An Analysis of the Changing Interpretation of Aristotle’s “Poetics”

The Context Theory and Poetic Theory in Aristotle and Avicenna

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Classical Studies

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the philosophical significance of Aristotle’s Poetics and its place in his corpus. Today, Aristotle’s poetic theory is largely ignored by the philosophical community, despite its significance from antiquity through the medieval period. This study examines the history of poetic theory, from Pre-Aristotelian views on poetic imitation, through Aristotle’s Poetics itself, and in commentaries by his successors in the Alexandrian school and Medieval Arabic philosophy. Focusing on Aristotle’s text and its commentary by Avicenna, we find that the Poetics does have philosophical value, and that it advances our understanding of psychology, reasoning, language, and logic. This study argues that the current philosophical community’s classification and treatment of Aristotle and his commentators’ conceptualization of poetic theory is problematic, and proposes a new possible classification placement for Aristotle’s Poetics among his works.
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Chapter One

Poetic Imitation Before Aristotle

Poetry has a long and prosperous history in Ancient Greece, from the Bronze Age epics of Homer and Hesiod, through the Archaic Period’s lyric poetry of Pindar and Sappho, to the Classical Period’s theatrical performances of Aeschylus and Aristophanes, to name only a few. Plato was the first philosopher to discuss poetry and poetic imitation (mimesis) in analyzing the societal value of fictional stories. In his Republic, he comments on poetic imitation in regards to its truth and influence, and develops a critique of poetry, specifically for its potential in improperly educating and influencing the beliefs of an audience into changing moral norms and political institutions.

A. The Greek Imitative Tradition

Almost all of the poetic imitation in the Greek tradition relies on mythology or legendary history, and discusses problems of ethics and politics. The first works of Greek poetry still extant today came in the form of epic, and helped shape the history of storytelling in the European world – the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer, and the Theogony and Works and Days of Hesiod. All four of these works have elements of mythology and legendary history; Theogony is about the mythological foundation of the universe and early humanity, and the Odyssey tells of a legendary Greek king fighting against gods and monsters in his quest home. Similarly, all four of these works examine human morality and political institutions; the Iliad tells of a terrible war fought by the Bronze Age warrior-elites, and Works and Days is about how to live the best life possible as a peasant farmer. Lyric poetry and theater mostly continued these trends, discussing morality and politics and evoking a relation to or a creating a setting within myth and legend.
By the Classical Period, in which Plato and Aristotle both lived, poetic imitation mostly took the form of tragedy and comedy. No matter what mode it undertook, poetry to the Greeks was a performance. Theater, lyric, and epic were all performed for a public audience, often in front of crowds, and even the poorest of city-dwellers enjoyed them. Poetry, along with the rhetoric of political figures, was communal in Greek society; they served as the only source of news, history, discourse, and education available to everyone. It held a vital role in society, and was incredibly influential.

B. Plato’s Critique of Imitation

_The Republic_ is one of Plato’s best known works and covers Platonic doctrine in almost every philosophical regard, including politics, religion, metaphysics, and literature. Most of the work consists in Plato setting up a “just city”, a utopian society which is used as an extended metaphor for the perfect soul. Plato addresses almost every aspect of the city, including its laws. Within these laws, Plato comments on the utility of literature, oral tradition, and theater. Plato censors poetry in the "just city" of his _Republic_, arguing that the lack of truth in stories and the influential nature of imitation leads to moral and political corruption.

i. Truth in Poetic Imitation

Plato believes fiction to be misleading and corruptive of the mind. He claims that people are ignorant and believe false stories, arguing that it is his job as a philosopher to show truth to others by refuting these stories. Plato argues that the false nature of stories, especially tragedy,
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prevents them from holding any value. In applying his theory of forms to imitation, Plato finds poetic works to be misrepresentations, or what he calls “phantoms” that are “far from the truth”.1

Plato argues that because so much of Greek poetry does not include direct truths, and many of them contradict each other, that in his hypothetical utopia, “most [tales] they now tell must be thrown out”.2 One of the main issues that Plato has with poetry is the portrayal of Greek mythological figures. Plato claims that most Greeks believed in tales of “gods [making] war on gods”, “battles of giants”, and other “many diverse disputes of gods and heroes”, but that these stories “mustn’t be said… for [they aren’t] even true”.3 Plato argues that the lack of truth in poetry corrupts men into holding false beliefs, and that the role of the philosopher is to expose these falsehoods and instead point men toward truth.

