

Images of Unlikeness: Proclus on Homeric σύμβολον and the Perfection of the Rational Soul

Daniel James Watson
DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Since the later half of the 20th century Proclus' interpretation of Homer has been the subject of significant scholarly attention. Most of this work has focused on the *Sixth Essay* of Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Republic*.¹ This is of no surprise. Not only is the *Sixth Essay* the most comprehensive survival of the Athenian academy's once copious work on Homer,² but it is one of our most important sources for fragments and reports of his ancient commentators.³ Yet while Proclus' relationship to Homer continues to generate interest, serious criticisms produced by earlier scholarship have not yet been answered. On one hand, there has been a general agreement that Proclus' interpretation either incidentally⁴ or inherently⁵ leaves behind the most apparent and rational meanings of the Homeric texts in his quest to find the doctrines of Plato in them. In doing so he is said to reduce Homer to a mere shadow of Plato's philosophy.⁶ On the other, Kuisma has shown that most of Proclus' interpretations are concerned *only* with the apparent meaning of the text. Based on this evidence he argues that Proclus not only favours the apparent sense of Homer, but that Proclus himself is not convinced by the

1. All translations are my own. However, I have received invaluable guidance from the French of Festugière. See Proclus, *Commentaire sur la République*, 3 Vols. trans. and notes A.J. Festugière (Paris: Vrin, 1970).

2. Anne D.R. Sheppard, *Studies of the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 46; Luc Brisson, *How the Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 92–93.

3. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 198.

4. Sheppard, *Studies*, 202; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 164, 170.

5. Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and its Continuity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 218, 238–40.

6. Sheppard, *Studies*, 130, 202; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 164, 170, 183, 232. Cf. E.R. Dodds, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), xxv.

hidden meanings he finds suggested there, turning to them only when it is necessary to demonstrate the concord of Plato and Homer.⁷ Yet as valid as this evidence is, it remains that the argument Kuisma derives from it contradicts Proclus' repeated insistence that the most important and characteristic level of meaning found in Homer is that which is beyond the apparent sense of the text.⁸ Herein lies a serious difficulty. If the purpose of the apparent sense of Homer's poetry is simply to point beyond itself to higher meanings, how is it that the meaning that belongs to the apparent sense in itself is emphasized in this process rather than left behind? How does it transcend and yet simultaneously remain itself?

Even though more recent scholarship has warmed to Proclus' interpretation of Homer, this dilemma has not yet been resolved. Or at least, it remains unsolved in such scholarship as makes Proclus' view of Homer its explicit subject. For the crucial advances made by scholars such as Trouillard and Gersh in understanding the central doctrines of Proclus' philosophy have only just begun to be applied to the matter.⁹ The purpose of this essay then is to set out from these beginnings in earnest. In doing so we will find that Proclus' interpretation of Homer does not drive him from one irrationality to another, from an irrational reduction of Homer to a mere shadow of Proclus' rational understanding of reality, to an irrational transcendence of the truly rational meaning of Homer's text. Rather, we will find that Proclus discovers in Homer the means by which the soul may express its rational capacities to a degree that it is not capable of on its own. Reason does not try to force Homer into being what it is and in doing so cease to be reason. Rather, reason is only fully reason insofar as it has transcended itself through Homer.

Homer's poetry has its immediate source in the divine poet's state of inspiration (*ἐνθουασμὸς*).¹⁰ Apollo is the cause of this state through the mediation of the Muses.¹¹ There is, however, another way in which it comes from a general familiarity (*οἰκειότης*) with daemons.¹² From this perspective the content of poetic inspiration is the visitation (*παρουσία*) of the various gods upon the poet's soul¹³ through the apparitions of their respective daemonic intermediaries.¹⁴ Thus, it follows that every daemon, regardless of the deity

7. Oiva Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1996), 51, 69–70, 89, 109, 118.

8. *In Remp.* I.81.11–27, 195.14–22, 198.29–199.4.

9. R.M. Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 119–36; Philippe St. Germain, "Remarques sur les symbolismes du Commentaire sur la République de Proclus," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 62.1 (2006), 117.

10. *In Remp.* I.184.11–12.

11. *Ibid.*, I.192.9–10, 193.14–20, 201.20–23.

12. *Ibid.*, I.166.22.

13. *Ibid.*, I.180.24–25.

14. *Ibid.*, I.79.2–3, 86.5–19.

that it primarily participates, insofar as it has the potential to become apparent to a human soul, is a member of the Apollonian series and a mediator of the inspiration that is Apollo's procession through, in and by the Muses.

For a soul to be capable of this inspiration it must be tender (*ἀπαλός*)¹⁵ and unpolluted (*ἄβητος*).¹⁶ The soul must be 'tender' in the sense that it must be receptive to the impression (*εὐτύπωτος*)¹⁷ of the divine illumination that it seeks to receive.¹⁸ If the soul belongs more to itself than to the illumination it will not easily receive the impression of its activity.¹⁹ The soul must be 'unpolluted' in the sense that it must be unmoved by the impressions of activities that are inferior to divine illumination.²⁰ For if it is filled with strange and variegated thoughts the activity of the illumination in it will be obscured.²¹

This inspiration stirs up (*ἀνακινεῖν*) the imagination (*φαντασία*)²² to produce imaginations (*φαντασίαι*)²³ that are identical to the imaginative forms of the daemons that inspire them.²⁴ However, while these imaginations are identical to their respective daemonic causes, they are symbolic (*συμβολικός*)²⁵ relative to the gods manifested in them. That is to say, they represent the gods through the strongest forms of opposition.²⁶ Why then must the gods be present to the soul through this analogy of opposites? This has partly to do with the principle that all things know according to their own mode. Insofar as a being is variegated, that is, insofar as it is opposed to the simplicity of the gods, the mode by which it apprehends the gods will also be opposed to them.²⁷ However, the rational soul also knows about the gods through a kind of poetry that comes from its own powers, rather than from those superior to it.²⁸ As a production that is proper to the soul, it cannot escape the variegation that belongs to the soul's own mode. Yet it strives to produce likenesses of the gods, and to some measure succeeds.²⁹ Clearly then, though the soul's

15. *In Remp.* I.181.4, 14.

16. *Ibid.*, I.181.4–5, 15.

17. *Ibid.*, I.181.8.

18. *Ibid.*, I.181.15–16.

19. *Ibid.*, I.181.5–8.

20. *Ibid.*, I.181.16–17.

21. *Ibid.*, I.181.7–12.

22. *Ibid.*, I.166.23.

23. *Ibid.*, I.86.16.

24. *Ibid.*, I.91.15–18, 110.26–111.2.

25. *Ibid.*, I.166.23–24.

26. *Ibid.*, I.198.13–19.

27. *Ibid.*, I.111.16–27.

28. *Ibid.*, I.177.23–178.2, 178.6–10, 179.3–9.

