A Philosophy of Art in Plato's 'Republic': an Analysis of Collingwood's Proposal

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Abstract. The status of art in Plato's philosophy has always been a difficult problem. As a matter of fact, he even threw the poets out from his ideal state[1], a passage that has led some interpreters to assess that Plato did not develop a proper philosophy of art. Nevertheless, R. G. Collingwood, wrote an article titled "Plato's Philosophy of Art"[2]. How can it be? What could lead one of the most important aesthetic scholars of the first half of the twentieth century to make this thesis about Plato? To understand Collingwood's position at that time, I will review it in a new light: his own philosophy of art at that moment as it was propounded in *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*[3], a work he published that same year. I will also examine how Collingwood's position changed when he returned to the same subject in 1938, on the publication of *The Principles of Art*. Finally, I will end this article defending the correctness of Collingwood's earlier interpretation of Plato's position on art.

I.

Collingwood's position on Plato's philosophy of art arises from the analysis he makes of the Tenth Book of the *Republic*, especially its beginning

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[1]*Republic*, 595a

[2]Collingwood published his "Plato's Philosophy of Art" in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* in 1925, XXXIV, pages 154-172. I will use Donagan's edition of the text in Donagan (1966), 155-183.

[3]Collingwood published *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* in 1925, (London: Oxford University Press). As before, I will be using Donagan's edition of the text in Donagan (1966), 43-154.

(from 595a to 608)[4], although he later completes his reading with some other passages of Plato's works. According to Collingwood, the cited passage can be summarized in three main points:

1. The doctrine of the Three Degrees of Reality
2. The doctrine of the Three Degrees of Knowledge
3. The doctrine of the Emotionality of Art[5]

Next, Collingwood passes to analyze the concept of imitation or copying (*μίμησις*), which is the key for the right interpretation of the passage. Thus, for Plato, a copy is not a replica, is not an object of the same order as the object copied, but "*an object of a wholly different order, having the characteristics proper to that order, and having in that resemblance the ground of its peculiar value*"[6]. Therefore, for Plato, as Collingwood shows, when a carpenter produces a bed, he is not producing an idea nor an intelligible object, but a percept, whose value lies in its relation with the first order object (the idea) being copied. But, there is a radical imperfection in the produced sensible object by which it cannot even been considered as an instance of the idea copied, since the perceptible is tainted with unreality and unintelligibility. As Collingwood states it: "*the attempt to embody the perfection of the concept in perceptible shape is a selfcontradictory attempt, and foredoomed to failure*"[7]. This last statement clarifies, for Collingwood, what Plato meant by *mimesis*: "*To copy is to construct in a given material an object resembling one which is not made in that material; and the material itself imposes an impassible restriction on the fidelity of the resemblance*"[8].

But if the concept of imitation is central to the understanding of the kind of relationship between the conceptual world and the perceptible objects, it is also the key to the right interpretation of the relation between the perceptible world and art. According to Collingwood, Plato's definition of art in the *Republic* arises from his consideration "*that in art this same process is repeated at a further stage. As the percept copies the concept,*

[4]*Republic*, 595a-608
[5]Cf. Donagan (1966), 158-160.
[6]Donagan (1966), 161.
[7]Donagan (1966), 162.
[8]Donagan (1966), 162.

so the work of art copies the percept."[9]. Collingwood understands that the same clarifications done before for the relation between the concept and the percept are now of application to the relation between percepts and works of art: each object is in a different metaphysical plane, and therefore the work of art possesses only those attributes peculiar to its own order of reality, and its value depends on its relation to the world of percepts[10]. Therefore, just as the value of the perceptible bed is judged by its relation to the ideal bed, so the picture of a bed must be judged by its relation to the perceptible bed.

The importance of this last conclusion is quite evident. Collingwood is stating that, for Plato, the artist in his activity cannot use the idea as the model he copies. Collingwood textually says: "*the concept, the ideal which the craftsman would realize if he could, is a thing of which the artist knows nothing*"[11]. The artist does not produce a bed nor a hero, but an object *sui generis*, which must be judged by a standard peculiar to itself and not by the standard of the ideal. This is just, according to Collingwood, the negative side of Plato's conception of art as double imitation — an imitation of the imitation of the concept. But it is also, Collingwood says, the founding-stone of all sound aesthetic theory: "*To distinguish art from science and morality and handicraft and to assert that it has a sphere of its own; to distinguish the value of its works from scientific truth and from practical utility, and to place them in a distinct metaphysical category; this is the first step towards a real philosophy of art*."[12].

