# *In Defence of Poetry: Intertextual Dialogue and the Dynamic of Appropriation in Plutarch's* De audiendis poetis[*]

[*Em Defesa da Poesia: O Diálogo Intertextual e a Dinâmica da Apropriação em* De Audiendis Poetis *de Plutarco*]

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**Abstract**

Intertextuality may be defined as the interaction between different texts, a dialogic relationship found especially in literary works and which the reader is asked to decipher. The absorption and tacit transformation of other texts in Plutarch's work suggests that the intertextuality in *De audiendis poetis* can be approached as literary intertextuality, making it both critical and creative. The allusion to other texts is the most important thread that weaves argumentative discourse and evidences together, in other words, the benefits that can be drawn from reading the poets.

**Keywords:** Plutarch, Poetry, Intertextuality.

**Resumo**

Pode-se definir Intertextualidade como a interacção entre diferentes textos, uma relação dialógica característica sobretudo de textos literários, que o leitor é chamado a descobrir. A absorção de outros textos e a sua transformação tácita na obra de Plutarco permite uma abordagem literária intertextual, que revela o carácter simultaneamente crítico e criativo de *De audiendis poetis*. Com efeito, a alusão a outros textos é o mais importante fio de que se tece o discurso argumentativo e põe em evidência os benefícios que se podem retirar da leitura dos poetas.

**Palavras-chave:** Plutarco, Poesia, Intertextualidade.

Intertextuality, understood as the interaction between different texts, represents a certain continuity of literary tradition; it is therefore unsurprising that this is a marked aspect of the written production of the Ancient Greeks, for whom memory was, as it were, the anchor of their own identity[1]. In the case of Plutarch's work, which to some extent condenses a long literary, philosophical and rhetorical tradition, one can discern a permanent and, generally speaking, explicit engagement with texts[2] of this tradition. It is true that the modern concept of intertextuality, coined by J. Kristeva, refers mainly to the constitutive dialogical relationship between specifically literary texts, and that the work of Plutarch – namely, *De audiendis poetis* – is perhaps closer to what we nowadays mean by critical or essayistic discourse. Nevertheless, it is also possible to speak of intertextuality in this type of work, especially when, as Perrone-Moisés says of intertextuality in critical discourse, criticism ceases to be metalinguistic to itself become writing[3]. In such cases, the critic does not refer to his sources, but absorbs them tacitly, constructing a new text. Indeed, a significant part of the *De audiendis poetis* reveals a dialogical relationship of this kind.

If "the first condition of intertextuality is that literary works should remain unfinished, that is, that they ask and allow themselves to be continued"[4], there is no doubt that Plato's work – due to the dialectical method by which it is characterised – is particularly inclined towards intertextual dialogue. With regard to the discussion on poetry in the *Republic* and its role in educating the guardians of the polis, the conclusions reached by Socrates and his interlocutors clearly have a provisional nature, presented as the necessary result of the chosen

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[1]   On the relevance of the intertextual approach to ancient literature, see, *e.g.*, G.B.CONTE, 1986, and D. FOWLER, 1997.

[2]   J. KRISTEVA (1969, pp. 84-85) explains the concept of intertextuality by stating that «tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absortion et transformation d'un autre texte.» From the point of view of literary composition, the modern concept of intertextuality may perhaps come close to *mutatis mutandis*, that of μίμησις or *imitatio* 'imitation', in the sense in which these terms are used by Dionysius of Halicarnassus or Quintilian, that is, as a process of personal creation derived from models. From the point of view of reception, the intertextual reading is a hermeneutic exercise that regards the text as a tapestry in which the threads of other texts are intertwined, seeking in them a wider meaning. Intertextual reading, as M. Riffaterre says, "is the opposite of linear reading." See M. RIFFATERRE, 1978.

[3]   L. PERRONE-MOISÉS, 1976. The author, of course, refers to works like Butor's on Baudelaire. However, I think that some of her observations are also relevant to the present case.

