

# Inspiration and Τέχνη: Divination in Plato's *Ion*

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## ABSTRACT

In Plato's *Ion*, inspiration functions in contradistinction to *technē*. Yet, paradoxically, in both cases, there is an appeal to divination. I interrogate this in order to show how these two disparate accounts can be accommodated. Specifically, I argue that Socrates' appeal to Theoclymenus at *Ion* 539a-b demonstrates that Plato recognizes the existence of intuitive seers who defy his own distinction between possession and technical divination. Such seers provide an epistemic model for *Ion*; that he does not notice this confirms he is not an exemplary rhapsode.

Keywords: Ancient Philosophy; Plato; *Ion*.

## INTRODUCTION

In Plato's *Ion*, inspiration functions in contradistinction to *technē*.<sup>1</sup> Since *Ion*'s rhapsodic expertise does not stand up to Socrates' epistemological critique, his performances of Homer cannot stem from knowledge, but from elsewhere, from divine inspiration. The two are presented as a strict disjunction. Yet in both cases there is an appeal to divination. If rhapsody, and poetry by extension, cannot synthesize the two, why does Socrates seem to think that divination can?<sup>2</sup> This puzzle has caused quite a bit of consternation about the value and subject matter of the dialogue.<sup>3</sup> In particular, it is unclear what Socrates thinks about the nature of poetic and rhapsodic inspiration. In this essay, I will argue that divination constitutes an alternate, and improved, framework for *Ion* to model his expertise on. By clarifying the role and scope of divination in the *Ion*, I aim to show that Socrates' disjunctive account – inspiration or *technē* – can actually be integrated. In so doing, I argue that there are in fact positive philosophical theses latent in the dialogue.

In part I, I rehearse the contrasting accounts of divination in the dialogue. In the first argumentative exchange, divination is referenced as a paradigmatic *technē*. The seer is best equipped to speak about the contrasting depictions of divination given by Homer and Hesiod. When *Ion* fails to meet Socrates' questioning, the argument changes direction. *Ion*'s ability is now the result of divine inspiration; again, Socrates cites divination as akin to what *Ion* purportedly experiences.

In part II, I interrogate the final reference to divination, which occurs when Socrates appeals to the Homeric Epics. Ostensibly, Socrates is trying to show *Ion* that the best person to judge literary depictions of a *technē* is a practitioner

of that *technē*. In each case, and for slightly different reasons, I show that Socrates fails to do justice to Homer. It is not that Socrates is only engaged in eristic with Ion, but that a deeper philosophical point lurks in the background. Divination is Socrates' final example and is quoted twice – first, Theoclymenus' vision of the suitors' destruction, and second, a bird omen appearing to the Trojans. I argue that Theoclymenus is what I call an 'intuitive seer' in that he can simultaneously practice his *technē* and claim to be divinely inspired. In other words, he is a model for Ion to emulate.

In part III, I sketch a related, but fundamentally distinct, account of divination offered by Brickhouse and Smith 1993. They too are interested in the relationship between *technē* and inspiration. Their account claims that the *technē* of a possessed seer like the Pythia consists of *knowing how* to enter into an inspired state. Once in this state, the god who possesses the seer takes over and the seer can no longer be thought of as in control of his or her thoughts, utterances, and actions.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, and drawing on Diotima in the *Symposium*, I argue that intuitive seers are *simultaneously* divinely inspired and self-aware. They are able to reflect and interpret their own divinations. I will argue that intuitive seers like Theoclymenus and Diotima cannot be explained according to the model proposed by Brickhouse and Smith.<sup>5</sup>

There is both a narrow and broad purpose for developing this interpretive possibility in the *Ion*. From a dramaturgical perspective, Theoclymenus and seers like him offer Ion an epistemic alternative on which to model his purported expertise. His failure confirms that he is not an exemplary rhapsode.<sup>6</sup> More broadly construed, this serves to blur the distinction between having a *technē* and being divinely inspired. When this distinction usually crops up, it is immediately undermined. But seers

like Theoclymenus and Diotima, together with Socrates' *daimonion*, complicate affairs and carve out space for visionaries who always retain their *nous*.

## PART I: TWO REFERENCES TO DIVINATION

The first reference to divination occurs at the beginning of the dialogue. Ion's specialty is Homer, but can perform the works of other poets (531a)?<sup>7</sup> Since Homer and Hesiod often engage with the same subject matter, Socrates reasons that he who can recite the former can also recite the latter. He urges Ion to consider those subjects like the seer's art (*mantikēs*), upon which Homer and Hesiod disagree (531b). Which person can speak better about divination – Ion or a seer? Ion replies that it would be the seer. In fact, Socrates explicitly connects Ion and divination by asking "Suppose you [Ion] were a diviner..." (*ei de su ēstha mantis*) (531b7), wouldn't you be the person best equipped to explain the similarities and differences between the two poets?

