The *Poetics* from Athens to al-Andalus: Ibn Rushd's Grounds for Comparison

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In his recent reflections on translatability across cultures, literatures, and languages, ʿAbdelfattah Kilito, one of the most imaginative Arabic intellectuals writing today, expressed his low opinion of Ibn Rushd (1126–98), the medieval Arabic philosopher who under his Latin name Averroes earned a prestigious place in Dante's *Inferno*, alongside Avicenna and Saladin (*Inferno* 4.144). In particular, Kilito was struck by the distance between Ibn Rushd's *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics* (*Talkhīṣ Kitāb Arisṭūṭālīs fī al-Shiʿr*, ca. 1174) and the Greek text on which it proposed to comment. Until the Renaissance, Ibn Rushd's commentary was the primary medium through which the *Poetics* reached Europe. It was translated into Latin in 1256 by Hermannus Alemannus ("Hermann the German"), who relied on the assistance of the "Saracens" residing at that time in Toledo, and in 1337 into Hebrew by Todros Todrosi of Arles.[1] The prestige of this commentary is indicated by the fact that the Latin translation of the Arabic original made in 1256 survives in twenty-four manuscript copies, whereas William of Moerbeke's 1278 Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* is extant in only two manuscript copies.[2]

1. The philosopher Roger Bacon later reported a conversation with Hermannus in which the latter admitted that the Saracens led the way in his translations (*in suis translationibus principals*) of the text, while he merely served as their assistant (see Roger Bacon, *Compendium studii philosophiae*, cap. 8, ed. J. S. Brewer, *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, Rolls Series 15.1 [London, 1859], 472).

2. For the dissemination and citation history of Hermannus's translation, see William F. Boggess, "Aristotle's Poetics in the Fourteenth Century," *Studies in Philology* 67 (1970): 278–94;

Yet the influence of Ibn Rushd's text did not prevent it from being considered a failure in the mind of the modern Moroccan intellectual, Kilito. "Despite his well-known erudition and the diversity of his interests," Kilito concludes, "the greatest philosopher of the medieval world did not comprehend Aristotle's book."[3] For Kilito, Ibn Rushd's commentary is an exemplary instance of the misrecognition that is entailed in all translation and that dooms the enterprise of cross-cultural inquiry from the start. Kilito suggests that every commentary, translation, and exegesis by a reader whose culture is distant from the source text reveals more about the commenting culture than the culture commented on. Kilito sees in Ibn Rushd's engagement with Aristotle's *Poetics* a document that reveals much about the intellectual horizons (and limits) of twelfth-century Cordoba, yet comparatively little about Aristotelian poetics.

Kilito's dismal assessment echoes Ernest Renan's notorious condemnation in *Averroès et l'Averroisme* (1852). Working with the limited amount of material on Ibn Rushd available to him in Latin, Renan criticized the Andalusian philosopher for his "complete ignorance of Greek literature [*l'ignorance la plus complète de la littérature grecque*]."[4] Jorge Luis Borges, citing Renan's accusation as his epigraph (as Kilito also did in his essay), undertook to narrate Averroes's engagement with Aristotle in the short story "Averroes's Search" (La busca de Averroes; 1947). Playing on Orientalist tropes while also (as will shortly be seen) deconstructing them, Borges narrates the defeat (*derrota*) that prevented the Arab philosopher "bounded within the circle of Islam" from grasping Aristotle's literary exegesis of tragedy and comedy.[5]

According to Renan, Borges, and Kilito, Ibn Rushd's failure hinged on the rendering of the Greek terms for tragedy and comedy by praise (*madīḥ*) and blame (*hijāʾ*), respectively. Ibn Rushd stood charged with uncritically rendering *tragōidiā* (τραγῳδία) by *madīḥ* and *komōidiā* (κωμῳδία) by *hijāʾ*, and specifically in his statement that "every poem and poetic statement is either praise (*madīḥ*) or blame (*hijāʾ*)."[6] The idea of translating tragedy by praise and comedy by blame did not originate with Ibn Rushd. However, Kilito, Borges, and Renan concentrated their complaints on the Andalusian phi-

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O. B. Hardison, *The Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 34.

3. ʿAbdelfattah Kilito, *Lan tatakallam lughatī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿah, 2002), 48.

4. Ernest Renan, *Averroès et l'Averroisme* (Paris, 1852), 48.

5. Jorge Luis Borges, "La busca de Averroes," in *El Aleph* (Caracas: Ayacucho, 1993), 135–50, quote on 136. Future references are given parenthetically.

6. Ibn Rushd, *Talkhṣ Kitāb Arisṭūṭālīs fi-l-Shiʿr*, ed. Charles Butterworth and Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Majīd Harīdī (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣrīyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 1986), 54. The English version is *Averroes's Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Charles Butterworth (Princeton University Press, 1986), 59. Future references are given parenthetically with the Arabic text followed by the English.

losopher and deduced from his hermeneutical error a general assumption concerning Arabic ignorance.

While *madīḥ* and *hijāʾ* correspond to clearly demarcated Arabic poetic genres, both terms have considerably broader uses as well. In addition to being the middle and longest section of the *qaṣīda* (panegyric ode), *madīḥ* can simply mean praise in general. Likewise, while *hijāʾ* corresponds to a specific kind of satire or invective that is the *qaṣīda*'s obverse, it also more generally refers to any kind of blame or mocking.[7] The same generality of meaning clearly does not apply to Greek tragedy and comedy, which primarily signify as specific literary genres. While Ibn Rushd's formulation was influenced by Abū Bishr Mattā Ibn Yūnus's Arabic translation of the *Poetics* (ca. 932), these proposed Greek-Arabic equivalencies were applied by Ibn Rushd more methodically and categorically than the medieval exegetical tradition had yet seen.

While Aristotle indeed did not suggest that poetry could be reduced to praise and blame, he did offer an origin theory whereby poetic discourse arose from ecomium and lampoon, respectively.[8] Ibn Rushd transposed Aristotle's historical genealogy, which pertained only to past literary production, into a general theory of poetry and used it to explain literature's present and future. Both in their initial formulations as *madīḥ* and *hijāʾ*, and through their Latin equivalents as *laudatio* and *vituperatio*, praise and blame were to shape subsequent discourse about literature in the Islamic world and Christendom well into the early modern period.

For Kilito, as for the modern interpreters who preceded him, this transposition of genres speaks to Ibn Rushd's failure to understand the Greek text. Kilito gave Ibn Rushd a measure of respite by blaming the mistake on Abū Bishr's translation and specifically on the conditions of the text's transmission from Athens to Baghdad. Kilito even pleaded for mercy for Abū Bishr, faced with "an amputated book" (49). For Kilito, Borges, and the Orientalist tradition that mediated Ibn Rushd's encounter with Aristotle to modernity, medieval Arabic literary theory misread Aristotelian poetics because of translation's intrinsic impossibility. Viewing the Greek-Arabic-Latin exchange through the prism of modernity, these critics perceived only an unbridgeable incommensurability dividing one literary tradition from the other. Reverberating across languages, cultures, texts, and genres, this incommensurability in their view doomed cross-cultural literary encounters to failure.

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7. For an overview of the *hijāʾ* as a genre, see G. J. H. Van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes towards Invective Poetry (Hijāʾ) in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

8. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (New York: Penguin, 1996), 7 (1449a). Future references to Aristotle's *Poetics* are given only in the form of Bekker numbers, without reference to the pages of Heath's translation.

