

Homeric Summaries in Plato

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Introduction: Homer in Plato

Plato's use of Homeric quotations has been well documented, particularly since Labarbe's study of 1949.¹ Labarbe's main focus was on textual transmission, showing how far Plato's quotations corresponded with or deviated from the texts of Homer as we have today, pointing to the possibility that Plato's Homer contained some readings different from those handed down to us today.² In response to Labarbe's study Lohse emphasized Plato's intentional alterations of Homeric quotations to suit his purposes.³ Independently from Labarbe, Tarrant's 1951 article catalogued some Homeric passages in Plato while providing an overview of how Plato quoted or referred to a range of authors in his writing.⁴ She also classified the purposes for which Plato quoted Homer and other authors, observing that he used quotations 'sometimes as integral to his argument, sometimes as a mere embellishment'.⁵ More recent studies on Homeric quotations in Plato include Halliwell's work on Plato's citations of the poets, observing a constant interplay between Plato's willingness to utilise the traditional power of poetic authority and his need to control this authority to 'the standards of discourse and reason embodied in, and advocated by, his own philosophical writing'.⁶

Thus Plato's use of Homeric quotations and references has been studied in some detail with textual, literary and philosophical interests, but his use of Homeric summaries, as

¹ Jules Labarbe, *L'Homère de Platon* (Liège: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1949). Plato's engagement with Homer more generally has been a subject of scholarly interest since antiquity. Cf. Richard Hunter, *Plato and the Traditions of Ancient Literature: The Silent Stream* (Cambridge: University Press, 2012), Chapter 2 'Homer and Plato', pp. 38-108, with the literature cited in n. 1, p. 38.

² See also George Edwin Howes, 'Homeric Quotations in Plato and Aristotle', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 6 (1895), 153-237, whose interest is also in variant readings and Édouard des Places, 'Citations et paraphrases de poètes chez Démosthène et Platon', in *Études platoniciennes 1929-1979*, by Édouard des Places (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp. 24-32 [originally published in 1935], who examines how Plato adapts Homer into his Attic prose.

³ Gerhard Lohse, 'Untersuchungen über Homerzitate bei Platon', *Helikon*, 4 (1964), 3-28, *Helikon*, 5 (1965), 248-295, and *Helikon*, 7, (1967), 223-231.

⁴ Dorothy Tarrant, 'Plato's Use of Quotations and Other Illustrative Material', *Classical Quarterly* N. S. 1 (1951), 59-67.

⁵ Tarrant, 'Plato's Use of Quotations', p. 59. She counted 99 instances of Homer's actual words cited in Plato as against 67 from other poets (p.59). For the numbers of Homeric quotations and references, see also Naoko Yamagata, 'Hesiod in Plato: Second fiddle to Homer?', in *Plato & Hesiod*, ed. by G. R. Boys-Stones and J. H. Haubold (Oxford: University Press, 2010), pp. 68-88 (p. 70, in comparison with Hesiod) and Naoko Yamagata, 'Use of Homeric References in Plato and Xenophon', *Classical Quarterly*, 62 (2012), 130-144 (p. 131, in comparison with Xenophon's use of Homer).

⁶ S. Halliwell, 'The Subjection of Muthos to Logos: Plato's Citations of the Poets', *Classical Quarterly*, 50 (2000), 94-112 (p. 109).

opposed to straight quotations, has not been a specific subject of study to date. The purpose of this essay is to examine Plato's varied techniques in summarizing Homer as an integral element of his writing strategy, while drawing on the studies of Plato's Homeric quotations and references carried out to date.