The second reference to divination occurs in the famous magnet section (533d-534e). Ion cannot explain his ability to perform Homer. Socrates introduces a new concept – a divine power (*theia de dunamis*) – in strong contrast to *technē*.<sup>8</sup> Like the power of the magnet, Ion, together with the epic poets, is divinely possessed. Not only does the magnet attract the iron ring, it implants power into the ring itself, thereby enabling the ring to pull other rings. Similarly, the Muse inspires Homer, who in turn inspires Ion, who is finally able to enchant his audience. Although Socrates introduces the concept of inspiration, specified as the rhapsode's complete lack of *nous* (*ho nous mēketi en autō enē*) (534b4-5), Ion heartily subscribes to it.

For Socrates, if a person is in possession of their intellect, they are unable to create poetry or sing prophecy. The particularity of Ion's expertise is the best evidence that he is inspired by the Muse. According to Socrates, what happens to Ion is analogous to "prophets and godly seers" (*tois khrēsmōdois kai tois mantesi tois theiois*) (534d2) in the sense that no one thinks it is the seers themselves who divine.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is the gods who use the seer as a medium.<sup>10</sup> Note, furthermore, that Socrates connects seers with prophets (*khrēsmōdois*), which etymologically means 'singer of oracles'.<sup>11</sup>

In the next section, I examine the final portrayal of divination in conjunction with the other *technai* discussed – chariot driving, medicine, and fishing. My aim is to see how each example functions in the Homeric Epics. In the case of divination, I argue that Theoclymenus is best conceptualized as an intuitive seer, someone who experiences visions but nevertheless remains self-aware. This is important because it serves as a potential model for individuals like Ion.

## PART II: THE HOMERIC QUOTATIONS

Socrates' use of Homer is perplexing, due in large part to his claim that a literary depiction of a *technē* requires the relevant practitioner to adequately judge it. What about aesthetic expertise? In what follows, I rehearse Socrates' quotations as they function in the Homeric texts. I show that each example, when considered in context, does not support Socrates' claim. In each case, there is a slightly different problem with Socrates' argument. This serves to open up alternate interpretations to what Socrates overtly states. In the case of divination, the final example, I stress its affinity with the kind of expertise claimed by Ion and rhapsody.

The first example is chariot driving. Socrates prompts Ion to quote what Nestor tells his son about turning post in the chariot race during Patroclus' funeral:

Lean yourself over on the smooth-planed chariot just to the left of the pair. Then the horse on the right – goad him shout him on, easing the reins with your hands. At the post let your horse on the left stick tight to the turn so you seem to come right to the edge, with the hub of your welded wheel. But escape cropping the stone... (*Iliad* 23.335-340 qtd. at 537a8-b6,)

κλινθῆναι δέ, φησί, καὶ αὐτὸς ἐυξέστω  
ἐνὶ δίφρῳ ἦκ' ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ τοῖν· ἀτὰρ  
τὸν δεξιὸν ἵππον κένσαι ὁμοκλήσας,  
εἷξαι τέ οἱ ἥνια χερσίν. ἐν νύσῃ δέ τοι  
ἵππος ἀριστερὸς ἐγχριμφθήτω, ὥς ἄν  
τοι πλήμνη γε δοάσσεται ἄκρον ἰκέσθαι  
κύκλου ποιητοῖο· λίθου δ' ἀλέασθαι  
ἐπαυρεῖν.

For Socrates, an expert in chariot driving is better able to interpret this passage than Homer, or a performer of the Homeric epics like Ion. Undoubtedly, chariot driving, like automobile driving, requires skill. But does it qualify as a *technē*? In fact, Nestor initially qualifies his instruction by stating that Zeus and Poseidon have 'taught' (*edidaxan*) his son every form of chariot driving and that there is no need for his 'instruction' (*didaskemen*).

Nevertheless, Nestor goes on to say that Antilochos' horse is slower than the other racers, and that he must therefore use his 'cunning' (*mētis*) if he is to be successful. It is in this context that he offers advice on how best to round the post. In fact, references to cunning litter Nestor's speech:

So then, my friend, your task is to use all the skill (*mētēn*) you can think of, so that the prizes do not slip past you. It is skill (*mēti*) you know that makes the good woodcutter, much more than strength. By skill (*mēti*) again the helmsman keeps his quick ship running straight over the sparkling sea, though the winds are buffeting. And it is by skill (*mēti*) that charioteer beats charioteer (*Iliad* 23.313-18).

ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ σὺ φίλος μῆτιν ἐμβάλλεο θυμῷ  
παντοίῃν, ἵνα μὴ σε παρεκπροφύγησιν ἄεθλα.  
μῆτι τοι δρυτόμος μέγ' ἀμείνων ἢ ἐβίηφι-μήτι  
δ' αὖτε κυβερνήτης ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ νῆα  
θοῇν ἰθύνει ἐρεχθομένην ἀνέμοισι-μήτι δ'  
ἡνίοχος περιγίγνεται ἡνίοχοιο.

As Detienne and Vernant demonstrated long ago, *mētis* does not only mean intelligence but also designates guile.<sup>12</sup> For its connotations of deception and resourcefulness, this concept is understandably absent from the epistemological theses developed in the *Ion*.<sup>13</sup> But it goes without saying that anyone familiar with Homer would make the connection. The chariot driving example most likely alludes to Ion's devious character, which emerges immediately prior to the chariot driving example.

