

Kevin Howery

Gwenda-lin Grewal

Homer (and the Internet)

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### **Poetry and Other Drugs**

Is philosophizing possible without poetry? How are philosophy and poetry related? I propose that philosophy is a remedy, a drug, to heal irrational thought and bring clarity to a world that is difficult to understand. Poetry is a poison that seeks to taint reality with grandiose stories which make the world simpler in the fashion of a tall tale. It describes something observed, but the cause of that which is observed is not provable and thus a story is made to placate a questioning public. The two ways of seeking knowledge then have an element of agency. The philosopher admits that they know nothing but are adamant about seeking the truth and encouraging others to do the same. Poets act as if they know everything and seek to make others believe them for the power and pleasure it brings them. Philosophy's humble beginnings in the ancient world make it seem as though philosophy is first considered as an antidote for sophistry and a story of a better, more perfect understanding of the world and our place in it. Investigating the use of poetry and drugs in Homer's *Odyssey* and Plato's *Republic* demonstrates how the two are connected and are required to express Plato's understanding of Homer and how philosophical poetry creates the conditions for the beautiful city and a more perfect state of knowledge.

You can take the ancient Greeks out of their myths, but you can't take the myths out of the ancient Greeks. When poetry is for so long the primary tool for educating the youth, it is impossible to strip its effects from the Greek experience. It is, in fact, the way that Ancient

Greeks would have defined themselves. It has been stated to such an extreme that “Homer and Hesiod were the most influential educators of Greece, since their myths provided the first paradigms of human virtue and vice and of man’s proper relationship with the gods<sup>1</sup>.” The Homeric myths particularly shape Greek culture and society even so far as to prompt Socrates to say that, “When you meet the praisers of Homer who say that this poet educated Greece, and that in the management of human affairs it is worthwhile to take him up for study and for living, by arranging one’s whole life according to this poet, you must love and embrace them as being men who are the best that they can be...”<sup>2</sup> When Homer has educated Greece for so long, who is Plato to say that he has done harm? Socrates recognizes the impact of Homer’s poetry and the scope of its depth, and yet he proposes that it be banished from the beautiful city.<sup>3</sup> Scrutinizing poetry is essential to understanding the Platonic project and seeing how it interacts with drugs (*Pharmaka*) provides the context of poetry and philosophy’s roles in the ancient and the modern world.

What exactly is poetry? Investigating what poetry consists of and how it is treated in many of the Platonic dialogues informs not only poetry’s nature, but also how it functions, is what damns poets to banishment from the city. Poetry is at first treated as a madness for Plato<sup>4</sup>. It seems to be a divine madness in which a Muse possesses a poet to “tell lies like the truth”<sup>5</sup>. It has no *technē* and is thus devoid of all skill. Poetry is a mode of telling lies or making false representations. An instance of this madness is demonstrated in the opening of the *Odyssey* when Homer invokes the Muse to “... tell how he (Odysseus) wandered and was lost when he had wrecked the town of Troy... Start from any place...”<sup>6</sup> Homer gives up agency and becomes a

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<sup>1</sup> Howland, *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 78, New York

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic*, X, 606e-607a

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 377b-377d

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Ion*

<sup>5</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, XVII

<sup>6</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, I, 2-10

vessel. A phantom to be spoken through with the blood of the Muse. Homer also gives up any responsibility for the truth of the Muse's tale, which as we know from Hesiod is not to be taken for granted. Socrates has established the belief of poetic madness in the *Ion*, but he experiences the madness for himself in the *Phaedrus*. When prompted by Phaedrus to make a "fine speech" Socrates takes on the role of the poet. He starts with a poetic refrain to the Muses. "Come Muses... Begin to sing with me my fable."<sup>7</sup> (*Plato, 237a*). He continues to point out how he gets carried away by the poetry:

**Socrates:** My dear Phaedrus, do I seem to you, as I do to myself, to be caught in the grip of a divine passion?

**Phaedrus:** There is no question, Socrates; a most uncustomary fluency has seized you.

**Socrates:** ... Don't be Astonished if I frequently become Nymph-possessed as the speech continues... I'm not far from speaking in dithyrambs... But this is the hands of a God.<sup>8</sup>

