this much and no more. Are you clever concerning Homer only or concerning Hesiod as well, and Archilochus?

Ion. In no way at all, but concerning Homer only, for it seems to me to be sufficient.

531a5

So. Is there anything concerning which both Homer and Hesiod say the same thing?

Ion. Indeed, much I think.

So. And so concerning these, would you explain what Homer says more beautiful than what Hesiod says?

Ion. I would explain those things alike, **[531b]** Socrates, concerning which they speak the same.

So. What about concerning those things they do not say the same? As for instance about the prophetic things both Homer says and Hesiod.

Ion. Indeed.

So. Really? Would you explain more beautifully than one of the diviners - the good ones - both how much alike and differently done they speak about divination?

Ion. The diviners.

So. If you were a diviner, even though you are not, would you be able both to explain in the same manner about the sayings and know differently about the sayings you explained?

Ion. Evidently.

531c1 - 532a3

[531c] So. And so why in the world then are you skilled [deinos] concerning Homer, but not concerning Hesiod, nor the other poets? Does Homer speak concerning other things or do the rest of the poets speak of these very things altogether? Hasn't he described in full for the most part about war, the intercourse of men both good and evil and skilled and unskilled with one another, the gods interacting with men and one another - that is, how they interact - heavenly experiences, the house of Hades, and the birth of the gods **[531d]** and heroes? Isn't it these things about which Homer has created his poetry?

Ion. You speak the truth, Socrates.

So. What about the other poets? Are they not concerned with these same things also?

Ion. Yes, but Socrates, they have not made things the way Homer has.

So. How so? Worse?

Ion. By far, yes!

So. Homer's better?

Ion. In truth by Zeus, better!

So. Is it not then the case, O dear head^[2] Ion, that whenever many speak about arithmetic, one speaks best, and of course, one will also recognize the one who speaks **[531e]** well?

Ion. I agree.

So. And so, he himself, the very man who recognizes those speaking badly, too, or another?

Ion. Clearly, the man himself.

So. Is it not the case that this man holds the arithmetical art?

Ion. Yes.

So. Well, whenever some persons speak about wholesome foods (what kind they are), one speaks best, but is it the person that recognizes the one speaking best that speaks best, or the person that recognizes the worse speaker, or he who speaks the best?

Ion. I suppose it is clear that it is he who speaks best.

So. Who is this? What do we call this person?

Ion. A doctor.

So. Therefore in summary, we say that he himself recognizes always both anyone who speaks well and badly **[532a]** concerning the many speakers themselves; or if he does not recognize the one speaking badly, it is clear that he does not speak well either concerning himself.

Ion. This is so.

So. Is it not the case that he himself proves to be skilled [deinos] concerning both?

Ion. Yes.

So. Isn't it the case that you say Homer, too, and the other poets of which there is Hesiod and Archilochus, speak about the same subjects, but not, since he, Homer, speaks so well whereas the others speak worse?

Ion. I speak the truth.

So. Therefore, even if you recognize **[532b]** him speaking well and them speaking worse, you would recognize that they speak worse.

Ion. Sort of, it seems.

So. Therefore, my dear sir, if we say Ion is similarly skilled [deinos] concerning Homer and alike concerning the other poets we will not err, since you admit yourself to be a sufficient judge of all howsoever great they speak about their subjects, and admit to make the poets meeting nearby the subjects.

Ion. And so what is the cause, Socrates, that when someone talks about the other poets, I neither turn **[532c]** my mind towards, nor am I able to contribute worthy mention, but simply start to fall asleep, but whenever someone makes mention, immediately I am awoken and I turn my mind towards that someone, and I have plenty to say?

So. To guess this (shrugs) will not be difficult, friend, but it is all clear that you are unable to speak with art and knowledge concerning Homer. If you were able to be as artful, then you could speak of the other poets as artfully, for poetry is a whole, I presume. Isn't this the case?

Ion. Yes.

[532d] So. Is it not the case that whenever one takes an art as a whole one will be concerned about coming to a manner of enquiry? What I mean by this, you need to hear in some way from me, Ion.

