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# Conceptions of the Poetic in Classical Greek Prose

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CONCEPTIONS OF THE POETIC IN CLASSICAL GREEK PROSE

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Alison C. Traweek

To my mother,  
who instilled in me a lasting love of poetry.

## Acknowledgements

This project is indebted in so many ways to the classes, conversations, and colloquia related to the department that I can say, without exaggeration, that it would not have been possible without the whole set of the specific, and remarkable, faculty, staff and colleagues of the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Particular thanks are due to my advisor, Bridget Murnaghan, who took even my most abstract and unformed ideas seriously, and had the patience and good humor to read through the earliest drafts with care. My readers Ralph Rosen and Peter Struck, similarly, have supported me at every step, and helped me see the forest when I was lost among the trees. Special appreciation goes to Jeremy Lefkowitz and Emily Modrall, who have been friends and mentors since my earliest days at Penn, and have seen me through to the end. Jason Nethercut and Sarah Scullin deserve far more than this brief mention for the generosity and hospitality they have shown me over the years; they have not only made my last several years easier by opening their home to me, but have made it richer by sharing their time and friendship. I do not know how to begin to thank my family, who has taken every one of my sometimes questionable life choices in stride, and has never doubted me. Finally, a proper accounting of the myriad ways in which I am indebted to Douglas Carman would require a dissertation of its own, so I will say here only that I am extremely grateful for all he has done, and, perhaps more importantly, for all that he has been willing to endure, to bring this dissertation into being.

## ABSTRACT

## CONCEPTIONS OF THE POETIC IN CLASSICAL GREEK PROSE

Alison C. Traweek

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This dissertation explores how prose authors of the Classical period envisioned literary distinctions, particularly how and when they labeled a particular utterance ‘poetic’. The first chapter addresses fifth-century prose authors whose work survives in significant degree (Herodotus, Thucydides), or whose projects are inherently interested in literary categorization (Gorgias). The second chapter continues the investigation, looking now at relevant fourth-century authors who show an explicit interest in literary categories and, especially, the place of poetry (Isocrates, Plato). The final chapter addresses Aristotle’s treatment of poetry. The foundation of the project is a semantic analysis of the language used to describe or single out a work or production as poetic. The primary terms are various *POI*- root words (e.g. *ποίημα*, *ποιητής*); various words of song (e.g. *αοιδός*, *μέλος*); and several adjectives and adverbs that consistently appear in the period in discussions of literary distinctions. There emerges, when these terms are traced through time, a clear picture of the ongoing instability of literary categories. Meter is consistently put forward as a formal feature that marks off poetry from prose, for instance, but it is just as consistently rejected by the same authors as a satisfying distinction; instead, further categories defined by subtler features are introduced to more accurately describe literary productions, and those productions’ relationship to the poetic. Studying how the authors of this period distinguished literary categories makes it clear that our emphasis on



the contrast between prose and poetry is too simplistic. Rather, the continual negotiations we see these authors engaged in when trying to define the poetic alerts us to the relative nature of literary categories, and how poetry only becomes what it is in contrast to what it is not.

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## Introduction

Dr. Diana Deutsch, a professor of psychology at the University of California in San Diego, studies sound perception, and particularly how we perceive music. Among her findings are a number of what she calls ‘musical illusions,’ situations where our brain recategorizes the musical sounds it is hearing into something quite different from what is actually being played.<sup>1</sup> She found that the brain does something similar with speech, a phenomenon she labels ‘phantom words.’ When a given phrase or sentence is repeated exactly, as by playing a recording again and again, the brain begins to assign a pattern to its intonations, a melody: the words gradually come to be perceived as sung rather than spoken.

Once this has happened, there is no way of turning the words back into speech. Even when that sentence or phrase is returned to its context and heard as it was originally intended to be, it remains song rather than speech; the brain hears the reintegrated words as if the speaker, who had been going along normally, suddenly burst into song, and then returned, seamlessly, to normal speech.<sup>2</sup> That is, the brain has permanently marked those words, permanently differentiated them from ordinary speech. Considering the nature of Greek poetry, Dr. Deutsch’s ‘phantom words’ provide an unusually clear illustration of the issue at the heart of this project: most of us, if presented with a segment of language, would be able to categorize it as song or speech immediately, but Dr. Deutsch has shown

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<sup>1</sup> Discussions and sound files of her so-called ‘musical illusions’ are available on her website, [http://deutsch.ucsd.edu/psychology/deutsch\\_research1.php](http://deutsch.ucsd.edu/psychology/deutsch_research1.php).

<sup>2</sup> An example and discussion by Dr. Deutsch of this phenomenon of ‘phantom words’ can be found at [http://philomel.com/phantom\\_words/sometimes.php](http://philomel.com/phantom_words/sometimes.php).

that the distinction is not only imprecise, but is even impermanent. The inconsistencies we find in the delineation of song and speech in antiquity, then, is not only not surprising, but precisely what we should expect.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Deutsch's work observes the unstable line between the broad categories of song and speech, but a similar instability is apparent in more specific generic distinctions as well. Although most of us understand them to be anachronistic, we have generally come to accept the literary typologies of archaic and classical literature constructed by the Alexandrians, and built in part on the theories of Aristotle. We acknowledge that Sappho would probably not have considered her verses in quite the same way as Aristotle, but at the same time accept the generic distinctions as basically useful. What has not been interrogated before is the category in which the various poetic genres are subsumed, the genus to their species – that is, poetry. Why do we assume we have any more certain of an understanding about what marked off poetry as distinct than we do about what marked off Sappho from Anacreon? There are clear differences between the two poets, but it is difficult to know which of those differences would have been perceived as essential, and the same, it turns out, is true for poetry more broadly.

The shift that comes into view in the fifth century when song begins to be eclipsed by something else is as fascinating as it is inexplicable. None of the authors who choose to not write song explain their choice, and none of the authors who continue to produce song defend theirs. There are hints of competition, sometimes even antagonism,

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<sup>3</sup> The introduction in Booth (1981) provides an interesting discussion of what makes 'song' different from 'poetry' in the modern world; while it does not carry over to the poetry of ancient Greece for a number of reasons, it is a useful illustration of the fluidity of categories.

between the two forms, but no statement of the differences that can be maintained, no boundary that can be set as absolute.

For us, so far removed from a culture for which song must have been almost a part of daily life, song and its partner are fairly simply ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’;<sup>4</sup> Thucydides, Plato and Demosthenes are as naturally of a piece as are Homer, Euripides and Pindar, and there is ample evidence that similar groupings were made in antiquity. To take the next step, however, and assume they were made for similar reasons, is to discount the ‘strangeness of song culture.’<sup>5</sup> Why should we think that a society that had accepted song as its primary medium of history, philosophy, science, mythology, religion, ritual and entertainment for centuries would draw a simple distinction when it was joined by the new medium that we call prose? What if the prose-poetry dichotomy, while straightforward and superficially functional, actually concealed subtler, more interesting negotiations?

The consequences would be significant: we cannot hope to adequately understand anyone’s claims or arguments about poetry unless we first understand what it is he thinks sets poetry apart. When those first authors who chose to not write song made their choice, what is the other against which they set their own work? What is it they saw themselves

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<sup>4</sup> Because the modern ideas and assumptions about poetry and the poetic are a constant, if largely implicit, backdrop to this study, it will be worthwhile to say a few words about them here. The modern terminology like ‘poem,’ ‘song,’ and ‘poetic’ is used in this study as if those concepts were simple and straightforward in the modern world, and are used in the casual sense, with the resonances you would expect any given person on the street to give them, and no more than that. That is, the idea of a poem is closely linked to metered language, that of the poetic to an elevated, artful tone, and so on. Scholarship on the complications of the modern conceptions abounds: Matterson and Jones (2000) ch.9 offers a succinct discussion of some of the complications inherent in the modern idea of poetry, for instance, and Zolla (1983) explores the implications of the mythologized poet. On the contested purpose of poetry in the modern world, see especially the eponymous essay in Heaney (1995).

<sup>5</sup> To borrow a phrase from Leslie Kurke’s article of the same name.

as *not* doing, that the songmakers did? Would they have agreed on the distinctions between their own work and the poetic other, or were the lines flexible and shifting? What, finally, did they think poetry was? These are the fundamental questions of this dissertation.

This study takes as its subject the prose authors of Greece from the fifth century, the first period for which we have substantial literary remains, to the first real attempt in the fourth century to codify the older, poetic, mode. It focuses on authors who either take poetry up as an explicit topic, or have occasion to address it consistently if circumstantially. It proceeds chronologically, addressing Gorgias, Herodotus and Thucydides in the first chapter ('Defining Poetry in the Fifth Century'), Isocrates and Plato in the second ('Defining Poetry in the Fourth Century'), and Aristotle in the third ('Aristotelian Poetics'). Each author is first studied individually to see what kinds of language he uses to talk about the poetic, how consistent he is with that use, and what we can infer from this about his underlying assumptions of literary categorization, particularly with regard to the category of the poetic. Each chapter ends by bringing the relevant authors back into dialogue with each other, and then with their predecessors. The sections and chapters necessarily build on each other, as each one adds another piece to our understanding of the several ways in which boundaries of literary type were negotiated.

The organizing principle of this study, necessarily in tandem with chronology, is a semantic study of the language of the poetic.<sup>6</sup> It traces, first, the vocabulary that we associate most naturally with the poetic: terminology built off the *POI*- root, such as *ποίησις*, *ποίημα*, and *ποιητική*, as well as their compounded relatives and relevant verbal uses; and words related to the archaic language of song, such as *ἀοιδός* and *ᾠδή*. We then address a less coherent set of terms which are brought to bear in particular periods, or by particular authors, on the categorization of literature more generally. In the ways that these authors, self-consciously or not, talk about poetry and the poetic, we can infer more explicit information about their ideas of the boundaries of the category.

This is complicated, of course, by the fact that many of these authors were not using the terminology in any ‘technical’ sense, and were often referring to poetry only tangentially. Additionally, there is variation in meaning not only from author to author, but often within individual authors. Both of these potential complications, however, are ultimately helpful: while we do not find a single, simple, straightforward answer to the question ‘what is poetry?’, we do find illustrations of the range of viable ways that the poetic was being thought about in the period.

What will become clear over the course of the study is that, while all the authors at various times appeal to the familiar prose-poetry dichotomy, all of them also find the dichotomy insufficient. Time and again, they propose alternative systems of classification based not on form but on other markers. Time and again, they abandon the bifurcated model in favor of more complicated distinctions that result in a multiplicity of categories.

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<sup>6</sup> Meijering (1987) has many of the same aims and questions as I do, and takes an approach similar to mine, but focuses on the scholia and Alexandrian critics of archaic poetry.

Finally, although all of them will acknowledge meter as a simplistic but convenient demarcation, the more meaningful distinctions are drawn according to the same issues that marked off the genres of archaic poetry: content, context, and function.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, this dissertation serves as a corrective to the idea that prose, from its inception, was in any simple way directly in opposition to the poetic. It's formal features, then as now, were convenient markers, and served well enough to suggest a general idea of what a given work might be or do. Every author in this study, however, when he probes the question, finds the dichotomy insufficient and incapable of capturing the nuances that interest him. Every author, more or less explicitly, posits at least a third category, and draws distinctions by means of something other than straightforward form. There is no denying that the prose authors of the Classical period saw themselves in a dialogue with the poetic tradition, but the lines of that tradition, and the motivations for engaging with it, are more flexible than was previously understood.

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<sup>7</sup> Carey (2010) 21-22 provides a succinct overview of the complications scholars face when trying to categorize archaic poetry, and discusses several of the ways they have attempted to mitigate these complications. Also see e.g. Graziosi and Haubold (2010), who discuss the relationship between lyric and other genres; Dougherty (1994) on the relationship of genre and occasion with regard to archaic foundation poetry in particular; Bowie (1986) on elegy; Rotstein (2010) opens with an extended discussion of genre, especially as it relates to iambic, and Rosen (2009) 13-15 discusses the genres of comic poetry more broadly. Harvey (1955) remains one of the fullest discussions on the obstacles to our understanding of generic distinctions in the archaic period, and Fowler (1987) and West (1974) are still foundational works for a number of more recent studies.



## Chapter One: Defining Poetry in the Fifth Century

Gorgias, Herodotus, Thucydides

It has often been assumed that the choice of prose, even in the fifth century, was inherently a polemic one, signifying a strong break with the tradition of poetry that stood as the great cultural authority.<sup>8</sup> In practice, however, the picture is rather different; far from envisioning a straightforward poetic tradition against which to position themselves, the earliest extant prose authors have widely varying attitudes towards and ideas about the literary culture into which they were inserting themselves. Gorgias, for example, does indeed offer a picture of a literary world in which there seems to be a simple way of setting poetry apart as a distinct literary category, only to then show that the distinction is merely a cosmetic one that does not address the underlying power of language.

Herodotus, on the other hand, refers more or less casually to quite a number of categories of poetry – hymns, dithyrambs, dramas and so on – but turns to a formal distinction between poetry and prose primarily when he wants to identify those who were doing something other than poetry. Thucydides, unsurprisingly, shares more with Herodotus than Gorgias, but ultimately draws his boundaries differently again, so that he sets all overly crafted language, metrical or not, in a category against his own more spare production.

This chapter explores the different and sometimes contradictory ways that these authors attempt to mitigate the instability of the category of the poetic, especially against

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<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Goldhill (2002) 5, who suggests that “the invention of prose involves a *contest of authority*” (emphasis his).

their conscious choice to, themselves, not participate in it. In the course of this, it will become clear that, even as the poetic becomes more easily and recognizably unified against the category of unmetred language, the unity of the set of unmetred language is simultaneously subjected to more rigorous typological distinctions. Moreover, when the formal distinctions prove insufficient, all three authors turn to something like context or function to focus their distinctions – that is, they ultimately draw their boundaries along lines unrelated to form.<sup>9</sup>

Since all three of these authors were working in the same city at roughly the same time, we can see in their lack of consensus about the boundaries of poetry a reflection of a society in which literary categories have not yet stabilized, or which has not yet agreed upon a method of dividing the literary productions. What is perhaps most interesting is the lack of even internal consistency; various features of poetry are brought to bear at different points, so that the lines marking off its boundaries are constantly changing. Finally, the impulse to categorize based on meter is probably a response to the emerging set of prose, although it quickly becomes clear that ‘prose’ is no more single than poetry is; neither poetry nor prose is simply meter or lack thereof, although that distinction serves as a useful starting point for more precise negotiations once prose works come on the scene.

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<sup>9</sup> See n.7 in the introduction for some bibliography on this subject.

Gorgias of Leontini came to Athens in the latter part of the fifth century, bringing with him a new kind of performance – a performance of *λόγος* that will come to be seen as the beginning of oratory. According to Diodorus Siculus, Gorgias amazed the Athenians – although they were already skilled in the use of *λόγος* – with his new and exotic devices such as homoioteleuton and isokola.<sup>10</sup> From Dionysius of Halicarnassus, we learn that it was Gorgias who first introduced orators to poetic and metaphorical expressions.<sup>11</sup> In fact, most of our ancient sources that have anything favorable to say about Gorgias treat him as a great innovator in performative speech, and as someone who revolutionized oratory in Athens.

Gorgias himself, of course, never called himself a poet or even claimed that his works were especially poetic. Rather, as this discussion will demonstrate, he made a great show of highlighting the importance of discrete categories of literature, emphasizing that his own was not poetry. While explicitly arguing that poetry and incantations were special kinds of literary productions, however, Gorgias is implicitly eliding the distinctions at every turn. Again and again, with reference to literary types, to particular disciplines, even to the difference between material and verbal art, Gorgias emphasizes the importance of distinctions, only to then blur those same distinctions. Finally, Gorgias conceives of an extraordinarily unified *λόγος*: various forms may differ in cosmetic ways, but ultimately those differences matter less than what unites them, which is the immeasurable power of language.

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<sup>10</sup> Diod. Sic. *Universal History* 12.53.

<sup>11</sup> Dion. Hal. *Life of Lysias* 3, a point Aristotle will more or less agree with.

Gorgias is unique in the Classical period for offering a straightforward, if facetious, definition of *ποίησις*: it is, he says at *Helen* §9, *λόγος* having meter. It is a strange statement made stranger by its context, which deserves further attention:

*λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν, ὅς σμικροτάτῳ σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτῳ θειότατα ἔργα ἀποτελεῖ· δύναται γὰρ καὶ φόβον παῦσαι καὶ λύπην ἀφελεῖν καὶ χαρὰν ἐνεργάσασθαι καὶ ἔλεον ἐπαυξῆσαι. ταῦτα δὲ ὡς οὕτως ἔχει δεῖξω· δεῖ δὲ καὶ δόξη δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀκούουσι· τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον· ἥς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολὺδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθής, ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμαίων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἴδιόν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἢ ψυχῇ.<sup>12</sup>*

(*λόγος* is a powerful master, which by means of the smallest and most indiscernible bodies accomplishes the most god-like works; for it is able to stop fear and remove physical suffering and stir up delight and augment compassion. I will demonstrate how this is the case; it is necessary to demonstrate this to my audience by a judgment also; I both consider and name all *ποίησις* as *λόγος* having meter. Terrifying shuddering and tearful pity and grievous longing come over the hearers of it [*ποίησις*], and at the actions and physical experiences<sup>13</sup> of others both in good fortune and bad the soul experiences some suffering of its own because of *λόγοι*, §8-9).

The judgment (*δόξη*) by which he intends to make his case is his definition of *ποίησις*, and the verbs he uses to assert it (*νομίζω*, *ονομάζω*) are strong enough to suggest that the definition was not a common or generally assumed one, and perhaps even that Gorgias' offering of a definition was a display in itself. The particular demonstration he provides, however, presents *ποίησις* as not just one subset of *λόγος*, but as almost identical to it in the power of its effects: *ποίησις* stirs up the emotions, he claims, presumably because of its share in *λόγος*. Verbal echoes then suggest that, however *ποίησις* might differ from

<sup>12</sup> The lack of connective and explanatory particles here is odd; Bers (1984) might associate this with a more prosaic style, but he is careful to say that it is rarely so simple. Some have suggested that this description may be of tragedy, and it certainly is similar to Aristotle's discussion of tragedy's effects, although of course the anachronism of that is obvious.

<sup>13</sup> Accepting Sprague's translation of *σωμάτων* as "physical experiences".

*λόγος*, ultimately the similarities overshadow any differences: the *φόβος* that *λόγος* stops in the earlier part of the passage is picked up by the *φρίκη περίφοβος* in the later part of the passage, and the *ἔλεος* that *λόγος* augments is seen again in the *πολύδακρυς ἔλεος* that comes over those listening to poetry. In short, immediately after defining *ποίησις* as a type of *λόγος*, he goes on to describe it as identical to *λόγος*. That is, he claims that *ποίησις* is distinct from *λόγος* in some important way, and then immediately elides that distinction by describing the effects of *ποίησις* as identical to those of *λόγος*.

From that swift if subtle denial of distinction, he moves to a discussion of incantatory magical songs, which he affords the same powers again: they bring pleasure and banish pain (*αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων ἐπῳδαὶ ἐπαγωγοὶ ἡδονῆς, ἀπαγωγοὶ λύπης γίνονται*, §10).<sup>14</sup> He has signaled this as a move from one type of *λόγος* to another (*πρὸς ἄλλον ἀπ' ἄλλου λόγον*, §9), but again both the effects of the chants and the language he uses to describe them are almost identical to his original description of the powers of *λόγος*. Again, he has posited a 'type' of *λόγος* only to undermine the proposition that it is, in any important way, different from *λόγος* writ large. He then abandons talk of *λόγος* and its supposed types, but the several examples he presents serve, again, to show that the power of *λόγος* is intrinsic to it rather than dependent on external decorations like meter

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<sup>14</sup> Taking this *διὰ*, like the previous one, with an almost instrumental force. It is interesting that his discussion of poetry focuses on language without reference to song, and that song is here put forward as a third category. While we should not put too much weight on this suggested separation of the musical and linguistic components of poetry, particularly as it is a particular kind of song that was in some sense distinct from poetry, it is interesting, especially since his definition of poetry selects out only meter – that is, rhythm, but not melody or mode. The distinction will be seen again in Herodotus and Plato but articulated most clearly in Aristotle. On the relationship between magic and Gorgias' idea of language, see especially Walsh (1984) 81-85, also e.g. Meijering (1987) 8-9, Verdenius (1981) 122-123.

or song; any kind of *λόγος* will, regardless of its form, be able to stir up or quiet emotions.<sup>15</sup>

Thus we see a pattern of Gorgias proposing literary ‘types’ only to describe their particular powers in ways that actually undermine the proposed differences. Gorgias makes a similar move with the work as a whole when he identifies the *Helen* as an *ἐγκώμιον* in the succinct antithesis that closes out the speech: τὸν λόγον Ἑλένης μὲν ἐγκώμιον, ἐμὸν δὲ παίγνιον (this speech is an *encomium* of Helen, but a diversion for me, §131).<sup>16</sup> What Gorgias has presented, however, even if he names it an *encomium*, satisfies none of the expectations the word should raise; however much it plays with rhythm and other so-called poetic devices, it is not worked into meter, and however little we may know about its context, we can assume he had no musical or choral accompaniment – it is, quite adamantly, *not* any kind of ordinary song.

Moreover, the fact that this more or less specific term is applied only at the very end – and then further qualified as a *παίγνιον* – may be one final joke. He has presented a speech in a style that was enormously innovative, if our sources can be trusted, but a

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<sup>15</sup> Meijering (1987) 7 makes a similar observation: “poetry is but one usage of language out of many that seek to delude people. It is distinguished from other such usages merely by its metric form.”

<sup>16</sup> *Εγκώμιον* and its verbal relatives were not especially uncommon in the fifth century; the noun, for instance, appears five times in Pindar, where, based on both context and immediate vocabulary, it must refer to song. (Pindar *Ol.*2.47, in close proximity to *λύρα*; *Ol.*10.77, with *αείδετο*; *Ol.*13.29, lacking explicit song vocabulary but likely referring to a victory procession at which song would be expected; *Pyth.*10.53, with *ῥυθμὸν*; *Nem.*1.7, with *μέλος*.) Moreover, the word seems to be derived from what happens in the *κῶμος*, thus further tying it to the tradition of ritual song. A passage at Herodotus 5.5, too, suggests that an *encomium* was likely to be a song of some sort, although there is no mention of musical accompaniment. However, the context of the praise is a funeral ritual, and therefore probably involved a kind of stylized song. A later reference in Xenophon, too, as well as numerous references in Plato, imply that the *ἐγκώμιον* was a song of some sort: Xenophon *Ag.*10.3; the references in Plato are far too many to list, but see e.g. *Lysis* 205e; *Prot.* 326a; *Sym.* 177b. Harvey (1955) 163f posits two distinct uses of the word, one referring to the poetic song and the other, a rhetorical term, referring to any speech of praise, whether in verse or not. Certainly the word is beginning to be attached to prose in the fifth century, but Harvey perhaps goes too far in drawing a sharp line between the two uses.

speech that would nonetheless not have been mistaken for poetry. At the last moment, however, he names it a kind of poetry, calling into question a distinction that, if we are understanding the joke correctly, would have been clearly felt if not fully articulated. Just as he elided the distinctions between types of *λόγος*, then, here he is pointing to the fallacy of assuming that even speech and song can be easily distinguished. By Gorgias' work of emphasizing the weakness of the boundaries, however, we can glimpse his expectation that his audience assumed a clear break between the poetic and his own project, even if he wished to challenge that.

Gorgias creates a similar elision when he compares his project to that of the poets (*ποιηταί*) who have been the primary vehicle of Helen's bad reputation:

*\*\*\* τούς μεμφομένους Ἑλένην, γυναῖκα περὶ ἧς ὁμόφωνος καὶ ὁμόψυχος γέγονεν ἢ τε τῶν ποιητῶν ἀκουσάντων πίστις ἢ τε τοῦ ὀνόματος φήμη, ὃ τῶν συμφορῶν μνήμη γέγονεν. ἐγὼ δὲ βούλομαι λογισμὸν τινα τῷ λόγῳ δοῦς τὴν μὲν κακῶς ἀκούουσαν παῦσαι τῆς αἰτίας, τούς δὲ μεμφομένους ψευδομένους ἐπιδείξας καὶ δείξας τάληθές ἢ παῦσαι τῆς ἀμαθίας.*

(\*\*\* those blaming Helen, a woman about whom the assurances of the poets of good reputation and the fame of the name, which is the memorial of the events, are univocal and universally reproachful. But I, offering some reasoning in my speech, wish to give the accused rest from blame, demonstrating that the ones making the accusation are lying, and showing the truth to give them rest from ignorance, §2).

In spite of the lacuna that opens this passage, we can infer that Gorgias would reject the ones blaming Helen, and would include the poets among them. He then sets himself the opposite task, to save Helen from blame. The vocabulary he uses underscores the difference of assumptions and methodology between the poetic tradition and his own project: the former is described with words of persuasion and tradition – *πίστις, μνήμη*,

φήμη – while his work promises λογισμός and δείξας, calculation and proof. He is, in effect, setting up dichotomy: the poetic tradition against the scientific one.

Of course, Gorgias ultimately has it both ways here: he has drawn our attention to two distinct traditions and set them against each other, just as he did with λόγος and ποίησις. Furthermore, as he did there, so too here he blurs the supposed distinctions immediately. The *Helen* consistently relies on persuasion and pathos rather than calculation or proof, and even the brief aside on the work of astronomers, philosophers and debaters (§13) focuses on how they use persuasion rather than any appeal to their reasoning. Moreover, the treatise *On Not Being* offers some insight into his ideas about the reach of λόγος. There, he argues that language is useless for communicating knowledge, since it bears no relationship with reality.<sup>17</sup> The implication is clear: λόγος grants no transparent access to truth. What it can do, the *Helen* argues, is stir up the emotions and incline a person one way or another. This is finally what the *Helen* does, under the guise of making rational arguments; it persuades based on reasonable possibilities.

At every turn, Gorgias comes back to hybridization. He begins by acknowledging a boundary, and then erases it. There is a poetic tradition and a scientific one, the beginning of the *Helen* posits – but Gorgias ends up using techniques drawn from both. There is a song tradition and a speech one – but Gorgias makes great use of rhythms and calls his prose work an ἐγκώμιον.<sup>18</sup> There are subsets of λόγος that should have various

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<sup>17</sup> On Gorgias' theory of knowledge and its relationship to language, see e.g. Verdenius (1981) 116.

<sup>18</sup> On Gorgias' intentional and considered appropriation of poetic rhythms for emotional effect, see Segal (1962) 127, who suggests that Gorgias “brings within the competence of the rhetor the power to move the



powers – but Gorgias makes them all identical in force. We see in these moves an underlying assumption of distinctions that Gorgias will acknowledge only to transgress.

In the case of *ποίησις*, the rejection of a delimited category is twofold: after undermining the differentiation of *ποίησις ἅπασα* from *λόγος* as discussed above, Gorgias later uses the word – the only other instance of the word in the (admittedly slender) surviving corpus – in its material sense, parallel to *ἐργασία* to refer to the creation of statues that grant divine pleasure to the eyes (*ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀνδριάντων ποίησις καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀγαλμάτων ἐργασία θέαν ἠδεῖαν παρέσχετο τοῖς ὄμμασιν*, §18). The effect of this *ποίησις* is remarkably similar to that of the verbal one: it can induce grief or longing in the viewer, it imparts something of the divine, and Gorgias notes that it plays a part in stirring up desire for activities and physical experiences (*πολλὰ δὲ πολλοῖς πολλῶν ἔρωτα καὶ πόθον ἐνεργάζεται πραγμάτων καὶ σαμάτων*, §18).

On its own, the claim appears unrelated to the discussion of poetry; there is no great surprise in finding *ποίησις* used to refer to art beyond literary creations. What is remarkable, however, is the similarity of this passage with the description of linguistic *ποίησις*. Both passages use *πόθος*, *ἐνεργάζεται*, the cognates *θειότατα* and *θέαν*, and the pairing of *πρᾶγμα* and *σῶμα* to explain how the viewer or auditor responds to works of art.<sup>19</sup> That is, the verbal echoes are many, enough that they are unlikely to be accidental.

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psyche by those suprarational forces which Damon is said to have discerned in the rhythm and harmony of the formal structure of music.”

<sup>19</sup> In an author less obsessed with the crafting of his piece we might think this a coincidence, as the words are all common enough on their own. For Gorgias, however, intentionality seems more likely.

He has already suggested that literary types show no significant differences in their impacts, and demonstrated this on a larger scale by assigning the same powers to several allegedly different kinds of *λόγος* and by calling his *Helen* an *ἐγκώμιον*. Here, by applying the semantics and practical effects of verbal *ποίησις* to material *ποίησις*, he breaks another boundary: he shows that language and material art both work on their audiences in the same ways. The parallel Gorgias has set up between the effects of material and linguistic *ποίησις* may also work in the other direction, allowing us a glimpse into his conception of how poetry is made. Since material *ποίησις* – a statue, for instance – is the result of human technical skill being applied to a stone or to metal, linguistic *ποίησις* – poetry – must be the result of human technical skill being applied to language. Linguistic *ποίησις*, however, has already been shown to have the same powers as *λόγος*, differing from it only in its form rather than in its essential nature; the further implicit comparison of material and linguistic *ποίησις* calls into question the idea that any *λόγος* could be free of human technical skill.

While Athenian anxiety about the deceptive possibilities of artistic and delightful language were not yet at their peak when Gorgias was making his presence felt in the city, concerns about the ability of beautiful language to convince an audience of the weaker argument were already being raised. Gorgias himself raises the problem at *Helen* §13, reminding his audience that speech can delight and persuade a great crowd because it was written with skill, even if it does not tell the truth (*εἰς λόγος πολὺν ὄχλον ἔτερεψε καὶ ἔπεισε τέχνη γραφείας, οὐκ ἀληθεία λεχθεῖς*). This, combined with the elision of meaningful literary distinctions made elsewhere, reveals a characteristically Gorgianic

play: an acknowledgement of a concern about the power of crafted language, and a subsequent assertion that all language is crafted, that no language can finally be simple or ‘safe’. This fits with the distinction he draws in *On Not Being* between language and reality, where language, like any other object of sense perception, is shown to have the power to influence opinion but not to impart knowledge.

Finally, then, after laying out his clear and simple definition of poetry, Gorgias shows how the feature that distinguishes poetry is one that actually plays only a minimal role in poetry’s power. As noted above, however, the very fact of Gorgias’ hybridization reveals an awareness of clear categories to blend; there must be, behind Gorgias’ bombastic prose, a model of a simpler prose style to which he was applying the tricks and turns of the poetic tradition. If poetry has its effects *qua* language rather than *qua* poetry, however, the distinction was in some sense arbitrary, as his own mixed style shows.<sup>20</sup> After all, when all *λόγος* is equally powerful and incapable of conveying reality in an unproblematic way, literary categories are only the ways language is shaped and ornamented, but whose impacts are dwarfed by the power of language itself.

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Unlike Gorgias, Herodotus never directly addresses the question of poetry. Nonetheless, he regularly makes use of poetry as a source, and so poetic productions receive tangential attention on numerous occasions and from numerous angles. As should

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<sup>20</sup> Certainly Aristotle treated him as a kind of hybrid; see below in chapter 3.

be expected for his period, his vocabulary is generally broad and inconsistent: the agent noun *ποιητής* seems to be fairly restricted in its use to those creating song of one sort or another, but the idea of song itself is much less bounded. There is one suggestion of formal distinction when he discusses the *λογοποιός*, but he nowhere mentions any formal features of poetry explicitly – in fact, metrical observations are limited to oracles and inscriptions, and never brought up in the context of poetry. On the whole, Herodotus treats his poetic evidence just as he does his non-poetic sources, singling out specific claims for approval or rejection, but never assuming that a source gains or lacks value based on its formal features.

What is most important in this discussion of the *Histories*, however, is that Herodotus draws no firm or simple lines between works like his and the works of the poets, and does not even consistently group poetry as a whole into a bounded category set off from other literary productions. Sometimes he and the poets share a common goal and even a common approach, but sometimes he is able to point to a methodological move made by a poet that is clearly antithetical to his own approach. He sometimes gestures towards more specific categories of literary productions, but in ways that are internally inconsistent and suggest that he had nothing like a formal system of literary distinction in mind. Where Gorgias shows great self-consciousness of breaking down walls between literary categories, then, Herodotus shows few, if any, consistent boundaries at all; instead, while he does show an interest in distinguishing literary types, the lines he draws are different at different times.

The term that seems to carry the most consistent and limited definition of all the terms attached to poetry is *ποιητής*, the agent noun, and it thus provides a useful focal point around which to begin this discussion. One of the most common roles of the *ποιητής* in Herodotus is the disseminator of common knowledge: information found in the poets may or may not be reliable, but it can be assumed to be wide-spread. The most explicit example of this is at 6.52.1-2, where Herodotus presents a story that the Spartans tell about how they came to possess their land, noting that their version of events has no parallel in any poet (*Λακεδαιμόνιοι γὰρ ὁμολογέοντες οὐδενὶ ποιητῆι λέγουσι ...*). This has been taken to mean that the poets tell a different version – as indeed later poets like Apollodorus will – but that Herodotus reports here what the Spartans say about themselves.<sup>21</sup>

In the following chapter, however, Herodotus rejects the Spartan version, using both a *μὲν-δὲ* construction and a *ταῦτα-τάδε* contrast to distinguish what the Spartans say from the story as the rest of the Greeks tell it (*ταῦτα μὲν Λακεδαιμόνιοι λέγουσι μούνοι Ἑλλήνων· τάδε δὲ κατὰ τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπ’ Ἑλλήνων ἐγὼ γράφω*, 6.53.1). The *τὰ λεγόμενα* here should refer to the more general tradition, apart from the specific Spartan one, as How and Wells note.<sup>22</sup> While Herodotus is not explicit about it, the story as told by the non-Spartan Greeks is likely the same one found in the poets, which allows us to read back into the qualification made to the Spartan version at 6.52.1: the implication is that the lack of a poetic source means the story will be at least less well known, if not

<sup>21</sup> e.g. How and Wells (1912) *ad loc.*; Pausanias 3.1.6, Apollodorus 2.8.2.

<sup>22</sup> How and Wells (1912) *ad loc.* identify this *τὰ λεγόμενα* as “i.e. the common Hellenic tradition found in the poets and logographers.”

actually suspect. It is impossible to sort out cause and effect from this – do stories become well known because the poets tell them, or do poets tell stories that are already common knowledge? – but we can at least see an expectation of overlap.

A well-known passage in book 2 again links poets with general knowledge, although in a different way. At 2.53, Herodotus addresses the chronological details and cultural importance of Homer and Hesiod, claiming that they lived about four hundred years before his own time, and asserts that the poets who are alleged to be earlier than these two were actually after them (2.53.3).<sup>23</sup> He has clearly separated these two out from the rest of the poets as exceptional, but his description of their activities may nonetheless tell us something about the activities he envisioned as proper to poets: they were the ones who laid out the genealogy of the gods, and gave epithets<sup>24</sup> to the gods, and separated out their particular honors and functions, and explained their appearances (*οὗτοι δὲ εἰσὶ οἱ ποιήσαντες θεογονίην Ἑλλήσι καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμάς τε καὶ τέχνας διελόντες καὶ εἶδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες*, 2.53.2). That is, they supplied instructions on how to know and worship the gods. He does not, however, give a picture of their work as particularly inspired or divinely authorized.<sup>25</sup> They are in fact depicted as doing work similar to Herodotus' own, although in relation to gods rather than men: their works are a sort of divine ethnography, just as Herodotus' is, in part, a human one.

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<sup>23</sup> Homer and Hesiod are not themselves called poets, then, but the comparison with the *ποιηταί* in 2.53.3 make it likely that Herodotus would have been comfortable applying the term to them as well.

<sup>24</sup> Following Mikalson's suggestion (Mikalson (2004) 34) that this *ἐπωνυμίας* is best translated as 'epithets'. How and Wells (1912) *ad loc.* suggest 'patronymics' as opposed to 'epithets,' perhaps because they are interested in not pushing the distinction that unnamed "others" make, connecting Hesiod to the making of the genealogy and Homer to the other activities of naming and describing.

<sup>25</sup> Although the archaic poets were themselves implicated in the connecting of their poetry to the supernatural, it is remarkable how rarely it shows up in the prose corpus; in fact, it is almost limited to, and most likely exaggerated by, Plato; see below in chapter two.

An aside on Aeschylus in the midst of the Egyptian discussion shows a more concrete example of a poet doing just what Herodotus himself does. In the midst of retelling an Egyptian aetiological story about Apollo's temple being on a floating island, Herodotus asserts that Aeschylus took from this Egyptian tale an idea which was found in none of the earlier poets (*ἐκ τούτου δὲ τοῦ λόγου καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄλλου Αἰσχύλος ὁ Εὐφορίωνος ἤρπασε*<sup>26</sup> *τὸ ἐγὼ φράσω, μούνος δὴ ποιητέων τῶν προγενομένων*, 2.156.6). As was the case with the Spartan tale above, what Herodotus finds notable is that the information was not found in other poets, although of course he himself purports to have identified the source of Aeschylus' innovation.<sup>27</sup> Here, Herodotus passes no judgment on Aeschylus' innovation, likely because he has verified its origin for himself. It is particularly interesting to note that he portrays Aeschylus as performing a very Herodotean task: finding obscure information to bring back to Greece and put into his literary creations.

A similar instance from the same book, however, has Herodotus passing judgment, precisely because he can find no outside proof:

*ὁ δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ὠκεανοῦ λέξας ἐς ἀφανὲς τὸν μῦθον ἀνενείκας οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον· οὐ γὰρ τινὰ ἔγωγε οἶδα ποταμὸν Ὠκεανὸν ἐόντα, Ὅμηρον δὲ ἢ τινὰ τῶν πρότερον γενομένων ποιητέων δοκέω τὸ οὐνομα εὐρόντα ἐς ποίησιν ἐσενείκασθαι.*

<sup>26</sup> How and Wells (1912) *ad loc.* note that this word is “harsh” and suppose that it may reflect Herodotus' jealousy at Aeschylus beating him to the discovery, or his resentment at a distortion of Greek mythology. It is indeed an odd choice, but nothing else in the passage suggests any reason to take it as necessarily pejorative. If anything, the rather strong *ἐκ τούτου τοῦ λόγου καὶ οὐδενὸς ἄλλου* – especially paired with the assertive *ἐγὼ φράσω* – suggests that Herodotus may be more interested in refuting another suggestion as to the origin of the detail than judging Aeschylus' use of it.

<sup>27</sup> The following line gives us a final interesting detail: Aeschylus, having taken this story that no earlier poet had used, then makes, *ἐποίησε*, Artemis the daughter of Demeter. The many and complex significances of the verb *ποιέω* and its relationship to poetry will be taken up below, but its appearance here, so soon after the cognate noun, is worth noting.

(The one who told about Ocean and brought it up in his opaque myth has no proof; for I at least don't know of any river Ocean, but I think Homer or someone earlier of those who are poets invented the name and brought it into his poetry, 2.23.)

How and Wells suggest that Herodotus is here ridiculing Hecataeus or someone like him for accepting an unverifiable story from the poetic tradition, which seems likely enough, especially since the only other usage of *μῦθος* in the *Histories* is similarly dismissive.<sup>28</sup> In spite of the difference in attitude, however, the language Herodotus uses is interesting: in both anecdotes, a storyteller is said to have brought a new or unfamiliar detail into his poetry. The verbs that describe the activity of poet and myth-maker are both *φῆρω* compounds, suggesting that there is some kind of parallelism between their activities.<sup>29</sup> His problem, however, has less to do with the invention of the poet than with the myth-teller's acceptance of an unverifiable story. This is a place where Herodotus would clearly differentiate himself and his methods, but the group against which he is setting his own work does not fall out as poetry against prose, but invention or unreliability against verifiability; it is entirely a criticism of content rather than form. The *ποιηταί* are one part of the group that is given license to invent, but by virtue of something other than producing poetry, whereas Herodotus separates himself off from that group – but includes in it other less reliable prose authors.