The pursuit of genuine truth lies at the center of Plato’s Theory of Forms. The theory is best described by the Allegory of the Cave in Book Seven of The Republic. The allegory displays the stages of knowledge along the path to understanding. The lowest stage is of complete ignorance – a person shackled to a wall seeing the shadows of figurines displayed against the opposite wall and believing them to be real things (i.e. the shadow of a horse figurine would appear to be a horse). To understand that they are simply looking at an image, or imitation, of a horse, the person would have to turn around to see the figurines. From this place, they would realize their ignorance of reality and instead believe that the figurines themselves are reality (i.e. that the figurine of a horse is a horse). Only if they leave the cave entirely and see a live horse would they realize again that the figurine was only an imitation. Plato applies poetic imitation to

2 Ibid, 377c.
3 Ibid, 378c.
this theory in Book Ten, claiming that an imitation “is naturally third from…the truth”.4 Just like
the shadow of a figure of a horse in the allegory, poetry, especially tragedy, portrays an imitation
of an imitation and is thus thrice removed from showing truth. He continues, claiming that
“imitation is purely far from the truth”, and that “it lays hold of a certain small part of each thing,
and that part is itself only a phantom”.5 This idea of imitation creating a “phantom” is very much
like the image of the shadow that captures the attention of the cave’s prisoners. In creating this
analogy, Plato also equates the audiences of poetic performances to those imprisoned in the cave,
and accuses the poets of keeping them there, as “those who take up tragic poetry…are all
imitators in the highest possible degree”.6 Plato’s analogy asserts that poetry displays false
imitations of tangible things and ideas – phantoms that distract society from understanding.

This theory emphasizes truth and understanding as the most important aspects of reality.
Education, thus, is “the craft concerned with…the turning around [of the soul]”.7 Plato’s
repulsion from imitation is grounded upon its fictitious nature, and he stresses the need for
philosophers, such as himself, to teach the ignorant by exposing falsehoods and displaying truths.

ii. The Influence of Poetic Imitation

Plato claims that the fictional stories generate bad habits in the populace by portraying
and normalizing immoral behavior. He discusses different ethical problems that are instilled in
people through these stories, and comments on the possibility of instilling good habits upon a
community by imitating just and moral deeds.

4 Republic, 597e.
5 Ibid, 598a.
6 Ibid, 602b.
7 Ibid, 518d.
Plato recognizes the importance of stories in society, and understands how influential they can be; although he promotes the censorship of stories that he believes undermine the ethics of a society, he acknowledges that others can be beneficial. He asserts that leaders “must supervise the makers of tales; and if they make a fine tale, it must be approved, but if it’s not, it must be rejected.”

Plato believes that stories are best used for educating the young, claiming that because children are so easily influenced and will enjoy the stories, poetry can be used to begin the education process very early. By using stories to educate the youth, Plato cannot allow most of Greek poetry to be taught. He believes that if Hesiod’s *Theogony* be uncensored, then “Cronos’…sufferings at the hands of his son… [will] be told to thoughtless young [men]”, and that if of these young men followed Zeus’ example and castrated their own father, “that in doing the extremes of injustice…he would be doing only what the first and the greatest of the gods did”.

Plato takes issue with the fact that in a society in which disrespecting one’s father is immoral, one of the first stories in the mythological canon is one in which the most revered god disrespects his father in a brutally violent way. Furthermore, Plato feels that a society cannot rightfully punish a young man for following the actions of a god, but instead must not teach fictitious and immoral stories to him.

Plato further argues that the stories popular in Greek society, such as Homer’s epics and Aeschylus’ tragedies, represent immoral deeds and express concepts that generate bad habits in the individuals of the populace. Just as telling impious stories to the youth instills improper

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8 *Republic*, 377b.
9 Ibid, 378a-b.
10 This issue is discussed thoroughly in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, and has become famous through the “Euthyphro Dilemma”.
beliefs on what is right, allowing the people access to improper deeds and concepts could miseducate them on how a good citizen should act.