I have selected three representative examples in order to observe how Plato uses Homeric summaries: 1) *Apology* 28c-d, where Socrates is compared to Achilles; 2) *Ion* 535b, where Socrates produces Homeric highlights; 3) *Republic* Book III 393d-394a, where Socrates summarizes the episode of Chryses in *Iliad* 1 in prose. These passages have different purposes and techniques in using Homer, designed to fit the different agenda and contexts of the dialogues in which they are introduced.⁷

***Apology* 28c1-d4: Socrates and Achilles**

This Homeric summary occurs in Socrates' defence speech as his reply to the hypothetical question that someone might ask, i.e. whether he was ashamed to have pursued such activities as a result of which he is risking his life (28b3-5).⁸ He summarises the conversation between Achilles and his mother Thetis in *Iliad* 18, incorporating two original lines with slight modifications (18. 96 and 98-99 – the corresponding lines in Plato are underlined and labelled as (a) and (b) respectively below):

φαῦλοι γὰρ ἂν τῷ γε σῶ λόγῳ εἶεν τῶν ἡμιθέων ὅσοι ἐν Τροίᾳ τετελευτήκασιν οἱ τε ἄλλοι
καὶ ὁ τῆς Θέτιδος ὕος, ὃς τοσοῦτον τοῦ κινδύνου κατεφρόνησεν παρὰ τὸ αἰσχρὸν τι
ὑπομῆναι ὥστε, ἐπειδὴ εἶπεν ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῷ προθυμουμένῳ Ἔκτορα ἀποκτεῖναι, θεὸς οὔσα,
οὕτωςί πως, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι· ὦ παῖ, εἰ τιμωρήσεις Πατρόκλῳ τῷ ἐταίρῳ τὸν φόνον καὶ
Ἔκτορα ἀποκτενεῖς, αὐτὸς ἀποθανῆ—(a) αὐτίκα γάρ τοι, φησί, ‘μεθ’ Ἔκτορα πότμος

⁷ Potentially any quotation from Homer can be regarded as a 'summary', but I have chosen three of the longest examples listed in Labarbe's Chapter III 'Homère <<condensé>>', Sections A (Paraphrases) and B (Allusions) (pp. 340-78), which make the observation of Plato's technique in summarizing easier. Labarbe lists three passages in Section A, i.e. *Apology* 28c-d, *Republic* III 390 (allusions to *Il.* 14. 294-351 and *Od.* 8. 266-366) and *Republic* III 393d-394a, of which I have selected the first and the third. He lists 22 passages in Section B, from which I have selected *Ion* 535b. The list also includes *Symposium* 179e-180a, which alludes to Achilles' choice in *Iliad* 18 in a similar way to *Apology* 28c-d in Section A. Nine examples, i.e. *Apology* 39a, *Gorgias* 523a, 525d, *Symposium* 190b, 216a, *Euthydemus* 288c, *Republic* III 407e-408a, *Laws* I 624a-b, XI 931b, XII 944a, are very short allusions providing material for jokes or illustration. The remaining ten examples are from *Republic*, all of which criticize passages from Homer (*Republic* II 378d, 379e, 379e-380a, 383a, III 390c, 390e, 390e-391a, 3991b1, 391b5, 465d-406a).

⁸ The mention of shame (αἰσχύνη) at 28b3 as well as the occurrence of the word suggesting the fear of ridicule (καταγέλαστος) at 28d3, which are not evident in the original text, have puzzled some readers. This seems to me to be convincingly explained by Metcalf who has analysed the Achillean nature of Socrates' shame and its philosophical significance. Cf. Robert Metcalf, 'Socrates and Achilles', in *Reexamining Socrates in the 'Apology'*, ed. by Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston: Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), pp. 62-84.

έτοιμος’—ὁ δὲ τοῦτ’ ἀκούσας τοῦ μὲν θανάτου καὶ τοῦ κινδύνου ὀλιγόρησε, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον δεῖσας τὸ ζῆν κακὸς ὢν καὶ τοῖς φίλοις μὴ τιμωρεῖν, (b) ‘Αὐτίκα,’ φησί, ‘τεθναίην, δίκην ἐπιθείς τῷ ἀδικοῦντι, ἵνα μὴ ἐνθάδε μένω καταγέλαστος παρὰ νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν ἄχθος ἀρούρης.’ μὴ αὐτὸν οἶει φροντίσαι θανάτου καὶ κινδύνου;⁹

The underlined passage (a) corresponds to *Il.* 18. 96, which occurs in Thetis’s reply to Achilles when he says that he does not wish to go on living until he kills Hector to avenge Patroclus’s death.

