

# ION

A 'rhapsode' is a professional reciter of the poetry of Homer and certain other prestigious early poets of Greece. In Athens the prize-winning rhapsode Ion from Ephesus (we do not know whether he is a historical personage or Plato's invention) runs into Socrates, who expresses admiration for his profession and questions him about it. Theirs is a private conversation, apparently with no others present (as in Euthyphro). Ion professes not just to recite superbly Homer's poetry (his specialty) but also to speak beautifully in his own right about Homer—in interpreting and explaining his poetry and its excellences. Socrates is more interested in this second aspect of Ion's professional expertise than in the first. He wants to know whether Ion speaks about Homer 'on the basis of knowledge or mastery': is he the master of some body of knowledge, which he employs and expresses in speaking about Homer?

The chief interest of this short dialogue, apart from its comical portrayal of Ion's enthusiasm for his own skills, lies in the way Socrates develops his own view—which Ion in the end blithely accepts!—that Ion speaks not from knowledge but from inspiration, his thoughts being 'breathed into' him without the use of his own understanding at all. Using the analogy of a magnet, with the power to draw one iron ring to itself, and through that another, and another, Socrates suggests that Homer himself—the greatest of the Greek poets—had no knowledge of his own in writing his poetry, but was divinely possessed. Ion and other expert rhapsodes are also divinely possessed—as it were, 'magnetized'—through him, both when they recite his poetry and when they speak about it—and they pass on the inspiration to their hearers, who are in a state of divine possession in opening themselves to the poetry. Neither poets nor rhapsodes have any knowledge or mastery of anything: their work, with all its beauty, is the product of the gods working through them, not of any human intelligence and skill. Thus these minor characters, the rhapsodes, provide Socrates entrée to much bigger game, the poet Homer himself, the great 'teacher' of the Greeks. Readers should compare (and contrast) Socrates' criticisms of Homer here with those in Republic II and III, and his critique of poetry in X, along with the views about poetic 'madness' that he advances in Phaedrus and elsewhere.

J.M.C.

- 530     SOCRATES: Ion! Hello. Where have you come from to visit us this time?  
 From your home in Ephesus?
- ION: No, no, Socrates. From Epidaurus, from the festival of Asclepius.
- SOCRATES: Don't tell me the Epidaurians hold a contest for *rhapsodes* in honor of the god?
- ION: They certainly do! They do it for every sort of poetry and music.
- SOCRATES: Really! Did you enter the contest? And how did it go for you?
- b     ION: First prize, Socrates! We carried it off.
- SOCRATES: That's good to hear. Well, let's see that we win the big games at Athens, next.
- ION: We'll do it, Socrates, god willing.
- SOCRATES: You know, Ion, many times I've envied you rhapsodes your profession. Physically, it is always fitting for you in your profession to be dressed up to look as beautiful as you can; and at the same time it is necessary for you to be at work with poets—many fine ones, and with
- c     Homer above all, who's the best poet and the most divine—and you have to learn his thought, not just his verses! Now that is something to envy! I mean, no one would ever get to be a good rhapsode if he didn't understand what is meant by the poet. A rhapsode must come to present the poet's thought to his audience; and he can't do that beautifully unless he knows what the poet means. So this all deserves to be envied.
- ION: That's true, Socrates. And that's the part of my profession that took the most work. I think I speak more beautifully than anyone else about
- d     Homer; neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus nor Stesimbrotus of Thasos nor Glaucon nor anyone else past or present could offer as many beautiful thoughts about Homer as I can.
- SOCRATES: That's good to hear, Ion. Surely you won't begrudge me a demonstration?
- ION: Really, Socrates, it's worth hearing how well I've got Homer dressed up. I think I'm worthy to be crowned by the Sons of Homer<sup>1</sup> with a golden crown.
- 531     SOCRATES: Really, I shall make time to hear that later. Now I'd just like an answer to this: Are you so wonderfully clever about Homer alone—or also about Hesiod and Archilochus?
- ION: No, no. Only about Homer. That's good enough, I think.
- SOCRATES: Is there any subject on which Homer and Hesiod both say the same things?
- ION: Yes, I think so. A good many.
- SOCRATES: Then, on those subjects, would you explain Homer's verse better and more beautifully than Hesiod's?
- b     ION: Just the same Socrates, on those subjects, anyway, where they say the same things.

Translated by Paul Woodruff.

1. The sons of Homer were a guild of rhapsodes who originally claimed to be descendants of Homer.

SOCRATES: And how about the subjects on which they do not say the same things? Divination, for example. Homer says something about it and so does Hesiod.