29. The theological possibilities of the soul's own poetry are attested more than they are developed in the *Sixth Essay* (*Ibid.*, I.194.16). Yet it is evident at least that it uses *εἰκόνες* rather than *σύμβολα* to represent its divine objects (*Ibid.*, I.84.22–30) and that these *εἰκόνες* are as

variegation demands that there is a degree of opposition between the soul's knowledge of the gods and the gods themselves, it does not demand opposition as extreme as that of the daemonic σύμβολον. However, it is relative to the soul's own poetry that we can begin to glimpse the psychological need that the daemonic σύμβολον fulfills.

The greatest significance of the daemonic σύμβολον is not that it, like the images produced by the soul's own poetic powers, provides the soul with information about the god manifest in it, but that it is a way of ascent for the soul to that god.³⁰ Its daemonic surface functions as a veil (παραπέτασμα)³¹ behind which a divine vision (θεωρία) is concealed.³² This surface, through its very opposition to the god, through its apparent monstrosity³³ and general implausibility,³⁴ moves (κινεῖν),³⁵ awakens (ἀνεγείρειν)³⁶ and even forces (αναγκάζειν) the soul to search for the divine truth hidden within.³⁷ But this awakening does not lead the soul past the surface of the σύμβολον as if it were an exterior object. For the imagination by which the daemon appears as σύμβολον and the imagination by which human soul receives that σύμβολον are, for each, a kind of body which, as body, involves the intellectual essence of both daemon and human in the world of becoming.³⁸ Therefore, when the soul moves past the imaginative surface of the daemonic σύμβολον, it is moving past its own surface as well, past the body that involves it in the cosmos, or as Proclus says, it is a "turn from its fall into genesis towards the divine."³⁹ This results in the soul's ineffable union with the gods.⁴⁰

There are, of course, many gods and many degrees of divinity in Proclus' theology and along with them many different degrees of ἔνωσις that are possible for the soul. Thus whenever speaking about 'union with the gods' we must always determine which gods and consequently, which union,

characterized by likeness to their divine objects as those of inspired poetry are by opposition (*In Remp.* I.72.23–73.30).

30. Van den Berg is thus right that a σύμβολον is a theurgic image by which the soul reverts on the gods and that an εἰκὼν is a scientific image by which the soul reverts on itself, but wrong in opposing this to a reading which distinguishes between them based on unlikeness and likeness (*Proclus' Hymns*, 134–136).

31. *In Remp.* I.74.19.

32. *Ibid.*, I.73.15–16, 79.2–4.

33. *Ibid.*, I.86.1, 85.17.

34. *Ibid.*, I.85.20.

35. *Ibid.*, I.85.18.

36. *Ibid.*, I.85.26, 86.8.

37. *Ibid.*, I.85.21–23, 85.26–86.1.

38. John F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico: Scholar's Press, 1985), 34, 61; *In Tim.* III.275.28–276.2, 298.27–28.

39. *In Remp.* I.181.25–26: "ἀπο τῆς ἐν τῇ γενέσει πτώσεως ἐπιστροπὴ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον."

40. *Ibid.*, I.81.14, 86.10, 178.19–24.

is meant. We already know that this is not a union with encosmic deities because this union is beyond the world of becoming. Nor is it the henads, for this union is with the essences (οὐσίαι) of the gods⁴¹ and the henads are beyond essence.⁴² These are noeric gods, that is, intellectual gods as opposed to more generally intellectual gods, such as the intelligible-and-intellectual gods and the intelligible gods.⁴³ For while this union is often described generally, as a kind of contemplation (θεωρία)⁴⁴ it is also characterized more specifically as a noeric contemplation (νοερὰ περιωπή)⁴⁵ of noeric realities (τὰ νοερώτερα).⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that this union could not, in turn, lead to a further ascent to still higher forms of union with superior deities,⁴⁷ but that union with the noeric deities is the specific end of the ascent provoked by daemonic σύμβολα.⁴⁸

This noeric ἔνωσις is not confined to the inspired soul. Those who hear the inspired poet recite Homer experience the same inspiration.⁴⁹ It is, according to Proclus, as Plato says in the *Ion*. Those who hear the poet are filled with his inspiration in the same way as metal rings are filled with a magnet's magnetism.⁵⁰ However, while any rational soul can receive daemonic σύμβολα in its imagination, there are few that can benefit from it. These σύμβολα damage most souls which receive them, "working in the lives of the many a terrible and unnatural confusion of piety toward the divine."⁵¹ But this is not the fault of the σύμβολα, the inspired poet, or the god manifest in them. Rather, such souls are harmed by their own dispositions.⁵² Because the σύμβολα of the gods

41. *In Remp.* I.79.1, 84.28.

42. *El. Th.* 115.

43. Saffrey and Westerink have provided a helpful chart in which they have abstracted the active, living relations of the divine hierarchies in Proclus. See Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, 6 Vols. ed. and trans. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968–1997), I.lxiii–lxix.

44. *In Remp.* I.80.23, 86.1. Festugière's belief that theurgy is inferior to philosophy seems to be at work in his consistent translation of θεωρία as "doctrine" even when it is clearly describing an object, that, as the end of a mystical ascent, is beyond the soul's own powers. See page 577 of "Proclus et la religion traditionnelle," In *Études de la philosophie grecque* (Paris: Vrin, 1971), 575–84.

45. *In Remp.* I.75.9, 81.7.

46. *Ibid.*, I.94.20–21.

47. The mystagogy described at *In Plat. Theol.* IV.5–9 appears to pick up where that of inspired poetry leaves off.

48. Cf. Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns*, 42–65.

49. *In Remp.* I.183. 25–26.

50. *Ibid.*, I.182.21–183.22.

51. *Ibid.*, I.128. 22–23: "δαιτην καὶ ἄτοπον ἐργάζεται σύγχυσιν ἐν ταῖς τῶν πολλῶν ζωαῖς τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον εὐλαβείας."

52. *Ibid.*, I.82.7–9.

in the imagination take the form of what is most opposite to the gods they are easily confused with what is truly opposed to them.⁵³ Therefore, any soul that is still driven downwards by its imaginations,⁵⁴ will go no farther than the imaginative surface of the σύμβολα⁵⁵ and will confuse what is least like the divine in its own imaginative life with the life of the gods symbolized in them.⁵⁶ Having thus confused the lowest with the highest, the soul is driven towards an impassioned and irrational life.⁵⁷ It is on account of this danger, Proclus argues, that Plato criticizes Homer in the *Republic*. The *Republic* is concerned with the education of youths.⁵⁸ Therefore, Plato speaks against him because the souls whom he is concerned to teach are still in need of the education that would allow them to hear inspired poetry without harm.⁵⁹ Yet it remains that for the soul that is naturally well suited (εὐφυής) to them,⁶⁰ which has purified its intelligence⁶¹ and made intellect the guide of its life,⁶² the σύμβολα of the inspired myths are the means of union with the noeric gods made visible in them.