Ion. By Zeus, yes, Socrates, I certainly do, for I rejoice hearing you, the wise.

So. I would like to tell you the truth, Ion, but I presume you maybe wise, though the rhapsodes and actors, whose poetry you sing, are wise, and I speak nothing more than the truth as is reasonable for **[532e]** an unskilled man. For concerning that which I asked you, you saw how worthless and amateurish knowing just Homer is, and how the complete man knows the same enquiry to be whenever you take the whole art.[3] We'll grasp the words meaning by argument. For example, something is the skill belonging to painting as a whole, right?

Ion. Yes.

So. Isn't it the case that many painters are and have been?

Ion. Of course.

So. Up to this time have you seen of these people anyone who is excellent at picking out [apophainein] who paints well, and doesn't concerning Polygnotus, the son of Aglaophon, but is incapable of picking out [apohainein] who paints well and doesn't concerning the other painters? **[533a]** Whenever he explains [epideiknuh] the works of the other painters, does he both sleep, is at a loss, and does not know what to add, but whenever it's necessary for him to show his opinion concerning Polygnotus or some other painter you want - but only one - does he awaken and turn his attention, and does he have in abundance much to say?

Ion. No by Zeus! Surely not.

So. Well, from the past to the present in the art of sculpting have you seen anyone who is skilled at explaining one sculpture only - for example about Daedelus of Metion, **[533b]** Epeius of Panopes, Theodorus of Samos, or some other sculptor who created well; but face to face with the works of other sculptors, this person is at a loss and sleeps not having anything to say?

Ion. No by Zeus! I haven't seen such a person.

So. Then again - I was just thinking - neither in flute-playing nor in harp-playing nor in singing with the harp nor in rhapsodying nor ever have you seen any man who is skilled at explaining who rhapsodes well and not: Olympus, Thamyris, **[533c]** Orpheus or Phemius of Ithaca, the rhapsode, and at the same time is at a loss and does not have words to add concerning Ion, the rhapsode of Ephesus.

Ion. I do not have to contradict you concerning this, Socrates. But I am aware of these things themselves, that with regards to Homer I speak the most beautiful of men and I have much to say, and everyone says that I speak well, whereas concerning the other poets I do not. Well now, you see, such is the case.

So. I do see, Ion, and in fact I am going to show **[533d]** what this matter seems to be to me.[4] This art, concerning speaking well of Homer, is not existing within you, as I was just saying, but divine inspiration [theia dunamis] which stirs you, just as in the rock which Euripides named Magnesian, but the people call Heracleian.[5] In fact, the stone itself not only attracts [agei] the rings themselves, but also puts into the rings a power so that these in turn are able to make this same thing, the very thing which the rock did, **[533e]** drawing other rings so that sometimes a very large chain of pieces of iron - such as rings - hang from each other [ex allhlwn]. the power makes [anhrthtai] all of these dependent upon this stone. Thus the muse herself [h Mousa auth] makes inspired, and as others become inspired, the chain is dependent upon those inspired.

All the good poets make words not from skill but by being inspired and possessed they say all those beautiful poems; and the good lyric poets in like manner, just as the Corybantes not being in of their senses, **[534a]** so the lyric poets not being in their senses create those beautiful poems, but whenever they embark upon music and rhythm, they rave like Bacchantes and are being possessed, just as the Bacchantes draw from the rivers of honey and milk being possessed and not being in their senses, and the soul of the lyric poets does this, which they say themselves. As we all know, the poets say to us that they bring their poems by plucking them **[534b]** from springs flowing with honey out of the muses glen and garden like bees, and they themselves are flying, and speak the truth.