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<sup>28</sup> 2.45, where a *μῦθος* about Heracles is called *εὐήθης* and grouped with other stories that Herodotus identifies as *ἀνεπισκέπτως*.

<sup>29</sup> The physicality implied by these verbs echoes the physicality of the *ἤρπασε* in the Aeschylus anecdote, and likely reflects the theory of material language that was prevalent in Herodotus' time; see e.g. Ford (2002) 161ff.



The last occurrence of the term involves Alcaeus, and gives a different picture of the *ποιητής*. Herodotus reports the story about Alcaeus' famous flight from battle, saying that Alcaeus put his battle experience into a *μέλος* and sent it to Mytilene, reporting his suffering to his companion Melanippos (*ταῦτα δὲ Ἄλκαῖος ἐν μέλει ποιήσας ἐπιτιθεῖ ἐς Μυτιλήνην, ἐξαγγελλούμενος τὸ ἑωυτοῦ πάθος Μελανίππῳ ἀνδρὶ ἑταίρῳ*, 5.95.2). The information that Alcaeus sends to Mytilene is categorically different from the kinds of information preserved by poets in the previous examples in several ways: it was his own personal experience, notably, and it has the conceit of being directed, like a letter, to a specific person, rather than being intended for a wider public.

This example shows us that the category of *ποιητής* was quite broad: it encompassed the religious knowledge of Homer and Hesiod, imported and even fabricated information like that of Aeschylus or the poet who named Ocean, and more intimate narratives like those we think of as proper to lyric poetry. It included oral tradition as well as written, if we can take literally Herodotus' suggestion that Alcaeus sent his *μέλος* to Melanippus. The *ποιητής* practiced both research and invention. In fact, it is difficult to find the limit of the term, as Herodotus provides no information on what might distinguish a *ποιητής* from any other sort of literary artist; even the terms used to describe their productions are varied, if they appear at all. A comparison of the several other literary producers that Herodotus identifies, however, will shed some light on the realm of the *ποιητής*.

We will begin with the *αοιδός*, the term that is thought to have been the default term for a poet before the introduction and adoption of *ποιητής*.<sup>30</sup> Arion is the only figure identified as an *αοιδός* (1.24), in fact: that he is *τοῦ ἀρίστου ἀνθρώπων αοιδοῦ* (1.24.5) seems to be the main reason the Corinthian sailors allow him to sing (*ἀεῖσαι*) the *νόμος ὄρθιος* before jumping into the ocean. The preceding lines give further information about Arion's work: he was the best kithara player of his age, and he created, named and taught the dithyramb (*Ἀρίονα ... ἐόντα κιθαρωδὸν τῶν τότε ἐόντων οὐδενὸς δεύτερον, καὶ διθύραμβον πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν ποιήσαντά τε καὶ ὀνομάσαντα καὶ διδάξαντα ἐν Κορίνθῳ*, 1.23).

Arion is the only *αοιδός* in the *Histories*, but there are interesting comparanda in several other passages that should be brought into the discussion before we set the *αοιδός* beside the *ποιητής*. The discussion of the Egyptian version of the Linus song at 2.79, for instance, includes a cluster of words cognate with *αοιδός*:

*πατριόοισι δὲ χρεάμενοι νόμοισι ἄλλον οὐδένα ἐπικτῶνται· τοῖσι ἄλλα τε ἐπάξια ἐστὶ νόμιμα, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἄεισμα ἓν ἐστὶ, Λίνος, ὅσπερ ἓν τε Φοινίκη αοίδιμος ἐστὶ καὶ ἐν Κύπρῳ καὶ ἄλλῃ, κατὰ μέντοι ἔθνεα οὐνομα ἔχει, συμφέρεται δὲ αὐτὸς εἶναι τὸν οἱ Ἕλληνας Λίνον ὀνομάζοντες ἀείδουσι, ὥστε πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἄλλα ἀποθαμάζειν με τῶν περὶ Αἴγυπτον ἐόντων, ἐν δὲ δὴ καὶ τὸν Λίνον ὀκόθεν ἔλαβον τὸ οὐνομα· φαίνονται δὲ αἰεὶ κοτε τοῦτον ἀείδοντες. ἔστι δὲ Αἴγυπτιστὶ ὁ Λίνος καλούμενος Μανερῶς. ἔφασαν δὲ μιν Αἰφύπτιοι τοῦ πρώτου βασιλεύσαντος Αἴγυπτου παῖδα μουνογενέα γενέσθαι, ἀποθανόντα δὲ αὐτὸν ἄνωρον θρήνοισι τούτοις ὑπὸ Αἴγυπτίων τιμηθῆναι, καὶ αοιδὴν τε ταύτην πρώτην καὶ μούνην σφίσι γενέσθαι.*

([The Egyptians] retain their ancestral customs, adding nothing. Among these is one notable custom, one song in particular, the Linus, who is the subject of song in Phoenicia and Cyprus and elsewhere, although each tribe has its own name for it. It happens to be the same song that the

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Nagy (1989), Braun (1938) 265f.

Greeks sing, calling it the Linus. So, many other things that go on among the Egyptians amaze me, particularly where they got the name Linus – for it is clear that they have always sung it, although among the Egyptians Linus is called Maneros. The Egyptians told me that he was the only son of the first king of Egypt, and that because he died young he is honored with these dirges by the Egyptians; this was the first and only song for them, 2.79.)

The term *αοίδιμος* is an unusual choice, as it is a highly poetic word that appears, outside of Herodotus and before the Hellenistic period, only in Pindar, Euripides, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, and Homer.<sup>31</sup> Herodotus himself uses it one other time, in his discussion of the Naucratan courtesan Rhodopis: another courtesan, Archidike, while never achieving the fame of Rhodopis, herself became the subject of song throughout Greece (*αοίδιμος ἀνὰ τὴν Ελλάδα ἐγένετο*, 2.135.5). The almost certainly secular nature of the song about Archidike argues against any strong link between the term and religion or ritual, although most of the uses in the poets refer to figures or themes that are, if not actually divine, strongly mythical.

Some have seen in these passages a divorce between the idea of making a song and the act of performing it; while the *αοιδός* in Homer was simultaneously maker and performer, Herodotus gives a picture, for example, of Arion's process.<sup>32</sup> Olen too, at 4.35.3, is shown as having made a *ῥυμος* to be sung by others, and elsewhere Phrynichus is said to have made and then produced a *δραμα*; the creating again occurs separately

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<sup>31</sup> Pindar *Ol.*14.2; *Pyth.*8.59; *Nem.*3.79; and fr.52f. Euripides *Electra* 471 and *fr. inc.* 3.33. *hH Apollo* 299. The Iliadic occurrence at 6.358 is unique in referring to a negative reputation. Stesichorus fr. S103 likely includes the word as well, but it is difficult to be certain as the text breaks off at *αοιδιμ-*. Theocritus and Callimachus both pick the term up in the Hellenistic period, although it never becomes particularly common.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Ford (2002) 133 and n.4.

from the public production.<sup>33</sup> However, it is important to note that the activities are all still related back to the single individual, even if they are separated out into a process – Herodotus may note that there were three stages in Arion’s dissemination of the dithyramb, but all three of them nonetheless remain closely linked to Arion. That is, while Herodotus’ observation of the process is interesting and perhaps even representative of a more recent awareness of the mechanics of song culture, he still seems to envision all the aspects of the Homeric *ἀοιδός* as encapsulated within one individual.

The emphasis in these passages on performance is quite different from what was seen in the passages that dealt with *ποιητής*. When the language of song – cognates of *ἀοιδός* – appears, it seems, Herodotus has in mind something different than when he discusses the work of the *ποιητής*. When he addresses the works of the *ποιηταί*, for instance, he tends to discuss only content, while the passages addressing the *ἀοιδός* and his *ἄεισμα* focus more on the ornaments of performance, and have relatively little interest in content. The activities of the *ποιηταί* are also described with a vocabulary that evokes the very physical, tangible world: thus Aeschylus *ἤρπασε* his detail from the Egyptians, and Homer, Hesiod and Alcaeus produce their works with participles of *ποιέω*. The first step in Arion’s process, too, is to *ποιεῖν*, which he does before his work can be named or taught – and, presumably, performed. When Herodotus talks about the *ποιηταί*, then, he may be focusing particularly on one aspect of the process, namely the mechanical constructing of the narrative.

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<sup>33</sup> 6.21.2; cf 2.48.2 and 60.1, see also Ford (2002) 133 n.5.

A digression on the habits of the Massagetae supports this. Herodotus describes their habit of getting drunk on smoke from certain herbs, comparing it to the drunkenness of Greeks on wine, and describes the effects: they rise up into dance and come into song (... ἐς ὄρχησίν τε ἀνίστασθαι καὶ ἐς ἀοιδὴν ἀπικνέεσθαι, 1.202.2). Given the circumstances, their songs are likely to be either traditional or very much *ex tempore*, and Herodotus' language appropriately emphasizes not the construction or content of the songs but the active performance of them, the activity of song and dance. This is not to suggest that he conceived of the *ποιητής* as a figure who was entirely distinct from and unlike the *ἀοιδός* more broadly; indeed, they are, for him, involved in essentially similar, and often identical, projects. Rather, his semantic choices might reflect which aspect or activity of the poet he was then focusing on in a particular passage. Thus when he speaks of or makes use of the *ποιηταί*, it is by virtue of the content of their productions rather than the embellishments – the music, dance, meter – of them. When separated out from their ornaments, then, what is left is simply information with which Herodotus can deal as he does with any other source: subject it to verification and investigation, and use it with greater or lesser reservation.

Herodotus' use of Aristeas provides a compelling example of this. Virtually nothing survives of Aristeas' *Arimaspea*, and the bulk of our information about him comes from this very passage in Herodotus (4.13-17), but they seem to have had similar projects in mind and, in some cases, even similar methodologies.<sup>34</sup> The passage in

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<sup>34</sup> Other than Herodotus, we have a brief quotation of six lines of the *Arimaspea* in Longinus (10.4), and entries giving biographical details in Tzetzes *Chiliades* (2.723-740, 4.523, 7.678-686) and in the *Suda*. The lines quoted by Tzetzes are almost certainly not from the *Arimaspea*, as it was lost by the time of Dionysius

Herodotus, however, is far from explicit about the form of the work he is discussing; the *Arimaspea* is identified in one sentence, without reference to meter and with few of the terms that should signal poetry:

ἔφη δὲ Ἀριστεύης ὁ Καυστροβίου ἀνὴρ Προκοννήσιος ποιέων ἔπεα,  
ἀπικέσθαι ἐς Ἴσσηδόνας φοιβόλαμπτος γενόμενος, Ἴσσηδόνων δὲ  
ὑπεροικέειν Ἀριμασποῦς ἄνδρας μουννοφθάλμους ὑπερ δὲ τούτων τοὺς  
χρυσοφύλακας γρυῖπας, τούτων δὲ τοὺς Ὑπερβορέους κατήκοντας ἐπὶ  
θάλασσαν.

(Aristeas, the son of Kaustrobios and a Proconnesian man, making ἔπεα, claimed that, possessed by Phoebos,<sup>35</sup> he reached the Issedones, and that beyond the Issedones lived the Arimaspians, one-eyed men, and that beyond these lived gold-guarding griffons, and beyond these lived the Hyperboreans right against the sea. 4.13)

Herodotus presents a picture of Aristeas as involved in a project that is essentially similar to Herodotus' own: he traveled, studied the people and places he saw, and reported back about what he witnessed. However, Herodotus examines Aristeas' version of events as presented in the *Arimaspea*, and finds it lacking since it does not agree with the reports of the Scythians themselves. In short, Herodotus treats Aristeas' poem exactly as he treats his other sources, and neither grants it special privilege nor submits it to unusual scrutiny because of its status as poem.

The very fact that it is a poem, in fact, hardly seems to interest Herodotus at all; he discusses the *Arimaspea* for several more paragraphs, but does not make a more

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of Halicarnassus. The *Suda* represents him as the author of both an epic poem, the *Arimaspea*, and a prose *Theogony*, although Herodotus mentions only the *Arimaspea*, the work that was directly relevant to his discussion in book 4. Birch (1950) 82ff lays out everything we know about the works, and categorizes the *Arimaspea* as “an inferior poetic counterpart of Herodotus' own work”; see also Scratchley (1843) 413. For a complete list of sources see Birch (1950), especially pp.79-80.

<sup>35</sup> The *Φοιβόλαμπτος* is interesting as it is the only suggestion in the *Histories* that poets might have something to do with the divine, but it seems clearly to be referring to his travels rather than his poetry.

explicit mention of its form, except for the recurrence of two key terms, *ἔπος* and various forms of *ποιέω*. 4.14.3 describes how, having returned to Proconnesus seven years after having allegedly died in the fuller's shop, Aristeas produced the *Arimaspea* and, having made it, went away again: *ποιῆσαι τὰ ἔπεα τὰ νῦν ὑπ' Ἑλλήνων Ἀριμάσπεα καλέεται, ποιήσαντα δὲ ἀφανισθῆναι τὸ δεύτερον*. Finally, at 4.16.1, Herodotus notes that even Aristeas did not claim in making his *ἔπεα* that he had traveled beyond the Issedonians: *οὐδὲ οὗτος προσωτέρω Ἰσσηδόνων ἐν αὐτοῖσι τοῖσι ἔπεσι ποιέων ἔφησε ἀπικέσθαι*.

While Aristeas is never identified as either *ποιητής* or *αἰοιδός*, cognates of *ποιητής* abound in the passage, as they do in most of the passages dealing with the work of the *ποιηταί*.<sup>36</sup> The meaning of *ποιέω* as 'to perform the activity of a poet' is familiar from the classical period on, but Herodotus' uses of it in this sense are interesting as they are some of the earliest attested.<sup>37</sup> However, the construction is not limited to poetry, but refers more generally to the process of organizing language, with or without meter.

If Herodotus had a strong sense of literary categories, we might expect to see some consistency in the various objects of *ποιέω*— that is, if *ἔπεα ποιεῖν* means 'to compose an epic poem,' we would expect to find it with Homer and Aristeas, but not elsewhere, and if *μέλος* is already limited to lyric poetry as we understand it today, we

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, Arion, at 1.23, is described as the *διθύραμβον πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν ποιήσαντά τε καὶ ὀνομάσαντα καὶ διδάξαντα ἐν Κορίντῳ*. At 4.35, the Delian women celebrate using a hymn *τόν σφι Ὠλήν ἀνήρ Λύκοις ἐποίησε*, and the passage notes that Olen also *τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς παλαιοὺς ὕμνους ἐποίησε*. Herodotus thinks that Pindar *ὄρθῳς ... ποιῆσαι νόμον πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι*.

<sup>37</sup> Theognis 1.713 may come closest to making this sense of the verb: *ψευδέα μὲν ποίοις ἐτύμοισιν ὄμοια*— this seems to be a direct reference to the line at Hesiod's *Theog*.27, to which it is identical except that the Hesiodic verb is *λέγειν*. The closest Homeric examples are *Od*.14.393, where someone wants to make a *ῥήτρᾳ*, and *Od*.21.71, where someone would be unable to make, *ποιήσασθαι*, any other *ἐπιχρῆσίνην μύθου*. See especially Braun (1938), *passim*.

would expect it to be applied to Sappho and Alcaeus but not, for instance, Aeschylus.

Instead, what we find is a great variety of terms for the product of *ποιέω* but little explicit interest in how the distinctions are made.

Homer and Aristeas are described as makers of *ἔπεα*, for example (Aristeas in the passage above, Homer at 4.32), but so are Croesus and Xerxes: at 1.90.1, Cyrus approves Croesus' ability to speak well and wisely with *ἔπεα ποιεῖν*, and Xerxes' dream at 7.14 reprimands him for not reporting its words – *τὰ ἐμὰ ἔπεα ποιησαμένοσ* – in his speech to the Persians. To *ποιεῖν* an *ἔπος*, then, is not restricted to composing epic, or even to composing poetry at all, but does suggest authoritative language, although that authority may stem from different sources: Aristeas' comes from the fact that he is, like Herodotus, reporting his own experiences, while Xerxes' dream carries the weight of all divine communications in Herodotus.

Herodotus' use of compounds of the two words, however, suggests a more precise category. Homer is identified as an *εποποιός* at 7.161, and his product named an *ἐποποιίη* at 2.116. Herodotus gives us an interesting detail of Homer's work in that same passage, where Herodotus asserts that Homer knew the tale of Helen's sojourn in Egypt but chose not to tell it because it was not as well suited to *ἐποποιίη*. This suggests that *ἐποποιίη* is a particular type of *ποίησις*, and further that the differentiation Herodotus makes is based on its content; certain types of narrative details fit an *ἐποποιίη*, while others do not. However, the activity of the *ἐποποιός* again shares some aspects with that of Herodotus himself: he does his research, like Herodotus, but then – unlike Herodotus – selects out the version that is most suited to *ἐποποιίη*.



The other terms for the product of *ποιέω* are numerous, but infrequent enough that drawing conclusions about what distinguishes them is difficult. Both Sappho and Alcaeus produce a *μέλος*, for instance, and in both cases the content is of a personal nature. No further details are given that would allow us to conjecture if it is labeled a *μέλος* because of its content or due to some other reason that Herodotus thought too obvious to mention. The term that will eventually become a catch-all for poetry in general, *ποίησις*, is, in Herodotus, still very broad in its significance, so that it can be applied to Homer's literary production at 2.23 but to wine and incense at 3.22; while we see an assumption of categories marking off different kinds of poetry, then, the only suggestion that these kinds can be grouped together in any cohesive way comes with the term *ποιητής*. That is, Herodotus sees a coherence in the way that poets go about creating their various products, but shows no impulse to group those products into a whole across specific types; the differences between the distinct genres of poetry – the dithyramb, the paian, and so forth – outweigh their incidental similarities, although their makers are seen as of a kind.

There is one term, however, that suggests Herodotus was drawing distinctions of literary type based firmly on form rather than content, at least in one case. This is *λογοποιός*, a compound with obvious parallels to the *ἔποποιός* discussed above. Only two figures are identified as *λογοποιόι*, Aesop and Hecataeus, and the only thing their productions could possibly have in common is their form, namely its lack of meter.<sup>38</sup> The resonance of the term is not well understood, and scholars have hypothesized various

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<sup>38</sup> Aesop at 2.134, Hecataeus at 2.143, 5.36 and 5.125-6.

nuances.<sup>39</sup> What we can conclude, however, is that here at least Herodotus must be conceiving of a broad category of literature, like that of Aesop and Hecataeus, that is united only by its lack of meter. What should be its opposite, however – namely, metered language – is rarely presented as a unified body of literary productions in the same way; that is, poetry as a whole becomes a meaningful unified category only when it is the negative of prose.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, the formal feature that we assume is poetry's most defining and obvious characteristic – its meter – comes into play in Herodotus only in relation to oracles and inscriptions.<sup>41</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to conclude that Herodotus' definition of poetry would resemble Gorgias'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, his references to the meters of oracles and inscriptions seem to be related more to establishing Herodotus' authority as actual eyewitness to the verses in question. While exact recitation of inscriptions may not have had implications beyond bolstering Herodotus' authority and indulging the curiosity of his audience, the situation with the oracles was different. As Ford observes, it was

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<sup>39</sup> Murray (2007a) 24-5, for instance, surmises that Herodotus would have referred to himself as a *λογοποιός*, and understands the term to essentially mean a compiler of stories. Other scholars, on the other hand, find a dismissive or derogatory sense in the word; thus Thomas (2002) 163 asserts that Herodotus conceives of a *λογοποιός* as someone who failed to make use of *ιστορία* and was therefore less reliable than Herodotus himself.

<sup>40</sup> Equally interesting is the implication here that categories of prose literature have not yet been distinguished from each other, which will be more clearly seen in Thucydides below.

<sup>41</sup> Of the oracles that are reported, most are cited in meter, and for several Herodotus specifically names the meter before providing an exact quotation: 1.47 and 1.62 are described as *ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ τόνῳ*, while 7.220 is *ἐν ἔπεισι ἑξαμέτροισι* and 1.174 is *ἐν τριμέτρῳ τόνῳ*. 5.60 and 61 present Cadmean inscriptions on tripods, and Herodotus again identifies them as *ἐν ἑξαμέτρῳ [τόνῳ]* and says that he himself saw them. See also West (1994) 243.

<sup>42</sup> *pace* Ford (2002) esp. 135 and 150, who conjectures that Herodotus' idea of poetry was very much like Gorgias', and based on putting a *λόγος* into meter.

essential to preserve the precise wording of oracles, as their meaning was dependent on interpretation; changing the words could significantly alter their meaning.<sup>43</sup>

In fact, Herodotus only quotes poetry in meter once, at 2.116, where he is arguing that Homer knew more versions of his story than he presented in the *Iliad*. Elsewhere, all poetry is paraphrased, even to the extent that his reference to the line of Pindar at 3.38 preserves every word of the quotation in the same order that Pindar had, but has lost meter by being put into indirect speech.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that Herodotus felt no compunction about separating the content of poetry from its meter, and therefore that meter was not a feature that, in any essential way, defined poetry – at least, not until a category of unmetred literature identified (lack of) meter as a distinguishing characteristic; again, for Herodotus, poetry became a unified category in reaction to prose.

Herodotus' interest in literary categorization is apparent, but much more complicated than Gorgias' – so complicated, in fact, that he had to be quite innovative in his terminology; the *POI*- compounds he uses, for instance, both those describing literary productions and others addressing productions in the physical world, are unattested before the *Histories* but allow him to distinguish categories of agency and product.<sup>45</sup> His

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<sup>43</sup> Ford (2002) 82, following Most. Perhaps some of the authority of the poets is related to this, as meter implied that preserving the exact words as the poet had them was significant, but this can only be speculation.

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Plato cites the same line, but retains meter.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Braun (1938) 280, 287; Ford (2002) 133-34, 139. The fact that several of these terms, along with non-literary compounds discussed below and other similar compounds that do not show up in Herodotus, do become relatively common in Athenian literature shortly after Herodotus suggests that they belonged to a tradition for which evidence is lost rather than that the linguistic innovations of the *Histories* had such a strong and immediate impact. Euripides in particular adopts several of the terms; it is worth asking, given the general complaints against his plain and lowly language, if this is an example of a poet borrowing from

only clear references to form have to do with oracles, inscriptions and prose, however, while his categories of poetry are consistently related to content;<sup>46</sup> nonetheless, he treats all sources with the same hand, granting no more authority to poetry than to any other available source. He clearly recognizes distinct types of poetry but is seemingly uninterested in, or perhaps unconscious of, an overarching category of poetry into which all those types fit – although he does group the creators of those forms into the broad category of ‘poet’.

It seems, then, that Herodotus had a clear conception of different genres of poetry, but little interest in grouping the different genres into a cohesive unit under the aegis of ‘metrical literature’. A sign of the relative newness of prose may be evident in Herodotus’ ease of categorizing it according to its form: the different kinds of song were prescribed to varying degrees, making their formal features seem almost intrinsic to them, and making them seem very different from each other. The newer prose literatures, however, were not yet bounded by any traditions. This freedom and flexibility, in fact, may be part of why Herodotus relies on many of the structuring features of the poetic

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a non-poetic tradition. *λογοποιός* appears several times in Plato; Euripides *Troïades* 853 and Xenophon *Hier.*1.29 use *τεκνοποιός*; Euripides has *μουσοποιός* at *Hipp.* 1428 and *Troïades* 1189; *σιτοποιός* is picked up by Euripides as well as Thucydides, Plato and Xenophon, among others; Euripides also adopts *παιδοποιός* at *Rhesus* 980 and *Phoin.* 338b, as well as in several other authors, with the verbal form being more common than the nominal; *ἀγαλματοποιός* appears in Plato at *Prot.* 311c and later in Aristotle. The *εποποι-* compounds are the most common.

<sup>46</sup> Context is another very plausible category by which Herodotus is grouping poetry, but he makes no explicit mention of it; the only times he comes close to discussing context is in the song passages.

tradition in shaping his *Histories*: the poetic tradition provided narrative frames that the prose tradition had not yet had time to create.<sup>47</sup>

Thus Herodotus, like Gorgias, is again blending what he sees as different traditions, but his do not break down so neatly into poetry versus prose; instead, Herodotus envisions a multiplicity of poetic traditions which are only beginning to be conceived of as a single group. His identification of a separate category unified by its lack of meter assists this coherence, allowing the various traditions of song to be grouped by their form against the equally broad, and still undifferentiated, categorization of prose. He does not subject his poetic sources to particular scrutiny or grant them special status; in fact, his few judgments of his sources are based on how well they accomplished their purpose.<sup>48</sup>

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Thucydides, perhaps unsurprisingly, has much more in common with Herodotus than with Gorgias. In fact, his position is almost antithetical to Gorgias'; while Gorgias was at pains to show that artless language was impossible, Thucydides is concerned with keeping his language free from ornaments that will delight his audience – ornaments he is never explicit about, but that are very likely quite similar to the ones Gorgias

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<sup>47</sup> The *Histories*' relationship with its poetic antecedents is rich and has been well studied; for its connections to tragedy, see especially Ostwald (1992). For its connections to epic, see e.g. Rosenmeyer (1982), Thomas (2002), and Nagy (1987), among many others.

<sup>48</sup> A connection between judgments and a work's intended purpose may also help explain his detailed description of his own work in his prologue.

appropriated so gleefully from the poetic tradition. Nor does he mark off his categories exactly as Herodotus does, however; where Herodotus seems to have grouped literature first by context and content and only secondarily by form, Thucydides finds a middle ground between the formal but facetious distinction of Gorgias and the thematic distinctions of Herodotus. He fixes on a third aspect, artfulness, and styles himself as taking his stand against that.

Thucydides is far less forthcoming about his sources than Herodotus is, poetic and prose alike; Homer is the only source he names, in fact, although he refers to generic *ποιηταί* numerous times and to *λογογγραφοί* once.<sup>49</sup> The creation of the *ποιητής* is only once called a *ποίησις*, and *ποίησις* is elsewhere used of building (3.2.2); as in Herodotus, the term for the maker seems to have become tied to literary production before that of the product. The *ποιητής* in Thucydides is very often a mouthpiece for general knowledge, too, as he was in Herodotus, although little attention is paid in either author to the form in which that knowledge was disseminated.

At 1.5.2, for instance, the facts Thucydides has laid out – that pirates were not always disparaged – are clear (*δήλουσι*) because of a combination of analogous contemporary evidence and the questions asked by the ancient poets (*οἱ παλαιοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν*). 1.11.2, similarly, explains how the Trojan expedition was weaker than both its *φήμη* and the *λόγος* told by the poets. Several other places do reference particular details presumably gleaned from a general body of unattributed poetry: 1.13.5 has the wealth of

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<sup>49</sup> Hesiod *ὁ ποιητής* is named at 3.96, but only in the context of identifying a place as the alleged location of his death. The term *αοιδός* appears twice, both times in quotations of Homer at 3.104, never in Thucydides' own language.

Corinth made clear (*δεδήλωται*) by the ancient poets, who named it wealthy (*ἀφνειὸν γὰρ ἐπωνόμασαν*); 2.29.3 has the nightingale named the Daulian bird by many of the poets (*πολλοῖς δὲ καὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ἀηδόνοσ μνήμη Δαυλιὰς ἢ ὄρνις ἐπωνόμασται*); and in 6.2.1 Thucydides confesses that he can neither name the race nor the origin of the Cyclopes or the Lastrygonians, but asks the reader to let suffice what is said by the poets and what each man knows about these races (*ὡς ποιηταῖς τε εἴρηται καὶ ὡς ἕκαστος πηγινώσκει περὶ αὐτῶν*).

In all these cases, Thucydides has the *ποιηταί* standing in as almost parallel to *τὰ λεγομένα*, the received tradition, perhaps beyond the scope of verification because of its age (as he observes at one point), but generally assumed to be more or less true. The grammatical constructions of these passages reinforce this: almost all of them make use of impersonal verbs with a dative of agent – a normal construction, but one that emphasizes the absence of real accountability; what the poets hand down, these passages imply, is closer to general wisdom than specific knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

The situation is, however, slightly different when Thucydides deals with Homer. Homer, unlike his unnamed counterparts, is regularly the active subject of indicative verbs, and is interrogated in a way that the general *ποιηταί* are not: at 1.3.3, Homer is presented as the best proof (*τεκμηριοῖ δὲ μάλιστα Ὅμηρος*) of the fact that the Greeks only recently identified themselves as a unified group, since even long after the Trojan War he never named them as a whole (*ἠνόμασεν* again). At 1.9.4, too, Homer has made clear (*δεδήλωκεν*) that Agamemnon's contingent was the strongest – although here

<sup>50</sup> See also the Marchant and Morris commentaries *ad loc.* On the significance of the use of the passive voice for making claims, especially with regard to the archaeology, see Crane (1996) 32ff.

Thucydides expresses some doubts, qualifying his statement: if Homer is enough for anyone to prove this positively (*εἴ τῳ ἱκανὸς τεκμηριῶσαι*).<sup>51</sup>

A slightly longer passage at 3.104 gives more information: to demonstrate that Delos was once the site of a major Ionian festival, Thucydides again turns to Homer. This passage contains a number of marked terms, and so deserves here quotation in full:

*δηλοῖ δὲ μάλιστα Ὅμηρος ὅτι τοιαῦτα ἦν ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσι τοῖσδε, ἃ ἐστὶν ἐκ προοιμίου Ἀπόλλωνος: [citation]. ὅτι δὲ καὶ μουσικῆς ἀγῶν ἦν καὶ ἀγωνιούμενοι ἐφοίτων ἐν τοῖσδε αὖ δηλοῖ, ἃ ἐστὶν ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ προοιμίου· τὸν γὰρ Δηλιακὸν χορὸν τῶν γυναικῶν ὑμνήσας ἐτελεύτα τοῦ ἐπαίνου ἐς τάδε τὰ ἔπη, ἐν οἷς καὶ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπεμνήσθη: [citation]. τοσαῦτα μὲν Ὅμηρος ἐτεκμηρίωσεν ὅτι ἦν καὶ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλη ξύνοδος καὶ ἐορτὴ ἐν τῇ Δήλῳ.*

(Homer particularly has made these things clear in these *ἔπη*, which come from the *προοίμιον* of Apollo: [citation]. That there was also a musical contest and that the Ionians went to them as contenders is again clear from these lines, which are from the same *προοίμιον*, for having hymned the chorus of Delian women he finished up his *ἐπαῖνος* in these *ἔπη*, in which he even remembered himself: [citation]. Homer has provided this evidence that there was in ancient times too a great assembly and festival in Delos, 3.104.4-6.)

All of this vocabulary of poetics corresponds perfectly with our idea of Homer's activities, so it is perhaps not surprising to find that this passage receives little attention in the scholarship.<sup>52</sup> However, it is worth reflecting on the vocabulary here in order to compare the appearances of these terms elsewhere in the text of Thucydides. *προοίμιον* is an easy starting point, as this is the only passage in the text that uses it; it seems to refer to the hymn as a whole, and there is an assumption behind it of a genre more or less well

<sup>51</sup> The Marchant and Morris commentaries both suggest that Thucydides' reservations apply only to specific details, not to the general idea. In other words, Homer is an essential source as he is likely the only source available to Thucydides, but Thucydides is aware that he must be used with care.

<sup>52</sup> Allison (1997) 190, for instance, simply states that *ἐπιμνήσεσθαι* clearly has to do with words, and most scholars spend little or no time on this passage.



defined. The other terms, fortunately, prove more fruitful. The passage ends by identifying Homer's activity as hyming and naming Homer's work an *ἐπαίνος*, which he brings to a close in more *ἔπη* – which even include a remembrance of himself.<sup>53</sup>

The impact of *ἔπος* here seems fairly clear: it seems to refer to the individual lines of verse – what we mean, for instance, when we say someone has quoted a line of verse: a small, usually metrical excerpt of a longer whole. Thus Thucydides introduces both of his quotations with the term, signaling that he is about to provide some lines of Homer. The other uses of the term, though, provide more insight into its significance. Instances of *ἔπος* are relatively rare in the *Peloponnesian Wars*; it appears only seven times in the work, three of which attach to Homer, with two of those coming from this passage. Nonetheless, from the several instances, we can begin to conjecture about the nuance of the term in Thucydides.

One instance of the word that has no connection with Homer still suggests a very similar meaning: it involves an ancient line of verse, cited at 2.54.2.<sup>54</sup> In the midst of the plague, Thucydides tells us, some Athenians called to mind an *ἔπος* which the elders said had been sung long ago (*ἀνεμνήσθησαν καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους, φάσκοντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι πάλαι ᾄδεσθαι*).<sup>55</sup> Thucydides then tells us that the line itself, given in hexameter, apparently gave rise to a dispute about whether it was actually plague (*λοιμός*) rather than famine (*λιμός*) that was named in the verse (*ἀνομάσθαι ἐν τῷ ἔπει*). This passage, then, aligns quite nicely with the usage above, where *ἔπος* means a line of

<sup>53</sup> The significance of hymns and hymning will be taken up in greater detail below.

<sup>54</sup> The source of this quotation is unknown, but Fontenrose (1981) 246 does consider it an oracle.

<sup>55</sup> The detail that the line was sung, *ᾄδεσθαι*, explains the manipulation the *ἔπος* here; it is separated off from ordinary language.

metrical verse, although it is less certain whether this line belongs to a longer whole or is complete on its own.

The remaining two instances of the term complicate the matter significantly.

Pericles uses the word at 2.41.4, pointing out that the marvels of Athens are so remarkable that they have no need of someone like Homer to praise them, or anyone else who might give delight in the immediate moment with his *ἔπος*, as the truth will dispel any uncertainty about the actual facts (*οὐδὲν προσδεόμενοι οὔτε Ὀμηροῦ οὔτε ὅστις ἔπεσι μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα τέρψει, τῶν δ' ἔργων τὴν ὑπόνοιαν ἢ ἀλήθεια βλάψει*). Marchant, in his commentary, suggests that we supply *ποιητής* to that *ὅστις*; it is a simple enough solution, and plausible, and has been accepted by others.<sup>56</sup> The contrast, however, seems broader than limiting that *ὅστις* to a *ποιητής* would suggest: it is not simply that poetic praise is superfluous for Athens, but actually that *λόγος* in itself falls short of the great *ἔργα* of the city.<sup>57</sup> Any *λόγος* of praise would be insufficient, as Pericles makes clear at several places in his speech.<sup>58</sup> The *ὅστις* here, then, should be granted its full breadth and not limited to a *ποιητής*, as Thucydides does not see embellished language as restricted to poets at all. This usage of *ἔπος*, then, takes a broader meaning of the term, to mean not metrical verses but decorated words.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> e.g. Ford (2002) 72, although he changes his translation at 130 to ‘eulogist’ rather than ‘poet’.

<sup>57</sup> The *λόγος-ἔργον* distinction in Thucydides in general, and in this passage in particular, is familiar from a number of scholars; see e.g. Hunter (1973) 178, who points to de Romilly *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> e.g. at the opening of the speech, 1.35.

<sup>59</sup> Of course, this is a perfectly acceptable usage, found frequently in Homer and Herodotus as well, and there is no reason that Thucydides could not use the specific, metrical meaning in one place and the more general meaning in another – as indeed Herodotus does as well.

The final instance of the term is at 3.67.6. The Thebans have been making their appeal to the Spartans regarding the fate of the Plataeans. At the close of their speech, they encourage the Spartans to do what is just, and not be swayed by words:

*μη τοῖς τᾶνδε λόγοις περιωσθῆμεν ἐν ὑμῖν, ποιήσατε δὲ τοῖς Ἑλλησι παράδειγμα οὐ λόγων τούτων ἀγῶνας προθήσοντες ἀλλ' ἔργων, ὧν ἀγαθῶν μὲν ὄντων βραχεῖα ἢ ἀπαγγελία ἀρκεῖ, ἀμαρτανομένων δὲ λόγοι ἔπεσι κοσμηθέντες προκαλύμματα γίνονται.*

(Do not let us lose our place in your favor, but make for the Hellenes an example, setting up contests not of words but of actions; brief reports are sufficient for noble actions, but descriptions of miscarried actions decorated with ἔπεσι become obscure.)

In this instance, ἔπος almost certainly does not refer to verse of any kind, but rather to decorative, perhaps even deceptive, language. Marchant's commentary notes that ἔπεσι here should be understood as 'fine phrases', and offers the synonym ῥήματα. Smith, too, translates it as 'speeches adorned with fine sentiments'.<sup>60</sup> Much of this work is done by the participle κοσμηθέντες, 'decorated', but it is clear that the noun itself allows for the broader significance.<sup>61</sup>

Two passages from other authors offer useful comparanda. Euripides' *Medea*, first produced in 431 – the year of Pericles' oration in Thucydides – has the chorus respond to Jason's self-justification that he has decorated his words well, but is nonetheless acting unjustly: 'Ἰᾶσον, εὖ μὲν τούσδ' ἐκόσμησας λόγους· ὅμως δ' ἔμοιγε, κεί παρὰ γνώμη ἐρῶ, δοκεῖς προδοῦς σὴν ἄλοχον οὐ δίκαια δρᾶν (576-8). The

<sup>60</sup> Smith (1894) *ad loc.*

<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere, to κοσμεῖν language is the work of poets: at 1.10.3, for example, Homer ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμήσαι the story of Agamemnon's army, exaggerating its size because of being a poet. At 1.21.1, similarly, Thucydides asserts that anyone would do well to trust the evidence he has brought to bear rather than what the poets hymn, since they ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες.

implication is that Jason has distorted reality by embellishing his words. Socrates, at *Apology* 17c, makes a similar claim regarding his opponents: unlike them, Socrates will speak only the truth, although his *λόγους* will not be *ρήμασί τε καὶ ὀνόμασιν οὐδὲ κεκοσμημένους* – “finely tricked out with words and phrases”, as Fowler’s translation has it.

In the Thucydides passage, then, as in the lines from Euripides and Plato, the neutral character of *λόγος* can be changed by embellishment with *ρήμασι* or *ἔπεσι*. There are several ways to make this move, of which meter is perhaps the most obvious, but the distinction has more to do with general artifice than with meter in particular; an *ἔπος* is a crafted *λόγος*. This reads back easily onto the example at 2.41, too, so that the *ὄστις* who would momentarily delight his audience does it not necessarily with verse, but with fine sentiments or phrases – with language more artful than casual and straightforward speech, whatever the metrical situation. Moreover, there is no inherent contradiction in applying this conception to the Homeric or oracular examples either; meter is certainly part of their decoration, but we know well that Homeric performances involved other details of spectacle as well, and the oracular passage is not just in hexameters but specifically said to have been sung or chanted, marking it as equally subject to a special or particular kind of delivery. Thus *ἔπος* is the specialized, marked term against the much more common and neutral *λόγος*, setting up a distinction not between verse and prose, but between artful language and plain words.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Thus more or less Smith (1894), whose commentary on 3.104 says that Thucydides uses *τὰ ἔπη* only of verses or poetic expressions which he implies may or may not be in meter. Several other passages provide further evidence of the neutrality of *λόγος*. At 3.83.3, for instance, in the discussion of the stasis in

Another passage with slightly different vocabulary lends credence to the idea that Thucydides thought of *λόγος* as something whose essence could be changed – generally for the worse – by manipulation. Athenagoras, attempting to calm the Syracusans down after Hermocrates has warned them of impending war with Athens, denounces Hermocrates and others like him as, essentially, rumor-mongers, warning that they fabricate stories that reflect neither current nor future reality (*οὔτε ὄντα οὔτε ἄν γενόμενα λογοποιοῦσιν*, 6.38.1).<sup>63</sup> The *λογοποιέω* here is a rare instance in Thucydides of a *POI*- compound referring to language, and, as discussed above,<sup>64</sup> such compounds are, even in the late fifth century, new and uncommon enough that their precise resonance can be difficult to determine.

