

Editing the Text of Homer in Plato's *Republic*

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STUDIES ON THE RECEPTION of poetry in the *Republic* have focussed particularly on Plato's criticism of Homer and tragedy, the narrative characteristics and problematic ethics of both the Homeric epic and the tragic genre, and their place and role in the newly-founded city.¹ Plato explicitly criticises the suspect ethics that both the Homeric epic and the tragic genre promote and emphatically denounces the negative effects that epic and tragic performances can potentially have on the audience. Undeniably, one of Plato's broader aims in his

¹ The criticism of Homer and tragic performances in the *Republic* is part and parcel of Plato's criticism of mimesis, on which, very selectively, T. Gould, "Plato's Hostility to Art," *Arion* 3 (1964) 70–91; H.-G. Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato* (New Haven 1980) 73–92; J. Annas, "Book 10. Poetry, The Ending of the *Republic*," in *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford 1981) 77–86, and "Plato on the Triviality of Literature," in J. M. E. Moravcsik et al. (eds.), *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts* (Totowa 1982) 1–28; R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley, "Art," in *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary* (London 1986) 270–288; G. R. F. Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," in G. A. Kennedy (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* I (Cambridge 1989) 92–158; P. Murray, "Inspiration and *Mimēsis* in Plato," *Apeiron* 25.4 (1992) 27–46, and *Plato on Poetry* (Cambridge 1996) 3–6, 19–24, commentary on *Resp.* 376E–398B9 and 595–608B10; A. Greco, "Plato on Imitative Poetry in the *Republic*," *JNStud* 3 (1994) 141–161; C. Janaway, *Images of Excellence. Plato's Critique of the Arts* (Oxford 1995) 106–157; J. Moss, "What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?" in G. R. F. Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (Cambridge 2007) 415–444; J. Marušič, "Poets and Mimesis in the *Republic*," in P. Destrée et al. (eds.), *Plato and the Poets* (Leiden 2011) 217–240.

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Republic is to correct poetry as a whole in moral terms, in order to make it the appropriate educational instrument for his citizen-philosophers. In order to provide a purely Platonic poetry his Socrates focusses on specific themes, narratives, and passages which he deems unacceptable and which he singles out through paraphrases and quotations.² Whilst he detects morally disturbing scenes and suggests deleting passages and individual lines, Socrates practically rewrites a number of poems, and consequently creates a different poem and ultimately a different text altogether.

Socrates' approach has been interpreted as exemplary of the manner in which tales are being revised, reshaped, and retold in the poetic tradition,³ and his encounter with poetry and particularly with Homer has been seen as an example of the Greeks' fascination with competition.⁴ Indeed, while aiming to correct, Socrates appropriates the technique of poetic composition, and his selective attitude towards myths and passages is understood as a representative example of the dynamic character of the poetic tradition. Socrates becomes another poet who recomposes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, silences sections from Hesiod's

² I do not discuss in this article the musical aspect of the performances and Socrates' instructions with reference to musical harmonies, on which see F. Pelosi, *Plato on Music, Soul and Body* (Cambridge 2010) 32–50; T. Lynch, "Why are only the Dorian and Phrygian *Harmoniai* accepted in Plato's *Kallipolis*? Lyre vs. Aulos," in L. Bravi et al. (eds.), *Tra lyra e aulos. Tradizioni musicali e generi poetici* (Pisa 2016) 267–284.

³ R. A. Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets. The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic* (Chicago 2002) 26–27. Socrates retains throughout his poetic criticism and literary judgement the roles of the educator and legislator. His legislative persona lurks behind the guidelines he offers on how to reform the educational curriculum of Callipolis, and becomes obvious in his explicit refusal to grant a chorus to Aeschylus for the performance of his *Hoplōn Krisis* (fr.350 *TrGF* = *Resp.* 383B1–9: χορὸν οὐ δώσομεν).

⁴ On the Greek impulse towards competition, M. Griffith, "Contest and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry," in M. Griffith et al., *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer* (Atlanta 1990) 185–207.

Theogony, and removes passages from Aeschylus' tragedies.⁵ Furthermore, Socrates' approach corresponds to that of a competitive poet, who positions himself in the poetic tradition by working within (and against) the corpus of established poetic works.⁶ As he sets out to purify and correct the Homeric epics, Socrates' poetic composition and performance can indeed be framed in an agonistic context.⁷ By competing with the poets he displays his *sophia*, and by creating his own poetry he demonstrates his "knowledge and factual accuracy" as well as his "moral and educational integrity," all of which are components of his poetic wisdom and of the competitive spirit of poetic performances.⁸ While revising the education of the Guardians Socrates dons a poetic persona to challenge the poets at their own game.⁹ He performs Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Homer, either in prose or in verse, and he is also turned into another student of

⁵ P. Kyriakou, "A Cause for Fragmentation: Tragic Fragments in Plato's *Republic*," in A. Lamari et al. (eds.), *Fragmentation in Ancient Greek Drama* (Berlin 2020) 501–526, at 502–510, draws attention to how Aeschylus is singled out in the *Republic* for presenting dangerous views of gods and heroes. Plato quotes as examples of problematic passages two from *Niobe* (fr.154a.15–16 = *Resp.* 380A4–5, fr.162 = *Resp.* 391E6–9) and fr.168.16 (*Resp.* 381D7), which in Radt's edition is taken to come from the *Xantriai*, but is now believed to be from either *Semele* or the *Hydrophoroi*, on which I. L. Hadjikosti, "Hera Transformed on Stage: Aeschylus fr. 168 Radt," *Kernos* 19 (2006) 291–301; A. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus: Fragments* (Cambridge 2008) 225–227. On the fragments of Aeschylus quoted in *Republic* 3, Kyriakou 516–521.

⁶ Cf. J. Moravcsik, "On Correcting the Poets," *OSAPh* 4 (1986) 35–47. The deletion of such passages goes hand-in-hand with Plato's refusal to interpret Homeric passages allegorically (*Resp.* 378D5–6 on ὑπόνοιαι).