But rather than viewing the Arabic rendering of tragedy and comedy by praise and blame respectively as a failure in translation, we might ask how this particular rendering served the uses Ibn Rushd sought to make of Aristotle's text. Such a line of inquiry will show that, far from being arbitrary or simply incorrect, Ibn Rushd's renderings explicate a poetics more appropriate to his Andalusian milieu than a strict rendering of Aristotle's meanings could have enabled. Moreover, Ibn Rushd's renderings extract the universally applicable aspects of Aristotle's teaching with a clarity that would have been invisible in the case of a more commensurable translation.

POETRY, HISTORY, PARABLES

In his opening statement, Ibn Rushd declares his aim as being to "summarize the universal rules found in Aristotle's book on poetry that all or most nations share in common" even as he notes that "most of what is in [the *Poetics*] are rules particular to [Greek] poetic compositions and customs" (54/59). Ibn Rushd's opening statement outlines a methodology for reading Aristotle against the grain, discerning in and extracting from his text qualities less evident to the general reader. The Arab philosopher specifically acknowledges his intention to focus on elements of the text that diverge from the norm, by separating out the general rules (*al-qūwanīn*), which are in the minority, from those that occupy the majority of the text and are specific to Greek literature.

Later on, echoing *Poetics* 1451b, Ibn Rushd writes that the poet "sets down names for existing things [that] speak about universal things. Therefore the art of poetry is closer to philosophy than the art of inventing a parable [*mathāl*]" (77/84).[9] Ibn Rushd has in mind a corpus of texts that, like the Arabic Aristotelian tradition itself, was mediated and altered in the process of its translation. *Kalīla wa Dimna*, best known to medieval Arabic readers in Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's translation from Pahlavi (ca. 740), is an Arabic story cycle that originated in ancient Indian tales and represented for Ibn Rushd the parable-like narrative form that Herodotus's *Histories* represented for Aristotle (see *Poetics* 9.1451b5–7). Needless to say, Ibn Rushd does not intend to suggest that Aristotle had *Kalīla wa Dimna* in mind when he compared poetry to history. But Ibn Rushd's primary concern was the repro-

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9. Hermannus Alemannus carried the "translation" of Aristotle's passage even further. Substituting the "book by Aesop" for the reference to *Kalīla wa Dimna*, he states that "the poet gives names only to things that exist and at times speaks in universals; and therefore the art of poetry is closer to philosophy than the art of proverbial tales" ("Averrois Cordvbensis commentarivm medivm in Aristotelis Poetriam," ed. William Boggess [unpublished PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1966], 29–30). As noted by Boggess, sixteen of the twenty-three extant manuscripts substitute the nonexistent *Ysope seu Hesiodi* for Aesop's fables. For Aristotle's statement, see *Poetics* 1451a36–b11.

duction of the spirit of Aristotle's meaning in its universal dimension, not in its literal meaning. Ibn Rushd fashioned a reading of Aristotle's book that accorded with his own definition of interpretation (*tāʾwīl*) as the process of "extracting the figurative significance [*al-majāz*] of an utterance [*al-lafz̤*] from its true meaning."[10] Far from marking a failure of translation, Ibn Rushd's hermeneutical method was entirely congruent with Aristotle's approach. From a diversity of forms, Aristotle extracted basic principles concerning poetic meaning, rhetorical expression, and ethical behavior that pertained to all times and places.

By creatively rendering the particularities of Aristotelian poetics in terms that resonated in his own milieu, Ibn Rushd showed himself to be a faithful student of his Greek master. Both the rhetoricization of poetic categories and the "translation" of history by an Arabic story cycle demonstrate that Ibn Rushd's commitment to deducing principles applicable to all poetry superseded literalist fidelity to the Greek text. Given that the very concept of translation was more fluid and capacious in medieval cultures than it is in modernity, it hardly seems legitimate to take Ibn Rushd to task for his creative localization of Greek literary forms.[11]

As evidenced by his ready transposition of Aristotle's *historia* into *mathāl*, Ibn Rushd approaches Aristotle's text already persuaded of the legitimacy and necessity as well as of the possibility of translation. Rather than regard incommensurability in translation as a sign of hermeneutic failure, he sees the interpretive gaps that emerge in the course of his exposition as proofs of poetry's universal applicability. If a set of terms such as *tragedy* and *comedy*, or *poetry* and *history*, can be adapted to the categories of a culture radically distinct from the culture within which the terms originated, such translatability of itself attests to the philosophical salience of a given paradigm. The hermeneutical disjuncture that some modern scholars and critics have chosen to read as a failure should be read as a demonstration of Ibn Rushd's (and Aristotle's) success.

Ibn Rushd does not inform his reader that he has substituted an Arabic story cycle for the Greek concept of history, nor does he apologize for his inability to explain Greek literary genres to his Arabic readers. Rather than seeking to extract data about ancient Greek literature from the *Poetics*, Ibn Rushd transformed Aristotle's text into a manifesto on Arabic poetics. The Arab philosopher was less concerned to recover the original meaning of

10. Averroes [Ibn Rushd], *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory* [*Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*], trans. Charles Butterworth (Salt Lake City, UT: Brigham Young University, 2001), 9 (translation modified in all citations from this work).

11. For medieval Islamic ways of conceiving translation, see Rebecca Gould, "Inimitability versus Translatability: The Structure of Literary Meaning in Arabo-Persian Poetics," *Translator* 19, no. 2 (2013): 81–104.

the Greek text than to extract from it those aspects that could help him understand poetry as such. Rather than pursuing the textual estrangement that Lawrence Venuti and other scholars of translation theory have advocated under the heading of *foreignization*, Ibn Rushd is an unabashed domesticator of his foreign text.[12] Ibn Rushd's method recalls the postulate that a society that is "confident in itself will often use fluent strategies in translation of foreign literary works."[13] Domesticating translations, therefore, are not necessarily to be seen as betrayals of the source text. Instead, they are evidence that a literary culture has come of age. This was the case for twelfth-century Islamic culture. Particularly in al-Andalus, Arabic scholars had moved well beyond the literalizing translational methodologies that, as Dimitri Gutas and others have shown, characterized the early Abbasid translation movement based in Baghdad.[14]

FROM DRAMA TO RHETORIC

While later readers have silently passed over the "translation" of the Greek concept of history in *Poetics* 1451 by "parable," the no more domesticating rendering of tragedy by praise (*madīḥ*) and comedy by blame (*hijāʾ*) has attracted greater opprobrium. An early assessment by Jaroslaus Tkatsch (1871–1927), the first scholar to study Abū Bishr's translation in depth, of Ibn Rushd's rendering of Aristotle as "a medley of monstrous misunderstandings and wild fantasies" has set the tone for subsequent generations of commentators.[15] Such condemnations notwithstanding, the many meanings that attach to *madīḥ* and *hijāʾ* in classical Arabic mean that Ibn Rushd's interpretive role with respect to the rendering of tragedy and comedy by praise and blame cannot be assessed from one angle alone.

Contesting the conventional reduction of *madīḥ* and *hijāʾ* to the formal genres of encomium and satire, Vicente Cantarino maintains that rather than using *madīḥ* and *hijāʾ* in their technical meanings, Ibn Rushd deploys these terms "to express the poet's subjective attitude in his rendition of the contemplated object."[16] Somewhat revising Cantarino, it could be said that

12. Lawrence Venuti, the best-known proponent of foreignization in translation theory, has authored two manifestos that contest domesticating translation methodologies in Anglophone literatures: *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995), and *The Scandals of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1997).

13. John Milton, "Foreignization: A Discussion of Theoretical and Practical Issues," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 54 (2008): 110.

14. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd–4th and 8th–10th c.)* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

15. Jaroslav Tkatsch, "Über den Arabischen Kommentar des Averroes zur Poetik des Aristoteles," *Wiener Studien* 24 (1902): 76.

16. Vicente Cantarino, "Averroes on Poetry," in *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age: Selection of Texts Accompanied by a Preliminary Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 19.