The passage that offers the best comparandum is 1.21.1, where he compares the reliability of his information to that of the information one might find in poets and logographers:

*ἐκ δὲ τῶν εἰρημένων τεκμηρίων ὅμως τοιαῦτα ἄν τις νομίζων μάλιστα ἅ διήλθον οὐχ ἁμαρτάνοι, καὶ οὔτε ὡς ποιηταὶ ὑμνήκασι περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες μᾶλλον πιστεύων, οὔτε ὡς λογογράφοι ξυνέθεσαν ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῇ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον, ὄντα ἀνεξέλεγκτα καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὑπὸ χρόνου αὐτῶν ἀπίστως ἐπὶ τὸ μυθῶδες*

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Corcyra, Thucydides describes the fear of the common men lest they come off the worse in their arguments, and become the victims of plots because of the versatility of their enemies (*μηὲς λόγοις τε ἥσσοις ὡς καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πολυτρόπου αὐτῶν τῆς γνώμης φθάσασι προεπιβουλευόμενοι*). As Marchant notes in his commentary, *πολύτροπος* here recalls Odysseus, suggesting that the concern is based on the enemies' command of persuasive language against the simplicity of the *φασλότεροι*.

<sup>63</sup> It cannot have escaped his, or his audiences', attention that this phrase is incredibly alliterative, although there is little notice taken in the commentaries. Marchant has nothing, and Smith only expands it to a more standard and clear expression, *ἃ οὔτε ἔστιν οὔτε ἄν γένοιτο*, which only serves to emphasize the strangeness of the Thucydidean phrasing. The scholiast, similarly, simply explains the second part of the phrase as *οὐχ οἷά τε γενέσθαι* (Hude (1973) 347). Perhaps the ornamentality of it can be explained by the fact that it appears in a speech of Athenagoras, rather than in Thucydides' own voice.

<sup>64</sup> With regard to Herodotus.

*ἐκνευκῆκότα, ἠύρῃσθαι δὲ ἡγησάμενος ἐκ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων  
σημείων ὡς παλαιὰ εἶναι ἀποχρώντως.*

(From the evidence expounded one would not be far off the mark believing the sorts of things I have explained, rather than trusting in how the poets have hymned about these things, embellishing them to be greater than they were, or how the logographers have put them together to be more pleasing to the audience than truthful, since their subject matter cannot be investigated and since most of it, because of the passage of time, has won its way into legend; but guiding himself from these clearest proofs he will discover enough about how things were in ancient times.)

Thucydides distinguishes his work from the work of poets and logographers not by its style or methodology, but by how its goals can be expected to shape it: poets are interested in praising their subjects, which often leads to the need to exaggerate, and logographers are interested in catching and keeping the audience's ear, which calls for a different kind of embellishment.<sup>65</sup> Thucydides, on the other hand, aims to provide a reasonable approximation, in words, of events as they actually were, with as little bias as possible.<sup>66</sup> What he has done, then, is draw a line between his own work and any work of embellished *λόγος*, regardless of its form: his is reliable, theirs is not, and the different forms that their works take is incidental to this more important distinction.

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<sup>65</sup> See also Allison (1997) 246, who observes that Thucydides' emphasis on the contrast of reliability rather than methodology has been often overlooked. She also notes that he does not set himself apart on stylistic grounds such as choice of words or syntax, a point I agree with, although I would nuance it a bit: he does not differentiate based on style except insofar as aspects of style such as simile, metaphor and meter further the goals of poet and logographer respectively. It should also be noted that this means of distinction prefigures Aristotle's attempt to categorize by means of causes – of which the final cause, its goal, was most important. Meijering (1987) 54 makes a similar observation about Thucydides' conflation of poets and logographers: with respect to their neglect of the truth and desire to entertain, "the logographers did not essentially differ from the poets." He adds that Thucydides "formulates the objective approach to contrast it with primitive history and poetry."

<sup>66</sup> On Thucydides' idea of language as representation of events, see Allison (1997), especially 247. Fornara (1988) 100 notes that Thucydides 1.22.3 seems to be aware of the problem of source bias, although he does not explicitly declare himself free of it.

The significance of the nominal compound at first seems similar to that found in Herodotus, where the *λογοποιός* was simply a producer of literature whose work was distinguished by not being metered. The verbal form, however, and a comparison with a similar compound, complicate the matter. The only other *POI-* compound in the work is the *σιτοποιός*; he turns grain into bread, forcing a significant change on the original material.<sup>67</sup> While pushing too strong an analogy would be unwise with so little evidence, it is possible that, with the unusual compound, Thucydides meant to suggest that these *λογοποιοί* and the ones who *λογοποιούσιν* were doing something similar to what bakers do: changing the object of their activity of making into something different. Starting with a *λόγος* that reflects things as they are or will be, these men altered the narrative so that it did not reflect any present or future reality; in short, they embellished their *λόγος* into something more akin to an *ἔπος*.

It is important to note, however, that there are several ways of embellishing a *λόγος* into an *ἔπος*; meter, as mentioned above, is the most obvious method, for instance, but hardly the only one. The problem, however, is not necessarily the embellishment itself, but its context.<sup>68</sup> Thucydides several times questions the advisability of accepting Homer's details as reflecting the reality of a given event or situation, for instance, but nowhere accuses him of willful deception or even of doing anything a poet should not do.<sup>69</sup> Exaggeration, he seems to suggest, is proper to poetry, while absolute adherence to

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<sup>67</sup> The term occurs three times: 2.78, 6.22, 6.44.

<sup>68</sup> Compare to the above, where the intended impact of the work determined its shape; context remains an essential piece of literary categorization for Thucydides.

<sup>69</sup> See above: Thucydides may have rejected particular details, but not poetry as a whole as a valid source; also see Ford (2002) 129.

investigated reality is not required of it; one may thus find some worth in it as a source of evidence, but must be a careful judge.<sup>70</sup>

This transformation is not automatically negative, however. Several statements suggest disdain for the work of poets and logographers, especially in respect to the ‘shallow’ pleasure they provide, but 1.21, for instance, does not carry any strongly negative judgment; the main problem with the works of the poets and logographers there is that their information cannot be tested because of the passage of time. The linguistic tricks they use to accomplish their goals are appropriate for their particular productions, but those same tricks become dangerous in the wrong context. That is precisely the problem that the Thebans have in the speech cited above: the Plataeans might use embellished language at a time when it is not appropriate, when the Spartans are expecting, rather, artless truth, and thus their *ἔπεα* will be understood as *λόγοι*.<sup>71</sup>

This is similar to what is at stake in what may be Thucydides’ most famous line, 1.22.4, where he declares his work to be a *κτηῖμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται* – a possession for the ages rather than a contest piece aimed at the immediate audience. Unlike the works of the poets and logographers whose productions cross too far into the world of *τὸ μυθῶδες*, Thucydides explicitly declares that his own work will consist of *τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες*, and claims that, while that may make it the less delightful (*ἀτερπέστερον*),<sup>72</sup> it will also make it useful.<sup>73</sup> Thucydides’ own text

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<sup>70</sup> Of course, this is tempered by the fact that, for ancient history at least, the poets were likely his only sources.

<sup>71</sup> One proper context for embellished *λόγοι*, of course, is a public festival, precisely what Thucydides says his own work will not be suited to.

<sup>72</sup> See Allison (1997) 131ff on Thucydides’ use of the comparative.

<sup>73</sup> On what he might mean by ‘useful,’ see Fornara (1988) 106.



will be unembellished, as is proper, in his estimation, for a story that is supposed to grant access to the truth of the situation it purports to report.<sup>74</sup>

Thucydides' creation of speeches throughout his history presents an interesting problem: he himself admits that he has crafted them to reflect what the occasion demanded (1.22.1), and of course they show a great deal of the very artifices that he is elsewhere at pains to denounce. Several speakers within the work, however, echo Thucydides' own disdain for spectacular language. Thus Cleon, for instance, in his speech against the reconsideration of the decision regarding the Mitylenians (3.36ff, especially 3.38.4-7), chastises the Athenians again and again for the pleasure they take in clever language, finally calling them spectators of words and auditors of action (*οἵτινες εἰώθατε θεαταὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων γίνεσθαι, ἀκροαταὶ δὲ τῶν ἔργων*, 3.38.4) and even slaves of extraordinary language (*δοῦλοι ὄντες τῶν αἰεὶ ἀτόπων*, 3.38.5). Cleon thus echoes Thucydides' own concerns about decorated language.<sup>75</sup>

The implied embellishment of *λόγος* that, I suggest, is inherent in *ἔπος* also offers a model for understanding Thucydides' regular pairing of poetry and general knowledge discussed above. It is not surprising, given the avoidance of supernatural powers in the text, that Thucydides does not seem to attribute any special knowledge, or special access

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<sup>74</sup> It is worth noting, though perhaps not surprising, that he refers to the speeches he provides – with all the caveats he gives as to their accuracy – as *λόγοι* at 1.22.1. Thucydides' two uses of *μυθῶδης* here are the earliest extant appearances of the word, and the term does not become popular after him for several centuries. It is difficult, therefore, to understand exactly what claim he is making here. The usage in the previous chapter suggests the key features of antiquity and unverifiability, but this does not fit well with the usage at 1.22.4, where it seems to refer to digressive narratives like those for which Herodotus is so famous; see Gomme (1954) 117.

<sup>75</sup> Crane (1996) 68 observes that, while Thucydides does try to capture the character of the speakers in his speeches, he “makes no attempt to conceal his personal style or to mimic, in a departure from this style, any of the peculiarities of the various speakers.” This may reflect his desire to keep his language as clean and free from ornament as possible.

to knowledge, to the poets. In fact, he envisions their productions almost as conveniently memorizable and easily accessible repositories of general human wisdom and stories, likely to have exaggerated common knowledge to a greater or lesser degree, but not otherwise particularly remarkable. Poetry is, in other words, an embellished version of what most people are likely to know, as *ἔπος* is an embellished *λόγος* – and moreover one that is distinguished more by this detail than by the particular method its embellishment takes.

Thucydides' use of language that will, after him, become specifically tied to song is similarly broad in its scope. He refers to people hymning three times (1.21, 2.42, 3.104), in rather different contexts. The passage at 1.21 (already discussed above, p.32) has the poets hymning (*ὕμνηκασι*) about their subjects, although they are exaggerating them beyond the realm of the believable (*ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες μᾶλλον πιστεύων*). Since the reliability of their versions are being compared, unfavorably, to Thucydides' own, we can assume that there is at least some overlap in subject matter, and from the participle *κοσμοῦντες* we know that the poets are engaged in organizing or ordering their language in some way.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, the verb *ὕμνεῖν* is well attested in archaic Greek, and is particularly common in opening formulae for the *Homeric Hymns*; in those instances, it is clearly connected not only with song but specifically with praises of the gods.<sup>77</sup> However, the word actually shows a widening, rather than contracting, of meaning during the Classical period: from being tied to songs sung in praise of gods, it becomes, by the later fifth

<sup>76</sup> See above on *κοσμέω* in Thucydides.

<sup>77</sup> e.g. Hesiod *Theog.* 33, Stesichorus *fr.*35, *hH Hermes* 1, among many others.

century, an acceptable synonym for a song on almost any subject, and ultimately to praise in any form, metrical or not.<sup>78</sup> This newer, broader significance is likely the nuance of the verb here: since Thucydides is comparing the poets' work to his own, he is likely referring to stories sung about the famous deeds of men rather than gods. Moreover, the use of *ὑμνεῖν* at 3.104 is explicitly a song of praise directed to mortals, as the poet finishes his praise by hymning the Delian chorus of women (*τὸν γὰρ Δηλιακὸν χορὸν τῶν γυναικῶν ὑμνήσας ἐτελεύτα τοῦ ἐπαίνου*).

Both of these uses, however, still refer to musical and poetic productions, regardless of their object. The third and final use of the term in Thucydides takes the even broader, although not unprecedented, meaning of any kind of speech of praise. At 2.42.2, Pericles says that he has praised the city for those things that the excellence of the dead heroes actually accomplished (*ἅ γὰρ τὴν πόλιν ὑμνησα, αἱ τῶνδε καὶ τῶν τοιῶνδε ἀρεταὶ ἐκόσμησαν*).<sup>79</sup> Here Thucydides avails himself of the full breadth of the term; he has allowed us to read what is, in effect, a *ῥυμος* in presenting Pericles' funeral oration. That Thucydides uses the term in its older sense of 'praise song' as well as its more recent sense of 'praise speech' gives us some insight into his method of categorizing, in this instance at least: a hymn is content – praise – rather than form.

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<sup>78</sup> e.g. Euripides *Troïades* has Hecuba observing that their misfortunes have made them hymned in songs at 1244; Xenophon *Hiero* has all men hymning Hiero; at Xenophon *Mem.* 2.1.33 Virtue promises that the good will be hymned forever and not forgotten; again, examples of hymns sung of mortals are numerous in this period. See also Marchant commentary on Thucydides 2.42, where he says the word was originally of poetic praise, then of a panegyric in praise – although he points to Plato, a rather later than necessary source for making this point. Harvey (1955) remains the authority on generic classification of archaic poetry.

<sup>79</sup> Again contrasting words and action, as so often in Thucydides; the use of *κοσμέω* here, regularly used of ordering speech, may serve to highlight the parallel: Pericles has ordered his speech, but the excellences of the dead ordered the city with their actions.

In fact, while literary categorization in Thucydides is admittedly less explicit than in Gorgias or Herodotus, when he does draw lines they are consistently divorced from form.<sup>80</sup> Both ἔπος and the various cognates of ὕμνος, for instance, are applied to both metrical and non-metrical language, suggesting that the grouping has been made for a different reason. For ὕμνος, as we have seen, it seems to be based on content, while the ἔπος describes neither content nor form but something else again, the result of τεχνή.

Thus Thucydides draws one boundary where Herodotus did, and distinguishes literary categories based on content: for instance, a ὕμνος of any form, metered or not, would be recognizable by its work of praising. The more significant distinction, however, is more complicated. He grants a time and place for crafted language, such as the festivals or (albeit somewhat dismissively) the agons, but implies that it is always more removed from reality, so that its picture of reality is distorted. The ways of manipulating language are manifold, including both the meter of poetry and the rhetorical devices of oratory. Regardless of the method, the result is the same: the literary production's connection with reality has been compromised, and this, for Thucydides, is a category that trumps any other.

The two formal categories of prose and poetry, then, for Thucydides, fail to capture the breadth of possibility for literary productions. That is, while meter might have marked off a recognizable set of literary productions, it was not different enough from the linguistic ornaments of the orators to make the distinction particularly meaningful. He needs, for his own work, a third category of language, one free of the beguiling

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<sup>80</sup> Thucydides is even less interested in meter than Herodotus, and never identifies meter for poetry or inscriptions.

ornaments of both poets and prose authors, and one which will, by its very artlessness, grant more transparent access to the truth. Finally, he sees form as in the service of function with regard to the categorization of literary productions.

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We see in these three authors multiple ways of categorizing literature, as well as multiple reasons for doing so. While form is consistently put forward, however, it is finally a different set of related categories, articulated in several ways, that proves more satisfying: content, context, and purpose. Thus Herodotus turns to form as a convenient way to group Hecataeus and Aesop, but rarely presents the varieties of poetic form as significantly more similar to each other than to prose – that is, dithyramb is as different from epic as both are from prose. However, the undifferentiated set of prose, a set marked off only by its form, offers Herodotus a model for another method of categorizing based on form, which he appeals to intermittently. Herodotus' first inclination, then, is to rely on the essentially contextual distinctions that were inherent to the poetic tradition but temper them with new possibilities suggested by the more recent prose tradition, just as he combined poetic and prose traditions in structuring his work.

A reliance on similar methods of literary categorization is also apparent in Thucydides. He expresses concern in a number of places over the importance of restricting particular forms of linguistic artfulness to appropriate contexts. Poets are criticized for being unreliable, for instance, but not for being artful, since manipulated

language was proper to them and to their contests. The problem, he says, is that artfulness can be used where it is not expected or not suited, creating a disconnect between speaker intentions and audience expectations – a disconnect that often results in deceit, as artfulness can compromise the transparent transfer of truth.

Gorgias is focused rather in another direction, as he is interested in showing the arbitrary and basically meaningless nature of literary categories. He acknowledges poetry as a specific kind of formally-marked language, but gives it no unique status: what power it has is primarily due not to its meter but to its essential component, language. Gorgias also, unusually, implies a separation of that language component of poetry from its musical components; this will be seen increasingly commonly, but his is one of the earliest such gestures.<sup>81</sup>

In contrast, both Herodotus and Thucydides consistently assume that music is always implicated in poetry to a greater or lesser degree. We saw, however, that Herodotus regularly used one family of words when he wanted to emphasize the musico-performative aspect of music and another when he wanted to emphasize its language content. This distinction is not preserved in later authors, although the impulse is reflected in subsequent separations of poetry from music.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, then, while these authors are beginning to experiment with formal distinctions in response to the analogous set of non-metrical productions, they are by and large still engaged in the archaic tradition of distinguishing and judging literary

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<sup>81</sup> *pace* Else (1963), who sees Aristotle as the first to make such a distinction.

<sup>82</sup> Already suggested in Gorgias, as we said, but implied several times in Plato and all but explicitly examined in Aristotle, as we will see in the relevant sections below.

productions on the basis of content, context, and function. Moreover, even as poetry becomes more of a unified concept across genres, prose begins to be broken down into categories of its own; thus Herodotus sees no reason to set Aesop and Hecataeus apart from each other, but Thucydides is resistant to being classed with authors who are, to his mind, inferior, simply on the basis of their shared lack of meter. Gorgias is a rather different case, but by the fact that he was playing with his audience's expectations, we can hypothesize that he would have found categories of content, context and function familiar and unproblematic.

## Chapter Two: Defining Poetry in the Fourth Century:

### Isocrates and Plato

The previous chapter examined the ways that three fifth century authors categorized poetry. The current chapter extends the discussion into the fourth century with the same methodology and goals. Although there is a larger body of extant prose literature from this period, there is, paradoxically, less attention given in most authors to questions of literary categorization; for the most part, for instance, the Attic orators express little explicit interest in comparing or contrasting their works with those of their predecessors or contemporaries, but instead seem to assume a defined niche into which their productions will fit.<sup>83</sup> The work of this chapter supports the idea proposed by a number of scholars that literary categories, which had been quite flexible in the previous periods, began to be more narrowly marked off from each other in the fourth century.<sup>84</sup>

The change was not, however, quick or straightforward, as the works under investigation here make clear. While Too is correct in noting that most fifth and fourth century authors did not typically formalize literature into “systems of genres,” she overstates the case by suggesting that they even played down the distinction between poetry and prose.<sup>85</sup> Instead, what we find is not an elision of distinction, but the creation

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<sup>83</sup> Their uncomplicated attitude may be part of why it is so easy for us now to think of the fourth century as a period primarily of prose. On this, see for instance Harriot (1969) 97f, Poulakos (1987) 317, Goldhill (2002) 3-4, Graff (2005) 304,

<sup>84</sup> See e.g. Halliwell (1997), Schiappa (1999), Ford (2002).

<sup>85</sup> Too (1995) 32.



of one: what was to Herodotus a vague and unspecific difference seems, to Isocrates, more natural, if also not inflexible.

One of the places where development is clearest is in linguistic innovations; while fourth century authors continue to use many of the same terms as earlier authors, there are three significant changes. One is that a whole category of terms, those cognate with *ἀοιδός* and designating especially performative song, largely fall out of use with minor exceptions. There is, however, expansion in a new direction: while the *POI-* compounds that were so creatively used in the fifth century continue to be employed, we also find in this period the first consistent uses of the adjective *ποιητικός* and its adverbial relative clearly building on the established literary meanings so prevalent in the family of words. Moreover, two adverbs, *καταλογάδην* and *χύδην*, appear for the first time in this period in Isocrates and Plato. These changes suggest dissatisfaction with the available vocabulary for describing literature, and thus continue the semantic negotiations begun in the previous century; if the terminology were to hand, they would not have needed to appeal to new words.

Isocrates is unique among the orators for his persistent interest not only in literary categories in general, but specifically in the category of poetry, and his considerations of the subject show more subtlety of thinking than tradition tends to credit him with. In Plato, on the other hand, we see a desire to distinguish his own projects from those of others, but a great instability in the ways he attempted to do it. Ultimately, the two authors complement each other in interesting ways, and together they provide us with a picture of the ways that poetry was being considered by the thinkers of the age.

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Isocrates stands with Plato as a representative of some of the most important developments of his age in philosophy and rhetoric, although their ideals were often in conflict.<sup>86</sup> One of the most obvious differences between the philosophies of the two men is their attitude towards *μουσική* in general, and one key piece of it – poetry – in particular.<sup>87</sup> While Plato competed with the poets and their productions in many different ways on many different occasions, Isocrates generally viewed them as innocuous, and moreover as an integral piece in achieving his goals.<sup>88</sup>

Isocrates shows more consistency in his literary categorization than the fifth century authors, and a greater reliance on a simple dichotomy of two essential types of literary performance, one metrical and one not. It will become clear, however, that the dichotomy is still not entirely sufficient, and, as we saw in the previous chapter, other means of categorizing and distinguishing types of literary productions remain quite active, particularly distinctions based on content and function. With the exception of the *Evagoras*, where he reframes his views somewhat in the interest of his larger rhetorical purpose, Isocrates will be seen to be relatively clear and straightforward in his thinking about the poetic.

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<sup>86</sup> On Isocrates' philosophical views, see e.g. Halliwell (1997), Rummel (1979) and Clark (1996).

<sup>87</sup> On Isocrates' relationship with *μουσική*, see e.g. Schiappa (1992) and (1999), J. Poulakos (1993), Halliwell (1997), and Haskins (2004). For Isocrates' own statement on the relationship of *μουσική* to his larger vision, see especially *Ant.* 181-2 and 266-7.

<sup>88</sup> See especially Haskins (2004).

We begin, then, with a look at whom Isocrates identifies as poets. As in the authors studied in the previous chapter, poets – *ποιηταί* – often line up with creators of metrical song. At *To Nicocles* 43-4, for instance, he names Hesiod, Phocylides and Theognis as *ποιηταί* whose maxims provide the best counsels for living well. At *Helen* 64, too, he identifies Stesichoros as a *ποιητής*, apparently for what we now know as his *Palinode* to Helen. Passages such as these reinforce our assumption of the essential similarity between the ancient *ποιητής* and our modern idea of poet: an organizer of metrical language, a creator of (as Auden had it) memorable speech.<sup>89</sup> Several other passages, however, serve to muddy the waters and nuance the distinction.

A passage of the *Antidosis* provides a useful starting point for the discussion of the various complications of the idea of the poetic in Isocrates:

*Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ἐκεῖνο δεῖ μαθεῖν ὑμᾶς, ὅτι τρόποι τῶν λόγων εἰσὶν οὐκ ἐλάττους ἢ τῶν μετὰ μέτρου ποιημάτων. οἱ μὲν γὰρ τὰ γένη τὰ τῶν ἡμιθέων ἀναζητοῦντες τὸν βίον τὸν αὐτῶν κατέτριψαν, οἱ δὲ περὶ τοὺς ποιητὰς ἐφιλοσόφησαν, ἕτεροι δὲ τὰς πράξεις τὰς ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις συναγαγεῖν ἐβουλήθησαν, ἄλλοι δὲ τινες περὶ τὰς ἐρωτήσεις καὶ τὰς ἀποκρίσεις γεγόνασιν, οὓς αντιλογικοὺς καλοῦσιν. εἴη δ' ἂν οὐ μικρὸν εἶργον, εἰ πάσας τις τὰς ιδέας τὰς τῶν λόγων ἐξαριθμεῖν ἐπιχειρήσειεν ἧς δ' οὖν ἐμοὶ προσήκει, ταύτης μνησθεὶς ἐάσω τὰς ἄλλας.*

(First of all, you should know that the types of *λόγος* are no fewer than the types of things made up with meter. For some men have given over their lives to researching the genealogies of the demigods, while others have philosophized about the *ποιηταί*, and others still have desired to put together the events of wars, and some, who are called the disputatious, concern themselves with questionings and responses. But it would be no small task if one should try to count out all the types of *λόγος*, so I will

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<sup>89</sup> As he defined it in the beginning of the introduction to his anthology of poetry, *The Poet's Tongue*, which originally appeared in 1935.

concern myself here only with that which pertains to me, ignoring the rest,  
*Ant.* 45-6)

Isocrates is here doing what Herodotus did not, and what Thucydides seemed to want: acknowledging a multiplicity of categories within the larger category of ‘un-metered,’ just as there is a multiplicity of categories within the larger category of ‘metered.’<sup>90</sup> The categories he indicates, moreover, are essentially based on content, although it is difficult to tell how significant he envisioned the distinctions to be. However, the fact that he feels the need to assert this and provide so many examples suggests that it might not have been immediately obvious to his addressees, and thus that he needed to make his case.

On the other hand, the first division, a level above the distinctions within the category of *λόγος*, is made precisely on the basis of its lack of meter and, as a consequence, metered language is naturally grouped against it. However, Isocrates goes on to say that the best kind of *λόγος* – the one he will concern himself with, and of course the one he himself practices – has a great deal in common with *ποιήματα μετὰ μέτρου*, immediately undercutting the bifurcated set of literary productions. The similarity has to do in particular with audience reaction: people delight in hearing this type of *λόγος* no less than they do things composed with meter (*ὧν ἅπαντες μὲν ἀκούοντες χαίρουσιν οὐδὲν ἥττον ἢ τῶν ἐν τοῖς μέτροις πεποιημένων*, *Ant.* 47). He is talking specifically about a Panhellenic type of speech, and the source of the pleasure of this type of speech seems to be precisely what they share with the poetic tradition. Isocrates describes the types of speeches he has in mind as those

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<sup>90</sup> Ford (2002) 257 sees implications of equivalence between the set of metrical works and set of non-metrical works. We will have more to say about the description of the metrical category below.

οὐς ἅπαντες ἂν φήσαιεν ὁμοιοτέρους εἶναι τοῖς μετὰ μουσικῆς καὶ ῥυθμῶν πεποιημένοις ἢ τοῖς ἐν δικαστηρίῳ λεγομένοις.<sup>91</sup> καὶ γὰρ τῇ λέξει ποιητικωτέρῃ<sup>92</sup> καὶ ποικιλωτέρῃ τὰς πράξεις δηλοῦσι, καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν ὀγκωδεστέροις καὶ καινότεροις χρῆσθαι ζητοῦσιν, ἔτι δὲ ταῖς ἄλλαις ιδέαις ἐπιφανεστέραις καὶ πλείοσιν ὅλον τὸν λόγον διοικοῦσιν.

(which all men agree are more like things made with music and rhythm than those spoken in the law court. Indeed, they make the facts clear with a more poetic and intricate style, and they try to make use of more elevated and original thoughts, and, furthermore, they populate the entire speech with other quite remarkable ornaments, *Ant.* 47.)

Within a single section of the speech, then, Isocrates has illustrated the slipperiness of categorizing *λόγος*: he begins by dividing *λόγοι* into the metrical and the unmetred, dismissing the metered for the time being as irrelevant to his discussion. However, when he attempts to make clear the ways in which the type of *λόγος* that he himself practices is superior to the lesser productions of the Sophists, he can only revert to the language of poetics. In other words, his categorization circles back on itself and describes his literary productions in terms of what was originally set out as their opposite: they are not *ποιήματα μετὰ μέτρον*, but they are better than other types of speeches in that they are *ποιητικωτέρῃ*.<sup>93</sup> They are not poems themselves, but are superior to other

<sup>91</sup> It is interesting, especially in light of Gorgias' definition of poetry, that Isocrates here includes music but elides the non-linguistic features of poetry, although it is obvious that he is imagining language as a third component. This is similar to definitions that will be put forward by Plato and Aristotle, as will be discussed below. The components he identifies as poetic, too, are almost identical to the ones Aristotle singles out in his discussions of style in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*.

<sup>92</sup> One of the earliest uses of this adjective, which is found elsewhere in Isocrates only once, at *Soph.* 12, where it seems to refer to all productive arts. Because of the dearth of evidence, there is little more we can say on this term in Isocrates, but it will be put to fuller use in Plato.

<sup>93</sup> The fluid shifts between nominal and verbal terminology here are also interesting: the beginning of *Ant.* 45 identifies the metrical works as *ποιήματα*, but *Ant.* 47 reverts to the less-specific participial usage – rather than being *ποιήματα*, the works in question are now *πεποιημένα*, and are explicitly contrasted not with non-metrical *λόγος*, but with the spoken word, the *λεγομένοις*. While the verbal uses of *ποιέω* are, as always, too common to be taken as consistently significant to the question of literary categorization, several occurrences elsewhere argue for a quite broad meaning of the idea of the *λόγος πεποιημένος*.

kinds of literary productions because of what they share with poetry.<sup>94</sup>

We have, then, in the case of literary types, an oscillation between a straightforward dichotomy and a more nuanced set of possibilities. The creators of the various types of *λόγος* are similarly fluid, as the *ποιητής* can create more than *ποίησις*, and need not even rely on meter. The *ποιητής* is at one point contrasted with the *λογοποιός* as someone who is capable of hymning (*ὕμνησοντες*) worthy men (*Antidosis* 137), but elsewhere (*to Philip* 109) grouped with him as someone who has praised the labors of Heracles while neglecting to praise his spirit, as Isocrates will. At *to Philip* 144 and *Evagoras* 40, similarly, the *ποιητής* and the *εὐρητής λόγων* are both engaged in praising benefactors of Greece.

These examples show Isocrates distinguishing types of literary makers in several ways. Content and function, interestingly, remain the primary lines by which categories are drawn: what the creator will be praising, rather than how he will be praising it.<sup>95</sup> Most interesting, though, is the breadth he gives to *ποιητής*: Isocrates, like Herodotus and Thucydides before him, seems generally to assume that the term is specific enough on its own to need no objective genitive. Often, then, contrasting the *ποιητής* with a literary producer connected etymologically with *λόγος* (e.g. *λογοποιός*, *εὐρητής λόγων*) implies two complementary formal categories like poetry and prose, but that is not the end of the story.

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<sup>94</sup> Implicit in this judgment, of course, is a positive valuation of at least the poetic, if not of poetry *per se*.

<sup>95</sup> Echoing older context-based generic delineations, although we will see formal ones moving in alongside them.

The phrase *ποιητής λόγων*, for instance – an innovation of the period, whether or not specifically of Isocrates himself – complicates the picture.<sup>96</sup> Isocrates twice describes a *ποιητής* with the genitive *λόγων* (*Against the Sophists* 15, *Antidosis* 192), thus disregarding the generic distinctions he seemed to be drawing above. Both times, he is discussing the limitations of training, and the fact that a man with no natural abilities for the work will never become a great speaker, however extensive his education.<sup>97</sup> The use in the *Antidosis* seems to take advantage of its ambiguity, as the *ποιητής λόγων* in that instance may, through training, become more pleasing (*χαριέστερος*), a trait associated with poets; Isocrates regularly acknowledges the pleasure of poetry and may here be using *ποιητής* in a kind of wordplay. That is, the speaker may, through education, learn to incorporate something of the poetic into his speeches without literally becoming a poet himself.<sup>98</sup> Thus the label would thus carry the force of both words: the *ποιητής λόγων* is not strictly a poet, but makes speeches that have something in common with poetry.

Another figure that is regularly contrasted with the poet is the *σοφιστής*, although they are assumed to be distinct from poets, orators and philosophers. The *σοφισταί* are set beside the *ποιηταί* at *to Demonicus* 51 as historical sources for living well: one should learn the best things in the poets (*τῶν ποιητῶν τὰ βέλτιστα*) but also know well anything useful in the other wise men (*καὶ τῶν ἄλλων σοφιστῶν, εἴ τι χρήσιμον*

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<sup>96</sup> This phrase appears twice in Isocrates and three times in Plato, and of course it cannot be known who used it first, or if it was more common than the extant evidence suggests. It never becomes a particularly common term, although it continues to appear now and then, in various contexts, into the Byzantine period.

<sup>97</sup> An idea perhaps suggested by Aristotle as well with regard to poetic composition, as will be discussed below.

<sup>98</sup> As the other appearance of the phrase, however, at *Soph.* 15, carries no similar suggestion of poetic undertones, the potential wordplay must remain merely speculative. Plato, however, has several analogous uses, as we will see, so it is not out of the question that the term had acquired a metaphorical resonance.

*εἰρήκασιν*).<sup>99</sup> This recalls the basic, neutral picture of the poets reminiscent of that found in the fifth century authors: the *ποιηταί* are keepers of cultural knowledge, and, while the form of their productions may be assumed or inherent, it is nonetheless not emphasized as particularly important in the scheme of their role.

A passage from *to Nicocles* 13 expands our picture somewhat. Isocrates there warns Nicocles that he cannot afford to be ignorant of any of the famous poets or wise men (*μήτε τῶν ποιητῶν τῶν εὐδοκίμουόντων μήτε τῶν σοφιστῶν μηδενὸς οἴου δεῖν ἀπείρωσ ἔχειν*), and suggests that being a listener to the poets and a student of the wise men (*τῶν μὲν ἀκροατῆς ... τῶν δὲ μαθητῆς*) will be an integral part of training Nicocles to judge those around him more accurately. The distinction is in the process of reception: Nicocles should listen to the *ποιηταί*, but be a student to the *σοφισταί*. Whoever the *σοφισταί* here may be referring to – whether to professionals like Gorgias and Protagoras, or, more vaguely, to sages of another sort – it is clear that the aural component of the poets' productions is key. It is possible, too, that the distinction has something to do with a more basic reality: the *ποιηταί* must be learned aurally, through their works, as they themselves are no longer present, while the *σοφισταί* are present and ready to be hired by able students.<sup>100</sup>

None of these passages offers a completely consistent definition of what Isocrates had in mind when naming the various kinds of speakers, but it is clear that they have

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<sup>99</sup> It is interesting to note that the *σοφισταί* seem to be less reliable than *ποιηταί* when it comes to providing good and useful advice, since Isocrates qualifies their contribution with a conditional: it is possible that they have something to offer, but not a given.

<sup>100</sup> Indeed, no contemporary figures are called *ποιητῆς*, Pindar being the closest in time to Isocrates – who was likely born a decade or so after Pindar's death in the mid fifth century. A similar situation will be found in Plato, and the implications of this will be discussed below.



much in common, especially their role in moral and practical education, praise, and communal memory. Thus the *ποιηταί* and *σοφισταί* stand beside the other manipulators of *λόγοι* – the *λογοποιοί*, the *εὐρητήης λόγων*, and the *ποιητῆς λόγων* – sometimes in comparison, sometimes in contrast, as figures of memorialization and education. Two key elements that appear again and again in discussing the works of those who deal in *λόγος* are praise and orality: all of these figures either speak before audiences about excellent men, mythical or contemporary, or come down from antiquity as givers of wisdom and knowledge to be listened to and recited.

Isocrates' language thus supports the idea of a connection between the poetic tradition and the rhetoric being developed and practiced in the Classical period, as explicitly suggested by Aristotle.<sup>101</sup> It is primarily content and purpose rather than form that unify the works of the different kinds of artisans in these passages: the emphasis is not on how the speakers convey their praises, but the fact of their involvement in the work of praising. Of course, Isocrates himself wrote a speech of praise in the *Evagoras*, albeit one masquerading as a letter of advice to the late king's son. In this piece, perhaps more than anywhere else in the corpus, Isocrates addresses the question of the boundaries of the poetic head-on. Early in the work, for instance, he explicitly contrasts his own encomium with traditional poetic encomia:<sup>102</sup>

*οἶδα μὲν οὖν ὅτι χαλεπὸν ἐστὶν ὁ μέλλω ποιεῖν, ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴν διὰ λόγων ἐγνωμιάζειν. ... τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ποιηταῖς πολλοὶ δέδονται κόσμοι· καὶ γὰρ πλησιάζοντας τοὺς θεοὺς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις οἷόν τ' αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι καὶ διαλεγόμενους καὶ συναγωνιζόμενους οἷς ἂν βουληθῶσι,*

<sup>101</sup> This will be taken up again in chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> Meijering (1987) 62-3 sees here evidence that Isocrates was doing something quite new, introducing the “novel genre of an eulogy in prose.”

καὶ περὶ τούτων δηλῶσαι μὴ μόνον τοῖς τεταγμένοις ὀνόμασιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ξένοις, τὰ δὲ καιροῖς, τὰ δὲ μεταφοραῖς, καὶ μηδὲν παραλιπεῖν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσι τοῖς εἶδεσι διαποικίλαι τὴν ποίησιν· τοῖς δὲ περὶ τοὺς λόγους οὐδὲν ἕξεστι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ' ἀποτόμως καὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων τοῖς πολιτικοῖς μόνον καὶ τῶν ἐνθυμημάτων τοῖς περὶ αὐτὰς τὰς πράξεις ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι χρῆσθαι. πρὸς δὲ τούτοις οἱ μὲν μετὰ μέτρων καὶ ῥυθμῶν ἅπαντα ποιοῦσιν, οἱ δ' οὐδενὸς τούτων κοινωνοῦσιν· ἃ τοσαύτην ἔχει χάριν, ὅστ' ἂν καὶ τῇ λέξει καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν ἔχη κακῶς, ὅμως αἰτᾶς ταῖς εὐρυθμίαις καὶ ταῖς συμμετρίας ψυχαγωγῶσι τοὺς ἀκούοντας.<sup>103</sup>

(I know that what I am to do is difficult, to make an encomium of the virtue of man through a speech. ... For many ornaments are given to the poets; they are able to represent gods interacting with men, and conversing with them and aiding whomever they wish in battle, and they make these things clear not only with ordinary words, but with exotic ones, and with newly coined ones, and with metaphors, abandoning none of these devices, but making their poetry intricate with all of them. But these sorts of things are not permitted to those working through speeches, but they must make precise use only of words that are in contemporary parlance and ideas that are concerned with the facts at hand. Additionally, the poets make all things with meter and rhythm, but speakers do not partake of any of these. These have a certain grace, so that, should a work be poorly done both in style and intention, nevertheless it will distract the souls of its hearers with its elegant beats and proportions, *Evag.* 8-10)

It is remarkable that the first list of ornaments granted to the poets does not include meter at all, but rather focuses on narrative and semantic choices that are essentially myths: the poet is free to relate fantastic stories about gods and men, and then to decorate them with unfamiliar or outlandish words and metaphors. Here, indeed, the *ποιηταί* seem to be purveyors of myths more than versifiers.<sup>104</sup> Of course, meter does

<sup>103</sup> The markers are again very similar to Aristotle's, although Aristotle sees meter as a subset of rhythm rather than a separate thing. It is clear elsewhere, however, that Isocrates was very much aware of the importance of rhythm to oratory; see e.g. *Soph.* 16, where a speech needs to be spoken *εὐρύθμως* and *μουσικῶς*; c.f. *to Phil.* 27. On the importance of *ψυχαγωγία* to rhetoric, see Meijering (1987) 6-12.

<sup>104</sup> For Isocrates' relationship to myths, see Papillon (1996) esp. 387, where he compares Isocrates' use of *μύθος* to that of *τὰ μυθώδη*, and shows that the former was applied to what was deemed useful, the latter to what was deemed not.

come up: it is meter and rhythm, Isocrates says, that put a final, almost magical, charm on content and style. Meter, finally, is able to compensate for any deficiencies in other aspects of poetic creation.

