

**ARISTOTLE ON THE ART OF  
POETRY: AN AMPLIFIED VERSION  
WITH SUPPLEMENTARY  
ILLUSTRATIONS FOR STUDENTS  
OF ENGLISH**

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Aristotle on the Art of Poetry: An Amplified Version with Supplementary Illustrations for Students of English by Aristotle & Lane Cooper

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ON THE ART OF POETRY

AN AMPLIFIED VERSION  
WITH SUPPLEMENTARY ILLUSTRATIONS  
FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

BY

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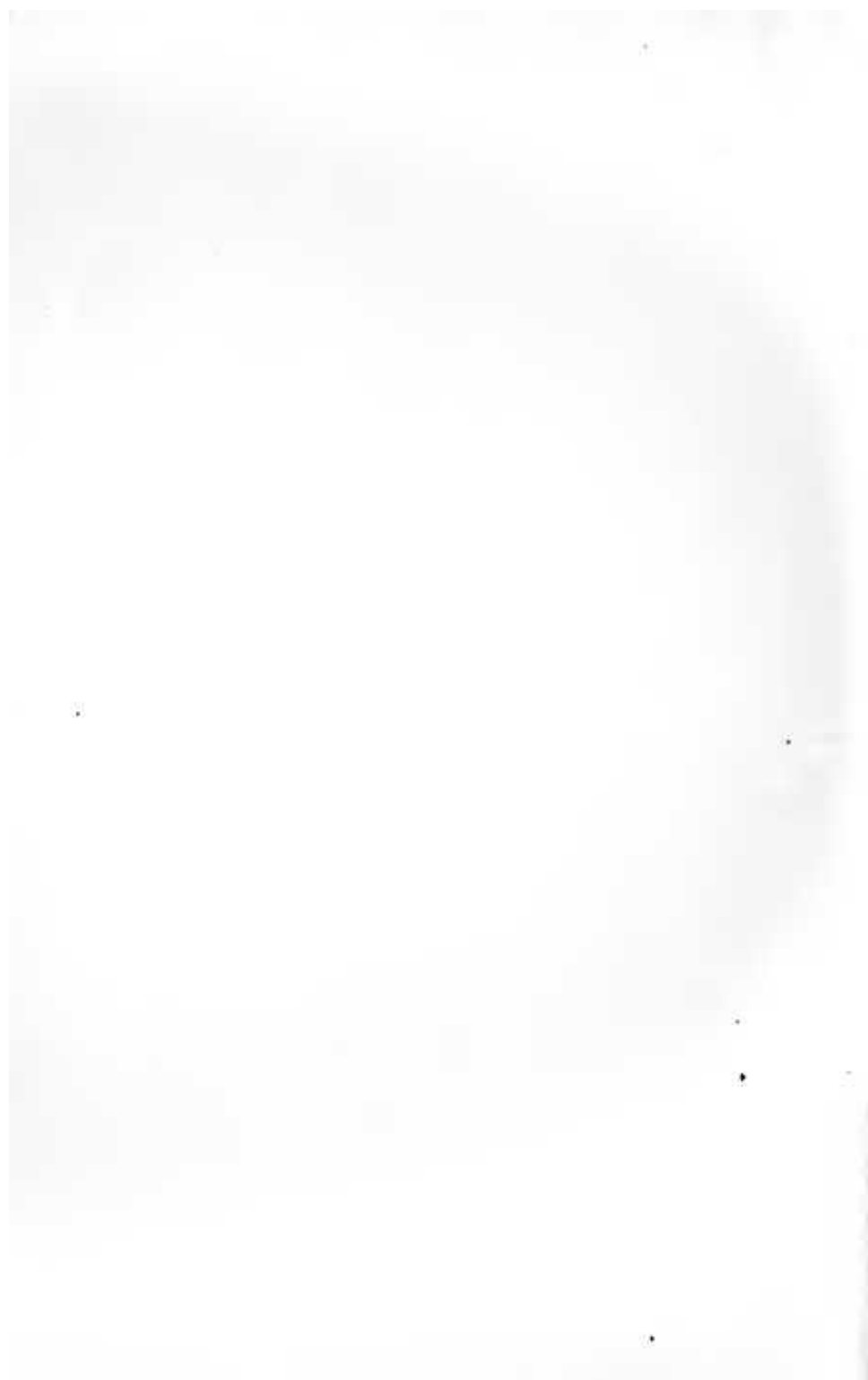
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TO  
ALBERT S. COOK  
PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND  
LITERATURE IN YALE UNIVERSITY  
WHO HAS RENDERED INESTIMABLE SERVICES TO HIS  
NATION IN PROMOTING THE CULTIVATION OF  
POETRY AND SOUND LEARNING







## PREFACE

This amplified rendering of the *Poetics* of Aristotle, I hope, will be useful to the student of literature in general, and perhaps not without suggestiveness even to scholars in the ancient classics. Primarily, however, it is designed for certain students of English that I meet with, who are capable of deriving profit from the substance of the treatise, but gain less on a first acquaintance with it in any modern translation than their efforts commonly deserve. Accordingly, my chief aim has been to make the subject matter of the work as intelligible as I thought it could be made for a first perusal by a kind of reader whose difficulties and initial mistakes I have come to know as a teacher of English. To this end I have employed a number of expedients, some of which may need a word of explanation. First of all, then, the original text has here been divided and expanded.