[4]   L. PERRONE-MOISÉS,1975, p. 72.

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method of analysis[5]. Indeed, from the tenth Book[6], it becomes clear that the matter remains open and unfinished, awaiting further revision[7]:

> And we might also allow her defenders, who are lovers of poetry but not themselves poetical, to make a prose speech on her behalf, to show that she is not only pleasing (ἡδεῖα) but useful (ὠφελίμη) for government and human life; and we shall be glad to listen. After all, it will be our gain if she turns out useful as well as pleasing.

It is precisely to this challenge that Plutarch seems to respond in *De audiendis poetis*, a treatise written in identical terms to those followed by Plato in his discussion of poetry[8]. In this work, Plutarch seeks to solve the "old quarrel between poetry and philosophy"[9], radicalized in the *Republic* and suppressed in the *Poetics*, where Aristotle advocates the philosophical nature of poetry, as opposed to History[10]. Plutarch re-addresses this topic, departing from Socrates' position on that Platonic dialogue, as he reflects on the place of

poetry in educating young people. His proposal, however, is to defend and demonstrate the pedagogical potential of poetry, as well as its propaedeutic role in relation to philosophy, which is the highest aspiration in Hellenistic paideia. Furthermore, the *topoi* used in defence of his thesis — the useful and the pleasant — are the same as those of the *Republic,* along with the definition of poetry as ψεῦδος and μίμησις.

However, if Plutarch writes *De audiendis poetis* under the influence of Plato with the aim of continuing his dialogue, the truth is that he does not at any moment affirm this purpose. His treatise does not respond to the Platonic challenge in a straightforward way; he neither quotes his master's words nor refers directly to his theory. Plato's name is mentioned a few times throughout the treatise –very few indeed, if compared to Homer– but not as a direct interlocutor, a fact that is all the more significant given the abundance of direct quotations in the treatise, as well as the regular rebuttal of several authors' viewpoints. His ideas are presented in

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5    *Rep.* 388d-e: "If our young men heard things like this in earnest and did not laugh at them as unworthy remarks (..) They would mourn and lament freely, without shame or restraint, at small accidents. (…) But they ought not to do so, as our argument just now showed – and we ought to be convinced by it, until someone convinces us with a better one."

6    *Rep.* 607d-e.

7    I use the translations of D. RUSSELL and M. WINTERBOTTOM, 1988.

8    The relation of this treatise to Plato's *Republic* is in general recognized by the critics. Cf. e.g., S. HALLIWELL, 2002, p. 296; R. HUNTER, 2009, p. 175.

9    *Rep.* 29d-e.

10    *Po.* 1451b.

a rather diffuse and tacit manner. The same is true of the part of the argument that seems to be of Aristotelian or, more generally, Peripatetic influence[11]. Plutarch grasps, absorbs and transforms ideas, adapting them to this new context of reflection on the importance of poetry in the curriculum of young people. And he does this within a sort of dialogue among peers, within a relationship of equality from which the new text, avowedly critical, is actually a personal rewriting, only possible within a firmly established tradition. This absorption and tacit transformation of other texts suggests that the intertextuality in *De audiendis poetis* can be approached as literary intertextuality, shaping it as both critical and creative. He does not write about those previous texts, but rather departs from them, driven by a desire for conciliation but, by no means, for a breach. In fact, the treatise intends not to be contentious with regard to Plato and Aristotle[12]; it is, rather, a revisiting of their ideas. He establishes what we may call a dialectical cooperation with

their ideas, the outcome of which is a degree of conciliatory synthesis. We will now recall aspects of this intertextual dialogue with the originals.

Plutarch does not ignore the moral and psychological issues that justified Plato's rejection of the educational value of poetry, On the contrary, he seems to share the philosopher's concerns.