⁷ Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* 62–66.

⁸ Griffith, in *Cabinet of the Muses* 189, who adds a third category covered by the broad term *sophia*—technical skill and aesthetic/emotional impact—the latter of which cannot apply straightforwardly to Socrates' poetic persona in the *Republic*, given his concern about how to control poetry's emotional impact on the audience.

⁹ Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* 62, on how Socrates imitates and impersonates the poet.

Homer, embodying, so to speak, the expected skills and expertise of the ideal rhapsode, the professional reciter of the Homeric epics.¹⁰ Socrates competes with the established poetic tradition by correcting, editing, rewriting, and adjusting it to the principles of Plato's moral and educational programme in the *Republic*.

In this article I focus on an aspect of Socrates' literary criticism that has gone unnoticed: the engagement of Plato's Socrates with Homer as an example of proto-scholarship.¹¹ In my analysis I direct attention to Socrates' list of Homeric quotations in *Republic* 3 (386C3–387B6), where he approaches the Homeric poems as material text, whose format and substance can change, and discuss especially the terms that he uses for his revision, correction, and editing of Homer. I demonstrate that the verbs employed there for Socrates' engagement with Homer are *termini technici* that are attested in fifth-century sources and in scholia to describe intervening in a text. Essentially, Plato's Socrates envisages editing the Homeric poems, and in the end creates his own text of Homer. His approach to poetry, especially the Homeric epic, in *Republic* Books 2 and 3 provides us with a valuable illustration of the fifth- and fourth-century turn towards textuality. Furthermore, it illustrates the convergence between orality and textuality and the co-existence of the written word with rhapsodic performance at the time; the written artefact of the epics, which is shaped anew by Plato's Socrates, is not meant to replace its oral performance and dissemination, and his edited text of Homer is still meant to exist within the frame of perfor-

¹⁰ The three identities of Socrates in the *Republic*—student, rhapsode, and poet—are analysed in Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* 53–66, who also discusses the mode that Socrates adopts in his performances (simple narrative or imitation) and identifies connections with the rhapsode Ion in Plato's *Ion*.

¹¹ On early Homeric criticism see A. Novokhatko, "Homeric Hermeneutics from Athens to Alexandria", in A. Rengakos et al. (eds.), *More than Homer Knew—Studies on Homer and his Ancient Commentators* (Berlin 2020) 87–146, at 87–102.

mance. While these fourth-century realities in Athens with regard to textual materiality and oral performance become part of the background for this analysis, the core argument of the article is that the *Republic* contains a precious and hitherto overlooked example of Homeric scholarship before the Alexandrians.

1. *Plato's Socrates, poets, and Homer's text in the Republic*

As has been recognized, in *Republic* 2 and 3 poetic censorship operates primarily along the axis of exclusion and inclusion:¹² Socrates cures poetry and creates his own ethically corrected and educationally improved kind of poetry through expulsions and erasures.¹³ The terminology he uses in prefacing his approach reveals that his censorship is simultaneously an attempt to create Callipolis' poetic canon (377B11–c3):

πρῶτον δὴ ἡμῖν, ὡς ἕοικεν, ἐπιστατητέον τοῖς μυθοποιῶσι, καὶ ὄν μὲν ἂν καλὸν [μῦθον] ποιήσωσιν, ἐγκριτέον, ὄν δ' ἂν μὴ, ἀποκριτέον. τοὺς δ' ἐγκριθέντας πείσομεν τὰς τροφούς τε καὶ μητέρας λέγειν τοῖς παισίν...

Firstly then, as it seems, we must put them into the care of the composers of the tales, and we must approve that good tale which they might compose, and we must reject that which is not. We shall persuade the nurses and mothers to tell their children the approved tales...¹⁴

¹² Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* 24. The verbal adjectives in the Greek text are revealing; e.g. *Resp.* 378B1–2 οὐ λεκτέου ... οὐδὲ λεκτέον, 378D5 οὐ παραδεκτέον, 379A3 οὐκ ἐπιτρεπτέον ... οὐ ποιητέον.

¹³ Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* 42–43, sees the verbs used in Socrates' interference with Homer as signalling his attempt to cure the Homeric text; cf. 37 on Socrates' desire to purify and purge the text. See also M. M. Moes, "Mimetic Irony and Plato's Defence of Poetry in the *Republic*," *JNStud* 5.11 (1996) 43–74, at 46, who points out that "the *Republic* is organized in accordance with a diagnosis / therapy schema," and Moravcsik, *OSAPh* 4 (1986) 38, on how "the notion of correction suggests truth, or at least degrees of adequacy and insight." On the new poetry of Socrates in the *Republic*, Naddaff 37–66.

¹⁴ Text Burnett's 1902 *OCT*; transl. C. Emlyn-Jones and W. Preddy, *Plato Republic. Books 1–5* (Cambridge 2013), at points modified.

The verbs ἐγκρίνω and ἀποκρίνω denote Socrates' approach, and as the technical meaning of ἐγκρίνω in our sources is first and foremost associated with the canonization of Greek authors,¹⁵ Socrates' literary censorship is framed within the process of canonization; the approved myths in his framework are called ἐγκριθέντες.

Socrates' canonizing lens converges with his scholarly approach to poetry. In *Republic* 3, where we encounter a number of Homeric quotations (386C3–387B6), Socrates envisages the Homeric epics as tangible and editable texts;¹⁶ the quoted verses, as he clarifies, will be removed from the poems. His interference with the text in this section should of course be interpreted metaphorically, but the resonance of the metaphor depends on the historical background of the material practice of writing and deleting on papyrus, and on the cultural framework of Homeric textual criticism. The passage is worth quoting in its entirety (*Resp.* 386C3–387B6):¹⁷

¹⁵ E.g. Photius *Bibl. cod.* 61 (20b25–27) and *Suda* s.v. Δείναρχος (δ 333) on the canonical Attic orators; Diog. Laert. 1.41 on the group of the Seven Sages.