A poet is a light-winged thing, and sacred, and he is not able to create until he becomes both inspired [entheos] and out of his senses [ekphrwn], and his mind is no longer in himself. Until he has these properties, the entire man is unable to create and to prophesy. In as much as creating and saying many beautiful things concerning matters is not a skill, just as you concerning Homer, but **[534c]** by divine allotment [theia moira] enabling each to speak, to create beautifully only these - a dithyramb, an encomia, a choral hymn, an epic, and an iambic verse. Each is poor with other things.[5.1]

They say these things not by skill but a god moves them, for if about a single thing they were able to speak beautifully, then about everything else they should be able to speak beautifully also. Through inspiration, the god uses the poets as servants, **[534d]** oracle mongers and diviners of gods by taking away their minds so that we, the ones listening, know that they are not the ones saying these things of great worth [houtw pollou axia] - those who are out of their minds - but the god himself is the one speaking, for through them he speaks to us.

The greatest proof [tekmhrion] of this statement is Tynnichus[6], who never made one poem which would've been thought right to be remembered, but he did make without skill, the paeon, nearly the most beautiful of all poems, which all sing, the very thing which he himself calls "an invention **[534e]** of the Muses." In this matter most especially it seems to me that the god showed us so that we would not be in doubt that human nature is not the maker of the beauty of such poems - nor of men - but the divine nature and gods. The poets are merely the interpreters of the gods, being possessed from the god each is inspired. Showing this the god purposely sings the most beautiful lyrics through the most **[535a]** poor of poets, or do I not seem to speak the truth, Ion.

Ion. Yes by Zeus, truly, for he somehow fastens upon me words for my soul, Socrates, and for me the best poets seem to interpret these things for us by divine inspiration from the gods.

So. And so once more the rhapsodes interpret the words of the poets for us. Don't you interpret?

Ion. Indeed, you speak the truth.

So. And so you become interpreters of the interpreters?

Ion. Yes, by all means.

[535b] So. Hold on and tell me this, Ion, and don't withhold your opinion so that I may ask you: whenever you perform the epic well and strike fear into your audience, either you sing about when Odysseus leaps upon the threshold making himself manifest to the wooers, and pouring out arrows from his foot, or when Achilles rushing upon Hector, or you sing one of the sad parts about Andromache, Hecube, or Priam: before singing these parts are you in your senses, or do you become outside yourself, and concerning these matters do you **[535c]** think your soul with respect to what you said is inspired, and thinks itself in Ithaca or Troy or wherever in fact is demanded of you from the epic?[7]

Ion. How clearly, Socrates, you asked the question, for I will not withhold anything from you. Whenever I say a sad part, my eyes fill with tears; whenever I say the fearful or terrible, my hairs stand upright under the influence of fear and my heart leaps.

[535d] So. Is this man in his senses who would weep having been dressed in clothes embroidered in various colors and in gold crowns both at a sacrificial festival, having lost none of these, or would he fear anything although he is standing before 20,000 men and with friends, neither stripped nor harmed?

Ion. No, by Zeus. By no means, Socrates, to tell the truth.

So. Do you know that you do many of the same things for the spectators?

[535e] Ion. I know that I do so very beautifully, for on each occasion I look down upon them from above a platform and see them weeping, looking terrible and being astounded by my words. It's necessary that I hold their minds; because whenever I make them cry, I will laugh taking their silver, but whenever they laugh, I weep for they get my silver.

So. Do you know that this spectator is the outermost of the rings which - I spoke earlier - receive power from the rest by the Heracleian stone? The middle is you, the **[536a]** rhapsodes and interpreters. The first himself is the poet. The god through all of these attracts whithersoever he wishes, the souls of men - the power hanging from each-other. As from this stone., a great string hangs upon the choral dancers (both teachers and under-teachers). On the side hanging upon the rings of the Muses, one poet hangs onto one muse, and another poet hangs on another muse. We say he is possessed and **[536b]** participates in the muse, for he is held. From those of the first ring, the poets, the rest are hung upon and become possessed; for there are the Orphics, and the Muses, and the rest are possessed by Homer, of

which you, Ion, are one. You are possessed by Homer, and whenever one sings a song of the other poets, you both sleep and are at a loss of what to say, but whenever one sings the hymns of your poet, you immediately wake up and your soul dances, and you have much to say. **[536c]** What you say about Homer, you say not by art, nor by learning, but by divine allotment and possession, just as the Corybantics with only one hymn quickly perceive who is the god by whom they are possessed. In this, the hymn and figure and word, they flourish. So it is with you, Ion, concerning Homer, whenever one recites him, you have much to say, and concerning the others you are at **[536d]** a loss. This is the cause of what you asked me: Why you perk up when it comes to Homer, but not the others has to do with the fact that not by skill but by divine allotment you are terrible and wonderful [deinos] when it comes to Homer.