So, after all, from Collingwood's perspective, Plato is actually setting the foundations of a sound theory of art. But, at the same time, we can get an overview of Collingwood's own conception about the foundations of any sound aesthetic theory, which he himself had tried to accomplish in the *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*, where we can find two complete sections (§§ 26-27)[13] devoted to the distinction between art, religion, science, history and philosophy. It is therefore Collingwood's own view about what a sound aesthetic theory should be that unveils the possibility of a theory

[9]Donagan (1966), 163.
[10]Cf. Donagan (1966), 163.
[11]Donagan (1966), 164.
[12]Donagan (1966), 164.
[13]Donagan (1966), 137-144.

of art in Plato.

But Plato, for Collingwood, goes even further: he does not only develop a negative theory of art — what art is not -, but also proposes a positive view of what art is. Collingwood understands that this is, in fact, one of the positive consequences of the Doctrine of the Three Degrees of Reality. The negative side of the concept of *mimesis* in Plato is the affirmation of the impossibility of the copy to reproduce the model in an adequate form; its positive side is that it is, at least, a copy, an imitation. This way, a work of art, although an object of a different degree of reality from the percept, nevertheless copies that perceptual world, maintaining a positive relation with it. For the clarification of the meaning of *mimesis*, from its positive side, Collingwood will review Books VI and VII of Plato's *Republic*, arriving at the following conclusions:

1. From the ontological point of view, "*only the highest grade is absolutely real, and ultimately therefore the other grades do not exist at all,they are appearance, not reality...*"[14].

2. But, appearances must also have some sort of ontological status. According to Collingwood, for Plato the percepts or appearances, so far as they are anything, are confused or perverted versions of the highest grade of reality, our right understanding of them being dependent of our understanding of their correct ontological status. Percepts are then the confused version of reality[15].

3. This last thesis applies also to the description of the relationship between the third level of reality and percepts. A work of art is then "*a confused version of this confusion*"[16], and its intelligibility comes from considering it from its proper ontological status.

For Collingwood, these are the key concepts for the right understanding of Plato's concept of *mimesis*. Each of the last two levels of Reality "*tries to be what the one above it is*"[17]. Even more, translating all this from the terminology of the object into that of the subject, we find that "*there*

[14]Donagan (1966), 165.
[15]Cf. Donagan (1966), 166.
[16]Donagan (1966), 166.
[17]Donagan (1966), 166.

are as many forms or grades of experience as there are grades of objects"[18], so that each of the lower levels of experience are defined from the error of believing that they deal with the grade of reality immediately superior. But then *mimesis* "*expresses not the resemblance between two real things, nor even the relation between a less real thing and a more real thing; it expresses the relation between an appearance and the reality which it appears to be*"[19].

This means, for Collingwood, that Plato conceives the work of art as "*an appearance of an appearance*"[20]. But it means also that just as the proper experience of the concepts must be called knowledge — the apprehension of necessary truth -, and the proper experience of the percepts must be called opinion, there must also be a proper experience of the objects of the lowest level of reality. Collingwood states: "*its own right name is imagination and that of its objects is phantasms or images*"[21]. Therefore imagination is the essence of the aesthetic experience in Plato, is the kind of experience that happens properly in art. Even more, just as the quality of knowledge is truth, and that of opinion is utility, works of art "*contain no truths, nor even assertions which by some chance might be true, but only a glamour which when stripped off leaves nothing behind (601). This glamour is what we call beauty*"[22].

For someone familiar with Plato's passages cited by Collingwood, these last statements may sound, at least, strange. Plato does not use in them the word *imagination* to refer to this kind of experience; instead, he speaks of *imitation* (μίμησις), *poetry* (ποίησις) or *painting* (ζωγραφία). I think, in fact, that we must look into Collingwood's own *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* to understand his interpretation of Plato. The third Section of Chapter 1 is titled "§ *3. Art in its specific Nature: Theoretically, as Imagination*"[23]. This must not necessarily mean that Collingwood is forcing the text. It is true that Collingwood is bringing into play his own preconception of what art is when reading the text, but it is also true that the text also offers itself for the playing.