Ibn Rushd uses *madīḥ* and *hijāʾ* in both their technical and nontechnical meanings. Even beyond Ibn Rushd's uses of praise and blame to evoke the poet's subjectivity, the typologization of poetry into these two modes assimilates it more thoroughly to a globally shared medieval rhetorical tradition.

To identify poetry as either praise or blame (whether such rubrics are intended in genre-specific or in more general senses) is to foreground poetry as a normative art, a choice that made eminent sense in Ibn Rushd's milieu. Even more appropriate to the rhetorical orientation of medieval literary culture was Ibn Rushd's distinctly non-Aristotelian foregrounding of character over plot. With respect to this preference, Ibn Rushd builds on the exegetical precedent of Ibn Sīnā, the Persian philosopher known to medieval Europe as Avicenna. In his commentary on the *Poetics* (1020), Ibn Sīnā distinguished between Greek and Arabic literature on the grounds that "Greek poetry was generally intended for imitating actions and emotions, and nothing else" while Arabic poetry is occupied with the "imitation of persons [*dhawāt*]."[17]

Even though it did not specifically reflect on the difference made by theater, the substance of this distinction was already strongly implied in Ibn Sīnā's commentary. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā's and Ibn Rushd's emphasis on the primacy of character over plot corresponds more closely to the aesthetic hierarchies inculcated by the introspective literary genres—such as lyric poetry and the novel—that constitute the bulk of modern literature. In this sense then, Ibn Rushd's interpretation marked a step in the *Poetics*' adaptation to modern aesthetic principles. While for Ibn Rushd and his predecessors all literary expression was reducible to two forms, genre taxonomies were flexibly applied, so to facilitate rather than constrain the production of literary meaning. In their antithetical as well as complementary relations, the rhetorical modes of praise and blame were highly generative. Ibn Rushd's interest lay in uncovering how the structure of meaning confers coherence on these categories rather than in debating their taxonomic accuracy.

According to Kilito, the amputations entailed in Ibn Rushd's formative attempt to render Aristotle into Arabic are intrinsic to the translational enterprise. Kilito titled his manifesto on this subject *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* (*Lan tatakallamlughatī*), as if to remind the reader of the impossibility of ever grasping the author's original intention in translation. And yet the reading proposed here indicates that Ibn Rushd's rendering of trag-

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17. Ibn Sīnā, "Kitāb al-Shiʿr," in *Fann al-shiʿr; maʿa al-tarjamah al-ʿarabiyyah al-qadimah wa shuruh al-Fārābī wa Ibn Sīnā wa Ibn Rushd*, ed. M. M. Badawī (Cairo: Matabat al-Nahda al-Miṣriyya, 1953), 170; *Avicenna's Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Ismail Dahiyat (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 74. Future references are given parenthetically with the Arabic text followed by the English.

edy and comedy by the rhetorical modes of praise and blame more effectively illustrates culture's translatability—its capacity to morph and shift across time and space—than its singularity.

Renan, Tkatsch, Borges, and Kilito all assume that Ibn Rushd's rendering of tragedy by praise and comedy by blame was motivated by sheer ignorance and that a firsthand encounter with the theater would have resulted in a better translation. But Ibn Rushd followed the precise lead of the Arabic translation of the *Poetics*. Hence the historical imprecision of Borges's story, which attributes the transposition of the meanings of tragedy and comedy exclusively to Ibn Rushd. When Ibn Rushd undertook to interpret the *Poetics*, however, the rhetoricization of tragedy and comedy as praise and blame was already well established in the Islamic exegetical tradition. Although these renderings were not the only ones available to the would-be commentator, they were normative. Indeed, the substitution for tragedy/comedy of praise/blame predates even the translation of the Syriac text into Arabic. It is attested in the writings of al-Kindī (801–73), the first Arabic philosopher in the Greek tradition. In an epitome of the text that predates its Arabic translation, al-Kindī stated that the *Poetics* contains an account of "the meters used in every species of poetry, like the panegyric [*madḥ*], elegy [*marāthin*], and invective [*hijāʾ*]."[18]

By contrast with Ibn Rushd's striving for fluent localization, the only extant fragment of the Syriac translation is marked by a literalist adherence to the original Greek lexicon.[19] Terms such as *tragedy*, *comedy*, and *harmony* are transcribed with exactitude, and no attempt is made to domesticate their meanings for a readership in late antiquity. One reason for what appears to have been the Syriac translator's literalist approach to the Greek text may have been that his translation had very few readers. While domestication features frequently in cultures that have been evolving for centuries, translators within newer literary cultures are more likely to adhere to strictly literal renderings of foreign texts.[20] Hence, when Arabic culture became more confident of itself, Aristotle's works were increasingly appropriated, localized, and adapted to the requirements of a medieval Islamic readership. Ibn Rushd represents the pinnacle of this domesticating process.

18. Michelangelo Guidi and Richard Walzer, "Studi su al-Kindī: Uno scritto introduttivo allo studio di Aristotele," *Atti della Reale Academia dei Lincei, Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 6.6.5 (1940), 402 (Arabic); 417 (Italian trans.). Also see the reference to al-Kindī's epitome in al-Nadim's *Fihrist*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 2:602.

19. See David Margoliouth, *Analecta Orientalum ad Poeticam Aristoteleum* (London, 1887), 77–79, for a translation of the text in question, which is preserved in the thirteenth-century *Dialogues of Jacob bar Shakko*, for an explication of its style (5).

20. Milton, "Foreignization," 112.

The long genealogy for the incorporation of Aristotle's *Poetics* into a poetic tradition is rooted in the interpretative traditions of late antiquity, above all in Themistius (ca. 317–88 CE) and in Alexander Aphrodisias (fl. 200 CE). Al-Fārābī (870–950) specifically cites Themistius, to whom a lost oration (*kalām*) on the *Poetics* was attributed in Arabic sources.[21] Curiously, given that al-Fārābī studied under Abū Bishr, who translated the Syriac *Poetics* into Arabic, the pseudo-Aristotelian tradition represented by Themistius seems to have played a larger role in shaping al-Fārābī's commentary on the *Poetics* than did the *Poetics* itself.[22] Al-Fārābī's brief work, considered by Arberry as "the earliest extant Arabic work on Poetics consciously based on the teaching of Aristotle," consists primarily of an enumeration of the twelve literary forms that the philosopher understood to constitute ancient Greek poetry.[23] Here we see the beginnings of an Arabic rhetoricization of the dramatic genres, particularly in al-Fārābī's definitions of tragedy and comedy, respectively: "Tragedy is a kind of poetry having a particular meter, affording pleasure to all who hear or recite it," states al-Fārābī. "In tragedy," al-Fārābī continues, "good things are mentioned, praiseworthy matters that are an example for others to emulate" (269/275). Comedy by contrast is "a kind of poetry having a particular meter" within which "evil things are mentioned, personal satires, blameworthy characteristics, and reprehensible habits" (269/275–76).

While al-Fārābī's definitions of tragedy and comedy do not by any means constitute a full-blown epistemology of poiesis according to the praise/ blame antinomy of the sort encountered in Ibn Rushd, the lineaments of a rhetoricization of a series of originally nonrhetorical literary forms are already present in this early treatise. Al-Fārābī writes as a compiler of information, not as a philosopher, and is not conscious of breaking new ground with his typology. Far from being an innovator, al-Fārābī was a reviver of an exegetical tradition from late antiquity. Thus, if a misreading is entailed in the rhetoricization of Aristotle's genre typologies, this misreading must be ascribed to an entire exegetical tradition originating in late antiquity. Like the later Arabic philosophers, this early Arabic exegetical tradition had little use for a theory of poetics based on drama. Partly for this reason, Arabic theorists of literary language did not regard mimesis as an effective basis for theorizing literary representation. The concept of literary representa-

21. "Farabi's Canons of Poetry," ed. and trans. A. J. Arberry, *Rivista degli Studi Orientale* 17 (1937): 270 (Arabic text); 276 (English trans.). Future references are given parenthetically with the Arabic text followed by the English. For the Arabic attribution of an oration on Aristotle to Themistius, see J. Tkatsch, *Die arabische Übersetzung der Poetik des Aristoteles und die grundlage der Kritik des griechischen Textes* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1928), 1:122.

