

# James Hutton

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Born in Airth, Stirlingshire, Scotland, son of a sea captain, James Hutton came to the United States as a young boy. He graduated from the Walton, New York, High School in 1920 and received his Bachelor of Arts degree at Cornell in 1924, having been elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year. His Master of Arts, in 1925, and his Doctor of Philosophy, in 1927, were also Cornell degrees. Except for a year as instructor in Greek and Latin at Columbia University (1926-27), he was a member of the Cornell faculty for the rest of his life: instructor 1927-29, assistant professor 1929-38, professor from 1938 on. In 1961 he was appointed Kappa Alpha Professor of Classics, and on his retirement in 1973 was named Kappa Alpha Professor emeritus. He served as chairman of the Department of Classics from 1946 to 1952. From 1927 to 1943 he was also a member of the Department for the Comparative Study of Literature, in association with Professor Lane Cooper.

As a student and in the early years of his teaching career, Hutton was much influenced by Lane Cooper, who was at the time a dominant Cornell figure in the study of literature. Cooper was the director of his doctoral dissertation, "The Influence of the Greek Anthology," and to Cooper he no doubt owed in some measure the great breadth of his scholarly training and his concern for both classical and post-classical literature, with an emphasis on the links between them. But his style as a teacher stood in marked contrast to the authoritarianism of Lane Cooper. Hutton's way of teaching was to encourage students to produce their own views and then to help them on their way by means of deft criticism and correction, offered gently but firmly, and by suggesting further territory for exploration.

James Hutton combined extraordinary erudition with discriminating literary judgment. The erudition was never on conspicuous display, but no one could know him or his work for long without coming to realize the astonishing range and precision of his knowledge. At the center of his scholarly interests was the influence of the classics on later European literature, and this interest is reflected in much of his published work as well as in the distinguished course, Humanism in the Renaissance, that he gave for many years. Many of his students would give foremost place to his skill as a critic and interpreter of such ancient authors as Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Virgil, and, very conspicuously, the poets of the Greek Anthology. Still other students have particularly vivid memories of his course entitled Modern Writers on Art, and others again would give first mention to the course that he gave—an

inheritance from Lane Cooper on Cooper's retirement—on Greek and Latin literature in translation, a seminar-style course for undergraduates that for many years attracted some of the most gifted Cornell students.

In the scholarly world he is known first and foremost for his two great studies of the influence of the Greek Anthology: *The Greek Anthology in Italy* (Cornell University Press, 1935) and *The Greek Anthology in France and in the Latin Writers of the Netherlands to the Year 1800* (Cornell University Press, 1946). These two volumes alone are sufficient to ensure James Hutton lasting renown as an authority on the European tradition of classical literature, but they give no adequate impression of the diversity and comprehensiveness of his literary studies. His numerous articles and reviews deal with literary subjects ranging from classical antiquity to the twentieth century. Some of these articles are minor classics, such as the essay entitled "Spenser's 'Adamantine Chains': A Cosmological Metaphor," which was his contribution to *The Classical Tradition* (1967), a festschrift for his friend and colleague of many years, Harry Caplan. Another conspicuous example is "Some English Poems in Praise of Music," in *English Miscellany* 2 (1951), a 63-page study of sixteenth and seventeenth-century English poems on music, tracing the history of the tradition of the harmony of the spheres that lies behind this poetry. Even some of Hutton's reviews deserve notice as significant essays on their topics, such as his searching review of Gilbert Highet's *The Classical Tradition* (*American Journal of Philology*, 1952). It should be added, moreover, that in everything that he wrote Hutton was a stylist of elegance and lucidity.

A selection of his essays, including three previously unpublished, appeared shortly after his death, in a volume entitled *Essays on Renaissance Poetry*, edited by Rita Guerlac (Cornell University Press, 1980). Left finished except for minor revisions, and to be published in 1981 by W. W. Norton & Co., is a translation, with extensive introduction and notes, of Aristotle's *Poetics*. He left also a large and very valuable unpublished study of peace poetry in the Renaissance.

A scholar and critic of international reputation, Hutton was in steady demand as a reader and adviser to literary projects of university presses. He served as an editor of *Cornell Studies in Classical Philology*; contributed to the *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum*, edited by P. O. Kristeller; was involved in numerous other scholarly enterprises; and served many times as a critic and reviser of the work of his friends and colleagues at Cornell and elsewhere, a service performed as an act of friendship and concern for the advancement of scholarship. This service was really an extension of his role as teacher, and the same careful and erudite criticism was enjoyed by a large number of graduate students in the preparation of their essays and dissertations in many fields besides Classics—Comparative Literature, Medieval Studies, English, and Romance.

Apart from a sabbatic year spent in Europe in the thirties and one or two trips to Scotland, Hutton seldom departed far or for long from Ithaca, and then usually to attend a meeting of a learned society. He was a member of the American Philological Association, serving on its board of directors from 1959 to 1963, of the Modern Language Association, and of the Renaissance Society of America. From 1944 to 1950 he was a member of the Committee on Renaissance Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies.

His other chief destination on leaving Ithaca was his beloved farm in North Lansing, with its spacious and handsome early-nineteenth-century house, where for many years he spent summer vacations, adding a measure of leisurely gardening to his customary literary pursuits.

Though quiet and unassuming in his way of life as in his personal manner, he was accorded many honors, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1958-59. On his retirement he was presented, by a group of old friends and colleagues, with a volume of studies entitled *Poetry and Poetics from Ancient Greece to the Renaissance* (Cornell University Press, 1975). He kept up an active correspondence with scholars in various fields, in this country and abroad, and retained a strong interest in Scotland, the country of his birth.

A life-long bachelor, he lived with his mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Hutton, and they shared a house for many years with Lane Cooper. After the death of his mother and of Lane Cooper, he continued to live at 123 Roberts Place, with his cousin, Mrs. Margaret Green. Frail health as well as his natural inclination for a quiet life led him to stay mostly at home during the last years of his life, but to his visitors as to his correspondents he continued to be a lively and companionable friend, with the same enthusiasm for literature and scholarship, and the same delightful combination of grace, wit, and learning that commanded the admiration and the affection of his colleagues and his students over the years.

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