¹⁶ Homeric quotations in the *Republic* have been the subject of P. G. Lake, *Plato's Homeric Dialogue: Homeric Quotation, Paraphrase, and Allusion in the Republic* (diss. Fordham Univ. 2011), who categorizes them as quotations, allusions, and paraphrases, and analyses them both in their original poetic context and in their receiving philosophical context, and also discusses their textual variants. On deliberate Homeric misquotations see S. Benardete, "Some Misquotations of Homer in Plato," *Phronesis* 8 (1963) 173–178, at 176; J. Mitscherling, "Plato's Misquotations of the Poets," *CQ* 55 (2005) 295–298; cf. the book-length study by J. A. Labarbe, *L'Homère de Platon* (Paris 1949), on the Homeric variants found in Plato. On poetic quotations and citations in the Platonic dialogues, D. Tarrant, "Plato's Use of Quotations and Other Illustrative Material," *CQ* 1 (1951) 59–67; S. Halliwell, "The Subjection of Muthos to Logos: Plato's Citations of the Poets," *CQ* 50 (2000) 94–112.

¹⁷ On these quotations in their original and receiving context, including textual differences, see Lake, *Plato's Homeric Dialogue* 247–279. For the translation of the quotations I have also consulted A. T. Murray, *Homer. Odyssey* I,

Ἐξαλείψομεν ἄρα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἀπὸ τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους ἀρξάμενοι
πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα—

βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλω

ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρω, ᾧ μὴ βίωτος πολὺς εἶη

ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν (*Od.* 11.489–491)¹⁸

καὶ τὸ—

οἰκία δὲ θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισι φανείη

σμερδαλέ', εὐρώεντα, τά τε στυγέουσι θεοὶ περ (*Il.* 20.64–65)

καὶ—

ᾧ πόποι, ἦ ῥά τις ἔστι καὶ εἰν Αἴδαο δόμοισιν

ψυχὴ καὶ εἶδωλον, ἀτὰρ φρένες οὐκ ἐνὶ πάμπαν (*Il.* 23.103–104)

καὶ τὸ—

οἴῳ πεπνῦσθαι, ταὶ δὲ σκιαὶ ἀΐσσουσι (*Od.* 10.495)¹⁹

καὶ—

ψυχὴ δ' ἐκ ῥεθέων παμένη Ἄϊδόσδε βεβήκει,

ὄν πότμον γοόωσα, λιποῦσ' ἀνδροτῆτα καὶ ἦβην (*Il.* 16.856–857)

καὶ τὸ—

ψυχὴ δὲ κατὰ χθονός, ἠύτε καπνός,

ᾧχετο τετριγυῖα (*Il.* 23.100–101)

καὶ—

ὡς δ' ὅτε νυκτερίδες μυχῶ ἄντρου θεσπεσίοιο

τρίζουσαι ποτέονται, ἐπεὶ κέ τις ἀποπέσῃσιν

ὄρμαθοῦ ἐκ πέτρης, ἀνά τ' ἀλλήλησιν ἔχονται,

ὡς αἱ τετριγυῖαι ἄμ' ἦσαν. (*Od.* 24.6–9)

ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα παραιτησόμεθα Ὅμηρον τε καὶ τοὺς
ἄλλους ποιητὰς μὴ χαλεπαίνειν ἂν διαγράφωμεν, οὐχ ὡς οὐ
ποιητικὰ καὶ ἡδέα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀκούειν, ἀλλ' ὅσῳ ποιητικώτερα,
τοσοῦτῳ ἦτον ἀκουστέον παισὶ καὶ ἀνδράσιν οὐς δεῖ
ἐλευθέρους εἶναι, δουλείαν θανάτου μᾶλλον πεφοβημένους.

In that case, said I, starting from the following passage, we shall
excise everything such as

rev. transl. G .E. Dimock (Cambridge [Mass.] 1995), and R. Lattimore, *The
Odyssey of Homer* (New York 1965).

¹⁸ A comma follows ἄλλω in Allen's *OCT* (1917), taking ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρω
in apposition to ἄλλω.

¹⁹ Allen has τοὶ δὲ in the second clause, also found in MS. F (with marginal
note γρ. ταὶ δὲ), which would turn σκιαὶ into a predicate rather than the
clause's subject.

I would rather work as a hired labourer for another,
 a poor landless man with a slender livelihood
 than to rule over the dead who have wasted away
 and this
 dwellings would appear to mortals and immortals
 fearful, dank, which even the gods detest²⁰
 and
 Alas! So even in the halls of Hades something truly exists,
 soul and phantom, but there is no understanding at all
 and this
 that he alone be conscious, but the shadows flit about
 and this
 flying from his limbs his soul went to Hades
 bewailing its fate, leaving behind manhood and youth
 and this
 the soul went below the earth, like smoke,
 uttering a shrill cry
 and
 as when bats in the depths of a wondrous cave
 fly around shrieking, whenever one of the string falls
 from a rock, and they cling to one another,
 so, shrieking, they went their way together.

We shall beg Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we put a line through these and all passages like them, not because they are not poetical and pleasant to hear for most people, but the more poetical they are, the less the boys and the men, those who must be free, should hear them, fearing slavery rather than death.

Socrates would still have made his point lucidly had he merely paraphrased the Homeric scenes he had in mind, as he had done with Hesiod's *Theogony*, but for the purification of the Homeric epic he chooses to quote each passage. The exact citation of passages is undeniable proof that Socrates knows precisely what extracts from the existing poetic tradition are not to be accepted in the new city, and demonstrates his good knowledge of the

²⁰ *Il.* 20.62 includes a μή that also negates the sentence quoted in the two verses here, and taking that into account “lest ... appear” would be a more accurate translation for these lines. The absence of μή in Socrates’ quotation, however, turns the verses into a positive statement.

Homeric epics, too.²¹ Beyond this conclusion, however, all seven citations are introduced in a way that reveals that Socrates approaches the Homeric poems through the lens of a scholarly critic and editor. Whereas a paraphrase or a prose rendition would reword a passage so as to present its meaning in the form of a summary and simultaneously show that the original passage has been absorbed into the receiving work, an exact quotation not only specifies the precise lines that are meant to be recalled but also incorporates in a new context an external passage that is meant to be perceived as a foreign body.