Ion. You speak well, Socrates. I would be amazed, however, if you could speak so well, so that I would be convinced that I am possessed and mad as I praise Homer. I think that I would seem better than no one to you, if you would listen to me speaking about Homer.

So. I must say that I wish to hear you; however, not **[536e]** until you answer this for me: Of which matters that Homer speaks, do you speak well? I don't suppose you speak well about everything.

Ion. You know well that I speak well about everything.

So. I don't suppose you speak well about those things which you don't happen to know about, but about which Homer speaks.

Ion. And of what kind of things are those which Homer speaks about, and I am ignorant of?

[537a] So. Doesn't Homer speak in many places, and at length concerning the arts? For example, chariot driving - if I remember, the verse, I will tell you.

Ion. Instead, let me, since I remember.

So. Then tell me what Nestor says to Antilochus, his son, exhorting him to be cautious concerning the turning post in the chariot race for Patroclus.

Ion.

"And upon the well-polished chariot board, lean, he says,
Softly to the left, **[537b]** yet for the right horse
Command loudly goading him on. Yield the reins to the ground.
At the turning-post let your left horse come near
Till the nave appears to graze the highest point
Of the wheel, but do not touch the stone." (Iliad, 23, 335ff.)

[537c] So. That suffices. Ion, Homer speaks these verses either rightly or not; which of the two would know better, the doctor or the charioteer.

Ion. The charioteer, I suppose.

So. He possesses his knowledge as a skill or by something else?

Ion. Not by something else, but as a skill.

So. Is it not the case that to be able to know has been assigned one of the skills by the god's work? There is not any skill that we know of that belongs to steering *and* medicine.

Ion. Of course not.

So. Nor that which belongs to medicine *and* carpentry.

[537d] Ion. Of course not.

So. Isn't it the case with all the arts also, where if we know one particular skill, we won't know some other particular skill? Answer this for me: would you say one skill is a skill for itself, and another a skill for itself and not another?

Ion. Indeed.

So. I'm inferring here. If one subject matter is understood, and another subject matter is understood, I can say that one subject matter deals with one skill, and the other subject matter deals with some other skill. **[537e]** Would you make the same inference, too?

Ion. Yes.

So. If for someone, somewhere understanding was of the same subject matters, would we say that these subject matters were two when the same things could be known from both?[8] In the same way that both you and I know that there are five fingers, so do we know the same thing. If I would ask you if we knew the same art, arithmetic, both I and you and even another, would say - I suppose - the same thing?

Ion. Yes.

[538a] So. Well then, just now I was about to ask you, at this moment: with regard to all the arts, it seems to you thus: certain things are necessarily known by the same art, and these things aren't known by any other art, but if certain things are not known by the same art, then these certain things are different.

Ion. It seems to me to be so, Socrates.

So. Isn't it the case that anyone who doesn't have a certain skill will not be able to know the words or doing-well of another art?

[538b] Ion. You speak truly.

So. Concerning the verses of which you spoke, as to whether or not Homer speaks well, who knows better: you or the charioteer?

Ion. The charioteer.

So. Because rhapsodes are somewhere else but not the charioteers.

Ion. Yes!

So. The rhapsodic art is different from the charioteering art.

Ion. Yes.

So. If different, then another subject matter.

Ion. Yes.

So. And what about when Homer speaks about Hecamede, the concubine of Nestor, giving wounded Machaon a potion to drink? **[538c]** He says these lines:

With Pramneian wine, he said, she
Grated goat cheese on top
With a grater made of bronze and
With an onion as a relish for a drink.

Whether Homer speaks rightly or not, this is distinguished rightly by the doctor or the rhapsode?

Ion. The doctor.