ION: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Well. Take all the places where those two poets speak of divination, both where they agree and where they don't: who would explain those better and more beautifully, you, or one of the diviners if he's good?

ION: One of the diviners.

SOCRATES: Suppose *you* were a diviner: if you were really able to explain the places where the two poets agree, wouldn't you also know how to explain the places where they disagree?

ION: That's clear.

SOCRATES: Then what in the world is it that you're clever about in Homer but not in Hesiod and the other poets? Does Homer speak of any subjects that differ from those of *all* the other poets? Doesn't he mainly go through tales of war, and of how people deal with each other in society—good people and bad, ordinary folks and craftsmen? And of the gods, how *they* deal with each other and with men? And doesn't he recount what happens in heaven and in hell, and tell of the births of gods and heroes? Those are the subjects of Homer's poetry-making, aren't they?

c

ION: That's true, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And how about the other poets? Did they write on the same subjects?

ION: Yes, but Socrates, they didn't do it the way Homer did.

SOCRATES: How, then? Worse?

ION: Much worse.

SOCRATES: And Homer does it better?

ION: *Really* better.

SOCRATES: Well now, Ion, dear heart, when a number of people are discussing arithmetic, and one of them speaks best, I suppose *someone* will know how to pick out the good speaker.

d

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Will it be the same person who can pick out the bad speakers, or someone else?

ION: The same, of course.

SOCRATES: And that will be someone who has mastered arithmetic, right?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well. Suppose a number of people are discussing healthy nutrition, and one of them speaks best. Will one person know that the best speaker speaks best, and another that an inferior speaker speaks worse? Or will the same man know both?

ION: Obviously, the same man.

SOCRATES: Who is he? What do we call him?

ION: A doctor.

e

532     SOCRATES: So, to sum it up, this is what we're saying: when a number of people speak on the same subject, it's always the same person who will know how to pick out good speakers and bad speakers. If he doesn't know how to pick out a bad speaker, he certainly won't know a good speaker—on the same subject, anyway.

ION: That's so.

SOCRATES: Then it turns out that the same person is "wonderfully clever" about both speakers.

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now *you* claim that Homer and the other poets (including Hesiod and Archilochus) speak on the same subjects, but not equally well. *He's* good, and they're inferior.

ION: Yes, and it's true.

- b     SOCRATES: Now if you really do know who's speaking well, you'll know that the inferior speakers are speaking worse.

ION: Apparently so.

SOCRATES: You're superb! So if we say that Ion is equally clever about Homer and the other poets, we'll make no mistake. Because you agree yourself that the same person will be an adequate judge of all who speak on the same subjects, and that almost all the poets *do* treat the same subjects.

- c     ION: Then how in the world do you explain what *I* do, Socrates? When someone discusses another poet I pay no attention, and I have no power to contribute anything worthwhile: I simply doze off. But let someone mention Homer and right away I'm wide awake and I'm paying attention and I have plenty to say.

SOCRATES: *That's* not hard to figure out, my friend. Anyone can tell that you are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of knowledge or mastery. Because if your ability came by mastery, you would be able to speak about all the other poets as well. Look, there is an art of poetry as a whole, isn't there?

ION: Yes.

- d     SOCRATES: And now take the whole of *any* other subject: won't it have the same discipline throughout? And this goes for every subject that can be mastered. Do you need me to tell you what I mean by this, Ion?

ION: Lord, yes, I do, Socrates. I love to hear you wise men talk.

- e     SOCRATES: I wish that were true, Ion. But wise? Surely you are the wise men, you rhapsodes and actors, you and the poets whose work you sing. As for me, I say nothing but the truth, as you'd expect from an ordinary man. I mean, even this question I asked you—look how commonplace and ordinary a matter it is. Anybody could understand what I meant: don't you use the same discipline throughout whenever you master the whole of a subject? Take this for discussion—painting is a subject to be mastered as a whole, isn't it?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: And there are many painters, good and bad, and there have been many in the past.

533

ION: Certainly.

SOCRATES: Have you ever known anyone who is clever at showing what's well painted and what's not in the work of Polygnotus, but who's powerless to do that for other painters? Someone who dozes off when the work of other painters is displayed, and is lost, and has nothing to contribute—but when he has to give judgment on Polygnotus or any other painter (so long as it's just *one*), he's wide awake and he's paying attention and he has plenty to say—have you ever known anyone like that?