Within the context of a dialogue Plato's hero is overcome by the same madness that drives poets. It demonstrates the susceptibility of even the philosopher to the dangers Plato sees in poetry. Perhaps this is an actual demonstration of madness or simply Plato using sarcasm to alert the audience as to poetry and philosophy's proximity. Either way the use of such language by Plato is striking. Socrates cannot recall what it is he is speaking of and although it is considered beautiful aesthetically, Plato would assert that the strictly philosophically beautiful is more important. The philosophically beautiful is a conception gathered in Plato's idealism.<sup>9</sup> The only truly beautiful things are not able to be observed by us i.e., the forms, and thus the beautiful city is one to be pursued as a reflection of its beauty is possible on earth. The *Kallipolis* must be

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 237a

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 283c

<sup>9</sup> Guyer & Horstmann, *Idealism in Modern Philosophy*, pp.12

philosophically beautiful rather than poetically beautiful to reflect any actual beauty. Whether or not Plato has in mind this epistemology and ontology when writing the *Republic* is not known, but his critique of poets indicates that the beauty of the divine is smeared by falsities told by poets. Socrates notes at the end of his fit of madness an awareness that perhaps only a philosopher is grounded enough to recognize, but it ties his own madness to Homer's in the language of epic poetry, "Didn't you realize, my blessed fellow, that I am no longer speaking in dithyrambic verse but epic hexameter..."<sup>10</sup>. Socrates is speaking not only in verse, but in the same verse as the epic poems he will criticize. The very rhythm of poetry has power, like the rhythm in music explored in book III of the *Republic*. It could be argued that all speech has a rhythmic form insofar as it holds an annotatable cadence but it is different from poetry because it is not intentional in its rhythm. These are the circumstances with which Socrates is given to advocate banishing the poets. It is worth noting that all forms of divine possession should be questioned. Socrates speaks of love as a madness imposed by the god *Eros* which, although the status of marital relationships will be reorganized in the conception of the beautiful city, the madness of love is not thought of as a madness of illusions like that of poetry. In many instances Socrates cites a possession of his own soul by a *daimonion* that bids him to stay and philosophize even when it is against his will. This is a possession that is the opposite of poetic madness. Instead of creating illusions, it forces their elucidation. Philosophical *eros* as it may be called is the purest kind of pursuit and all other desires are forfeit to it. Even the night's sleep and evening meals are forsaken during the *Republic's* demonstration of philosophical *eros*.<sup>11</sup>

In the context of the *Republic*, poetry seems to have one job and one job only, education. Education is crucial because it is the building block to introducing the proper roles to the proper

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<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 413-242a

<sup>11</sup> Howland, *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 39

citizens. Cephalus explains how "...The tales told by the poets about Hades—tales that seem laughable to the young—make men who are close to death fear that they will be punished in the afterlife for their unjust deeds..."<sup>12</sup> Because the poets are providing false images of reality by speaking about things of which they cannot truly know i.e., gods and Hades, then "On that account such tales must cease, for fear that they sow a strong proclivity for badness in our young."<sup>13</sup> Homer, with whom Socrates tells us he has a certain affection<sup>14</sup>, is particularly regarded as an educator of Greece, his being the author of what distinguishes Greeks, namely, the united force against the Trojans as sung about in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Socrates goes further to say that "Homer, while he was himself alive, was in private a leader in education for certain men who cherished him for his intercourse and handed down a certain Homeric way of life..."<sup>15</sup> However, the poetry that has been passed down by Homer and recited by the Rhapsodes is not only an imitation of the world in which Homer was divinely possessed to describe it, but a further corruption of that imitation by means of distance from the source. This is not to say that what is divine is corrupt, but that the message loses its intended meaning on the ears of mere mortals. If poetry really is madness, like *eros*, then it must teach us something about the divine. However, the only sort of knowledge that is divine is the knowledge of the forms, which in Plato's theory of the forms, can only be known through philosophy. This is why Socrates mentions the "... old quarrel between philosophy and poetry. For that 'yelping bitch shrieking at her master' and 'great in the empty eloquence of fools' ... and countless others are signs of this old opposition."<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this quarrel is not as old as implied by Plato, but the conflict within

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<sup>12</sup> Howland, *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy*, pp. 60, New York

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Republic*, III, 391e

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Republic*, X, 595c

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Republic*, X, 600a

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Republic*, X, 607b

Plato is obvious in his poetic language which perhaps Plato sees as something useful, but in need to check by his tripartite soul. Philosophy must be the master and poetry, while useful as a servant in its vocabulary, must always be subordinate as Plato attempts to do in his own writing. Another character described this way, but in Homer, is Helen. Helen is using the comparison of herself to a dog in shedding blame when she was kidnapped, igniting the Trojan War. Again, when we hear a story of a forbidden (perhaps unjust) romance between Aphrodite and Ares where Aphrodite is compared to a dog “Her eyes stare at me like a dog. She is so beautiful but lacking self-control.”<sup>17</sup> When Plato’s mouthpiece, Socrates, speaks in such a way it would be counter evident to assert that he is not aware of the language of Homer on this topic. Helen has an interesting relationship to drugs and the divine (like Aphrodite), particularly in philosophy and poetry.