Shortly afterwards, he suggests that meter is capable of decorating language in such a way that the inferior idea may seem better than it is because of linguistic adornment – an opportunity again not granted to authors such as himself:

*γνοίη δ' ἄν τις ἐκεῖθεν τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῶν· ἦν γὰρ τις τῶν ποιημάτων τῶν εὐδοκιμούντων τὰ μὲν ὀνόματα καὶ τὰς διανοίας καταλίπη, τὸ δὲ μέτρον διαλύσῃ, φανήσεται πολὺ καταδεέστερα τῆς δόξης ἣς νῦν ἔχομεν περὶ αὐτῶν. ὅμως δὲ καίπερ τοσοῦτον πλεονέκτουσιν τῆς ποιήσεως, οὐκ ὀκνητέον, ἀλλ' ἀποπειρατέον τῶν λόγων ἐστίν, εἰ καὶ τοῦτο δυνήσονται, τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας εὐλογεῖν μηδὲν χεῖρον τῶν ἐν ταῖς ᾠδαῖς καὶ τοῖς μέτροις ἐγκωμιαζόντων.*

(One could understand the power of these [poetic features] from this: should someone retain the words and ideas of the most highly respected poems, but abandon the meter, they will appear far worse in our esteem than we consider them now. Nevertheless, although the advantages of poetry seem so great, the task must not be avoided, but attempted, to see if it be possible to eulogize good men in no worse a way than those who use song and meter to sing their praises, *Evag.* 11)

Here Isocrates is directly challenging the poetic tradition both in the function of his speech and in its style, and is asserting his own works as not only able to hold their own beside the traditional poetic encomia, but as actually superior to them. He chastises the poets for relying on what he claims are essentially linguistic tricks to dress up mediocre ideas enough that audiences do not see past the decoration to the mediocrity, while he is limited to common words and phrases and the most relevant details, behind which his underlying ideas have nowhere to hide – and must, therefore, be formidable in themselves.

This is largely in the service of promoting himself over the poets, of course; elsewhere, Isocrates relies, implicitly and explicitly, on the poetic tradition behind him. His maneuvers here to demonstrate how different his effort is from poetic productions serve a purpose: playing up the deceptive powers of meter and rhythm as soul-distracting features of poetic encomia allows him to simultaneously promote his own encomium for being free of them.<sup>105</sup> The definition of poetry that is implied by the discussion of genre in the *Evagoras*, then, is clearly based on formal features, but is not one that is pushed elsewhere in the corpus. Indeed, elsewhere, when he is not at pains to show the superiority of his work to the received tradition, literary details such as rhythm are considered as important to speeches as to poetry, and his judgments of poetry are far more neutral. That is, he has it both ways: poetic features are part of what makes his speeches so good, and also part of what makes poetry seem better than it is. What distinguishes his work from poetry, then, is perhaps the degree to which it relies on poetic ornamentation, and the superiority of his ideas.

To further investigate this, we turn now to a discussion of poetic products. The term that would become the standard one for poetry, *ποίησις*, continues to be an uncommon one in Isocrates, appearing only ten times in the entire corpus.<sup>106</sup> It most often refers to the general body of work produced by a poet, especially Homer or Hesiod, and as such usually appears with a named poet in the genitive.<sup>107</sup> Twice, however, it is used as

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<sup>105</sup> See e.g. Walker (2000).

<sup>106</sup> Which does, however, make it slightly more prevalent in his corpus than it was in the works of either Thucydides or Herodotus. Unlike them, however, Isocrates reserves the term for literary productions, and does not apply it to any other kind of making, as Thucydides and Herodotus did.

<sup>107</sup> *Panath.* 18, 33, 263; *ad Nic.* 43, 48; *Paneg.* 158; *Helen* 65.

an abstract concept, first in the *Evagoras* passage discussed above, and then in the *Panathenaicus*.

*Panathenaicus* 35, explicitly contrasts *ποίησις* with *λόγος*: Isocrates claims to have made more praises by himself than all others together, either working in *ποίησις* or *λόγος* (*περὶ δὲ τῶν τῆς πόλεως εὐεργεσιῶν τῶν εἰς τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἤδη ποιήσομαι τοὺς λόγους, οὐχ ὡς οὐ πλείους ἐπαίνους πεποιημένος περὶ αὐτῆς ἢ σύμπαντες οἱ περὶ τὴν ποίησιν καὶ τοὺς λόγους ὄντες*). This passage is usually translated with the familiar contrast of poetry and prose. A closer look at another passage that seems to suggest a similarly simple contrast, however, may help us gain a more nuanced understanding of what is being expressed here as well.

Isocrates, in *to Nicocles* 7, uses the uncommon adverb *καταλογάδην* to discuss literary gifts such as the one he is presently engaged in presenting to Nicocles: both *ποιήματα* with meter (*τῶν μετὰ μέτρου ποιημάτων*) and things written *καταλογάδην* (*τῶν καταλογάδην συγγραμμάτων*) may or may not live up to the promise they showed at their inception. Again, translations tend to revert to the poetry-prose distinction, although more than meter is in question. The constructions are clearly parallel, so the adverb in the second part should be doing the same work as the prepositional phrase in the first: identifying a defining feature of a particular kind of literary production. Isocrates presents the two sets as complementary and implies that they encompass most, if not all, of the possible kinds of literary gifts. Because of this, the passage has generally

been taken as unproblematically dividing metered language from unmetered,<sup>108</sup> but a more interesting distinction signaled in part by the adverb is actually at work.

Before we can explore the significance of *καταλογάδην*, however, we will take a moment to summarize that of *ποίημα*. Herodotus uses the word four times, but always to identify a material production.<sup>109</sup> It does not appear with its literary resonance before Isocrates and Plato, so Isocrates' uses here are among the earliest.<sup>110</sup> That it should acquire a literary meaning, as its various relatives in the *POI*- family do, is not surprising, but it does suggest that there was a perceived need for it in the fourth century that was not felt in the fifth. Its five appearances in Isocrates, then, deserve a brief overview to make its meaning clearer.

In the passage above, we see it described as *μετὰ μέτρου* and set against things done *καταλογάδην*; two other passages bolster the idea that a *ποίημα* is, if not yet precisely a poem, at least most naturally associated with compositions made up of metrical language. *Antidosis* 45, for instance, as we saw above, asserts that the types of *λόγος* are now fewer than those of *τῶν μετὰ μέτρου ποιημάτων*, and *Evagoras* 11 that, if one should remove the meter of *ποιήματα*, the result would seem far less impressive than it had before. In each case, a *ποίημα* is, as Gorgias claimed of *ποίησις*, essentially being conceived of as *λόγος μετὰ μέτρου*.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> See e.g. Forster (1979) *ad loc.*, as well as Norlin's translation for the assumption of a prose vs. poetry dichotomy.

<sup>109</sup> e.g. the dedication of Glaukon at 1.25.7, of Rhodopis at 2.135.13.

<sup>110</sup> It should be clear that we make no attempt here to assert priority of the uses of Isocrates or Plato, but accept them as more or less contemporaneous.

<sup>111</sup> A final use in *to Nic.* 42 is slightly different, but fits in well enough with this restricted definition.

While there is not enough evidence to draw firm conclusions, the *ποιήματα* here are not only more concrete and specific than we have seen before, but also more precisely language, and less intrinsically music. It is a distinction that recalls the one Herodotus made between the performative and linguistic aspects of poetry, but that comes even closer to separating poetry from music. Moreover, it is clear that Isocrates and Plato, far more than Herodotus and Thucydides, are concerned to explain how their relatively short performative literary productions differ from poetry; having a concrete analogue to compare to their *λόγοι* is a useful step in such a process of disambiguation. The fact that it is largely dependent on a difference in form is likely a result of the fact that divisions by content, context and function are hardly meaningful – as Isocrates himself says, he is, in many cases, doing poetic work.

With a clearer understanding of this antithesis, then, we return to a consideration of *καταλογάδην*. The adverb first appears in this period in Isocrates and Plato, although its linguistic roots are far deeper; Homer uses *καταλέγω*, for instance, to mean ‘to tell in order’, and the register of citizens in Athens was known as the *κατάλογος* from at least the fifth century.<sup>112</sup> Both of these imply a systematic and thorough, if artless, ordering of information; if that concept of organization was carried over into the new adverb, it should mean something like ‘systematically, in a list-like manner.’<sup>113</sup> This, in fact, makes better sense in context than “unmetrically” would. Where the *ποιήματα* were marked by

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<sup>112</sup> e.g. Homer *Il.* 10.413; see also Aristophanes *Eq.* 1369, Thucydides 6.43.

<sup>113</sup> Thus the standard accepted definition is too narrow; *LSJ* q.v. defines the word first as ‘by way of conversation, in prose,’ although their secondary definition of ‘in detail, longwindedly’ comes somewhat closer to my analysis of it. There are, to my knowledge, no published studies on this word, although it could certainly benefit from such work.

being *μετὰ μέτρου*, the *συγγράμματα* are similarly identified by their form: they are carefully organized, systematically structured. It is not entirely clear here what the structure of the *συγγράμματα* might be, but it is something more than simply the absence of meter. Isocrates is not describing here poetry and prose, then, but rather two categories of language that have been organized in different ways.<sup>114</sup> The distinction, in this case, falls out as poetry and prose, except that it suggests a plurality of types of prose, of which the *καταλογάδην* is only one. There is, moreover, as was suggested in Thucydides, a suggestion that lack of meter is no more sufficient for grouping prose than its presence was for grouping poetry.

The question of writing, set against things done metrically in the previous passage, is also an interesting one. Later in the *to Nicocles*, Isocrates returns to this distinction and observes what kind of productions most people consider most useful, considering both the poems and the things that have been written up (*τὰ συμβουλευόντα καὶ τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ τῶν συγγραμμάτων χρησιμώτατα μὲν ἅπαντες νομίζουσιν*, 42). The formal qualifications that appeared in *to Nicocles* 7 are here absent, but *ποίημα* is again contrasted with written productions, suggesting that Isocrates conceived of them as essentially oral rather than written. That is to say, while texts of poetry are certainly in existence by the time of Isocrates, the fact of its having been written down remains a secondary feature that does not affect the nature of the poem or change the general expectation of poetry as something that is performed.

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<sup>114</sup> There may be an implication here of a third category, one of language that lacks the metrical organization of a *ποίημα* as well as the organization of a *λόγος καταλογάδην* – something like casual conversation, perhaps – but there is simply too little evidence in Isocrates to make the argument. We will have occasion to revisit the idea in the discussion of Plato.



A similar comparison of poetry and the written appears in the second letter to Dionysius. In the opening passages of this letter, Isocrates apologizes to Dionysius for sending a letter rather than carrying on a conversation in person. He dwells on the problems of the written versus the spoken word:

*οἶδα μὲν οὖν ὅτι τοῖς συμβουλευεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι πολὺ διαφέρει μὴ διὰ γραμμάτων ποιεῖσθαι τὴν συνουσίαν ἀλλ' αὐτοὺς πλησιάσαντας, οὐ μόνον ὅτι περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πραγμάτων ῥᾶον ἂν τις παρὼν πρὸς παρόντα φράσειν ἢ δι' ἐπιστολῆς δηλώσειεν, οὐδ' ὅτι πάντες τοῖς λεγομένοις μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς γεγραμμένοις πιστεύουσι, καὶ τῶν μὲν ὡς εἰσηγημάτων, τῶν δ' ὡς ποιημάτων ποιοῦνται τὴν ἀκρόασιν· ἔτι δὲ πρὸς τούτοις ἐν μὲν ταῖς συνουσίαις ἦν ἀγνοηθῆναι τι τῶν λεγομένων ἢ μὴ πιστευθῆναι, παρὼν ὁ τὸν λόγον διεξιὼν ἀμφοτέροις τούτοις ἐπήμυνεν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐπιστελλομένοις καὶ γεγραμμένοις ἦν τι συμβῆναι τοιοῦτον, οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ διορθῶσων·*

(I know, of course, that, for those wishing to give counsel, it is better by far to do their communication not through writings but in person, not only because it is easier to discuss matters face to face than to make them clear through a letter, nor because everyone trusts in the spoken word more than the written, and hears the former as propositions, but the latter as poems; and in addition to this, if someone doesn't understand or believe the things said in personal conversation, the one speaking, being present, can defend it, but if this happens with letters or writings, there is no one present to set it straight.)

Here, poetry is grouped not with the spoken but with the written word. Poems, like letters, are divorced from their creators, and – as Plato, too, famously complains<sup>115</sup> – left without interpreters or defenders. There is, moreover, a suggestion that a poem, like the written word, is complete and unalterable, and hence demanding of a different kind of audience engagement. While the alignment of poems with writings is unique in Isocrates to this passage, the distance of the poets is not; as at *to Nicocles* 13, this may reflect an assumption of absence on the part of poets as on the part of letter writers.

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<sup>115</sup> On which more below.

This assumption of absence lines up with Isocrates' consistent linking of the terms *ποιητής* and *ποίησις* with earlier poets, especially Homer and Hesiod. Poetry – and the poets who create it – are thus linked in Isocrates to several important ideas: it is typically an aural experience, heard and recited in public, rather than written or read; it is generally old, belonging to a previous period or generation; it is most often concerned with praise, and may provide educational models of living; it is well organized and artfully laid out, and often relies on linguistic ornamentation such as meter and metaphor; and, finally, it is often divorced from its creator.

None of these descriptions of poetry will be particularly surprising. What must be noted, however, is the general lack of interest in meter as a defining characteristic of poetry. It is, instead, one among several, and perhaps not significantly more important than the others. Thus Isocrates was able to link his own productions to *ποίησις* in its function and even, loosely, form, because he conceived of *ποίησις* not simply as metrical speech but as one embodiment of an ancient ideal of organized and instructional language, of which his own work was to be a different manifestation.<sup>116</sup> Isocrates considered the poetic to be recognizable by its content and by the reaction it elicited from its audience: it conveyed praise and knowledge, and did it in such a way that it pleased the listeners. Indeed, like Thucydides, he seems to find in content a more satisfying marker than in meter.

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<sup>116</sup> Certainly Isocrates' contemporaries could, and did, produce poetry; how he would position himself and his works in relation to them is unclear, but, as he never mentions a poet later than Pindar, we can only speculate.

Finally, the set of words that, especially in Herodotus, stood as a counterpart to *POI*- root words deserves attention. In Isocrates, words cognate with *ᾄδειν* and *ᾠδή* are conspicuous primarily for their absence: the words provided as examples here appear twice each, and other cognate terms are used very rarely. The distinction that Herodotus seemed to make, then, between focusing on content with *POI*- root terms and focusing on performance with cognates of *ᾠδός*, is not one that was picked up within the larger culture, or that survived to the next generation. On the other hand, musical components are as consistently put forward as essential aspects of poetry as meter is; the musical dimension of poetry, then, is still very much an active and defining feature of it, even if Isocrates has lost the terms that, for Herodotus, served to express the connection more literally.

Isocrates' views on what poetry is, then, often line up rather neatly with our own modern ones: it is closer to song than other types of language, is often marked by meter and other decorative and stylistic features, and is charming to its audience. It is an oral and aural performance at heart, although separating it from its oral context does not change its essence. Isocrates regularly assumes two categories of performative language, using *POI*- root words for those connected to meter and song and *LOG*- root words for the other, but the distinction is not hard and fast, or absolute, as we see with the *ποιητῆς λόγων*, the description of his own productions as *ποιητικώτερα*, and his privileging of categorization by content rather than form.

We again see an oscillation between an inclination to set poetry apart by virtue of its meter, and a desire for a more meaningful categorization; for the latter, like Herodotus

and Thucydides before him, Isocrates most often turns to content and function. The slippage can also be seen elsewhere. One such place is the identification of literary makers: there are poets and makers of *λόγος*, who are generally kept distinct, but there is also the sophist, who does not fit neatly into either category, but bridges them both.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, with respect to literary productions, there is the neat division of the metrical and the unmetred, but it is complicated by the third category of the written, which, again, fails to fall naturally into one category or the other, although it shares aspects of both.

While Isocrates may not find a system of organization that is entirely satisfactory, however, he seems to have a relatively clear idea of poetry as something that is similar to his works in both form and content, but ultimately inferior. The various genres are implicitly acknowledged in the passage from the *Antidosis* that opened this discussion, although he seems remarkably uninterested in such specific distinctions of poetic kind; whether he is imagining a multiplicity of styles when he discusses poetry or focusing on a single one is unclear. He is, however, apparently satisfied with whatever unified set of poetry he is imagining, even if he is not quite able to articulate its boundaries. On the other hand, like Thucydides, he seems more concerned to challenge the idea of a monolithic set of prose, especially for the sake of his own, than to distance all prose from poetry. While Thucydides wanted his work as far removed from poetry as possible, however, Isocrates locates his in the middle, having the best share in each.

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<sup>117</sup> See e.g. McCoy (2008), Carter (1991), Walker (2000), Haskins (2001) on the position of the Sophist as a literary figure in this period.

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Plato's relationship to poetry is famously complex and at times contradictory, and expressed differently by different characters and in different dialogues.<sup>118</sup> One major source of the complications is the over-determined nature of his use of poetry. While Thucydides and Isocrates viewed the poets as, in some sense, competitors, they had surprisingly little anxiety about accounting for the ways in which their productions differed from those of the poets. Plato, on the other hand, was frequently at pains to justify his own productions, and especially his particular methodology of dialectic. Like the poets and the orators, he was himself a language worker first and foremost, and so needed to both discredit their methodologies as unreliable, and to prove his own as the most capable of arriving at philosophical truths. That is, Plato is rarely able to discuss the poets without implicating himself and his own philosophical project in the process.

In this project, then, we look not for an overarching, single and unified explanation of the poetic in Plato, but rather to tease out major threads of thought woven through the corpus.<sup>119</sup> The differences in the aims, techniques and purposes of the individual dialogues are significant, but, for many of them, poetry is enough of a tangential or circumstantial topic that grouping and comparing them is productive. These dialogues are the *Apology*, the *Phaedo*, the *Charmides*, the *Laches*, the *Lysis*, the

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<sup>118</sup> See especially Havelock (1963), a foundational text for many subsequent studies. Boys-Stones and Haubold (2010) provide some of the most recent work on the question of Plato and poetry.

<sup>119</sup> That is, we are not assuming that we should expect to find, much less look for, a unified theory of poetry in Plato. As Murray (1996) 2 puts it: "We cannot speak of a Platonic theory of poetry, but rather of a collection of texts in which various attitudes, images and myths about poetry are expressed."

*Euthyphro*, the *Menexenus*, the *Lesser Hippias*, the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras*, the *Meno*, the *Euthydemus*, the *Cratylus*, the *Symposium*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Critias*.<sup>120</sup> The kinds of basic assumptions we find in this set of dialogues will be broad, on the one hand, but on the other may be taken as representative, if not of Plato or Socrates personally, at least of the kinds of assumptions and theories about the poetic that were current in the first half of the fourth century. In that sense – in that we are given multiple snapshots of multiple ways to think about poets and their works – the inconsistency that can be frustrating can also be seen as a valuable insight into the period.

Against this set of dialogues in which poetry is dealt with more or less circumstantially stand the several dialogues that take poetry as a primary subject of inquiry to a greater or lesser degree. These dialogues – the *Ion*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Laws*, and the *Republic* – will be treated individually. Not surprisingly, the views of poetry expounded in these dialogues are some of the more marked, and in some cases are mutually exclusive. Regardless of the contradictions, the views expounded in these dialogues will be considered in the context of the individual works, and studied especially for how they compare with the generalizations found in the grouped dialogues. In this section, then, we will begin by tracing the kinds of language this study is interested in within the grouped set of dialogues. The examples that have been chosen are those that either demonstrate what seems to be a basic assumption appearing in the

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<sup>120</sup> The spurious dialogues and the letters are left out; none of those, in any case, takes a particular interest in poetry, so that, even if they are genuine, their absence here should not impact the study significantly. The *Crito* is absent simply because it is completely lacking in the kind of language that is being traced in this study, which is perhaps surprising in itself, but is certainly a topic to be dealt with elsewhere.

majority of instances, on the one hand, or notable exceptions, on the other. The conclusions we draw from this section will then be laid out and briefly compared to the pictures found in other authors. We will then turn to the individual dialogues, looking especially for the ways they deviate from the norms found in the grouped set.

### 1. The grouped dialogues

Plato's *ποιηταί*, when they are identified as specific individuals or classes of individuals, are most often exactly who we would expect: Homer and Hesiod, Pindar, Theognis, Epicharmus, Solon and Simonides, and many others – but always figures who had, by the late fifth and early fourth centuries, been canonized in the culture. The *Laches* singles out a specific type of poet with the objective genitive *τραγωδίας*, while the *Euthydemus* calls a speech-writer a *ποιητής λόγων*.<sup>121</sup> For Plato, then, as generally for Isocrates, the term seems to have been essentially trimmed of the broader meanings that continued to obtain occasionally in the fifth century and earlier, and, unless a specific descriptor is added, has largely become restricted to the maker of poetry, although there are two exceptions.

In the *Sophist*, Theaetetus struggles to understand what the Stranger means with his broad definition of making, and wonders if the Stranger can really be suggesting that the sophist should be a *ποιητής* even of animals (*καὶ γὰρ ζῴων αὐτὸν εἶπες ποιητήν*, 234a). In the *Euthyphro*, similarly, Socrates explains to Euthyphro that he has been accused of being a *ποιητής* of the gods (*φησὶ γὰρ με ποιητὴν εἶναι θεῶν*, 3b). Both of

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<sup>121</sup> *Laches* 183a, *Euthyd.* 305b.

these instances, however, are such odd and strained uses of the term that they cannot but be surprising; even when the term is used with its broadest significance elsewhere, it consistently implies an active maker altering something in the world, which is hardly the husbandman's role in the making of animals, or Socrates' with respect to his daemon. In the first case, Theaetetus' incredulous question emphasizes how uncertain he is about the Stranger's claim, and in the second, it is clear that Socrates does not consider himself in any sense a creator of his daemon; the use of the word *ποιητής* in these passages, then, is meant to indicate how unlikely both speakers feel the claims are – work it can do precisely because it has become so restricted in its significance.

Diotima's discussion, as reported by Socrates in the *Symposium*, directly addresses the disconnect between the breadth of the term itself and the specificity of its referent:

οἴσθ' ὅτι ποιήσις ἐστὶ τι πολὺ· ἡ γάρ τοι ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ ὄν ἰόντι ὄπωϋν αἰτία πᾶσά ἐστι ποιήσις, ὥστε καὶ αἱ ὑπὸ πάσαις ταῖς τέχναις ἐργασίαι ποιήσεις εἰσὶ καὶ οἱ τούτων δημιουργοὶ πάντες ποιηταί.

Ἀληθῆ λέγεις.

Ἄλλ' ὅμως, ἢ δ' ἢ, οἴσθ' ὅτι οὐ καλοῦνται ποιηταὶ ἀλλ' ἄλλα ἔχουσιν ὀνόματα, ἀπὸ δὲ πάσης τῆς ποιήσεως ἐν μόνον ἀφορισθὲν τὸ περὶ τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ τὰ μέτρα τῷ τοῦ ὄλου ὀνόματι προσαγορεύεται.<sup>122</sup> ποιήσις γὰρ τοῦτο μόνον καλεῖται, καὶ οἱ ἔχοντες τοῦτο τὸ μόνον τῆς ποιήσεως ποιηταί.

(You know that *ποίησις* is more than a single thing. In fact, for anything coming into being from not-being, the whole cause is *ποίησις*, so that all works produced by all these *τέχναι* are *ποιήσεις*, and the workmen of these are all *ποιηταί*.)

<sup>122</sup> With language again elided, and the musical aspects highlighted.



Quite so.

But nevertheless, she said, you know that they are not all called *ποιηταί* but have other names, and from all *ποίησις* one part, that one concerned with music and meter, is marked off to be called by the name of the whole. For this alone is called *ποίησις*, and those who concern themselves with this part of *ποίησις* as a whole are called *ποιηταί*, 205b-c)

A number of details in this passage are of interest. First, of course, there is the explicit interest in the arbitrary restriction of the broad term to the specific use; Diotima does not imply that there is any reason why only this one kind of maker should be called the *ποιητής*, she simply observes that it is the case.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, she defines the work of the poets as a *τέχνη* made out of music and meter.<sup>124</sup> Here, the poet is simply another kind of inventive maker.<sup>125</sup> Finally, the piece of *ποίησις* that is singled out is the one concerned with music and meter (*μουσική καὶ τὰ μέτρα*); the fact that the linguistic element is not highlighted certainly does not suggest that it was not seen as integral, but the renewed assertion of the connection of music and poetry is worth noting here after the relatively unmusical poetics of Isocrates.

Agathon's speech earlier in the dialogue has interesting points of contact with, and points of departure from, the picture painted by Diotima. When he takes up the question of Eros' skill (*σοφία*), for instance, he says he will, like Eryximachus, describe Eros in terms of his own craft (*τέχνη*). He begins by calling Eros a *ποιητής*, and

<sup>123</sup> On the connection of Eros and making, especially as used elsewhere in the dialogue, see Zuckert (2009) 225f.

<sup>124</sup> Elsewhere in the *Symposium*, and certainly elsewhere in the corpus, Plato offers definitions of the poet that conflict with this one, but here at least we see the full assimilation of poet to craftsman that was hinted at in Herodotus and Thucydides; indeed, shortly after this passage, Diotima asserts that prudence and virtue are begotten in the soul with the help of *ποιηταί* and as many of the *δημιουργοί* as are called *εὐρετικοί* (209a). In any case, Diotima's discussion of the possible range of meanings of the terms likely exaggerates the situation somewhat, but it is true that none of the words have become restricted to literary productions.

<sup>125</sup> See Mitscherling (2009) 184-190 for an interpretation of the use of poetry in the *Symposium*.

moreover one who is so wise (*σοφός*) that he makes (*ποιήσαι*) poets of those he touches: *καὶ ἄλλον ποιήσαι πᾶς γοῦν ποιητῆς γίγνεται οὗ ἂν Ἔρως ἄψηται* (196e2). Like Diotima, then, he sees poets as working from some kind of *τέχνη*, although he implies that the divine – essentially elided in Diotima’s discussion – may have a role in making the poet what he is.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, he limits the respect in which Eros is a good poet: with respect to all the *ποίησις* having to do with music (*πᾶσαν ποίησιν τὴν κατὰ μουσικὴν*, 196e).<sup>127</sup> While he does not specify what kind of poet Eros makes of men, then, it seems clear that he means to imply that lovers become composers of praises of the beloved, as Hippothales does in the *Lysis*.<sup>128</sup> That is, whatever their form, poets engage in praise.

The term is thus employed with some consistency, then, even if details of how the poet works – by means of artful skill or with the help of divine inspiration – vary. We turn now to a discussion of the activities of the poet to fill out our picture. A passage in the *Timaeus* provides details about how one citizen judged one poet, as well as a look at how poets’ materials were used at festivals. At 21a, Critias begins to tell a story about an experience of his youth, during the Apaturia. The passage introduces several important terms and so deserves here quotation in full.

τὸ δὴ τῆς ἐορτῆς σύνηθες ἐκάστοτε καὶ τότε συνέβη τοῖς παισίν· ἄθλα γὰρ ἡμῖν οἱ πατέρες ἔθεσαν ῥαψωδίας. πολλῶν μὲν οὖν δὴ καὶ πολλὰ ἐλέχθη ποιητῶν ποιήματα, ἅτε δὲ νέα κατ’ ἐκεῖνον τὸν χρόνον ὄντα τὰ Σόλωνος πολλοὶ τῶν παίδων ἤσαμεν. εἶπεν οὖν τις τῶν φρατέρων, εἶτε δὴ δοκοῦν αὐτῶ τότε εἶτε καὶ χάριν τινὰ τῶ Κριτία φέρων, δοκεῖν οἱ τά τε ἄλλα σοφώτατον γεγονέναι Σόλωνα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ποίησιν αὐτῶν

<sup>126</sup> On Plato as the innovator of the doctrine of poetic inspiration, see Murray (1992) 34-7. See also Weineck (1998), Orsini (1975) 42-3, Tigerstedt (1969) and (1970); the subject will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>127</sup> Again with the emphasis on the musical rather than linguistic piece.

<sup>128</sup> See below.

ποιητῶν πάντων ἐλευθεριότατον.<sup>129</sup> ὁ δὲ γέρον - σφόδρα γὰρ οὖν μέμνημαι - μάλα τε ἤσθε καὶ διαμειδιάσας εἶπεν: εἴ γε, ὦ Ἀμύνανδρε, μὴ παρέργῳ τῇ ποιήσει κατεχρήσατο, ἀλλ' ἐσπουδάκει καθάπερ ἄλλοι, τόν τε λόγον ὃν ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου δεῦρο ἠνέγκατο ἀπετέλεσεν, καὶ μὴ διὰ τὰς στάσεις ὑπὸ κακῶν τε ἄλλων ὅσα ἤρην ἐνθάδε ἤκων ἠναγκάσθε καταμελῆσαι, κατὰ γε ἐμὴν δόξαν οὔτε Ἡσίοδος οὔτε Ὅμηρος οὔτε ἄλλος οὐδεὶς ποιητῆς ἐγένετο ἄν ποτε αὐτοῦ.<sup>130</sup>

(A customary event of the festival relating to young boys happened every year also at that time: our fathers set up contests of rhapsody for us. Now in fact many *ποιήματα* of many *ποιηταί* were recited, but since Solon's were new at that time, many of the boys sang those. Indeed, someone of our phratry – whether it seemed that way to him at that time or whether he was giving a compliment to Critias – said that Solon seemed to him wisest in respect to some things but, with regard to his *ποίησις*, he seemed the freest of all the *ποιηταί*. At which the old man – this I remember exactly – was exceedingly delighted and, smiling, said, “Aamnander, if only he had not treated his *ποίησις* like a side-project, but had done it earnestly like the others, and had completed that story he brought back from Egypt, and not been compelled to neglect it because of civil unrest and all the other evils he found here when he came back – in my opinion neither Hesiod nor Homer nor any other *ποιητής* would ever have been more honored than him,” 21b-d.)

Not only do we see here that festivals involved contests in the recitation of canonical poetry attributed to famous poets, but we see that there was some choice of which *ποίημα* to sing – and a preference, as in the *Odyssey*, for the new ones.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, we find reinforcement for the idea that the *ποιητής* is specifically the maker, and that any later performers would be called by a different title.<sup>132</sup> Finally, there is the obstacle to Solon's fame: namely, that he let poetry be a side project for him, and never fully devoted himself to it. In other words, he was merely a hobbyist poet – implying that, even if it was

<sup>129</sup> On this problematic adjective, see below.

<sup>130</sup> Solon's return from Egypt with a story that would apparently have made good poetry recalls the detail Herodotus gives at 2.156 about Aeschylus inserting into his poetry a detail he had picked up in Egypt.

<sup>131</sup> New at the time of the original conversation at least; Plato, like Isocrates, tends to focus mostly on the canonical poets of the archaic and earlier classical periods.

<sup>132</sup> On the separation of poets and performers, see e.g. Nagy (1990) 21ff.

anachronistic to apply it to Homer, being a professional poet was a possibility.<sup>133</sup>

Moreover, the implication is that being a poet was work that required time and attention as well as skill – in other words, that poets were poets by virtue, like craftsmen, of *τέχνη*.

The specific verbs used to describe the activities of the poet can also illuminate Plato's understanding of the term *ποιητής*. The verb that continues to describe their activities most generally remains *ποιέω*, used absolutely or with a number of direct objects.<sup>134</sup> There is an enormous variety of verbs that show up regularly to describe the poet's work, however, from the expected *ἐγκωμιάζειν*, *ᾄδειν* and *ὑμεῖν*, to the more surprising but equally common *ἐντείνειν* and *κοσμεῖν*, to the verbs most associated with describing speeches, *λέγειν* and *διέρχεσθαι*. All of these verbs, however, are almost equally commonly used to describe language that is clearly not musical or poetic,<sup>135</sup> making them simply the vocabulary of describing language in general, without regard to its particular form or (in many cases) function; one implication of the crossover of verbs is that all language, regardless of its formal features, was understood as essentially the same – a point that Plato explicitly makes in several places.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> For other interpretations of Solon's role in this passage, see e.g. Capra (2010) 207ff, Cook (1996) 92. Nagy (2002) 84 shows how the passage resembles the opening of Herodotus' *Histories*, and discusses the impact of the similarities.

<sup>134</sup> See especially Braun (1938) for in-depth discussion of the use of this verb with respect to the activity of composing poetry. See also chapter one for Herodotus' use of the verb as 'to poet,' and Nagy (2002) 25ff for a discussion of the verbs of speaking and singing in the *Ion* in particular.

<sup>135</sup> See e.g. Nagy (2002), which offers discussions of several individual uses, and Murray (1996) 110, which briefly lays out the seemingly antithetical verbs that are in fact used interchangeably for song and speech from Homer on. See also Aristotle below.

<sup>136</sup> Plato's assertions of the essentially similar nature of all language will be taken up below. For the verbs, see e.g. *Critias* 108c4, *Menex.* 239b7 for representative uses of *ὑμεῖν*; *Lysis* 204d4, *Theag.* 123e7 for representative uses of *ᾄδειν*; *Tim.* 47b4, *Charm.* 157e6 for representative uses of *ἐγκωμιάζειν*; *Phaedo* 60d, *Hipparch.* 228d for representative uses of *ἐντείνειν*; *Apol.* 17c, *Laches* 196b for representative uses of *κόσμειν*; *Pol.* 270b, *Parm.* 127a for representative uses of *διέρχεσθαι*.

Although poets are largely uncomplicated and peripheral to the subjects at issue in these dialogues, the activities proper to poets are applied metaphorically to non-poets in several interesting ways. In the *Critias*, for instance, when Socrates assures Critias that he will be given indulgence, he does it with an extended metaphor based on the theater:

*προλέγω γε μὴν, ὦ φίλε Κριτία, σοὶ τὴν τοῦ θεάτρου διάνοιαν, ὅτι θαυμαστῶς ὁ πρότερος ἠὲδοκίμηκεν ἐν αὐτῷ ποιητής, ὥστε τῆς συγγνώμης δεήσει τινός σοι παμπόλλης, εἰ μέλλεις αὐτὰ δυνατὸς γενέσθαι παραλαβεῖν.*

(I would warn you, dear Critias, of the *διάνοια* of the theater, how the earlier *ποιητής* won great acclaim in this, so that you will need great indulgence if you would manage to succeed them, 108b)

Hermocrates extends the metaphor, telling Critias that he will have to invoke the aid of Paian and the Muses to shine up and hymn the ancient men (*προιέναι τε οὖν ἐπὶ τὸν λόγον ἀνδρείως χρή, καὶ τὸν Παίωνα τε καὶ τὰς μούσας ἐπικαλούμενον τοὺς παλαιοὺς πολίτας ἀγαθοὺς ὄντας ἀναφαίνειν τε καὶ ὕμνεῖν*, 108c). Finally, Critias himself calls the group a theater (*τῷδε τῷ θεάτρῳ*, 108d).

It is the fact of competition in language that the metaphors serve to highlight, but the choice remains interesting. Moreover, the comparison here is quite broad: Plato has not made his interlocutors specifically rhapsodes, but also allowed something of the tragedian to spill in.<sup>137</sup> A similar move is made in the *Cleitophon*, where Cleitophon compares Socrates to an actor singing the role of a god in a tragedy (*ὥσπερ ἐπὶ μηχανῆς τραγικῆς θεός, ὕμνεις...407a*). Clearly, none of these men is expecting the others to break into meter or song, but just as clearly as Plato is conflating rhapsodes and

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<sup>137</sup> Nagy (2002) 68 and n.68.

tragedians, so he is conflating singers and speakers, breaking down the generic boundaries that are elsewhere assumed.

These comparisons of speakers of prose *λόγοι* to poets are metaphorical and, likely, tongue-in-cheek, but there are many places where Plato attempts to lessen or completely elide the distinctions between poets and other groups of men.<sup>138</sup> The *Apology* groups the *ποιηταί* first with *θεομάντεις* and *χρησμοδοί*, with the essential similarity that they are vehicles for the divine, and thus sometimes speak more than they know, or fail to understand what they say (22b9).<sup>139</sup> This points to the idea, played up most in the *Ion*, that the poets work not by knowledge or skill, but because of divine inspiration, although Plato does not pursue it here.

Elsewhere, however, Plato contrasts the *ποιηταί* with orators and non-professionals. In the *Gorgias*, for example, the chain of questions leads Calicles to agree with Socrates that, ultimately, what the orators are doing is not fundamentally, but only formally, different from what the poets are doing, and both of them are doing something like rhetoric: *δημηγορία ἄρα τίς ἐστὶν ἢ ποιητική* (502c). The *Symposium* draws a different pairing, this time an opposition, between poets and private citizens (*ιδιώται*): Eryximachus claims in his speech that no one has ever mentioned Eros' parents, neither a *ποιητής* nor an *ιδιώτης* (178b3).<sup>140</sup> This has been taken to signify a prose-verse

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<sup>138</sup> It is interesting to consider, alongside this suggestion, Aristotle's claim at *Rhet.* 1408b that the poetic style is also acceptable when speaking with irony, like Gorgias or like Plato in the *Phaedrus*. See below.

<sup>139</sup> *Meno* has a similar grouping, although it adds *πολιτικοί*, and the poets there are not *ποιηταί* but *ποιητικοί ἅπαντες* - interesting in itself, as he is allowing the new adjective *ποιητικοί* do the work of the more familiar noun.

<sup>140</sup> On what Plato might mean by *ιδιώτης*, see e.g. Velardi (1989) 47. Meijering (1987) Appendix 1 addresses how *ιδιώτης* and its relatives are used in the corpus of archaic poetry and the commentary tradition on it.

distinction – Joyce’s translation renders it that way, for instance – and that may be implied. However, given the discussion of Solon in the *Timaeus* that was mentioned above, we may see here an emphasis not on the form of the production, but on the role of the maker – that is, we may see the poet being separated out from the private citizen as a professional.<sup>141</sup>

We should take a moment to acknowledge the substantive *ποιητική*, although we will have more to say about it below. The adjective has existed for some time as a way to mark off any productive thing or idea, but has only recently begun to appear with reference to literary productions.<sup>142</sup> In the context of the dialogue, it is clear that Socrates means to refer to at least tragic poetry, if not to the broader idea of poetry in general. It is equally clear that he means for it to be understood with an implied *τέχνη*, on the model of *μουσική* and *ῥητορική*. His definitional statement here should, however, be understood as quite new, not only in its use of the abstract substantive for the art as a whole, but in the equivalence it draws between poetry and public speaking: far from being anything mystical or powerful, poetry is just another language art.<sup>143</sup>

In the previous chapter, most clearly in the case of Herodotus, we observed a difference of emphasis related to the use of *POI-* root words as compared to that of words cognate with *ᾠοιδός*. The distinction is almost a moot one in Plato; as in Isocrates, that

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<sup>141</sup> There are similar distinctions made in the *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, which will be addressed below.

<sup>142</sup> The comparative *ποιητικότερα* in Isocrates, discussed above, is the first such usage in this study. Plato uses it primarily for literary productions, but occasionally has it refer to productive arts more generally, as especially in the *Sophist*, as e.g. 219b, which identifies all the arts that have to do with anything put together or made (*τὸ σύνθετον καὶ πλαστόν*, 219a) as the poetic (*ποιητικὴν τοίνυν αὐτὰ συγκεφαλαιωσάμενοι προσείπωμεν*).

<sup>143</sup> Although this adjective will carry greater nuance elsewhere; see below, in the discussions of the *Phaedrus* and *Laws*.

other set of terms is largely absent.<sup>144</sup> This in itself is interesting, however; we have seen that the *ποιητής* is envisioned fairly consistently as the creator of a literary work that is likely to be performed by someone at some point and almost certainly involves some aspect of music and meter, but the poet's own role as performer is hardly mentioned.