[18]Donagan (1966), 166.
[19]Donagan (1966), 167.
[20]Donagan (1966), 167.
[21]Donagan (1966), 168.
[22]Donagan (1966), 168.
[23]Donagan (1966), 52.

The explanation is different for Collingwood's assertion that beauty is, for Plato, the proper quality of works of art. In this case, Collingwood is going to reason his proposal from an etymological point of view. He admits that Plato, in 601 does not use what has become the Greek equivalent for beauty (*kallós*) but rather talks of the glamour, fascination or spell (*kelesis*) that surrounds a work of art. But, according to Collingwood, Plato does not use *kallos* because for him that word "*does not mean beauty. It means goodness or rightness or utility*"[24]. So just as the Greeks did not have a word for art, in the modern sense, they did not have a word for beauty, and when Plato wants to talk about art's beauty, he uses words like *hedoné*, *keleísthai*, or *eros*, words that possess a more than evident sensual connotation coherent with the degree of reality and experience proper to the works of art.

All the above implies, for Collingwood, that Plato is separating art from reason and placing it in emotion[25]. Although, Plato himself makes explicitly this separation, as in the *Republic* 603b[26], the important point to note about this is that Collingwood is going to deduce art emotional character from its imaginative nature: "*The emotionality of art, as Socrates conceives it, is a deduction from its imaginative nature. If each grade of objects is what it is by trying to embody an ideal drawn from the next higher grade, if each is a μίμησις of the next above, imagination is what it is by being a μίμησις, at two removes of truth*"[27]. This means the substitution of truth by certitude in the case of perception, and of certitude by glamour or emotional character in the case of art. Collingwood goes even ahead of Plato's text when he explains the glamour that clings to the work of art by the fact that it indirectly symbolizes truth, so that, according to Collingwod, Plato is actually conceiving the work of art as a symbol of truth, being precisely this the reason of Plato's expulsion of the artists from his ideal state: "*If the emotionality of art were a merely sensuous reaction, the struggle against it, the old quarrel between poetry and philosophy, would be merely another case of the irksome but not heartrending warfare which all must wage against animal lust. The struggle against art is the struggle to*

[24]Donagan (1966), 168.
[25]Cf. Donagan (1966), 168.
[26]See especially *Republic*, 603b
[27]Donagan (1966), 169.

resist the emotional appeal of a symbol in order to penetrate to that which it symbolises"[28].

I suppose that in this point you could be, again, perplexed. Some pages before[29], Collingwood had stated that for Plato a work of art did not contain any truth, and I am now showing that according to him, for Plato, a work of art is a symbol of truth. I hope to undo, or at least clarify, this seeming contradiction. To do it I want you to take into account Collingwood own thesis about art as a symbolic form that expresses the meaning of life, developed in *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art*: "*What the artist sees as an absolutely unique creation, the historian sees as another attempt added to the long list of previous attempts to express the meaning of life in a symbolic form. Both the artist and the historian regard the work of art as expressive: but whereas the artist regards it as expressive simply of itself, the historian regards it as expressive of the experiences, now forgotten, which have paved the way for its creation*"[30].

The text shows us many thinks about Collingwood's reading of Plato. In the first place, that Collingwood is making the two, apparently contradicting, statements about Plato's conception of the work of art because for him there is not contradiction at all. The first one defines art from the artist's own point of view, while the second is the result of examining art from the philosopher's point of view (being philosophy the only place where a theory of reality can be propounded). But, secondly, that for Collingwood art is also conceived as a symbol, but only from the historical point of view. The question is now whether or not is possible to draw these distinctions in Plato's text.

The answer to this last problem is found in the following passage, from Plato's *Republic*: "*Why, between ourselves — for you will not betray me to the tragic poets and all other imitators — that kind of art seems to be a corruption of the mind of all listeners who do not possess, as an antidote a knowledge of its real nature*"[31]. (595b) In it, Socrates is talking about the problem that works of art mean to those who do not know their true nature, their spellbinding and glamorous nature. These are both the artists and spectators who do

[28]Donagan (1966), 170.
[29]Cf. Donagan (1966), 168.
[30]Donagan (1966), 68.
[31]*Republic*, 595b

not know Truth, while the philosopher who has climbed to the world of ideas, who is aware of art's real nature, is also aware that its spellbinding nature and glamour comes from its being a symbol of truth, that talks openly to feelings but is quiet for reason.