The first line of thought to be defended is the actual pedagogical value of remarkable narratives in the training of young men, primarily in the context of learning philosophy. The argument is that fictional narratives provide enthusiasm and pleasure (χαί-ρουσι … μεθ' ἡδονῆς ἐνθουσιῶσι – 14e), therefore promoting study of the densest philosophical content. In line with the precepts of rhetorical art and the weight given to *pathos* as a means of persuasion, the author recognizes the impossibility and inconvenience of repressing emotions. Instead, he argues that they should be oriented towards the learning of good and virtue. The

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[11]  Although it is not at all certain that Plutarch knew Aristotle's *Poetics*, it seems very clear to me that the definition of poetry as *pseudos* and *mimesis* in this treatise echoes Aristotelian thinking. In fact, although these are also the terms that define poetry in Plato, it is Aristotle's view, as we recognise from the *Poetics*, that emerges in *De aud. poet.* 16b-d; 17d; 18a-f. It also seems very likely, as A. ROSTAGNI and other critics have argued, that behind these excerpts lies Aristotle's lost treatise *On the Poets*. Halliwell sees with much reluctance the possibility of a direct connection with the Stagirite, but states that "we should allow for a Peripatetic strand in the argument of *De audiendis poetis*." See S. HALLIWELL, 2002, 299. On the presence of Aristotle's work in Plutarch, see A. ROSTAGNI, 1955, pp. 255-322; H. FLASHAR, 1979, pp. 79-111; F.H. SANDBACH, 1982, pp. 207-232; A. PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ, J. GARCÍA LÓPEZ & R. M. AGUILAR, 2000; G. ROSKAM, 2009, pp. 25-44.

[12]  Cf. A. ZADOROJNYI, 2002, p. 298.

pleasure derived from listening to poets may have beneficial effects.

At first glance, this could not be more distant from Plato. However, in further defending the need for careful vigilance over this kind of pleasure, Plutarch is admitting the dangers of a naive and unprepared reading of poetry, thus aligning himself with some assertions in the second Book of the *Republic*[13]. Here, Socrates was open to the possibility that *mythoi* could serve for the education of children, but only those that could convey proper values or the truth. He therefore proposed an act of surveillance or censorship on the future authors of these narratives, so that they would only compose fables bearing an edifying morality. Plutarch's proposal is different because his immediate objectives were also different. His text is not a speculative, theoretical exercise on education, nor is it, like Plato's *Republic*, an exercise in imagination in the search for the ideal[14]. In fact, although he could have composed a literary dialogue in the

Platonic manner, he opted for a non-fictional text to respond to a concrete historical situation – that of the moment in which he lives. That is why the first rebuttal is that "it is neither useful nor perhaps possible to keep boys of the age of my Soclaros or your Cleandros away from poetry"[15]. Instead of prohibiting, he therefore integrates, and his proposed surveillance[16] takes a new direction: that of guiding young people in reading poems so that they will be able ἐν τῶι τέρποντι τὸ χρήσιμον ζητεῖν καὶ ἀγαπᾶν, "to seek and to love that which is useful in that which gives pleasure"[17].

Plutarch therefore shares Plato's moral concerns, for he recognizes the potentially negative effects of pleasure derived from reading poetry, and even seeks to thwart them. Moreover, like his master, he bases his thesis on knowledge of the human psyche, particularly that of the young[18]. But it is, so it seems, a knowledge founded on the personal experience of his being both a father and a teacher, as opposed to on a philosophical study of the soul and the

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[13]  Cf. 377a-c.

[14]  In *Rep*.376d Socrates invited the other participants to join the dialogue with words that leave no doubts about this: ἴθι οὖν, ὥσπερ ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές τε καὶ σχολὴν ἄγοντες λόγῳ παιδεύωμεν τοὺς ἄνδρας "Come, then, just as if we were telling stories or fables and had ample leisure, let us educate these men in our discourse." Cf. HUNTER, 2009, p. 175.

[15]  *De aud. poet*. 14d.

[16]  The words are: φυλάττωμεν αὐτούς 'let us protect them'.

[17]  *De aud. poet*. 14f. HALLIWELL, 2009, p. 297, speaks of  "a sort of self-censorship, replacing the political censorship proposed in Plato' s *Republic*."