Socrates draws attention to the distinct nature of the Homeric quotations, and points to their foreign character by introducing each with *καί*, at times supplemented by *τό*. The use of *καί* marks out each quotation as a separate entity. On the surface, using *καί τό* breaks the linguistic monotony, as it alternates with *καί* harmonically in this passage. Although a definite article, *τό* gains the role of a demonstrative pronoun in the passage and in Socrates' speech, for it directs our attention each time to the precise quotation and invites us to perceive each set of verses as a discrete unit, implicitly marking each as a selection from a larger number of verses and a longer text. Accordingly, Socrates' vague introduction *πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα* with which he generalizes on the tone and content of the extracts, so invoked at the opening and closing of the passage, is rendered more precise, as, notionally at least, he treats the Homeric poems as material and editable texts.

Surprisingly, Socrates' hypothetical interference in the quoted extracts closes with a plea to Homer and other poets to accept amicably this selection of passages for removal (*παραιτησόμεθα ... μὴ χάλειπαίνειν*). This appeal to the poets gives the impression that the poet-creators will need to approve his acts of deletion. Throughout the process of correcting and restructuring poetic works, the authorial figures are portrayed as the agents who will have to authorize the removal of the condemned passages and to approve the recommended changes.

²¹ Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* 40.

It could be suggested that Socrates' asking for permission ought to be seen as ironic; even if permission is not granted, the problematic passages, which have been isolated and decontextualized, have already been marked as unsuitable. As already pointed out, Socrates recomposes the poetry of Callipolis within a seemingly dynamic and flexible poetic tradition, reflected in the method that he applies to the poetic works, approached as textual entities that could be edited and rewritten. Equally, this flexibility is implicitly reflected in his oscillation between the actual and the hypothetical, the present and the future. From *Resp.* 381D15 to 388D7 (particularly in 388A5–D7) Socrates uses the future tense, the potential optative, and imperatives, implying that the imagined new texts will be created in a hypothetical future, shifting the temporal axis to a time beyond the present.²² To be sure, the hypothetical tone of the conversation suggests that Socrates' new poetic texts will become the predominant version only when and if the *Republic's* new city is established. The temporal shifting itself remains puzzling, however. Socrates' corrective lens focusses on problematic passages in the course of the discussion, and, in effect, already puts into action his own recommendations, edits, and corrections in the *hic et nunc* of the conversation and in the absence of any permission from the poet-creators. The final decision on the passages that should be removed, especially those from the Homeric epics, is explicitly made now amongst the interlocutors, and the interference with the poetic works is already visible and tangible in the conversation.

The insertion of the figure of the poet into this process of poetic revision creates a connection between authorship and the authored product, and foregrounds the paradoxical image of the author as still being in possession (but not in control) of his text after the text's composition and dissemination. Each named poet

²² E.g. *Resp.* 381D1–7 μηδεὶς ... λεγέτω, μηδὲ ... καταψευδέσθω, ... μηδ' ... εισαγέτω, 383C1–3 χορὸν οὐ δάσομεν, οὐδὲ τοὺς διδασκάλους ἐάσομεν ἐπὶ παιδείᾳ χρῆσθαι τῶν νέων.

is introduced as a marker of identification and simultaneously as a sign of recognition of the agent behind the process of poetic composition.²³ This naming—either individually or as a group “the poets”—functions, therefore, as an inscription.²⁴ Generally, the authorial presence assigns to poetry a sense of permanence and textual fixity.²⁵ Nevertheless, the authority of the author is undermined in this passage, as the named poets are not in control of their texts. In fact Socrates, who receives the poetic works, is the one who controls these texts, and his authority increases, as he is able to change their work and turn it into his own creation. This process whereby Socrates recomposes a finished poetic product and rewrites a completed poetic text reflects a fate that is inevitable in textual transmission, namely that the authors are no longer in control of their works.²⁶ The text, be it prose or poetry, could be detached from its ascribed author, divided into sections, some of which could get lost in circulation, others separated from the whole, and the work itself could eventually look very different from the original, the author's product. As Socrates approaches the text not as reader but as editor, a new scriptor is born simultaneously with the text's

²³ On the authorial signatures available in classical Greece see C. Calame, “Identités d'auteur à l'exemple de la Grèce classique: signatures, énonciations, citations,” in C. Calame et al., *Identités d'auteur dans l'antiquité et la tradition européenne* (Grenoble 2004) 11–41, who adopts the view of M. Foucault, “Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?” *BSPH* 63.3 (1969) 73–104, that the author is a historical and cultural construct that provides a framework for the interpretation of the text.

²⁴ Names of authors as oscillating between description and designation is an important feature in Foucault, *BSPH* 63.3 (1969) 73–104.

²⁵ Cf. A. Beecroft, *Authorship and Cultural Identity in Early Greece and China: Patterns of Literary Circulation* (Cambridge 2010) 90–95, on the models of textualization in the *Lives* of Homer and the role of the fixed author.

²⁶ Cf. K. J. Dover, *Lysias and the Corpus Lysiacum* (Berkeley 1968) 1–22, on how the author loses control over the text the moment the text has been circulated.

circulation, a scriptor who in the end creates his own text.²⁷ The very compilation of decontextualized Homeric passages as well as Socrates' mark-ups and deletions reveal that he has already changed the Homeric text and created a different text, Socrates' text of Homer.