Collingwood gives one more step in his interpretation of Plato's *Republic* when he tries to explain the reason for art's symbolic character: "*the view stated by Socrates, at any rate, is that mind is such a unity and that its various grades of experience are linked together by a progressive dialectic*"[32]. Only from a conception that considers mind as an essential unity is possible to hold that art is a symbol of truth. Moreover, for Collingwood this is the only possible explanation for Plato's two-sided position about the status of art and artists in his ideal state. From one point of view, if aesthetic activity is a symbol or μίμησις of activities of a higher level, it can be considered as a preparation for them; so that it could be admitted in the education of a class of citizens of the ideal republic, as Plato does in *392d-396*. But, from the other point of view, art is not truth; it is only its symbolic representation or μίμησις, so that it must be prohibited to those who are to be in contact with it, the future philosophers, being this Plato's position about art in Book X[33].

Once again, Collingwood's position about mind or spirit clarifies his reading of the text. In this sense, it is significant that Section twenty-eighth in Chapter 6 of *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* is titled: "*The unity of spiritual life*". In it, Collingwood tries to describe the interrelation between the five phases of the life of the spirit he has just discussed before: art, religion, science, history and philosophy. For him, they are not species of a common genus, but activities interconnected in a double way: each one presupposes and includes the previous one in the scale of spiritual life (philosophy presupposes history; history, science; and so on), and each is in a sense all the others that follow that same scale (art is, in a sense, religion; religion, science; and so on)[34]. Therefore also for Collingwood mind is a unity in which the different kinds of experience are linked together dialectically.

I think Plato's text justifies this interpretation. In order to see it, I

[32]Donagan (1966), 170.
[33]Cf. Donagan (1966), 170-171.
[34]Cf. Donagan (1996), 144.

propose the reader to take a close look at the well known Allegory of the Cavern[35], in conjunction with the Analogy of the Line[36]. In them, he describes the path the ignorant must walk to discover truth. This travel is, essentially, a process of self-discovery[37] by which the soul gets to know the world of ideas, in such a way that in order to get such knowledge, a soul must go through all the different grades until he reaches reason (imagination, belief, understanding and reason). So, after all, as Collingwood had stated, there are elements in Plato's *Republic* that enabled him to assert that mind is a unity whose different types or grades of experience are linked together in a progressive dialectic, describe in the Myth as the climbing of the prisoner out of the cave, and his final contemplation of the sun.

II.

I have offered the main keys of Collingwood's proposal of a philosophy of art in Plato. It could be summarized in the following points.

1. Plato sets the basis for a sound theory of art distinguishing art from other types of experience. The central concept in this distinction is *μίμησις*. A work of art is neither a percept nor an idea, but an imitation of the percept, and therefore an imitation of the imitation of the idea, a second order copy of true reality.

2. Plato also develops a positive theory of art by defining a proper experience for the work of art. This experience is imagination and its proper quality is beauty conceived as the emotional dimension of the work of art.

3. The emotional character of the work of art, its glamour, can only be explained defining art as an indirect symbol of truth. This explains Plato bipolar position about the arts in the description of the ideal state.

I would like now to complete the present exposition on Collingwood's claim that there is a positive side on Plato's account of art by taking a

[35]Cf. *Republic*, 514a-518b.
[36]Cf. *Republic*, 509d-511e.
[37]Cf. *Republic*, 518c.

closer look at the question of its plausibility. I will approach the subject in an indirect way, for I pretend to review another related treatment of the same question undertaken by Collingwood on his *Principles of Art* that, in some aspects, introduces some important changes on the conclusions we just have arrived at from the article we have been analyzing.

Collingwood returns to Plato quite early in the *Principles* (page 6 of his Introduction to the work), and he does it with what I personally consider a very useful advice for anyone approaching the study of any philosopher of the past — as it could be expected from the great historian he was. He warns us against the peril of reading what Plato says about art from our modern biases, assuming "*that Plato is describing an aesthetic experience similar to our own.*"[38]; and extending later this precaution against many of the translations of Plato's works, that he considers guilty of the general prejudice about Plato's theory of art.

But the issue I wish to consider more closely now is the shift in Collingwood's position about Plato's definition of art registered in the *Principles* if we compare it with the analysis he developed in the article just analyzed. In this sense, while in the 1925 article, he explicitly defends that although Plato in the Third Book of his *Republic*, distinguished between two kinds of art — *mimetic art* and *non-mimetic art* — , this distinction was left aside in the Tenth Book, where Plato considers all art as *mimetic*. According to him, such an abandonment is reinforced by the fact that Plato did not use any more the distinction in the dialogs he wrote after[39].