22. For al-Fārābī's studies under Abū Bishr, see Nicholas Rescher, *The Development of Arabic Logic* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963), 121–22.

23. A. J. Arberry, introduction to "Farabi's Canons of Poetry," 266.

tion in the premodern Islamic world was better captured by poiesis—a concept Heidegger later glossed as the "bringing-forth" of new realities through the imagination—than by mimesis, which from a premodern Islamic vantage point would seem to be merely servile imitation.[24]

REPLACING MIMESIS BY THE IMAGINATION

One of Ibn Rushd's most startling reversals of the *Poetics*' mimetic orientation occurs with the following propositions: "Poetic statements are imaginative. There are three sorts of imaginative figurations [*al-takhyīl*] and comparison [*al-tashbīh*]" (54/60). Adhering impressively close to the Arabic original, Hermannus Alemannus rendered *takhyīl* (imagination) as *imaginatio* and *tashbīh* (resemblance) as *assimilatio*.[25] Both authors radically departed from the *Poetics*' original vision with this formulation that shifted the conversation from the relation between the subject and the object of representation to the question of how figuration achieves its efficacy and inscribes itself onto the imagination. While such formulations are nowhere to be found in Aristotle's text, they lay the foundation, in Arabic and Latin, for theories of poetic perception that stand to make as profound a contribution to the theorization of literary representation as the Aristotelian tradition of equating poiesis and mimetic representation.

So, given that the rendering of tragedy by praise and comedy by blame was not unique to Ibn Rushd, and this aspect of Ibn Rushd's interpretation draws on a lineage that predates the Arabic translation of the *Poetics* itself, the right question to ask, then, is not why Ibn Rushd rendered Aristotle's modalities of poetry by praise and blame, or why he replaced mimesis by imagination, but why he made this choice against the grain of the Arabic Aristotelian tradition, as represented by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. When Ibn Sīnā undertook to make sense of Aristotle's anatomy of literary form in the *Book of Healing* (*Kitāb al-shifāʾ*), Ibn Sīnā imitated al-Fārābī's literalism, even to the extent of straining comprehension. Although Abū Bishr's Arabic translation had already initiated the transposition of drama into poetry by rendering tragedy as "panegyric" (*madīḥ*), Ibn Sīnā followed al-Fārābī in using the Greek genre term, transliterated as *ṭarāghūdhīyā*.[26] Ibn Sīnā's

24. For Heidegger's gloss on poiesis, see *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York: Continuum, 2006), 284.

25. Hermannus Alemannus, "poetria ibinrosdin," appendix to *De arte poetica: translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeke* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968), 42; "The Middle Commentary of Averroes of Cordova on the *Poetics* of Aristotle," trans. O. B. Hardison, in A. Preminger et al., *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Ungar, 1974), 349. Future references are given parenthetically with the Latin text followed by the English.

26. Ibn Sīnā, "Kitāb al-Shiʿr," 166/67; al-Fārābī, 269/275.

practice was in keeping with the practice of transliterating rather than translating Greek terms that could not readily be assimilated into Arabic.[27] For the Greek translation movement in its early stages, adopting the most literal approach seemed the safest translation strategy. By the time the Greek-Arabic encounter reached twelfth-century Spain, however, pure literalism had come to seem outmoded and irrelevant to contemporary Arabic and Mozarabic literary culture. Freer, localizing renderings had come to seem more interesting as well as more important than strictly literal versions.

The foregoing indication that Ibn Rushd chose to render tragedy and comedy as praise and blame when he had other options again generates the question, why did the Andalusian philosopher make such a choice when he was working within a philosophical-exegetical tradition that placed a high value on philological exactitude even to the extent of preferring transliteration to translation? Butterworth's acknowledgment that Averroes aimed less to provide "a careful explanation of Aristotle's account of poetry" than to glean "from that account features common to all or most nations in the light of which he can carry out his own investigation of Arabic poetry" offers one clue regarding the newness of his method.[28] Gutas provides another clue when he notes that Ibn Rushd's innovation as a commentator consisted of his "attempt to apply some of the ideas which he understood from Aristotle's book to specimens taken from Arabic literature."[29]

With respect to his interest in using Aristotelian poetics to as a tool to elucidate Arabic poetry, Ibn Rushd breaks with both al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, neither of whom cited as extensively from the Arabic poetic canon—or from any poetic canon for that matter—as did Ibn Rushd, and both of whom were less interested in comparing the merits of varying literary forms than in probing the imagination's philosophical foundations. (At the same time, it is clear that Ibn Rushd's intervention would have been unthinkable without these two philosophical predecessors.) Of the three Arabic peripatetic philosophers, Ibn Rushd is the most Aristotelian with respect to his belief in poetry's pedagogical usefulness, while al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā are more interested in locating poetry within a hierarchy of disciplines. While al-Fārābī took the most comprehensive approach to this task in his *Catalogue of the Sciences* (*Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿUlūm*), Ibn Sīnā aimed to cosmologically uncover poetry's epistemology in his *Book of Healing*. Neither approach suited Ibn Rushd, who was most deeply concerned with the practical business of evaluating poetry as literary figuration.

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27. On this methodological distinction between the translators' and the peripatetic philosopher's approach, see Dimitri Gutas, "On Translating Averroes' Commentaries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110 (1990): 95; and Ismail Dahiyat, *Avicenna's Commentary*, 5.

28. Butterworth, "Introduction," in *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, 19.

29. Gutas, "On Translating Averroes' Commentaries," 100.

An even deeper indication of the reasons behind Ibn Rushd's philosophical reworking of Aristotle's text is afforded by the philosopher himself. In *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al-tahāfut*), his refutation of al-Ghazali's similarly titled attack on the philosophers, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), Ibn Rushd argued out in painstaking detail the objective reality of philosophical universals. Just as Aristotle had argued that poetry is more philosophical than history due to its reliance on probability (*Poetics* 9.1451b5–7), so too was Ibn Rushd persuaded of the objective existence of truths based on reason. This was Ibn Rushd's way of conceiving the relation between the probable and improbable. Whereas al-Ghazali, persuaded that God's omniscience limited the scope of human reason, had reduced philosophical universals to unreal phenomena existing subjectively in the mind, Ibn Rushd maintained against al-Ghazali that universals "exist potentially, not actually in the external world; indeed, if they did not exist at all in the outside world they would be false."[30] Even more directly related to his belief in the truth-value of poetry, Ibn Rushd argued in a later work, *The Decisive Treatise* (*Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*), dedicated to demonstrating the harmony of religion and philosophy and thereby to defending the authority of worldly knowledge, that "one who is not cognizant of artfulness is not cognizant of what has been artfully made [*al-maṣnūʿ*], and one who is not cognizant of what has been artfully made is not cognizant of the Artisan [*al-ṣānaʿa*]," namely God.[31] To know God was to apprehend the poetic representation of reality, which accorded with the dictates of reason. Ibn Rushd's belief in the revelation of universals through aesthetic and rational means motivated his adaptation of Aristotelian poetics to his own literary milieu and licensed his rhetoricization of literary forms to bring poetics into closer alignment with philosophy.