ION: Good lord no, of course not!

SOCRATES: Well. Take sculpture. Have you ever known anyone who is clever at explaining which statues are well made in the case of Daedalus, son of Metion, or Epeius, son of Panopeus, or Theodorus of Samos, or any other *single* sculptor, but who's lost when he's among the products of other sculptors, and he dozes off and has nothing to say?

ION: Good lord no. I haven't.

SOCRATES: And further, it is my opinion, you've never known anyone ever—not in flute-playing, not in cithara-playing, not in singing to the cithara, and not in rhapsodizing—you've never known a man who is clever at explaining Olympus or Thamyrus or Orpheus or Phemius, the rhapsode from Ithaca, but who has nothing to contribute about Ion, the rhapsode from Ephesus, and cannot tell when he does his work well and when he doesn't—you've never known a man like that.

ION: I have nothing to say against you on that point, Socrates. But *this* I know about myself: I speak about Homer more beautifully than anybody else and I have lots to say; and everybody says I do it well. But about the other poets I do not. Now see what that means.

SOCRATES: I do see, Ion, and I'm going to announce to you what I think that is. As I said earlier, that's not a subject you've mastered—speaking well about Homer; it's a divine power that moves you, as a "Magnetic" stone moves iron rings. (That's what Euripides called it; most people call it "Heraclean.")<sup>2</sup> This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does—pull other rings—so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone. In the same way, the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. You know, none of the epic poets, if they're good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed, and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems. The same goes for lyric poets if they're good: just as the Corybantes are not in their right minds when they dance, lyric poets, too, are not in their right minds when they make those beautiful lyrics, but as soon as they sail into harmony and

b

c

d

e

534

2. Natural magnets apparently came from Magnesia and Heraclea in Caria in Asia Minor, and were called after those places.

rhythm they are possessed by Bacchic frenzy. Just as Bacchus worshippers<sup>3</sup> when they are possessed draw honey and milk from rivers, but not when they are in their right minds—the soul of a lyric poet does this too, as

- b they say themselves. For of course poets tell us that they gather songs at honey-flowing springs, from glades and gardens of the Muses, and that they bear songs to us as bees carry honey, flying like bees. And what they say is true. For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. As long as a human being has his intellect in his possession he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy. Therefore because it's not by mastery that they make poems or say many lovely things about their subjects (as you do about Homer)—but because it's by a divine gift—each poet is able to compose beautifully only that for which the Muse has aroused him: one can do dithyrambs, another encomia, one can do dance songs, another, epics, and yet another, iambics; and each of them is worthless for the other types of poetry. You see, it's not mastery that enables them to speak those verses, but a divine power, since if they knew how to speak beautifully on one type of poetry by mastering the subject, they could do so for all the others
- c also. That's why the god takes their intellect away from them when he uses them as his servants, as he does prophets and godly diviners, so that we who hear should know that *they* are not the ones who speak those verses that are of such high value, for their intellect is not in them: the god himself is the one who speaks, and he gives voice through them to us. The best evidence for this account is Tynnichus from Chalcis, who never made a poem anyone would think worth mentioning, *except* for the praise-song everyone sings, almost the most beautiful lyric-poem there is,
- d and simply, as he says himself, “an invention of the Muses.” In this more than anything, then, I think, the god is showing us, so that we should be in no doubt about it, that these beautiful poems are not human, not even *from* human beings, but are divine and from gods; that poets are nothing but representatives of the gods, possessed by whoever possesses them. To show *that*, the god deliberately sang the most beautiful lyric poem through the most worthless poet. Don't you think I'm right, Ion?

535

ION: Lord yes, *I* certainly do. Somehow you touch my soul with your words, Socrates, and I do think it's by a divine gift that good poets are able to present these poems to us from the gods.

SOCRATES: And you rhapsodes in turn present what the poets say.

ION: That's true too.

SOCRATES: So you turn out to be representatives of representatives.

ION: Quite right.

- b SOCRATES: Hold on, Ion; tell me this. Don't keep any secrets from *me*. When you recite epic poetry well and you have the most stunning effect

3. Bacchus worshippers apparently danced themselves into a frenzy in which they found streams flowing with honey and milk (Euripides, *Bacchae* 708–11).

on your spectators, either when you sing of Odysseus—how he leapt into the doorway, his identity now obvious to the suitors, and he poured out arrows at his feet—or when you sing of Achilles charging at Hector, or when you sing a pitiful episode about Andromache or Hecuba or Priam, are you at that time in your right mind, or do you get beside yourself? And doesn't your soul, in its enthusiasm, believe that it is present at the actions you describe, whether they're in Ithaca or in Troy or wherever the epic actually takes place?