If this is the doctrine defended in his earlier article, Collingwood changes his mind in the *Principles*, where he explicitly makes the following affirmation: "*In the tenth book Plato's position has changed. But it has not changed in the direction of regarding all poetry as representative. The change is that whereas in Book III some representative poetry is banished because what it represents is trivial or evil, in Book X all representative poetry is banished because it is representative.*"[40]

I want to consider, in first place, the consequences that this change might have for the general theory developed earlier. In this sense, Collingwood had defended that, for Plato, *mimesis* was the essence of art, being

[38]Collingwood, R. G. (1958), 6.
[39]Cf. Collingwood, R. G. (1966), 174-175.
[40]Collingwood, R. G. (1958), 47-48.

this an affirmation Plato had arrived at in the Tenth Book of the *Republic* for the first time. But if in Book X Plato still distinguishes between *mimetic* and *non-mimetic* poetry (or art), this assertion can no longer be defended. Therefore the question can be raised again: What is poetry? What is art? But the answer can no longer be: *mímesis*. Further more, we also followed Collingwood in his explanation of how the emotional character of art (its glamour, or spellbinding nature) arose, in Plato, from its *mimetic* or symbolic nature. Collingwood's new position in the *Principles* also ends with this conception of poetry or art in general. The emotional character of art can still be a feature of a type of art (mimetic art), but not of all art as such.

Collingwood tries to support his statements by a careful and almost statistical analysis of the appearances and uses of the word *mímesis* (and its derivatives) in Book X[41], so that, at first reading, we could think that he has definitely abandoned the account of Plato's theory of art developed in 1925, and could almost convince us to do the same; assuming, therefore, that there is not a theory of art in Plato; but only, at least in the *Republic*, a theory of *mimetic* art.

Nevertheless, I consider Collingwood's 1925 article a better explanation of what Plato understood as art or poetry. In the time that is left, I will try to show why.

Let us begin, then, with some important clarifications that I think necessary to make. To do it, I will follow a book by the Professor Emilio Lledó, titled *El concepto "poiesis" en la filosofía griega*[42]. Through it, we will take a certainly brief, but necessary, review of the meaning of *poiesis* and *mímesis*, in Plato's philosophy.

Professor Lledó makes in his book an interesting and fruitful attempt to show the history of the Greek word *poiesis* from its verbal root as it appeared in Homer or Hesiod as ποιέω, and in Heraclitus as ποιε ιν, until the establishment of a new sense for its derivative form, ποίησις, achieved by Plato in his dialogs. I will not go now through this history, but I do want to use some important conclusions that we can draw from it, particularly from the careful study Professor Lledó performs of the meaning of both terms in the platonic dialogs, and specially in the *Republic*. In this sense, I

[41] Cf. Collingwood, R. G. (1958), 48-49.

[42] The book, unfortunately, is not translated into English. For non-English speaking people the translation would be: *The "poiesis" concept in Greek Philosophy.*

am forced to skip the analysis of the problem of whether it is possible to understand Plato's use of the term *poiesis* as references only to poetry or to art in general. I will use both ways of translating the term, although I am aware that this question deserves a closer examination.

To begin with, there is an illuminating parallel between a passage of the *Gorgias* with another of the *Republic*, one which we have already reviewed when we were following Collingwood's first interpretation of Plato's philosophy of art. In it, Socrates defends that if we strip poetry of its melody, rhythm and meter, we are only left with words, with speeches[43]. The Greek word that Plato uses in this passage for what it is normally translated as word or speech is *λόγοι*. Plato is therefore distinguishing four elements in poetry: melody (*μέλος*), rhythm (*ῥυθμὸν*) and meter (*μέτρον*) in one side, and *λόγοι*, on the other; that is to say, a content that remains even if the other three disappear[44]. We will later return to this same terminology again, so I just want you to keep it in mind.

Professor Lledó rightly continues his review of the concept of *poiesis* in the Tenth Book of the *Republic* underlining that the *mimesis* that Plato is talking about in this book has a different sense if compared with the sense it had in the Third Book[45].