Both poetry and philosophy are methods of unlocking a greater truth about the universe. This is true as it functions in Athens as an educational tool. Plato takes these methods up in his myth of the cave. While the philosopher is he who brings knowledge of the world back to the prisoners and encourages them to leave their captivity, the poets stand behind the parapet in the cave, carrying the artifacts whose shadows the prisoners see.<sup>18</sup> Whether or not the prisoners of the cave believe the philosopher demonstrates an addiction to the easy answers provided by the shadows. Making the decision to observe the cave and the light and make a choice is then up to the encouragement of the philosopher. Poetry shows answers to a questioning people, philosophy leads them to find the answers for themselves. The poets are using divinity to distort reality for the prisoners in the cave and will do so to the citizens of the beautiful city if given the chance. Therefore, despite the loss of that which is beautiful in Homer’s world, the old poets must be

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<sup>17</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII, 367

<sup>18</sup> Benardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, pp. 70,

either removed totally or censored to such a great extent that they will lose all plot and content.<sup>19</sup> Notice that the themes of the myth in being (a myth) and the symbolism of the emergence from the dark into the light and thereafter the struggle to see in both dark and light are both known to the philosopher. The exact sorts of symbolism used in this poetic myth are those that Homer consistently uses in the *Odyssey*. However, it is different. The audience is not meant to believe that the philosopher must literally come into the light. The audience *is* supposed to believe that Odysseus sailed to Hades and returned from there to Ithaca.

Now that we understand what poetry might be and how it is used, we can turn to drugs. I propose that the effects of drugs are not so different from that of poetry. In the *Odyssey* we see not only the proximity of drugs and poetry, but also how the effects can be similarly healing or damaging. The ways in which we have thus far explored poetry showed how it can be damaging to the individual and to the state. Plato's argument is that it will recover its virtues when put to the right uses by the right people, as Plato demonstrates not only in the argument of Socrates, but in the poetry which Plato himself writes. In the beautiful city, there must be none of the old poets, but that does not mean that myth disappears. In the *Republic* we hear many myths that are not only allowed in the state but are required for its functioning. I will call these stories propaedeutic myths or more Platonically, noble lies. These myths are not confined to the hypothetical construction of a utopia but are used to communicate Plato's philosophy to Athens when he spoke it and to everywhere the dialogue has since been read. Without the colorful myth of the ring of Gyges' ancestor, the difference between seeming virtuous and being virtuous in Glaucon's challenge would be less clear. Instead, a complicated lie about sex and murder shows how uncouth this morality of appearance is. The more we dig into this myth, the more we see its

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 607c.

connections to poetry as well, as when he tells of the hollow horse in which the ring is found.<sup>20</sup> Socrates presents a hollow horse, like that Odysseus devised at Troy. These myths are medicine. They are treating the illness of what appears to be true, the virtue of seeming just, and helping heal the soul to be truly just. It is the medicine of the gods. Noble lies are medicine to which other sorts of poetry are poison. But the two concepts could be treated under the same word, *Pharmakon*.

The *pharmakon* in Plato was popularized in modern philosophy by Derrida's *Plato's Pharmacy*;<sup>21</sup> however, although the use of philosophical medicine is treated by Derrida, the connection with poetry is left unanswered. Homer's absence is strange considering that based on only the few literary references already quoted above, it is impossible to read Plato's dialogues without understanding their proximity to Homer.<sup>22</sup> Drugs in the *Odyssey* shed deceit, cloud emotions, and stir the *thumos* in ways that drive the poem's pivotal moments. Drugs receive their dual treatment as a poison and a medicine throughout Plato's dialogues. The ideas discussed in the *Republic* are remedies to the illnesses in the state. The *Pharmacia* is omnipresent in prescriptive philosophy. Like a doctor, you can't just describe a condition, you must be able to diagnose a treatment. Doctors are also a common thread in Plato's work as discussed in the *Ion* and *Republic*, among others. Being a doctor is a textbook example of having a *technē*; being able to practice medicine is the knowledge of illnesses and their remedies. Socrates argues that you would rather have a doctor who has trained in medicine than one who is trained in what Homer says about medicine<sup>23</sup>. Homer, after all, is not an expert on medicine. Exactly what Homer is an expert on is called into question here. While it seems that a poet is an expert in is the beautiful.