2. *ἐξαιλείφω, διαγράφω in their scholarly and historical context*

Socrates opens this very Homeric section in the *Republic* emphatically with the verb that defines the executed activity: ἐξαιλείψομεν, "we shall excise." Although the verb is in the future tense, projecting the action to an undefined time beyond that of Socrates' discussion, it nonetheless effects the deletion in the here and now of the conversation. ἐξαιλείψομεν constitutes a signpost of Socrates' editorial activity, before he begins piling up all the problematic passages that should be deleted. As if in ring-composition, the initial deletion implied by ἐξαιλείψομεν is echoed in the closing paragraph by ἂν διαγράψωμεν, "if we put a line through." Both verbs point to the modifications that will be made to the text of the Homeric epics, and both equally signal the act of cancelling and erasing in visual terms. Socrates and his interlocutors will wipe out verses from the Homeric poems (ἐξαιλείψομεν), and they will draw a line through the passages that have been selected for deletion (ἂν διαγράψωμεν). The act of having something inked out opens and closes the section with the Homeric citations, and marks out the selected passages from the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, as if they were lines on a papyrus. One pictures Plato's Socrates having in his mind's eye the texts of the two epics and selecting the verses that are meant to be deleted.

ἐξαιλείφω and διαγράφω are used in the Platonic corpus with reference to acts of inclusion and exclusion, to writing and erasure, and are found in several passages in the *Republic*, *Laws*, *Phaedrus*, and *Theaetetus*. This group of passages has to do with

²⁷ Cf. R. Barthes, "Le mort de l'auteur," *Manteia* 5 (1968) 61–66, at 64–66, whose discourse of the "death of the author" can be applied to Socrates' approach, too, but with a twist, given that in Barthes' view once the text is attached to an author, the text becomes closed, and a full stop is imposed.

the creation of an artefact, real or imaginary, in material and visual terms. In almost all cases these verbs describe the act of removing from a certain inscribed material item, be that a record, registry, or painting, and are often juxtaposed with various compounds of the verb γράφω and with nouns that denote writing or sketching.²⁸

The association of these two verbs with the act of writing and erasing becomes particularly explicit in two passages from the *Phaedrus* and the *Theaetetus*. Socrates problematizes writing throughout the *Phaedrus*, and at 257B7–258B5 he attempts to refute a specific claim made by Phaedrus, who exclusively associates written speeches and their survival with the sophists (257D4–8). Socrates refers to the statesmen as persons who also are interested in having their names connected with written documents, and explains how they attempt to inscribe their names and record praise for themselves in decrees that have been approved by the *boulē* and the people (257E8–258B9).²⁹ This act would ensure their preservation. Socrates cites the typical beginning of an imaginary decree (ἔδοξε ... τῇ βουλῇ ... τῷ δήμῳ), whose written and material composition he emphasizes by calling it σύγγραμμα, and continues by presenting in conditionals the two possible outcomes of its creation: to remain fixed or to be wiped out (ἐὰν μὲν οὗτος ἐμμένῃ ... ἐὰν δὲ ἐξαλειφθῇ).³⁰ The two alternatives, permanence through approval or erasure through disapproval, are framed by the act of writing, as the outcome would be decisive for the composer's value as author (ὁ ποιητής ... τοῦ ἄξιος εἶναι συγγράφειν). Fundamentally,

²⁸ Cf. Ar. *Eq.* 875 on erasing a name from the list of citizens (τὸν Γρύπτον ἐξαλείψας). I thank the referee for this reference.

²⁹ Cf. Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 194 for historical examples of two politicians who produced large numbers of laws that received the seal of approval from the *demos*.

³⁰ Cf. also Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 188 where the verb is used for the effect of the resolution that was just read: the reward of those who restored the democracy was annulled (ἐξαλείφεται) as a result of the decree (τῷ ψηφίσματι) that Ctesiphon proposed for Demosthenes.

both these outcomes are connected with questions of materiality and preservation. The verb ἐξαλείφω is included in this passage as the opposite of ἐμμένω, suggesting an act that permanently obliterates the decree and wipes out the name of the statesman.

The same verb ἐξαλείφω is used similarly in Plato's *Theaetetus* (187A7–B3). In this case, however, the elimination is enacted in an oral context, verbal arguments made in the course of a conversation. Theaetetus is asked to remove from his mind everything that has been argued up to that point (πάντα τὰ πρόσθεν ἐξαλείψας), to start over with clear vision, and to revisit his definition of knowledge.³¹ ἐξαλείφω is used in this case metaphorically, but the precision of what is meant to be deleted (πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ... πάντα τὰ πρόσθεν), defined partly in temporal terms (up to when and from the time when) and partly in spatial terms (arguments and points in the conversation), is connected explicitly with some sort of progression (ἐνταῦθα προελήλυθας). It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the temporal and spatial specifications in the passage quoted above reflect the precision of καὶ τό in Socrates' editorial activity in the *Republic*, as he goes through the Homeric epic and selects problematic passages that do not fulfil his purposes.

Another passage in the *Republic* presents the permanence of writing or drawing on a material substance as something negotiable, and is of particular relevance to Socrates' purification and editing of the Homeric text in the same dialogue. At 500D10–501C10 the philosopher-ruler is presented as a painter who paints the city according to the divine paradigm (500E3–4). We can find in this passage both διαγράφω (500E3) and ἐξαλείφω (501B9), the first aligned with the creative process described in the passage and the second maintaining its meaning of obliteration.³² Just like a painter the philosophers will take a board (501A2 ὡσπερ πίνακα), and after they wipe it clean (501A3 καθα-

³¹ Cf. Euripides *Hec.* 590 on deleting from Hecuba's mind (ἐξαλείψασθαι φρονός). I thank the referee for this reference.

³² In this case διαγράφω would mean "delineate/mark out with lines."

ρὰν ποιήσειαν ἄν), they will shape the figure of the constitution (501A9–10 ὑπογράψασθαι ἄν τὸ σχῆμα τῆς πολιτείας).³³ Socrates' description of the creation of the city's painting includes both stages of the process—the preliminary stage, which will result in the διαγραφή (501A1 “sketch/outline”), and the second stage that produces the end result, the establishment of the new city, which is called γραφή (501C2 “drawing”). The two nouns emphasize the means by which the city's painting is crafted, which is presented in this passage as an outline, a sketch, of a sort normally created by using a stylus or charcoal.³⁴

We know from Hesychius, the Aristotelian *Ath.Pol.*, and the results of non-invasive imaging on the Pitsa *pinakes*³⁵ that πίνακες (wooden writing boards) would have had a preparatory layer, made of white chalk, gypsum powder (the material used for the Pitsa *pinakes*), or kaolinite clay.³⁶ That drawing on this white layer would have been done with a stylus is confirmed by traces on the

³³ Painters' *pinakes* were made of either terracotta or wood: R. Di Cesare, “Per una visione economica della pittura antica tra antichità e arte,” in G. Marginesu (ed.), *Studi sull'economia delle technai in Grecia dall'età arcaica all'ellenismo* (Athens 2019) 75–91, at 79–80, 83.