There are several possible explanations for why the *ποιητής* continued to be linked more to making than performing even after *ἀοιδός* had fallen out of favor as a productive word, all of which must remain speculative. First, there is the dominance of tragedy and comedy – in the Platonic corpus if not in the larger culture – and dramatic poets composed works specifically to be performed by others. Second, nearly all the poets mentioned by name in Plato belong to previous generations; they may have been performers in their day, but all that survives of them in Plato's period are the poems that others continue to sing. Finally, it is possible that we can find evidence of the search for a new term for the poet-as-performer in the proliferation in the period of terms to describe performers; rhapsodes, actors, orators, sophists and philosophers are all coming into their own in this time, even as the *ἀοιδός* is disappearing, and as the poet continues to make songs that he hopes will be known far beyond the audience he himself can personally address.<sup>145</sup>

In the set of grouped dialogues, then, we find an idea of the significance of *ποιητής* that is largely in keeping with what was seen in Isocrates: generally speaking, a *ποιητής* is a creator with a central position in society who works with language, meter

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<sup>144</sup> The verb *ἀδεῖν* remains in common use, and *ῥόδός* appears regularly; other nominal terms are not used.

<sup>145</sup> The work of Nagy and others on the terminology of singers and song may support this last option; see e.g. Nagy (2002) 71 and n.4.



and music. It is a relatively restricted term, and Plato's uses of it that stretch or strain its basic meaning serve as exceptions that prove the rule: for the speakers in the *Critias* to call each other poets, for instance, works as a metaphor precisely because they are not, in fact, poets in the strict sense. When we looked at the verbs that describe the poets' activities, on the other hand, we saw very little to distinguish them from the writers of unmetred speeches, implying an underlying assumption like Gorgias' that poetry was, essentially, decorated language.<sup>146</sup>

We saw a wider register of meanings when we looked at who the poet was compared and contrasted with. He shared with prophets a link to the divine that allowed him to say more than he knew, and with the orator a technical skill related to the manipulation of language – aspects that might be contradictory if set side by side, but that were both apparently sufficiently accepted ideas that they did not need justification or explanation. He could also be classed with the craftsmen, further emphasizing his technical skill. Being a poet was, moreover, shown to be a profession, and something that distinguished a man from the *ιδιώτης*. Finally, we observed that, while the poet's productions were intended for performance, the poet himself was not often pictured as a performer. It is, ultimately, a fairly straightforward term, although the variety of figures with which he can be paired – prophets, orators, actors, sophists, politicians, and more – do speak to the complexity of his role behind the relative simplicity of his title.

We turn now to an examination of the poet's products. Like Isocrates, Plato uses *ποίημα* relatively infrequently, but with two distinct resonances against Isocrates' largely

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<sup>146</sup> See also Ford (2002) 229, who observes that this view did not allow for a rhetorical poetics.

stable one.<sup>147</sup> Most often, Plato’s use of the term *ποίημα* seems unproblematically similar to our term “poem,” although it sometimes also seems to select out particular verses from a larger work. Thus the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are *ποιήματα* in *Alcibiades I* (112b) and *Hippias Minor* (228d), while, in the *Timaeus* passage discussed above, Critias describes how the *ποιήματα* of many poets were declaimed (21b). However, *Charmides* (162d) and *Hipparchus* (228d) identify metrical lines inscribed on Herms as *ποιήματα* as well. As the whole work or a small section of it, however, the primary force of the term is to identify a specific production.

There are also a number of discussions of the various categories of *ποιήματα*, and several categories of things that are set against *ποιήματα* as a different kind of production. The *Hippias Minor*, for instance, describes how Hipparchus had made<sup>148</sup> everything he wore and carried, from his ring to his Persian girdle, and including a number of literary productions: *πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ποιήματα ἔχων ἐλθεῖν, καὶ ἔπη καὶ τραγωδίας καὶ διθυράμβους, καὶ καταλογάδην πολλοὺς λόγους καὶ παντοδαποὺς συγκειμένους* (and in addition to these [the ring and girdle and so-forth], you also came in carrying *ποιήματα*— epics and tragedies and dithyrambs – and many *λόγοι καταλογάδην* and every kind of composition, 368c-d). There is clearly a distinction of literary types being made on a formal basis here, and there are at least two levels of division: *ποιήματα* are first separated off as one broad type of literary production,

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<sup>147</sup> This is supported by the fact that Diotima’s discussion of the breadth of *ποιητής* and *ποίησις* does not include *ποίημα*, and indeed the term is not used anywhere in the dialogue. The term appears only 19 times in the set of grouped dialogues, with this distribution: *Alc.* 1, *Apol.* 1, *Charm.* 2, *Hipparch.* 2, *Hip. Min.* 2, *Lysis* 3, *Meno* 1, *Parm.* 1, *Phaedo* 3, *Soph.* 2, *Tim.* 1.

<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, Plato uses several verbs (e.g. *ἐργάζειν*, *ὀφείνειν*, *πλέκειν*, among others) to describe the material objects Hipparchus wore and carried, but never *ποιεῖν*— which he seems to reserve here to describe only the making of the literary works.

parallel, it seems, to *λόγοι καταλογάδην* at least.<sup>149</sup> Within the *ποιήματα*, he then identifies three types, epics, tragedies and dithyrambs. He is doing easily here what seemed less intuitive to Herodotus: viewing disparate kinds of poems as similar in essence while acknowledging that each belonged to its own genre.

It is less clear what we should do with the second and third categories, the *λόγοι καταλογάδην* and the *παντοδοπούς συγκειμένους*. Were there only two categories presented here, it would be tempting indeed to follow the usual prose-poetry dichotomy that people have traditionally seen in this passage. If we accept that dichotomy, however, what are we to make of the third category, the *παντοδοπούς συγκειμένους*? We have already covered metered and unmetered language, so what is left? There is no need for the *παντοδοπούς συγκειμένους* to refer to a specific, identifiable category, but the implication is that the forms already named have not exhausted the possibilities; at the very least, it suggests a need for a catch-all category for odds and ends. It is precisely this messy set that allows us to see more clearly the subtlety of *καταλογάδην*.

In the Isocrates section above, we saw that the adverb *καταλογάδην* referred to organization of some sort, and that, while it was not necessarily a natural opposite to metered language, it allowed for the creation of a third category against metered speech, a category that distinguished between unmetered speech that was systematically organized, and unmetered speech that was not. In this passage, similarly, we see metered language singled out, but we are left to account for two other types. Others have solved this by

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<sup>149</sup> There is nothing in the Greek that prevents us from understanding only one top category, *ποιήματα*, and setting the other types as subsets of that; equally, however, there is no evidence elsewhere to suggest such a broad meaning of *ποιήματα*.

reading the third type as an appositive description of the *λόγοι καταλογάδην*; Jowett, for instance, preserves the dichotomy in his translation without quite acknowledging the third term: “you had brought with you poems, epic, tragic, and dithyrambic, as well as prose-writings of the most various kinds,” and many other translators do likewise.<sup>150</sup>

Fortunately, there is an analogous passage to provide further insight. The *Lysis* also suggests a difference between *ποιήματα* and things spoken *καταλογάδην*, as well as a suggestion of a more complicated situation. Here, Ctessipus complains about the ways that Hippothales, in praising Lysis, abuses his friends’ patience and ears:

*καὶ ἃ μὲν καταλογάδην διηγεῖται, δεινὰ ὄντα, οὐ πάνυ τι δεινὰ ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴν τὰ ποιήματα ἡμῶν ἐπιχειρήσῃ καταντλεῖν καὶ συγγράμματα. καὶ ὃ ἔστιν τούτων δεινότερον, ὅτι καὶ ἄδει εἰς τὰ παιδικὰ φωνῇ θαυμασίᾳ, ἣν ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἀκούοντας ἀνέχεσθαι.*

(And the things he goes through *καταλογάδην*, although they are incredible, are not the really incredible ones – those are when he applies himself to pouring out *ποιήματα* and *συγγράμματα* over us. Even more incredible than those is when he sings to his darling in a “wonderful” voice, which we are forced to listen to, 204d.)

Here again, as in the *Hippias Minor*, we see a multiplicity of categories that our dichotomy of prose and poetry cannot account for. Ctessipus implies at least four categories, although there must be overlap between them – for one thing, it is hard to imagine how a *ποιήματα* could be expressed if it were not spoken, or written, or sung – and even suggests a hierarchy, of audience distress if not of compositional or performative form. There are, first, what Hippothales goes through *καταλογάδην*; more

<sup>150</sup> e.g. Lamb gives the similar “And in addition you said that you brought with you poems, both epics and tragedies and dithyrambs, and many writings of all sorts composed in prose.”

incredible are the *ποιήματα* and *συγγράμματα*; and worst of all are what he sings.<sup>151</sup>

Given the etymology of the adverb *καταλογάδην*, it is not entirely convincing to think it would signify idle conversation. Moreover, because they are set specifically against the *συγγράμματα*— what has been written down in advance, but is nonetheless almost certainly destined for oral performance – it is more likely that the adverb suggests not random chatter but rather something organized but not particularly interesting, like a list.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, we can wrap up the discussion of *ποίημα* with one brief observation. We saw above that, when *ποιηταί* were under discussion, the emphasis was rarely on the performance of the poetry, even though the terms that made such a distinction clear in the previous century had fallen away. When *ποιήματα* are mentioned, similarly, the emphasis is rarely on the public or performative aspects. The term is used to identify specific works, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or to indicate types of works, like the tragedy or the dithyramb; performance might be implicit in the genre, but it is the unit of content rather than performance that is being identified. That is, while Plato very likely associated a *ποίημα* with a balanced package of *λόγος*, *μέλος*, *μέτρον* and other features all working in tandem, he did not use *ποίημα* to describe the effects or features of the poet's activities.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Translations are better at acknowledging the nuances of the categories here than in the *Hippias Minor* passage. Wright, for instance, gives 'constant talk', 'poems and speeches', and 'song', and Lamb has 'conversation', 'poems and prose compositions', and 'songs'. The separation of *ποίημα* from song here, although it is not sustained, recalls the several places in Isocrates where a separation between poetry and music was implied, and prefigures the more explicit separation in Aristotle.

<sup>152</sup> The genre of catalogue poetry like the *Γυναικῶν Κατάλογος* may support this, although it is not clear when it acquired its name.

<sup>153</sup> For that, he most often relies on *μέλος* and *ῥόδός*.

Turning, then, to the use of *ποίησις*. Like *ποίημα*, it is a relatively uncommon word, appearing in most dialogues only once or twice, if at all.<sup>154</sup> However, whereas *ποίημα* was relatively restricted in its meaning, the broader significance of *ποίησις* as any made thing continues to be in play. There does seem to be consistency within individual dialogues; the *Charmides* and *Sophist*, for instance, use the term only with its broad, unspecified and non-literary significance, while the dialogues that use it to refer to literary productions (*Apology*, *Gorgias*, *Lysis*, *Theaetetus*, and *Timaeus*) extend its meaning to the broader, physical meaning only carefully and with notice.

In its literary incarnations, *ποίησις* often seems to be something akin to our idea of poetry: the abstract business that poets occupy themselves with. In the *Apology*, for instance, Socrates observes that the poets think of themselves as *σοφώτατοι* on account of their *ποίησις*; it is the abstract practice they engage in that makes them respected and wise. The description of Solon in the *Timaeus* passage discussed above adds nuance to the idea: Solon was wise in respect to other things, but *ἐλευθεριώτατος*<sup>155</sup> with regard to his *ποίησις*, and would have been more famous than any other poet had he taken his *ποίησις* seriously rather than treating it as a side project.

The uses of the term in the *Symposium* support the idea of *ποίησις* as the abstract idea of poetry, although they also demonstrate that the term retains its full range of meanings. The word appears in two distinct discussions – the same two, in fact, that dealt

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<sup>154</sup> It appears a bit less than twice as often as *ποίημα*, with the following distribution: *Alc.* 1, *Apol.* 1, *Charm.* 3, *Gorg.* 6, *Lysis* 1, *Menex.* 1, *Pol.* 1, *Soph.* 4, *Symp.* 8, *Theaet.* 2, *Tim.* 2, with the appearances in the *Charm.* and *Soph.* referring only to material creations.

<sup>155</sup> The superlative describing Solon there is not well understood; we are not even sure if it should be *ἐλευθεριώτατος* or *ἐλευθεριώτατος*, never mind what it would mean in either case. Capra (2010) 206ff offers a good discussion of this.

most fully with *ποιητής*. First, Agathon claims in his speech that Eros, the *ποιητής*, is good (*ἀγαθός*) at every *ποίησις* having to do with music. The word is clearly related to something similar to our idea of poetry here, but it retains an almost verbal force: it is the making that is done through music. Moreover, that qualification of it – that it is specifically *ποίησις τὴν κατὰ μουσικὴν* – especially in a passage that has already made several references to poetry and even quoted several tragic poets, should be a flag to us that it retains its breadth; if it were already closely limited, the explanation would seem extraneous.<sup>156</sup>

The *Theaetetus*, too, manages to have it both ways. At 152e, for instance, Socrates uses *ποίησις* with its restricted resonance to mean something along the lines of the oeuvre of Homer or Epicharmus. A later passage, however, takes a more unusual approach, and again gives the noun a verbal, active force. There, in the course of making an unrelated point, Socrates mentions to Theodorus a practice of the ancient poets:

*παρειλήφαμεν παρὰ μὲν τῶν ἀρχαίων μετὰ ποιήσεως ἐπικρυπτομένων τοὺς πολλοὺς, ὡς ἡ γένεσις τῶν ἄλλων πάντων Ὠκεανός τε καὶ Τηθύς ῥέυματα τυγχάνει καὶ οὐδὲν ἔστηκε, παρὰ δὲ τῶν ὑστέρων ἅτε σοφτέρων ἀναφανδὸν ἀποδεικνυμένων, ἵνα καὶ οἱ σκοτοτόμοι αὐτῶν τὴν σοφίαν μάθωσιν ἀκούσαντες...*

(We have received from those ancient ones who concealed most things with their poetry how the origin of all things is Ocean and Tethys, that all is flow and nothing stands fast, but from the later ones, who, because they

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<sup>156</sup> Fowler, in his Loeb translation, sees this as straining the metaphor Agathon began by conflating Eros to his own field, and it is perhaps not the most graceful extension of meaning, but nothing in the term itself resisted such an extension. It also recalls Theaetetus' surprised question about the sophist as *ποιητής* of animals, but the greater restrictions on the significance of the agent noun made that example less natural than this one. The following section makes this even clearer, as Agathon enlarges the sense of the term by defining the *σοφία* of Eros as the *ποίησις* of all life (*μὲν δὲ τὴν γε τῶν ζώων ποίησιν πάντων*, 197a). Diotima, too, in the discussion mentioned above, observes that *ποίησις*, strictly speaking, should be any making, but in practice is restricted to what the poets make – although the dialogue that is going on around her belies her assertion about its restriction.

are wiser, made public demonstrations openly [of these same things], in order that even leatherworkers, listening to them, might learn their wisdom, 180c-d).

Here there is a contrast between how things were done in the past, and how they have been done more recently: the moderns make their knowledge clear and available to everyone, but the ancients concealed their knowledge with *ποίησις*.<sup>157</sup> The *ποίησις* is again a very active molding as the ancients are seen as literally manipulating their language in such a way as to make it conceal its meaning – they are craftsmen, ironically, hiding knowledge by means of their craft from other craftsmen. Plato does not clarify what role the *ποίησις* has in the hiding, but, by the wording, it seems to be a tool or method of composition.

On the other side of the spectrum from the subtle meanings in the *Symposium* and *Theaetetus*, the *Gorgias*, in what may be a conscious echo of its namesake, offers a rare straightforward definition of *ποίησις*: if one should strip away song, rhythm and meter from all *ποίησις*, Socrates asks Callicles, what would be left besides *λόγος* (*εἴ τις περιέλοι τῆς ποιήσεως πάσης τό τε μέλος καὶ τὸν ῥυθμὸν καὶ τὸ μέτρον, ἄλλο τι ἢ λόγοι γίνονται τὸ λειπόμενον*, 502c)?<sup>158</sup> This is, of course, one step in an argument, and should not be taken as a clear statement of Socrates' actual belief, or of Plato's, for that matter, although it likely reflects current conceptions; the very way that the question

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<sup>157</sup> This concealment seems to be mythical allegories; see Tate (1929) for Plato and the allegorical tradition, Richardson (1975) for the allegorical tradition more generally. Aristotle attributes a similar practice to the ancient poets; they are likely referring to the same, or at least a similar, genre of poets and poetry. See below.

<sup>158</sup> Leaving us with the familiar picture of *ποίησις* as *λόγος* with the addition of the ornaments *μέλος*, *ῥυθμός* and *μέτρον* – that is, language overlaid with decorative elements.



is asked suggests that the definition is at least partly facetious – especially when compared to the other uses in the dialogue.

At 449d, for instance, Socrates asks Gorgias to describe what *ῥητορικὴ* is concerned with, in the way that weaving is concerned with the making of clothes, and music the making of a *μέλος* (ἡ ὑφαντικὴ περὶ τὴν τῶν ἱματίων ἐργασίαν ... καὶ ἡ μουσικὴ περὶ τὴν τῶν μελῶν ποίησιν).<sup>159</sup> That is, what is the end product of the practice of the art of rhetoric, as clothes are of weaving?<sup>160</sup> The *ποίησις* here is set parallel to *ἐργασία* as the activity that results in the product – *μέλος*, in this case – and is thus similar in its force to the other very active uses discussed above. While *ποίησις* can be put forward as the result of adding *μέλος* and *μέτρον* to *λόγος*, then, it is also, more actively, the process of adding those things, so that the term is still fluctuating between multiple meanings.

Moreover, in the course of further honing the ‘simple’ definition of *ποίησις* given at 502c, Socrates – allegedly in the interest of clarifying distinctions – manages, as we saw above, to thoroughly confuse at least rhetoric and poetry. Having shown that poetry is really just *λόγος*, and indeed *λόγος* spoken to a great crowd for the sake of pleasure, poetry was also declared to be a kind of public speaking (*δημηγορία*, 502c).<sup>161</sup> The fact that it is not *ποίησις* that he uses here, however, but *ποιητική*, a relatively recent coinage, lets Plato reserve *ποίησις* as a very active term, referring less to poetry writ large than to active and intentional manipulation of language.

<sup>159</sup> On the idea that Plato likely coined the term *ῥητορικὴ*, see especially Schiappa (1990) and (1992).

<sup>160</sup> Again prefiguring Aristotle’s reliance on end as definition.

<sup>161</sup> As was observed above, in the discussion of the *ποιητής*.

The term *ποίησις* is thus more complicated than either of its relatives, *ποίημα* or *ποιητής*. It operates on multiple valences in Plato, sometimes in close proximity: first, its primitive sense of making in any respect continues to be productive, although this seems to have yielded its primary position to newer resonances. It can also refer to a specific set of poetry: the poetry of a particular author, or of a particular genre, for instance. In this sense, it functions as a way to group *ποιήματα* into meaningful categories: the *ποιήματα* of Homer comprise the *ποίησις Ὀμήρου*, for instance. It also describes the abstract practice of making poetry, although Plato usually prefers the newer, and more restricted, *ποιητικὴ [τέχνη]* for this resonance. Most interesting, though, is how often the word carries almost verbal force in Plato, a nuance that had not been much in evidence previously.

A final set of *POI-* root terms remains to be discussed. We saw in the fifth century a number of new compounds built off the *POI-* root and put forward to single out makers or products of specific kinds. These compounds continue to be productive in Plato, although, more often than not, the compounds he uses relate not to literary arts, or even the arts at all, but to creation in the physical world, most often in the interest of explanation by analogy.<sup>162</sup> A passage in the *Euthydemus* that is unusually dense with such compounds will illustrate his use of, and creation of, such compounds. At 289b-d, Socrates is trying to prove his point that what is needed is a confluence of knowledge

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<sup>162</sup> For the most part, his interest is in drawing comparisons with craftsmen in the material world, so we see terms like *ὄψοποιία* and *μηχανοποιός* in the *Gorgias*, as well as several entirely unique words like *θησαυροποιός*, *τυρρανοποιός* and *δευσοποιός* in the *Republic*. On Plato's use of craft analogies, see e.g. Graham (1990), Warren (1989).

relating to both the making and the use of a given object.<sup>163</sup> As he often does, Socrates uses a material craft to make a point about language: just as the arts of lyre-making (*λυροποιική*) and lyre-playing (*κιθαριστική*) are very different, and the lyre-maker (*λυροποιός*) knows only the former but not the latter, and just as the case is the same with flute-making (*αύλοποιική*), so too we should expect that learning the art of speech-making (*λογοποιική*) should not be good enough unless we also learn how to use the speeches.<sup>164</sup>

Given the nature of the dialogue, Plato is likely being facetious here and mocking Euthydemus and Dionysodorus with the use of ridiculous language, but this is only the most extreme example of a common occurrence of semantic creativity in Plato.<sup>165</sup> What is most important for our purposes, however, is the evidence this provides of the period's continuing interest in developing terminology that allows for precise categorization not only of makers and their products, but, as seen above with *ποιητική*, for the abstract concept that the making involves. While the terms in this passage of the *Euthydemus* are overkill, nominal forms of similar compounds are abundant in the orators of the period, and continue to be found in Aristotle and beyond.

In these dialogues, then, we have a picture of poetry that is in some ways similar to that of Isocrates, but with several important distinctions. First, he is largely consistent with retaining the concept of music whenever he speaks of poetry, whereas Isocrates

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<sup>163</sup> On the importance to Plato of knowing an object's end, c.f. *Rep.* 352e, the rule of classification to which Aristotle will basically adhere: *ἄρ' οὖν τοῦτο ἂν θείης καὶ ἵππου καὶ ἄλλου ὅτουοῦν ἔργον, ὃ ἂν ἢ μόνῳ ἐκείνῳ ποιῆ τις ἢ ἄριστα;* (would you have it that the work of a horse or anything else is that which one is able to do best with it, or only by means of it?).

<sup>164</sup> These adjectives are found nowhere else in the extant Greek corpus, although they are clearly modeled both on familiar compounds and on abstract adjectives like *ῥητορική* and *μουσική*.

<sup>165</sup> Fossum (1931) remains an important starting place for discussions of Plato's semantic creativity.

rarely observes the musical aspects, usually presenting poetry as essentially language. On the other hand, Plato's usual purpose in mentioning the musical aspects of poetry is to show that, without them, it is nothing other than language – that is, to break down the boundaries setting poetry apart from other kinds of language. This allows him, like his predecessors, to break up the category of non-metrical language in a way that pushes the less-desirable kind – for him, the poetic – farther into the realm of poetry and away from the realm of his own works. One consequence of this attempt is the multiplication of categories elsewhere: thus the incomplete separation of *ποιητική* from *μουσική*, and the assertion of the similar category of *ῥητορικὴ*.

Alongside these relatively unsurprising conclusions, however, Plato reveals other, subtler ideas about poetry. His linguistic innovations, for instance, suggest at least an awareness of, if not a dissatisfaction with, a vocabulary inadequate for describing literary categories. In some cases, like that of *ποίησις*, it is clear that he saw some value in preserving the semantic range of the term, and thus experimented with neologisms that might provide a more stable and precise way to talk about the idea of poetry without sacrificing the more active force of *ποίησις*. Perhaps more importantly, with the coining of terms like *ῥητορικὴ* and in the semantic precision he aims for with it, we see an interest in bounding the category of the poetic as distinct from other categories of language use – an interest that suggests a relatively stable idea of the poetic.

Two final points must be made. While Plato's picture of the divinely inspired mad poet is the one that has come to dominate our idea of the poet, it should be emphasized how much of a deviation that was from his predecessors and peers. Certainly, as was said

above, the archaic poets themselves claimed a special connection with the divine, but there is no hint of such a thing in Herodotus or Thucydides, and Isocrates' conception of the poet is ultimately rather mundane. Secondly, while we have seen that authors turn to a variety of alternative categorizations when the formal ones prove insufficient, Plato appeals on several occasions to classification by causes. This is, in some ways, a natural development of classifications based on content, context and function, but is more explicitly articulated in Plato than in other authors – until, that is, it is taken up again by Aristotle.

## 2. The individual dialogues

To nuance these generalizations drawn from Plato's circumstantial discussions of poetry, we turn now to the individual dialogues that, in one sense or another, take poetry as a primary subject of discussion. In this section, we will be focusing specifically on places where Plato deviates from the spectrum of assumptions and opinions sketched above. That is, the basic ideas culled from the dialogues in which poetry is tangential will now serve as a measuring stick for what is said when poetry is the explicit topic. The dialogues under discussion here are the *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Laws*, and *Republic*.

We begin with the *Ion*, the dialogue that most obviously concerns itself with the poetic. We will follow roughly the same trajectory of exploration as before, although we are now aiming more to highlight divergences from the established norms than to tease out every nuance in the dialogue itself. It will come as no surprise to observe, from the start, that this dialogue that takes poetry as its subject more than any other should also

resolve itself with one of the least nuanced views of the poetic. That is, it is easier to take aim at a still target.

The *Ion* takes one of the strictest definitions of ποιητής in the corpus, specifying that he is the one who makes what performers such as the rhapsode and the actor sing. Socrates' further comment that he himself is merely an ιδιώτης not only marks him off as engaged in something different, but distinguishes poet, rhapsode and actor as, in some sense, professional (ἀλλὰ σοφοὶ μὲν ποῦ ἐστε ὑμεῖς οἱ ῥαψωδοὶ καὶ ὑποκριταὶ καὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἀδετε τὰ ποιήματα, ἐγὼ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τάληθη λέγω, οἷον εἰκος ιδιώτην ἄνθρωπον, 532d).<sup>166</sup> The emphasis on both professional performance and on singing is heavy throughout the work, with little attention paid to non-professional contests like that mentioned in the *Critias*. Thus the poet in the *Ion* is called μελοποιός as well as ποιητής, and he makes ἔπη and μέλος, terms more closely associated with performative song, more often than ποίησις or ποιήματα, terms tied more to content and the shape of the language they are made up of.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>166</sup> As also Murray (1996) 110, although she is inclined to interpret ιδιώτης elsewhere as marking specifically a prose-poetry distinction – a suggestion I find largely unconvincing.

<sup>167</sup> Poetic productions are much more frequently referred to in the *Ion* as μέλος than anything else, and other terms are infrequent; there are no μῦθοι, for instance, and no ὕμνοι – regular terms for types of language in the rest of the Platonic corpus. There are, moreover, only seven instances of λόγος, a term that is used fairly neutrally throughout the corpus to describe a language act, whether spoken or sung. For comparison, there are 22 instances in the *Menexenus*, a dialogue of 4908 words compared to *Ion*'s 4091, and 18 in the 4505 word *Hip. Min.*, plus ten more related nouns built off the LOG- root. In the *Ion*, λόγος appears three times in the phrase ἀξιός λόγος to mean something like 'worthy of mention': at 532c when Ion says he is unable to say anything worth mentioning after listening to someone discourse (διαλέγεται) about a poet other than Homer; and twice by Socrates at 541d to describe why foreign men have been honored in Athens. Twice Socrates uses λόγῳ as an instrumental dative meaning 'reason' (534d and 532e). Ion uses it 535a to refer to the things Socrates has just said, and Socrates uses it in a similar way at 540a of Ion's admission. That is, this dialogue is more careful than perhaps any other to distinguish poetic activities from non-poetic, although it is also careful to keep the rhapsode firmly on the side of the poetic; see e.g. Murray (1996) 114-115.

The most famous contention of the dialogue, of course, is that a poet works not through *τέχνη* but by means of a magnet-like chain of force emanating from the divine.<sup>168</sup> This is developed carefully over the course of the dialogue, from his starting claim – soon recanted – that the rhapsode has a *τέχνη* (530b8). The rhapsode, like the poet in other dialogues, is soon compared to the *μαντικός* as one who knows but has no *τέχνη* to account for his knowledge; this is made explicit at 533-4: poets of *ἔπη* make their poems (*ποιήματα*) not from *τέχνη* but because of being inspired and possessed (*ἔνθεοι* and *κατεχόμενος*), and the same is said of the rhapsode, who does the same work as the poet, although he does it at one level farther removed from reality.

As mentioned above, this dialogue prefers non-*POI*- root words to discuss the poet's productions; there is in fact only one use of *ποίησις* – to refer to Homer's body of work, it seems (*ἽΟμηρος τὴν ποίησιν πεποίηκεν*, 531d) – and only four uses of *ποιήματα*, which consistently denote specific productions of poets, as often elsewhere. They are also, however, in the service of the larger purpose of this dialogue, attributed not to humanity or men but divinity and the gods, as is explicitly stated when trying to account for Tynnichus' one good poem (...*οὐκ ἀνθρώπινα ἐστὶν τὰ καλὰ ταῦτα ποιήματα οὐδὲ ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ θεῖα καὶ θεῶν*, 534e). Furthermore, they are, again, edged away from the spoken and towards the sung by the language around them.

This dialogue, then, unlike many others in the corpus, has the implicit goal of drawing a sharp distinction between *λόγος* of any sort and the poetic. In the process of

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<sup>168</sup> The magnet analogy is articulated at 533c ff. The degree of involvement of the divine is a Platonic innovation, as noted above, that was nowhere more fully developed and explained than in the *Ion*, although it is difficult to sustain the idea to any great extent in the other dialogues.

achieving this, it shows a preference for the language of song rather than the language of speech, even though it seems that Ion's work as a rhapsode has as much to do with exegesis of Homer – which would almost certainly not be sung – as with recitation of Homer's epics, which would almost certainly have been at least chanted, if not actually sung.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, it removes nearly all the skill and responsibility from the poet, placing responsibility for the excellence of a poem firmly in the hands of the divine; many other dialogues emphasize the role of divine inspiration in the poet's work, but rarely is there an attempt to entirely erase poetic τέχνη like this. The *Ion*, then, is anomalous when compared to the rest of the corpus, and equally anomalous when compared to the larger picture of cultural assumptions about poets and poetry, when it relegates the poetic almost exclusively to the divine, while men retain some power over λόγος. That is, the poetic has been separated from λόγος and had its power located elsewhere, beyond the world of human agency.

The *Phaedrus*, in some ways, locates itself on the opposite end of the spectrum from the *Ion*, although it shares with it an interest in attributing poetry at least in part to divine inspiration.<sup>170</sup> However, it is also at pains to elide the very boundaries that the *Ion* was so interested in upholding, and to connect rhetoric with tragedy as the *Gorgias* does. The first mention of a ποιητής in the dialogue illustrates both of these points. Phaedrus has just completed presenting Lysias' speech to Socrates, and Socrates' sanguine reaction bothers him.

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<sup>169</sup> See e.g. West (1974), Nagy (1989). See below on Aristotle's multiplicity of categories that seem to suggest a middle ground between speech and song.

<sup>170</sup> Orsini (1975) 47-62 provides an interesting, if now somewhat dated, overview of scholarship on this dialogue.



*ΦΑΙΔ· μηδαμῶς, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀληθῶς εἶπε πρὸς Διὸς φιλίου, οἷε ἄν τινα ἔχειν εἰπεῖν ἄλλον τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἕτερα τούτων μείζω καὶ πλείω περὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ πράγματος;*

*ΣΩΚ· τί δέ; καὶ ταύτη δεῖ ὑπ' ἐμοῦ τε καὶ σοῦ τὸν λόγον ἐπαινεθῆναι, ὡς τὰ δέοντα εἰρηκότος τοῦ ποιητοῦ, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκείνη μόνον, ὅτι σαφῆ καὶ στρογγύλα, καὶ ἀκριβῶς ἕκαστα τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀποτετόρνενται;*

(PHAID: Socrates, by Zeus Philios, tell me truly, do you think that any other Greek would be able to speak on this subject more impressively or more fully than this?)

SOC: What? Must you and I praise this speech in this respect as well, that the ποιητής said what needed to be said, and not only in these other respects, that it was clear and powerful, and that each of the words was turned out precisely? 234e-235a)

In the course of this project so far we have seen a speechmaker called a ποιητής λόγων on several occasions, but it is much less common for ποιητής to carry this meaning on its own, without the specifying genitive. This is, moreover, the first descriptive identification of Lysias' activities by Socrates in the dialogue, and it comes only lines after the end of the recitation. In light of these details, and especially in light of what follows, it is likely that the use here is supposed to be slightly surprising, and to set the reader just a bit off-balance.

Somewhat later in the dialogue, in the course of describing the speechwriting process, Socrates describes the speaker as a ποιητής who sets out from the theater happily if his speech held good (γεγηθῶς ἀπέρχεται ἐκ τοῦ θεάτρου ὁ ποιητής, 258b). Context, again, makes it clear that it is political speeches being discussed, but the metaphor makes the speaker into a poet, and the public forum into the theater. In other words, Plato is here conflating rhetoric and tragedy, much as he did in the *Gorgias*,

separating rhetoric from other non-metered language and associating it firmly with the poetic.

This same conflation is apparent throughout the dialogue, especially in the ways Socrates describes his own activities. Introducing his speech at 237a, for instance, he first invokes the muses (*ἄγετε δὴ, ὦ Μοῦσαι, εἴτε δι' ᾠδῆς εἶδος λίγειαί, εἴτε διὰ γένος μουσικὸν τὸ Λιγύων ταύτην ἔσχετ' ἐπωνυμίαν*). When he pauses to address Phaedrus at 241d, it is because he has recited a line in meter, and he wishes to make an end to his *λόγος*. When Phaedrus pushes him, Socrates rebukes him: *οὐκ ἦσθου, ὦ μακάριε, ὅτι ἤδη ἔπη φθέγγομαι ἀλλ' οὐκέτι διθυράμβους, καὶ ταῦτα ψέγων; ἐὰν δ' ἐπαινεῖν τὸν ἕτερον ἄρξωμαι, τί με οἶει ποιήσειν;* (don't you see, my friend, that I am now speaking *ἐπή*, no longer dithyrambs,<sup>171</sup> even though I am blaming – what do you think I would compose if I were praising? 241e). When he resumes his *λόγος* at 244a, he tells Phaedrus that he is now speaking not as Phaedrus but as Stesichorus. Finally, as he concludes his first speech, he acknowledges that he has been compelled to speak poetically (*[παλινωδία] τοῖς ὀνόμασιν ἠναγκασμένη ποιητικοῖς τισιν διὰ Φαῖδρον εἰρησθαι*, 257a).

Not only has he explicitly labeled his speech poetic in several ways, he has equated it to several genres – that is, he begins with the dithyramb although he is speaking subject matter proper to iambs; he then stumbles into epic, and ends up calling himself Stesichorus and his work a *παλινωδία*. He is acknowledging a range of well-established genres, only to disregard their particular boundaries. At the same time, he is

<sup>171</sup> That is, Socrates' speech began with the phrase that traditionally opened the dithyrambic preludes, but then fell into hexameters, i.e. epic. See e.g. Thompson (1868) 34.

throughout maintaining some of the most important features of speeches – most obviously, a general avoidance of meter. In this way, he illustrates vividly how easily rhetoric and the poetic bleed into each other.<sup>172</sup>

We saw similar metaphorical comparisons of non-poets to poets in the *Critias* and *Cleitophon*, although this one is different in several important ways. First, Socrates is in fact slipping into meter now and then, whereas earlier comparisons were largely facetious. Second, whereas earlier comparisons were applied by one speaker to another, here Socrates assimilates himself to the poets.<sup>173</sup> He seems, in fact, to be acting out, as it were, the process of falling into divine inspiration, and demonstrating the lack of control that poets have with regard to composing their poetry. The *Phaedrus* is here, like the *Ion*, interested in connecting poetry more with divine inspiration – specifically divine madness, in this case – than any kind of real knowledge, and moreover, in taking rhetoric with it.<sup>174</sup>

A few passages later, in the course of describing the different kinds of madness that can overtake a man, it goes even farther, describing how divine madness works, and its effects:

λαβοῦσα ἀπαλήν καὶ ἄβατον ψυχὴν, ἐγείρουσα καὶ ἐκβακχεύουσα κατὰ  
τε ἄδᾶς καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν, μυρία τῶν παλαιῶν ἔργα  
κοσμοῦσα τοὺς ἐπιγιγνομένους παιδεύει· ὃς δ' ἂν ἄνευ μανίας Μουσῶν  
ἐπὶ ποιητικᾶς θύρας ἀφίκηται, πεισθεὶς ὡς ἄρα ἐκ τέχνης ἱκανὸς  
ποιητῆς ἐσόμενος, ἀτελής αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ ποίησις ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν  
μαινομένων ἢ τοῦ σωφρονοῦντος ἠφανίσθη.

<sup>172</sup> A sentiment Thucydides would likely approve of, although his ‘good’ category of λόγος would look little like Plato’s.

<sup>173</sup> *pace* Tejera (1999) 45, who argues that Socrates resists being identified with the poets.

<sup>174</sup> See Tejera (1999) 44 on divine madness in the *Phaedrus*.

(there is a madness that can seize a delicate and untrodden soul, wake it up, and fill it with Bacchic frenzy<sup>175</sup> towards ᾠδή and other ποίησις, and, decorating the countless deeds of the ancients, it educates later generations; but he who comes to the ποιητικὰς gates of the muses without mania, persuaded that he will be a ποιητής from τέχνη, he and his ποίησις, being ineffective and of a man in his right mind, will be disappeared by the ποίησις of the madman, 245a.)

In many ways, the uses of the key terms here reinforce what we have seen elsewhere: the ποιητής is concerned with music, for instance, and his art is ποίησις, and a major concern of poetry is the education of posterity. Singling out ᾠδή as one among an assumed multiplicity of kinds of ποίησις reinforces the broad inclusivity he is attributing to it, and essentially makes room for rhetoric alongside the many other genres of the poetic. As Tejera puts it, “Socrates is broadening the conception of rhetoric in a way unheard of by Phaedrus.”<sup>176</sup> From the point of view of this project, however, Socrates is simply clarifying that rhetoric is not distinct from poetry in anything significant, even if their forms are distinct.

Also in this passage is the first of several uses in the dialogue of the adjective ποιητικός used with reference to literary productions.<sup>177</sup> Later, the ποιητικός will take its place as sixth on the list of kinds of men that experienced souls will be drawn to, after the philosopher, king and prophet, among others (248d-e), and then as one of the four kinds of divine madness, and particularly the one associated with the Muses (265b). The final appearance is at 257a, where Socrates ends his speech and comments on the τὰ ὀνόματα ποιητικά τινα he was compelled to use. The *Phaedrus* is thus quite consistent with

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<sup>175</sup> Elsewhere a poetic word, found in Sophocles and especially Euripides, and in once in the *Rep*.

<sup>176</sup> Tejera (1999) 48.

<sup>177</sup> In fact, it is used in the *Phaedrus* only with reference to literary productions.

regard to this adjective: it is always connected with madness of some kind, and especially with the Muses – themselves, of course, the keepers of poetry.

This dialogue, more than the others, also allows us to see the *ποιητής* as a language-worker among other language-workers. There is the orator, of course, whose work is often similar to the poet's in spirit if not in form. Alongside the orator and poet, however, this dialogue also shows us the philosopher: like the poet, he is divinely possessed and inspired, but he retains a clearer memory of true being.<sup>178</sup> In the discussion of the different kinds of madness, Socrates explains that the soul of the philosopher retains its wings, and describes his activities:

*πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνοις αἰεὶ ἐστὶν μνήμη κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἷσπερ θεὸς ὦν θεῖός ἐστιν. τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἀνὴρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος, τελέους αἰεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται· ἐξιστάμενος δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σπουδασμάτων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θείῳ γιγνόμενος, νουθετεῖται μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ὡς παρακινῶν, ἐνθουσιάζων δὲ λέληθεν τοὺς πολλοὺς.*

(For he is always, as far as he is able, by means of memory, among those things among which god is divine. Now a man, if he use these remembrances rightly, is always accomplishing perfect initiations, and he alone truly achieves perfection; but stepping out from human pursuits and turning to godly ones, he is rebuked by the majority as one who is maddened, and it escapes their notice that he is inspired, 249c-d).

