



Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics

Averroes, Charles E. Butterworth

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This volume contains a translation into English of Averroes's Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics, an introduction to the translation in which the arguments of both Averroes and Aristotle are sketch out and their differences from Plato and other important thinkers explored, an outline analysis of the order of Averroes's commentary, annotations to the text, a bibliography, and a glossary of important terms with their English translations.

Aristotle's Poetics has held the attention of scholars and authors through the ages, and Averroes has long been known as "the commentator" on Aristotle. His Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics is important because of its striking content. Here, an author steeped in Aristotle's thought and highly familiar with an entirely different poetical tradition shows in careful detail what is commendable about Greek poetics and commendable as well as blameworthy about Arabic poetics.

Heretofore, non-Arabic readers have had to depend upon Hermannus Alemannus's Latin translation of Averroes's Middle Commentary or on its English version. Both are inadequate. They incorrectly render Averroes's various arguments and make his beautiful poetic citations read like doggerel. Moreover, they provide inaccurate and incomplete information about the sources of those citations and consequently portray Averroes's text as a curious compilation of relics from some exotic but not very learned horde.

The present translation is based on a sound, critical Arabic edition prepared by the translator. Not only is it the first English translation from the Arabic original, but also the first translation of the Arabic text into any language other than medieval Hebrew or Latin. The translation is literal and eloquent, albeit more literal when eloquent when sense demands such a sacrifice. Throughout the commentary, the same English word is used for the same Arabic word unless an exception is noted. The renditions of the poetic citations are somewhat freer without reaching to unwarranted innovations.

Questions leading to a more accurate grasp of Averroes's argument are explored in the introduction, and the basic themes of his interpretation of Aristotle are laid bare. Thus, Butterworth takes issue with many of the prevalent beliefs about medieval Arabic poetics and explores the philosophical contention that poetry belongs to the art of logic. In doing so, he also points to the way that position allows both Averroes and Aristotle to revise Plato's attack on poetry and the significance of their revision.

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