In rendering tragedy by praise and comedy by blame, Ibn Rushd chose the exegetical path most suitable to comparative literary analysis. Had he followed the path of his illustrious predecessor Ibn Sīnā, and transliterated rather than translated Aristotle's alien terms, Ibn Rushd would not have attracted the opprobrium of Renan, Borges, and Kilito. And yet such literalism would have done little to advance world literature. Most important, had Ibn Rushd set forth a theory of poetics in terms alien to Arabic literary culture but more proximate to Aristotle, he would not have been able to deploy the *Poetics* to elucidate the poetry of al-Mutanabbī, Abū Firās, and Abū Tammān. Although Ibn Rushd entered the scene after many centuries of Qurʾānic exegetes and rhetoricians, from al-Rummānī to al-Bāqillānī to al-Jurjānī, had cultivated a method for reading Arabic poetry alongside the

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30. Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, trans. Simon Van Der Bergh (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial, 1954), 65.

31. Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*, 9.

Qurʾān, such an interpretive feat with regard to Arabic poetry had never before been performed within the Arabic Aristotelian tradition.[32] For Ibn Rushd, the rendering of tragedy and comedy by praise and blame was a necessary element in his appropriation of a text that would eventually become—but which at the time of his writing was not—a normative account of poetic signification. One of Ibn Rushd's many achievements is to have made it possible for Arabic scholars to see in Aristotle's *Poetics* a tool for understanding their own literary tradition, rather than an arcane document pertaining only to a distant Greek literature.

Ibn Rushd's exegesis reveals a kinship between the poet's creativity and the philosopher's universalizing aspirations. Indeed, to a greater degree than his predecessors as well as his modern critics, Ibn Rushd reads Aristotle's *Poetics* with the eyes of a poet. The concept that guides him is less mimesis—understood as the reproduction of reality—than poiesis: imaginative recreation in a completely new linguistic and literary environment, which was for Aristotle congruous with poetry itself. Poiesis was what Arabic and Greek philosophers of literature shared in common; mimesis was the grounds on which they diverged. Consequently, Arabic philosophy's grounds for comparison with Aristotelian poetics was more fully encapsulated in the former than the latter. Ibn Rushd approximated the Greek sense of poiesis through the Arabic term *takhyīl* (image making).[33] Poiesis, not mimesis, was uppermost in Ibn Rushd's mind when he distinguished between the "poetic statement [*qawl al-shiʿrī*] that urges belief [*al-iʿtiqād*]" and the "poetic statement that urges character [*al-ʿāda*]" (72/78). Whereas the latter "impels us to an action [*ʿamal*]," the former "only influences us to believe that something exists or does not exist, not to seek it or reject it" (72/78).[34]

Since poiesis works at a higher level of abstraction than mimesis, its aims are more philosophical. While Arabic translators and commentators maneuvered among a series of terms—*muḥāka, takhyīl, tashbīh,* and *tamthīl*—to render mimesis, Islamic philosophy's deepest contribution to global

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32. For an introduction to Islamic rhetoric, see Gustave von Grunebaum's translation of al-Bāqillānī's *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān: A Tenth-Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1950).

33. On this concept in classical Arabic literary theory, see *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond (Oxford: Oxbow, 2008); and Wolfhart Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und griechische Poetik: Ḥāzim al-Qarṭājannī's Grundlegung der Poetik mit Hilfe aristotelischer Begriffe* (Beirut: Beiruter Texte und Studien, 1969), 149–54. The distinction proposed here between mimesis and poiesis is not intended to be definitive and is explored in greater detail with respect to Perso-Arabic poetics in Rebecca Gould, "Travelling Romance: Persian Narrative and Vernacular Imaginations from South Asia to the Caucasus" (unpublished manuscript, 2014).

34. Hermannus's text here (49/356) is extremely close to the Arabic original.

poetics lies more in what it had to say about the role of the imagination than in any theory of mimetic representation. When Ibn Rushd asserted that "poetic discourses are imaginative" (54/60) he referenced *takhyīl* instead of the more precise Arabic term for mimesis, *muḥāka* (inscription, engraving). Regarding poetry's capacity to approximate reality as one of its lesser powers, Ibn Rushd set forth an even more ambitious thesis. Buoyed by an Arabic tradition that saw poetry as a form of creation ex nihilo, he identified the discursive specificity of poetry through the work it performs on the imagination.

The rendering of *takhyīl* by "mimesis" and its variants in English translations of Ibn Rushd's commentary has served to obscure the Arabic philosophical tradition's disengagement from this aspect of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition and its replacement of the Greek theory of representation by concepts more rooted in Islamic thought.[35] Like Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd's interest in poetry lay primarily in its ability to bring new worlds into being by fabricating new representations. The relation between these representations and the nonrepresentational perfection that lay at the pinnacle of the Platonic hierarchy of forms was not of great concern to the Arabic rhetorical tradition.

And yet, by disengaging from what might be seen as a correspondence theory of truth applied to literature, neither Ibn Rushd nor his Latin translator disengaged from the intersection between the text and the world. To the contrary, persuaded that, as Ibn Rushd elsewhere maintained, the truth discovered by the ancients "agrees with and bears witness to the truth" of Islamic and Christian civilization, both translators intensified that relation by rhetoricizing ancient Greek literary forms.[36] Among recent scholars, Karla Mallette is the most discerning with regard to the practical implications of the rhetorical concept of poetry that reverberated across the medieval Mediterranean and the concomitant irrelevance of the mimesis concept for a medieval readership. Because Ibn Rushd and Hermannus understood Aristotle's *Poetics* "as a manual for those who intended to use words to effect change in the world, they viewed it in a continuum with ethics," Mallette notes.[37] Mallette correlates this medieval ethical orientation to poetry with the rendering of tragedy and comedy by praise and blame.

Aristotle of course famously revised his master's condemnation of poetry by inverting the Platonic theory of forms and reinterpreting Platonic mimesis. Ibn Rushd and his Islamic and Latin contemporaries found other ways

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35. The rendering of *takhyīl* as "imitation," followed by Butterworth in his translation, and criticized by Gutas, "On Translating Averroes' Commentaries," 98. See also n. 22 above.

36. Ibn Rushd, *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl*, 9.

37. Karla Mallette, "Beyond Mimesis: Aristotle's Poetics in the Medieval Mediterranean," *PMLA* 124 (2009): 585.

of elucidating the discursive work done by literature in and on the world. They were able to elude the Platonic rejection of poetry because they were not trapped within a theory of forms that made all imitations false simulations of superior originals.[38] Avoiding a hierarchal concept of representation, they foregrounded ethics over ontology. Whereas the ancient Greek emphasis on mimesis arose from a culture that saw artistic expression embodied first and foremost in the performing arts and that was continuously confronted with simulacra of reality, medieval commentators such as Ibn Rushd and Hermannus Alemannus worked within cultures that discerned the deepest forms of creativity in the written word.[39] Hence their preoccupation with poetics was matched by their concern with rhetoric. This second concern derived its inspiration in part from another Aristotelian text, the *Rhetoric*, while also engaging with the indigenous Arabic tradition of ʿ*ilm al-balāgha* (the science of rhetoric).[40] The Arabic philosophers' belief in poetry's efficacy was contingent on their impulse to classify poetry as either praise or blame. To interpret their rhetorical-didactic orientation to poetry as a fall from an imagined Platonic-Aristotelian state of grace is to instrumentalize the imagination in the service of a metaphysical hierarchy of forms.