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<sup>20</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 359d-60b

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, *Plato's Pharmacy*, Chicago

<sup>22</sup> Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre*, xi, Plymouth

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Ion*, 538c

The form of beauty is the highest form and therefore, good poetry, like a good doctor, can reach the highest purpose of that profession. However, poets continually treat things about which they know nothing. Plato cites medicine, war strategy, Hades, and the actions of the gods to name a few. Philosophers on the other hand acknowledge their lack of knowing and gain respect through the courage to seek the answers. As Derrida points out, the written word according to a myth Socrates tells in the *Phaedrus* is invented as “a recipe for both memory and wisdom”<sup>24</sup>, perhaps explaining why Plato and not his teacher wrote his philosophy down. These remedies of the state, the body, and the soul are one of the most consistent arguments throughout the *Republic*.

Where did the use of drugs to alter emotional and political, rather than physical states, come from? Where drugs show up in the *Odyssey* illustrate how emotional capacities can be manipulated by poetry, giving Plato’s arguments a historical context on which to stand. The first instance of drug ingestion comes from Helen in the court of Sparta. When discussion turns to the fate of Odysseus and all those lost returning from Troy, Helen decides to mix a drug for them all “... she would mix the wine with drugs to take all pain and rage away, to bring forgetfulness of every evil. Whoever drinks from the bowl will shed no tears that day, not even if her mother or her father die, not even if soldiers kill her brother, or her darling son with bronze spears before her very eyes. Helen had these powerful magic drugs from Polydamna, wife of Thron, from Egypt, where fertile lands produce the most narcotics: some good, some dangerous. The people there are skillful doctors. They are the Healer’s people. She mixed the wine and told the slave to pour it, until then she spoke again.”<sup>25</sup> In the description of Helen’s medicating the men at court there are references not only to Egypt, where the memory and wisdom enhancing drug of writing was said to come from in the *Phaedrus*, but also the comparison to a doctor. Helen takes her

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<sup>24</sup> Derrida, *Plato’s Pharmacy*, I

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, IV, 219-35

place as the doctor, curing the emotional ailment of woe that has spread over those feasting. It allows Telemachus to endure the sad stories of his father's fate without an outburst of emotion. The drug controls the emotional and spirited part of his soul, as reason is meant to do in the *Republic*. Poetry about the adventures of Odysseus needs a drug, and taming the *thumos* is the solution. Helen has many motives for cooling the emotions of the patrons in her court. It is important to remember that it is Helen's being taken to Troy that starts the war. She does not want the men to remember that all this tragedy is deeply connected with her actions, which she excuses through an equation with poetic madness and a lack of autonomy. She is dulling their memory so that they do not actively hold a resentment against the irreversibility of time, what one scholar says; "There is perhaps in the entire *Odyssey* no single action that shows such a deep and human understanding of human things as Helen's drugging of everyone."<sup>26</sup>

Later we are introduced to Demodocus, a poet who is described as "... the poet, whom the Muse adored. She gave him two gifts, good and bad: she took away his sight, but gave sweet song."<sup>27</sup> He is given a poison, which takes away his sight, but is given a new vision, an antidote to his woes. Demodocus is given the sight of song, or sung poetry, the mode of reciting poetry in Ancient Greece. Poetry as an antidote is the way in which Plato invokes it. Not in its fanciful ponderances on the things that cannot be known, but for its observance of what can be known, but not seen. This ties the forms, the allegory of the cave, the banishment of old poets, and the rightly ordered state together. The philosopher doing poetry does not need to give up sight. Demodocus is later bid to stop his singing for the emotional outpouring it creates in Odysseus. He is singing of the episode of the Trojan horse and is bid to do so by Odysseus himself! It is at this point when Odysseus gets to become the poet to explain the emotion evoked by poetry. It is

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<sup>26</sup> Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre*, 27