If we recall the two main passages of Book III where Plato speaks of *mimetic* poetry[46], he distinguishes between two basic kinds of poetry: simple narrative (*ἁπλ η διηγήσει*) and imitative o representative narrative (*διὰ μιμήσεως*). If the poet only narrates, the poetic form is *diegeśis*, like in dithyrambs; while if he moves the characters theatrically, speaking through them, the poetic form will be mímesis, like in tragedies and comedies. In the second one, the poet hides himself under the character and speaks through it; he, therefore, tries to be another person, tries to substitute it in voice and figure, imitates a role. A careful reading of these passages therefore shows that *mímesis* refers in them to a specific poetic form where the poet acts and appears through the characters, so that his speech (the poet's) is determined by the characters that act in a given tragedy or comedy.

[43]Gorgias, 502c
[44]Cf. Lledó, E. (1961), 94.
[45]Cf. Lledó, E. (1961), 98.
[46]Republic, 392d - 394c

Plato's use of the term *mímesis* in some parts of the Tenth Book is different from the usage just explained. As you may recall, after reintroducing the question about poetry in similar terms as those stated in Book III, Plato directly asks Glaucon for a definition of *mímesis*[47], so that in the following passages the dialog is examining the concept from a variety of approaches, according to the well-known Socratic method. We have already reviewed the contents of these passages and the application of the conclusions at which Plato arrives in them to poetry, so I will not repeat the analysis now. It is important to notice, nevertheless, the change of key that the concept *mímesis* has undergone from the Third Book to the Tenth. From describing a mere literary or poetic form, it has gained an ontological and epistemological status, describing the relation between the world of appearances and the ideal world. But I believe it couldn't have been otherwise, for Plato is returning to the subject after what I consider the climax of the *Republic,* in Book VI and VII: the Analogy of the Line and the Allegory of the Cave.

If we return now to Collingwood's statements in the *Principles*, his defense of a distinction between *mimetic* poetry and *non-mimetic* poetry in the Tenth Book is based on the analysis of those passages of the book where Plato speaks of imitative or representative poets (*mimetikos poietés)* or similar forms and the assumption that *mímesis* is contextually implied in others where Plato uses only the term *poiesis*[48]. Taking a closer look at those passages, and bearing in mind the two senses of the concept *mímesis* just explained, I think it is possible to maintain that for Plato all poetry (and art) is *mímesis* (in an onto-epistemological sense); and that some poetry is *mimetic* and other is not (from the perspective of a classification of its literary form of speech); that is to say: although all poetry is *mímesis*, there are poetic forms in which the poet imitates the speeches, actions, feelings... of the characters of a story, while in others, the poet does not imitate them; he speaks himself, he is his own voice, the speech (*logos*) he makes is his own.

In this sense, there is an important passage in Book X that confirms my claim as well as Collingwood's in his 1925 article, and that ought to be

[47]Republic, 596a
[48]Cf. Collingwood, R. G. (1958), 48, n. 2.

interpreted in a different way from Collingwood's assertion in the *Principles*. After having established the three degrees in which reality can be divided from the point of view of their making or *poiesis*[49] — the model or idea, the percept and the image — ; Plato returns to the specific case of poetry and Homer, to see whether it possesses true knowledge or only the appearance of knowledge. In the conclusion of this part of the *Republic*, Socrates states the following:

> "*Shall we, then, lay it down that all the poetic tribe, beginning with Homer, are imitators of images of excellence and of the other things that they 'create', and do not lay hold on truth?*"[50]

And a few lines after again:

> "*And similarly, I suppose, we shall say that the poet himself, knowing nothing but how to imitate, lays on with words and phrases the colors of the several arts in such fashion that others equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent, whether he speak in rhythm, meter and harmony about cobbling or generalship or anything whatever.*"[51]

The passage perfectly shows that Plato is talking about poetry (or art) in general, and that it is defined as an ignorant imitation. As a matter of fact, Plato goes on with this manner of talking about poetry understood as *mímesis* until he returns to the place from which the examination of its meaning started: the reasons for the banishment of tragic poetry.