Despite acquiescing to Socrates' claim that he is divinely possessed when he performs Homer, Ion is ever the performer. He remains attuned to the ebb and flow of the audience:

You see I must keep my wits and play close attention to them [the audience]: if I start them crying, I will laugh as I take their money, but if they laugh, I shall cry at having lost money (535e3-5).

δεῖ γάρ με καὶ σφόδρ' αὐτοῖς τὸν νοῦν  
προσέχειν; ὥς ἂν μὲν κλαίοντασ' αὐτοῦς

καθίσω, αὐτὸς γελάσομαι ἀργύριον  
λαμβάνων, ἔαν δὲ γελῶντας, αὐτὸς  
κλαύσομαι ἀργύριον ἀπολλύς.

Ion's ability to adapt in front of his audience demonstrates that his expertise, purportedly a *technē*, encompasses *mētis*. Far from being a virtue, as it is in Homer, Ion's association with *mētis* is a strike against him.

Socrates' second example is medicine. He quotes the formulation of a medicinal drink:

...over wine of Pramnos she [Hecamede]  
grated goat's milk cheese with a brazen  
grater...and onion relish for the drink  
(*Iliad* 11.639-40 with 630, qtd at 538c4-5).

οἶνῳ Πραμνεῖῳ, φησίην, ἐπὶ δ' αἰγείον κνή  
τυρὸν κνήστι χαλκείῃ· παρὰ δὲ κρόμυον  
ποτῶ ὄψον·

In this section of the *Iliad*, Nestor has rescued Machaon out of the fighting. The two men return to Nestor's tent and are served a medicinal drink by Hecamede. It is instructive to note that nowhere is Hecamede characterized as a doctor. All that is known of her is that she is Nestor's servant, beautiful as a goddess, and knowledgeable about making a medicinal drink. Does knowing how to make a medicinal drink qualify as knowing medicine? Socrates considers it a literary depiction of medicine. Consider this example in relation to the argument of the *Ion*. A *technē* is comprehensive, and since Ion only knows how to perform Homer, he cannot have a *technē*. By analogy, Hecamede is not a doctor because she can only make one medicinal drink.

The penultimate example of a *technē* is fishing. Socrates asks Ion whether a fisherman or a rhapsode is best able to interpret the Homeric passage:

Leaden she [Iris] plunged to the floor of the sea like a weight that is fixed to a field cow' horn. Given to the hunt it goes among ravenous fish, carrying death (*Iliad* 24.80-82, qtd. at 538d1-3).

ἡ δὲ μολυβδαίνῃ ἰκέλη ἐς βυσσὸν ἵκανε, ἥ τε κατ' ἀγραύλοιο βοὸς κέρας ἐμμεμανῖα ἔρχεται μυστῶϊσι μετ' ἰχθύσι πῆμα φέρουσα.

The speaker is not a fisherman, but the Homeric poet, the speaker of the poem. It is a literary trope – a simile – about Iris, the divine messenger, diving like the weight on a fisher's horn. In order to make a successful simile, one needs to know both sides of the comparative. Accordingly, given that the simile is deployed in a divine context – Iris seeking out Thetis at the bottom of the ocean – it is doubtful that a fisherman could adequately interpret this use of language if their expertise *qua* expertise is fishing.

Socrates' final example is divination. First, in the *Odyssey*, he quotes Theoclymenus, who is a prophet of Melampus' sons:

Are you mad? What evil is this that's upon you? Night has enshrouded your hands, your faces, and down to your knees. Wailing spreads like fire, tears wash your cheeks. Ghosts fill the dooryard, ghosts fill the hall, they rush to the black gate of hell, they drop below darkness. Sunlight has died from a sky run over with evil mist (537b1-8) (*Odyssey* 20.351-57; Plato omits line 354).

εἰλύεται κεφαλαί τε πρόσωπά τε νέρθε τε γυῖα, οἰμωγὴ δὲ δέδεγε, δεδάκρυνται δὲ παρειαί· εἰδῶλων τε πλεον πρόθυρον, πλείη δὲ καὶ αὐλὲ ἱεμένων ἔρεβόςδε ὑπὸ

ζόφον· ἥελιος δὲ οὐρανοῦ ἑξαπόλωλε, κακὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν ἀχλὺς·

The language is poetic and ambiguous and is noteworthy for being the only purported example of possession divination in all of Homer.<sup>14</sup> The passage foretells the future ruin and death of Penelope's suitors. In fact, given the Homeric poet's own account of the scene, which occurs prior to Theoclymenus' divination, it is clear that the seer and Homeric poet are in concord. The preceding description to the divination section:

...but among the suitors Pallas Athena roused unquenchable laughter, and struck away their wits. And now they laughed with jaws that were not their own, and they ate flesh that was defiled with blood, and their eyes were filled with tears, and their spirits wanted to cry out (*Odyssey* 20.345-49).

...μνηστῆρσι δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη ἄσβεστον γέλω ὥρσε, παρέπλαγξεν δὲ νόημα. οἱ δ' ἤδη γναθμοῖσι γελοίων ἄλλοτρίοισιν, αἰμοφόρυκτα δὲ δὴ κρέα ἤσθιον· ὅσσε δ' ἄρα σφέων δακρυόφιν πίμπλαντο, γόον δ' ὥϊετο θυμός.