³⁴ On the technique of painting in ancient Greece, Di Cesare, in *Studi sull'economia* 75–91. Although she focusses on Roman art, E. A. Meyer, “Writing Paraphernalia, Tablets, and Muses in Campanian Wall Painting,” *AJA* 113 (2009) 569–597, is helpful for visualizing writing implements. On the vocabulary for writing equipment and the practice of writing in fifth-century literary and epigraphic sources see A. Novokhatko, “The Wetted Sponge, The Wretched Rho, and Other Greek Evidence for Scribal Work,” *Glotta* 96 (2020) 148–173.

³⁵ These are four wooden panels dated to the second half of the sixth century B.C., discovered in a cave in the Corinthia.

³⁶ Hesych. s.v. ἐν λευκώμασιν (3175 Hansen); *Ath.Pol.* 47–49. P. J. Rhodes, “Public Documents in Greek States: Archives and Inscriptions,” *G&R* 48 (2001) 33–44 and 136–153, at 33–36; A. Missiou, *Literacy and Democracy in Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge 2011) 112–113; H. Brecoulaki et al., “The ‘lost art’ of Archaic Greek Painting: Revealing New Evidence on the Pitsa *pinakes* through MA-XRF and Imaging Techniques,” *Techné* 48 (2019) 34–53, at 38, 41, 47.

pinakes of drawing with the tip of a pointed instrument (whether wooden or metal), while P. J. Rhodes and Anna Missiou suggest that writing on white-washed boards would also have been done using charcoal.³⁷ Stylus and charcoal allowed for the temporary existence of writing on these boards, as they made it possible to rub out words or letters if so required.

The process of forming the city and its citizens through a number of sketches is visually enacted in *Resp.* 501B9–C2:

καὶ τὸ μὲν ἄν οἶμαι ἐξαλείφουσιν, τὸ δὲ πάλιν ἐγγράφουσιν, ἕως ὅτι
 μάλιστα ἀνθρώπεια ἦθη εἰς ὅσον ἐνδέχεται θεοφιλῆ ποιήσειαν.

Then, I think, they would rub out some parts and they would also redraw them, until they had made human characteristics as much and as far as possible dear to the gods.

These lines generate a visual loop; we see the philosopher-painters marking on their boards, rubbing out their designs, and then again drawing the same part numerous times. ἐγγράφω and ἐξαλείφω are turned into signifiers of acts of creation and destruction, design and removal respectively, and the sketch of the new city is portrayed as being in continuous change. Most importantly, ἐγγράφω and ἐξαλείφω here are used to express notions of formation and deletion, both of which involve writing and all kinds of creative activities related to permanence or erasure.³⁸

³⁷ To my knowledge, no ancient source refers to charcoal as one of the materials used for sketching on white-washed tablets, but the suggestion is logical, as the writing would have to contrast with the background, and on a white background this would have suited the use of charcoal. Rhodes, *G&R* 48 (2001) 35, refers to Ath. 407C1–5 who reports on the authority of Chamaeleon (fr.44 Wehrli²/fr.47 Martano) that Alcibiades wiped away a listed pending prosecution by using a moistened finger (βρέξας τὸν δάκτυλον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος διήλειψε τὴν δίκην τοῦ Ἠγήμονος), which implies, in his opinion, the use of charcoal for writing.

³⁸ The process of updating something that is written down or wiping it out completely resembles writing on wax tablets that were used for accounts that needed to be updated: M. Cammarosano et al., “They Wrote on Wax. Wax Boards in the Ancient Near East,” *Mesopotamia* 54 (2019) 121–180, at 158–

Apart from concepts of delineation and expunction, creation and destruction, the two verbs are used in the Platonic corpus with an emphasis on visuality and also materiality. In all cases, even in the passage in *Theaetetus* where the verb is used metaphorically, the agent of the verb is presented as creating something tangible and marked on some sort of surface and as being visible to everyone. The visual import of the verbs expresses a strong sense of materiality and textuality: the names of statesmen would be inscribed or erased from the decree in the *Phaedrus*; in the *Theaetetus* erroneous concepts of knowledge need to be erased from the mind, and Theaetetus needs to restart his exploration *tabula rasa*; in the *Republic* the philosopher-painter is creating on a board a sketch of his new city and its citizens by drawing, erasing, and re-drawing. In two passages in the *Laws* (778A7–10, 850A1–5) διαγράφω and ἐξαλείφω are framed by concepts of creation, writing, and erasure.³⁹ For instance, ἐξαλείφω at 850A1–5 denotes exclusion from Magnesia's registry: surpluses in selling and purchasing should be registered (ἀναγραφῆτω), according to the law, whereas deficiencies should be erased (ἐξαλειφέσθω).⁴⁰

Beyond the Platonic corpus, occurrences of these two verbs that Socrates uses for his activity make us more aware of the perceived materiality of the Homeric epics in *Republic* 3 as well as of Socrates' scholarly and editorial approach to the poems: ἐξαλείφειν is often associated with wax tablets, and its employ-

168. The authors refer to a Babylonian document where we read of the re-use of wiped-out writing boards in legal procedures (133): "Their obligations are paid, their writing boards wiped clean, their tablets broken."

³⁹ It should be noted that in *Leg.* 778A7–10 διαγράφω is used with the meaning "delineate" or "describe" and not "cancel" or "erase."