H(a) *Iliad* 18. 94-96

τὸν δ’ αὖτε προσέειπε Θέτις κατὰ δάκρυ χέουσα·
‘ὠκύμορος δὴ μοι, τέκος, ἔσσεαι, οἷ’ ἀγορεύεις·
αὐτίκα γάρ τοι ἔπειτα μεθ’ Ἔκτορα πότομος ἐτοιμος.’¹⁰

The underlined passage (b) corresponds to Achilles’ reply to Thetis’s word in line 96 that his death will shortly follow Hector’s.

H(b) *Iliad* 18. 98-99

αὐτίκα τεθναίην, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρ’ ἔμελλον ἐταίρῳ
κτεινομένῳ ἐπαμῦναι.¹¹

In this passage Socrates is comparing himself to Homeric heroes, particularly Achilles. There is a little irony here as he was earlier talking about having examined and exposed poets to have no wisdom (22b-c), while here he is happy enough to borrow Homer’s

⁹ *Apology* 28c1-d4 quoted from *OCT, Platonis Opera Tomus I*, ed. by E. A. Duke et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1995). The following translation is from *Plato I Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, ed. and tr. by Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 147-49: You see by your argument those demigods who died at Troy would be worthless, all of them, including the son of Thetis who so scorned danger rather than endure some disgrace, that when, in his eagerness to kill Hector, his mother, who was a goddess, said to him something like this, I think: ‘My son, if you are going to avenge the death of your companion Patroclus and kill Hector, you will die yourself – (a) for immediately, I tell you,’ she says, ‘after Hector doom awaits’ – on hearing this he thought little of death and danger, but being much more afraid of living the life of an evil man and not avenging his friends: (b) ‘May I die right now,’ he says, ‘when I have made the unjust man pay the penalty,’ in order not to remain here a laughing stock beside the crooked-beaked ships, a burden on the earth.’ You don’t think he had any thought for death and danger, do you?’

¹⁰ *Iliad* 18. 94-96 quoted from *OCT, Homeri Opera Tomus II Iliadis Libros XII-XXIV*, Third edition, ed. by David B. Monro and Thomas W. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920). The translation of this and the subsequent quotations from Homer’s texts are my own: And to him in her turn Thetis spoke, shedding tears, |‘Indeed you will be short-lived, my son, as you say, | For immediately then, I tell you, after Hector doom awaits.’

¹¹ Translation: May I die right now, since I was not to come to defend my friend when he was killed.

stories and lines to make himself more respectable to the ordinary citizens of Athens who make up his jury.

Another notable point is that he makes a slight modification to his ‘summary’ of the story of Achilles. First, he cleverly prepares for it with the phrase ‘his mother ... said to him **“something like this, I think”**’ (28c6) to signal that his quotations will not be exact. Then he inserts what Achilles himself said just before this scene, i.e. that he is determined to avenge Patroclus by killing Hector (*Il.* 18. 79-93), into Thetis’ reply as an ‘if’ clause (‘if you are going to avenge the death of your companion Patroclus and kill Hector’), before quoting line 96, the last line of H(a):

For immediately then, I tell you, after Hector doom awaits.

Looking at the rest of H(a), we notice that there is an obvious omission in the *Apology* passage, i.e. the speech introduction (*Il.* 18. 94) which contains the epithet *κατὰ δάκρυ χέουσα* (shedding tears).¹² This epithet portrays Thetis as a lamenting mother, which adds more pathos to the original Homeric passage. With the removal of that emotional element Thetis’s words as quoted by Socrates sound rather cool and almost severe.