The passages are remarkably similar in tone and language. What gives the divination legitimacy is not something external to the text, but rather confirmed by the literary context, both in terms of when it appears, and in the consequences to the suitors. In other words, a divination implanted in a literary context is functionally indistinguishable from a concept like foreshadowing.<sup>15</sup> But the seer does not specialize in literary concepts and so does not constitute an expert in this case.

Augury, one of the most dramatic divinatory methods, is Socrates' example of technical

divination.<sup>16</sup> He quotes from the *Iliad* during the battle of the wall. The Iliadic poet states:

There came to them a bird as they hungered to cross over an eagle, a high-flier, circled the army's left with a blood-red serpent carried in its talons, a monster, Alive, still breathing, it has not yet forgotten its warlust, for it struck its captor on the breast, by the neck; it was writhing back but the eagle shot it groundwards in agony of pain, and dropped it in the midst of the throng, then itself, with a scream, soared on a breath of the wind (7.200-207).

ὄρνις γάρ σφιν ἐπῆλθε περησέμεναι μεμαῶσιν, αἰετος ὑσιπέτης, ἐπ' ἄριστερὰ λαὸν ἐέρπων, φοινήεντα δράκοντα φέρων ὀνύχεσσι πέλωπον, ζφόν, ἔτ' ἀσπαίροντα · καὶ οὐπω λήθετο χάρμης. κόσψε γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔχοντα κατὰ στῆθος παρὰ δειρὴν ἰδνωθεὶς ὀπίσω, ὁ δ' ἀπὸ ἔθεν ἦκε χαμᾶζε ἀλγήσας ὀδύνησι, μέσφ δ' ἐγκάββαλ' ὀμίλῳ · αὐτός δὲ κλάγξας πέτετο πνοιῆς ἀνέμοιο.

For Socrates, it is for the seer to “examine and judge” (*skopein kai krinein*) (539d2) these passages. What is presupposed in both examples is that divination constitutes a legitimate *technē*. Although the technical/possession distinction is never explicitly made in the *Ion*, these two Homeric quotes come closest.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it is sometimes overlooked that both possession and technical divination are treated as genuine *technai*.<sup>18</sup>

The bird omen does not occur to anybody specific, but is open to interpretation. Polydamas, a soldier, interprets the event, and it is never mentioned whether or not he has any specific divinatory skills. All the Trojans seem

to interpret the omen as a negative sign. This suggests that one does not require any special expertise like the *technē* of divination, which contradicts Socrates' claim that the omen can only be adequately judged by a specialist, the seer. If lots of people can judge literary depictions of a bird omen, then it does not constitute a *technē*.

There is something else peculiar about divination, particularly the claim that the first quotation of Theoclymenus' constitutes the only instance of possession divination in the Homeric texts. There is certainly something unnerving about it.<sup>19</sup> It is Erymachus, Polybus' son, who accuses Theoclymenus of being “out of his mind” (*aphrainei*) (20.360). This implies that Theoclymenus' is indeed possessed. Yet it is a suitor who makes the claim, and the suitors reject the divination as laughable. In this sense, the claim that Theoclymenus is out of his mind is a claim that he is mad, as opposed to actually inspired. Shortly thereafter, Theoclymenus retorts that he has a “sound enough head” (*noos en stēthessi tetugmenos ouden aeikēs*) (20.366) on his shoulders to make his own exit. In fact, he subsequently interprets his divine episode:

I see advancing on you all a catastrophe which you cannot hope to survive or shun, no, not a single one of you with your brutal acts and reckless plots here in the home of godlike Odysseus (20.367-370).

τοῖς ἔξειμι θύραζε, ἐπεὶ νοέω κακὸν ὑμῖν ἐρχόμενον, τό κεν οὐ τις ὑπεκφύγοι οὐδ' ἀλέαιτο μνηστήρων, οἳ δῶμα κάτ' ἀντιθέου Ὀδυσῆος ἀνέρας ὑβρίζοντες ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάασθε.

According to the standard account of divination presented in the dialogues, possessed seers cannot interpret their divinations.<sup>20</sup>



Therefore, Theoclymenus appears to be a different sort of seer. He has visionary expertise minus the mediumistic possession of seers like the Pythia.

Flower introduces the concept of intuitive divination, which is distinct from both technical and possession divination.<sup>21</sup> He defines it as a special ability wherein the seer spontaneously ‘sees’ reality or the future but does not depend on being possessed. For example, consider Calchas in the Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. From witnessing two eagles, he prophesizes that Troy will fall. A sacrifice is needed. Calchas is not possessed but he does intuit, or see, future events. This concept can be fruitfully applied to Theoclymenus; he uses the same ocular imagery that Calchas uses (20.367).