⁴⁰ The process described at *Leg.* 850A1–5 reflects real *polis* practices with registries, on which see M. Faraguna, "Documents, Public Information and the Historian: Perspectives on Fifth-century Athens," *Historiká* 7 (2017) 23–54, esp. 36–37; L. Boffo and M. Faraguna, *Le poleis e i loro archivi* (Trieste 2021) 61–264.

ment signals the physical and corporeal character of the action;⁴¹ both ἐξολείφειν and διαγράφειν are found in fifth-century sources and in scholia as *termini technici*, and denote interference with specific lines or words in the text and ultimately the editing of that text.⁴² In addition, research on documents has demonstrated that the text of a document, often written on a *pinax/pinakion* or a *sanis* (a term sometimes used for wax-covered boards), was not in all cases considered permanent; the text would be written temporarily, as it might be obliterated when circumstances changed or when the data had to be updated.⁴³

A number of fourth-century sources refer to interference in the written texts of catalogues or laws: lists of men registered for cavalry service were amended when some of them were judged unfit (*Ath. Pol.* 49.2 τῶν πρότερον ἐγγεγραμμένων μὴ δυνατοὺς εἶναι ... ἐξαλείφουσιν); the Thirty reportedly had a catalogue with the names of the privileged class, which they constantly edited by removing and adding names (36.2 τοὺς μὲν ἐξήλειφον τῶν ἐγγεγραμμένων, τοὺς δ' ἀντενέγραφον τῶν ἔξωθεν), and we read in Xenophon that Theramenes' name was removed from that catalogue (*Hell.* 2.3.51 ἐξαλείφω ἐκ τοῦ καταλόγου); lastly, in Lysias 30 Nicomachus is accused of increasing the time he was

⁴¹ E.g. *IG I³* 52.A.10 ἐχσάλειφόντων, 84.22 ἐχσάλειψάτο; Eur. *Peleus* fr.618 *TrGF*; Ar. *Pax* 1180–1181; Lys. *In Nic.* 2.

⁴² Novohatko, *Glotta* 96 (2020) 168, points out that in the second half of the fifth century ἐξολείφειν is turned into a *terminus technicus* (e.g. *IG I³* 52). According to E. G. Turner and P. J. Parsons, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World²* (London 1997) 16, διαγράφειν denotes “cancelling a letter or letters by means of a stroke drawn horizontally or obliquely through them” (e.g. Aesch. *Dicteyli*, *P. Oxy.* XVIII 2161.ii.33, where the letters ηδη are crossed out), and is found in the Homeric scholia as a *terminus technicus* (e.g. schol. *Il.* 19.365–368a ἀθετούνται σίχχοι τέσσαρες ... ἢ τε συνέπεια οὐδὲν ζητεῖ διαγραφέντων αὐτῶν).

⁴³ Rhodes, *G&R* 48 (2001) 33–44 and 136–153, are fundamental; see also C. Pébarthe, *Cité, démocratie et écriture: histoire de l'alphabétisation d'Athènes à l'époque classique* (Paris 2006) 261–268. On this practice in Delphian inscriptions, T. Homolle, *Les archives de l'intendance sacrée à Délos* (Paris 1887) 12–14.

expected to spend transcribing Solon's laws to six years by inserting some laws and erasing others (Lys. 30.2 τοὺς μὲν ἐνέγραφεν τοὺς δὲ ἐξήλειφεν).⁴⁴ Probably the most important fourth-century source on the temporary nature of written texts is *Ath. Pol.* 47–49, describing the constant updating of the λελευκωμένα γραμματεῖα (47.2 and 4 ἀναγράψαντες and ἀναγράφας), the λελευκωμένον πινάκιον (48.4 γράψας), and the *pinax* (49.2 εἰς τὸν πίνακα ἐγγράφουσι) that registered lists of taxes, leases, charges against corrupt officials, and individuals liable for cavalry service.⁴⁵

Although writing and written texts denote permanence, especially when they are compared with oral speeches and the verbal, the updating of public documents and the erasure of the written text bring this practice close to Socrates' approach to the Homeric epics. I would stress the terminology used in these fourth-century sources to denote the adding and obliterating of text on these boards. In all cases the verb used for wiping out is ἐξαλείφω, the same verb that Socrates uses for his removal of Homeric lines, which is also found in all passages coupled with variants of ἐγγράφω and other compounds of γράφω. To my knowledge, the earliest paired use of ἐξαλείφω and ἐγγράφω is found in Aristophanes' *Peace*, at the point where the Chorus recalls the organisational tasks in a soldier's life (1180–1181 τοὺς μὲν ἐγγράφοντες ἡμῶν τοὺς δ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω / ἐξαλείφοντες δις ἢ τρίς). The combination of these two verbs and the context in which they are found—lists and catalogues, products of the administrative action of maintaining records—shows that they embody the act of creating a material text by using writing and also of changing that material text by wiping out the writing.

The *Republic* absorbs and contextualizes into Plato's philosophical program the social and political practices of document

⁴⁴ See in more detail and for more examples Rhodes, *G&R* 48 (2001) 33–44.

⁴⁵ Cf. [Dem.] 58.48–52 on the inscribing and erasure of individuals' debts in the register.

creation and updating in the fourth century, which accordingly become a source of public history. Socrates focusses exclusively on the content that should be removed from the Homeric poems, and as a result the terminology used is that of obliteration, deletion, and removal. His ἐξαλείφω may not be coupled with ἐγγράφω or ἐμμένω, but in all the cases where the term is found it is used in connection with creative acts. The terminology that describes Socrates' activity in the *Republic* and his approach to Homer reinforces the conclusion that he views Homeric epic in particular as an editable artefact. The contrast with Hesiod, whose problematic passages are paraphrased and not quoted, brings to the fore the distinctiveness of the approach to the Homeric text. Furthermore, the *termini technici* with which he describes his method allows us to view Socrates' interference with the Homeric text as an example of pre-Alexandrian scholarship and Homeric criticism.