It is as if the direction of attention is the main distinction between poet and philosopher here: both seem to be in the grip of some kind of madness, both deal with an abstraction of reality. While the poet attempts to create compelling imitations of reality,

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<sup>178</sup> The idea of the poet as an imperfect philosopher is also implied in the *Phaedo*, when Socrates says that philosophy is the greatest kind of music (*φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὐσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς*, 61a); he explains that he had turned finally to versification in case the dream telling him to practice music had meant music in the literal sense (60e-61b).

however, the philosopher is thrilled by his recognition of the original in the imperfect copies in the world; the one aims at a better copy, the other at the original form. It is a more mystical picture of the philosopher than Plato generally gives, but he is playing up, rather than down, the similarities between that philosopher and the inspired poet/orator that Socrates is all but acting out.

We saw above that the *Ion* was concerned with marking poetry off as a category entirely distinct from *λόγος* and assigning it to the realm of the divine. The *Phaedrus*, while it does retain the connection between poetry and divine, works to elide boundaries between literary categories, to insert rhetoric into the category of the poetic, and even to implicate philosophy. It makes use of the extended metaphors of orator as poet and the conflation of rhetoric to tragedy, and even has Socrates slip through a variety of poetic genres in the course of his speech; the lines between kinds of poetry, and between poetry and any other kind of literary production, are shown to be thin, and any man can, at any time, be seized by the gods and made a poet.

The *Laws* is even more explicit than the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus* about the connection of the poet to the divine: the Athenian announces at 719c, for instance, that poets do their work when, on the tripod of the Muses, they are struck out of their minds by divine powers (*ποιητής, ὁπόταν ἐν τῷ τρίποδι τῆς Μούσης καθίζηται, τότε οὐκ ἔμφρων ἐστίν*, 719c). Because of its interest in the social function of poetry, it goes beyond all other dialogues, however, in the extent to which it emphasizes the musicality of poetry: unlike the rest of the corpus, the *Laws* relies extensively on the language of song and music, and does less with the *POI*- root words that are favored elsewhere.

One exception to this is seen in the adjective *ποιητικός*, which is used in interesting ways in this dialogue. For one thing, although the agent noun *ποιητής* is common, *ποιητικός* also appears as a substantive that is not quite synonymous with the agent noun, but that identifies an aspect of his nature. Thus at 700d, we are presented with poets who are naturally poetic, but nonetheless ignorant of what was just and customary in their art (*ἄρχοντες μὲν τῆς ἀμούσου παρανομίας ποιητὰὶ ἐγίγνοντο φύσει μὲν ποιητικοί, ἀγνώμονες δὲ περὶ τὸ δίκαιον τῆς Μούσης καὶ τὸ νόμιμον*); their productions are inappropriate, but by virtue of their misunderstanding, not their natural poetic inclination.<sup>179</sup> Elsewhere a *λόγος* is *ποιητικός*, and the good lawmaker is said to be capable of persuading the *ποιητικός* man to compose rightly; in this dialogue, then, the adjective is closely connected with its root meaning of creative and productive, although the creativity and productivity are consistently channeled through language.

While the *Laws* thus presents a fairly unproblematic, if extreme, picture of poets as musicians and their works as essentially performative music, two passages are particularly interesting for the light they shed on literary categorization and the significance of the adverb *καταλογάδην*. Towards the end of the work, the Athenian explains that the lawgiver must be judge of all kinds of speech; finally, a dichotomy is set up: the lawgiver must pay attention to speeches that are

*ἐν ποιήμασιν ἔπαινοι καὶ ψόγοι περὶ τινῶν λέγονται καὶ ὅσοι καταλογάδην, εἴτ' ἐν γράμμασιν εἴτε καθ' ἡμέραν ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις πάσαις συνουσίαις διὰ φιλονικίας τε ἀμφισβητοῦνται καὶ διὰ συγχωρήσεων...*

<sup>179</sup> Compare 682a, where the poetic race often hits on truth with divine assistance (*θεῖον γὰρ οὖν δὴ καὶ τὸ ποιητικὸν ἐνθεαστικὸν ὃν γένος ὑμνωδοῦν, πολλῶν τῶν κατ' ἀλήθειαν γιγνομένων σὺν τισιν Χάρισιν καὶ Μούσαις ἐφάπτεται ἐκάστοτε*).

praises or censures spoken in poetry, and whatever is spoken *καταλογάδην*, whether in writings or in all the various daily interactions that occur in contention or agreement, 957c-d).

Here again, the organizational adverb is set against *ποιήματα*, but it is now the one that is further divided: it is both what is written and, although the significance is less clear, what is said in the course of ordinary negotiations. This is a far less specific resonance than elsewhere; it appears to encompass any language that isn't poetry. In short, we have in this passage a clear distinction between poetry and other, although both categories are defined more by their content and context than their form. Additionally, as we have seen before, the *ποιήματα* seem to be the simpler category, with more distinctions required for the other.

In an earlier passage, however, the adverb is used in a way more in keeping with its appearances elsewhere. The Athenian is reflecting on the discussion thus far – which, he observes, has been spoken like a poem (*παντάπασι ποιήσει τινὶ προσομοίως εἰρησθαι*, 811c) – and claims that all discourses like theirs, whatever their form, deserve to be recorded:

*ἀν ἄρα που περιτυγχάνη ποιητῶν τε ποιήματα διεξιῶν καὶ γεγραμμένα καταλογάδην ἢ καὶ ψιλῶς οὕτως ἄνευ τοῦ γεγράφθαι λεγόμενα, ἀδελφά που τούτων τῶν λόγων, μὴ μεδιέναι τρόπῳ μηδενί, γράφεσθαι δέ·*

(if, searching, he should happen on *ποιήματα* of the *ποιηταί* and things written *καταλογάδην* or even spoken in a plain way without being written, kin of this discourse, he must not let it go in any way, but have it written down, 811e)

Here, as elsewhere, more than two categories are posited: there are poems, and plain speech – presumably something like casual conversation – and an intermediate



category of writings *καταλογάδην*. The interest is on content rather than form, but the grouping of *ποιήματα* and *καταλογάδην* against *ψιλῶς λεγόμενα* reinforces the idea that *καταλογάδην* is a third category, a distinct kind of prose. While meter stands as one important feature of poetry, then, its opposite – unmetered language – is here broken into multiple categories; negotiations of literary type are located among the unmetered rather than between the set with meter and the set without.

The *Laws*, then, presents a picture of poets and poetry that is within the spectrum of valences seen elsewhere, but it also offers insights into how literary categories were drawn. Language can be grouped by its lack of meter, but requires further discrimination before the category is specific enough to be meaningful. That is, just as Thucydides earlier distinguished his prose from that of other authors, and Isocrates identified his prose as more poetic than its weaker counterparts, Plato here also acknowledges a third category. It is, however, not a category related to poetry at all, but instead to some other system of organization; poetry is put forward as a bounded category of musical performance, while it is now unmetered language that needs more precise definition.

Whereas the previous dialogues emphasized the connection of the poets to the divine, the *Republic* aggressively erases it and returns poets completely to the realm of the human. They are consistently figured as craftsmen. We have seen elsewhere that, while *ποιητής* can, in certain circumstances, retain some of its old flexibility, it strains the language somewhat, and its broader resonances are used carefully and with ample warning. In the *Republic*, however, there are quick and unmarked switches between the two meanings not once but twice. The passage opens at 594b with a reference to the

tragic *ποιηταί*, a particular qualification found nowhere else; that is, a passage that will be interested in generalizing the poet to a craftsman begins by emphasizing a qualification that would normally be taken more or less for granted.<sup>180</sup> Shortly afterwards, 596d introduces a discussion of *ποιηταί* of material goods that extends to 597d. 598d then returns to the concept of the specifically literary *ποιητής*, in a discussion that continues until 601b. Two sentences later, at 601d, the *ποιητής* is again a material craftsman, this time a flutemaker. The final references to *ποιηταί*, found in the discussion spanning 605a through 606e, refer explicitly to the poet of language – and do so, in fact, in fairly ordinary ways. That is, in a relatively short span of the dialogue, an equivalency between *ποιηταί* of every sort is pushed by the unusual and sudden shifts between productive realms. For the remainder of the dialogue, the *ποιητής* will be an unproblematic literary producer, a craftsman of language perfectly analogous to the flutemaker.

Poets are normalized in other ways as well. At 330c, for instance, Socrates remarks to Cephalus that, like most people who have not personally earned their wealth, he seems somewhat indifferent to it, whereas those who have earned it themselves are quite fond of it, as fathers are their children or poets are their poems (*ὥσπερ γὰρ οἱ ποιηταὶ τὰ αὐτῶν ποιήματα καὶ οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας ἀγαπῶσιν, ταύτη τε δὴ καὶ οἱ χρηματισάμενοι περὶ τὰ χρήματα σπουδάζουσιν ὡς ἔργον ἑαυτῶν, καὶ κατὰ τὴν*

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<sup>180</sup> It is not clear that an unqualified *ποιητής* at this point would necessarily be understood as a tragedian, but the point is he would almost certainly be assumed to be a literary producer unless he were marked otherwise.

*χρείαν ἤπερ οἱ ἄλλοι*).<sup>181</sup> The comparison of all three productions – children, wealth and poems – to *ἔργα* emphasizes the very active role that the creators in each case played, and plays down the exceptionality of the poet.

Moreover, poets are put forward as just one kind of language-worker among several, and are shown as quite similar to them. 392a, for instance, claims that both *ποιηταί* and *λογοποιοί* fail to speak rightly about the issues most important to mankind (*καὶ ποιηταὶ καὶ λογοποιοὶ κακῶς λέγουσιν περὶ ἀνθρώπων τὰ μέγιστα*). Shortly after, it is asserted that the poets and mythologists work in similar ways (*ἄρ' οὐ πάντα ὅσα ὑπὸ μυθολόγων ἢ ποιητῶν λέγεται διήγησις οὕσα τυγχάνει ἢ γεγονότων ἢ ὄντων ἢ μελλόντων*; 392d). Even in the following section, when the discussion turns to manner rather than matter and different kinds of poetic genres are recognized, poets are presented as essentially craftsmen like any other. Tragedians and comedians and their productions are used as examples, but it becomes clear when the conversation returns to the guardians that they are only examples, not exceptions; poetry is just one of the imitative crafts from which the guardians are to be released (*τοὺς φύλακας ἡμῖν τῶν ἄλλων πασῶν δημιουργιῶν ἀφειμένους*, 395c).

The poets' productions, too, are regularly presented as another craft among crafts, as at 493d, where a man might make a demonstration of his poetry or political service or duty, *ἢ ποιήσιν ἢ τινα ἄλλην δημιουργίαν ἢ πόλει διακονίαν*. However, while poems are an entirely human creation in this dialogue, poetry nonetheless possesses a unique

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<sup>181</sup> A similar analogy is expressed, although less explicitly, in several other places in the corpus; see especially *Sym.* 209c, *Theaet.* 160e, *Phaedrus.* 274e. See also Aristotle below, who has almost the identical analogy.

power that is not shared by other kinds of literary productions. In concluding their discussion of poetry in book ten, for instance, Socrates asks his companions to agree that *ποίησις* has been rightly dismissed from the city on the grounds of her essence. It is acknowledged that *ποίησις* would be welcomed into the city with pleasure if it could be shown that she were necessary to a well-governed city, but they are cautious, being conscious of her ability to charm:

*ἦ γὰρ, ᾧ φίλε, οὐ κηλῆ ὑπ' αὐτῆς καὶ σύ, καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν δι' Ὅμηρου  
θεωρῆς αὐτήν;*

*πολύ γε.*

*οὐκοῦν δικαία ἐστὶν οὕτω κατιέναι, ἀπολογησαμένη ἐν μέλει ἢ τινι  
ἄλλῳ μέτρῳ;*

*πάνυ μὲν οὖν.*

*δοῖμεν δέ γε που ἂν καὶ τοῖς προστάταις αὐτῆς, ὅσοι μὴ ποιητικοί,  
φιλοποιηταὶ δέ, ἄνευ μέτρου λόγον ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς εἰπεῖν, ὡς οὐ μόνον  
ἡδεῖα ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀφελίμη πρὸς τὰς πολιτείας καὶ τὸν βίον τὸν  
ἀνθρώπινόν ἐστιν· καὶ εὐμενῶς ἀκουσόμεθα.*

(So, friend, are you too not charmed by her, particularly when you see her through Homer?

Very much.

Is it not right, then, that she return when she has defended herself in a *μέλος* or some other meter?

Definitely so.

And should we grant to her champions, as many as are not *ποιητικοί* but *φιλοποιηταί*, to speak a *λόγος* without meter on her behalf, about how she is not only sweet but also beneficial to the polity and human life? And we, being favorable, will listen? 607d-e.)

Since poets do their work without divine assistance in this dialogue, the power of poetry must be a result of its form, its music and meter, as well as its content. Thus it is poetry that charms Homer's audience, rather than Homer himself, as he is merely the craftsman. Similarly, poetry's defenders must speak their *λόγος* without meter, while she would defend herself in a *μέλος*. That is, while the *ποιητής* has become indistinguishable from the *λογοποιός* in many ways, *ποίησις* remains dangerous.

Here again, perhaps more fully than elsewhere, language has been separated out from poetry, but in this case it is the safer component.<sup>182</sup> However, if the poet is defined by his skill in the manipulation of a particular kind of language, but his production nonetheless is powerful beyond those of other language workers, the power must lie elsewhere, neither in the language nor the poet. Plato puts it into the form, the music and meter; in this way, he maintains the integrity of language to be used unproblematically by those who use it for the right ends.

Whereas the *Ion*, the *Phaedrus*, and *Laws*, then, are concerned to remove knowledge and *τέχνη* from the poet as much as possible – a move not made with particular force elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, let alone in other authors, and thus one that stands out in those dialogues – the *Republic* aims to make its poet so completely a craftsman that the terminology of inspiration is entirely avoided.<sup>183</sup> If the *Ion*, *Phaedrus*

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<sup>182</sup> A similar separation is implied early in the dialogue at 393c-d, where the poet, if he did not hide himself (*ἀποκρύπτειτο*), his whole *ποίησις* and *διήγησις* would be without mimesis.

<sup>183</sup> Or rather, language of inspiration is avoided entirely except for a pun on a usual term for inspiration, *ἐνθεός*, at 382d, where Socrates asserts that there is no false poet in god: *ποιητῆς μὲν ἄρα ψευδῆς ἐν θεῷ οὐκ ἔνι*; see Mitscherling (2009) 213. See also Murray (1996) 153, although she finds less humor in the word play.

and *Laws* went to an extreme to connect poetry to the divine, the *Republic* goes to the extreme of severing its ties to the gods.

The dialogues' assumptions about literary categories, too, differ. The *Ion* emphasizes how poetry is distinct from *λόγος*, removing it from the world of human control and raising it to that of the divine. The *Phaedrus*, on the other hand, pushes for an equation of poetry and a certain kind of *λόγος*, making the orator as prone to divine inspiration as the poet. The *Laws* draws a fairly simple line around metered and musical speech as a unified category, but then proposes finer distinctions for unmetered language. The *Republic*, finally, returns the poet firmly to the world of humans, but pulls language away from poetry in a move similar to, if more extreme than, what was done in the *Ion*.

Each of these moves stands out as unique in the corpus, but they are nonetheless natural extensions of ideas and assumptions expressed elsewhere. More than any other author, Plato is concerned about the role of the divine in poetry and the degree of control poets have over their productions. When poetry is not the explicit subject of a discussion, craft and divine inspiration work in tandem more or less unproblematically, but one or the other can be emphasized according to his needs. Plato also gives more weight to the role of music in poetry than is seen elsewhere; while he can and does use poetry for its content, its ideal presentation is never completely forgotten. Moreover, he makes more use of the ambiguity of language, how it is at once the medium of poetry and rhetoric, but also of philosophical dialectic. In an effort to address that problem, he experiments with a variety of ways to bound off the dangerous language while preserving the beneficial one for himself and his own productions.

In spite of the contradictions between and among dialogues, however, poetry in Plato can be generally defined as language to which craftsmanship, inspiration and musical performance have been applied in some combination, and whose power is attributed variously to each of those. He is never able to entirely satisfy himself, it seems, as to the nature of poetry's power and how it relates to the other language arts, as his different attempts to align it or divorce it from those arts demonstrates. However, it is a stable enough idea that the extended metaphors of the *Phaedrus* and the shifts between the literary and the non-literary meaning of terms in the *Republic* are effective: poetry is, for Plato, bounded off clearly enough as a category that he can use it as a meaningful signifier. It is, however, a signifier that often takes other kinds of *λόγος* with it, and thus serves less to mark off poetry as to mark off Plato's own method of language use. One of the reasons for this is his simultaneous interest in distinguishing his project from that of the orators and sophists; literary categorization was so important to Plato because he was self-consciously creating a place for himself and his own philosophical use of language, and poetry was one of several 'others' against which he sought to define his own works.

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In some ways, we find these authors engaged in the same kinds of negotiations we saw in the fifth century authors, although some of the terms have changed. There is little importance placed on distinguishing the various categories of poetry in Isocrates or Plato, although they can appeal to genres when they wish; unmetred language, on the other

hand, is now the site of the great negotiations of literary categories. As such, there has been an explosion of definitional terms to delineate the literary non-poet: *ῥήτωρ*, *σοφιστής* and many other labels now stand beside *λογοποιός* and *λογόγραφος* as available categories for literary makers who are not *ποιηταί*. Alongside these are a number of neologisms – organizational adverbs, adjectives in *-κός* and substantives in *-κή*, and, to a lesser degree, specifying compounds built on the *POI*- root – that demonstrate a continuing interest in marking off literary typologies with precision, although fewer and fewer of them are focused on the metrical set.

Those same organizational adverbs that acknowledge the importance of form to typology, however, also reveal an ongoing resistance to a simple dichotomy. Isocrates and Plato both, in several places, draw a simple line between language that is metered and language that is not, but they also insist on more complex divisions: of language that is metered against language that is organized in some other way, against another set of language that is explicitly sung, against yet another set for which the fact of its having been written is essential. However, as the set of metered language becomes a more defined and unified category, its unmetered partner increasingly demands greater differentiation of its types. In order to articulate these, we find both Plato and Isocrates resorting to differentiation by means of content, context and function. This is especially true for Plato, whose interest in identifying a literary product's end will be seen in a more fully expressed form in Aristotle's own literary categories.



### Chapter Three: Aristotelian Poetics

Aristotle stands out immediately for his explicit attempts to systematize the categories of literature, especially in the *Poetics*, although we will find that a great deal of what he has to say about rhetoric in the *Rhetoric* provides a kind of negative-space picture of the poetic. The very fact of producing a treatise on poetry, as Lloyd and others have observed, implies an idea of poetic as a complete and discrete organism, and moreover one that can be investigated and studied as a thing in itself.<sup>184</sup> On the other hand, the fact that Aristotle thought it worthwhile to expound on his theories in a treatise suggests that he felt there was an argument to be made about the role, powers, and definition of poetry – that is, that these remained far from settled questions.

There can be no question that Aristotle's ideas about poetry depended to a greater or lesser degree on his teachers and community. Indeed, in the previous chapters we have seen a number of ways in which the other authors prefigure Aristotle's methodology, especially in drawing his boundaries not by virtue of form but by virtue of the causes that shape his scientific methodologies elsewhere.<sup>185</sup> The *Poetics* as a whole has sometimes been understood as a response to Plato's denunciation of poetry, and the knowledge and opinions of the audience – presumably not always one of philosopher-kings – are taken

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<sup>184</sup> See e.g. Lloyd (1968) 282, Sifakis (2001a) 28-9.

<sup>185</sup> A methodology we will have occasion to refer to in the course of the study, analyzing his own works by means of the method he relied on; that is, the causes of a given thing will frequently be identified as part of its definition. The clearest explanation of Aristotle's system of four causes can be found at *Physics* 194b and 198a; see also Meijering (1987) 102-3, who discusses the relationship of the theory of causes to poetry in general and the *Poetics* in particular.

into account in discussions of poetry's effects on both performer and spectator.<sup>186</sup> While it is impossible to know the degree to which Aristotle had Plato in his sights, there are certainly points of contact between their analyses of the poetic in a number of places. It would be detrimental, however, to focus only on Plato, as Aristotle is clearly in dialogue with many of his predecessors. That is to say, Aristotle's *Poetics* is very much a product of its time and place; the work of the previous chapters, then, while directed towards more immediate ends, supply us with a fuller picture of the poetic theories underlying Aristotle's approaches than we might otherwise have had.

For instance, while his rejection of meter as a determining factor in poetry has been seen as an important departure from standard Greek attitudes,<sup>187</sup> we have in fact observed similar gestures in every author examined. Thucydides, for instance, turned to artfulness and context to distinguish his prose when meter left him grouped with productions that, although they were unmetred, he found far too poetic. The situation is similar with regard to Aristotle's elision of the divine: in spite of Plato's vocal insistence in several dialogues on the central role of the supernatural in poetry, Herodotus' poets, like Aristotle's, are essentially craftsmen who do their work by *τεχνή* like any other artist, with no particular cachet. These are the kinds of continuities that this study brings into focus, and by which in turn we are able to better understand the tradition behind the *Poetics*.

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<sup>186</sup> On the *Poetics* as a response to Plato, see e.g. Lloyd (1968) 282: "Aristotle's most important contribution to literary criticism was to have rescued poetry from the denunciations of Plato. Against Plato, he emphasized the seriousness and moral value of poetry, arguing that what the poet represents is the universal, even though he does so by means of the particular." On the relationship more generally, see e.g. Halliwell (1987) 72-3, Orsini (1975) 63-64.

<sup>187</sup> Halliwell (1987) 71.

What is almost certainly new with Aristotle is a theory of poetry that is fully and scientifically articulated, and largely consistent through the corpus. This allows us to consider a number of previously latent relationships. Aristotle gives us the chance to examine the relationship of individual genres to each other and to the larger idea of poetry, for instance, as well as the points of contact and differentiation between poetry and music that have been hinted at in earlier authors. Because we can, for the first time, assert confidently that the author in question actually had a more or less clear, consistent and considered conception of the poetic, this chapter will take a slightly different shape than the previous ones. After the discussion of relevant language, we will have occasion to reflect on how this work informs our understanding of Aristotle's poetics in general, as well as of the *Poetics* specifically.

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The term *ποιητική*, as we have seen, was a comparatively recent addition to the critical vocabulary.<sup>188</sup> It is precisely *ποιητική*, of course, that Aristotle presents as the subject of his treatise on poetry; the force of the word in general, however, let alone to Aristotle as the subject of his treatise, is not immediately clear.<sup>189</sup> We begin our

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<sup>188</sup> Its appearance in the fourth century, as discussed above, is thought to reflect an important conceptual shift towards a coherent and articulated conception of poetry, although it was still very much a work in progress. See e.g. Halliwell (1986) 10: "[I]t is arguable that the development of terminology does reflect a shift in the balance of ideas about the nature of poetry."

<sup>189</sup> Although, as mentioned above, most scholars now accept that it should be understood, like *ῥητορικὴ*, as modifying an elided *τέχνη*. On Aristotle's conceptions of *τέχνη*, see e.g. Halliwell (1986) 42ff.

discussion, then, with a review of the opening of the *Poetics*, to which we will return after an investigation of the resonances of the term.

*Περὶ ποιητικῆ αὐτῆς τε καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν αὐτῆς, ἣν τινα δύναμιν ἕκαστον ἔχει, καὶ πῶς δεῖ συνίστασθαι τοῦς μύθους εἰ μέλλει καλῶς ἔξειν ἢ ποίησις, ἔτι δὲ ἐκ πόσων καὶ ποίων ἐστὶ μορίων, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα τῆς αὐτῆς ἐστὶ μεθόδου, λέγωμεν ἀρχάμενοι κατὰ φύσιν πρῶτον ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων.*

(Concerning *ποιητικῆ*, itself and the kinds of it, what power each has, how one must organize the plot if the *ποίησις* is going to be nobly done, and furthermore from how many constituent parts, and what sort of constituent parts, and similarly concerning the other things,<sup>190</sup> as many as are relevant to an investigation of it, let us speak, first beginning, following natural order, from first principles, *Poetics* 1447a 1-12)

We are immediately reminded of another language art to which Aristotle devoted a great of thought: rhetoric. A closer comparison will serve us well here, as Aristotle does provide a precise definition for *ῥητορικῆ* early in the *Rhetoric*: *ἔστω δὴ ῥητορικῆ δύναμις περὶ ἕκαστον τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν* (So let rhetoric be the faculty of seeing all possible proofs for any given thing, 1355b 26f).<sup>191</sup> That is, he intends us to understand *ῥητορικῆ* as a capacity, an intellectual process in potentiality.<sup>192</sup> By analogy, then, *ποιητικῆ* should also be primarily a capacity, at least when used in its technical resonance.<sup>193</sup> With this as our starting assumption, we turn to the three other

<sup>190</sup> This is, as Golden and Hardison (1982) 67 observe, hardly an exhaustive list, but rather gives a picture of the kinds of inquiries Aristotle will pursue.

<sup>191</sup> The imperative and strong particle suggest that Aristotle is indeed making an assertion, and that he expects that his audience will not have considered it in quite this way before.

<sup>192</sup> Understanding *τέχνη* here in its fullest sense, as both the innate inclination to learn a thing and the knowledge of the method of executing it.

<sup>193</sup> A broader resonance than in Plato, where it seemed to apply strictly to the art.

treatises (in addition to the *Poetics*) in which it appears, and begin to illuminate the contours of that capacity.<sup>194</sup>

In the *on Interpretation*, Aristotle proposes to treat only a particular kind of sentence: the proposition (*ἀποφαντικός*), which is the kind of sentence in which truth or falsehood take part (*ἀποφαντικός δὲ οὐ πᾶς, ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ τὸ ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι ὑπάρχει*, 17a 3-4). The investigation of other kinds of sentences, those to which truth and falsehood do not apply, is proper to rhetoric and poetry, rather than dialectic (*οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι ἀφείσθωσαν, ῥητορικῆς γὰρ ἢ ποιητικῆς οἰκειότερα ἢ σκέψις, ὁ δὲ ἀποφαντικός τῆς νῦν θεωρίας*, 17a 6-8).<sup>195</sup> This is definition by negation, but it does provide an important detail: poetics, like rhetoric, is not concerned with judgments of truth, as dialectic is.<sup>196</sup>

A passing usage at *Metaphysics* 991a 21-22 points to a similar conclusion. In the course of explaining the Forms, Aristotle is systematically rejecting false conceptions of them for various reasons. One of these reasons is that a kind of language inapplicable to the subject has been adduced: *τὸ δὲ λέγειν παραδείγματα αὐτὰ εἶναι καὶ μετέχειν αὐτῶν τᾶλλα κενολογεῖν ἐστὶ καὶ μεταφορᾶς λέγειν ποιητικᾶς* (saying that [these Forms] are models and that other things have a share in them is to say nothing meaningful and to speak poetic metaphors).<sup>197</sup> Aristotle is not here saying that calling the Forms patterns is to say something false, but that subjects have linguistic methodologies

<sup>194</sup> Leaving out one instance in the *Politics* that is simply naming the treatise, and of course the appearances unrelated to literary productions – like its relatives, it retained its broader meaning through Aristotle.

<sup>195</sup> Compare *Poetics* 1460b 14f, where Aristotle observes that each art has a unique “standard of correctness,” as the Loeb has it (*ὁρθότης*).

<sup>196</sup> For a concise overview of Aristotle’s conception of dialectic, see Hamlyn (1990).

<sup>197</sup> Innes (2003) provides an extended discussion of metaphor in ancient literary theory and criticism; see especially 12-20 for Aristotle’s perspectives.

appropriate to them, and that application of the wrong method to a given subject will not result in anything meaningful.<sup>198</sup> It is philosophy that is wanted here, not poetry, and *ποιητική* is simply not relevant to philosophical inquiry. Alongside the *on Interpretation* passage, the implication is that, in order to find the truth, one must use a method relevant to truth. More important for the purposes of this study is the extension of that rule: since *ποιητική* is inapplicable to questions with truth-value, the exercise of this capacity simply does not intersect with the plane of scientific or philosophical truth.

We find at *Rhetoric* 1404a more information about the process this capacity of *ποιητική* underlies. Here, Aristotle observes that most uneducated people think the poetic style is the most beautiful, but fail to realize that there is a different *λέξις* for *λόγος* and *ποίησις*.<sup>199</sup> He goes on to give what he considers to be proof of his claim:

δηλοῖ δὲ τὸ συμβαῖνον· οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ τὰς τραγωδίας ποιοῦντες ἔτι  
 χρῶνται τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ καὶ ἐκ τῶν τετραμέτρων εἰς τὸ  
 ἰαμβεῖον μετέβησαν διὰ τὸ τῷ λόγῳ τοῦτο τῶν μέτρων ὁμοιότατον εἶναι  
 τῶν ἄλλων, οὕτω καὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀφείκασιν ὅσα παρὰ τὴν διάλεκτόν  
 ἐστίν, οἷς οἱ πρῶτον ἐκόσμου, καὶ ἔτι νῦν οἱ τὰ ἐξάμετρα ποιοῦντες.

(the result is clear: for those making tragedies no longer use the same manner, but just as they changed from tetrameters into iambs, because that is the most similar of the meters to *λόγος*, so also they got rid of all those words, as many as are beyond the scope of dialectic, words with which the earliest creators adorned, and with which the ones making hexameters now still adorn, 1404a 29-36)

<sup>198</sup> Thus also Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary *ad loc*, where he paraphrases Aristotle's objection: "it is vain and useless to posit exemplars of this kind, as he will show; and second, because this manner of speaking is similar to the metaphors which the poets introduce, which do not pertain to the philosopher."

<sup>199</sup> On the technical significance of *λέξις* in Aristotle, especially in the *Poetics*, see Grintser (2002) 77-78 and Swiggers and Wouters (1995) 21-22. On the relationship between grammar and poetic *λέξις*, especially with regard to the *Poetics*, see especially Swiggers and Wouters (2002) *passim*. The reference here to the uneducated audience speaks against the claims for an audience consisting solely of an educated elite; see e.g. Golden (1976) 356, whose interpretation of catharsis hinges on an exclusively aristocratic audience.

We see here how utterly natural Aristotle envisions the relationship between those methods and their style to be: the change in meter naturally resulted in a corresponding change in λέξεις.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, although it is clear that the οἱ who are ornamenting their productions are poets, it is significant that their identification rests in their verbal activity rather than their nominal label: it is their activity to which attention is drawn. The suggestion is of a methodology in service of a particular end: anyone wishing to create or judge a particular kind of poetry or speech rightly will need to familiarize himself with the kinds of vocabulary and linguistic features (among other things) that are appropriate to the form in question, and it is the capacity of ποιητική that allows that.

The *Rhetoric* provides an important nuance. Although ποιητική with its literary sense appears rarely in the early parts of the treatise, it shows up a number of times in the third book, in the discussions of style and organization (λέξεις and τάξεις). Early in the discussion, Aristotle remarks on the importance of using the kind of λέξεις that is appropriate to a given λόγος:

ὠρίσθω λέξεως ἀρετὴ σαφῆ εἶναι· σημεῖον γὰρ ὅτι ὁ λόγος, ἐὰν μὴ δηλοῖ, οὐ ποιήσει τὸ ἐαυτοῦ ἔργον· καὶ μήτε ταπεινὴν μήτε ὑπὲρ τὸ ἀξίωμα, ἀλλὰ πρέπουσαν· ἢ γὰρ ποιητικὴ ἴσως οὐ ταπεινὴ, ἀλλ' οὐ πρέπουσα λόγῳ.

(let it be emphasized that the excellence of λέξεις is clarity; the evidence of this is that a λόγος, if it does not clarify, does not do its proper work. Moreover, it should be neither lowly nor beyond its worth, being properly suited; so ποιητική, perhaps, is not lowly, but neither is it properly suited to λόγος, 1404b 1-6)

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<sup>200</sup> Cope *ad loc.* remarks here on the lack of speculation on Aristotle's part on why the poets' made these changes; I suggest that that is the wrong question: rather, as we will see below, we should imagine the poets adapting their methods to suit the adaptations they observe. Aristotle says as much at *Poetics* 1448b 19ff.

Here, rhetoric is the capacity underlying the linguistic process that produces *λόγος*, and it differs from the poetic in two interrelated ways. First, *λόγος* and the product of *ποιητική* may both do better to avoid the lowly style, but they clearly occupy different realms regardless; that is, *ποιητική* produces something other than *λόγος*, but parallel to it. Second, the proper work of *λόγος*, the aspect that determines its excellence, is its clarity.<sup>201</sup> The proper work of *ποιητική* is not here defined, but it must be something other than clarity.<sup>202</sup> From these three passages, then, we begin to see sketched out the details of the capacity for a linguistic method that is not relevant to scientific proofs of truth, that is not useful for philosophical inquiry, and that produces something that may have a great deal in common with *λόγος* in its *λέξις*, but is nonetheless not reliant on clarity, which is essential to *λόγος*. Of course, all of these are definitions by negation, but Aristotle's attempts in the remainder of book III to mark off the territory of *ῥητορική* from *ποιητική* allow us to bring the latter into higher relief.

One place where this becomes particularly clear is in the discussion of the stilted style (*λέξις ψύχρα*).<sup>203</sup> He identifies four major causes of stiltedness, and goes on to explain how the specific features that bring it about must be used sparingly in *λόγος*,

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<sup>201</sup> Cope (1877c) 13 observes that Aristotle is here following a rule laid out by Plato in *Rep.*352d, and elsewhere expressed by Aristotle, that the virtue of anything that can be used as a tool lies in its *ἔργον*. He concludes that this refers to all language, as Halliwell asserts throughout his commentary on the *Poetics*, but what is interesting in this passage is that, in fact, it seems to refer only to a specific kind of language – namely, rhetoric – while releasing at least poetics from the restriction.

<sup>202</sup> That is, if its end were clarity, it would not differ significantly from rhetoric, and its product would not differ significantly from *λόγος*; compare *Rhet.* 1355b 27-8, which asserts that each art has a unique purview. *pace* Halliwell, who insists on clarity as proper to all language arts, e.g. (1987) 161.

<sup>203</sup> Demetrius §114f addresses this: he defines the *λέξις ψύχρα* as *μεγαλοπρέπεια*, or using a loftier style than the subject matter deserves. See Cope (1970) 286-287 for more on the term.



although they are more acceptable in *ποιητική*.<sup>204</sup> The first cause is compound words (*δίπλωσις*), and he gives examples from Lycophron and Gorgias, explaining that they seem poetic because of being compound (*πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα ποιητικὰ διὰ τὴν δίπλωσιν φαίνεται*, 1406a 5-6). The second cause is the use of unusual or foreign words (*γλῶτται*), with Lycophron and Alcidamas supplying examples.<sup>205</sup>

He spends more time on the third and fourth causes. The third problem is epithets (*ἐπίθετοι*) that are too long, or too out of place, or too densely used. These can make a *λόγος* exotic and interesting if used moderately, but they are appropriate to poetry and not to *λόγος* (1406a 5).<sup>206</sup> Again, though, the question is one of matching the proper style to the particular end. Certain features of language are acceptable in any kind of literary product in moderation, but using too many features that are more appropriate to one method will make the product less suited for the end of any other method. Compounds are suited to dithyrambs, for example, unfamiliar words to epic, and metaphors to iambs, but all of these must be used sparingly in *λόγος*.<sup>207</sup> Just as using the wrong instrument or mode will harm the integrity of a literary production, so also will using the wrong kind of word.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Cooper (1938) 62-3 provides a lucid summary of the overlapping categories of *λέξεις* discussed in both the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*.

<sup>205</sup> He does not explain his reasoning in this instance, although it becomes clear from the passages that follow that he is concerned with the distancing effect of unfamiliar language.

<sup>206</sup> Compare *Poetics* 1460b 12, where these same elements are explicitly described as ‘given to the poets’ (*[γλῶτται, μεταφοραὶ, πολλὰ πάθη τῆς λέξεως] δίδομεν γὰρ ταῦτα τοῖς ποιηταῖς*).

<sup>207</sup> This allocation is made at *Poetics* 1459a 9-14, although Aristotle provides no further explanation for the suitability.

<sup>208</sup> Compare to Demetrius §§78 and 91, where he says that an accumulation of metaphors will make a dithyramb instead of a *λόγος*.

The fourth cause of ψύχρα, finally, is metaphors, which are inappropriate to λόγος for three primary reasons: some are ridiculous by association, because the comic poets use them; others are far-fetched and tragic; and others, like those of Gorgias, are obscure (χρῶνται γὰρ καὶ οἱ κωμωδοποιοὶ μεταφοραῖς, αἱ δὲ διὰ τὸ σεμνὸν ἄγαν καὶ τραγικόν· ἀσαφεῖς δὲ, ἂν πόρρωθεν. οἶον Γοργίας..., 1406b 7-9).<sup>209</sup> The problem with these, he says, is that they are unpersuasive, mainly because they obscure the plain meaning – no one can be persuaded by what he does not understand. That is, just as arguments composed according to the poetic method were not effective in philosophical contexts, so too they will not be effective in a rhetorical context, in part because the kinds of language suited to them obfuscate the clarity that rhetoric demands.

What overuse of compounds, inclusion of foreign words, excessive epithets, and metaphors share – what, presumably, makes them all suited to ποιητική and unsuited to ῥητορική – is that they are unfamiliar.<sup>210</sup> Unfamiliar things, in their turn, are unpersuasive, as he has observed previously (ἅπαντα γὰρ ταῦτα ἀπίθανα διὰ τὰ εἰρημμένα, 1406b 20). The fuller explanation appears in the previous chapter: on account of speaking poetically in the improper situation, [those using unfamiliar language] make [their λόγος] laughable<sup>211</sup> and stilted, and unclear through inconclusiveness (διὸ ποιητικῶς λέγοντας τῆ ἀπρεπείᾳ, τὸ γελοῖον καὶ τὸ ψυχρὸν ἐμποιοῦσι, καὶ τὰ ἀσαφῆς

<sup>209</sup> Gorgias is a favorite source of examples for Aristotle in his discussions of style, perhaps because he was an obvious illustration of excessively poetic prose – an accusation he would likely have enjoyed.

<sup>210</sup> On the idea that this unfamiliarity might make them in some way painful, make them ‘sufferings of speech’ (πάθη τῆς λέξεως, *Poetics* 1460b 12), see Grintser (2002) 87-8.

<sup>211</sup> Here understanding γελοῖος as a harmless error, as described at *Poet.* 1449a. Halliwell (2008) 326 explores the implications of this definition on Aristotle’s general idea of humor; 307-331 offers a detailed discussion of laughter as an ethical virtue in Aristotle more broadly.

διὰ τὴν ἀδολεσχίαν,<sup>212</sup> 1406a 32-34). As we know, lack of clarity is a fatal flaw for λόγος, but it seems to be closely linked to ποιητική, perhaps even to the extent that lack of clarity, in some capacity, is desirable.<sup>213</sup>

To this point, we have seen that ποιητική can be understood, in its technical sense at least, as the capacity for a process whose medium is language, and whose end does not involve questions of truth and falsehood. A second aspect of it became clear in the *Rhetoric*: not only is clarity not part of its work, but lack of clarity, intentional unfamiliarity in particular respects and in particular situations, is even proper to it. A last passage from the *Rhetoric* provides more information as to its end.<sup>214</sup> Discussing pleasure and its several sources, Aristotle mentions that the imitative arts are pleasant because seeing them brings knowledge:<sup>215</sup>

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ μανθάνειν τε ἡδὺ καὶ τὸ θαυμάζειν, καὶ τὰ τοιάδε ἀνάγκη ἡδέα εἶναι οἷον τὸ τε μιμούμενον, ὥσπερ γραφικὴ καὶ ἀνδριαντοποιία καὶ ποιητικὴ, καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἂν εὔμεμιμημένον ᾗ, κἂν ᾗ μὴ ἡδὺ αὐτὸ τὸ μεμιμημένον.<sup>216</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ τούτῳ χαίρει, ἀλλὰ συλλογισμὸς ἔστιν ὅτι τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο, ὥστε μανθάνειν τι συμβαίνει.