So. When Homer says:

[538d] She was going in the depths like
A piece of lead,
Which comes eagerly attached
To the horn of a field ox
Eating raw flesh carrying hurt
Among the fish.

Would we answer that this is more to the art belonging to fishing or rhapsody as far as correctness is concerned?

Ion. Clearly, Socrates, that belonging to fishing.

So. Consider this. Imagine you asking me, "Since then, O Socrates, in Homer **[539e]** you find only the arts which are each meant to be separate, come on - I beg you - seek out for the prophets and the things done prophetically, what sort of person is that who belongs to this art to make it possible to distinguish whether what is done is done well or badly" [9] - Consider the following which I will answer easily and truthfully for you. In many places, he speaks in the Odyssey also, for instance when the prophet of the house of Melampus, Theoclymenus, says to the suitors:

[539a] Luckless, what evil is this that you suffer? At night your
Heads head wrapped faces and your limbs beneath,
Groaning is ablaze, and cheeks are wet with tears.
Of phantoms and a full entrance-hall, a full courtyard
Sending to the nether darkness under gloom
[539b] Sun of the heaven perishes out of this, and an evil
Mist is to be spread over.

In many places in the Iliad, such as upon the fighting on the wall, he says there:

A bird came upon us, crossing and eager,
An eagle soaring aloft, skirting the better host,
[539c] Carrying a blood red monster with its monstrous claws,
Living and still gasping. And not yet did they forget the joy of battle.
He struck holding him by the neck his beast
Having bent backwards, and from where he had reached the ground
He was in a painfully, great pain, and he let him fall in the middle of the host.
[539d] He screamed and flew with the breeze of the wind.

I say this, and such things belong to the prophet to examine and judge.

Ion. You speak the truth, Socrates.

So. You speak these truths also, Ion. Come now - just as I picked out for you out of the Odyssey and the Iliad such as is proper to **[539e]** prophesying, doctoring, and fishing, so you will pick out for me - since you're more acquainted with Homer than me - such as is proper to the rhapsodic art, Ion, the skill which is the rhapsodic one, which belongs to the rhapsode so that he can judge and distinguish better than the rest of man.

Ion. I say, Socrates, everything. [10]

So. You shouldn't say everything, Ion; or are you so forgetful? It would not befit you, a rhapsode, to be forgetful.

[540a] Ion. What did I forget?

So. Don't you remember that you said the rhapsodic art is different from charioteering?

Ion. I remember.

So. Isn't it the case that a whole art, being different will know something completely different than another whole art?

Ion. yes.

So. The rhapsodic art won't know everything according to your words - not even the rhapsode.

Ion. Yes, with the exception, perhaps of the important arts.

[540b] So. Do you know what kinds of arts there are, since you don't know everything?

Ion. I think such as what befits a man and woman, a slave and a free man, a subject and a ruler -

So. As is fit to say for a captain in sea being tossed in a storm: will the rhapsode know better than the navigator?

Ion. No, but the navigator will know.

[540c] So. Who is fit to be in charge of a sick person? Will the rhapsode know better than the doctor?

Ion. Not in that.

So. But what about being fit for a slave?

Ion. Yes.

So. Say for instance, there's a slave who's a cow herder. Who is more fit for calming angry oxen? Will the rhapsode know how to, but not the cow herder?

Ion. Surely not.

So. And take for example the instance of a woman working wool, where the

woman's a spinner? Is a rhapsode fit for that?

[540d] Ion. No.

So. Is a rhapsode fit for being a general who exhorts his soldiers?

Ion. Yes, such matters as those the rhapsode will know.

So. What? The rhapsodic art belongs to the general's art?

Ion. I, too, know what is fitting for a general to say.

So. Perhaps since you're a general, Ion. And in fact, if you happened to be acquainted with horses and at the same time the lyre, you would know which horses are evil, and well-to-be-driven, but **[540e]** if I were to ask you, "Do you know, is it by virtue of the horseman or the lyre player that horses are driven well?" what would you reply to me?

Ion. The horseman, of course.

So. Isn't it the case that if you had to distinguish good lyre-playing - you admit - you would choose the lyre-player and not the horse man.