Practically this means that physical ritual and philosophy are necessary preludes to the proper reception of the inspired σύμβολον,⁶³ but in this regard he seems to make philosophy⁶⁴ superior to physical ritual. This ordering might seem to be contradicted where he says that without knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) one cannot piously make use of physical theurgy or the σύμβολα of the myths.⁶⁵ Ἐπιστήμη is, after all, generally used by Proclus to speak of the scientific knowledge that the soul has as soul. In this sense philosophical knowledge is an extremely pure form of ἐπιστήμη. If philosophical knowledge is signified here it would suggest that philosophical activity is inferior to that of physical theurgy. However, this use of the word simply refers us right back

53. *In Remp.* 1.74.24–30.

54. *Ibid.*, 1.81.1–2.

55. *Ibid.*, 1.74.26–27.

56. *Ibid.*, 1.80.30–81.5.

57. *Ibid.*, 1.75.10–16.

58. *Ibid.*, 1.85.12–16.

59. *Ibid.*, 1.79.18–23.

60. *Ibid.*, 1.85.27.

61. *Ibid.*, 1.74.26–27.

62. *Ibid.*, 1.80.26.

63. *Ibid.*, 1.80.13–81.10.

64. *Ibid.*, 1.80.24–30, 81.6–27, 182.6–9. The word φιλοσοφία is not evoked in the description of the education necessary for the proper reception of poetic σύμβολα. However, his description of it makes no other interpretation possible. The person who is ready to receive them will have “made intellect the leader of his life” (*Ibid.*, 1.80.25–26). Clearly this involves an education superior to the sphere of moral and political life. This is proven by Proclus’ descriptions of education in his commentaries on the *Alcibiades* and *Euclid*. See *In Alc.* 193.25–195.2, 235.1–236.18; *In Eucl.* 20.11–21.4.

65. *In Remp.* 1.128.21–23.

to Achilles. For Proclus also says that Achilles has knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the theurgic rites which allows him to perform them properly⁶⁶ and yet he also shows that Achilles is not freed from sensible attachment⁶⁷ in the way that philosophy brings about.⁶⁸ The knowledge necessary to participate in and even to perform physical ritual is necessarily of a lower order.

However, philosophy is not superior to theurgy in any absolute sense. Proclus is clear that the proper reception of the daemonic images of inspired poetry is a theurgic act⁶⁹ and that, relative to this act, philosophy is only a purification.⁷⁰ The inspired σύμβολα, he says, are the traces of a mystagogy⁷¹ which brings the soul, by means of the theoretical vision hidden in these traces,⁷² to a mystical union with the divine.⁷³ When Plato says that inspired poetry should only be heard in tandem with the “most august and perfect” (μεγίστων καὶ τελεωτάτων) sacrifices,⁷⁴ Proclus sees this as proof, not only that there is a theurgy hidden in the σύμβολα of inspired poetry,⁷⁵ but that it is on the same level as “the most holy initiations and the most perfect mysteries”⁷⁶ which, as such, are suitable, not for the participants of physical theurgy, but for the leaders of such rites.⁷⁷ For if physical theurgy helps to purify the soul of materiality⁷⁸ we have seen that this theurgy elevates the soul to the gods.

We now have a fairly clear picture of what kind of theurgy is found in Homer, however, problems remain. What does it actually mean for philosophy to purify the soul’s imaginations or for the soul to look beneath the surface of the σύμβολα manifest in it? Moreover, how does this result in the soul’s ascent and unification with the noeric gods? To resolve these ambiguities we must turn to Proclus’ *Commentary on Euclid*.

66. *In Remp.* I.147.1.

67. *Ibid.*, I.139.10–14.

68. *Ibid.*, I.119.12–18, 124.5–11.

69. On this see Sheppard, *Studies*, 145–62; Carine Van Liefferinge, *La théurgie: Des oracles chaldaïques à Proclus* (Liège: Centre International d’Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 1999), 243–79; Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns*, 66–110.

70. *In Remp.* I.74.26, 80.24–30, 86.3–5, 124.5–11.

71. *Ibid.*, I.74.22–23, 80.20–23.

72. *Ibid.*, I.80.23–30, 81.27–82.2, 82.19–20, 86.1, 192.9–12.

73. *Ibid.*, I.81.10, 15, 86.10.

74. *Ibid.*, I.80.20–21.

75. *Ibid.*, I.80.22–23.

76. *Ibid.*, I.80.18–19: “ταῖς τε ἀγιωτάταις τῶν τελετῶν καὶ τοῖς τελειωτάτοις τῶν μυστηρίων.”

Cf. also I.78.22.

77. *Ibid.*, I.84.26–29.

78. *Contra* Andrew Smith, *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 116–17; Sheppard, “Proclus’ Attitude to Theurgy,” *The Classical Quarterly* 32.1 (1982): 217–18, 222–24; Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Hymns*, 77, 111. Both Sheppard and Van den Berg follow Smith in seeing the lowest theurgy as a kind of “white magic” rather than a means of the soul’s unification.

The soul is the mean between Intellect and the sensible world. It is not immediately filled and unified with itself in its thought as Intellect is.⁷⁹ Nor is it satisfied with things other than itself as sense perception is.⁸⁰ Rather, it is an intellectual essence that must come to know itself through what is other than itself. Soul innately knows⁸¹ the unified plenitude of forms that it is, but it cannot know this knowledge of itself without first becoming exterior to itself. Thus, the soul's desire to know its innate self-knowledge moves it to unfurl⁸² this knowledge by projecting it into multiplicity and extension.⁸³ Such a projection requires some kind of matter from which it may receive multiplicity and extension. This is what it has in its imagination.⁸⁴ But imagination is not to be confused with physical matter, which is suitable only for the reception of sensible form. Rather, it is a form of intellectual activity that is only slightly inferior to that of the soul itself.⁸⁵ It passively receives the soul's projection of its contents into it as their substrate, but does this by generating them in itself.⁸⁶ It contains the forms that are united and unextended in the soul in a way that is divided and extended, but in such a way that the soul, in seeing those divided and extended forms, is able to recognize and know the unity that they have in itself.⁸⁷

However, the fact that the soul is able to revert to itself through its self-projections, does not mean that it will always do so successfully. While the imaginations of the sensible world bring about a necessary awakening of the soul's self-knowledge, they can also obscure it, so that the soul is drawn away from itself.⁸⁸ Insofar as the mind is thus lost in its imaginations, moved by exterior things and not by itself, its eye, as it were, is closed, so that it can neither see nor remember itself in its own imaginations,⁸⁹ but rather con-

79. *In Eucl.* 18.10-19.5, 148.16-149.2.

80. *Ibid.*, 19.2-5.

81. *Ibid.*, 52.12-22, 55.4-9. The knowledge of the soul, and even of the imagination, is already γνῶσις before it projects and reflects upon its contents. See Carlos Steel's excellent treatment on pages 298-300 of "Breathing Thought: Proclus on the Innate Knowledge of the Soul," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. John Cleary (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 293-309.

82. *In Eucl.* 54.27-55.18.

83. *Ibid.*, 52.23-27.

84. *Ibid.*, 51.15-52.3.