> "*On this, then, as it seems, we are fairly agreed, that the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning of the things he imitates, but that imitation is a form of play, not to be taken seriously, and that those who attempt tragic poetry, whether in iambics or heroic verse, are all altogether imitators.*"[52]

[49] Republic, 595c-598d.
[50] Republic, 600e
[51] Republic, 601a-b
[52] Republic, 602b

It must be stressed how Plato is building his argument in the above text. He begins with his general conclusion about imitation and an evaluation that is deduced from it; and from there he simply applies both to the particular case of tragic poetry. But the above text is important for one more reason: it marks a new change of direction in Plato's argument about poetry and art. Once he has clarified what is the general nature of poetry, he wants to deal again with imitative poetry or art, now in the restricted sense of a specific literary form, to reinforce his banishment from the ideal city. It is from 602b onwards, and until the end of the treatment of the question of poetry in Book X of the Republic, that Plato refers continually to imitative or representative poetry (*poieseos mimetikḗ*), so that his analysis is no longer centered in the epistemological or ontological deficiency of poetry in general, as it was before, but on the subjects that this specific form of poetry talks about through imitation.

This also explains why, in 607a, Plato saves from the general banishment against poetry the hymns to the Gods and the praises of good men. Although all poetry (and art) is nothing more than imitation, although some poetic forms are specially pernicious for the health of the ideal state, Plato doesn't want to renounce to the force that art and poetry have over people, above all, because not everyone is called to be a philosopher, not every citizen will be able to know true reality. To put it another way: most of the citizens still need images.

I realize that this last affirmation needs some justification. In this sense, it is necessary to retake what I consider the most important contribution of Collingwood's 1925 article to the understanding of Plato's conception of art in the *Republic*: his assertion of the emotional character of art or poetry, reading it together with the passage from the *Gorgias* cited earlier and its parallel in the *Republic*. In the first one, Plato stated that if we strip poetry of its melody, rhythm and meter, we are only left with words, with speeches (*lógoi*). In the one from the *Republic*, Plato declares that if we strip poetry of its melody, rhythm and meter, we are left with nothing[53]. From the last one, Collingwood arrived at the spellbinding or glamorous nature of art (*Kelesis*), which he proposed to be the right equivalent for what we understand today as beauty, and that was related later

[53]Republic, 601a-b.

by him to the symbolic nature of art.

Taking this three pieces into account, the passage in the *Republic* offers, as Professor Lledó defends, a definition of poetry (*poiesis*) from a new perspective. For a moment, Plato leaves aside any consideration of the social effects of poetry (or art), or the relation of the imitation (*mímesis*) to truth[54]. The first two elements of poetry that Plato mentions here are names or words (ὄνομα) and phrases (ῥ ημα) that are used in poetry to color what is represented. But this means that, in poetry, words and phrases, or in general, speech or language (*logos*) do not lead to true reality. In poetry we are forced to stay in the words themselves, in their coloring, in the appearance of what it is. It is the external aspect of the words, their color, what appears; so words are not the means for understanding a reality that hides and shows in them.

Moreover, Plato adds other elements to the characterization of poetry just reviewed in the same passage: meter, rhythm and melody. It is precisely after introducing them in the text that Plato talks of the spell (*Kelesis*) that these elements posses. As the passage shows, by their spell, the audience is not longer interested about what the poet talks about, about the true of his saying (*lógos*); instead they "*see only through words*", they behold only words in themselves. Therefore, poetry is invested with a magic power, with some kind of enchantment, fascination or glamour (*kelesis*) that removes the listener from any rational consideration, from the interest in truth and ties him to the mere images of truth: to words.

III.

With this, I have laid the elements to understand both Plato's banishment of poetry in his ideal state and his indulgence with the hymns to the Gods and the praises of good men. These two forms of poetry are admitted in the ideal state, because their spellbinding nature, the *kelesis* that is bound to its "names and phrases", "rhythm, meter, and melody", that tie the listener to the mere words (*lógos*), is appropriate for a specific class of citizens in the ideal state: those that are not to become philosophers, those that are not able, by nature, to get hold of truth, but that are condemned to

[54]Cf. Lledó, E., (1961), 103-105.

live between shadows, between images, between the products of *mímesis*. So if their nature is such that the rational part of their souls is so weak, they must be guided by the irrational part to which poetry speaks: they must respect the Gods of the state, and respect and try to imitate good men, although they will not know what, in truth, these are: they will see their images, their imitations in poetry. But for them, this will suffice.

Collingwood himself also pointed out this dimension of poetry or art in its 1925 article when he described it as the symbol of truth, something he missed in the new approach to the subject he made in the *Principles*. As I explained earlier, in Collingwood's terms, the problem was to remain in the symbol, to take the symbol not as a symbol of some other reality, a more truthful reality, but as all reality itself.

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