Plato recognizes the relationship between what people hear and how people act. He believes that “imitations, if they are practiced continually from youth onwards, become established as habits and nature, in body and sounds and in thought”.[11] This is a central concept to Plato’s proposed censorship; if people hear stories of characters acting in a certain way, they will develop habits that reflect those specific actions. Therefore, if Plato wants the people of the city to act justly, he must instill good habits in them. His answer to this problem is simply that he will “forbid [the poets] to say [unjust] things and order them to sing and to tell tales about the opposite”.[12] Plato’s goal is to make his city as just as possible; to do this he believes he must eradicate any source of injustice, and finds poetic imitation to be largely responsible.

iii. Poetic Corruption of Ethics and Politics

Plato’s tripartite division of the soul links poetic imitation with “appetitive” desires. He asserts that poetry, like the bodily functions and immoral actions discussed, needs to be oppressed and kept in moderation. He views poets as being morally and politically corruptive, arguing that poetry is disruptive in its ability to influence the psychologies of an audience.

Plato theorizes on the nature of the soul in Book Four, and divides it into three parts; the reasoning, the spirited, and the appetitive. He claims that the soul functions best when the reasoning section is in charge and the appetitive is held in moderation. Plato places poetic

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imitation among the appetitive desires of men, arguing that it “keeps company with the part in us that is far from prudence, and is not comrade or friend for any healthy or true purpose”.13

Plato furthers his rejection of literature by claiming that he would be “justified in not admitting [a poet] into a city that is going to be under good laws, because he awakens this part of the soul and nourishes it, and, by making it strong, destroys the calculating part”, as it is the reasoning section of the soul that is supposed to rule the appetitive, and keep it in moderation, not the other way around.14 Plato describes the power of poets:

making wicked men mighty, [poets] turn the city over to [the lower class] … the imitative poet produces a bad regime in the soul of each private man by making phantoms that are very far removed from the truth and by gratifying the soul’s foolish part.15

Plato labels poets as destroyers of men’s souls in that they gratify their appetitive desires, and destroyers of cities to the extent that they empower the lower class. Plato views imitative poetry as corrupting of both the moral code and political institutions of society.

Plato argues that imitative poetry is a detriment to society, corrupting the ethical and political systems in men and in cities through its educational and influential attributes. He discusses poetry as being composed of fabrications and yet having immense psychological value in how it is used: disastrous if used to promote immoral habits and dangerous politics, and helpful if used to promote proper ethics and stable governance.

13 Republic, 603a-b.
14 Ibid, 605b.
15 Ibid, 605b-c.
Chapter Two

Aristotelian Poetic Theory

Aristotle’s *Poetics* is hailed as a foundational work for theatrical education, yet is also full of innovative ideas and significant philosophical doctrines. The *Poetics* is studied in universities across the country by students of Theater, English, and Classics, and remains to this day the defining work on understanding and analyzing stories. However, it is largely regarded by philosophers to be one of Aristotle's least important works. The classification of the *Poetics* as a work of “productive science” or on “productive knowledge” leads it to receive far less attention than his works on logic, the “theoretical sciences”, and the “practical sciences”. This devaluation is unwarranted, as Aristotle creates a unique discussion in the *Poetics* on the abstract concepts, psychological responses, and logical structures present in poetic imitation.

A. Poetics

Aristotle develops genuine philosophical discourse on poetic theory in the *Poetics* and analyzes how and why humans enjoy storytelling as much as we do. The *Poetics* of Aristotle discusses the conceptual characteristics of poetic imitation and the influential power of emotion while examining the logical characteristics of poetic structure.

i. Imitation

Aristotle claims imitation to be the basis of poetics. He asserts that through imitation, poets create something new that can serve to both educate and pleasure. The abstract quality of imitation lends poetry to “express the universal”, and attain a philosophical status in generating discourse on conceptual subjects such as ethics and politics.
In the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, writing was becoming increasingly developed in the Greek world and led to the creation of prose. One of the first among these new works of prose was Herodotus’ *Histories*, and even though Herodotus had finished this work while Plato was a child, Plato makes no mention of historical literature in the *Republic*. This exclusion certifies that Plato did not consider history to be a part of imitative poetry, and can be interpreted as Plato placing historical work as a promotion of higher faculties, while poetry is a promotion of lower faculties. Herodotus’ innovative work set a precedent for the informational and technical language of prose that both Plato and Aristotle would imitate in their philosophy. Prose allows writers to use direct language to explain arguments and relate facts in a way that is clear and easy to comprehend, quickly becoming the popular style of philosophy and history; verse is more artistic, it generates a flow of language that is melodic, and allows for the addition of inexplicit meanings, remaining the style of poetic imitation. Aristotle, however, finds prose to not be the main distinguishing factor between fiction and non-fiction writing. He takes history as an example, and claims that “the poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose”, because if Herodotus’ work was written in verse, “it would still be a species of history”.\(^{16}\) He expands his view:

The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal, I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 9. 1451a37-b26.
Imitation, according to Aristotle, is inherently educational. The educational characteristic of poetry is unlike that of history, however, as history is concerned with what was, and poetry is concerned with what could be. History is concrete, while poetry is abstract; therefore, Aristotle theorizes that poetry is “more philosophical” and “a higher thing” than history, as it requires abstract thought and reasoning to understand “what may happen”. It is also important to note that this education, focusing on what is general and possible as opposed to what is particular and factual, is directed at society itself, and arms the people with an understanding of the ethical and political issues that these societies face, or may face.

Plato and Aristotle both discuss the nature of poetic imitation: what it is, what it does, and the role it plays in society. Plato argues that it appeals to the lowest part of the soul and is corruptive. Aristotle disagrees, claiming that imitation is instead educational. Aristotle tells his audience that “the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood”, and that “through imitation [man] learns his earliest lessons”.18 This is supported by modern science. The University of Washington’s Institute for Learning and Brain Science explains:

> Imitation is the ability to learn behaviors by observing other people’s actions. It is a social game that children love to play. It’s also an important way for infants to learn about everything from how a toy works to social norms, like how to behave in a library.19

Humans learn social norms through imitation; by seeing how others act and respond to different actions, humans determine the social rules of their society and act accordingly. As infants show, imitation is both completely natural and beneficial to our learning process.

18 *Poetics*, 4. 1448b5-23.
Aristotle reinforces Plato’s argument that that there is pleasure in viewing an imitation. This is not a problem to Aristotle, however, as it simply reinforces his point that imitation is, among certain other pleasurable acts, “one instinct of our nature”. It is not Aristotle likening imitation to the immoral “habits” that Plato does, but rather believing that the pleasure of imitation lies in its power to educate.

The cause of this again is, that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general; whose capacity, however, of learning is more limited. Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring.

Aristotle argues that the pleasure of poetic imitation lies in its educative purposes. He specifically adds that this applies to not just philosophers and the educated people of society, but “men in general”. In the context of poetry being a shared experience in a community, as it was in Greece, these experiences were essentially the education of the masses. Furthermore, in the context of literature largely revolving around social, ethical, and political issues, poetic performances channel a poet’s beliefs or views on these issues. The power of the poet is thus the same in Plato and Aristotle, but viewed in a different light; Plato finds them to be corruptive in their ability to disrupt a society’s morals and political system, and Aristotle finds them to be educational in their ability to challenge citizens’ beliefs about morality and politics.

\[20\] Poetics, 4. 1448b5-23.  
\[21\] Ibid.
ii. Emotion

The purpose of imitation lies in emotion; it is the mode in which an audience can connect with the events and actions of the story and learn about the issues presented. Literary experts emphasize the role of catharsis in Aristotle’s poetic theory, and it is through emotional responses such as catharsis that a poet is able to influence an audience in an intended manner.

Aristotle considers tragic imitation to be “not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action”.22 Aristotle puts the emphasis of poetics in *mythos*, or “plot”. He argues that it is more important what the characters do rather than how they are characterized. In shifting the focus of imitation toward plot, Aristotle can comment on an important effect that plot creates: catharsis. Catharsis is the process of releasing emotion, and Aristotle recognizes the power of this emotional release in imitative poetry. It is “in the form of action” that the imitation makes its effect; “through pity and fear effecting the proper purification [*κάθαρσις*] of these emotions”.23 Pity and fear have famously become the two Aristotelian pillars of catharsis, here translated as “purification”. Aristotle describes these emotions as “the distinctive mark of tragic imitation”,24 but does not say anything about their purpose outside of chapter fourteen, where he claims that “the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation”.25 While this conflicts with what Aristotle previously says of the pleasure in imitative poetry – that it comes from learning – this is not necessarily true, as Aristotle may be discussing catharsis as a process of learning through the

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, 13. 1452b31-a38.
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release of emotion.  Although the purpose of generating emotional responses in imitative poetry is vague in the *Poetics*, in the *Rhetoric* he discusses the importance of an emotional appeal in persuading an audience.