<sup>212</sup> Reading this term more generously than is usually done. The force of it, however, if we look to Socrates' definition at *Theaetetus* 195c and Theophrastus' *Characters* 3, is more than just garrulousness. Socrates, in Fowler's rendering, calls it ἀδολεσχίαν "when a man drags his arguments up and down because he is so stupid that he cannot be convinced, and is hardly to be induced to give up any one of them." Theophrastus has "ἀδολεσχίαν is the discoursing of much and inconsidered talk." That is, it is essentially ineffective dialectic, which is how I understand it here. Compare to *Clouds* 1480 and Isocrates 13.8, the former on the methods practiced in the Thinkery, the latter on the purpose of the Sophistic methods.

<sup>213</sup> c.f. 1460b 13f on the correctness of poetry being unlike correctness in other things, which will be taken up in more detail below. See also e.g. Halliwell (1986) 132: "Aristotle's poet is not expected to assert or argue (though he must know how to make his characters do so)."

<sup>214</sup> Again, according to Aristotle, to know a thing's causes, especially its end or final cause, allows you to know the thing itself.

<sup>215</sup> Burnyeat (1978) provides a lucid overview of the several kinds of knowledge that Aristotle conceives of, as well as a summary of scholarship on the subject.

<sup>216</sup> Several emendations have been suggested for this passage, as scholars have not been satisfied with it as it stands; the problem lies with the substantives that Aristotle offers as examples of the kinds of imitations he's talking about. Many have understood these as signifying the products of those arts, rather than the productivity latent in it. Cope *ad loc.*, for instance, says "we must either read here with Vater γραφική &c. in the dative, as had occurred to myself, or suppose that the 'art' in the three cases is carelessly substituted

(Since it is also pleasurable to learn and marvel, those kinds of things must be pleasant also, such as an imitating, like painting and sculpting and creating *ποιητική*, and everything which has been imitated well, even if the thing imitated is not pleasurable itself; for the pleasure is not in this, but is the inference that this is that, so that we happen to learn something, 1371b 3-8)

This gives us two further aspects of *ποιητική*. First, we see that it should lead to knowledge,<sup>217</sup> and specifically to a kind of knowledge associated with iterative study and habituation more than demonstrable facts. Secondly, the pleasure is an intellectual one involving deductive reasoning.<sup>218</sup> Given all of this, we can provide a working definition of *ποιητική*, at least in its most technical sense: it is the faculty of a method of production whose medium is language, whose concern is something unrelated to truth, whose form does not rely on clarity to be effective, and whose end is deductive learning.

To return, then, to the *Poetics*. To claim that the *ποιητική* in the introduction of the *Poetics* text should refer to the capacity of making poetry rather than the product or abstract concept will not meet enormous opposition, although it has by no means always been assumed to signify such.<sup>219</sup> However, this force can fruitfully be brought to bear elsewhere as well. When describing the attributes of tragedy, for instance (*Poetics* 1450a 38ff), Aristotle observes that the last component, *ὄψις*, is emotionally powerful but rather outside the particular art and, moreover, least native to the poetic (*ἡ δὲ ὄψις*

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for the ‘product’ or result of the art.” However, we saw above that *ποιητική*, like *ἐπιτορική*, signifies a capacity for a process or method of linguistic construction. In light of this, all three terms are perfectly comprehensible – perhaps a bit more comprehensible – as nominatives identifying methods. See also Grimaldi (1974) 263–4, who highlights the present tense of the first participle as evidence for understanding the substantives as processes. That the second and third participles are perfects only strengthens this.

<sup>217</sup> The indicative in the result clause, of course, emphasizing that learning actually takes place.

<sup>218</sup> On the intellectual nature of poetry in Aristotle’s conception, see Else (1963) 128–130, Lord (1982) 92.

<sup>219</sup> See e.g. Else (1963) 3–4 and n.11, who adamantly rejects translating the term as ‘poetry’, which has historically been preferred.

*ψυχαγωγικὸν μὲν, ἀτεχνότατον δὲ καὶ ἥκιστα οἰκειῶν τῆς ποιητικῆς, 1450b 16-17).*

The following sentence, introduced with an explanatory particle, explains why: *ὄψις* refers to the physical, actual performance, and so belongs to the arts of competition and acting, and is better handled by the costumer (*ἡ γὰρ τῆς τραγωδίας δύναμις καὶ ἄνευ ἀγῶνος καὶ ὑποκριτῶν ἔστιν, ἔτι δὲ κυριωτέρα περὶ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν τῶν ὄψεων ἢ τοῦ σκευποιοῦ τέχνη τῆς τῶν ποιητῶν ἔστιν, 1450a 17-18).* This separation of the poetic and the literal, live production necessarily turns the focus away from the finished product to only the elements active in its composition, as *ποιητική* should imply.<sup>220</sup>

One final passage must be addressed before turning to the other terms of the poetic. In his description of how best to construct plots (1455a 21ff), Aristotle observes that the poet who actually, physically, performs his plot as he composes it will be the more effective, as having his own soul in the grip of particular emotions he wishes to convey will make his poetry more likely to produce the same effects on his audience:<sup>221</sup>

*δεῖ δὲ τοὺς μύθους συνιστάναι καὶ τῇ λέξει συναπεργάζεσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα πρὸ ὀμμάτων τιθέμενον.<sup>222</sup> ... ὅσα δὲ δυνατὸν καὶ τοῖς σχήμασιν συναπεργαζόμενον· πιθανώτατοι γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως οἱ ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν εἰσιν, καὶ χειμαίνει ὁ χειμαζόμενος καὶ χαλεπαίνει ὁ ὀργιζόμενος ἀληθινώτατα.*

(One should join up the plot and elaborate in the *λέξις* what is as much as possible laid out before the mind's eye. ... As far as possible also, it should be elaborated with gestures; for, through nature itself, they are most convincing who share in the passions, and he who is in a state of

<sup>220</sup> In a sense, then, it is drawing a distinction similar to that which Herodotus drew with his use of *POI*- words compared to *AOID*- words, as discussed above in chapter one.

<sup>221</sup> The central role of emotion to the poetic, which Aristotle here takes for granted, will be taken up below. On the assumption of a direct connection between the speaker's emotions and the audience's, see Meijering (1987) 15-16.

<sup>222</sup> Meijering (1987) 16-17 provides a discussion of what exactly *πρὸ ὀμμάτων τιθέμενον* means in the context of poetic composition.

distress is most realistically distressed and he who is in a state of provocation most realistically rages, 1455a 21-22, 29-32)

The fact that the poet's productions are, for one thing, a vehicle for transferring emotion to the audience, combined with the fact that emotion will be the more powerfully instilled in poetry when the poet is himself experiencing it, makes clear what kinds of men will be best suited to poetry. These men are the *εὐφυής* and the *μανικός* (1455a 33).

This passage has confounded many scholars for its apparent suggestion – elsewhere absent from Aristotle – that poetry is connected to madness.<sup>223</sup> Various emendations have been suggested to mitigate the apparent contradiction such a claim would present; Halliwell, for instance, in his Loeb, suggests adding a *μᾶλλον* and reading the *μανικοῦ* as a genitive of comparison, because manic “sounds *too* passionate for the psychology of composition posited by Ar.”<sup>224</sup> The problem will be taken up in greater detail below with reference to *Rhetoric* 1408b, but we can say here that Halliwell is both right and wrong.

Aristotle is not suggesting that poetry depended in any way on a man being out of his mind, but that poetry is more effective if it conveys high emotions realistically, and the man who can best portray high emotions is one who himself feels them easily. That is, the poetic capacity will be best realized in a man whose soul is naturally suited to the demands of the underlying art; this is, first, the *εὐφυής*, the man who is literally well-suited by nature.<sup>225</sup> The *μανικός*, however, is characterized by heightened emotion,

<sup>223</sup> Else (1963) 496 provides a succinct summary of the various statements of the problem.

<sup>224</sup> Halliwell (1987) 89, emphasis his.

<sup>225</sup> The generic nature of the term is puzzling, but is in keeping with Aristotle's basic idea that souls are naturally inclined to the activities that suit their natures.

although he is less able to control it than the *εὐφυής* man. Thus he is also suited to the poetic, albeit in a different way.<sup>226</sup> Allowing the full idea of capacity to resonate here, as opposed to the narrower scope of *τέχνη* as skill, makes it clear that a particular kind of soul will naturally incline towards the poetic because of its innate shape.<sup>227</sup>

This also makes clear that Aristotle does not see his work as simply laying out a manual by which to compose the best poetry.<sup>228</sup> Certainly he envisions a *τέχνη*, a skill that can be taught and learned, that is proper to the poetic; his observation that amateur poets master plot last would hardly make sense otherwise, for instance. However, the fact that certain people are better suited to the poetic than others by virtue of their soul justifies preserving the resonance of natural aptitude that *ποιητική* carries.<sup>229</sup> Precisely what that capacity involves is a question we will have occasion to address again, when we come to the discussion of the poets.

Leaving *ποιητική*, then, we turn to what are normally thought of as the cognate words for poetic products, *ποίησις* and *ποίημα*.<sup>230</sup> As in previous authors, these

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<sup>226</sup> See Else (1963) 496-502: he sees *εὐφυής* and the *μανικός* as two melancholic figures particularly adept at the imagination required to compose poetry, although the former was notable for being able to control his ecstasy, whereas the second was in the control of his. Interestingly, Aristotle makes no mention of whether the poetry of the *εὐφυής* would be superior to that of the *μανικός*. See also Meijering (1987) 18-19, who comes to a similar conclusion.

<sup>227</sup> Which is, in itself, a further suggestion of the absence of the supernatural. Perhaps also present is the suggestion that a poet may be naturally inclined to poetry but lack self-control and discipline; that is, just as Aristotle distinguished the good dialectician – the philosopher – from the bad – the sophist – so there is also a good and bad kind of poet.

<sup>228</sup> An idea that has been largely dismissed, although it was once considered a plausible theory; see e.g. Armstrong (1941) 121. *pace* Meijering (1987) 103f, which seems to assume that it was at least in part intended as a kind of how-to manual for aspiring poets.

<sup>229</sup> Which will be emphasized again below, when poets follow the version of poetry most natural to them. Compare Isocrates on how anyone could apply himself to the study of rhetoric, but only those with a natural aptitude would master it.

<sup>230</sup> It should be noted that the great majority of the occurrences in the Aristotelian corpus of both words refer to action or making in the material world, although such uses will be left out of this study for obvious reasons.

deceptively straightforward words resist simple definition. In addition, they are, in their literary incarnations, quite infrequent in the corpus; even without doing exact calculations it is clear that they are by no means the default way to refer to poetry in the general or specific sense.<sup>231</sup> Scholars agree, by and large, that *ποίησις* is much the more active term, although it is not always clear in what realm the activity is thought to be occurring.<sup>232</sup>

Fortunately, Aristotle does provide for us a brief account of how *ποίησις* came to be, which provides a different path to isolating what it is:<sup>233</sup>

κατὰ φύσιν δὲ ὄντος ἡμῖν τοῦ μιμεῖσθαι καὶ τῆς ἀρμονίας καὶ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ (τὰ γὰρ μέτρα ὅτι μόρια τῶν ῥυθμῶν ἐστὶ φανερόν)<sup>234</sup> ἐξ ἀρχῆς οἱ πεφυκότες πρὸς αὐτὰ μάλιστα κατὰ μικρὸν προάγοντες ἐγέννησαν τὴν ποίησιν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοσχεδιασμάτων.<sup>235</sup> διεσπάσθη δὲ κατὰ τὰ οἰκεῖα ἦθη ἢ ποίησις· οἱ μὲν γὰρ σεμνότεροι τὰς καλὰς ἐμιμοῦντο πράξεις καὶ τὰς τῶν τοιούτων, οἱ δὲ εὐτελέστεροι τὰς τῶν φαύλων, πρῶτον ψόγους ποιοῦντες, ὥσπερ ἕτεροι ὕμνους καὶ ἐγκώμια.

<sup>231</sup> Aristotle, when he has a particular piece in mind, will typically identify it by name. Other alternatives are the neuter article with the genitive of the poet's name; various forms of a passive participle of making in the neuter plural; verbs of making and doing with or without an expressed object; and, of course, a generic signifier such as *δρᾶμα* or *τραγωδία*. Such identifiers vastly outnumber the uses of the nouns *ποίημα* and *ποίησις*, even more than in earlier authors.

<sup>232</sup> Thus Kristjánsson (2007) 164 has *ποίησις* as “the mechanical process by which an *εἶδος* is brought into being.” Else (1963) 9 calls it “the poetic art itself at work,” while Davis (1992) 9 offers a rather philosophical take with “[t]he *Poetics* is about *ποίησις* understood as poetry, or imitation of action, and *ποίησις* understood as action, which is also imitation of action.”

<sup>233</sup> Again because, for Aristotle, knowing something involves first identifying its causes; see e.g. Rees (1981) 26, Hamlyn (1990) 470-1.

<sup>234</sup> Aristotle's claim here that meter is a subset of rhythm is an interesting one, and perhaps why he will elsewhere allow rhythmic language to remain *μουσική* even without *μελωδία*; see the discussion of music below.

<sup>235</sup> The term *αὐτοσχεδιασμάτων* is not well understood; apart from this occurrence, it appears only one other place in the extant corpus, in a fragment of the comic Plato. Nonetheless, it receives no attention in the commentaries. There are several simplex cognates which all carry some aspect of the idea of improvisation, off-handedness, or whimsicality, and the force of the prefix *αὐτο-* is familiar enough. However, conjecturing from that exactly what Aristotle means to imply here is almost impossible. I follow other translators in giving ‘improvisations’, but it is worth reflecting on what kinds of improvisations he is imagining as the root of poetry: lighthearted speaking contests, similar to what we see in the *Symposium* of Plato? Or perhaps, in order to account for the rhythm piece, it involved physical imitation or dramatization as well? Again, there is no way of knowing, but it should be emphasized that it is not as simple as the word ‘improvisations’ implies.



(Because mimesis is natural to us, as are harmony and rhythm (and it is clear that meters are kinds of rhythms), those who were most inclined towards these things by their nature, leading it out little by little, brought *ποίησις* into being from improvisations. But *ποίησις* split according to its<sup>236</sup> inherent characters: the more serious people made imitations of noble actions and people, but the baser types made imitations of the petty, first making invectives, just as the others made hymns and encomia, 1448b 19-28.)<sup>237</sup>

That is, the fact that we are naturally inclined to the component pieces of *ποίησις* – mimesis, harmony, and rhythm – is a material cause of *ποίησις*, and the fact that it is common to all is the reason that everyone enjoys it.<sup>238</sup> Its roots are in some kind of extemporaneous performance, which presumably had only the most indistinct restrictions delimiting it, and then developed stricter boundaries. Thus *ποίησις* is the set of restrictions on performance done by means of mimesis, harmony and rhythm that were discovered over time, the gradually revealed abstract idea of its proper shape. Moreover, that set has a *τέλος* of its own, towards which it is constantly developing, with the aid of its creators.<sup>239</sup>

Aristotle is imagining a single originary fountain of all the different kinds of poetry, as the bifurcation makes clear; the original unity, the genus, is *ποίησις*, but the

<sup>236</sup> I follow Else here (*pace* Halliwell) in understanding the *οικεῖα ἦθη* as belonging to *ποίησις*, not to its practitioners; see especially Else (1963) 136-7.

<sup>237</sup> Else (1963) 125 provides a succinct summary of how this chapter recapitulates the first three, although those addressed the being of poetry, while this one addresses the becoming.

<sup>238</sup> According to his natural capacities, of course. The *Politics* is perhaps most explicit about this; see e.g. 1342a 14-17. See also Golden (1976) *passim*, which argues that music affects different souls in different ways. Meijering (1987) 103 identifies the causes in a similar way: *λόγος* + *ῥυθμός* + *ἁρμονία* are the material causes of poetry, the poet, who has in mind an *εἶδος*, is the efficient cause, and the *τέλος* is the correct kind of *ἡδονή*.

<sup>239</sup> This is one respect in which it resembles a living organism, although with interesting complications: it has no existence outside of its creators, but, while it may provide pleasure and other benefits, its end is not directly related to its creators. c.f. Halliwell (1987) 10, where he says that poetry is not “a contingent achievement of specific poets, but a kind of cultural organism whose intrinsic essence is independent of this work or that.”

more focused differentiations, the individual species, are also *ποίησις*. To borrow one of Aristotle's favorite analogies, just as man is a kind of animal, and retains his participation in the genus *animal* even when the attributes of his particular species are brought to bear, so *ποίησις* is *ποίησις* whether enacted as a species like tragedy or a dithyramb, or conceived of broadly as a genus.

This is a clearer and more stable assertion of a literary category than we have seen before: *ποίησις* is a constant concept standing behind a variety of different manifestations, an abstraction of, presumably, all potential poems, as well as the outline of all potential genres. As *ποίησις* develops, too, further possibilities are revealed; for instance, as Aristotle explains, Homer revealed aspects of drama, although he clearly did not produce it.<sup>240</sup> Aristotle shows that it that remains fixed even as the species evolve:

*παραφανείσης δὲ τῆς τραγωδίας καὶ κωμωδίας οἱ ἐφ' ἑκατέραν τὴν  
ποίησιν ὀρμῶντες κατὰ τὴν οἰκεῖαν φύσιν οἱ μὲν ἀντὶ τῶν ἰάμβων  
κωμωδοποιοὶ ἐγένοντο, οἱ δὲ ἀντὶ τῶν ἐπῶν τραγωδοδιδάσκαλοι, διὰ τὸ  
μείζω καὶ ἐντιμότερα τὰ σχήματα εἶναι ταῦτα ἐκείνων.*

(once tragedy and comedy had been partially brought to light, those who were impelled to one kind *ποίησις* or the other because of their nature themselves became makers of comedy instead of iambs, instructors of tragedy instead of epics, because these forms were greater and more respectable than the others, 1449a 3-7).<sup>241</sup>

<sup>240</sup> See *Poet.* 1448b 35-7; this passage has often been connected to Plato's assertion that Homer was the first of the tragic poets.

<sup>241</sup> On the chronological problems of this outline of development, and especially on how poorly the comic tradition fits into it, see Else (1963) 147-9.

The different expressions of *ποίησις* grew and developed, and poets changed their methods to match its new incarnations, but there was a stable and unified core – *ποίησις* – underlying every schema.<sup>242</sup>

In its technical sense, then, Aristotelian *ποίησις* is the given set of potential representations, in the most active sense of the word, of character and action making use of rhythm and harmony. Moreover, part of its evolution involved the distinction of linguistic style, and a corresponding deemphasizing of the musical aspects, although its intrinsic nature did not change. The representation aspect is important: *ποίησις* is deeply connected to real or potential performance – that is, as a memory or imagined idea of performance in the absence of the real thing.<sup>243</sup> As such, it is the abstract model to which *ποιητική* appeals in order to produce specific poems, a formal cause of poems.

The word can, however, be used more loosely, and indeed is more frequently used in its colloquial senses: in addition to naming an abstract concept of representations of human actions,<sup>244</sup> it can also signify a specific poem, a body of poetry of a particular poet or genre, and a specific method or style of poetic composition.<sup>245</sup> Thus it is a specific poem of Tyrtaeus called ‘Eunomia’ at *Politics* 1306b 39, and the general poetry of Homer at *Sophistical Refutations* 171a 10. Illustrating the third resonance, that of individual style, requires a few more steps.

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<sup>242</sup> It is essential that this not be confused with something like a Platonic form, however, especially because, by its very nature, Aristotelian *ποίησις* is always in a state of coming-to-be. Also note that we see here again the relationship between the poet’s nature and the poetry he is drawn to, as above.

<sup>243</sup> On memory as an activity in contrast to the passivity of perception, see e.g. Moseley (2010) 88-89; 90-91 address the role of imagination in memory.

<sup>244</sup> Given the Aristotelian system, it should also be for a particular end, although what that end may be is never explicitly stated; it may simply be the pleasure that is naturally derived from seeing imitations.

<sup>245</sup> Understanding style here in the modern, colloquial sense, rather than as *λέξις*.

At *Poetics* 1458a 20, Aristotle is explaining what kinds of language a poet should avail himself of. In the course of describing the best kind of λέξις, he observes that common words provide the most clarity, but can also give a stilted style; he offers the ποίησις of Kleophon and Sthenelus as a model of such a style (παράδειγμα δὲ ἡ Κλεοφῶντος ποίησις καὶ ἡ Σθενέλου). He is not referencing any particular poem or set of verses, but rather pointing to the overall impression their works give, or what makes the works inherently ‘Sthenelic’ or ‘Kleophontic’. To put it another way, he is emphasizing a particular feature found throughout a given body of work that is illustrative of that body of work: Sthenelus’ reliance on common words, like epic’s reliance on lofty ones, is an identifiable reason for the qualities that stand out in them. A poet’s style emerges from his particular uses of all the features that define the art, both the technical skills he brings to bear (e.g. λέξις and μέτρα) as well as his intellectual talent (e.g. the ability to put a plot together well).<sup>246</sup> That is, we have here a different species of ποίησις: just as ποίησις could refer to specific genres in the abstract, so it can be an abstraction of the poetry of an individual poet.

The *Rhetoric* reveals another important feature of ποίησις. Claiming that he has sufficiently covered the elements of λόγος, Aristotle turns to linguistic purity (ἐλληνίζειν, 1407a 22). This depends on five features, the third of which is relevant to our purposes:

τρίτον, μὴ ἀμφιβόλοις· ταῦτα δέ, ἂν μὴ τάναντία προαιρηῆται. ὅπερ ποιούσιν, ὅταν μὴθὲν μὲν ἔχωσι λέγειν, προσποιῶνται δέ τι λέγειν· οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι ἐν ποιήσει λέγουσι ταῦτα, οἷον Ἐμπεδοκλῆς· φενακίζει

<sup>246</sup> See e.g. 1450a 34-37, where Aristotle claims that amateur poets will master diction and character before structure.

γὰρ τὸ κύκλω πολὺ ὄν, καὶ πάσχουσιν οἱ ἀκροαταὶ ὅπερ οἱ πολλοὶ  
παρὰ τοῖς μάντεσιν· ὅταν γὰρ λέγωσιν ἀμφίβολα, συμπαρνεύουσιν.

(Third, not to be ambiguous – unless the opposite is preferred. This is what people do when they have nothing to say, but make a pretense of saying something; for people like this say these things in *ποίησις*, like Empedocles. This circumlocution deceives, and the audience suffers what most people do at the hands of a mantis – for when they speak their ambiguities, people assent,<sup>247</sup> 1407a 35-42)

Here we are given an explanation for why someone might choose to communicate ἐν *ποίησει*, as well as an idea of how it affects the audience. Using language that is not of transparent significance can serve to conceal the fact that they actually have nothing to say, and the kind of people who would do this might choose to speak ἐν *ποίησει*.<sup>248</sup> That is, just as we saw above with *ποιητική*, the clarity of meaning that is so essential to rhetoric is not a particular concern of *ποίησις*, and in fact the obfuscation of meaning might even be a deliberate tactic of *ποίησις*, or a reason to use it.<sup>249</sup>

Aristotle continues with the explanation of why the soothsayers choose to be obscure: it causes people to accept what they say. In other words, because the audience cannot easily understand what the mantis is saying, Aristotle suggests, it is unable to find

<sup>247</sup> My reading here perhaps stretches the grammar some, as I am suggesting taking a different, unexpressed subject (i.e. the audience) for the second verb. However, the sense is much clearer, as it is difficult to understand the meaning in the claim that the soothsayers both speak and give their assent.

<sup>248</sup> The example of Empedocles here is somewhat puzzling, as Aristotle elsewhere holds him and his ideas in high esteem (see e.g. Diogenes Laërtius, viii. 57), but it does make an interesting counterpoint to the claim in *Poetics* 1447b 18 that Empedocles is not a poet in spite of his use of meter: here, while he is not called a poet, he is indirectly envisioned as somehow engaged in *ποίησις*, or something like it.

<sup>249</sup> See also *Rhetoric* 1404b 6-9: Aristotle observes again that common words make for clarity (*τῶν δ' ὀνομάτων καὶ ῥημάτων σαφῆ μὲν ποιεῖ τὰ κύρια*), but the kinds of words discussed in the *Poetics* make for elevation and ornamentation (*μὴ ταπεινὴν δὲ ἀλλὰ κεκοσμημένην τᾶλλα ὀνόματα ὅσα εἴρηται ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς*), which is more appropriate to poetry.

fault with it.<sup>250</sup> Users of *ποίησις* may have different motives for relying on ambiguity, as the sentence that closes off this section makes clear, but they may, for different reasons, nonetheless rely on it: *ἅπαντα δὴ ταῦτα ὅμοια, ὥστ' ἂν μὴ τοιούτου τινὸς ἔνεκα, φευκτέον* (all these [ambiguities] are of the same kind, so that, unless they are for the sake of some such reason, they should be avoided, 1407b 6).<sup>251</sup> That is, there are a number of reasons one might choose to be obscure, and one model of obfuscation is *ποίησις*. Given the examples of Empedocles and oracles, along with the absence of mimesis and the other components of *ποίησις* in its technical sense, Aristotle's attention does not seem to be on any of the defining characteristics of poetry, or certainly not of tragedy. It is, however, a connection between *ποίησις* and obfuscation, a relationship that will confront us time and again.

A final passage from the *Rhetoric* will speak to one of the most contentious aspects of Aristotle's ideas of poetry: the place of inspiration. At 1408b, he is discussing the specific situations when an orator might want to make use of compound words, epithets, and loan words – that is, of language more proper to *ποιητική*. These are, he says, first suited to a man who speaks emotionally by nature (*τὰ δὲ ὀνόματα τὰ διπλᾶ καὶ τὰ ἐπίθετα πλείω καὶ τὰ ξένα μάλιστα ἀρμόττει λέγοντι παθητικῶς*, 1408b 11-12). They are also appropriate to a man who has already made his audience ecstatic (*καὶ ὅταν ἔχη ἤδη τοὺς ἀκροατὰς καὶ ποιήσῃ ἐνθουσιάσαι ἢ ἐπαίνοισι ἢ ψόγοις ἢ ὀργῇ ἢ*

<sup>250</sup> Aristotle gives here the example of the famous oracle given to Croesus and reported in Herodotus: he could not blame the oracle for his mistake, since it was not the oracle, but his own interpretation of it, that was at fault.

<sup>251</sup> This passage is frequently misread as pointing to the single intention of misdirection. Freese in his Loeb, for instance, misunderstands this to be referring only to the 'deliberate intention to mislead,' but in fact the *τοιούτου τινός* should refer to any of a number of possible reasons.

φιλία, 1408b 14-15). Finally, such linguistic devices are proper to ecstatic orators (φθέγγονται τε γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐνθουσιάζοντες, 1408b 17-18). He follows this with a pithy observation about how this makes those features appropriate to poetry: it is inherently inspired (ἐνθεον γὰρ ἡ ποίησις, 1408b 20).<sup>252</sup>

As in the similar passage discussed above with reference to *ποιητική*, it is not necessary to understand this as attributing the power of poetry or oratory in any direct way to supernatural powers. Rather, while emotional appeals may have their limited place in rhetoric, the emotional component of poetry is central to it, and inseparable from it.<sup>253</sup> Emotion might be useful for orators in their attempts to persuade, but for *ποίησις* – here used in its technical sense – emotion is a necessary piece of achieving the desired end of understanding.

While Aristotle does take advantage of the looser meanings seen in earlier authors – poem, oeuvre, genre, and so forth – the importance of the technical meaning should be kept in focus. Aristotle’s *ποίησις* is almost poetry in potentiality, the changing, developing, abstract set of potential performances of character and action, executed in media like music and language, that will be poems. The organic nature of Aristotle’s concept, the fact that its end is revealed slowly and in stages, reflects a new way of

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<sup>252</sup> With a second, puzzling conclusion: the emotionally elevated aspect of it makes it also proper for being ironic, “like Gorgias did, and the speeches in the *Phaedrus*” (μετ’ εἰρωνείας, ὅπερ Γοργίας ἐποίει καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ *Φαίδρω*, 1408b 21). On Aristotle’s conception of irony as a positive form of wit, see Halliwell (2008) 320-321.

<sup>253</sup> *pace* Halliwell, who is loathe to admit even this much passion into Aristotle’s conception of poetry. It is rather unfortunate that, unlike Plato, Aristotle does not attempt to explain precisely how poetry, or language more generally, caused such reactions. We can infer that it relates to how the audience members’ souls harmonize with the character represented in the language, but the exact mechanisms are unclear.

thinking about literary categories, one that has its roots in, but is more successful than, its predecessors.

While earlier authors grouped literary productions in a variety of ways, most of them based on form, content or context, only Aristotle attempts to articulate a fundamental unity underneath the great variety of changes made to form, content, and context. That is, while earlier authors were able to group literary productions in a variety of ways, they were inherently descriptive rather than definitional – what a poem did or looked like rather than what a poem was. They were therefore inherently unstable, as generic developments would be constantly changing the superficial features. With Aristotle, although it is incompletely enacted, we can see an attempt to identify the unchanging essence of poetry when he uses *ποίησις* to show that all its incarnations were in the service of a unified end, and thus that poetry is itself a unified thing.

In comparison, the other familiar word that can be used for a poet's productions, *ποίημα*, is more restricted and concrete in its scope. As mentioned above, *ποίημα* is a relatively uncommon word in Aristotle, appearing with its literary force only seven times outside of the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, but there is a greater consistency to its appearances than is seen in the other terms: a *ποίημα* is usually imagined as the literal and actual product of the productive art of the poet, with a particular emphasis on the actual words. Thus, for instance, there are a handful of passages where Aristotle points to a poem of a particular poet as evidence with *ποίημα*.<sup>254</sup> There is a slightly broader meaning when Aristotle draws an analogy between a poet's feelings towards his poem and a father's

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<sup>254</sup> See e.g. *Ath. Con.* 5.3.4, *Poet.* 1448b 29.



towards his son, in that it is any given poem, rather than a particular one, that Aristotle has in mind, but the focus is still very much on a literal product.<sup>255</sup> Three slightly different instances, however, will add nuance to the picture.

First, in the *Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle observes that it can be difficult to make an argument (*λόγος*) about pitch accent in unwritten dialectic, but easier in *ποιήματα* and written works (*παρὰ δὲ τὴν προσφδίαν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἄνευ γραφῆς διαλεκτικοῖς οὐ ῥάδιον ποιῆσαι λόγον, ἐν δὲ τοῖς γεγραμμένοις καὶ ποιήμασι μᾶλλον*, 166b1-3). The implication seems to be that, with *ποιήματα* and written works, one can consult the original text in order to make precise arguments about the details of it, but that this is not the case with purely oral dialectic.<sup>256</sup> In this situation, *ποιήματα* must be the language that can be read from a text or recited in order to demonstrate the points of argument, the words without regard for details of context or performance which elsewhere remain closely tied to the poetic.<sup>257</sup>

Two passages from *Rhetoric* wrap up this discussion by identifying specific features that can turn language into a *ποίημα*. At 1406a, Aristotle is discussing the use of epithets, and the care one must take with them to avoid becoming excessively stilted. One of the examples from Alcidamas strikes Aristotle as so egregious that he notes in a parenthetical aside, and with a clause of actual result, that it has ceased being *λόγος* and

<sup>255</sup> See e.g. *Nic. Eth.* 1168a 2, *Gr. Mor.* 2.12.4.5. As we saw above, Plato used the same analogy on several occasions.

<sup>256</sup> This claim stands as an interesting counterpoint to the assertions of the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>257</sup> Aristotle's own example makes this fairly certain: having made his claim regarding the relative ease of making arguments about pitch accents in *ποιήματα*, he quotes a line of Homer and says that the argument can be made by saying the *οὐ* more sharply – that is, by literally enunciating the pitch. The lack of concern here with anything beyond the language may be related to the distinction Aristotle occasionally acknowledges between music and poetry; see below. Compare to Herodotus' preservation of meter in oracles and dreams.

become a poem: *τοῦτο δ' ἄμα καὶ διπλοῦν καὶ ἐπίθετον, ὥστε ποίημα γίνεται* (1406a 31). In a similar passage somewhat later, Aristotle observes the importance of rhythm in *λόγος* for giving it perceptible limits, but cautions that it must not actually have meter – for, he explains, that would be a poem: *διὸ ῥυθμὸν δεῖ ἔχειν τὸν λόγον, μέτρον δὲ μή· ποίημα γὰρ ἔσται* (1408b 30).<sup>258</sup>

Thus we are invited to imagine not compartmentalized and sharply separated categories of *λόγος* and *ποίησις*, but a spectrum of language use across which an author can range: when the situation requires, he can hover near the poetic without wandering into it, or he can eschew all poetic features and make his production as entirely *λόγος* as possible.<sup>259</sup> In one sense, then, *ποίημα* and *λόγος* are, finally, not inherently different: an orator making improper use of his art might make a *ποίημα*, just as a poet who lacks *ποιητική* might accidentally end up with *λόγος*, as both are simply collections of more or less ornamented language.<sup>260</sup> In other words, a *ποίημα* is a possible product of a linguistic art, whether or not the creator is aiming at poetry – it is an objective and quantifiable set of features independent of the intentions or abilities of its maker.

While it has not yet been reduced to the single meaning, then, *ποίημα* comes close to our colloquial idea of poem, especially with respect to how much emphasis is put on

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<sup>258</sup> One of several places in the corpus where Aristotle casually allows an easier equivalency between meter and poetry than he will grant when he is concerned with precision, as he is in *Poet.* 1447b 14-16, and further support that, while it remains insufficient, the equivalency is nonetheless a commonplace when poetry is not itself under investigation. c.f. *Rhet.* 1404b 14-17, where *τὰ μέτρα* are contrasted with *ψιλοὶ λόγοι*. See also below in the discussion of the *ποιητής*.

<sup>259</sup> This also explains why Aristotle allows that such stylistic flourishes are acceptable in *logos* to a point: there is no sharp delineation, but rather a tipping point. Compare Gorgias, who relished the ambiguity of the distinction, as well as Plato's elisions of boundaries in the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>260</sup> Compare Winslow (2007) 88-9, where he defines *λόγος* as “the gathering which is for the sake of deliberating possibilities.”

its linguistic features, and how little on other features like music and emotion. There is also greater differentiation between *ποίημα* and *ποίησις* than we have seen before, with *ποίημα* consistently signifying the particular works and language, while *ποίησις* is more likely to imply the larger abstract body of potential *ποιήματα*. The relationship between them can be summarized in terms of cause in this way: *ποίησις* is an efficient cause of *ποιητική*, which is in turn an efficient cause of *ποιήματα*.<sup>261</sup> That is, without a bounded abstract concept, there would be no impulse for a faculty of poetic production, and without such a faculty there would be no product that is in service to the final cause of poetry as a whole, which is a particular kind of learning.

With the abstract idea and concrete product, in both general and specific form, thus explored, we turn now to a discussion of the kind of man who participates in this kind of production. Often, the *ποιητής* in Aristotle is exactly who we expect: Homer, Simonides, Alcman and Euripides, for instance, are all identified as *ποιηταί*. They are shown participating in the kinds of activities we would expect, as well: passing down traditional stories, as at *Eudemian Ethics* 1230a 3, where they mythologize about Cheiron; acting as largely reliable witnesses for factual and historical information, as at *Rhetoric* 1375b 28; and, more fully than has been seen before, entirely the craftsmen, the active producers, of their poetic productions.

Several aspects of the poet's definition deserve notice, however. When the difference between Homer and Empedocles is attributed not to their form but to the object of their respective productions (*Poetics* 1447b 14-16), Aristotle implicitly suggests

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<sup>261</sup> Interestingly, while there are obvious analogues of *ποίημα* and *ποιητική* in *λόγος* and *ῥητορική*, there is no clear partner in rhetoric for *ποίησις*.

that most of his contemporaries would have associated a poet first and foremost with the use of meter. This shows that the same impulse we saw in earlier authors is still active: meter is an easy way to distinguish poetry, but it is ultimately not a qualifier that gives more than superficially useful information about product or producer.

On the question of the source of the poet's powers, the shift is complete: the poet's reliance on supernatural connections has been all but erased from his work, and his productions are explicitly a result of his effort, innate character, and technical skill. In fact, the treatise is predicated on such an assumption, and it is precisely because the poet is a practitioner of a *τέχνη* that Aristotle is able to articulate a system of successful poetic composition at all.<sup>262</sup> In a discussion in the *Poetics* of the kinds of events that are terrible or fearful, for instance, he observes that the poet is not at liberty to subvert the major elements of traditional stories, but should nonetheless be inventive and use the tradition well (τοὺς μὲν οὖν παρελημμένους μύθους λύειν οὐκ ἔστιν ...αὐτὸν δὲ εὐρίσκειν δεῖ καὶ τοῖς παραδεδομένοις χρῆσθαι καλῶς, 1453b 24-5).<sup>263</sup> Similarly, when Aristotle distinguishes well done and poorly done poetry, the weaker is consistently described as lacking in skill (e.g. *ἀτεχνοτάτη* at 1454b 19, *ἄτεχνοι* at 1454b 31) rather than uninspired. The discussions in the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* of poetic style, too, support this: at every stage, the poet's choices are conscious and artful, and entirely under his control.

Indeed, in the discussion of the origins and developments of *λέξεις* in book III of the *Rhetoric*, both orator and poet are imagined as craftsmen shaping their language in similar ways, but according to their unique intentions and ends. Moreover, Aristotle

<sup>262</sup> On the significance of *τέχνη* in Aristotle, see especially Halliwell (1986) 43ff.

<sup>263</sup> On the idea of *χρῆσθαι καλῶς*, see Meijering (1987) 163-4.

claims that the most important aspect of λέξεις, that concerning delivery (περὶ τὴν ὑπόκρισιν, 1403b 19), was first attended to by poets.<sup>264</sup> That Aristotle understood there to be a very close connection between poetic and rhetoric is no surprise,<sup>265</sup> but the specific techniques that he separates out as more appropriate to poets do tell us a bit more about how he understood the poet's work to differ from the orator's.

For instance, at 1404b 39, he says that homonyms are useful to the Sophist for working their deceits (κακουργεῖν), but that synonyms are useful to the poet. He does not explicitly say why, but given what he has said elsewhere we can assume that synonyms allow for more effective metaphors – that is, while homonyms allow for trickery, synonyms emphasize the similarities between unlike things.<sup>266</sup> He also points out particular habits: poets use the singular for the plural, which is one way to achieve ὄγκος of style (1407b 33); they invent words in the course of describing through negation, which is useful for proportional metaphor (1408a 6); and, at least in ancient times, they practiced the periodic style through their antistrophic songs (1409a 26). While he does not explain how these relate, the impact of these features has elsewhere been said to decrease the familiarity the listener will have with what he hears, and so to obscure the meaning to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>267</sup> Although such obscurity is anathema to composers of λόγος, we have seen a number of times now that it is allowable, perhaps

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<sup>264</sup> Compare the similar claim at 1404a 21.

<sup>265</sup> e.g. the statement just below on how delivery belongs to both arts, 1403b 23-4.

<sup>266</sup> Marcos (1997) 138 observes that metaphor “explains by bringing the unusual, new, or unknown to what is familiar or already experienced.”

<sup>267</sup> Compare the discussion above, on *Rhetoric* 1406b and stiltedness of style. On the role of familiarity in learning, see Burnyeat (1978) 116.

even desirable, for poetry; how it relates specifically to the poet will be illustrated by two passages in the *Metaphysics*.