[18]  *De aud. poet*. 15a.

effects of emotion on human behaviour. Hence, the result is necessarily different.

Plutarch conciliates his moral and psychological concerns with Aristotle's more detached perspective, rejecting factual and philosophical truth as a criterion for the evaluation of good poetry: ποιητικῆι μὲν οὐ πάνυ μέλον ἐστὶ τῆς ἀληθείας, "poetry is not concerned with truth"[19]. The understanding of poetry as *pseudos* is a starting point taken by the author without moral reservations, because in the realm of poetry, the meaning of the word is "fiction", that is, τὸ πλαττόμενον λόγωι, "that which is configured by words"[20]. And this is the very essence of art. For this reason, the verses of Empedocles or Parmenides are designated as *logoi*, as opposed to the *mythoi* that characterize poetry worthy of that name.

It is not difficult to hear the echoes of Aristotelian views in these examples, adduced to distinguish fictional poetry from discourses that merely imitate formal aspects of poetic elocution. Indeed, the very centrality of *mythos* in poetry inevitably brings to mind

passages from *Poetics*[21]. This is not, however, a clear evocation. The intertext is perceived in a very diffuse manner, as a reminiscence, in which the same words acquire different meanings depending on their context. The concept of *mythos* in Aristotle's *Poetics* has more to do with "plot" or "concatenation of actions," whereas in these excerpts of *De audiendis poetis* its sense is less technical, instead moving closer to a meaning of "fictional narrative" which is more "Platonic"[22]. It is nonetheless possible to perceive both figures, the Academic philosopher and the Lycian philosopher, as traditional authorities in the field of poetics, albeit filtered, so to speak, by Plutarch's own ideas and scope in the composition of his treatise.

It is certainly not by chance that, to support his opinion, he quotes Solon's well-known statement πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἀοιδοί, "poets tell many lies", whilst also drawing on the example of Socrates himself (16c):

> This is why Socrates, the life-long striver for truth, found himself, when he set about composing poetry in obedience to a

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[19]  *De aud. poet.* 17d. Aristotle himself does not exclude moral expectations from aesthetic experience. See e.g. *Poetics* 1452b-1453a. As S. Halliwell remarks, "Aristotle, while avoiding such outright moralism [i.e. Plato's], still expects tragedy (and mimetic art in general) to be conformable to a moral understanding of the world." Cf. S. Halliwell, 1998, p. 5. On the possible debt of *De audiendis poetis* to Aristotle, see supra n. 6.

[20]  *De aud. poet.*16b.

[21]  See Arist., *Po.* 1447b; 1450a-1450b; 1451b. R. Hunter and D. Russell note that Empedocles "had been a paradigm of verse which was not poetry (ποίησις) since Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447b18". See R. Hunter & D. Russell, 2011, p. 88.

[22]  I mean platonic in the sense that it is used in *Rep.* 376d or 377a. See supra n.11.

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dream, no very convincing or gifted maker of lies; he therefore put Aesop's fables into verse, on the principle that where there is no fiction there is no poetry.

In a treatise aiming to reconcile the teaching of poetry with that of philosophy, Plutarch quotes a poet and a philosopher, but not just any philosopher. To quote from Socrates is to bring Plato into dialogue, and, what is more, as an abetting witness in a case against those who reject the falsities of fictional narratives. This is a rhetorical device used by Plutarch throughout the treatise, one that seeks to answer Plato's objections with the philosopher's own statements or, as in this case, with the example of his beloved and admired master Socrates. Supported by these authorities, he presents part of the solution to the initial problem: to prevent uncritical adherence to some of the bad words and actions presented in poems of all kinds, we must inevitably make young people understand that there is no poetry without fiction or falsehood.