<sup>27</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII, 62-9

important to note that Odysseus' poetry rarely brings tears, only love for the poet and favor for his actions. The only case in which it does cause an emotional outburst is from Penelope who perhaps recognizes the poetry as a sign of her beloved husband.<sup>28</sup> Odysseus' poetry, like a philosopher's poetry, can calm the emotions and direct the *thumos*. This power is contained at many points in his story when Odysseus points out how he spoke to (or perhaps with) his *thumos* when traveling from the island of Calypso, he then is held back by his *thumos* twice before slaughtering a crew member, before attacking Polyphemus, when he is kicked by Melanthius, and when he hears the suitors taking the slaves to bed.<sup>29</sup> Odysseus' poetry acts similarly to Helen's poetry. It calms the emotional outcry to do the *thumos*' bidding and this connection is perhaps why Helen and Odysseus can recognize one another even when concealed, as Helen does when Odysseus is disguised as a beggar surveying the defenses in Troy.

The final use of drugs in poetry that strikes me as possibly the most important in this argument is the poison and antidote used in Odysseus' account of his experience with the potion that Circe brews. When Odysseus arrives on the island of Circe, he sends his men to go investigate. They are all welcomed by a pack of tamed wild animals; "Round it were mountain wolves and lions, which she tamed with drugs. They did not rush on the men but gathered around them in a friendly way."<sup>30</sup> The drugs used to domesticate these animals are not clearly different from those used on Odysseus' men, who are wild beasts in their own way. The sailors are then domesticated by drinking a potion that turns them into swine, not into one of the animals they were confronted with on their approach. Were the animals they were confronted with transformed humans as well? Or were they tamed with a different sort of drug? The only account

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<sup>28</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XIX, 604

<sup>29</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, XX, 1-23

<sup>30</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, X, 221-14

given of the potion's makeup is given by Odysseus as narrator. He describes them as "...a potion mixed with barley, cheese, and golden honey, mixed with Prammian wine. She added potent drugs to make them totally forget their home..."<sup>31</sup> How did he know what comprised the drug? It is hardly a coincidence that golden honey, like poetry's honeyed words (an association made by Lucretius),<sup>32</sup> would be contained as well as a foreign wine like that Odysseus gave Polyphemus. However, Circe allows their minds to remain as they were. That makes it like poetry because their minds are left to be philosophical, but they cannot communicate the philosophy properly should they so choose. They are like poets themselves. They possess truths, but cannot speak them. Instead, only a pig's oink comes out. This domestication is one way that a drug can tame not just a person, but a city. Plato treats such a domesticated city in the *Republic*. He compares two cities, the first conception that is rightly ordered called by Glaucon a pigsty. The other, with myth as the grounding of a hierarchy, is the beautiful city.

Taming animals is referenced once more concerning Eumaeus' dogs toward the end of the homecoming. There is no potion that a humble and grounded servant like Eumaeus can brew or any poetry he can spin to tame them. Instead, he resorts to throwing rocks at them.<sup>33</sup> However upon Telemachus' arrival at Eumaeus' home the dogs do not bark. They are tamed by familiarity. This is a taming that poetry is capable of and is one of Plato's strongest charges against it. It pretends to be familiar and to make the audience familiar with things that are unseen. The gods, Hades, and the conversations of others while you are sleeping are just a few examples. However, the dogs initial poetic nature makes room for their philosophic nature. Book II of the *Republic* will provoke the same feeling that this produces when discussing who is naturally inclined to be

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<sup>31</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, X, 234-37

<sup>32</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*

<sup>33</sup> Benardete, *The Bow and the Lyre* pp. 111

a soldier of the auxiliary. Socrates ties in this feeling when he asks Glaucon “In your opinion, then, does the man who will be a fit guardian need, in addition to spiritedness, also to be a philosopher in his nature?”<sup>34</sup> When pressed to clarify why this ought to be the case Socrates compares a philosopher to a well-trained dog. “‘In that way it distinguishes friendly from hostile looks by nothing other than by having learned the one and being ignorant of the other.’ I said. ‘And so, how can it be anything other than a lover of learning since it defines what’s its own and what’s alien by knowledge and ignorance?’”<sup>35</sup> These dogs are more like Eumaeus’ dogs that do not attack Telemachus upon his arrival. Because they do not recognize Odysseus in his disguise, he gets attacked. The dogs are showing their philosophical spirit. This sort of dog is well-trained, not just tame. It knows when to be angry and when not to be, unlike Circe’s tamed beasts who are always docile.