This is of course consistent with Socrates’ attitude elsewhere in his defence speech. At 34c he says that he will not bring out his family or weep in front of the jury to arouse their sympathy, which he does not regard as seemly (34e). In the way of appealing to the jury’s sympathy, he only goes as far as to quote another line from Homer at 34d, οὐδ’ ἐγὼ ‘ἀπὸ δρυὸς οὐδ’ ἀπὸ πέτρης’ (*Od.* 19. 163) to remind them that he is human, born of parents and has sons, too.¹³ However, just as he avoids putting his own family’s grief on display, he does not allow himself to quote Homer’s epithet depicting Thetis shedding tears.

Moving on to Homeric passage H(b), which is a quotation from Achilles’ reply, it is notable that Socrates’ addition of ‘when I have made the unjust man pay the penalty’ (28d2) makes a significant difference to the image of Achilles. This modification of the passage turns his personal vengeance into the defence of justice even at the cost of his own life, which also foreshadows Socrates’ attitude as detailed in the *Crito*, where he refuses to act against the decision of the court of law. As Adam Parry puts it, ‘In order to make Socrates more like Achilles, Plato makes Achilles more like Socrates.’¹⁴ This observation is even more pertinent

¹² Cf. Labarbe, p. 344.

¹³ Translation of *Od.* 19. 163: I was not born ‘of oak and of rock’.

¹⁴ Adam Parry, ‘A Note on the Origins of Teleology’, *Journal of History of Ideas*, 26 (1965), 259-62 (p. 262). For further implications of this alteration, see Seth Benardete, ‘Some Misquotations of Homer in Plato’,

when we consider what Achilles was doing when Thetis arrives in *Iliad* 18. She addresses him τέκνον, τί κλαίεις; (My child, why are you **crying**?) (18. 73). Just as Socrates denounces Homer for depicting Achilles' excessive lamentation in the *Republic* (388a-b), here, too, he cuts out the unheroic portrayal of Achilles from his summary of the Homeric episode. So in the *Apology*, Plato's Homeric summary tempers the pathos of the tale of Achilles and casts him as the hero of justice, painting him in the image of Socrates.

***Ion* 535b1-c3: Socrates vs Ion**

Ion is a dialogue between Socrates and Ion, a rhapsode and expert on Homer. Reminiscent of Socrates' mention of examination of wise people including poets in *Apology* 22b-c, he questions Ion to ascertain what expert knowledge he might have, and at the end of the dialogue, just as he describes in *Apology*, reaches the conclusion that the poets do not possess wisdom, but they do what they do through inspiration. In the course of the dialogue several Homeric passages are quoted by Ion and Socrates.¹⁵ Socrates is shown to be just as competent to quote from Homer as Ion and even more competent to discuss matters relating to Homer and other poets.¹⁶

Our passage in question contains a collection of very brief summaries of Homeric episodes. The 'summaries' in the Platonic passage are underlined and labelled (a) to (e) and the corresponding words are underlined in the passages in Homer labelled H(a) to H(e) below:

ΣΩ. Ἔχε δὴ μοι τόδε εἰπέ, ὦ Ἴων, καὶ μὴ ἀποκρύψῃ ὅτι ἂν σε ἔρωμαι· ὅταν εὖ εἴπῃς ἔπη καὶ ἐκπλήξῃς μάλιστα τοὺς θεωμένους, ἢ τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα (a) ὅταν ἐπὶ τὸν οὐδὸν ἐφαλλόμενον ἄδῃς, ἐκφανῇ γιγνόμενον τοῖς μνηστῆρσι καὶ ἐκχέοντα τοὺς ὀιστοὺς πρὸ τῶν ποδῶν, ἢ (b) Ἀχιλλεῖα ἐπὶ τὸν Ἔκτορα ὀρμῶντα, ἢ καὶ τῶν περὶ (c) Ἀνδρομάχην ἐλεινῶν τι ἢ περὶ (d)

Phronesis, 8 (1963), 173-178 (pp. 173-74) and Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), pp. 183-86.