This is the reason why, like Aristotle, Plutarch insists on the concepts of verisimilitude (εἰκός) and adequacy (τὸ πρέπον)[23], arguing that poetry should be judged according to poetic criteria. The most important of these derives from poetry being defined as mimesis, as an imitation that only makes sense

and arouses emotions if it is credible or plausible. Recognition of the similarities with reality in that which is represented in art is itself a source of pleasure. It is thus the quality of verisimilitude that is at issue in the evaluation of poetic mimesis. Without ever explicitly citing Aristotle, but rather with arguments similar to those of *Poetics*, Plutarch censors those who merely repeat Simonides' words, "poetry is a spoken painting and painting a silent poetry". He adds the fundamental assertion that *mimesis* cannot aim to beautify that which is ugly, but rather to represent things according to what is appropriate. And the appropriate representation is one that respects the characteristics of the represented.

This painting analogy already had a longstanding tradition in the time of Plato and Aristotle, but they are the ones who, in different and even antagonistic ways, drew profound theoretical and philosophical conclusions from these images. Aristotle, for example, points to the transfiguring quality of art, when speaking of the pleasure that repulsive, real-life images elicit when artfully worked[24]. Plutarch adopts the same ideas, with examples taken from painting, sculpture and poetry[25]:

> We avoid a sick or ulcerated man as a disagreeable sight, but we enjoy looking at Aristophon's

[23]  *De aud. poet*. 18a.
[24]  *Po.* 1448b.
[25]  *De aud. poet*. 18c.

'Philoctetes' or Silanion's 'Jocasta', which are made to resemble the sick and dying. Similarly, when the young man reads what Thersites the buffoon or Sisyphus the seducer or Batrachos the brothel-keeper is represented as saying or doing, he should be taught to praise the technique and skill of the imitation, but to censure and abuse the habits and activities represented.

Again, these lines of thought bring Plato and Aristotle together. In a passage that seems to follow ideas and statements from the *Poetics*, Plutarch opens the door to Plato by recalling the example of Thersites, a Homeric character[26]. By denoting Thersites a γελωτοποιός, "buffoon", Plutarch echoes a passage of the *Republic* where the philosopher narrates the myth of Er[27]. In this way, the author subtly suggests not only that Plato himself created myths, but also that he has not refrained from including in those myths immoral figures of the epic tradition. Thersites's final destiny in this eschatological myth is to become a monkey, which means that the story of this character is one of guilt and punishment. It is precisely here that Plutarch offers a moral lesson, designed to prevent young people from being influenced by examples of bad mythical characters, and to show that bad actions ultimately hurt those who practise them[28].

In this way, Plutarch interweaves both Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives into his text and sews them, so to speak, with his own proposal – to limit the potentially dangerous effects of poetry through critical judgement, teaching young people how to read and interpret poetic texts.

However, whilst the ideas of Plato and Aristotle serve as the primary intertext, which emerges as though it were a palimpsest, other figures from both poetic and philosophical Greek tradition are also employed. The author openly engages with them through quotations or paraphrases[29].

In terms of quotations, we find distinct types: some serve to exemplify methods of reading and interpreting poems, while others illustrate or confirm the author's ideas. In some of these cases, the words of consecrated authors are invoked as appeals to authority. It is nonetheless curious that, in the case of quoted poets, this authority is understood as neither intrinsic to their very nature nor derived from their belonging to a particular canon. Authority is based, rather, on the possibility of

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[26] Thersites appears in *Il*. 2. 212-277. He is there presented as a physical and morally inferior character. In later tradition, he remains the mythical paradigm of the insubordinate.

[27] *Rep*. 620c. This Platonic echo is pointed out by HUNTER & RUSSELL, 2011, p. 102.

[28] *De aud. poet*. 20b.

[29] C. PERRI (1978, pp. 303-304) rightly states that even direct citations, because they appear in a different context, are distortions of reference texts.

convergence and reconciliation with the moral standards conveyed by some philosophers, above all by Plato[30]. Plutarch bridges the gap between poetry and philosophy, displaying an eclecticism that exemplifies, in practice, his main theory that only knowledge grants the ability to distinguish between what is or is not beneficial, and to choose the best option accordingly. Both in poetry and in philosophy.