85. Thus it is variously called either passive intellect (νοῦς παθητικός, *Ibid.*, 52.3) or intelligible matter (νοητὴ ὕλη, *Ibid.*, 53.1). On the subject of imagination as the lowest form of intellectual life I am much indebted to Gregory Maclsaac. See pages 131-35 of "Phantasia between Soul and Body," *Dionysius* 19 (2001), 125-36.

86. *In Eucl.* 52.20-53.05; Maclsaac, "Phantasia between Soul and Body," 128.

87. *In Eucl.* 141.2-142.2.

88. *Ibid.*, 46.4-9.

89. *Ibid.*, 20.17-21.4, 46.3-15.

fuses itself with them.⁹⁰ Only education can awaken the soul from this state of forgetfulness and ignorance, to recollect itself through its imaginations rather than remain ensnared by them.⁹¹ Such an education will wean the soul from thinking itself through material imaginations, and from there, lead it to imaginations that are progressively less extended and divided and more like the ideas within soul that they mirror back to it. This process culminates in the soul's attainment of "perfect and noeric knowledge" (τελειοτέραν καὶ νοερωτέραν γνῶσιν)⁹² in which it is able to escape the imagination entirely, to see all the varied figures of itself that it had projected into the imagination as "united" (ἐνοειδῶς) and "without figure" (ἀτυπῶτως).⁹³

It is in dialectic that the soul completes its education in the sciences, perfecting its imaginations by relating them to the unhypothetical knowledge of Intellect.⁹⁴ Proclus says elsewhere how dialectic does this by moving from form to form until it reaches the first form and then finally goes beyond Being in reaching the first unity which is implied by Being.⁹⁵ However, insofar as dialectic is a form of the soul's divided mode of thinking, albeit its final and most unified stage, it has not yet attained Intellect, much less the super-essential realities. Therefore, its moving past Being to the One by means of the forms cannot not be understood to occur on the level of the forms and the super-essential realities themselves. Rather it is the soul's reflection on itself through extremely simple and exact imaginations of what it knows about such things in its essence. For all things are contained in the soul, even the gods and the One,⁹⁶ but so long as it acts by its own powers, it must know all that it knows by reflecting on itself through its imaginative projections of itself, even at the heights of dialectic.⁹⁷ It is not until dialectic leads the soul, in turn, to Intellect itself, that the soul can know all that is contained in the sciences in a way that is immediate, and free of the division and extension implicit in the imagination and from there, perhaps, move on still higher to other forms of γνώσις.⁹⁸

By looking at the theurgic movement described in Proclus' *Sixth Essay* in the light of this epistemological movement we are able to resolve certain difficulties, but in a way that gives rise to others. It is evident how this education

90. See for example *In Remp.* I.119.3–120.11.

91. *In Eucl.* 46.15–47.8.

92. *Ibid.*, 55.21–22.

93. *Ibid.*, 55.14–15.

94. *Ibid.*, 32.2–20, 43.10–21, 44.1–14.

95. *In Parm.* 653.14–23, 655.9–656.1.

96. *In Eucl.* 141.19–142.7.

97. *Ibid.*, 16.12–16, 54.27–55.6.

98. *Ibid.*, 55.18–23.

is the necessary means by which the soul is purified of such imaginations as lead it downward. It habituates the soul to thinking without imaginations of the sensible world and then moves the soul from there to simpler and more exact forms of imagination that are progressively more like to the ideas in the soul, so that through them the soul may come to know its own likeness to Intellect with more and more clarity. Yet as we saw above, the soul must not only be emptied of the movements of lesser things, but even of its own movement, if the impress of divine inspiration is not to be obscured within it. This certainly does not occur in the lower sciences. However, at the height of the soul's education, in the dialectical discovery of the One, we seem to have found just such an emptying of the soul. Because the soul's imagining of the One is its imagination of what is utterly simple⁹⁹ it would seem that in discovering the One in its thinking the soul has achieved a way of imagining itself almost entirely free of the division and extension that are implicit in its reflection on itself through its projections, an imagination so simple, that in gazing at it the soul appears almost to reflect on itself through the Imagination itself, caught in its nakedness, prior to the multiplications for which it is the potential. In thinking the One it has not reached the One, but thinks itself through a projection of itself that makes it empty of its own projections, so that what is superior to itself may reveal itself in it. This, surely, is the state of 'purity' and 'tenderness' that Proclus said the soul must attain in order that it may worthily receive the σύμβολα of the gods.¹⁰⁰

However, an ambiguity emerges when we consider the role of dialectic in the soul's education. In the *Sixth Essay*, it appears that philosophy is only significant as a purification that makes it possible to use the daemonic σύμβολα of inspired poetry as a means of ascent to the noeric realities of Intellect. Yet in the *Commentary on Euclid* it appears that dialectic, as the purest form of philosophy, is able to reach Intellect of itself.¹⁰¹ These positions appear, at first glance, to be irreconcilable. Yet if we consider them in light of the *Elements of Theology* we shall see that this is not the case.

In his masterful book *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, Stephen Gersh points out a problem that emerges from Proclus' description of the structure of procession and return.¹⁰² If something is identical with its cause it

99. *In Parm.* 1104.19–1105.25.

100. It is in this sense that Jean Trouillard says, the One is "le meilleur symbole de la divinité sur le plan spéculatif" and "le plus incantatoire." See *La mystagogie de Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 99.

101. *In Eucl.* 55.18–23.

102. Stephen Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 1978), 56. Here he raises the problem without attempting to solve how it is that "the otherness which the effect has acquired in procession is to a certain extent corrected."

will be indistinguishable from it and never proceed into distinction from it. If something is utterly other, it will have no relation to its principle at all. Therefore, for something to proceed from its principle it must do so through a mixture of identity (ταυτόν) and otherness (ἕτερον), or in other words, likeness (ὁμοιότης).¹⁰³ The character of those things that have a greater degree of identity will remain closer to the cause, those with a greater degree of otherness will proceed farther.¹⁰⁴ But whatever their degree of likeness to their cause, it is through a relation of likeness to it that they proceed from it. However, the reversion of entities to their causes is through likeness as well. For everything that proceeds from its cause desires “to be conjoined with it, every part to every part,”¹⁰⁵ as to that which is the mediation of the Good to it.¹⁰⁶ The problem here, however, is how it is able to do so. For if an entity proceeds to the degree that its otherness makes it distinct from its cause, the power of its otherness will, in some fashion, need to become converted to identity in order to revert. But this cannot be by a dissolution of its otherness. Proclus is clear that each entity remains “steadfast in its rank” (ἄλυστος κατὰ τὴν τάξιν)¹⁰⁷ even in reverting to its cause, which means that the degree of otherness by which it proceeds to its rank must remain intact. Rather, it seems, that for an entity to revert to its cause it must somehow discover identity with its cause that it does not have of itself, in the very otherness by which it proceeded from it.