¹⁵ Labarbe lists six passages from *Ion* and there are over 50 entries on *Ion* in the index. Some reservations have been expressed by Rijksbaron about the judgement as to which variant readings in *Ion* are due to Plato's mistake or deliberate alteration and which derive from a different text as discussed in Labarbe, Tarrant, 'Plato's Use of Quotations', and Lohse, 'Untersuchungen', on the grounds of either unreliability of or, in the case of Tarrant, failure to use, the apparatus in their texts of *Ion*. Cf. *Plato Ion Or: On the Iliad*, ed. by Albert Rijksbaron (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 37. However, the question regarding Plato's intention does not apply to the passage discussed below, being a composite of various passages obviously put together by Plato himself.

¹⁶ On Socrates' superior competence to Ion in matters of Homer, see David Bouvier, 'Homère chez Platon: citations et construction d'un silence', in *La citation dans l'Antiquité: Actes du colloque du PARSIA, Lyon, ENS LSH, 6-8 novembre 2002*, ed. by Catherine Darbo-Peschanski (Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon, 2004), pp. 33-49 (pp. 44-46).

Ἐκάβην ἢ περὶ (e) Πριάμον, τότε πότερον ἔμφρων εἶ ἢ ἔξω σαντοῦ γίγνη καὶ παρὰ τοῖς πράγμασιν οἶταί σου εἶναι ἢ ψυχὴ οἷς λέγεις ἐνθουσιάζουσα, ἢ ἐν Ἰθάκῃ οὔσιν ἢ ἐν Τροίᾳ ἢ ὅπως ἂν καὶ τὰ ἔπη ἔχη;¹⁷

The two lines labelled (a) above correspond to the scene at the beginning of *Odyssey* 22, depicting Odysseus leaping on to the threshold, pouring forth his arrows.

H(a) *Od.* 22. 1-4:

αὐτὰρ ὁ γυμνώθη ῥακέων πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,
ἄλτο δ' ἐπὶ μέγαν οὐδόν, ἔχων βιὸν ἠδὲ φαρέτρην
ἰὼν ἐμπλείην, ταχέας δ' ἐκχεύατ' οἴστους
αὐτοῦ πρόσθε ποδῶν, μετὰ δὲ μνηστῆρσιν ἔειπεν.¹⁸

The scene corresponding to passage (b) of Achilles rushing at Hector occurs in *Iliad* 22.

H(b) *Il.* 22. 312-13:

ὀρμήθη δ' Ἀχιλεὺς, μένεος δ' ἐμπλήσαο θυμὸν
ἀγρίου,¹⁹

The 'piteous' episode about Andromache, containing a word cognate with ἐλεινός (piteous) and apparently corresponding to (c), occurs in the *Iliad* 6, though another, more extended piteous episode occurs at *Il.* 22. 437-515.

H(c) *Il.* 6. 431:

ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν' ἐπὶ πύργῳ....²⁰

Similarly, the 'piteous' episode about Hecuba, containing a word cognate with ἐλεινός, apparently corresponding to (d), occurs at *Il.* 22. 82-83, though another piteous scene follows at 22. 430-37.

¹⁷ *Ion* 535b1-c8 quoted from *OCT, Platonis Opera Tomus III*, ed. Ioannes Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1903). The following translation is from *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues*, tr. by Trevor J. Saunders et al. (London: Penguin Books 1987), translation of *Ion* by Trevor J. Saunders, p. 56: SOCRATES: Hold on a minute, Ion, and tell me this – and do be frank about answering whatever I may ask you. When you give a performance of epic and stun your audience, and you sing of Odysseus (a) leaping on to the threshold and revealing himself to the suitors and pouring forth his arrows before his feet, or of (b) Achilles rushing at Hector, or one of those piteous episodes about (c) Andromache or (d) Hecuba or (e) Priam, are you, at that moment, in control of your senses? Or are you taken out of yourself, and does your soul, inspired as it is, imagine itself present at the events you describe – either at Ithaca or Troy or wherever else the scene of the epic is set?