While different than the *Rhetoric* in the mode of influence, Aristotle recognizes that poetic imitation can teach people and change minds in a congruent manner as in political speeches. In comparison of the two modes – poetic and rhetoric – Aristotle tells us:

The dramatic incidents must be treated from the same points of view as the dramatic speeches, when the object is to evoke the sense of pity, fear, importance, or probability.

The only difference is, that the incidents should speak for themselves without verbal exposition; while the effects aimed at in speech should be produced by the speaker

Aristotle identifies that it is often the purpose of a story to evoke emotion, just as in political speeches; the only difference between convincing an audience in a speech and in a performance is that a speech must be expressed by the speaker and a poem by the action. He claims that the way to change people’s minds is through their own emotions: by triggering an emotional response and using that response to impress something, such as a message on morality.

A poem, play, or epic should therefore be an interesting story that generates emotional responses to promote or challenges cultural ideals, such as in catharsis, in which the emotional

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26 Scholarship is divided on this point. Traditionally, catharsis is thought to be the most important aspect of Aristotle’s poetic theory, and it has remained the most famous point in the *Poetics*. However, the text suggests that this is not so. Leon Golden points this out in his article *Catharsis*, in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 93 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962). He discusses the theory of catharsis as an educational experience in addition to an emotional one. This seems to fit in better with Aristotle’s arguments, especially considering that the word “catharsis” only appears once in the entire work. Golden sites G. F. Else’s *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA, 1957) in its discussion of various works and usages of “catharsis” in Greek literature.

27 See *Rhetoric*, trans. Roberts, 2.11, 1388b29-32: “the several emotions may be produced or dissipated, and upon which depend the persuasive arguments connected with the emotions”.

release allows the audience to relate to the poem on a personal level, experiencing the events as a surrogate character, and developing ideas on morality through that experience.

Tragedy is the main topic of discussion in the extant version of Aristotle’s Poetics. Stephen Halliwell, in his translation and commentary of the Poetics, tells us that Aristotle’s poetic theory exhibits not just action, but men “in the pursuit of the goals of action”. He argues that these goals are “taken to bear on the supreme moral aim of happiness...the standard of success in action...the virtuous perfection of human agency”. Moral commentary is imbedded within tragedy, as a tragic hero is designed to be striving toward “virtuous perfection”, and relates to an audience what that moral perfection is and how it is achieved. Tragedy also comments on politics, with many tragic works revolving around rulership, such as the Oresteia, or law, such as Antigone. When tragic heroes, in their struggle for perfection, encounter political issues, their speech “takes the shape of a reflection on matters of constitutional change”.

A poet uses imitation to produce a story in which anything is possible, creating worlds and stories that are fictional, but the possibility of which makes them completely real to an audience. That reality is solidified through an emotional connection with characters whose actions serve to entertain and influence a community into challenging, supporting, or realizing a specific set of beliefs. Halliwell reveals that the emphasis on action in Aristotle’s theory “implies

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29 In discussing tragedy, Aristotle often included epic, pointing out differences only in verse, narrative form, and length.
30 The extant Poetics is believed to be only Book I of which there is a lost Book II, theorized to focus on comedy. See: Walter Watson’ The Lost Second Book of Aristotle’s “Poetics”, University of Chicago Press, 2012.
32 Ibid.
that the fabric of tragedy, or indeed of all poetry, is the representation of human purpose striving for realization, and therefore falls within the purview of ‘practical’ or ethical philosophy”.  

B. Logical Structure

Aristotle argues that through the use of logical structure in poetic discourse, imitation produces truths for an audience to deduce. By a process of cause and effect in linear storytelling, poetry can take on a logical structure that leads an audience through a story deductively.

Aristotle discusses poetic stories as plots organized in a logical manner that lead to logical conclusions. Directly marked against Plato, whose main problem with imitation was the inherent lack of truth, Aristotle argues that through fiction, truth can be logically ascertained. He breaks down imitative formulae and procedure to show how structured poetic imitation is, in direct comparison to his work on logic and reasoning.