Thus, there can be no unqualified sense in which the soul’s dialectical activity is enough to lead the soul to Intellect. By purifying its imaginations it may rid its self-knowledge of such otherness as obscures the kind of likeness of Intellect that it is, but it will not attain any greater degree of identity with Intellect than it already has of itself.

However, we have also seen that in purifying itself through dialectic the soul is made capable of receiving the σύμβολα of the gods and that through these the soul is indeed able to revert to Intellect. This is already established, but it is only now that *why* it is so begins to become clear. Where the soul, of itself, can only minimize its otherness to Intellect as far as its rational essence allows, the divine σύμβολα, in the way we have just learned is necessary to the reversion of any entity to its cause, makes the same otherness by which the soul is made separate from its causes the medium through which the soul discovers its further identity with them. Of itself, the soul must leave behind such imaginations as most sunder it from Intellect as it seeks to conform

103. *El. Th.* 29–30.

104. *Ibid.*, 30, 36.

105. *Ibid.*, 32: “πᾶν πρὸς πᾶν συνάπτεσθαι.”

106. *Ibid.*, 35.

107. *Ibid.*, 34.

itself to Intellect, that is, imaginations of a material¹⁰⁸ and immoral nature.¹⁰⁹ However, once the soul has purified itself of these lower images, poetic inspiration gives them back. But, now they manifest the soul's causes to it in a way that is superior to how they are manifest to it within its proper nature, just as before, they had manifest only the soul's effects to it and these in a way that is inferior to the manner in which they are manifest to it within its proper nature. It is thus through inspired σύμβολα, that the soul is able to ascend to its causes because they transform the otherness that keeps the soul below into the actuality of its ascent.¹¹⁰

It is, of course, only possible for the σύμβολα of inspired poetry to play this role because they are not projected into the imagination by the soul's essence, but by the superior essences acting as its proximate causes. It follows that the imaginations they project have a greater likeness to the intellectual gods visible in them than those produced by the soul because they are projected from essences that have a greater likeness to the intellectual gods than the soul does. However, this is not a break from the soul's natural activity, but rather an extension of the soul's own self-knowing.¹¹¹ It is still coming to know itself through the images in its imagination. What has changed are the limits of the soul's self-knowledge. In thinking itself through the mediation of imaginations that have been projected in it by daemons, it follows that the soul comes to know and act upon itself, not as it does of itself, but in the manner of the daemons that have projected the images. Its essence remains the same but that essence comes to live according to a higher activity that it could generate of itself.¹¹² In this way the soul's self-thinking begins to pierce through to its divine depths, to the 'one of the intellect' implied in the rational self-knowledge that belongs to it alone,¹¹³ but which it is unable to see in itself without the more-than-rational means that are given to it in poetic inspiration.

It is now evident that the soul's ascent to the gods by means of the σύμβολα of Homer is not an irrational addition to Proclus' otherwise rational philosophical system, but that its necessity belongs to one of the most

108. *In Eucl.* 46.3–9.

109. *In Remp.* I.80.28–30.

110. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 49.

111. Dominic J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 153.

112. Proclus often refers to the identity that underlies the soul's various transformations and in which they are all unified as its ὑπαρξίς (*In Alc.* 247.7–11) or σύνθεμα (*In Remp.* I. 177.18–23; *In Crat.* 19.13, 31.1–7). On ὑπαρξίς see Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 32–36. On σύνθεμα see Trouillard, "Le symbolisme de Proclus," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 7 (1981): 298.

113. *In Remp.* I.177.14–23, 178.12–16.

fundamental features of that system,¹¹⁴ namely, the structure of procession and return. Moreover, we have seen that this ascent is also rational in the sense that it is not an interruption of the soul's *dianoetic* activity so much as a further unification of it. Yet a problem remains. If the purpose of such an ascent is to transcend the soul's native activity,¹¹⁵ then it seems that the preservation of the soul's character has a tragic quality. The retention of its specificity will be the retention of something that limits the soul's ability to attain the union it desires. Rationality would remain, but against the will of the philosopher, who would not, in a sense, believe in reason, but would seek always to leave it behind as completely as possible in favour of more divine forms of knowledge. If carried to its logical conclusion, this position, would not only treat all scientific inquiry, but all things, simply as means to the end of union with the Good and not as having any good of themselves.¹¹⁶

However, we see in Proclus' treatment of self-constitution in the *Elements of Theology* that this reading would leave us unable to reconcile important features of Proclus' presentation. According to Proclus there is an intermediary position between that which is only productive and that which is only produced, namely, that which is produced not by a superior principle, but by means of its own self-production.¹¹⁷ Everything that has an existence that is separable from body,¹¹⁸ from the highest intelligible gods, to the lowest human soul, is self-constituted in this way.¹¹⁹ The most important thing here is that since the procession of the self-constituted from the Good¹²⁰ is also its procession from itself, it follows that its reversion on the Good will also be its reversion on its own particular good.¹²¹ It remains that the reversion of the soul, as a self-constituted principle, upon the Good, necessarily involves that it transcend what belongs to its own nature as soul. However, what this means is that the soul's reversion to the Good is not a flight away from itself. Rather, it is in its very transcendence of itself, in its conversion

114. On the problem of understanding theurgy as merely a solution to the problem of embodiment see page 1 of Edward Butler's "Offering to the Gods: A Neoplatonic Perspective," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* (Summer 2007): 1–20.

115. *In Remp.* I.180.30–181.2.

116. While their concerns are more literary than philosophical, this criticism is implicit in Trimpi and Lambertson's frustration with the way that Proclus seems to be always leaving behind the most apparent and rational sense of the text in favour something "beyond" it. Trimpi, *Muses of one Mind*, 218, 238–39; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 170, 179, 229, 232.

117. *El. Th.* 40. Cf. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 239, 250.

118. *Ibid.*, 16.

119. *Ibid.*, 42.

120. *Ibid.*, 11.

121. *Ibid.*, 42.

towards the Good, that the soul reverts most perfectly to its own nature as soul and becomes perfected on its own level.¹²²

Generally Proclus argues that the purpose of the σύμβολα of Homeric poetry is not to educate, but to inspire the soul, in the manner outlined above. However, Proclus adds an important qualification to this. While they are certainly not educational for untrained youths, for those who are already mature, and in need of a “more mystical lesson” (μυστικωτέρας ἀκρόασεως)¹²³ it is, in addition to being a mystical ascent, a “true education” (παιδείαν ἀληθινήν).¹²⁴ It remains, however, that inspired poetry is not educational in the way that philosophy is, because it does not prove what it says through demonstration.¹²⁵ Because the inspired poet is possessed the things he says about the gods must be taken to be the truth.¹²⁶ However, it is the philosopher that makes his teaching comprehensible to a wider public.¹²⁷ Yet it is somewhat misleading to say that the philosopher merely makes him comprehensible. For the symbols of inspired poetry are the starting points of much of philosophy’s knowledge.¹²⁸ According to Proclus, Plato not only sees Homer as irrefutable,¹²⁹ but as the leader (ἡγεμών) and master (διδάσκαλος) of the most important dogmas of philosophy.¹³⁰ Thus he takes Homer’s judgments for his own,¹³¹ and seeks in all things to resemble him.¹³²

This places us in a somewhat perplexing position. Relative to the idea that worthy soul’s reception of inspired σύμβολα is a rational theurgy, we have seen that philosophy is a necessary preparation. However, now it seems that the σύμβολα of inspired poetry are the source of some of the most important doctrines of philosophy. If one must be purified by philosophy to safely approach the σύμβολα of inspired poetry, how is one to derive its contents from the σύμβολα in the first place, as Proclus claims that Plato does? To answer this we must distinguish between the kind of philosophy that the soul is itself capable of and that which it can derive only from inspiration.