¹⁸ Translation: But resourceful Odysseus stripped off his rags, | leapt on to the great threshold, holding the bow and the quiver | full of shafts, and poured forth his swift arrows | right before his feet, and spoke among the suitors.

¹⁹ Translation: And Achilles charged, with his heart filled with wild rage,

²⁰ Translation: But come now take pity on me and stay here on the tower

H(d) *Il.* 22. 82-83

Ἕκτορ, τέκνον ἐμόν, τάδε τ' αἶδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον
αὐτήν, εἴ ποτέ τοι λαθικηδέα μαζὸν ἐπέσχον.²¹

Corresponding to (e) is the 'piteous' passage about Priam, containing the Homeric version of the word ἐλεινός itself, at *Il.* 22. 408-429.

H(e) *Il.* 22. 408:

ὄμωξεν δ' ἐλεινὰ πατήρ φίλος...²²

The underlined words in Passages H(a) to H(e) are effectively the 'summaries' of the Homeric episodes that Socrates is evoking.²³ It is abundantly clear that this is a conversation between two men who intimately know Homer, so much so that even a single word such as 'threshold', 'rushing at' or 'pitiable' is enough to evoke the whole episodes. Ion as the Homer expert duly picks up such cues and enthusiastically responds, saying how vividly Socrates has made his point and that when he performs he is not in his usual state of mind, as when he relates something pitiable, his eyes fill up with tears and when he relates something fearful or terrible, his hair stands on end and his heart thumps (535c4-8).²⁴ We can easily imagine that just listening to such Homeric 'summaries' is enough to cause emotional reaction in Ion, such as making his hair stand or filling his eyes with tears. It is a clever device for Socrates' part to persuade Ion that his art is not about rational thinking, but about emotion and irrational inspiration.

This passage also illustrates Plato's profound understanding of how poetry affects us, which he uses as a weapon against poetry itself. Although the usual trappings such as metre, music, and the rhapsode's costume (530b6-7) are absent, just by firing off the dramatic 'highlights', he manages to mobilize the power of poetry.

²¹ Translation: Hector, my child, respect these and take pity | on me, if I ever held out my breast to you to banish your care.

²² Translation: And his dear father cried out pitifully....

²³ Labarbe, p. 365, observes that the 'piteous episodes' of Andromache, Hecuba and Priam are listed in reverse order, considering them to be the passages in *Iliad* 22, i.e. 408-29 (Priam), 430-37 (Hecuba), and 437-515 (Andromache) respectively. Those passages undoubtedly count among their piteous episodes, but my examples H(c) and H(d) above are arguably the first 'piteous passage' of Andromache and Hecuba respectively, which curiously happen to contain a cognate word to ἐλεινός and come in the order as mentioned by Socrates. For the relevant Homeric passages cf. *Plato on Poetry*, ed. by Penelope Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 121 on *Ion* 535b6-7.

²⁴ As Lema Habash put it, 'The proof that he is out of his mind is that he is not able to control the movements of his body,' referring to 535c5-8. Cf. Nicholas Lema Habash, 'Lack of *Techne* and the Instability of Poetry in Plato's *Ion*', *Classical World*, 110 (2017), 491-521 (p. 509).

Republic III 393d3-394a7: verse into prose

Finally we turn to our third example, the summary of Chryses' episode at the opening of the *Iliad* (1. 12-42). It is a unique example of a passage consciously composed as a summary for a specific purpose, i.e. to demonstrate the effect of *mimesis* as an artistic device.