Stories are easiest to follow when they are linear, with as few digressions and tangents as possible. Reasoning is the same way, as is anything that requires a sequence of human thought. Humans think in a linear manner, and are most comfortable when structured by cause and effect. Logic is based upon the rules of cause and effect; if one or more premises, or inferred statements – which act as causes – are said to be true, then a conclusion – acting as a resolving effect – can be reached. In the case of poetic stories and logical problems, every point between the first causes and the resolving effects serve both purposes as being an effect of previous causes and a cause for later effects. Remember that Aristotle tells us imitation is “not of men, but of an action”, this action being the events in a plot. Aristotle explains that cause and effect is a

34 Halliwell, p. 140.
35 Poetics, 6. 1449b22-31.
necessary tool for plot; it allows the story to remain effectively linear, and thus rational. He claims that emotional responses “[are] heightened when…they follow as cause and effect” and that “even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design”. The “design” here is not a reference to a poet designing the story, but of the effects being the natural, probable, or inevitable outcomes of the causes.

It is in the nature of tragedy, according to Aristotle, to follow strictly the constant flow of cause and effect, as he claims that it must be “whole”. “A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end”, meaning that it must be linear and flow logically. The beginning “is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be”; these are the first causes, which set problems for the characters or the logicians, and put the problems in context with all the tools necessary. A middle, then, is “that which follows something as some other thing follows it”. The middle consists of the points with the dual purpose of being both causes and effects; what would be events in a play and terms in a proof. Lastly, the end is “that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it”. The end, appropriately, is the conclusion. The conclusion is what necessarily follows from a story’s initial issues and main events, or a proof’s premises and terms; it is the point in which the problems set by the first causes have been resolved.

By emphasizing the mythos, or plot, Aristotle stresses the necessity of a story to follow cause and effect and utilize a direct line of reasoning. This presents a story or plot as a sequence of points, much as a syllogism is a sequence of three terms and other logical proofs can be

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36 Ibid, 9. 1452a3-12.
37 Ibid, 7. 1450b22-1451a15.
38 Ibid, 7. 1450b22-1451a15.
sequences of any number of interconnected terms. Aristotle tells us that syllogisms also follow the laws of cause and effect, as they are “[discourses] in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so”.

A common example of a syllogism:

All men are mortal,
Socrates is a man,
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

With this structure in mind, it would be possible to translate a story’s plot into logical language, as poetry would be logical in the sense of its structure relying on deduction to move from one point to the next. This syllogistic structure is shown in an example that Aristotle gives in the *Poetics*, taken from Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*:

Some one resembling me has come,
No one resembles me but Orestes,
Therefore, Orestes has come.

At some point in the main story it is known that someone resembles Electra and that he has come. It is also revealed that there is no one that resembles Electra but Orestes. Therefore, it may be logically concluded that Orestes has come. This sequence is syllogistic and utilized poetically: the first premise is a minor premise of particular value, about a specific thing (some one), and is shown in the plot as an event. The second premise is the major premise and is universal, or a general claim (no one), this is known by Electra and shared with the audience. The conclusion is

40 *Poetics*, 16. 1454b19-1455a21.
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thus logically drawn, and amounts to an important progression in the plot using the reasoning capacity of the audience and characters. This reasoning allows poets to apply a logical structure to their works to maintain a proper continuation of events and bring about a proper conclusion.

C. Sciences

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle classifies all fields of inquiry into Theoretical Science, Practical Science, and Productive Science. Productive sciences are comprised of arts and skills, receive very little attention, and are described as artistic, specific, and non-philosophical. While there is some overlap between poetics and productive sciences mentioned in the *Metaphysics*, the evidence supports the *Poetics* as a work of higher knowledge. It is conventional to interpret the *Poetics* as a work of productive science, as many are slow to realize the abstract and conceptual philosophical value in Aristotle’s poetic theory.41

Aristotle identifies productive science with physical construction from nature or through human labor and skill. It serves as a contrast to a theoretical science relating to non-physical concepts, such as physics and the soul, and a practical science associated not with products but with agents, such as ethics and politics. All of Aristotle’s works fit either into theoretical science, logic, which is the instrument used to discuss theoretical science, or practical science; only the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* are left out – to be classified as productive sciences.

