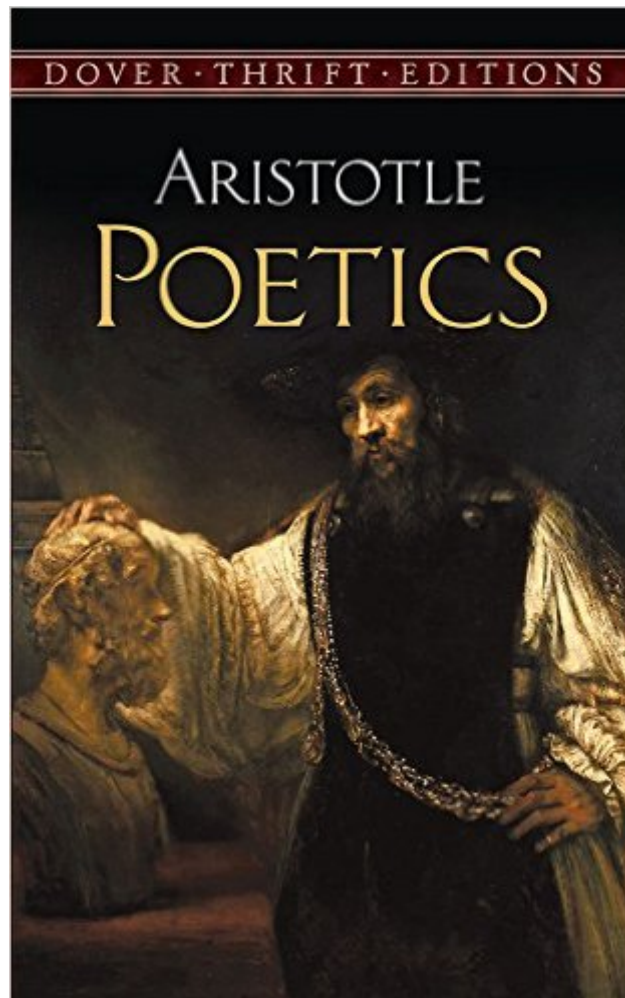


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Poetics (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Among the most influential books in Western civilization, Aristotle's *Poetics* is really a treatise on fine art. In it are mentioned not only epic and dithyrambic poetry, but tragedy, comedy, and flute and lyre playing. Aristotle's conception of tragedy, i.e. the depiction of a heroic action that arouses pity and fear in the spectators and brings about a catharsis of those emotions, has helped perpetuate the Greek ideal of drama to the present day. Similarly, his dictums concerning unity of time and place, the necessity for a play to have a beginning, middle, and end, the idea of the tragic flaw and other concepts have had enormous influence down through the ages. Throughout the work, Aristotle reveals not only a great intellect analyzing the nature of poetry, music, and drama, but also a down-to-earth understanding of the practical problems facing the poet and playwright. Now, in this inexpensive edition of the *Poetics*, readers can enjoy the seminal insights of one of the greatest minds in human history as he sets about laying the foundations of critical thought about the arts.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After reading Aristotle's "Poetics," I felt a severe sense of shame for not having read it much, much sooner. As a student of literature, I found that many of the concepts upon which my evaluation of literature are based, whether I picked them up in classes or through amateur theorization, are founded in the "Poetics". The "Poetics," which the Penguin editor Malcolm Heath explains in his outstanding introduction/explication, is probably comprised of lecture notes, and not intentionally

meant for public consumption, nonetheless stands as the standard against which literary criticism is gauged. This is amazing, as the work itself is hardly 50 pages long. Aristotle begins by talking about the origins of art in imitation: Artists convey their sense of the world through imitating what they see and feel around them. This is accomplished both in visual art, and for a more thorough understanding of human events, in poetry. Aristotle goes on to explain the history of literature: how encomium (praises) and invective (curses) give rise respectively to epic and lampoons. These then pave the way for tragedy and comedy. In terms of these basic steps, in the later part of the "Poetics," Aristotle gives definitions to parts of speech, to wit, nouns, verbs, etc., and how they are used in different forms of speech, and in various contexts within the genres he outlines. Spending the greater part of the work on an investigation of tragedy, Aristotle examines the component parts of what he takes to be the best kinds of tragedies. In terms of quality, the work must be complete, showing the causal relation of events and the causal reactions of characters to those events.

The "Poetics" contains Aristotle's observations on what elements and characteristics comprised the best tragedies based on the ones he'd presumably seen or read. He divides "poetry," which could be defined as imitations of human experience, into tragedy, comedy, and epic, and explains the differences between these forms, although comedy is not covered in detail and tragedy gets the most treatment. For one thing, tragedy, he states, seeks to imitate the matters of superior people, while comedy seeks to imitate the matters of inferior people. To Aristotle, the most important constituent of tragedy is plot, and successful plots require that the sequence of events be necessary (required to happen to advance the story logically and rationally) and probable (likely to happen given the circumstances). Any plot that does not feature such a necessary and probable sequence of events is deemed faulty. Reversals and recognitions are plot devices by which tragedy sways emotions, particularly those that induce "pity and fear," as is astonishment, which is the effect produced when the unexpected happens. He discusses the best kinds of tragic plots, the kinds of characters that are required, and how their fortunes should change over the course of the plot for optimum tragic effect. With regard to poetic language or "diction," he emphasizes the importance of figurative language (metaphor, analogy) in poetry and the importance of balancing figurative with literal language. It is his opinion that metaphoric invention is a natural ability and not something that can be taught. Of all the poets Aristotle mentions who exemplify the ideals proposed in the "Poetics," Homer draws the most praise.

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