Socrates cites two examples of divination because they constitute distinct types, and it has been thought that this must mean Socrates’ first Homeric quote is possession divination.<sup>22</sup> But careful attention to the Homeric epics shows that the situation is more complicated. The difference between the two Homeric quotations is not one of possession and technical, but intuitive and technical. This solves the problem of interpreting literary instances of a *technē*. If it is the case that Theoclymenus is an intuitive seer, not a possessed one, then he can interpret his prophetic vision. A degree of self-awareness is retained.<sup>23</sup>

In the next section, I analyze an account that seeks to bridge the gap between possession divination and the concept of *technē*. Smith and Brickhouse argue that the technical component of possession consists in knowing how to trigger possession. Although I think this argument has merit in the context of possession divination, Theoclymenus flouts the ordinary senses of possession divination. Theoclymenus, in Homer, represents an intuitive seer, someone who can ‘examine and judge’ literary depictions of a divination.

### PART III: POSSESSION DIVINATION IS A *TECHNĒ*

At the beginning of the *Ion*, divination is characterized as a *technē*. Then it is characterized as the complete opposite of a *technē*, namely as a result of a divine power. At first glance, the third case of divination seems to combine the two, that is, as characterizing possession divination as a *technē*. In their analysis of divination in Plato’s dialogues, Brickhouse and Smith point to various passages in the dialogues where divination is characterized as a *technē*.<sup>24</sup> If it is a *technē*, then divination must constitute some form of knowledge. They conclude that the possessed seer possesses “a genuine – though relatively paltry – craft, and thus a... certain – though relatively paltry – form of knowledge” (37). What buttresses their analysis are two sections in the *Statesman* (260e1, 290c4-6) that distinguish between two sorts of *technai*. The first initiates commands; the kingly *technē* is the paradigmatic example. The second, by contrast, merely apes the commands of the first. Such *technai* include: “the interpreter, the person who gives the time to the rowers, the seer, the herald, and many other sorts of expertise related to these” (*eis tauton meixomen basilikēn hermēneutikē, keleustikē, mantikē, kērukikē, kai pollais heterais toutōn tekhnais suggenesin, hai sumpasai to g’ epitattein ekhousin*) (*Statesman* 260d11-e2).

But according to the *Apology*, seers “know nothing of what they say” (*isasin de ouden hōn legousi*) (22c1-4). How can a seer be ignorant yet still possess a *technē*? More to the point, the reason seers do not know what they say is because they are mad.<sup>25</sup> In response to this, Brickhouse and Smith 1993, 42 state:

What needs to be explained then is the relationship between the diviner’s craft

and the knowledge which constitutes it and the truths or commands they divine when they are “mad” and “out of their minds.”

For Socrates, poets are akin to seers in that they function not according to knowledge, but to “a sort of natural talent and by inspiration” (*alla phusei tini kai enthousiazontes*) (*Apology* 22b8-c2). When a seer divines, they are not self-aware, and so can hardly be thought of as utilizing a *technē*. Consequently, they are not qualified to offer an interpretation of the divination.<sup>26</sup>

The only thing the seer might reasonably know is that they have had an authentic divinatory episode.<sup>27</sup> For Brickhouse and Smith 1993, the answer lies in the ability of the seer to enter into a state of madness or frenzy:

...even if this *technē* only enables the diviners to enter into the state of receptivity to the god – a state in which they are *ekphrones* – the knowledge that constitutes their *technē* is hardly trivial (45).

Seers do possess a *technē*; it consists of the ability to enter into a state of frenzy. The Pythia knows the necessary conditions to enter into a state of possession. Brickhouse and Smith maintain that the seer can access superlative moral truths. The problem, of course, is these moral truths remain something of a mystery. The gods' motivation for communicating them is unclear.<sup>28</sup>

Brickhouse and Smith's argument has a pleasing synthesis. They combine both horns of divination in such a way that preserves (1) the mediumistic nature of possession together with (2) the features of a *technē*. I agree with their account for possessed seers like the Pythia, but their argument glosses over a seer like

Theoclymenus. In particular, their account is unable to account for a seer who has a divine gift, experiences visions, and furthermore is the person most qualified to “examine and judge” (*skopein kai krinein*) (539d2) relevant passages in Homer. Seers who undergo possession cannot examine and judge their divinations.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, such a seer cannot be characterized merely as a technical seer, an augur for instance, because their expertise includes a visionary element.

When Socrates introduces the two examples of Homeric divination, he does so in order to show *Ion* that rhapsody does not have a distinct subject matter. Since a genuine *technē* requires its own subject matter, rhapsody is not a *technē*. More specifically, he shows *Ion* that the relevant craftsperson, not the rhapsode, is best able to interpret literary instances of their *technē*. According to the epistemological reasons already outlined, it is difficult to see how a possessed seer could ‘examine and judge’ what occurs to Theoclymenus.<sup>30</sup>

One difficulty with this argument is that the focus is too much on Theoclymenus as he is depicted in Homer. In the context of the *Ion*, together with evidence drawn from dialogues like the *Phaedrus*, it is easier to think that the possibility of a seer like Theoclymenus is rejected. This would be persuasive if there was no evidence of seers like Theoclymenus in Plato's dialogues. But one paradigmatic example of an intuitive seer is Diotima in the *Symposium*. She is depicted as a seer, she hails from Mantinea (*mantis* – seer), and is responsible for delaying a plague for ten years by recommending the appropriate sacrifices.<sup>31</sup>