Aristotle only discusses productive science and productive knowledge in the *Metaphysics*, where he uses efficient causality to describe how a product is created or “changed”. He describes the efficient causes of productive knowledge as “principles of change in another

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41 An example of this classification is in Georgios Anagnostopoulos’ *A Companion to Aristotle*, from the Blackwell Companions to Philosophy series, published 2013 by John Wiley & Sons.
The product that is changed or created is referred to as the final cause of that productive science. For example, a carpenter with woodworking skills is the efficient cause that changes wood into tables in the productive science of carpentry. This explains productive science well: a physical material is changed by someone with capabilities (efficient cause) into something else (final cause). Thus, carpentry is a productive science. Other productive sciences, such as painting and sculpting, all follow the formula of being “either an art or some other capacity” in which “the principle of production is in the producer”, or the artist.43

Since Aristotle often references the physical creations of productive sciences to be “products of art”, it is confusing exactly what Aristotle means.44 Carpentry can be considered an art, as is painting and poetry, but poetry does not create a product in the same way carpentry and painting do. In those arts, the efficient cause, or the artist in possession of a specific skill, is applied to realize a product, which Aristotle only exemplifies as physical objects. Poetics may be considered productive in its efficient cause – as all poems are made by poets with knowledge of the art of poetry – but it is not productive in its final cause – as poetry is not a physical object or changed matter, but a rational formulation of language.

Aristotle’s poetic theory has been shown to be full of philosophical value; its psychological effect is displayed by the theoretical requirement of understanding poetry and extracting its meaning, and its necessary structure demonstrates that there are logical aspects as well. Aristotle creates genuine philosophical discourse on an art form that is often brushed aside.

43 Ibid, 11.7. 1064a28-b5.
44 Ibid, 7.9. 1034a31-b7.
by the philosophical community, despite the consistent demonstration of its psychological, logical, and theoretical attributes. The Poetics is not a work discussing productive knowledge, but an in-depth analysis of literature as a complex manifestation of human reasoning.
Chapter Three

The Context Theory

“Context theory” is a term coined by the poet O.B. Hardison in his analysis of Medieval Arabic philosophers’ tendency to include Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* in their translations and commentaries of the Organon, the collection of Aristotle’s work on logic. He referred to this tendency as “warping” Aristotle’s meaning, and attributed it to mistakes made by the Medieval Arabic philosophers in interpreting the poetic theory of Aristotle and the culture of the Greeks.45

Hardison, like many scholars familiar with the *Poetics*, analyze Aristotelian poetic theory as literary and not philosophical. The “warping” that takes place in the context theory is not a misunderstanding of the *Poetics*, as Hardison argues, but rather an alternate view on the value of the work – a philosophical value as opposed to a literary one. The Medieval commentators of Aristotle discuss the psychological effects and logical processes that are conceptualized within the literary discussion of Aristotle’s poetic theory.

In Chapters One and Two of this study, literature is shown to have philosophical value, but only inasmuch as there is also literary value. The literary constructs discussed in the *Poetics* are used as a vehicle to understand its philosophical concepts: it is in the structure of plot that Aristotle finds a logical process, and in imitative pleasure that Plato finds a psychological element. Hardison claims that a view of poetic theory as one of logical processes makes it an “essay on method”, and removes the link between literature and ethics.46 The significance of the link between literature and ethics is in no means downplayed in a philosophical analysis of the

46 Ibid, 60.
Poetics, as ethical and political commentary is the target in which the psychological effect of literature aims.

This chapter addresses the issues that arise from the different categorizations of the Poetics in considering the history of this classification, the challenge in finding it a proper place among the categorization of “sciences”, and analyzing the work done by later Greek philosophers in establishing its logic value. These issues are shown not to be matters of understanding Aristotle’s poetic theory, but of a different viewpoint than one solidified in today’s community – one that can generate unique impressions on how to analyze this work.

A. Legitimacy of the Context Theory

The inclusion of the Rhetoric and Poetics among Aristotle’s logical treatises illustrated by the context theory does not originate with Medieval Arabic thinkers, nor is it due to a misinterpretation of Aristotle or a lack of understanding Greek poetry, as Hardison claims. Rather, the inclusion was inherited by Medieval Arabic philosophy from previous scholarship by the Greek philosophers of the Alexandrian school. Although it is unknown who of the Alexandrian school was first to include these works in the Organon, influential Alexandrian philosophers including Ammonius, John Philoponus, Elias, and others have all been found to classify the Poetics as a treatise of logic.