3. *Homer in the Republic: between song and text*

Issues of materiality and textuality and questions about the control of the written text link the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. Famously, Socrates' critique of rhetoric in the closing sections of the *Phaedrus* devalues the written word in relation to the spoken. Writing can only serve to jog the memory of those who know already, and it is fundamentally an *aide mémoire* for recalling pre-acquired knowledge (275A5–6 ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον, 276D1–5 ὑπομνήματα).⁴⁶ Writing, therefore, becomes a *hypomnēma*, a “reminder,” but also a crucial instrument for preservation. The materiality of writing as well as its role as the means by which works are preserved for both the present and the future are reflected in the written scroll of Lysias' speech that Phaedrus

⁴⁶ G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge 1987) 205, who also notes that the dangers of writing are dispersed if the written word is not perceived as a means of understanding. At 204–222 he discusses in detail three other interpretations of the reservations about the written word in the *Phaedrus* alongside his own.

hides under his cloak.⁴⁷ These two functions—writing as the preserving tool and the written word as *hypomnēma*—are also determined, respectively, by the writers themselves and by those who receive the written works. Authors, poets, orators, and law-givers control the written word in ways that affect its reception by audiences and readers. In *Phdr.* 278D8–E2 Socrates exemplifies the control over the created written work when he describes how an author, whether poet or writer of speeches or laws, might play with words by turning them up and down (ἄνω κάτω στρέφω), and how he might add phrases or remove them from the composition (πρὸς ἄλληλα κολλῶν τε καὶ ἀφαιρῶν).

While in the *Phaedrus* the author is portrayed as the agent who would control the material substance of his written work, its shape and outcome, in the *Republic*, as I have argued, the author is no longer in control of his written text; it is Socrates, the reader and receiver, who is depicted as the one who is in charge of the Homeric epic, a poetic work whose content can be altered and whose text can be edited. Our temporal perception of the process of creation and reception of a material text is, therefore, different in the two dialogues: in the *Phaedrus* the author is described as manipulating the components of his work while creating the material text, whereas in the *Republic* Socrates handles the text of Homer as a finished product which is circulated without the presence of the author. As Socrates and his interlocutors become the receivers of this materialized and textual Homeric epic, they are also portrayed as the ones who have the means to interfere with the text, remove verses or words, alter its substance, and create a different written work. Ultimately, the received poetic works are already fixed in their material form as textual artefacts, but their content, length, and shape can be edited.

⁴⁷ The treatment of the written word as tool is exemplified in Socrates' insistence that Phaedrus read the written script of Lysias' words (230D3–E1), which represents Lysias himself (228D8–E2); on which, Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* 208–210.

Moreover, the correction of Homer that resembles, as I have suggested, the process through which a new Homeric edition is created does not just theoretically become the focus of Socrates' reformulation. While Socrates goes through Homer's works in the *Republic*, selected passages from the epics become part of his discourse, as he incorporates in his words also verses from Homer.⁴⁸ The text of Homer becomes fragmented, broken off, and dislodged from the body of the full poem, and is presented as artefacts of the fragmentary poet and not of the citing author.⁴⁹ This very presence of Homeric quotations in Socrates' presentation on the ethical problems of existing poetry takes the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as a series of verses from which Socrates selects, some of which are integrated word-for-word in Books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*. Would Socrates have recited the Homeric lines paying attention to the dactylic hexameter? Toward the middle of Book 3, when Socrates is about to narrate the incident with Chryses at the opening of the *Iliad*, he notes that he will do so without metre because he is not poetical (393D8 φράσω δὲ ἄνευ μέτρου· οὐ γὰρ εἶμι ποιητικός). Socrates' drawing attention to the lack of metrical prosody in his prose paraphrase suggests that when he had quoted from the Homeric epics he should be understood as reciting the quotations in metre. In their conversations, in which Socrates might be quoting Homer from memory, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are presented as works that, at least for Socrates and his interlocutors, no longer belong exclusively in their original context of performance; they or parts thereof become accessible through memory and can be recited and integrated in contexts other than rhapsodic performances.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lake, *Plato's Homeric Dialogue* 32.

⁴⁹ Cf. H. Čulík-Baird, *Cicero and the Early Latin Poets* (Cambridge 2022) 8–21, on fragmentation and poetic quotations in Cicero's speeches.

⁵⁰ Plato's interlocutors and readers would have recognized these Homeric quotations in the *Republic*, as Homeric epic was part of the educational curriculum. On the continued study of Homer in democratic Athens, A. Ford,

4. *Conclusions*

Socrates' attention in the *Republic* to specific verses from Homer and other poets, which he quotes word-for-word in the course of his poetic reformation with the aim of removing them from their poems, anticipates the attention of fourth- and third-century scholars to the physical text of poetry, foreshadows the editorial practices of the fourth and third centuries, and reflects an historical background in which editing Homer was already a recognizable scholarly practice. My interpretation of Socrates' approach to the Homeric epics inflects our overall reading of *Republic* 2 and 3: the *Republic* becomes a discussion in which we can observe how methods and theories of scholarly and textual criticism can be put into action. The approach of Plato's Socrates reveals that some of the critical methods regarding texts were already in existence before their systematization in the Peripatetic and Alexandrian libraries, and places the *Republic* in the lineage of pre-Alexandrian Homeric criticism. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Socrates' attention to the text of Homer presents him as something of an early scholar. Interpreting his interference with Homer through the lens of scholarship brings out the significance of the *Republic* as evidence for the existence of some of the working methods of subsequent scholars, especially the Alexandrians, already in fifth- and fourth-century Athens and in the Platonic dialogues. In this sense and in light of my interpretation, Plato's work contributes to our

"Reading Homer from the Rostrum: Poems and Laws in Aeschines' *Against Timarchus*," in S. Goldhill et al. (eds.), *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge 1999) 231–256, at 232–241, who discusses the poetic quotations in Aeschines' *In Timarchum*. On poetic quotations in fourth-century Attic orators, S. Perlman, "Quotations from Poetry in Attic Orators of the Fourth Century B.C.," *AJP* 85 (1954) 155–172.

understanding of the development of textual criticism in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.⁵¹

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