My title derives from a celebrated passage in Plato's *Republic*, one that is cited regularly in scholarly discussions of his view of poetry. It occurs in Book X, near the end of the second extended analysis of poetry in that work:

Then let this be our defense—now that we've returned to the topic of poetry—that, in view of its nature, we had reason to banish it from the city earlier, for our argument compelled us to do so. But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let's also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy, which is evidenced by such expressions as that “dog yelping at its master,” the one that is shrieking; “great in the empty eloquence of fools”; the “mob of overly wise critics”; and the “subtle thinkers” who are “beggars all”; and myriad other signs of this ancient opposition of theirs.¹

These words of Plato’s are familiar; yet despite—or perhaps because of—their very familiarity, they turn out upon closer inspection to be full of unexpected perplexities. Just what kind of opposition between poetry and philosophy is denoted by the vague words *diaphora* and *enantiôsis*? Are the poetic phrases Socrates cites intended to prove merely the claim that that opposition existed, or also the further claim that it was ancient, and if so how are we to understand that quality of being ancient opposition of theirs.¹

¹ My thanks to Susanne Gödde, Alan Griffiths, Maria Chiara Martinelli, and Mario Telò for their timely, thoughtful, and expert advice on an earlier written version; and to Lowell Edmunds, Richard Hunter, and Dirk Obbink for their stimulating discussion of an oral presentation at Komotini in September 2009.

¹ *Rep.* X, 607b–c. Ταῦτα δή, ἐφιν, ἀπολελογηθῆσθαι ἡμῖν ἀναμνησθῆσαι περὶ ποιήσεως, ὅτι εἰκότως ἄρα τότε αὐτὴν ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀπεστέλλομεν τοιαύτῃ σύναν τό γάρ λόγος ἡμᾶς ἦμει, προσείπωμεν δὲ αὐτήν, μή καὶ τινα συλληρότητα ἡμῶν καὶ ἀγροιαν κατεγνώ, ὅτι παλαιά μὲν τις διαφόρα φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ποιητική καὶ γάρ ἢ "λακέργεις", πρὸς δεσπόταν κύων" ἐκεῖνη κραυγάζουσα καὶ "μέγας ἐν ἀφρόνων κεναζομάσι", καὶ ὁ "τῶν διαφόρων δήλως κριτῶν" καὶ οἱ "λεπτωθὼς μεριμνῶντες," ὃτι ἄρα "πένονται", καὶ ἄλλα μνήμα σημεῖα παλαιάς ἐναντιώσεως τούτων. This translation, as well as all other ones in this article, is taken from Cooper (1997); I have modified it, and the Greek text, to reflect my understanding of the poetic quotations (see below), and I have added a translation of the final words, which are oddly lacking there.
ancient? Furthermore, although Socrates speaks about a quarrel between two contestants, can we be sure that it was an equally balanced dispute, given that all the phrases he cites are from poets against philosophers? How are we to understand the fact that he speaks of a contest not between individual writers, between poets and philosophers, but rather between two modes of discourse, poetry and philosophy, given that all the quotations seem to be directed against single individuals or loose collections of individuals? And above all, how are we to interpret the specific phrases he cites—who wrote them, and what did their original authors mean by them, and how do they now function within the present argumentative context into which Plato has inserted them?

To some extent, most of these issues have already been discussed by a number of other scholars, though of course I at least am hopeful that reconsidering them here will turn out to have some degree of usefulness. But along with these other questions, there is another, no less fundamental one, which does not seem to have been adequately explored at all, or even acknowledged more than a couple of times: whether in fact there was in reality, or was not, any kind of ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry of the sort that Plato describes here.

To limit the possibilities of misunderstanding, let me try to be more precise. My question is not whether or not there was, within the philosophical writings of Plato, a long-standing dispute between poetry and philosophy. For the scholarly consensus is that there indeed was, and this view is manifestly well founded. From the early Ion through the more mature Symposium, Phaedrus, and Republic, until the late Laws—to mention only these dialogues—Plato’s own quarrel with the poets is well established, deep-rooted, persistent, recurrent, explicit, and intense. So no one is likely to dispute the claim that Plato’s philosophy engaged synchronically in a systematic disagreement with poets and poetry and that this disagreement lasted diachronically throughout his whole career.

But by the same token it is obviously impossible to understand Socrates’ phrase “an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry” as referring to the domain of Plato’s philosophy—not only because to do so would irrevocably destroy the historical fiction of Plato’s Republic (at the

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3 See, besides the works listed in the preceding note, also e.g. Murdoch (1977); Ferrari (1989); Asmis (1992); Moss (2007).