Although a thorough investigation of Diotima is beyond the scope of the present paper, it suffices that she is both (1) a seer, and (2) depicted in an argumentative exchange with Socrates. She is not a philosopher but she knows



the nature of *Eros* as well as the Form of Beauty. Her knowledge is the result of her particular expertise – divination. The crucial point is not necessarily what she knows, but that she is able to conceptualize and articulate it in a discursive exchange.<sup>32</sup>

Her particular knowledge befits a philosopher like Socrates.<sup>33</sup> She twice sketches the different stages in the ascent toward the Form of Beauty, which only a philosopher can ever know. She first gives a more detailed account (210a-212a), but within this she also provides a short synopsis (211b-d) not altogether identical with what we see in the longer account. Furthermore, not only does she enlighten Socrates about the nature of *Eros*, but she also explains the deficiencies of Socrates' own account. He was, she claims, mistaken in focusing on 'being loved' as opposed to the proper *explanadum*, namely that of being a lover (204c).

Diotima's ability to 'examine and judge' her divinations demonstrates that Theoclymenus is not as antithetical to the epistemology Plato develops as it might first seem. Since Diotima can argue for her position, she is not a seer of the usual Platonic sort. In fact, in her ability to argue and extrapolate a position, she seems to act much more like Socrates, despite the fact that she is not a philosopher.<sup>34</sup>

Smith and Brickhouse's argument demonstrates how the possessed seer has a *technē*. I have outlined reasons for thinking that such an account fails to explain how a seer is best qualified to interpret Theoclymenus' vision. In order for such an analysis to take place, the intuitive seer must retain a degree of self-awareness, which is precluded for possessed seers. Why is the distinction between inspiration and *technē* undermined? I submit that this undermining tacitly offers Ion a way out of the epistemological labyrinth erected by Socrates. Recall that it is Socrates who commits Ion to

a false dichotomy: either he is possessed by a god, and therefore does not have *technē*, or he does have a *technē* and can therefore (1) apply it to the whole subject matter, and (2) interpret literary depictions of it. Since Ion can do neither (1) nor (2), he is possessed by a god when he performs Homer.

## CONCLUSION

When Ion shows that he is aware of the effect he has on his audience (535e), he contradicts Socrates' account of divine inspiration.<sup>35</sup> Insofar as he is aware, Ion is not divinely inspired in the mediumistic sense. The claim to be divinely inspired is ersatz and self-serving. He wants money. Of course, monetary concerns are compatible with divine inspiration, but in the context, it ought to set off warning bells. So, far from being out of his mind, Ion is intimately aware of his abilities and his effect on audiences. He admits to catering his performance to the audience.

It is too strong, I think, to conclude that divine inspiration is wholly rejected. The notion that the best poets are divinely inspired permeates the dialogues.<sup>36</sup> In the context of the *Ion*, the rhapsode's passivity is emphasized by appeal to possession divination. But since Ion remains sensitive to his effect on the audience, he is not totally passive, not a medium through which Homer and the gods operate. Nevertheless, the dialogical exchange between Socrates and Ion reveals the possibility that an exemplary rhapsode can combine the alleged paradoxical features of Ion's expertise.

Divination, deployed at each argumentative stage of the dialogue, provides the syncretic model for Ion to emulate, and navigate out of Socrates' dichotomy. A seer like Theoclymenus is simultaneously inspired and self-aware; Ion

could try to explain his expertise in this manner. That he does not perceive this means of accommodating Socrates' questioning demonstrates that he is not as prestigious as intuitive seers like Theoclymenus or Diotima. Rather, like most seers, rhapsodists, and poets, Ion is ignorant of his abilities.

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## NOTES

1 Harris 2004, 189-198 argues that Socrates distorts the relationship between *technē* and inspiration in order to subvert poetry's prestige.

2 Bloom 1970, 57 states, 'By reflecting on divining we can penetrate what Socrates wishes to teach us about rhapsody and poetry'.

3 Socrates' account of divine inspiration, in particular, is a common target of ironic interpretations. Woodruff 1983 writes, "The first thing to notice about Plato's account of inspiration is that it is literally false" (8). For other ironic accounts, Tigerstedt 1969, 26-29; Bloom 1970, 55-56; Murray 1996, 10-12; Liebert 2008, 202-25.

4 Brickhouse and Smith 1993, 37-51. Epistemologically, possessed seers can access true beliefs, but not knowledge, since they cannot give an explanation of their claims. Cf. *Meno* 99c-d.

5 My argument has affinity with Trivigno 2012, 283-313. Both of us agree that the *Ion* contains a "serious philosophical point" (283), which lies in-between the polarized account of rhapsody given by Socrates. Both of us see divination as to providing Ion with a model. Our disagreement lies in how we argue for such a position. Trivigno accepts the distinction between possession and technical divination. His justification for combining them into what he calls 'oracular divination' is two-fold. First, poetry and divination are connected in other dialogues, notably the *Apology* (22a-c) where the Delphic Oracle is central. Second, since oracular divination resolves the tension between technical and inspired accounts, the move is "irresistible" (300) to make. The strength of my reading, by contrast, is to mine the richness of Theoclymenus as depicted in *The Odyssey*. As I show in Part II, Theoclymenus is best understood to be an oracular seer, or what I call, following Flower 2008, an 'intuitive seer'. As such, he constitutes a model for Ion.