Previously we observed how the soul’s discovery of the One in its self-thought allowed it to become radically passive relative to more divine activities. However, this is not its only significance. For at the same time as this

122. Following Gersh, *KINHΣΙΣ AKINHΤΟΣ*, 133–35. Cf. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 65, 76, 239.

123. *In Remp.* I.182.8–9.

124. *Ibid.*, I.182.3, 10.

125. *Ibid.*, I.185.16–17.

126. *Ibid.*, I.185.27–186.1.

127. *Ibid.*, I.159.3–6.

128. *Ibid.*, I.85.8–13, 156.22–157.6, 164.13–169.24.

129. *Ibid.*, I.154.21–22, 155.25.

130. *Ibid.*, I.158.14–17.

131. *Ibid.*, I.158.21.

132. *Ibid.*, I.164.13.

discovery empties the soul of itself relative to superior powers, it is also the means by which the soul may be truly itself, which is to say, truly active on its own level. The soul does not know what it knows in the sciences, and thus does not know itself through the knowledge of the sciences, until it is able to demonstrate that knowledge to itself. But before the soul discovers a way of thinking the One, at the peak of the education that it receives through the sciences, it is not able to truly demonstrate any of its knowledge. For all its knowledge to that point is based on prior hypotheticals.¹³³ It is only when the soul reaches a principle that doesn't presuppose any others that it may, through a process of deduction from that principle, prove the veracity of the knowledge that lead it to that principle in the first place.¹³⁴ Thus, it is only upon the discovery of the principle of the One, the unity that is presupposed in all other forms of unity,¹³⁵ that the soul's reflection on itself through the sciences is truly able to become knowledge of itself. If then Proclus also says that dialectic is able to anchor the soul's hypothetical knowledge by relating it to the unhypothetical science of Intellect,¹³⁶ it is through learning to reflect on itself through the imaginative projection of its idea of the One, that it is able to do so.

This is worth further consideration. The soul's self-knowledge is not exterior to it. The soul is, by definition, a kind of knowing that knows itself,¹³⁷ and knows its knowing of itself, in the way that Intellect does, but in a divided and extended manner.¹³⁸ We have now seen that this knowledge that is the soul itself is only possible relative to the discovery of the One in its self-reflection. Thus, it would appear that this discovery is nothing less than the cause from which the soul's self-creation proceeds. By attaining the act of imagination that is presupposed in all its other imaginations, it achieves the initial self-reflection that is presupposed by the plurality of self-reflections that compose its essence. It is relative to this reflection and only relative to it, that all of the soul's other self-reflections are the unfolding of its self-creation.¹³⁹ Therefore, it follows that the soul's reflection on itself through its imagination of the One is at once the point at which it abandons its own activity, in order to act as a receptacle of the activities of superior beings, and the point through which its own essential self-possession of its proper activity emerges, the point at which it both leaves its life for another and comes into its own

133. *In Eucl.* 9.25–14, 32.2–7, 75.5–26.

134. *In Parm.* 655.12–656.2, 696, 1033.28–1034.7.

135. *El. Th.* 1–6.

136. *In Eucl.* 42.9–44.24.

137. See note 81.

138. *In Eucl.* 16.8–16; *In Parm.* 807.1–809.5. Cf. Trouillard, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 162.

139. This seems to be Trouillard's position. See *La mystagogie de Proclus*, 197, 204; *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 88–89.

life.¹⁴⁰ It is with reference to these considerations that it becomes possible to deal with the problem we face in the *Sixth Essay*.

How is the philosophy that prepares the soul for the worthy reception of inspired σύμβολα to be distinguished from the philosophy that has its source in such σύμβολα? There does not seem to be any simple way to distinguish them according to subject matter. For while what Plato learns from Homer seems to be primarily concerned with the gods, we shall see that inspired poetry is also instructive on more mundane concerns. Moreover, Proclus' reading of the *Parmenides* shows that while philosophy is primarily concerned with the soul's self-knowledge as such, the emergence of the self-knowledge that it is, relative to its discovery of the One in its self-reflection, involves the unfolding of a science that systematically articulates the hierarchies of divine entities.¹⁴¹ For in the purification of its conception of the One, through a process of negation by which it systematically determines what may not be attributed to the One, it simultaneously unfolds a positive doctrine of the divinities that proceed from the One. The most simple negations of the One also act as positive definitions of the highest divine orders, the most complex negations as positive definitions of the lowest divine orders.¹⁴²

Here we must remember that knowledge of the gods is presupposed in the appropriate use of inspired σύμβολα. It is the contrast that the worthy recipient of the divine σύμβολον marks between what he knows to be true about the gods and what he sees in the σύμβολον that moves him to pierce the surface of the σύμβολον to discover its divine interior.¹⁴³ Such theology as philosophy is able to deduce from its thinking of the One is then this knowledge. However, as detailed and systematic as the soul's own knowledge of the gods is, it is only a skeleton of the living realities of which it speaks.¹⁴⁴ It has a universal knowledge of the gods, but has yet to clothe its universality in a more particular knowledge of what belongs both to the lives of specific divinities, and to the soul's involvement in realities that are superior to its own.¹⁴⁵

For the revelations made visible in the inspired σύμβολα to become an extension of philosophical knowledge, the soul must somehow learn to demonstrate their truth. That this is possible is seen in Plato's example.¹⁴⁶

140. On the two ways in which the One is present to any given entity see *In Parm.* 707.5–6; Trouillard, *La mystagogie du Proclus*, 133, 230.

141. Brisson, *How the Philosophers Saved Myths*, 88–89. For Proclus' summary of the theology that he and Syrianus derive from the hypotheses of the *Parmenides* see *In Parm.* 1061.25–1065.14.

142. *In Parm.* 1086.8–1089.13.143. *In Remp.* I.85.13–26.

144. On what divinely revealed theology adds to philosophical theology in Proclus, see Butler, "The Gods and Being in Proclus," *Dionysius* 26 (2008): 93–114.

145. Proclus says directly that it is only through inspired poetry that "mystical perceptions of the gods themselves" are possible (*In Remp.* I.192.10–11).

146. *In Remp.* I.159.3–6.