While Aristotle argued that, pace Plato, mimetic art partakes of truth, even the Stagirite was unable to do away entirely with the assumption that art's value is measured by the accuracy of its representation of the world. Islamic aesthetics by contrast emphasized the generative and even magical powers of the imagination.[41] Herein lies a basic difference between Aristotle and his Arabic commentators: the distance between the world and its aesthetic representation is the beginning of poiesis in Arabic literary criticism. "The best poetry is that which lies the most [*khayr al-shiʿr akdhabuhu*]," runs a famous Arabic proverb that was cited by many Arabic rhetoricians, including al-Jurjānī.[42] According to this logic, the distance between the

38. For another account of the impact of this Platonic duality on aesthetics, see Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 27 (1983): 45–56.

39. For an important attempt to dislocate the normative assumptions guiding the *Poetics*' dependency on the dramatic forms, see Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1990), esp. 26 and 216.

40. For the Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, see *Arisṭūṭālīs al-Khiṭābah: al-tarjamah al-ʿArabīyah al-qadīmah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1979); and the studies by Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); and Uwe Vagelpohl, *Aristotle's Rhetoric in the East: The Syriac and Arabic Translation and Commentary Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

41. For a discussion of these local Islamic traditions concerning poetry's metaphysics, see J. Christoph Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh: The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York University Press, 1988).

42. ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-Balāgha*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul: Istanbul Government Press, 1954), 243. For additional engagements with this provocative statement in the Ara-

world and its representation in literature is to be cultivated, theorized, and celebrated, whereas in the Platonic tradition this distance is a problem to be overcome.

By privileging language over representation, poetry over drama, and the work of the imagination over conformity to representational aesthetics, Ibn Rushd was able to detach literary meaning from a correspondence theory of truth without relinquishing literature's capacity to intervene in the world. Aristotle, preoccupied as his treatise was by the concept of mimesis, assumed the dependency of art on reality and never sought to reverse that relation. Aristotle's concept of probability enabled him to demonstrate the efficacy of artistic representation in relation to other discourses (such as history), but, unlike Arabic and Persian theorists of poetics, Aristotle did not argue for poetry's ontological primacy in the world of representations. For Aristotle, as for Plato, poetry was always, at some level, subordinate to another level of discourse that was perceived as more proximate to truth. Indeed, the mere attempt to justify poetry (as against history) in terms of philosophy shows that, for Aristotle, philosophy was more important than poetry.

As mediators between Greek learning and Islamic literary culture, and as philosophers, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd worked at the peripheries of an Islamic culture in which their more theologically grounded counterparts, al-Rummānī, al-Bāqillānī, and al-Jurjānī, were more deeply immersed. Most scholars have concluded that medieval Arabic philosophical engagements with Aristotle did not directly impact Arabic poetry or poetics.[43] And yet the traffic in the opposite direction—from the Arabic-speaking world to Western Europe—was vibrant and diverse enough to make a lasting impact on European literary theory. What these marginal philosophers, Ibn Rushd in particular, accomplished that was original was to enrich the philosophical traditions of classical antiquity with a medieval Islamic way of reading the poetic artifact. This worldview included, among other things, an emphasis on the rhetorical aspects of artistic expression. The emphasis for both Plato and Aristotle was on how art represents the world rather than, as for the Arabic tradition, how art brings the world into being through stylized expression. Far from being a flaw, the value and importance of Ibn Rushd's encounter with Aristotelian *Poetics* is his adaptation of its alien and un-Islamic conception of poetry to local rhetorical norms.

bic rhetorical tradition, see J. Christoph Bürgel, "'Die beste Dichtung ist die lügenreichste': Wesen und Bedeutung eines literarischen Streites des arabischen Mittelalters im Lichte komparatistisher Betrachtung," *Oriens* 23/24 (1974): 7–102.

43. Amjad Trabulsi argues the contrary in *La Critique Poétique des Arabes jusqu'au Ve Siècle de l'Hégire* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1958). For the (more common) view that there was no direct influence, see S. A. Bonebakker, "Aspects of the History of Literary Rhetoric and Poetics in Arabic Literature," *Viator: Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1 (1970): 90–95; and I. G. Krachkovsky's introduction to Ibn al-Muʿtazz's *Kitāb al-Badīʿ* (London: Luzac, 1930).

BORGESIAN INTERPELLATIONS

Alone among Ibn Rushd's detractors, Borges gestured explicitly toward the otherwise imperceptible advantages of Ibn Rushd's imprecise rendering of tragedy and comedy by praise and blame. One of the most poignant moments in "Averroes's Search" is when the philosopher initiates a post-prandial discussion concerning the merits and demerits of a poetic figure imagined into being by the pre-Islamic poet Zuhayr (ca. 520–609). Zuhayr is known in the annals of Arabic literature as the poet who, more than any other of his contemporaries, avoided unfamiliar language and "distin-guished himself by praising a man only according to the virtues he really possessed."[44]

The poetic figure that hovers over the dinner table in the philosopher's home in twelfth-century Cordoba is the likening of destiny to an old, blind camel. The least learned among Ibn Rushd's guests claims that "five hun-dred years of admiration" have worn the image thin and deprived it of poetic intensity. The guests unanimously assent. Alone among those pres-ent, Ibn Rushd dissents from the consensus upheld by his guests. He eventu-ally breaks his silence to deliver the most suggestive words spoken that eve-ning, in defense of images hallowed by custom and tradition. Ibn Rushd's philosophical speech is conditioned by the different temporalities pertain-ing to poetry and the discourses of everyday life. "Time," Ibn Rushd muses, "which ravages fortresses, *enriches* poetry" (139; emphasis added). Ibn Rushd then counters his guests' disdain for texts that have borne multiple readings with the argument that Zuhayr's poetry is enriched by the many interpreta-tions that accrue to it through its journey across the centuries.

Whereas Ibn Rushd's guests only note that the passage of time can make a cliché from a brilliant image, Ibn Rushd focuses on the creative infusion afforded by multiple readings. To embrace polysemy as the goal of poetic meaning is implicitly to adopt a non-Platonic theory of literary representa-tion. It is to relinquish the expectation that poetry approximates truth and instead to assert that, by generating new meanings and new realities, poetry brings truth into being. Over time, readers graft onto Zuhayr's image new associations until his poem becomes thicker, denser with meanings, and more suffused with significations.

Persuaded as he is of the aesthetic superiority of polysemy over singular meaning, Ibn Rushd celebrates the work done to a literary text in time, as it acquires new readers who graft their life experiences onto their readings of the text. The philosopher argues that a text is enriched by every new read-

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44. Bonebakker, "Aspects of the History," 81 n. 17, offers a long list of medieval Arabic liter-ary critics, from al-Jumaḥi to Ibn Rashīq, who attributed this assessment of Zuhayr to the caliph ʿUmar.

ing to which it is subjected and that nothing is more conducive to multiple readings than the passage of time. Whereas the original comparison consisted of only two terms, *camel* and *old man*, "today," notes Ibn Rushd, "it has four. Time widens the circle of the verses" (139).[45] Ibn Rushd concludes by gesturing toward poetry's highest goal. "I myself," he declares, "know some verses that are, like music, all things to all men" (139).

There is yet another dimension to Borges's revelation. Whereas Renan and Kilito begin by assuming that Ibn Rushd's ignorance of Greek drama led deterministically to his rendering of tragedy and comedy by praise and blame, and thereby deny any scope for the philosopher's imagination, Borges subtly suggests that the concept of drama was available to the Cordoban philosopher even though this awareness remained opaque in his commentary. Borges follows Renan's lead: he begins apologetically, assuming that the conditions under which Ibn Rushd labored made an accurate understanding of Aristotle's text impossible. "Averroes," Borges writes, ventriloquizing the Orientalist tradition, "who knew neither Syriac nor Greek, was working from a translation of a translation" (135). Like Renan before him and like Kilito afterward, Borges considers the incommensurability of ancient Greek and medieval Arabic cultures to lie at the origin of Ibn Rushd's incomprehension. And yet this seemingly straightforward argument for the impossibility of translation is undermined by two moments in the text, both of which unfold in lapidary fashion and leave to the reader the task of assessing Ibn Rushd's legacy.