Hermes is the first god given credit for help in Odysseus’ poetry thus far. He reveals that there is a special drug called the *moly* plant. The *moly* plant has two natures. On one side “...its root is black, its flower white as milk. The gods call this plant *Moly*.”<sup>36</sup> Poetry also has this dual nature. A light side that can be evoked in philosophical education, and a dark side that can leave the highest reality humanly available to the shadows on the wall of the cave. The contrast of dark and light shows up in the allegory of the cave and the myth of mother earth placing metal in the souls of all men in the *Republic* and in Odysseus’ trip to Hades and emergence back into the sunlight. In the tale of the metal in their souls Socrates says that “I’ll attempt to persuade first the rulers and the soldiers, then the rest of the city, that the rearing and education we gave them were like dreams; they only thought they were undergoing all that was happening to them, while, in

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<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 357e-358c

<sup>35</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 357e-358c cont.

<sup>36</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 10, 304-307

truth, at that time they were under the earth within, being fashioned and reared themselves, and their arms and other tools being crafted. When the job had been completely finished, then the earth, which is their mother, sent them up. And now... they must plan to defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth... but the god fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is the way they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver, and iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen.”<sup>37</sup> This double nature is also indicative of the dual grammatical number, an extension of the single and not the plural. The *moly* plant, like poetry has a dual nature. The plant works against Circe’s potion and when her plan has failed Odysseus is given further instructions to threaten her and to ensure that his men are set free and cured, seemingly by an antidote, before he will go to bed with her, as she bids him to do. In this way, Odysseus has been put in a place of absolute power above a god by means of a different god’s help. This power he has is one that philosophers will have, but they do not need to speak of gods, of whom they cannot know, to achieve this power. This is why Homer’s myths are treated with such suspicion by Socrates.

With poetry out, philosophy will be called to fill its place. The overwhelmingly poetic hero Odysseus is replaced by the philosophical hero, Socrates. If the beautiful city were filled with philosophers, they could all recognize their place within its structure and fall into balance on their own. To do this they must be educated. In Plato’s view philosophy is the cure to all the Athenians woes. And Athens has woes in Plato’s lifetime. When Plato was born the golden age of Athens was starting to wane. After being defeated in the Peloponnesian War with Sparta, the City-State lacked the power it once held so tightly. Philosophy could be the antidote that Athens is looking for. Unfortunately, it’s a drug that if used too potently, becomes perceived by the body

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<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Republic*, III, 414d-415a

as a poison in a reaction like that of a vaccine. Injecting just a small amount of philosophy into the Athenian public led to a quick outburst of the illness-to-be-cured. A reaction that killed Socrates. He was tried and put to death for impiety, rejecting the traditional gods and introducing his own, as well as for corrupting the youth. Plato was a member of the youth in reference. He was just 28 years old when Socrates drank the hemlock that ended his life. From then, Plato committed his life to philosophy, but went about it in a different way than Socrates (perhaps to avoid the same fate as his teacher). This method was the dialogues as taught in his *Academy*. Plato believed that educating young philosophers and giving intellectuals a place to meet and discuss without disrupting the rulers of the city was a steppingstone to saving his hometown. The *Republic* is the first example recorded of political philosophy. Something new was happening and it was going to replace poetry in the eyes of Plato. In the tradition of city mapping<sup>38</sup> Plato plans to bring rational thought into the construction of the *Polis* as well its citizenry via education. This was a radically new plan that continues to shape western politics. It is the familiarity with the issues Plato is grappling with that so compel the reader in this text. If Plato's plan to educate the Athenians will work, then he will need poetry as an aide. As already established, poetry was the main form of education for the Athenians. The stories of Homer were so familiar as to make up a common founding for all those who considered themselves Greek. This is especially poignant after the Persian invasions when the Greeks are forced to come together as the Delian league to combat Xerxes army. Connecting the people to the land in the tales of essential Greekness is not something that can be disrupted overnight. Therefore, the city is strictly imaginary in the discourse of the *Republic* and Athens is never cited as its exact location although it is admitted that Athenians are preferable citizens to others. In Plato's

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<sup>38</sup> Pappas, *Plato and the Republic*, Routledge Publishing 1995.

beautiful city, all these problems will be resolved. If you can rightly order the city, then the citizens will be rightly ordered and vice versa. The first step of philosophical education then is to train the soul. "...the other virtues of a soul, as they are called, are probably somewhat close to those of the body."<sup>39</sup>