6 Trivigno 2012, 309-311 argues that the dichotomy is undermined so as to gesture toward an anti-au-

thoritarian oracular model of rhapsody. By this, he means that good poetry ought to provoke self-reflection and critical thought, not blind adherence to authority. Ion, when challenged, seems to fall back on the authority of Homer.

7 As noted by many, Socrates oscillates between interrogating Ion's purported ability to perform and his ability to interpret Homer. This is particularly noteworthy because it points to the complex, often ambivalent, account of the *technai* associated with inspiration. Baltzly 1992, 30; Guthrie 1965, 218; Grote 1888, 125; Grube 1965, 41.

8 Harris 2004, 189-198; Havelock 1963, 155-156 on the cleavage between inspiration and *technē*. Both Murray 1996, 1-5 and Halliwell 1999, 271-273 note how Plato distinguishes between inspiration and *mimesis* as it figures into the operational mode of the poets. Inspiration and *mimesis* "pull the understanding of poetry in opposite directions" (Halliwell 1999, 272). Whereas *mimesis* depends crucially on the theory of Forms, which is absent from the *Ion*, inspiration depends upon the activity of the gods. I am not at all certain that such a strong division can be maintained, however, especially once attention is turned to the *Symposium*. For in Diotima's ascent passage there is both the language of inspiration and the Form of Beauty.

9 All quotations are translations from Cooper 1997.

10 In the *Republic*, Socrates characterizes the Pythia as the 'Delphic Apollo' and as the god who sits at the center of the earth (427c). Legislation is the topic under consideration and Socrates asserts that since he and his interlocutors have no knowledge of how best to serve the divine (i.e., what sorts of temples need to be constructed, what sacrifices to be made, etc.), it is prudent that they follow Apollo as he manifests himself in the Pythia. Note, then, the co-extensiveness between the Pythia and Apollo; when the seer is possessed, she is literally Apollo. Her words are actually Apollo's words.

11 This pairing is unique to Plato. Mikalson 2010, 125-126, following Parker 2005, 111-112, speculates that the *chresmodoi* might refer back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century *chresmologoi*, who were collectors or interpreters of oracles. Importantly for Plato, the former are inspired while the latter are never depicted as such.

12 Detienne and Vernant 1991, 1-5.

13 Terms to account for *metis* include "flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years" (Detienne and Vernant 1991, 3).

14 Liebert 2010, 191; Murray 1981, 94; Lowens-tam 1993, 26-27.

15 Accordingly, "the prophecy functions rather as a narrative device, an instance of foreshadowing and dramatic irony, and not an instance of divination per se" (Liebert 2010, 192).

16 Flower 2008, 25.

17 Liebert 2010, 190 notes how Socrates "chooses

two literary examples of the same craft which illustrate the paradoxical aspects of that craft".

18 Murray 1996, 105-106 dispels the paradox of divination's dual function in the *Ion* by appeal to the distinction in the *Phaedrus*. Also, Trivigno's argument claims that as a private experience, no seer would be able to interpret Theoclymenus' vision. This is so because they would need to have access to the vision itself. Trivigno fails to notice that Theoclymenus' himself interprets the vision, which shows that he remains self-aware while experiencing the vision.

19 Liebert 2010 quotes several scholars who characterize it as "the most eerie passage in Homer," (Russo 1992, 124) and part of "a very remarkable and macabre scene." (Stanford 1948, 353).

20 Cf. *Phaedrus* 244d-e; *Timaeus* 71a-72.

21 Flower 2008, 87-91 also characterizes this type of divination as 'second sight' or an "innate faculty of divination (*emphutikos mantikē*)" (87). It is crucial to note that Flower connects technical with intuitive divination. Many seers, such as Calchas in *The Odyssey*, were both an augur and had a "prophetic intuition" (88). This is important in the sense that it explains why Socrates quotes a passage from Homer that depicts technical divination. Dodds 1963, 70-71 also makes reference to this alternate form of divination, drawing together Theoclymenus, Cassandra of the *Agamemnon*, and the Argive seer of Apollo, all for whom prophetic madness was "spontaneous and incalculable" (70). Dodds distinguishes between the visionary divinations of these figures and the enthusiasm, or strong possession, of the Pythia.

22 Murray 1981 notes: "It has long been recognised, however, that, with the exception of Theoclymenus at *Ody. XX. 351-7*, prophecy of this visionary nature is absent from Homer" (94).

23 Flower 2008, 88-89 also distinguishes between two sorts of possession. The first is the familiar sort where the seer's self temporarily departs, such that the god literally occupies the body of the seer. The seer's self-consciousness is absent. In the second sort, by contrast, the seer retains some semblance of self-identity. Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is an example. Even though she prophesizes, she is aware of the content of her prophecy, which in this case is her own death. In fact, I disagree with Flower 2008 who seems to think that Theoclymenus does not interpret his vision, since he is an "altered state of consciousness" (79), but leaves the interpretation to the audience. The text shows that Theoclymenus interprets his vision to mean the future ruin of Penelope's suitors.

24 cf. *Ion* 538e; *Laches* 198e-199a; *Phaedrus* 244c

25 cf. *Phaedrus* 244a6-d5; *Ion* 534b5.