The *Poetics* as it has come down to us may represent a part of Aristotle's notes for a set of lectures, or perhaps for a dialogue; though now and then it seems more like the uneven memoranda of some person who attended the lectures. However this may be, and apart from any difficulties inherent in the subject, the treatise does not furnish easy reading. Superficially, it has the look of a continuous discourse without much articulation



in the parts ; it is divided into chapters, to be sure, yet in such a way that transitions in the thought are not always obvious. Of the special topics, again, though some are carefully expounded and amply illustrated, others are dismissed with a sentence or two. In particular, the citations and other illustrations occasionally amount to the barest jottings, as ' Here is an example from the Bath Scene ' — the example not being added. When the illustrative matter only adds to the darkness of an abstract principle, how great is that darkness ! The present version aims to indicate the chief divisions unmistakably, and, by a running marginal gloss and certain interpolations, the lesser divisions and transitions as well ; to render many of the examples less enigmatical ; and, in short, without seriously distorting the perspective of the original, to supply such information as may be needed at the moment for a better, if not a complete and final, understanding of the individual thoughts and their sequence.

The reader that I have in mind may not be very systematic in the use of scholarly apparatus ; he might even neglect the assistance of a foot-note. In order to perform my intended office for him, I have not scrupled to expand the wording in passages where, if unalert, he might otherwise advance too quickly. Far from hoping to rival the excellent terseness of Bywater's translation, or the smoothness (sometimes deceptive) of Butcher's, I have generally been willing to delay the reader at the risk of circumlocution, or by explicit repetition of a thought which is implicitly carried along in the Greek, and have even dared to interrupt the

sequence by comments, long or short, where my students in the past have gone astray. In this way, for example, the unwary will not at the outset miss the emphasis one ought to lay upon the tragic *catharsis* or the tragic *hamartia*; and certain misconceptions that frequently arise during the first perusal of the treatise, and tend to become rooted impressions, may likewise be avoided — for instance, the common misunderstanding of what Aristotle says on the relative importance of 'character' and 'plot'. On the other hand, no point has been made of calling attention to discrepancies in the *Poetics*, except where they are particularly troublesome; still, not all of the minor ones have been passed over in silence.

Furthermore, an attempt has been made to suggest that the principles of Aristotle have a wider application than his own illustrations, drawn solely from Greek literature, may serve to reveal; and not only the main principles, but some of the lesser as well. It is proper, of course, to observe that his ideal of perfect tragedy is not independent of the traditions of the Attic drama, or of local usage on the stage of his own day. At the same time, it is the experience of those who concern themselves with the *Poetics* that, allowance being made for the tentative method underlying certain of its apparently hard and fast conclusions, the treatise gains new significance for the student of modern literature with every re-examination. It seems desirable that the possibility of this wider application should, so to speak, be discovered from the first. I have therefore introduced sundry illustrations from familiar sources, chiefly

English, which may do away with any presupposition that the work can have no bearing, say, upon the modern 'romantic' drama. For example, Aristotle holds that to be on the verge of committing a deed of horror knowingly, and yet to refrain, makes an undesirable situation in tragedy. His reasons may or may not seem cogent at first glance; but the situation itself can be illustrated as well by the instance of Hubert and Arthur in *King John* as by that of Haemon and Creon in *Antigone*; probably it is illustrated in *Hamlet*. My supplementary examples could readily be multiplied, but that would distend the translation, and might not leave enough to the ingenuity of the reader. Doubtless some of them could be replaced to advantage; I can only say that in supplying examples I have tried to work in the spirit of the original, where the illustrative matter is simple and direct rather than always meticulously precise.

My additions are more extensive in the earlier part of the work, and decrease toward the close. I cannot hope that their tone, or style, will please the more experienced student of the *Poetics*; but it will not disturb the reader that I specially have in mind, for whose sake the additions have been printed in the same kind of type as the rest of the translation. It would be easy, on a second reading, to skip most of the interpolations, for the longer ones have all been enclosed in brackets, and the shorter ones also, when they interrupt the thought rather than help the reader on. Sometimes, as here and there in Chapter 25, it would be hard to draw the line between such liberties as a translator ordinarily may take in filling out the