ION: What a vivid example you've given me, Socrates! I won't keep secrets from *you*. Listen, when *I* tell a sad story, my eyes are full of tears; and when I tell a story that's frightening or awful, my hair stands on end with fear and my heart jumps.

SOCRATES: Well, Ion, should we say this man is in his right mind at times like these: when he's at festivals or celebrations, all dressed up in fancy clothes, with golden crowns, and he weeps, though he's lost none of his finery—or when he's standing among millions of friendly people and he's frightened, though no one is undressing him or doing him any harm? Is he in his right mind then?

ION: Lord no, Socrates. Not at all, to tell the truth.

SOCRATES: And you know that you have the same effects on most of your spectators too, don't you?

ION: I know very well that we do. I look down at them every time from up on the rostrum, and they're crying and looking terrified, and as the stories are told they are filled with amazement. You see I must keep my wits and pay close attention to them: if I start them crying, *I* will laugh as I take their money, but if *they* laugh, I shall cry at having lost money.

SOCRATES: And you know that this spectator is the last of the rings, don't you—the ones that I said take their power from each other by virtue of the Heraclean stone [the magnet]? The middle ring is you, the rhapsode or actor, and the first one is the poet himself. The god pulls people's souls through all these wherever he wants, looping the power down from one to another. And just as if it hung from that stone, there's an enormous chain of choral dancers and dance teachers and assistant teachers hanging off to the sides of the rings that are suspended from the Muse. One poet is attached to one Muse, another to another (we say he is "possessed," and that's near enough, for he is *held*). From these first rings, from the poets, *they* are attached in their turn and inspired, some from one poet, some from another: some from Orpheus, some from Musaeus, and many are possessed and held from Homer. You are one of *them*, Ion, and you are possessed from Homer. And when anyone sings the work of another poet, you're asleep and you're lost about what to say; but when any song of that poet is sounded, you are immediately awake, your soul is dancing, and you have plenty to say. You see it's not because you're a master of knowledge about Homer that you can say what you say, but because of a divine gift, because you are possessed. That's how it is with the Corybantes, who have sharp ears only for the specific song that belongs to whatever

c

d

e

536

b

c

god possesses them; they have plenty of words and movements to go with *that* song; but they are quite lost if the music is different. That's how it is with you, Ion: when anyone mentions Homer, you have plenty to say, but

- d if he mentions the others you are lost; and the explanation of this, for which you ask me—why it is that you have plenty to say about Homer but not about the others—is that it's not mastering the subject, but a divine gift, that makes you a wonderful singer of Homer's praises.

ION: You're a good speaker, Socrates. Still, I would be amazed if you could speak well enough to convince me that I am possessed or crazed when I praise Homer. I don't believe you'd think so if you heard me speaking on Homer.

- e SOCRATES: And I really do want to hear you, but not before you answer me this: on which of Homer's subjects do you speak well? I don't suppose you speak well on *all* of them.

ION: I do, Socrates, believe me, on every single one!

SOCRATES: Surely not on those subjects you happen to know nothing about, even if Homer does speak of them.

ION: And these subjects Homer speaks of, but I don't know about—what are they?

- 537 SOCRATES: But doesn't Homer speak about professional subjects in many places, and say a great deal? Chariot driving, for example, I'll show you, if I can remember the lines.

ION: No, I'll recite them. I *do* remember.

SOCRATES: Then tell me what Nestor says to his son Antilochus, when he advises him to take care at the turning post in the horse race they held for Patroclus' funeral.

ION: "Lean," he says,

*Lean yourself over on the smooth-planed chariot*

- b *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 . . .*<sup>4</sup>

- c SOCRATES: That's enough. Who would know better, Ion, whether Homer speaks correctly or not in these particular verses—a doctor or a charioteer?

ION: A charioteer, of course.

SOCRATES: Is that because he is a master of that profession, or for some other reason?

4. *Iliad* xxiii.335–40.

ION: No. It's because he's a master of it.

SOCRATES: Then to each profession a god has granted the ability to know a certain function. I mean, the things navigation teaches us—we won't learn them from medicine as well, will we?

ION: Of course not.

SOCRATES: And the things medicine teaches us we won't learn from architecture.

ION: Of course not.