26 Instructive here is *Timaeus* 71e-72b wherein Plato introduces the need to appoint official interpreters of seer. For Plato, "as long as the fit remains on him [the seer], the man is incompetent to render judgment on his own visions and voices" (72a3-4) (τοῦ δὲ μανέντος ἔτι τε ἐν τούτῳ μόνοντος οὐκ ἔργον τὰ φανέντα καὶ φωνηθέντα ὑφ' αὐτοῦ κρίνειν). We might take this to mean that the

seer is permitted to interpret their own divinations once they have regained their cognitive faculties. Instead, Plato asserts the need to appoint official interpreters and further states that these individuals should not be misinterpreted as seers themselves (72b). These interpreters would have a degree of interpretive skill and could therefore be thought to possess a *technē*. Such interpreters are needed because they are in their 'right mind' and can 'recollect and ponder' what was said or described while the seer was asleep or in a visionary state. One might think it obvious that one could remember the content of a prophetic dream, but important here is Plato's claim is words "spoken [out loud] in dream".

27 Smith and Brickhouse 1993, 45.

28 McPherran 1996, 196-197 agrees with Brickhouse and Smith that Socrates grants seers "a certain kind of menial craft knowledge; namely, the knowledge of how to put themselves into a position to receive a god's revelations (196-197). Of further interest is McPherran's claim about Socrates' *daimonion*. According to McPherran, the adjectival character of the *daimonion*, together with other considerations, give credence to the idea that Socrates does not experience an all-consuming possession of the sort experienced by seers. Rather, what seems to occur is "the other sort of psychological disassociation recognized by late – and so possibly early – antiquity, where 'subjects' consciousness persists side by side" (McPherran 1996, 196). This idea of compartmentalization has affinity with my own thesis concerning intuitive seers.

29 Important here is to distinguish between the official interpreters that can be trained to interpret divinations (*Timaeus* 71a-72) and seers themselves. The former does not jive with Socrates' argument in the *Ion*, which stipulates that only practitioners of a *technē* can judge (literary) depictions of that *technē*. Since one could train an official interpreter, could Theoclymenus' divination, then, be an instance of possession divination? I do not think so because Socrates' argument exclusively deals with experts judging (literary) depictions of their own *technē*. The problem with treating Theoclymenus' vision as an instance of possession divination is that a possessed seer cannot formulate such judgments. This should trigger serious reflect on the part of the reader as to what Socrates is thinking by deploying divination as his final, and indeed most sustained, example.

30 The 'examine and judge' criterion also opposes Trivigno's claim that no seer could judge what occurs to Theoclymenus because of the fundamental privacy of the vision. To judge the vision adequately, a seer would need to experience the vision themselves. But this underestimates the breadth of what Socrates is asking – can a seer judge whether or not a divination in Homer is well or badly composed? I do not think much else can be asked than drawing on one's experiences and training.

31 Cf. *Symposium* 201d.

32 Consider the structure of the *Symposium*. The only participant not to give a speech is Socrates who instead speaks about a retold discussion he had with

Diotima. As her central function is to be a discussant, it is most important that she be able to examine and judge her divinations.

33 Incidentally, it is useful to keep in mind Socrates' *daimonion*, which emerges repeatedly in Plato's dialogues (*Apology* 31c-e, 40a-c, *Euthyphro* 3b, *Euthydemus* 272e, *Republic* VI 496c, *Phaedrus* 242 b-c; *Theaetetus* 151a). His sign is never characterized as the possession *cum* passivity that the Pythia experiences. One reason is that Socrates usually characterizes his *daimonion* as a sign (*Apology* 31d3, *Phaedrus* 242c2) and not as the actual possession of a god. In this way, Socrates retains a degree of self-awareness. Another reason is that the *daimonion* only discourages (*Euthydemus* 272e; *Phaedrus* 242b-c; *Apology* 40a-c). This coalesces with Socrates' privileging of reason. The *daimonion* causes him to reflect on something, which his reason then takes up and evaluates. For these reasons, Socrates' *daimonion* is thought to be different than what occurs to seers when they divine. So, for instance, Van Riel 2013, paraphrasing McPherrin 1996, writes "this *daimonion* is not of the same order as is recourse to divine inspiration or divination, or even a dream. Take for example the divine inspiration of poets (such as discussed in the *Ion*), or the Homeric hero possessed by a god, or the possession of the Maenads: each time, the subject is deprived of reason, and an external divine force takes control of his actions. There is none of this with regard to Socrates' *daimonion*...Divination and dreams, for their part, are occasional interventions of the divine, signs given by a god outside of us" (34). Van Riel is correct as far it takes us, but I think that this does a disservice to intuitive seers like Theoclymenus and Diotima. These seers are able to interpret their divinations, thereby giving credence to the notion that they remain self-aware when they divine.

34 Diotima is also variously characterized as "wise" (*Symposium* 201d3, 208b8) and this underscores the notion that she is not a possessed seer.

35 Tigerstedt 1969, 21.

36 cf. *Symposium* 209 b-e; *Phaedrus* 245a; *Laws* 692a, 811c9-10, 817a.