Ion. Yes.

So. Since you know the military art, you are (who you are) by virtue of the general's art, or by the rhapsodic art?

Ion. It makes no difference.

[541a] So. What?! You say nothing differs? Do you say strategy and rhapsody are 1 or 2 arts?

Ion. It seems to me 1.

So. Anyone who's a good rhapsode happens to be a good general?

Ion. Very much, Socrates.

So. Then anyone who happens to be a good general is a good rhapsode?

Ion. It doesn't seem to me to be so.

So. But it seems to you that anyone who's a good rhapsode is **[541b]** a good general.

Ion. Yes.

So. Aren't you the best rhapsode of all of Greece?

Ion. Or course, Socrates.

So. Are you then the best general of all of Greece?

Ion. You're good, Socrates, and this art of "generalizing" I learned from Homer.

So. And so in the name of the gods, since you are the best of the Greeks - best at being a rhapsode and being a general - what in the world are you doing, going around reciting poetry, and on the other hand not being a general? Or does it seem to you that **[541c]** you were crowned a golden wreath for Greece because Greece is in need of many rhapsodes and not generals?

Ion. Our city, Socrates, is ruled and led militarily by you [Athenians], and a general is not needed, and my city and the Spartans wouldn't choose me for general for both sides have enough.

So. Dear Ion, don't you know Apollodorus of Cyzicus?

Ion. What sort of person is he?

So. The sort who is general, whom the Athenians themselves have taken often, though being strangers. **[541d]** This city has taken Phanosthenes of Andros, Heraclides of Clazomenae, who are strangers having shown that they are worthy of the logos, and into the generalship, and the magistrate. Then, if they will not take Ion of Ephesus for general nor will they honor him, does it seem that he is worthy of merit? And what from this follows? Aren't you, the Ephesians, originally Athenians, and Ephesus, the city, is smaller **[541e]** than none? But really, ion, if you speak the truth that you are able to speak with skill and understanding concerning Homer, you wrong anybody whom you promise to show that you understand and assert many beautiful concerning homer, and you deceive me by lacking to show me any skill. You've shown me what you are not skilled at; without skill - just as Proteus knows - you try to turn into every shape until you end up trying to escape me by **[542a]** becoming a general. You won't show me what you are skilled at concerning Homer's wisdom. If you are skillful, then given what I just said now, you deceive me and wrong me promising to show some skill with Homer. If you aren't skillful by art, but divinely inspired receiving from Homer not knowing many of the beautiful things you speak concerning the poet, just as I said concerning you, you do no wrong. Choose whether you wish to be named by use an unjust man, or divine.

[542b] Ion. It makes a big difference to me, Socrates. Much better it is to be called divine.

So. In that case this better title belongs to you in our eyes, Ion, to be divine, and not to speak with skill concerning Homer.

[The End.]

FOOTNOTES

[1] What is a rhapsode? A rhapsode was a professional reciter and singer of poetry in ancient Greece. If a rhapsode (a professional reciter of poetry in ancient Greece) couldn't remember whether Odysseus carried a sword or weapon in a particular line, for example, there was no book which he could consult for the exact word. However, he could quickly determine from the rest of the line that the missing word had a certain number of syllables and a certain pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. There wouldn't be many candidates for the missing word. That quality makes the lines self-repairing when being recited by people with less than perfect memories. Hence, we can see the pragmatic importance of meter and rhyme in the preservation of oral culture.

[2] The term, "O Dear Head," also shows up in the Apology.

[3] This was a very difficult sentence to translate. The gist of it seems to be that who ever knows part of the art, e.g. Homer, knows the whole art, e.g. poetry.

[4] This can be taken as a sign that the Platonic Socrates is speaking. The Platonic Socrates is the one who comes up with answers rather than abiding in the question. The Socratic Socrates is in what scholars take to be the early dialogues, e.g. the Charmides, and Laches, where no final position is taken. 533d1 is where Plato departs from the metaxis of nous in relation to the ground, which is ambiguous, in favor of fixing the phenomena of poetry.

[5] Socrates is talking about a lode stone or magnet.