The first moment occurs when Ibn Rushd takes a break from his arduous work on *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*. While surveying his library in search of illumination regarding the meaning of the terms *tragedia* and *komedia*, Ibn Rushd glances out his window and gazes on the grounds below. There he sees, through the bars of his balcony, a group of children playing. One child from among the group is pretending to be a muezzin, the person who recites the Islamic call to prayer five times a day from the minaret (tower) of a mosque. A second boy, standing motionless and supporting the erstwhile muezzin on his shoulders, pretends to be the minaret from which the muezzin recites the call to prayer. A third boy, kneeling and bowing low in the dirt, is the congregation of the faithful. This spectacle does not last long because all three boys want to play the muezzin and none wants to assume the role of the motionless minaret or the congregation of the faithful. But this perfor-

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45. In the entirety of *El Aleph*, the story collection of which the Averroes story is part, the term rendered here as "circle" (*ámbito*, more precisely "scope," "ambit") occurs only three times: at the beginning and end of the Averroes story, with reference to the "circle" that bounded Averroes and prevented him from understanding tragedy and comedy, and here, with reference to the space of poetry that is widened by time. Formally reproducing its semantic content by appearing both at the story's beginning and at its end, "circle" functions as a metonym for a historical horizon that is bounded but also extended by time.

mance drags on long enough to suggest to the discerning reader that, just as every culture possesses its own distinct notion of literature, so too every culture possesses its own dramatic forms, whether or not these forms are denominated as such and whether or not these forms are made foundational to its genre systems. Given the universal grounds for comparison that was the motive, stimulus, and goal of Ibn Rushd's endeavors, Kilito's untranslatability thesis appears untenable within the Borgesian framework.

This Borgesian suggestion concerning the availability to Ibn Rushd of a concept of tragedy that was within his conceptual grasp even while the term itself remained a mystery is confirmed by a second postprandial exchange between Ibn Rushd and his dinner guests. One of his guests, Abu al-Hasan, has traveled all over the world, as far as China. All of Ibn Rushd's guests are eager to hear tales of the sights Abu al-Hasan has seen in the course of his travels. Abu al-Hasan obliges by telling of a strange phenomenon he encountered in Canton (Borges borrows the term used by Arabic travel writers such as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa to describe this region of southern China: Sin Kalán, literally meaning "Great China").[46] A group of Muslim merchants conduct Abu al-Hasan to a house of "painted wood" that resembles "a single room, with rows of cabinet-like contrivances, or balconies, stacked on top each other" (137). The structure Abu al-Hasan describes without being able to name is, of course, a theater. "There were people eating and drinking," Abu al-Hasan elaborates, "there were people sitting on the floor as well, and also on a raised terrace" in the midst of a performance of "fifteen or twenty wearing crimson masks who prayed and sang and conversed among themselves" (137–38). As with the tableaux of children playacting the roles of a muezzin, minaret, and congregation below Ibn Rushd's window, the imaginary status of these proceedings is underscored by the narrator: the masked actors "were imprisoned, but no one could see the prison; they rode on horses, but the horse was not to be seen; they waged battle, but the swords were of bamboo; they died, and then they walked again" (138).

Similarly to the famous opera scene in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that renders the spectacle on stage strange through defamiliarization, Abu al-Hasan describes the performance he witnessed in Canton in terms that convey its strangeness to the Arab milieu. Without using an Arabic term for drama or theater, Abu al-Hasan makes available to Ibn Rushd in twelfth-century Cordoba all he would have had to know in order to adequately understand what Aristotle meant by tragedy and comedy. (Meanwhile, apart from Borges's story, we know that the terms *tragedy* and *comedy* had been transliterated into

46. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah, texte arabe, accompagne d'une traduction*, ed. C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1853–58), 93–93. For Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's use of Şin Kalān, see Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-modern Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 155.

the Arabic lexicon by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā much earlier.) Both the playacting children and the traveler's tale indicate that the mimetic element assumed to be missing from Ibn Rushd's commentary and necessary for his comprehension of the text in fact was already abundant in the target culture. This reading is supplemented by a medievalist's lexicographical observation that "throughout the middle ages any place, usually but not necessarily out of doors, where public and secular entertainments were given—often public square or marketplace—might be called a theatre."[47] While Ibn Rushd lived and wrote in an Islamic Spain milieu, the medieval European theatrical tradition was also part of his world. The mismatch between tragedy and praise, on the one hand, and comedy and blame, on the other, is less the result of cultural misrecognition than of two similar phenomena acquiring different names in different literary cultures. Establishing a grounds for comparison, this difference-in-sameness helps the Arabic philosopher ground the comparative study of literary form, thereby creating a basis for a comparative poetics that still awaits its analytical realization.

Whatever Borges's intentions, Ibn Rushd's measurement of Zuhayr's excellence—the ability of his images to signify all things to all readers and listeners—elucidates the *Poetics* as well as Ibn Rushd's commentary on it. Both texts bear an uncanny capacity for generating multiple interpretations. The key question generated by their reception histories is not whether these texts were altered in transmission but rather whether they could engender new meanings and new ways of reading poetry when considered in light of different textual traditions. That time widens the circle of meanings does not mean that the old is better than the new. Rather, Borges's axiom suggests that the translatability of literary form is released into the world gradually, not in a single instant. The translatability of literary form is activated through a text's ability to signify different things to different people and for its chords to resound differently to different ears.

From this vantage point, Kilito's pessimism regarding the translatability of cultures seems to evade a deeper issue. It is symptomatic of this evasion that Kilito cites Petrarch's famous remarks condemning the Arabs and their poetry as "nothing more than seductive . . . nothing more disgusting" as the epigraph to his work without noting that, in all likelihood, nearly everything that Petrarch knew about Arabic poetry would have reached him via Ibn Rushd's commentary, just as Kilito's own access to Petrarch's writings was mediated by French and Arabic sources.[48] The Greek-Arabic-

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47. Mary Marshall, "Theatre in the Middle Ages: Evidence from the Dictionaries and Glosses," *Symposium: A Journal Devoted to Modern Foreign Languages and Literature* 4 (1950): 382.

48. For a recent discussion of Petrarch's access to Ibn Rushd's text, see Karla Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 34–64. Older significant discussions include C. H. L. Bodenham, "Petrarch and the

Latin exchange generated far more meanings, including productive mis-readings, than either Petrarch or Kilito are willing or able to acknowledge. In order for Aristotle's *Poetics* to illuminate medieval Arabic poetry, the literary forms specific to ancient Greece had to undergo modification. But there is no mandate for reading the modification Ibn Rushd performed on Aristotle's text as a reduction in its meaning. Indeed, such modifications were probably underway before Aristotle's ideas on poetry were given textual form, for as we know today, the *Poetics* is a set of lecture notes probably compiled by Aristotle's students.[49] Aristotle's works are well known to have become esoteric for most readers during their late antique reception.[50] In the form in which it has reached us, Aristotle's text hardly represents the philosopher's unmediated reflections on the interface between form and meaning or representation and the making of poetry.

Notwithstanding the assumption of a linear, if fragmented, continuity between the literary forms of ancient Greece and modern European literary genres that still pervades scholarship on the *Poetics*, few theorists of modern literature turn to drama as to a normative model for literary discourse.[51] Those for whom modern literature is the norm look to the novel as modern literature's ur-genre (perhaps arguing for the epic as the novel's precursor), while those oriented to premodern literary cultures look to the lyric.[52] With respect to the foregrounding of drama as the normative model for literature by classical theorists of literary language, the real parallel is between ancient Greece and ancient India, not between Greece and Europe.[53] With respect to the emphasis on rhetoric, the closest parallels are between medieval Islam, late antiquity, and ancient Greece. Against this background, modern European theories of literature are foreign and strange, worth examining on their own terms but hardly adequate guides to the aesthetic values of places and times that never came under their influence.