By calling several texts and authors into this discussion, Plutarch clearly opts for the dialectical method, proceeding in the manner of the Platonic Socrates as he guides the "conversation" to its intended ends. This procedure has an argumentative feature, in the sense that it supports the thesis he defends, according to which poetry can be valuable as propaedeutic to philosophy, as long as young men are duly guided so as to distinguish the benefits it encloses. We can therefore say that the intertextual composition is in itself a subtle rhetorical strategy intended to persuade.

I will seek to illustrate this argument with an analysis of the first chapter, since it presents –almost as a prologue– Plutarch's thesis and the main points of the reasoning he will later expound. It bears, furthermore, the marks of a text interwoven with the threads of other texts, giving birth to a third and different one.

It is not surprising that a treatise which advocates poetry in the syllabus of young people should open with a quotation by a poet – Philoxenus. What is perhaps odder is that the author invokes a smaller poet and a somewhat vulgar image to support his starting idea. As we know, however, this light humour is not at all alien to Plutarch's style, and also not completely innocuous. This peculiar opening fulfils several purposes: it introduces the metaphor that shapes further discussion – education is feeding – and at the same time, it subtly starts to bring poets and philosophers closer together. In the same sentence, he quotes a poet and a thinker, Cato, and in the following one, he transfers the "poetic" gastronomic image to the context of philosophy. Just as in the feeding of the body, it is best to mix flavours and textures; thus, in the feeding of the spirit, whose main food is philosophy, it is best to mix it with poetry. More importantly, a crucial point of the defence of poetry is found here, in the conditional sentence that has the effect of suspending the very idea of truth[31]:

> If, my dear Marcus Sedatus, it is true, as the poet Philoxenus used to say, that of meats those that are not meat, and of fish those that are not fish, have the best flavour, let us leave the expounding of this matter to those persons of whom Cato said that

[30]  This idea is explicitly stated by the end of the book, 35f.

[31]  Translated by F.C. Babbitt, 1957. I use here this translation because the author maintains in english the conditional sentence.

their palates are more sensitive than their minds. And so of philosophical discourses it is clear to us that those seemingly not at all philosophical, or even serious, are found more enjoyable by the very young…

Despite its lightness, the opening sentence is the first symptom of downplaying the concept of truth in the context of poetry, since the author seems unconcerned with this aspect.

Throughout the treatise, the citation of poets as a strategy to illustrate and support philosophical insights not only sustains the argument for confluence between poets and philosophers, but also seems to signal something else about poetic language. It may be that, because it is directed at both *reason* and *emotion,* it has the ability to say more and to say it better.

An expressive example serves to reinforce and illustrate the dual nature of poetic art with respect to its effects on the listener / reader. Plutarch quotes a line from *Odyssey* on Egyptian drugs – φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμειγμένα πολλὰ δὲ λυγρά, "many drugs that are good mixed with many that are bad".

One could hardly overlook the Platonic echoes of the first word in this line –φάρμακα. However, while Plato emphasizes the negative element of φάρμακον, Plutarch seems to valorise ideas of mixture and symmetry (πολλὰ μέν ... πολλὰ δέ). Hence, Plutarch paves the way for resolving poetry's harmful effects —not by avoidance but rather by κρίσις[32], the capacity for critical thought.

This quotation from the *Odyssey* is immediately followed by one from the *Iliad* which again resonates with Plato:

> therein is love and desire and the
> intimacies
> that cheat and steal the hearts
> even of the wise[33].