SOCRATES: And so it is for every other profession: what we learn by mastering one profession we won't learn by mastering another, right? But first, answer me this. Do you agree that there are different professions—that one is different from another?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: And is this how you determine which ones are different? When *I* find that the knowledge [involved in one case] deals with different subjects from the knowledge [in another case], then I claim that one is a different profession from the other. Is that what you do?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: I mean if there is some knowledge of the same subjects, then why should we say there are two different professions?—Especially when each of them would allow us to know the same subjects! Take these fingers: I know there are five of them, and you know the same thing about them that I do. Now suppose I asked you whether it's the same profession—arithmetic—that teaches you and me the same things, or whether it's two different ones. Of course you'd say it's the same one.

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then tell me now what I was going to ask you earlier. Do you think it's the same way for every profession—the same profession must teach the same subjects, and a different profession, if it *is* different, must teach not the same subjects, but different ones?

ION: That's how I think it is, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Then a person who has not mastered a given profession will not be able to be a good judge of the things which belong to that profession, whether they are things said or things done.

ION: That's true.

SOCRATES: Then who will know better whether or not Homer speaks beautifully and well in the lines you quoted? You, or a charioteer?

ION: A charioteer.

SOCRATES: That's because you're a rhapsode, of course, and not a charioteer.

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: And the rhapsode's profession is different from the charioteer's.

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: If it's different, then its knowledge is of different subjects also.

d

e

538

b

ION: Yes.

- c     SOCRATES: Then what about the time Homer tells how Hecamede, Nestor's woman, gave barley-medicine to Machaon to drink? He says something like this—

*Over wine of Pramnos she grated goat's milk cheese  
With a brazen grater. . . . And onion relish for the drink . . .<sup>5</sup>*

Is Homer right or not: would a fine diagnosis here come from a doctor's profession or a rhapsode's?

ION: A doctor's.

SOCRATES: And what about the time Homer says:

- d     *Leaden she plunged to the floor of the sea like a weight  
That is fixed to a field cow's horn. Given to the hunt  
It goes among ravenous fish, carrying death.<sup>6</sup>*

Should we say it's for a fisherman's profession or a rhapsode's to tell whether or not he describes this beautifully and well?

ION: That's obvious, Socrates. It's for a fisherman's.

- e     SOCRATES: All right, look. Suppose you were the one asking questions, and you asked me, "Socrates, since you're finding out which passages belong to each of the professions Homer treats—which are the passages that each profession should judge—come tell me this: which are the passages that belong to a diviner and to divination, passages he should be able to judge as to whether they're well or badly composed?" Look how easily I can give you a true answer. Often, in the *Odyssey*, he says things like what Theoclymenus says—the prophet of the sons of Melampus:

- 539     *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.<sup>7</sup>*

And often in the *Iliad*, as in the battle at the wall. There he says:

5. *Iliad* xi.639–40 with 630.

6. *Iliad* xxiv.80–82.

7. *Odyssey* xx.351–57; line 354 is omitted by Plato.

*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.<sup>8</sup>*

c

d

I shall say that these passages and those like them belong to a diviner. They are for him to examine and judge.

ION: That's a true answer, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well, *your* answers are true, too, Ion. Now *you* tell me—just as I picked out for you, from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, passages that belong to a diviner and ones that belong to a doctor and ones that belong to a fisherman—in the same way, Ion, since you have more experience with Homer's work than I do, you pick out for me the passages that belong to the rhapsode and to his profession, the passages a rhapsode should be able to examine and to judge better than anyone else.

e

ION: My answer, Socrates, is "all of them."

SOCRATES: That's not *your* answer, Ion. Not "all of them." Or are you really so forgetful? But no, it would not befit a *rhapsode* to be forgetful.

ION: What do you think I'm forgetting?

540

SOCRATES: Don't you remember you said that a rhapsode's profession is different from a charioteer's?

ION: I remember.

SOCRATES: And didn't you agree that because they are different they will know different subjects?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: So a rhapsode's profession, on *your* view, will not know everything, and neither will a rhapsode.

b

ION: But things like that are exceptions, Socrates.

SOCRATES: By "things like that" you mean that almost all the subjects of the other professions are exceptions, don't you? But then what sort of thing *will* a rhapsode know, if not everything?

ION: My opinion, anyhow, is that he'll know what it's fitting for a man or a woman to say—or for a slave or a freeman, or for a follower or a leader.

SOCRATES: So—what should a leader say when he's at sea and his ship is hit by a storm—do you mean a rhapsode will know better than a navigator?