Poetry of the Arabs," *Romanische Forschungen* 94 (1982): 167–78; H. A. Kelly, "Aristotle-Averroes-Alemannus on Tragedy: The Influence of the Poetics on the Middle Ages," *Viator* 10 (1979): 206; and Charles Burnett, "Petrarch and Averroes: An Episode in the History of Poetics," in *The Medieval Mind: Hispanic Studies in Honour of Alan Deyermond*, ed. Ralph Penny and Ian Macpherson (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 1997), 49–56.

49. Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 32.

50. See D. S. Margoliouth, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), 21–76.

51. An unfortunate instance of the master narrative linking ancient Greece to modern Europe is the collection *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Princeton University Press, 1992), particularly the essay by Stephen Halliwell on "The Poetics and Its Interpreters" (409–23), which makes no reference to the Arabic exegetical tradition.

52. Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, esp. 26 and 216.

53. Much like Aristotle's *Poetics*, the earliest Sanskrit treatise on aesthetics, the *Natyasastra* attributed to Bharata-Muni, is exclusively concerned with drama. For a translation of this text by Manomohan Ghosh, see *The Natyasastra: A Treatise on Ancient Indian Dramaturgy and Histrionics* (Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, 1956).

When the *Poetics* is interpreted as a prolegomenon to literary theory today, and as one of the foundational texts establishing a grounds for comparative literature, when it is used as an introductory text in graduate proseminars on comparative literature, it is read as Ibn Rushd himself read the text: for what it has to say about poetics, beyond ancient Greece. While this approach has contributed to the text's extraordinary afterlife, it can make no claims to be consistent with the usages envisioned for the *Poetics* in its original context. Nor does Ibn Rushd's approach correspond to the later reception of the *Poetics* in early modern Europe, wherein Italian critics such as Antonio Riccoboni (1541–99) made of Aristotle's text a "practical manual for poets and playwrights."[54] At the same time, Ibn Rushd's willingness to assimilate the culturally specific aspects of Aristotle's text into his immediate milieu paved the way for the subsequent European appropriations of the text by Hermannus Alemannus, Lorenzo Valla, Julius Caesar Scaliger, and Umberto Eco. The rendering of tragedy by praise and comedy by blame licensed later adaptations, which in turn made of the *Poetics* a text that could elucidate all literatures, if in inevitably differing ways, and only after reading the original against the grain.

With respect to its emphasis on dramatic literature, Aristotle's *Poetics* is indisputably a product of its epoch. The text's relevance beyond its original milieu resides more in its exegetical method—including especially the use of textual citations to substantiate epistemological claims that Ibn Rushd put to good use in his commentary—than in general precepts. Rather than offer a universal theory of poetry, as Plato did through Socrates in the *Republic*, Aristotle and Ibn Rushd pioneered a method for comparative poetics. Their achievement suggests that the *Poetics* and its commentary's merging of literary form and philosophical analysis should be regarded as a strength rather than as a weakness. That Aristotle's explications are tied to readings of specific texts and genres attests to the literary acumen that accompanied his philosophical agenda. Just as Aristotle's insights were tied to his time and place, so too were Ibn Rushd's horizons intensively shaped by his immersion in Arabic poetry.

To fault the Arab philosopher for rendering tragedy as praise and comedy as blame is to internalize the Orientalist fallacy that makes of ancient Athens the gold standard for all literary cultures and regards any departure from Greek norms as a fall from grace. A more productive way of narrating the circuitous route followed by the *Poetics* as it journeyed from Athens to Baghdad (via Abū Bishr and al-Fārābī) to Central Asia (via Ibn Sīnā) and to

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54. John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship: From the Revival of Learning* (Cambridge University Press, 1908), 134. For a recent facsimile reprint of this work, see *Poetica Aristotelis Latine conversa (1587) Compendium Artis poeticae Aristotelis [ab] Antonio Riccoboni (1591)* (Munich: Fink, 1970).

al-Andalus (via Ibn Rushd) is to see each iteration as a testimony to the translatability of literary norms that in turn makes possible the translatability of literary form. In all its multifarious deployments, the power of poetry resides in its ability to act on the imagination. In the words of al-Fārābī, poetry is "composed of things that aim at imaginative assent . . . and result in seeing it as better or worse, more beautiful or uglier, dignified or base."[55] Ibn Rushd echoes al-Fārābī when he notes that, unlike rhetoric, poetry achieves its mission when it persuades us of a particular belief (*iʿtiqād*).[56] The imaginative assent referenced by al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd stimulates a transformation of the seer as well as of the seen. The translatability of literary form across time and space gives the lie to the still-prevalent scholarly habit of treating Arab poets, translators, commentators, and philosophers as merely the flawed and ignorant mediators of an immutable Greek civilization.

Ibn Rushd's illustrious predecessor Ibn Sīnā opened the second chapter of his commentary on the *Poetics* by limiting his interpretation to that part of the *Poetics* "which we are able to understand" (177). Ibn Sīnā acknowledged that the text was full of "discussions of poems and descriptions" peculiar to the Greeks (177). The Cordoban philosopher declared his interest in precisely that part of the *Poetics* that could be understood without reference to the Greek tradition. While al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā systematically sought to gain a deeper grasp of the Greek genre system, Ibn Rushd did not subordinate his inquiry to such an information-gathering end. Far from seeking to understand Greek literature, Ibn Rushd aimed to understand those aspects of Aristotle's *Poetics* that pertain to the literatures of all peoples, including the Arabs. While Ibn Sīnā's approach was more lexically precise, Ibn Rushd's hermeneutics offers a more substantial precedent for the discipline of comparative literature. What the latter's commentary sacrifices with respect to technical precision it gains with respect to creative intervention. While Ibn Rushd failed to explicate Greek literary forms to an Arab readership, he made great strides toward enabling a comparative poetics that could give the lie to the only lesson that Petrarch took away from his encounter with Ibn Rushd in Hermannus's translation.

In what remains the best study of the poetics of praise for the early modern period, O. B. Hardison foregrounds the centrality of Ibn Rushd's intervention. "Had [Ibn Rushd's] paraphrase added only the magic name of Aristotle to the theory of praise," Hardison notes, "it would be a significant document."[57] However, Ibn Rushd went beyond the mere infusion of Aris-

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55. Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿUlūm*, ed. ʿUthmān Amīn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣrīyah, 1968), 83.

56. See Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīṣ*, 68–72, 79/75–79, 86. Ibn Sīnā's term is *raʾy* (179/94), which comes closer to meaning "opinion." Both terms correspond to Aristotle's *dianoia*.

57. Hardison, *The Enduring Monument*, 35.

totle and revived a discussion from late antiquity concerning the modalities of poetic speech. Looking beyond the Latin critics Donatus and Fulgentius, who had discussed praise solely in connection with Vergil's *Aeneid*, Ibn Rushd broadened the theory of praise to include all literary genres.

It may be the case that Ibn Rushd achieved this clarity by neglecting essential aspects of Aristotle's poetics, such as plot (*mythos*) and mimesis. It may also be true that Ibn Rushd chose to focus exclusively on those aspects of Aristotle's poetics that could be easily assimilated by the Arabic literary canon. But if the reduction of poiesis to praise and blame is regarded as an error, it must be acknowledged that Ibn Rushd's mistranslation—which is better understood as simply a variant interpretation—was one of the most productive misreadings in world literary history.