ALEXANDER GOTTLIEB BAUMGARTEN has been known to students of philosophy and the theory of criticism mainly as the inventor of the term “aesthetics.” His reasons for this choice of term, the meaning he attached to it, and his contribution to the philosophical study of the arts—all these have been unknown to most readers. Excerpts of the work here offered have occasionally appeared in English translation, and there is a German version by Riemann. The text itself is hard to come by, and there are not many persons who have the time or patience to struggle with the philosophical Latin of the eighteenth century. But the importance of Baumgarten in the history of aesthetics and the characteristic clarity and vigor of his thought on a subject of acknowledged difficulty have readily led us to the conclusion that his work should regain its interest if it is again made available to students of aesthetics and to general readers. We therefore offer no excuse for rescuing the Meditationes, Baumgarten’s earliest work, from undeserved obscurity. What may need excuse is the occasional inelegance or possible inaccuracy in our effort to grasp the author’s intention.

The text we reproduce is that of the first edition of 1735. This contains many errors, but it is uncertain that it would be rewarding to attempt to edit it. The two earlier printings, that by Croce in 1900, and that dedicated to him in 1936, are, like the present facsimile, mere reissuings. For the purpose of translation we have been compelled to emend the text and
not infrequently. Many errors are obvious or trivial, and we have not usually remarked them in the notes. Neither of the two previous editions nor Riemann’s German translation has caught the numerous wrong propositional derivations. Some of these mistakes may be the result of a later reordering of his propositions by the author; others are certainly misprints.

Of the frequent inaccuracies in quotation, even from the chief source, Horace’s *Ars poetica*, some seem owing to differences between Baumgarten’s texts and ours, and others to the fact that Baumgarten, in the eighteenth-century manner, preferred to quote from memory, or to pretend to do so. In translating we have followed modern texts of the classics, without always remarking in the notes the differences, which for the most part are unimportant.

We were anticipated in the task of tracking down the citations to Horace by Riemann, who had found some, perhaps half, of them, though he seldom troubled to locate what was not right at hand in the *Ars poetica*. As to the quotations and direct citations, we believe we have caught them all, but we have not even attempted to fix all the allusions. Indeed, this would be nearly impossible, since Baumgarten’s literary, as distinct from his philosophical, style is largely a stringing together of more or less apposite allusions, most of them from Horace, but many from other classical sources. We have noted only a few of the most striking of these.

We were fortunate in having always at our call the great learning of Professor William C. Helmbold. Our debt to our colleague can be indicated by the fact that he worked through the entire manuscript twice, making scores of suggestions, most of which we have adopted, and saving us from many errors. We also owe a special debt to Professor Stephen C. Pepper for encouraging and helping to further the project and to Professor Benson Mates for warm cooperation on special problems. We wish to thank Margaret Kerr Aschenbrenner for her help in the preparation of the manuscript.