ION: No, no. A navigator will know *that*.

c

SOCRATES: And when he is in charge of a sick man, what should a leader say—will a rhapsode know better than a doctor?

ION: Not that, either.

8. *Iliad* xii.200–207.

SOCRATES: But he *will* know what a slave should say. Is that what you mean?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: For example, what should a slave who's a cowherd say to calm down his cattle when they're going wild—will a rhapsode know what a cowherd does not?

ION: Certainly not.

d SOCRAVES: And what a woman who spins yarn should say about working with wool?

ION: No.

SOCRATES: And what a man should say, if he's a general, to encourage his troops?

ION: Yes! That's the sort of thing a rhapsode will know.

SOCRATES: What? Is a rhapsode's profession the same as a general's?

ION: Well, I certainly would know what a general should say.

e SOCRAVES: Perhaps that's because you're also a general by profession, Ion. I mean, if you were somehow both a horseman and a cithara-player at the same time, you would know good riders from bad. But suppose I asked you: "Which profession teaches you good horsemanship—the one that makes you a horseman, or the one that makes you a cithara-player?"

ION: The horseman, I'd say.

SOCRATES: Then if you also knew good cithara-players from bad, the profession that taught you *that* would be the one which made you a cithara-player, not the one that made you a horseman. Wouldn't you agree?

ION: Yes.

SOCRATES: Now, since you know the business of a general, do you know this by being a general or by being a good rhapsode?

ION: I don't think there's any difference.

541 SOCRAVES: What? Are you saying there's no difference? On your view is there one profession for rhapsodes and generals, or two?

ION: One, I think.

SOCRATES: So anyone who is a good rhapsode turns out to be a good general too.

ION: Certainly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: It also follows that anyone who turns out to be a good general is a good rhapsode too.

ION: No. This time I don't agree.

b SOCRAVES: But you do agree to this: anyone who is a good rhapsode is a good general too.

ION: I quite agree.

SOCRATES: And aren't you the best rhapsode in Greece?

ION: By far, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Are you also a general, Ion? Are you the best in Greece?

ION: Certainly, Socrates. That, too, I learned from Homer's poetry.

SOCRATES: Then why in heaven's name, Ion, when you're both the best general *and* the best rhapsode in Greece, do you go around the country

giving rhapsodies but not commanding troops? Do you think Greece really needs a rhapsode who is crowned with a golden crown? And does not need a general?

c

ION: Socrates, *my* city is governed and commanded by you [by Athens]; we don't need a general. Besides, neither your city nor Sparta would choose me for a general. You think you're good enough for that yourselves.

SOCRATES: Ion, you're superb. Don't you know Apollodorus of Cyzicus?

ION: What does *he* do?

d

SOCRATES: He's a foreigner who has often been chosen by Athens to be their general. And Phanosthenes of Andros and Heraclides of Clazomene—*they're* also foreigners; they've demonstrated that they are worth noticing, and Athens appoints them to be generals or other sorts of officials. And do you think that *this* city, that makes such appointments, would not select Ion of Ephesus and honor him, if they thought he was worth noticing? Why? Aren't you people from Ephesus Athenians of long standing? And isn't Ephesus a city that is second to none?

e

But *you*, Ion, you're doing me wrong, if what you say is true that what enables you to praise Homer is knowledge or mastery of a profession. You assured me that you knew many lovely things about Homer, you promised to give a demonstration; but you're cheating me, you're a long way from giving a demonstration. You aren't even willing to tell me what it is that you're so wonderfully clever *about*, though I've been begging you for ages. Really, you're just like Proteus,<sup>9</sup> you twist up and down and take many different shapes, till finally you've escaped me altogether by turning yourself into a general, so as to avoid proving how wonderfully wise you are about Homer.

542

If you're really a master of your subject, and if, as I said earlier, you're cheating me of the demonstration you promised about Homer, then you're doing me wrong. But if you're not a master of your subject, if you're possessed by a divine gift from Homer, so that you make many lovely speeches about the poet without knowing anything—as I said about you—then you're not doing me wrong. So choose, how do you want us to think of you—as a *man* who does wrong, or as someone *divine*?

b

ION: There's a great difference, Socrates. It's much lovelier to be thought divine.

SOCRATES: Then *that* is how we think of you, Ion, the lovelier way: it's as someone divine, and not as master of a profession, that you are a singer of Homer's praises.

9. Proteus was a servant of Posidon. He had the power to take whatever shape he wanted in order to avoid answering questions (*Odyssey* iv.385 ff.).