εἰ γὰρ Ὅμηρος εἰπὼν ὅτι ἦλθεν ὁ Χρύσης τῆς τε θυγατρὸς λύτρα φέρων καὶ ἰκέτης τῶν Ἀχαιῶν, μάλιστα δὲ τῶν βασιλέων, μετὰ τοῦτο μὴ ὡς Χρύσης γενόμενος ἔλεγεν ἀλλ' ἔτι ὡς Ὅμηρος, οἶσθ' ὅτι οὐκ ἂν μίμησις ἦν ἀλλὰ ἀπλῆ διήγησις. εἶχε δ' ἂν ὧδε πως—φράσω δὲ ἄνευ μέτρου· οὐ γὰρ εἰμι ποιητικὸς—Ἐλθὼν ὁ ἱερεὺς ἤρχετο ἐκείνοις μὲν τοὺς θεοὺς δοῦναι ἐλόντας τὴν Τροίαν αὐτοὺς σωθῆναι, τὴν δὲ θυγατέρα οἱ λῦσαι δεξαμένους ἅποινα καὶ τὸν θεὸν αἰδεσθέντας. ταῦτα δὲ εἰπόντος αὐτοῦ οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι ἐσέβοντο καὶ συνήνουν, ὁ δὲ Ἀγαμέμνων ἠγρίαιεν ἐντελλόμενος νῦν τε ἀπιέναι καὶ αὐθις μὴ ἐλθεῖν, μὴ αὐτῷ τό τε σκῆπτρον καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ στέμματα οὐκ ἐπαρκέσοι· πρὶν δὲ λυθῆναι αὐτοῦ τὴν θυγατέρα, ἐν Ἄργει ἔφη γηράσειν μετὰ οὗ· ἀπιέναι δ' ἐκέλευεν καὶ μὴ ἐρεθίζειν, ἵνα σῶς οἴκαδε ἔλθοι. ὁ δὲ πρεσβύτης ἀκούσας ἔδεισέν τε καὶ ἀπήει σιγῇ, ἀποχωρήσας δὲ ἐκ τοῦ στρατοπέδου πολλὰ τῷ Απόλλωνι ἤρχετο, τάς τε ἐπωνυμίας τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνακαλῶν καὶ ὑπομιμνήσκων καὶ ἀπαιτῶν, εἴ τι πρόποτε ἢ ἐν ναῶν οἰκοδομήσεσιν ἢ ἐν ἱερῶν θυσίαις κεχαρισμένον δωρήσαιτο· ὧν δὴ χάριν κατηύχετο τεῖσαι τοὺς Ἀχαιοὺς τὰ ἅ δάκρυα τοῖς ἐκείνου βέλεσιν. οὕτως, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ἄνευ μιμήσεως ἀπλῆ διήγησις γίγνεται.²⁵

One can agree that this is an accurate summary of the storyline of *Iliad* 1. 12-42, but put in prose, stripped of the music and of *mimesis* (i.e. the singer's acting out of the characters), the passage is undeniably flat. It is not entirely devoid of the emotion of the

²⁵ Republic III 393d3-394a7 quoted *OCT, Platonis Opera Tomus IV*, ed. Ioannes Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902). The following translation is from *Plato V Republic Books 1-5*, ed. and tr. by Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 251-53: For if Homer had said that Chryses came with a ransom for his daughter as suppliant of the Achaeans and their kings in particular and after this he was still speaking in the person of Homer, and not as Chryses, you know that this would not be imitation, but plain narrative. It would go something like this (I'm not going to speak in verse—I'm no poet): The priest came and prayed that the gods would grant them the capture of Troy and a safe return home. He asked them to accept the ransom, respect the god and release his daughter to him. When he had said this everyone else paid their respects and approved his proposal, but Agamemnon grew angry and told him to go away immediately and never return; that his sceptre and the wreaths he wore would not protect him; before his daughter was ransomed she would grow old with him in Argos. He told him to go away and not provoke him if he wanted to return home safely. When the old man heard this he was afraid and went off in silence. On leaving the camp he offered up many a prayer to Apollo, calling up the god's titles, reminding him and demanding his due if he himself had hitherto made any acceptable offering either in the ritual of building temples or in holy sacrifice. Indeed he repeatedly begged him to repay the Achaeans of his tears with those arrows of his. So my friend," I said, "this is how a straightforward narrative is constructed without imitation."

original – Agamemnon’s anger and Chryses’ fear are mentioned, but the pathos of the father’s plea or the shocking lack of respect in Agamemnon’s behaviour towards the priest do not have the same emotional impact on the audience/readers, as evidently intended.

