Jeff Mitscherling: *The Image of a Second Sun: Plato on Poetry, Rhetoric, and the Technē of Mīmēsis*, 2009 Humanity Books.

The book is obviously intended for a mixed audience of classicists and philosophers, scholars and students. This is the obvious explanation for the long quotations in both text and notes, which sometimes extend to whole pages and may appear artless or even unseemly to some academics. For the same reason passages from ancient authors are always translated with keywords transliterated or even quoted in the Greek original.

The book is clearly structured in five chapters. The lengthy first chapter functions as an introduction, where the major interpretative lines of Plato's critique of poetry, followed by both classicists and philosophers, are sketched. The presentation is not structured with reference to the bipolar antithesis of literal versus ironic; instead we are offered a multi-polar overview of the various assumed targets of Plato's critique of *poiēsis*: poetry, dramatic poetry, art, illusionistic art, Athenian education, sophistic teaching. *En passant* the author deals with the secondary question of the reason for the vehemence of Plato's critique. Rejecting the psychologizing interpretation of inner conflict between the philosopher and the poet *manqué*, he considers plausible the explanation that Plato's criticism was in fact directed at the Sophists, "whom Plato certainly found frequent enough occasion to malign in remarks even more scathing than those found in his criticism of poetry" (p. 49). It is their teaching method and goals that the author proposes as his own answer to the primary question, a synthesis of Havelock's and Gadamer's interpretations, in the chapter's conclusion.

The rest of the book is an effort to support this thesis by adding as much context as there is available. In the second chapter the author attempts to clarify Plato's concept of "poetry" by means of providing us with the background of its pre-Platonic conceptions. Both the nature of the knowledge possessed by the poet and the "technical" and/or inspired nature of his "craft" were in fact central elements in those conceptions. It is these complementary views and the precise nature of the relation between them that will provide Plato with a starting point for his own inquiry into the nature and value of poetry.

In the third chapter the author focuses on the role played by the notions of "knowledge" and *technē* in Plato's own discussions of poetry in dialogues other than the *Republic*. He suggests that poetry, especially dramatic poetry, was generally considered by Plato as a sort of *technē* like rhetoric and dialectic, although he takes care to notice that Plato's view of poetry is dynamic and evolves "to some extent in accordance with the development of his theory of knowledge" (p. 160).

In Chapter 4 the author tries to demonstrate both the peculiarity and the significance of Plato's collapsing the distinction between dramatic and non-dramatic

poetry in *Republic* 10. The author restates the view put forward in the first chapter with added nuance, arguing that the target of Plato's criticism of poetry is not poetry itself but the art of mimesis, i.e. the technique of persuading by appearing to be what one is not, or by merely appearing to speak the truth. He concludes that "it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that Plato's criticism of poetry was indeed, at least to some extent, intended as a parody of sophistic literary criticism" (p. 253) and takes pains to clarify that parody does not exclude very serious criticism.

Drawing on the realist phenomenology of Roman Ingarden and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, in Chapter 5 Mitscherling offers the reader a model of the aesthetic experience and the work of art that illustrates the significance of Plato's insights that imitation (*mimesis*) is essential to the latter and participation (*methexis*) to the former. Since both the author and the two avowed major influences on his interpretation are academic philosophers, this chapter should be particularly appealing to students of the Platonic tradition.

The two appendices, on the other hand, listing Plato's poetic quotations and references, (I) and discussing Plato's quotations (and occasionally misquotations) of Homer in the *Republic* (II) will be more useful to scholars approaching Plato's works from a literary viewpoint; the question marks accompanying some references in Appendix I suggest that there is more work to be done in this area both by traditional classicists working on textual tradition and within a literary theoretical framework.

Unfortunately the book's production is far from perfect. Besides the occasional misprint in English (e.g. in the Bibliography, p.445 Burger 1978, read *Phaedrus* instead of *Phaedrus*), there are quite a few in the transliterations [mēsthai instead of the correct mōsthai (128), therapēn instead of therapōn (129), enthousiazontēn instead of -ōnton, tatēn instead of tautēn (178), hste instead of hōste (181), sklrou instead of sklērou (185)] and in the Greek quotations on pages 378-381 (mainly involving breathings and accents). Page numbers are missing from a few articles in the Bibliography (Gadamer 1986, Mitscherling 1982, Skillen 1992, Tigerstedt 1969, Walcott 1956, and Webster 1939) and most importantly something has gone terribly wrong with the Index, where page numbers for Chapters 2ff. are roughly 4 pages wrong, i.e. the first entry should read: Adeimantus, 20, 207, 214, 217-18, 256.

Nonetheless, Professor Mitscherling has succeeded in his aim to address as wide an audience as possible, offering both a reliable sourcebook and a fresh look on questions that have been with us at least since antiquity.

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