But the fact that the truths revealed in these σύμβολα can be demonstrated has interesting consequences. If the soul is able to demonstrate the truths that it sees in the divine σύμβολα it means that they are truths that it has in its own essential being since the soul's knowledge of an object is, as we have established, always a knowledge of its own innate ideas. However, in this case, the soul is not able to produce the imaginations through which this knowledge of itself is possible without the inspiration of superior powers. We have found that the soul is able of itself, relative to its discovery of the One in its self-thinking, to unfurl the knowledge of itself that constitutes its being through its various forms of self-reflection. But it appears now that it is not able to unfurl *all* that belongs to it without the further means of self-reflection that are provided for it in its reception of inspired σύμβολα. The soul is then in the strange situation of not being able to fully realize what it already is by nature without the help of what is beyond its nature. However, in this we have not yet reached the limit of inspired poetry's potential to be the means of the soul's self-creation, for there is more in inspired poetry than σύμβολα.

The symbolic aspect of inspired poetry is only one of the three forms of poetry that compose it.¹⁴⁷ In it there is also a learned form of poetry that generates imaginative images that are strictly suitable for scientific inquiry¹⁴⁸ and also an imaginative form of poetry, which produces images that do not point beyond their own appearance in the imagination,¹⁴⁹ which, as such, are appropriate only as a basis for opinion (δόξα). Of course, we have seen that all three are present in symbolic poetry. The inspired σύμβολον has an imaginative appearance, which, as an accurate representation of the deeds of daemons on the plains of Troy operates on the level of true opinion.¹⁵⁰ Through this imaginative appearance the purified soul reverts simultaneously on the intellectual god that is manifest in the imaginative appearance and on itself in its own station through its demonstration of the scientific truth manifest in it. It is tempting to conclude then that the lesser forms of poetry are distinguished from symbolic poetry simply as parts from a whole. However, there is a more fundamental difference at work here. Each kind of poetry produces its images based on paradigms that are on a different ontological level than the paradigms on which the images of the others are

147. On Proclus' division of the kinds of poetry in Homer see Sheppard, *Studies*, 162–202; Kuisma, *Proclus' Defence of Homer*, 122–32; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 188–97; Trimpf, *Muses of One Mind*, 211–16; Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm: Theories of Interpretation of the Later Neoplatonists* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 107–10; Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns*, 112–41.

148. *In Remp.* I.179.2–15, 186.22–29, 192.12–15.

149. *Ibid.*, I.179.16–32, 190.2–25, 192.15–19.

150. For Proclus' understanding of opinion see *In Tim.* II.250.5–251.18, 255.12–22, 257.20–24, 258.2–4.

based.¹⁵¹ What makes the lesser forms of poetry lesser is not simply that they do not operate in as many registers as symbolic poetry, but that the imaginative images that they produce are images of inferior realities. Even when a lesser form of poetry is a source of the same kind of information as that provided by a superior form of poetry it is information about a lower level of existence.

A good example of this is found in the difference between the scientific data provided by learned poetry and that which is provided by symbolic poetry. Since learned poetry is oriented towards a rational, rather than an intellectual paradigm, it provides data regarding things that the soul can know of its own power. It speaks of the soul's own life, the distinction between the essence of the soul and its imaginary projection of itself, the elements of nature, and of political science.¹⁵² If we can take Proclus' discussion of the topic in the *Platonic Theology* to apply here, it also provides information on the realities superior to soul, but only insofar as the analogy of the soul's own likeness to them permits.¹⁵³ In short, it presents to the soul that has yet to receive scientific education, a preliminary grasp, in the form of true opinions, of the kind of knowledge that they may come to truly know through philosophy.¹⁵⁴ However, since symbolic poetry, in its orientation towards intellectual paradigms, is not limited by the likeness that the soul has to them, it is able to reveal information about things far beyond the soul's own understanding. It speaks of the chains of Hephaestus, the horrors of Hades, the fornication of Zeus and Hera, the various regions of existence, the battles of the gods, the demiurgic monad and of all the greater life of the gods that lies beyond the soul's own powers of vision.¹⁵⁵ Yet because it is adapted to teaching the soul what it cannot know of itself, it is not able to teach the uneducated soul about the things that it may come to understand through philosophy.¹⁵⁶

Similarly, the imaginative aspect of symbolic poetry provides different data than that of strictly imaginative poetry. The imaginative images of symbolic poetry are the daemonic appearances of the intellectual gods to Homer's audience and to the heroes of Greece and Troy alike. The daemons may be

151. Cf. pages 639–40 of Sheppard's "Image and Analogy in Later Platonism," in *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens: Akten des internationalen Kongresses* 13.17, eds. Theo Kobusch, Michael Erler and Irgard Männlein-Robert (München: K.G. Saur, 2002), 639–47.

152. *In Remp.* I.179.3–15, 186.22–29, 192.12–15, 193.4–19.

153. *In Plat. Theol.* I.4. This is also apparent in the *Sixth Essay* itself where Phemios, who is presented as the example of a learned poet, is said to be characterized by the knowledge of divine things as well as human (*In Remp.* I.194.13–17).

154. *In Remp.* I.81.11–27, 84.2–19, 84.26–85.1.

155. *Ibid.*, I.156.22–157.6, 193.10–16.

156. *Ibid.*, I.80.5–9, 81.27–82.9.

taken to have done the deeds that Homer ascribes to them, but their greater significance is the way that they make the Intellectual gods visible on a human level. The images of imaginative poetry, however, do not point beyond the characters of the heroes that are imitated in them.¹⁵⁷

Yet, despite its lowliness, imaginary poetry is able to provide a benefit that symbolic poetry cannot. Homer's portrayal of the daemons is far from appropriate moral instruction. We have found that only those who are able to discern the higher realities symbolized in their obscene acts may safely attend to them at all. Yet, imaginative poetry, so long as correct imitation remains its goal, is able to provide just such moral training to those who are beginning their education.¹⁵⁸ This is why it is so important to Proclus to show that the actions of the heroes which imaginative poetry imitates are appropriate to them as heroes.¹⁵⁹ For if Homer's poetry is found to provide a bad moral example in the aspect of his poetry which points to no good that is superior to the moral level, he will be greatly to blame.¹⁶⁰

However, as useful as imaginative poetry is in instilling good habits into the hearers, it becomes dangerous if it ceases to have accurate imitation as its goal and begins to concern itself only with pleasing its listeners. For in doing so it will produce whatever illusions are necessary to most bewitch the senses and inflame the passions.¹⁶¹ Instead of forming virtue in the soul through exact imitation of the phenomena of the natural order, it will delude the many with images that flatter their prejudice.¹⁶² This kind of poetry is not generally found in Homer. The only example that Proclus gives of Homer's imaginary poetry drifting into illusion is a passage where he presents the sun as rising out of a lake, when, of course, the sun does not actually ever come out of a lake, but only seems to according to sense-perception.¹⁶³ However, according to Proclus, even Socrates is sometimes at fault in this way, such as when he gives his false speech on Eros in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁶⁴ The real problem is that tragic poetry *is*, in fact, characterized by illusionist poetry¹⁶⁵ and that it derives its illusionist character from the accurate imitations that belong to Homer's imaginative poetry.¹⁶⁶ It is insofar as Homer is, through no fault of

157. Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 91; Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 215–16.

