

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHICAL POETICS

What is poetry? Why do human beings produce and consume it? What effects does it have on them? Can it give them insight into truth, or is it dangerously misleading? This book is a wide-ranging study of the very varied answers which ancient philosophers gave to such questions. An extended discussion of Plato's *Republic* shows how the two discussions of poetry are integrated with each other, and with the dialogue's central themes. Aristotle's *Poetics* is read in the context of his understanding of poetry as a natural human behaviour and an intrinsically valuable component of a good human life. Two chapters trace the development of the later Platonist tradition from Plutarch to Plotinus, Longinus and Porphyry, exploring its intellectual debts to Epicurean, allegorical and Stoic approaches to poetry. The book will be essential reading for classicists as well as ancient philosophers and modern philosophers of art and aesthetics.

Key Themes in Ancient Philosophy provides concise books, written by major scholars and accessible to non-specialists, on important themes in ancient philosophy which remain of philosophical interest today.

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KEY THEMES IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

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MALCOLM HEATH



CAMBRIDGE
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521198790

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First published 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
 Heath, Malcolm.

Ancient philosophical poetics / Malcolm Heath.
 p. cm. — (Key themes in ancient philosophy)
 Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-19879-0 (hardback) — ISBN 978-0-521-16868-7 (paperback)
 1. Poetics—History—To 1500. 2. Philosophy, Ancient, in literature. 3. Language and
 languages—Philosophy. 4. Plato. Republic. I. Title.

PN1040.H43 2012
 808.1—dc23
 2012023161

ISBN 978-0-521-19879-0 Hardback
 ISBN 978-0-521-16868-7 Paperback

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Preface

My first debt is to the series editors, John Ferrari and Catherine Osborne, for inviting me to write this book. My second, and most important, is to the students on my course ‘Should We Ban Homer?’ in 2009/10: without their engaged and intelligent contributions, developing the material would have been much harder, and much less enjoyable. An anonymous reader for Cambridge University Press provided insightful commentary on the initial outline proposal. Without that stimulus, Chapter 4 would have had even less to say about the Epicureans than it does, and I might have persisted (with however bad a conscience) in my pretexts for not engaging with Plotinus: the resulting change of plan has had beneficial consequences, direct and indirect, throughout Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 5 also benefited from Timothy Costelloe’s timely invitation to contribute to an edited collection on the history of the sublime (Heath 2012). Some of the ideas in Chapter 2 were refined in the light of discussion of *Republic* 2–3 and 10 at two meetings of the Yorkshire Ancient Philosophy Network in 2010/11. The editors put me further in their debt by making extremely helpful comments on a draft, as did my colleague Regine May.

Chapter 3 draws in part on work undertaken for an ongoing project on Aristotle and the anthropology of poetry (Heath 2008; 2009c; 2009d; 2011); the approach outlined here will in due course be worked out in more detail in a monograph, provisionally entitled *Poetical Animals*. I am grateful to the Arts Humanities Research Council and the Leverhulme Trust for their financial support for this project.