At *Metaphysics* 995a 8, Aristotle observes that the familiar is most intelligible, and therefore that people find the kinds of proofs they are used to to be most reliable: some want a speaker to speak scientifically, others want a speaker to use examples, and others still value a poet brought in as witness (τὸ γὰρ σύνηθες γνώριμον. ... οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐὰν μὴ μαθηματικῶς λέγῃ τις οὐκ ἀποδέχονται τῶν λεγόντων, οἱ δ' ἂν μὴ παραδειγματικῶς, οἱ δὲ μάρτυρα ἀξιοῦσιν ἐπάγεσθαι ποιητήν).<sup>268</sup> The poet's work is left implicit, however; while the dialectician and the rhetorician use their proper versions of inductive logic to persuade, the construction changes for the poet, and all we are told about him is that a certain kind of man values having him brought in as witness.

The poet's work is precisely to bring an audience to knowledge that cannot be accessed through induction, but only through metaphor, by getting the audience to perceive likeness that it had not previously seen. We have seen that the knowledge related to poetry is not factual or philosophical, and is not best expressed with clarity, as that would not allow for the unfamiliarity required to deduce a previously hidden similarity. Just as the orator must have the capacity to discover all available means of persuasion, the poet must have the capacity to identify likeness, chains of causal relationships, where others would only see difference, as another passage from the *Metaphysics* will illustrate.

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<sup>268</sup> This is clearly aligned with Aristotle's idea of the three major categories of language art, dialectic, rhetoric and poetic, and reinforces that each has its proper audience and its proper mode.

At 1091b, he is summarizing the difficulty that thinkers have faced in trying to deal with first principles.<sup>269</sup> Typically, he turns to the poets as examples:

*οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ταύτη ὁμοίως, ἧ βασιλεύειν καὶ ἄρχειν φασὶν οὐ τοὺς πρῶτους, οἷον νύκτα καὶ οὐρανὸν ἢ χάος ἢ ὠκεανόν, ἀλλὰ τὸν Δία· οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ τούτοις μὲν διὰ τὸ μεταβάλλειν τοὺς ἄρχοντας τῶν ὄντων συμβαίνει τοιαῦτα λέγειν, ἐπεὶ οἱ γε μεμιγμένοι αὐτῶν καὶ τῶ μὴ μυθικῶς πάντα λέγειν, οἷον Φερεκύδης καὶ ἕτεροί τινες, τὸ γεννησαν πρῶτον ἄριστον τιθέασι, καὶ οἱ Μάγοι, καὶ τῶν ὑστέρων δὲ σοφῶν οἷον Ἐμπεδοκλῆς τε καὶ Ἀναξαγόρας, ὁ μὲν τὴν φιλίαν στοιχεῖον ὁ δὲ τὸν νοῦν ἀρχὴν ποιήσας.*

(The ancient poets thought similarly, in that they said that it was not the first powers, like night and chaos and ocean, but Zeus who was lord and king. Indeed, it is on account of the rulers changing that they said these things, since those making these connections and not speaking mythically, like Pherecydes and certain others – those set up the primary generator as the good. The Mages, too, say the same, and some of the later wise men, like Empedocles and Anaxagoras, the former making *φιλία* an element, the latter making *νοῦς* the first principle, 1091b 4-13.)

He seems to be referring, at least at first, to theogonic poets, and he suggests that they ordered their theogonies as they did based on their experience with the mutability of rulers: mortal kings grow old and die, or get overthrown, so that there is a constant chain of succession, which they transferred back into their mythologies.<sup>270</sup> The implication is that the poets are doing work similar to that of the philosophers – that is, essentially explaining the natural world – but that they are doing it in a very different way. They are, in essence, allegorizing: they are conveying truths about the world by hiding them in narrative stories.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>269</sup> A good bit of ink has been spilled over this passage but, to my knowledge, no one has tried to reconcile this description of poetry with what is presented elsewhere.

<sup>270</sup> It is worth noting that here, again, Empedocles is not counted among the poets, and that it is indeed their subjects that differentiate them, as Aristotle would have it in the *Poetics*.

<sup>271</sup> His description here is very similar to Plato's in the *Theaetetus*; see above in chapter two. On the place of allegory and poetry in classical Greece, see especially Richardson (1975); Struck (1995) addresses the

Two details are of central importance here: first, that Aristotle is explicitly talking about the ancient poets.<sup>272</sup> Second, that he is describing them as engaged in an activity that looks very little like what later poets did: while their allegories may have been superficially mimesis of actions, their end was to reveal truths about the natural world, which clearly has no part in Aristotle's idea of epic or tragedy.<sup>273</sup> In short, what we seem to have here is a description of an earlier incarnation of poetry, several generations prior to tragedy.<sup>274</sup> However, because Aristotle's conception of *ποίησις* is based not on formal features but on a constantly developing way of performing mimesis by means of harmony and rhythm, the fundamental similarity between these allegorical poems of natural science and the tragedies of Sophocles stands.<sup>275</sup>

It is obvious that Aristotle envisions the poets of his day quite differently, but the implication of allegory's participation in *ποίησις* illuminates a number of his assertions about poetry. The importance of obfuscation, for instance, which has been implied again and again, makes sense if some earlier incarnation of poetry was heavily dependent on allegory. Similarly, allegory is precisely finding similarities in dissimilar things. While

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relationship between the allegorical tradition and the rhetorical tradition in which Aristotle is basing himself. Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on a different passage (983b), also associates the early poets with allegory: "These [theological] poets dealt to some extent with the nature of things by means of certain figurative representations in myths."

<sup>272</sup> Nor is it likely that he is using the word loosely; already in Isocrates and Plato, as we saw, the term *ποίησις* had become fairly restricted, and its appearance would be difficult to understand as a metaphor: for whom, and why? There is clearly an interesting if unarticulated triangulation between these poets, natural scientists writing in meter like Empedocles, and the poet as presented in the *Poetics*, which deserves further attention.

<sup>273</sup> In fact, it had a much greater part in what philosophers did. We can speculate that Aristotle envisioned a time before philosophy had developed, when poets did the work that would come to be the philosophers'.

<sup>274</sup> This says nothing of Aristotle's opinion of such poetry one way or the other; it is descriptive rather than judgmental.

<sup>275</sup> *pace* Meijering (1987) 13, which assumes that poetry's *τέλος* would have been constant, so that Aristotle would not have considered e.g. didactic poetry to be poetry at all.



the tragic poets of Aristotle's day had little to do with the philosophical allegorical tradition, the importance of working by means of metaphor, and revealing likenesses between things that previously seemed unlike, had not changed.

Putting aside the question of the relationship between philosophy and poetry, we can turn now to one of the most famous and difficult passages in the *Poetics*: 1451a 36ff, where *ποίησις* is described as more philosophical and ethical than history.<sup>276</sup> It will be seen to resonate in interesting ways with the passage just discussed.

φανερὸν δὲ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ὅτι οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον. ὁ γὰρ ἱστορικός καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς οὐ τῷ ἢ ἔμμετρα λέγειν ἢ ἀμετρα διαφέρουσιν· εἴη γὰρ ἂν τὰ Ἡροδότου εἰς μέτρα τεθῆναι καὶ οὐδὲν ἦττον ἂν εἴη ἱστορία τις μετὰ μέτρου ἢ ἄνευ μέτρων· ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἢ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἢ δ' ἱστορία τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγει.

(It is clear from what has been said that the work of the poet is not to say things as they are, but the sorts of things that might be and are possible according to likelihood or necessity. That is, the historian and the poet do not differ because of speaking with meter or without: The productions of Herodotus would be no less a history done with or without meter. Rather, they differ in this point, namely that the one speaks what is, the other what could be. On account of this, *ποίησις* is more philosophical and serious than history, because *ποίησις* is concerned more with universals, and history reports individual events one by one, 1451a 36-b 8.)

Aristotle's insistence here on the insufficiency of meter as a determining characteristic of a literary production is familiar from a number of passages, although it is imperfectly observed in the corpus. The picture of the poet is no less interesting, however.

<sup>276</sup> See e.g. Halliwell (1986) 105, who observes that it provides "some of the clearest and most fundamental insights into the status of poetry." See also Sifakis (2001b) 21-2, Powell (1987) *passim*. Meijering (1987) ch.2 *passim* addresses the relationship between the genres as it was theorized and discussed in antiquity, especially among the Alexandrians.

Whereas the ancient poets were engaged in concealing natural science in their poetry with narratives of human action, the poets of Aristotle's day had a different *ἔργον*, namely to not represent actual reality, although still by means of human action. There is an inherent similarity, however, between these two different ends: neither one would be as effectively done with clear and transparent language as with some level of obscurity. Clarity of language belongs to representations of reality, which is not the poet's realm.<sup>277</sup> This – the realm of the actual against the realm of the possible – is the familiar distinction between poetry and history, the one representing events episodically, it would seem, the other representing *τὰ καθόλου*, universal things.

What, exactly, the universals are that poetry should relate is variously understood, but Halliwell's assessment will set up this discussion nicely. He associates them with the discrete and coherent unity that are the components of a good plot; that unity, with probability and necessity as its basic criteria, allows the audience to simultaneously see the logical chain of cause and effect that underlies the plot – and that is rarely to be seen in reality – and come to understand how that logical chain relates to real experience of the real world.<sup>278</sup> That is, recognizing the coherence revealed by poetry allows one to better understand reality. We can also here add to our definition of *ποιητική*: as *ῥητορική* was the faculty for discovering the available means of persuasion, we can now presume that *ποιητική* is the faculty for identifying the logical chains of causation underlying a plot.

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<sup>277</sup> I should say again that I am not suggesting that Aristotle imagined poets as actively striving for opacity, simply that occasional and carefully handled obfuscations were appropriate to their work.

<sup>278</sup> Halliwell (1987) 106-7. Else (1963) 305 drew a similar conclusion: "What [poetic] can offer us is a view of the *typology of human nature*, freed from the accidents that encumber our vision in real life" (emphasis his).

This brings poetry into conversation with the other arts concerned with knowledge and understanding, including philosophy, politics and rhetoric, although there is, perhaps for good reason, great resistance to the idea of letting poetry attain to equal ground with them.<sup>279</sup> Nonetheless, the discussion in the *Politics* makes it clear that poetry has ethical value, and several passages assert that learning and increased understanding are one result of contemplating poetry.<sup>280</sup> That is, while it is clearly not in the service of the same kind of truth that philosophy occupies itself with, poetry is far more than simple entertainment. The key to its function can be found by bringing a passage in the *Posterior Analytics* to bear on this discussion in the *Poetics*.<sup>281</sup>

At 99b 20ff, Aristotle is concluding his discussion of the syllogism, and he addresses the question of how men are able to perceive the immediate premises that are the necessary starting point of any demonstration leading to scientific knowledge. He concludes that the ability is neither innate nor based in one of the higher capacities like reasoning. Instead, they are a result of sense perception. He then describes the process:

ἐκ μὲν οὖν αἰσθήσεως γίνεται μνήμη, ὡσπερ λέγομεν, ἐκ δὲ μνήμης  
πολλάκις τοῦ αὐτοῦ γινομένης ἐμπειρία· αἱ γὰρ πολλαὶ μνήμαι τῷ  
ἀριθμῷ ἐμπειρία μία ἐστίν. ἐκ δ' ἐμπειρίας ἢ ἐκ παντὸς ἡρεμήσαντος  
τοῦ καθόλου ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, τοῦ ἐνὸς παρὰ τὰ πολλά, ὃ ἂν ἐν ἅπασιν ἐν  
ἐνῇ ἐκείνοις τὸ αὐτό, τέχνης ἀρχὴ καὶ ἐπιστήμης, ἐὰν μὲν περὶ γένεσιν,  
τέχνης, ἐὰν δὲ περὶ τὸ ὄν, ἐπιστήμης.

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<sup>279</sup> See e.g. Else (1963) 304: “Aristotle’s defense [of poetry] does not take the crude form of identifying poetry with philosophy, and his ‘universals’ are not Plato’s Ideas.” Halliwell (1987) 110 similarly resists letting this “be inflated into a grand claim of gravity and deep truth for the poet’s art.” I hope to show that, while he and Else are correct in rejecting any kind of mystical power, the connection between poetry and philosophy is stronger than they allow. Halliwell’s corollary, however, that “the function of universals should not be translated into the terms of artistic idealism,” is almost certainly correct; they are no more mystical than the means of persuasion underlying an orator’s work.

<sup>280</sup> See e.g. Lord (1982) 152, Sifakis (2001a) 24-25.

<sup>281</sup> To my knowledge, the connection between these passages has not been addressed before, although a number of scholars have hypothesized conclusions similar to those I will propose.

(Memory comes into being from sense perception, as we said, and from recurring memories of the same thing comes experience; that is, multiple memories make a single experience. Then, from experience – from the universal now entirely established in the soul, the one from the many, which is a single identity among all of them – from this is the origin of art and science, the one – that is, *τεχνή* – related to becoming, and the other – that is, *ἐπιστήμη* – related to what is, 100b 3-9)

In other words, experience comes from repeated exposure to the same pattern of action, and is the imprint of that pattern on the soul.<sup>282</sup> Every time we run into a particular, then, it brings us closer to the universal – as Aristotle puts it, each instance of sense perception is of a particular thing, but the perception is of the whole: it is not ‘the man Callias’, but ‘man’ (*καὶ γὰρ αἰσθάνεται μὲν τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον, ἢ δ’ αἴσθησις τοῦ καθόλου ἐστίν, οἷον ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλ’ οὐ Καλλίου ἀνθρώπου*, 100a 16-100b 1). History shows us what Callias did, but poetry allows us to understand what a man like Callias is likely to do.

Poetry’s work, then, is to provide depictions of actions that the audience will perceive, and that will imprint the soul with a certain pattern. When a given pattern has been stamped, as it were, a sufficient number of times, the soul has acquired an understanding of a universal, an experience.<sup>283</sup> This process, the acquisition of experience, is an inductive one by which we come to know primary premises: *δῆλον δὲ ὅτι ἡμῖν τὰ πρῶτα ἐπαγωγῇ γνωρίζειν ἀναγκαῖον· καὶ γὰρ ἡ αἴσθησις οὕτω τὸ καθόλου ἐμποιεῖ* (it is clear that we must learn first premises by means of induction; for

<sup>282</sup> On the practical implications of the Aristotelian idea of experience, see e.g. Moseley (2010) 91.

<sup>283</sup> The reason we need poetry, as is clear from Halliwell’s explanation above, is that reality rarely allows us to perceive the patterns of probability and likelihood that underlie human actions.

even sense perception makes universals in this way, 100b 3-5).<sup>284</sup> Finally, *ποιητική* is in the service of leading the audience to first premises.

This is not to suggest that poetry leads its audience to the same kinds of truths as philosophy; poetic truths are very much ethical truths rather than absolute ones: how a noble man will respond to adversity, for instance, rather than the meaning of nobility. However, knowledge of probable and likely actions cannot be discovered by philosophical methods any more than philosophical truths can be found through poetry. Poetry does not, as Halliwell worried, make any grand claims of gravity or deep truth. However, as a reliable method of attaining a very different kind of truth, poetry stands with philosophy as a useful path to knowledge.

When Aristotle says, then, at *Poetics* 1451a 36ff, that poetry is more philosophical and serious than history, he means that, whereas *ἱστορία* is a method that will bring its audience to an understanding of what events have actually transpired, the effect of *ποίησις* will have more in common with philosophy. The members of the audience may or may not gain any knowledge of individual events, but their souls will be imprinted with a pattern of action that may, with repeated stampings, allow them to understand how a given character will behave. That is, it can potentially train their souls.<sup>285</sup> Specifically, if people are exposed to good poetry often enough, they are likely to themselves become more virtuous.<sup>286</sup> The highest end of poetry, then, the reason it

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<sup>284</sup> Kahn (1978) 396-397 explains what Aristotle means by induction.

<sup>285</sup> On the idea that musical education benefited the soul in the same way that gymnastic education benefited the body, see e.g. Golden (1976) 353 and Simpson's commentary on *Pol.* 1340b 10.

<sup>286</sup> See e.g. *Pol.* 1341b 32.

deserves serious consideration, is that, by means of reason and emotion, it results in knowledge that cannot otherwise be attained.<sup>287</sup>

My qualification of that as the highest end is a significant one, as it would not be available to every member of the audience. It has been argued that Aristotle's description of the impact of poetry would apply only to the educated aristocrats, and thus that the audience must have been restricted to them.<sup>288</sup> As is clear from the discussion of the effects of music in the *Politics*, however, Aristotle's description actually allows for multiple effects to match its multiple audiences.<sup>289</sup> That is, each member of the audience would get from poetry what his soul could take: the educated and noble man gaining understanding of universals, children acquiring ethical training in their souls, and the base simply enjoying the spectacle. After all, as Aristotle made clear, poetry is enjoyable for everyone.

Before we move into the other categories of language, it will be useful to look briefly at Aristotle's use of compound *POI-* words. We saw earlier authors making

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<sup>287</sup> Offering a detailed analysis of the role of catharsis in the work of poetry is beyond the scope of this paper, but it will be useful to summarize my understanding of the relationship here. In general, I follow Sifakis (2001a), who asserts that catharsis is "the understanding that comes through contemplation while the spectator is emotionally aroused, and normally painful emotions ... become eventual inducers of pleasure because they lead to and facilitate understanding" (112). In short, I find more likely the rather straightforward description of catharsis given in the *Politics* than the puzzling hints in the *Poetics*, and understand catharsis to be something like the relief following emotional excitement. Purgative or healing interpretations I find unconvincing as that would require an audience in need of healing, and it is difficult to imagine Aristotle envisioning a theater full of people ailing in an identical way. Finally, although catharsis seems to be part of the proper end of poetry as well as *μουσική* more generally, the particular emotions Aristotle discusses in the *Poetics*, pity and fear, belong to tragedy (and perhaps epic), with other genres being connected to other emotions. Sifakis (2001b) chapter 3 and appendix 1 offer useful reviews of the various theories that have been put forward, and Halliwell (1986) 184ff gives a broader analysis of the scholarship on the subject.

<sup>288</sup> For a discussion of various theories of who would have been in Aristotle's imagined audience, see Sifakis (2001b) 34ff.

<sup>289</sup> See e.g. Sifakis (2001a) 96.

creative and productive use of the various *POI-* suffixes to identify specific kinds of literary productions, and to make differentiations for which there were no established terms to hand. Aristotle uses his own share of compounds, but the great majority of them refer to material creations rather than literary productions of any kind.

As we saw above, *ποιητική* emphasized the capacity for poetic production; it carries a similar force as a suffix, as a number of such *-ποιητική* compounds make clear, although of course the capacity is now directed to a specific kind of production. Most examples in the Aristotelian corpus of this kind of compound refer to productivity in the material world, but one refers to literary production – the *διθυραμβοποιητική* of *Poetics* 1447a 14. This word is in fact a *hapax* in the extant Greek corpus, and certainly flouts Aristotle’s own stated distaste for flamboyant compounds. As he says in several places, though, compounds are acceptable if the thing in question lacks a name.<sup>290</sup> It is probable, then, that Aristotle is breaking new conceptual ground here, although we cannot discount the possibility that it is simply Aristotle inserting some style of his own.<sup>291</sup> In fact, a number of his compounds for literary productions are quite rare, if not unique. The term *δραματοποιέω*, for instance, used to show how Homer was the first comedian because he dramatized the ridiculous (*Poetics* 1448b 37), does not appear again until Plutarch, with another hundred year break before its third appearance.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> As at *Rhet.* 1406a 42-3.

<sup>291</sup> More likely in this passage than in many others; here he is introducing related types of mimesis, and he emphasizes their making in different ways: *ἐποποιία δὲ καὶ ἡ τῆς τραγῳδίας ποιήσις ἔτι δὲ κωμῳδία καὶ ἡ διθυραμβοποιητική...* Whether or not we follow Else (1963) 6 n.21 in emending the *κωμῳδία* to the genitive *κωμῳδίας* on analogy with *τραγῳδίας*, which I am inclined to accept, this certainly looks more like artful *variatio* than a happy accident.

<sup>292</sup> Aristotle’s only other verbal compound, *ἰαμβοποιέω*, has a similar afterlife, appearing only once more, in a fourth c. CE theologian, Gregorius of Nazianzus, *Ep.* 176.3.3. While there is not enough evidence to do

Even with the nominal terms that are made on analogy with rather more common generic distinguishers, Aristotle's uses are uncommon. Thus he has *διθυραμβοποιός* in the *Rhetoric*, which is not seen again until the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE.<sup>293</sup> Although Herodotus made use of *ἐποποιός* and *ἐποποιία*, neither one seems to have picked up significant currency by the time Aristotle comes to them.<sup>294</sup> Furthermore, apart from a single appearance in the *Rhetoric*, *ἐποποιία* is limited in the Aristotelian corpus to the *Poetics*. Within the *Poetics*, however, it is relatively common, appearing 22 times against the single instance in the *Rhetoric*.

While we must be careful not to put too fine a point on such slender evidence, it is possible to draw a few tentative conclusions here. First, the fact that so many of the words Aristotle uses to specify literary type are quite rare – what he himself might call *δίπλοι* or *γλῶτται*, even – suggests that there still was not a definitive and established vocabulary of literary typology. Moreover, since these words are almost entirely limited to the works dedicated to defining and describing literary arts, it seems safe to infer that the generic distinctions were not felt as so important elsewhere; that is, outside of the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, Aristotle seems not to have felt it necessary to identify poetry by species. On the other hand, as we saw above, he is also not turning frequently to the abstract and concrete terms for poetry more generally, *ποίησις* and *ποίημα*. That is, Aristotle's default is to be more precise rather than less – the 'verses of Homer' rather

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more than hypothesize, it is worth considering whether Aristotle chose to innovate verbal forms of the compound in order to highlight the activity over the product or idea, as he does so often in both these treatises

<sup>293</sup> Several times in Athenaeus, also in the works of Philodemus, Mnasion and Hephaestion on poets, among a few other late treatises.

<sup>294</sup> There are no attested uses between Herodotus and Aristotle, and after Aristotle the next secure use is Dionysius of Halicarnassus.



than ‘epic’, for instance, or the ‘things made by Euripides’ rather than ‘tragedy.’ In other words, while we have seen almost two hundred years of interest in literary categorization, it seems only slightly more natural for Aristotle to conceptualize the overarching set of poetry than it did for Herodotus.

To turn now from the words of making to the other sets of language. We saw, with Plato and Isocrates, experimentation with two adverbs of organization, *χύδην* and *καταλογάδην*. In general, they used them to separate literary productions on the basis of an organizational system – or perhaps lack thereof – other than the presence or absence of meter. It seems, however, that – at least for *καταλογάδην* – the distinction was not significant enough or clear enough to take hold; Aristotle, for whom ordering and organization were so important, never uses the adverb at all, let alone to group literary productions.<sup>295</sup>

With *χύδην* we are in a slightly happier position. He does not use the word frequently – in fact, only four times in the corpus – but those passages are helpful for illustrating the resonance of the term. For one thing, two instances offer a clear visual picture of what it means when something is done *χύδην*. First, in the *Parts of Animals*, in the course of describing a particular mollusk, Aristotle observes that there are unidentified black objects scattered *χύδην* throughout its body (680a 15). That is, essentially, the creature had a random scattering of freckles. A very different description in the *Poetics* implies a very similar idea: paint smeared *χύδην*, he says, is not as

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<sup>295</sup> It does, however, become a relatively common term in the Second Sophistic.

pleasurable as an outline in black and white (1450b 2). In both cases, the implication is complete absence of order or organizing principle: the relevant principle is chaos.<sup>296</sup>

The final occurrence, at *Rhetoric* 1409b 7, finally, does involve literary categorization. In his discussion of the pros and cons of various styles (λέξεις), he has observed that the continuous style, like that of Herodotus and the dithyrambic preludes, is unpleasant because the audience has no sense of where they are in the piece. He favors the periodic style, which is easy to learn and pleasant: the latter because the audience consistently knows where it is and feels that some conclusion has been reached, the former because it is easily retained in memory, thanks to the fact that it has number.<sup>297</sup> His proof of this is that everyone remembers things in meter, τὰ μέτρα, more easily than τῶν χύδην.

This is usually translated as poetry and prose,<sup>298</sup> of course, but the real contrast is in the absence or lack of organization by means of number: language in meter has it, language that respects rhythm without turning into meter has it, language that has been scattered at random lacks it.<sup>299</sup> Thus Herodotus writes an inferior prose because he lacks perceivable boundaries (in Aristotle's opinion, at least); his work, like a dithyrambic

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<sup>296</sup> Compare *Politics* 1324b 5, where the laws are described as developing χύδην. Compare the uses of Plato and Isocrates above in chapter two.

<sup>297</sup> Cope (1938) 99 offers a very lucid illustration of what Aristotle means when he says the audience is always able to keep track of itself: it is like walking up and down a colonnade because, although the portico is of a discrete length such that a walker always knows how far he is from an end, he can turn and make the walk as many times as he likes. Thus there is boundary, but not limit. The following page clarifies what is likely meant here by 'dithyrambic prelude': something like "the novel, relaxed, often incoherent, extravagances of Melanippides."

<sup>298</sup> Aristotle indeed does use τὰ μέτρα in several places to refer to poems. See also Else (1963) 38-9 and 133-4, who defines the plural μέτρα as verses in the concrete sense, as opposed to the singular μέτρον, which is meter.

<sup>299</sup> Cope *ad loc.* defines χύδην more or less as I do, but nonetheless retains the translation "poetry and (disordered) prose," which I suggest does not do justice to the real force of the adverb.

prelude, is too much *χύδην*. Good prose is again the happy medium between unorganized and strictly organized language.

This is an important distinction to clarify for several reasons. To retain the poetry versus prose dichotomy here, while it does not do egregious harm to the meaning of the passage, elides an important aspect of Aristotle's idea of good prose: namely, that it must have clear and rhythmic organization. It stands in a middle position between poetry, for which meter, or elaborate and patterned rhythm,<sup>300</sup> is a normal feature, and some disorganized third, perhaps conversations, perhaps poorly executed speeches, but in any case no category that could be subjected to systematic study. Indeed, Aristotle remarks several times on the importance of rhythm to prose, and is clearly concerned that the speeches be laid out properly; it is difficult to imagine that he would think of *τὰ χύδην* as having any share in good rhetoric. It must not be forgotten that prose, while not subject to the same kinds of organizing principles as poetry, nonetheless is very much reliant on its own system of organization, including rhythm. There is, again, a spectrum: poetry is highly numbered, and there is an undesirable and ineffective kind of language having too little share in number, while good prose sits between the two.<sup>301</sup>

We come now to the language of song and music. It will come as no particular surprise that Aristotle uses few of the archaic terms for song and poetry; already in Herodotus, after all, we were seeing a significant favoring of *POI*- words over *AEID*-

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<sup>300</sup> That meter is a kind of rhythm is clearly stated by Aristotle himself, as seen above.

<sup>301</sup> Compare the multiplicity of categories implied in earlier authors.

terminology.<sup>302</sup> The old term for bard, *ᾄδοός*, appears only once, and only distantly in Aristotle's voice; he is citing an old adage when he remarks that the *ᾄδοί* tell lies.<sup>303</sup> Similarly, the verb *ᾄδειν* appears only once in the corpus, at *Politics* 1339b 8. Aristotle is here discussing the low status of musicians and poets, and as proof of that status he observes that Zeus himself does not sing and play kithara for the poets, but rather listens to and is entertained by them.<sup>304</sup> There is not, finally, enough data to draw any serious conclusions about what resonance Aristotle would have attached to these words, but they are conspicuous in their absence. Song terminology, it seems, has been almost erased from the lexicon of the poetic, replaced almost entirely by words having to do with making.

The term *μέλος*, however, has been retained, and in fact is one of Aristotle's default words for unspecified music.<sup>305</sup> More interesting is the way that this term serves to highlight distinctions within and outside of poetry, as *μέλος* is compared and contrasted with both *ποίησις* and *λόγος*. That *ποίησις* and *μουσική* are intricately connected is indisputable, but in the course of analyzing and categorizing literary productions of various kinds, Aristotle shows that the line between them is coming into

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<sup>302</sup> That is, using *POI*- words when he was primarily interested in content, *AEID*- words when he was focused on performance.

<sup>303</sup> *ἀλλὰ τὴν παροιμίαν πολλὰ ψεύδονται ᾄδοί, Met.* 983a 4. The adage has obvious resonances with Hesiod's famous passage at *Theog.* 27-8: ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, / ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρῦσασθαι. The word is found more than once in the corpus, but the other uses are all within quotations of other, older authors. The situation is even more interesting with the nominal cognate for the product. Like *ᾄδοός* and *ᾄδειν*, Aristotle uses *ᾠδός* just once. However, that usage refers not to human song at all, but to the song of a partridge.

<sup>304</sup> There is also the implication here that poet and performer / musician are the same. Given the anachronism of this equivalence, and the mythic nature of his example, he likely imagines a Phemius more than a Sophocles here; much of the low status of the poet is related to performance, and actors have largely taken over that aspect of poetry by Aristotle's day.

<sup>305</sup> Far more frequently, of course, given Aristotle's corpus, the term applies to physical limbs.

sharper focus. This can be best be seen by an examination of the adjective *φιλόζ* and the ways that Aristotle uses it to draw distinctions between language and song.

Although language is never taken up explicitly in the discussion of music in the *Politics* (1339bff), it is clear that, throughout, *μουσική* is being understood in its broad sense, which includes poetry.<sup>306</sup> Early in the discussion Aristotle observes that music is pleasant whether it be done *ψιλήν* or *μετὰ μελωδίας* (1339b 21). There have been arguments made that the music described here as *ψιλήν* refers to purely instrumental music, but more recently scholars have largely come to agree that it must be the other way around: it is not music with language and music without, but language with and without tuning.<sup>307</sup> The resulting categories of music are thus language with meter but without tuning, and language with both meter and tuning.<sup>308</sup> That is, the linguistic element is being considered separately from the melodic one, although both are still considered to be *μουσική*. It is presumably the retention of rhythm – that is, meter – that allows the language to remain *μέλος*, and therefore *μουσική*, even though it is no longer done with music as we understand it. Meter is thus an essential aspect of *μουσική*, and so of *ποιητική*, in this instance, but the fact that meter and tuning can be separated serves to split the previously unified category of poetry in two.

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<sup>306</sup> See e.g. Lord (1982) 86: “he simply takes for granted the prominent place of poetry in music education.” C.f. Lord (1982) 103 and Simpson (1998) 42, following Kraut, Lord and Jowett.

<sup>307</sup> Lord (1982) 85-87 outlines the linguistic arguments for this case, which relies especially on the significance of *μελωδία* as essentially ‘musical mode’ – that is, a more or less closed set of tones in more or less set relation to each other. I translate *μελωδία* throughout this discussion as ‘tuning’ after Lord. Compare Plato at *Republic* 389d 1, where he defines *μέλος* as language with rhythm and harmony; c.f. *Poetics* 1449b 29.

<sup>308</sup> With the implication of a third category of language lacking both rhythm and tune, which is perhaps similar to the *τὰ χύδην* discussed above.

A similar passage in the *Poetics* reiterates this, and provides further detail.

Aristotle observes that the linguistic arts, like painting, dancing, and music for aulos and lyre, can provide imitations of both objects of mimesis, the serious and the base.<sup>309</sup> He identifies two categories of linguistic art here which are envisioned as fundamentally similar: *λόγος* and *ψιλομετρία* (1448a 11). Given that Homer is the first example of *ψιλομετρία*, the significance here is likely something like rhapsodic recitation against true lyric song, perhaps akin to the distinction between recitative and aria in opera.<sup>310</sup> He is pairing plain language with something like recitative, and asserting that it has the same capacities for imitation that music does: there is posited again a middle term, a set between music and not-music. Because the compound that describes it emphasizes the meter rather than the tuning, we again see the middle term drawing a division between music and poetry.<sup>311</sup>

There is, moreover, a similar hybridization appearing on the other side. This is most explicitly seen at *Poetics* 1447a 29, where Aristotle identifies an unnamed category that includes both metrical and unmetred language:

ἡ δὲ μόνον τοῖς λόγοις ψιλοῖς ἢ τοῖς μέτροις καὶ τούτοις εἴτε μιγνῦσα  
μετ' ἀλλήλων εἶθ' ἐνί τινι γένει χρώμενη τῶν μέτρων ἀνώνυμος  
τυγχάνει οὔσα μέχρι τοῦ νῦν.

<sup>309</sup> Implicit in the claim is the conviction that some people must have held that poetry's power came from music more than from language, and there were certainly suggestions of such an idea in earlier authors. Aristotle, however, is asserting that language is capable of representing character and action as well as music is. While this is puzzling to those of us raised in the Western tradition of music, it remains viable in the musical traditions of the Near and Middle East. See especially Sifakis (2001b) 30-35.

<sup>310</sup> An analogy suggested by Lord (1982) 86.

<sup>311</sup> Else (1963) 62, remarking on this set of categories, reads it slightly differently: "To be sure, [*μέλει* and *μέτρον*] have particular reference to [*ἄρμονία* and *λόγος*]; but back of that is the basic fact that 'song' and 'verse' are both species of *λόγος*" (emphasis his). I agree with him, and consider my assertion to be attendant on his.

(The [art] making use of bare words alone or meters, either with these combined with each other or of a single kind of meter, is even now unnamed, 1447a 28-1447b 2)

The examples he gives are Sophronic mimes and Socratic dialogues, which are mimesis of human actions, but are without meter and, perhaps more importantly, are without music.<sup>312</sup> That is, he is delimiting a category that is almost-poetry, that differs from poetry primarily in its lack of music. Putting this together with the previous discussion of recitative and song, the resulting categories of the two different kinds of division can be illustrated as follows:<sup>313</sup>

<b>dividing by language and tune:</b> <sup>314</sup>	<b>dividing by mimesis, meter and tune:</b> <sup>315</sup>
'music' [-language, +rhythm, +tune]	'poetry' [+mimesis, +meter, +tune]
'song' [+language, +rhythm, +tune]	'mixed' [+mimesis, ±meter, -tune]
'recitative' [+language, +rhythm, -tune]	
<i>'ordered prose' [+rhythm, -tune]</i> <sup>316</sup>	
<i>'unordered prose' [-rhythm, -tune]</i>	

The relationship between the two different sets of divisions is not immediately clear – i.e., how 'recitative' and 'song' relate to 'poetry' – but two details that have been implicit in many of the earlier authors here become explicit: literary productions can be

<sup>312</sup> Else (1963) 37 claims that this is the first such separation of poetry and music expressed in classical Greece. As suggested above, I see it in several other places in Aristotle, but more importantly I suggest it is already present *in nuce* even in the fifth century, and certainly in Plato.

<sup>313</sup> To be clear, the labels I am assigning to each combination of media are simply for convenience's sake; as the quotation marks suggest, they should be understood more or less in their modern senses, without reference to the kinds of complications under discussion. That is, 'music' is not supposed to overlap with *μουσική*. I believe the potential confusion brought about by this is less than what would result from using no labels at all.

<sup>314</sup> A trichotomy similar to my column of 'divisions of language and tune' is reached by Else (1963) 67, who makes his divisions according to medium. He ends up with "sub-poetic", which is music without language, "poetry bare", which is language without music, and "poetry with music." I suggest that rhythm is just as important as language and tune, because, without it, it is difficult to see how what I call 'recitative' could remain *μουσική*.

<sup>315</sup> Language being assumed in this system of division, as it is for the implied categories of prose.

<sup>316</sup> The two categories of prose, judged according to the standards discussed above, are implied by both divisions, but explicit in neither.

categorized with meaningful results according to almost any of the media proper to them, and the results will be different sets, with some overlap but different emphases. That is, there are any number of ways the lines can be drawn, and each one results in slightly different sets, some simpler and some more complex, but none of them absolute.

Aristotle finally shows a basic acceptance of the difficulty of precisely distinguishing the categories, and explicit awareness of the great variety of ways that sets of literary productions could usefully be grouped – by form, rhythm, music, mode, object of mimesis and so on. On the other hand, following methodologies that were already nascent in Plato – and perhaps even earlier – he achieved greater success in identifying stable categories of literature than anyone before him. Paradoxically, of course, one of the reasons his system displays stability is that he allowed for the instability inherent to it: that is, the boundaries were never hard and fast. Song could drop a register and become a simpler kind of language, rhetoric could take on too many metaphors and become poetry; by moving the focus away from the product – the particular poem or speech – and onto the causes underlying it, he effectively did away with the concern of the categories bleeding into each other. The products might be coextensive, but the causes were discrete.

Although he is in many ways carrying on a tradition that had been under development for centuries before him, Aristotle's contributions are nonetheless remarkable. First, he established a largely consistent set of causal relationships between the words that had been, since Herodotus at least, the primary identifiers of the poetic. Second, he found a way to account not only for the different genres, but for the changes



within individual genres – that is, by envisioning the poetic as an enactment of features innate to us – rhythm, harmony and mimesis – he described an idea with an end of its own, towards which it would naturally develop. With that, variations and evolutions, however significant, could no longer impact the essence. Even when tragedy had more in common with rhetoric than the dithyramb, it remained a mimesis of human action, done by means of language, meter and harmony, with a highest end of leading the audience, with the help of metaphor, towards an understanding that was accessible no other way. It remained, in short, recognizably poetry.

## Conclusions

Reflecting on the multiplicity of ways that these six authors responded to the problem of identifying and distinguishing between literary productions, what is perhaps most remarkable is the underlying consistency in several areas. Motivations for drawing boundaries between literary productions changed from author to author, for instance, but in every case the dichotomy proved to be insufficient. It did provide, however, useful standards between which to negotiate: Thucydides wanted his work farther from a version of unmetred language he saw as too poetic, Isocrates wanted his farther from a version of unmetred language he considered too prosaic, but both of them were able to illustrate the positions they saw their productions occupying by means of the illusion of a simple opposition of prose and poetry. Gorgias made it his aim to straddle the midpoint, and thus emphasize the arbitrary nature of the midpoint itself. Herodotus oscillated between seeing two equivalent sets based on form, and seeing the formal distinctions within poetry as no less important than that between poetry and prose. Plato experimented with multiple ways of dividing language such that some kinds of it could be marked off as beneficial and philosophical, while other kinds were unreliable and deceptive; poetry was often set up, by virtue of its form, as the epitome of the unreliable language art, but then revealed to be a combination of music and rhetoric, thus forcing hybridity.

Aristotle implicitly granted the inefficiency of the dichotomy from the start, as we can see that he posited at least three, and likely more, distinct kinds of language arts that

could be marked off and described. His treatises on two of them, the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, make it clear that even with a multiplicity, the boundaries were vague – an assertion expressed more explicitly and succinctly in Gorgias’ productions, as Aristotle seems to acknowledge.

An equally important result of this study is our ability to see the essential continuity underlying these various postures. Each of these authors has poetry in mind for a different reason, uses it for a different end, and finally relies on poetry to identify the place of their works within the tradition. The authors show greater or lesser interest in generic distinctions within the set of the poetic, and even acknowledge a separation of poetry and music quite early on. On the other side, we saw regular and significant interest in the divisions within the larger category of prose. In both cases, this was typically accomplished by allowing the opposite set to stand as a simple and unified monolith; that is, poetry was allowed to be complicated when prose was simple, and vice versa. Aristotle, however, manages to present the enormous complexity of literary categorization while still maintaining a loosely structured order by allowing for a range of differentiations not only within poetry or within prose, but in a spectrum across them both. Form is thus retained as a useful descriptor, but not relied on as an essential signifier.

This dissertation also lays open the path for several fruitful studies. The place of music in relation to the poetic was raised on a number of occasions, and, although our evidence on the subject is regrettably thin, our understanding could only be increased by tracing out that thread. It would also be interesting to look forward from Aristotle, and

perform similar studies on the Hellenistic scholars and scholiasts; just as chapters one and two of this study filled out our understanding of the background of the *Poetics*, so our increased understanding of Aristotle, detailed in chapter three, provides a starting point for contextualizing his intellectual descendents. Finally, we are no more able than Plato to single out poetry clearly enough to identify it absolutely, but, as with Dr. Deutsch's phantom words, we know song when we hear it.

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