[5.1] The poet, Brandon Brown, believes that the Greek bears out that a poet is just good at one and only one of the poetic arts enumerated. This is because of the use of "men" and "de" in enumerating this list.

[6] In 534d5 - 534c2, Socrates describes the phenomena of what would be called today the "one hit wonder."

[7] This difficult to translate passage [535b1 - 535c3] is simply asking whether or not Ion takes himself to be in his senses or out of them.

[8] I made a very free translation of this question, so that it would fit in with Socrates' following comments about one's 5th finger and arithmetic.

[9] Nothing but a confusing sea of datives, here, which makes this passage difficult to translate. The gist of this question/passage becomes apparent in 539d3, when Socrates answers that the prophet is the one fit to judge such matters.

[10] Ion didn't have to answer this, but it's within his boastful and cock-sure attitude to give such an answer. He could've said that the rhapsodic art was what Socrates described in the beginning [530b-d] as making one's self beautiful, spending time with the poets, interpreting their pieces, and reciting them. He could've also quoted the part where a poet moved by the god sings about the Trojan war made Odysseus cry, and then reveal himself (end of Book VIII and the beginning of Book IX):

This was the song that the famous minstrel sang. But the heart of Odysseus melted, and the tear wet his cheeks beneath his eyelids. And as a woman throws herself wailing about her dead lord, who hath fallen before his city and the host, warding from his town and his children the pitiless day; and she beholds him dying and drawing difficult breath, and embracing his body wails aloud, while the foemen behind smite her with spears on back and shoulders and lead her up into bondage to bear labour and trouble, and with the most pitiful grief her cheeks are wasted; even so pitifully fell the tears beneath the brows of Odysseus.

Then, Ion could've answered that the skill of the poet or rhapsode is to make people reveal who they are by making them feel.

Appendix: Poems by the Translator

I. PATIENCE

Never mind that the apple has no seedful core -
Ever-brown leaves and ever-bare trees.
The wind never rests & has to turn every leaf.
The sea never ceases to be silent
Intent on humming white noise -
Empty seats sound the retreat
From graces of Pound and pleasure.

Write.

Sit.

Sip a cup of coffee.

And wait.

II. CHAOS AND ORDER

Every shuffled deck is as God intended

For the gambler sees order in random things
For time is a syndicate made of money
For the electric fur on a cat rides on scant little
For the purse that spilled on the sidewalk was there
For you to pick up but you don't
For only being a woman would insure your virtue

The universe is made of simple rules.

That 13 notecards shuffled make a poem is a simple rule.
That you always talk to the black-cloaked woman
That is reading Leviathan at the bar is a simple rule,

For the red wave on her hair is coming to the shore not limping
For the matter of books and persons is never chance
For the cat speaks to you in signs and bites
For the wings of insects spray flowers with air when they are happy

These are the rules for making the universe

III. "Nothing Like the Coast"

Nothing like the coast
To tie the land and the sea,
To manage the soil's daily greed...
To greet the pounding
Fall for every wave.

Far away from the coast
There is no in
Between.
Everything
That can be thought
Defeated sinks so easily.

The coast remembers everything,
Who has drowned, or been floundered,
Saved.
Yet it has no permanent measure
Like an ever shifting interpretation of an ancient myth
Sung new.
Morning and evening
Tied.

IV. Reverie

I traced a circle with my index finger
Around the wild and stylized daisy
Embroidered by her mother on her vest.

She made a snap as she took a dandelion
Into her hand. The seedlings in random ways
Flew about and twinkled in the sun.

Saturate my eyes with cobalt,
Emerald, saffron and gilt.
With joy, I close my eyes....

V. Lips

A gentle one
A nibble
Dry lips
Moist lips
A quick lick
With a tongue tip
That presses, caresses,
Another tongue tip
Surprised teeth
Bitten, licked lips
Tongue lash
Electric bliss
French kiss
Wet cheeks
Last kiss
"Later. Tonight."
Hurry. Quick.
Last Kiss
Last Kiss
Last Kiss
Last Kiss
Raspy Breath
Last Kiss