Socrates argues that the two arts that train the soul to be in harmony are music and gymnastics. If these skills are properly cultivated to create a healthy mind and body, bringing once again the analogy of a doctor prescribing treatments and even referencing medical treatment performed at Troy according to Homer's recounting of the events in which the effectiveness of such a remedy is found to be questionable at best. Poetry and Philosophy are two sides of the same coin. Poetry is the poison and Philosophy the remedy. The mistake of taking Poetry as an antidote is tantamount to sprinkling breadcrumbs on a wound.<sup>40</sup> As pointed out above, any good vaccine needs small amounts of the illness, or poison, in it to be effective. Philosophy is the same way. Plato needs poetry to communicate philosophy, bringing back the propaedeutic myth and adding to it the importance of poetic language. In Plato's hands poetry is put to good work. The platonic dialogues are littered with poetic language, even when speaking of things strictly philosophical. Poetry created the language with which philosophy can thrive. Similes, metaphors, figurative language, irony, illusion, and more are some of the most distinguishing tools with which Plato's philosophy is communicated. However, unlike the poetry that has come before Plato, he does not conceal anything. He seeks, with philosophy to lift the veil of how things seem to be and determine the way things are and what they ought to be. This is the way in which poetry and philosophy differ. Philosophy is the noble child of the parent that must abdicate the throne, like Laertes does for Odysseus. As such, we can respect the poets for

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<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Republic*, VII, 518d

<sup>40</sup> Ferrari, "The Doctor is in"

their education in the past, as Socrates seeks to do in book X but still, we must censor them and ask them to leave the city to the philosopher king to rule and educate the people.

The myths that Plato presents are noble lies. They are not true, but they service the city without making claims about things which cannot be known, such as conflict between the gods and the tortures of Hades. Providing these falsehoods is dangerous for poets because stories are so instrumental in education. “The poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind.”<sup>41</sup> And their legislation is based on such groundless falsehood, or at least lacking truths for the average citizen, even if the philosopher can find value in the poetry. The poets are always hiding behind their veils to shirk the blame for the unjust stories they promulgate. They even attribute the stories wholly to the muses to remove all culpability from themselves. The philosopher knows that the storytellers must be unshielded from the results of their myths. “Gyges could have stolen as much as he wanted and got away with it, but he could not have gained the throne without appearing, and he could not have appeared unless he was seen to have the power to vanish.”<sup>42</sup> Philosophers must use the veil of poetry and then shed it in an act of triumph to take their place as the just rulers of the just city. That which is just is good and that which is good is beautiful. This beauty far surpasses the beauty in the honeyed words of the poets. If the micro dosing of poetry issued in such a way, all injustice will be drained from the city and all that will remain is a rightly ordered society in which each does their own work and shares in perfect cooperation with their *Polis*. The philosophers in their final form are those who understand the dual nature presented in the *moly* plant, in poetry, and in drugs in general. The philosopher king will use this understanding to make a rightly ordered society and in Plato’s argument this will mean those who have a false understanding of the dual nature, poets, must be banished. Perhaps this will

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<sup>41</sup> Bernardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 223, Chicago

<sup>42</sup> Bernardete, *Socrates’ Second Sailing*, 37

lead to the closed society that Popper so fears<sup>43</sup>, but the nature of justice is too important to leave the poets and sophists in charge.

When disease runs rampant, a remedy is imperative. In the unjust individual as well as unjust Athens, poetry has ruled for too long and now it must yield to the strong drug of philosophy. Philosophy will order society as it orders the soul, it will demonstrate the double nature of all things, it will make the ideal world of the forms known and will domesticate people under the combined power of reason and myth. Plato's attempt to imagine a better world than that which he lives, a world of the forms, causes him to seek a city for its own sake. The city is just and non-instrumental. This fact paints him in stark contrast to Homer who tells only lies and encourages the *Fable of the Bees*<sup>44</sup> style unjust person who is publicly seen to be just (as reflected in Glaucon's Challenge). The removal of poets from the city may not be desirable for the appetite, much like giving up meat, but it will be good for the philosophical appetite, which is ruled in turn by reason. These consumables demonstrate the potency of drugs and their abilities to shift realities in the *Republic* and the *Odyssey* and presents the grounds of which makes philosophy possible.

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<sup>43</sup> Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Princeton

<sup>44</sup> Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, London

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