Socrates also said that Poetry *is capable of corrupting, with few exceptions, even men of character and virtue*[34]. The tacit relationship between Homer and Plato points to the convergence of thought between them. This happens, however, through a kind of chronological inversion. Instead of presenting the Iliad as Plato's intertextual model, the opposite occurs. For the reader of Plutarch, behind these Homeric verses lies the Platonic text. Accordingly, we can say that its evocation

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[32]  L. Van der Stockt (1990, pp. 23-31), points out that « la krisis qu'il recommande (15d) lui permet de sauver l'expérience esthétique ». In fact, if for Plato as well as for Plutarch the whole educational effort was directed towards ethics, in this treatise, an intellectual objective is devised at the service of ethics – the development of κρίσις, or the capacity of discernment that lets one enjoy the pleasant and in it find what is useful and healthy (τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ τὸ σωτήριον διώκειν).

[33]  *De aud. poet.* 15c.

[34]  *Rep.* 605c.

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and resonance have an argumentative intention, highlighting the possibility of reconciliation between poetic discourse and philosophical thought. In this case, it is no longer simply a matter of exhibiting the aesthetic qualities of poetic language, but of showing how its beauty and the pleasure it conveys can be a vehicle for fostering serious ideas.

The path to reconciliation continues with an association between the thinking of the poet Simonides' and that of the Sophist Gorgias. Both maintain that accepting the deception of poetry is a sign of intelligence and wisdom. The following examples, however, indicate that philosophical discourse is not always more accurate than poetic discourse. In fact, through this confrontation between Homer and Epicurus, the latter is – from the author's perspective - defeated. This passage is, moreover, symptomatic of Plutarch's conciliatory attitude towards Plato:

> What then ought we to do? Stop the young men's ears, like the Ithacan sailors', with some hard, insoluble wax, and force them to set sail with Epicurus, and steer clear of poetry? Or fix and settle their judgment with rational arguments, not letting pleasure distract it into harm, and so protect them and guide them aright?

Epicurus' paraphrase echoes Plato's own ideas about the place of poetry in educating the guardians of the polis. Plutarch, however, does not criticize them directly. On the contrary, he even seems to justify them tacitly. These rhetorical questions are those of someone who is thinking about education in the real world, his own world, and not, as in the *Republic*, in an imaginary and fictitious one. The question here is, if all is possible in an imaginary world, then the same cannot be said about the real one.

Moreover, as a reader of Homer, Epicurus does not have the interpretative skills that Plutarch thinks should be learned by young people. Indeed, in the episode of the Odyssey evoked here, it is not the forced deafness of the sailors that is praised, but rather the curiosity of Ulysses, his desire to access the knowledge granted by the Sirens' song. This is one of the features of his *arete*, attested in the opening lines of the poem. Ulysses' instructions to his companions –to cover their own ears with wax and tie him to the ship's mast so that he could hear the Sirens without danger– exemplify their intelligence and wisdom. Herein lies the symbolic value of the episode, in its expressive power to discuss the duplicity of poetry and the responses given to it. While praised in other parts of *De audiendis poetis*, Epicurus is here blamed in favour of Homer[35].

Plato is quoted in this chapter only once and in a rather surprising way. Having been quietly present from the beginning, only

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[35] See *De aud. poet*. 37a.

now is he directly named as if all the previous segments did not use him as a point of reference. The author quotes a passage from the *Laws* (733d) in which the philosopher employs the image of mixing water with wine to symbolise, in this specific context, the advantages of having parents who differ in character. Plutarch takes up this same image and uses it as a metaphor for the best way of dealing with poetry:

> When unmixed pleasure makes its fabulous and theatrical elements wax wanton and luxuriant, blustering violently for reputation, let us take hold and prune and constrain: but when it touches poetry with its grace, and the sweet attractions of the style are fruitful and purposeful, let us introduce some admixture of philosophy.

Again, Plutarch does the same thing he has already done in several other passages of the treatise: uses Plato to answer Plato.

The chapter concludes with the quotation of a fragment of Sophocles that, once again, leaves behind lingering echoes of Socrates' words in the *Republic* on the importance of first learning.

Poetry and philosophy hand in hand: at the end of the first chapter, this is the prevailing idea. Those which follow will develop, deepen, and demonstrate this desirable union within a work where the echoes of other texts are continuously being heard.

[36] *Rep.* 377a-b.

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