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Edited by Penelope Murray

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PLATO ON POETRY

*Ion; Republic 376e–398b9;
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PREFACE

Plato's views on poetry, and particularly those expressed in the *Ion* and *Republic*, have had a profound effect on the history of Western poetics. Plato writes on poetry not as a disinterested observer, but as a passionate participant in a struggle between poetry and philosophy whose repercussions are still being felt today. Much has been written in recent years on Plato as a critic of literature; but no commentaries have appeared in English on the *Ion*, or on the opening books of the *Republic* in which Plato launches his attack on poetry, since the early years of this century. This volume brings together these texts and the relevant section of *Republic* 10. It aims to provide the reader with a commentary which takes account of modern scholarship on the subject, and which explores the ambivalence of Plato's pronouncements on poetry through the analysis of his own skill as a writer. A general introduction sets Plato's views in the wider context of attitudes to poetry in Greek society before his time, and indicates the main ways in which his writings on poetry have influenced the history of aesthetic thought in European culture.

I wish to thank the University of Warwick for granting me a period of study leave in which I was able to complete this commentary. Thanks are also due to Mark Vermes, who provided valuable assistance in preparing the text for publication. My colleagues Andrew Barker and Angela Hobbs willingly discussed the interpretation of various problematic passages, and I am particularly grateful to Angela Hobbs for her generosity in lending me a copy of her unpublished Ph.D. thesis. A series of seminars at the University of Warwick's Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature provided a stimulating context in which to discuss Plato's ideas on poetry. Oswyn Murray read and commented on the Introduction, and sustained me in other ways during the writing of this book. I am particularly indebted to Professor S. R. Slings of the Free University of Amsterdam for putting at my disposal his expert knowledge of the text of the *Republic*, and for the time and trouble he has taken in answering my queries on points of difficulty. I must thank Professors Pat Easterling and Ted Kenney for their encouragement, and for

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P R E F A C E

the astuteness of their comments. My greatest debt, and one which it is a pleasure to record, is to Pat Easterling, who introduced me to the delights of Plato's *Ion* in my first term as an undergraduate at Newnham.

University of Warwick
January 1995

P. A. M.

ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

1. Abbreviations for ancient authors and works usually follow those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. S. throughout refers to the Socrates of the Platonic dialogues.
2. Modern works are abbreviated as follows:
 - D–K H. Diels (ed.), revised by W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th edn. (Berlin 1961)
 - EGF M. Davies (ed.), *Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen 1991)
 - FGH F. Jacoby (ed.), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin 1923)
 - LSJ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott (edd.), revised by H. Stuart Jones and R. Mackenzie, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th edn (Oxford 1968)
 - N–H R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard (edd.), *A commentary on Horace: Odes book I* (Oxford 1970); *A commentary on Horace: Odes book II* (Oxford 1978)
 - PMG M. Davies (ed.), *Poetarum melicorum Graecorum fragmenta, post D. L. Page* (Oxford 1991)
3. Works cited by author and date only are listed in the Bibliography.