Plato’s choice of the passage is also worth noting. As we have seen while examining *Ion* 535b1-c8 above, particularly pitiable or exciting episodes can evoke some of the emotional effect of the original even when only one or two key words are picked out, but with this episode, without the metre and epic diction such as formulaic epithets, the excitement of Homer’s poetry is all but squeezed out.²⁶ Plato himself later unmasks the lure of poetic diction, including metre, rhythm and melody, in Book 10, 601a-b.²⁷

The choice of this passage from the opening of the *Iliad* is significant in another way – it is as if Plato is announcing that he is rewriting Homer. That agenda is followed through the discussion of the education in the ideal state in Books 2 and 3 where a large number of Homeric passages are censored.²⁸ It then culminates in the expulsion of Homer and other poets in Book 10 (607a), on the grounds that lyric and epic poetry give pleasure whereas in the ideal state, it is law and reason rather than pleasure and pain that should be the rulers. However, the charming myth of Er (614b2-621b7), Plato’s glorious prose composition, closes the dialogue, suggesting what literature in the ideal state should be like. This is as if the rewriting of Homer which began with the summary of the Chryses episode has been completed with this myth, ending with the episode of the soul of Odysseus who chooses his new life last of all to return to the earth (620c3-d2).

Conclusion:

From the examples studied above, it is clear that, although the way in which Plato summarizes Homer varies, the resulting summaries have consistent agenda across the three dialogues examined. In *Apology* 28c-d, Plato self-consciously moves away from the verse text, modifies the lines to alter the nature of Achilles’ heroism to suit Socrates, and leaves out the undesirable and emotional behaviour of Achilles and Thetis. This mirrors the condemnation in *Republic* 388a-389a of the depiction of emotional behaviour of the gods and heroes, especially Achilles. *Ion* 535b-c, consisting of a collection of Homeric highlights,

²⁶ For detailed analyses of the linguistic transformation of *Il.* 12-42 into this passage, including changing poetic or archaic diction into contemporary and everyday expressions, cf. Labarbe, pp. 358-59 and Luigi Bottin, ‘Platone Censore di Omero’, *Bollettino dell’ Istituto di Filologia greca dell’ Università di Padova*, 2 (1975), 60-79.

²⁷ Cf. *Plato Republic 10*, tr. and commentary by S. Halliwell (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 1988), p. 128 on 601b2.

²⁸ Bouvier, ‘Homère chez Platon’, p. 46 notes that 26 Homeric passages are considered of which 24 are condemned.

displays the power of Homer, particularly his impact on our emotion. The dialogue not only shows Socrates' expertise in citing Homer's original lines, but also his ability to rewrite them in his own voice to cause desired emotional effect on Ion. *Republic* 393s-394a serves as the overture to the educational agenda of the dialogue, in which the pretence and pleasure of Homeric verse is to be replaced by the honesty and wisdom of Socratic prose. Although the passage itself is rather dry and austere, the dialogue ends with the myth of Er, pointing to the possibility of prose literature that can promote virtue, which arguably is the aim of Plato's entire oeuvre.

Through his Homeric summaries Plato demonstrates his understanding of poetry, especially its emotional effects and its pleasures, though he chooses to use his knowledge to fight against Homer. What becomes a big manifesto in Book 10 of the *Republic* is in fact already present in his earlier dialogues, including *Ion* and even *Apology*.