158. *In Remp.* I.81.11–27, 84.17, 194.18–27.

159. See for example, *Ibid.*, I.103.1–106.13, 115.4–117.21, 130.1–131.4.

160. *Ibid.*, I.150.11–154.23.

161. *Ibid.*, I.179.19–29.

162. *Ibid.*, I.192.18–21, 195.1–12.

163. *Ibid.*, I.192.21–30.

164. *Ibid.*, I.176.13–177.3.

165. *Ibid.*, I.201.14–18.

166. *Ibid.*, I.196.4–9.

his own, the father of the tragedians that Socrates speaks against him.¹⁶⁷ But, Proclus argues, if one were to make over-much of what has resulted from the very last of Homer's activities, one must also censure the Demiurge because of the evil that there is in genesis.¹⁶⁸

The use of the Demiurge as a point of comparison here is very instructive. If the interrelations of the different kinds of poetry present in inspired poetry are comparable to the creative activity of the Demiurge, it would seem to indicate that as distinct as they are, their various purposes are all still unified by a single purpose, or providence, that is intellectual in character. Some significant evidence, relative to this thesis, is found in the comparison that Proclus draws between the structure of Platonic dialogue and that of inspired poetry. One of the ways that Proclus justifies Homer's use of μίμησις is by drawing attention to Plato's use of it. He argues that Plato does not object to μίμησις so much as poetry which has no higher aim than μίμησις, since it is when μίμησις is subject to no higher aim that it lapses from its own proper end into illusion.¹⁶⁹ Plato's dialogues are full of imitations of people doing all kinds of activities, good and bad.¹⁷⁰ However, in a given dialogue, these imitations function as parts of a whole whose overall character is philosophical and as such, they are subordinate (πάρεργος) to its philosophical purpose.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Homer's poetry is characterized by its inspired σύμβολα, but it includes mimetic elements that are subordinate to that inspiration.¹⁷² But the most interesting thing here is why these lesser elements are there to begin with. For the mimetic elements of Homer's poetry are not simply subordinate to its inspired character, but are the means by which that inspiration is mediated to the general public in a form that is adapted to their weakness.¹⁷³ Thus, the various forms of poetry are not merely parts of an interconnected whole that is characterized by poetic inspiration. They are also declining expressions of the inspiration that characterizes that whole,¹⁷⁴ which, in their declension, make the inspiration they manifest accessible to every level and every state of the human soul.

So it appears that poetic inspiration is the source of two kinds of causation. The first is its reproduction of exactly the same inspiration in other

167. *In Remp.* I.203.5–10, 204.18–25.

168. *Ibid.*, I.205.13–21.

169. *Ibid.*, I.197.7–198.8.

170. *Ibid.*, I.199.7–10.

171. *Ibid.*, I.199.9–10.

172. *Ibid.*, I.190.13–15, 199.10–14.

173. *Ibid.*, I.195.19–20, 196.4–9.

174. This idea is further developed by Proclus' in his account of the historical process through which the inferior forms of poetry came to be practiced in distinction from inspired poetry (*In Plat. Theol.* I.4; *In Remp.* I.205.4–13).

worthy souls. However, it is also the cause of a series of declining forms of poetry, each of which are suitable to a specific level of human receptivity, down to the very lowest. The lesser forms of poetry have their participation of intellectual inspiration in the form of their own character and the orientation that belongs to that character, whereas, in the inspired symbol itself, the epistemological and imaginative elements are both made to transcend their own native character, in that both manifest what they do not have the power to produce in themselves. In this we see that even the last ripples of inspiration are characterized by the double-movement of self-constitution. For even the most banal imitation that poetic inspiration produces in the imagination is only present insofar as the imagination is also exalted above its natural activity in the inspired σύμβολον. At every level, poetic inspiration, in causing each part of the soul to transcend its natural capacity, causes each part to be more itself through giving it its proper orientation to Intellect.

Thus it becomes clear that those who charge Proclus with irrationality relative to his reading of Homer have little reason to do so. The fact that the rational self-knowledge particular to soul is actualized to a greater degree in its ascent to the intellectual gods through the σύμβολα of Homeric poetry shows that the soul's abiding rationality is not something that the soul is trying to unsuccessfully shake itself free of, but that its ascent to the gods is always also an ascent to its rational self. Moreover, it also shows that Proclus is not, as some argue, imposing reason on realities that are beyond reason.¹⁷⁵ For how can the soul come to know its own internal reasons through Homer, in a way that it cannot know of itself, if it is simply imposing itself on Homer and not, through him, genuinely coming into contact with lives that are beyond its rational grasp? However, the rationality of Proclus' position cannot be firmly established on the merits of the soul's epistemological activity alone. It must also account for the way that the μίμησις of the properly imaginative level of Homer's poetry is involved in the kind of self-knowledge that inspired poetry creates in the soul. For it is a common criticism of Proclus to say that he is incapable of appreciating the apparent meanings of Homer in his haste to discover the meaning that lies behind it.¹⁷⁶ Yet we have found that this too has no basis. But neither is his appreciation for the "the vividness of imitation, the variety of characters and the beauty of expression" which he sees as characteristic of both Homer and Plato¹⁷⁷ a sign that he lacks confidence in the higher meanings he sees manifest in them:¹⁷⁸ quite the contrary. He is

175. Sheppard, *Studies*, 202.

176. Trimpi, *Muses of One Mind*, 238–40; Lambertson, *Homer the Theologian*, 170, 232.

177. *In Remp.* I.171.15–17: "ἡ τῆς μιμήσεως ἐνάργεια καὶ ἡ ποικιλία τῶν ἠθῶν καὶ ἡ τῶν ὀνομάτων ὥρα."

178. Kuisma, *Proclus' Defense of Homer*, 8, 110, 117, 114, 124.

able to affirm the mimetic aspect of Homer simultaneously with the scientific and symbolic because true μίμησις only occurs in the context of poetic or philosophical inspiration. In insisting on the relative accuracy and goodness of the apparent sense of Homer, Proclus shows that in the context of the demiurgic power of poetic inspiration, even imitations of the realities that are outside of the soul through privation can be pure opinative projections of the soul's own reasons, rather than in any way leading the soul away from itself. Proclus does not then seek to deny or minimize the mimetic power of either Homer or of Plato. Rather, he provides the reason why their mimetic power is superior to that of uninspired poets. It is superior because it is moved, beyond its ability to move itself, by intellectual and rational causes to seek its own end through intellectual and rational ends rather than being left to fruitlessly seek its own end in exclusion of them. Thus it is not those that defend rationality who have anything to fear from Proclus' understanding of Homer, but those who want spiritual and sensible experience to be means of escape from rationality. However, if we may take Euripides' *Bacchae* to be at all representative, even the tragedies will warn that this is a dangerous position to hold.