The transmission of Aristotelian thought from the 4th Century BCE Greece to 10th century CE Persia is complicated and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four with the introduction of Avicennan thought. For now, it is important to note that it came with a quantity of problems, but certainly not enough to dismiss the works they generated. Critics of the context theory find that the Arabic philosophers’ work on poetic theory is built upon a problematic
textual tradition, dismissing them immediately. While there were mistakes made in the process of translating Aristotle from Greek to Arabic via Syriac, as well as in understanding the literary world of a foreign culture, these points do not discredit the context theory. Deborah L. Black, in her pioneering work *Logic and Aristotle’s “Rhetoric” and “Poetics” in Medieval Arabic Philosophy*, refutes this quick dismissal of Arabic commentaries due to their transmission issues. She argues that the Alexandrian philosophers had no issues translating Aristotle or understanding Greek poetry, and that in passing the context theory to the Arabic-Islamic world, the Arabic commentators are absolved of such critique. She contends that an analysis of the logical value in poetic theory does not rely on the particular qualities in any poetic tradition, as poetic theory is a universal concept applied to all poetic traditions, and that the “question of what constitutes the nature and scope of logic is, therefore, prior to any determination of whether this or that treatise can be designated as logical”. Her argument expresses that any claim that a given treatise has logical value must be based upon an interpretation of what logic is. Thus, instead of dismissing the *Poetics* as non-logical and a work on productive knowledge, Black believes that a serious inquiry into the logical nature of Aristotle’s and his commentators’ poetic theory can grant “an expansion of the realm of logic itself”.

Arabic philosophers used the commentaries and analyses of later Greek thinkers to better understand Aristotles’s philosophy. As the Alexandrian school served as an important step in understanding Aristotelianism for Medieval Arabic philosophy, Medieval Arabic philosophy’s ability to provide an expanded perspective can help us in understanding Aristotle as well.

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48 Ibid, 1.
B. Productive Science & Bekker Numbering

The problem of demoting the Poetics to a work of productive science works in tandem with the simple act of maintaining its position within a universally accepted corpus. The current classification of the Poetics stems from an old compilation and a much older manuscript, neither with significant claims on why Aristotle’s poetic theory should be irrelevant to the rest of his work. Arguments against this classification include an enigma within the existence of the Poetics, the theoretical characteristics of Aristotle’s poetic theory, and an evaluation of the similar roles played by poetry and logic.

We owe our current reference system for Aristotle’s work to a German scholar, August Immanuel Bekker, who edited and organized all of Aristotle’s works in the early 1830s. From this compiling and transcribing of over a hundred manuscripts came his Complete Works of Aristotle and with it our prized “Bekker numbering” system. The system, based on page, column, and line numbers from Bekker’s book, allows us to identify univocally any expression in the Aristotelian corpus with a short sequence of numbers and letters. For example, 164a1 is the first line of the Sophistical Refutations, the last book in the Organon, and 1447a1 is the first line of the Poetics, the last book in the corpus. Bekker did not continue the custom set by the Alexandrian school and supported by the Arabic commentators on including the Poetics and Rhetoric in the Organon, nor did he follow the philosophy of later influential Western Christian philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, who claimed, similar to Avicenna two centuries earlier, that poetry has both psychological and logical characteristics.50 Bekker instead left the Poetics as

the last work in Aristotle’s corpus, coupled with the *Rhetoric* in a category of their own, usually labeled as productive sciences.

The classification scheme of labeling the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* as productive knowledge comes from a source that Aristotelian philologist Paul Moraux dates to the third century BCE.\(^{51}\) If this is true, then the productive science categorization may have a temporal relation to Aristotle on its side, yet it still disregards centuries of development of Aristotle’s poetic theory through the Alexandrians and Arabic philosophers. Whether this disregard is intentional in Bekker’s compilation remains unclear, but seems unlikely. Bekker is described by a 1910 publication of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as a scholar who “confined himself to textual recension and criticism, in which he relied solely upon the [manuscripts], and contributed little to the extension of general scholarship”.\(^{52}\) Despite being an expert on Greek manuscripts, Bekker disregards those who did contribute to Aristotelian scholarship among the Alexandrian school, Medieval Arabic philosophy, and the Latin West in his exclusion of the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* from the Organon. Today, Bekker’s decision endures, as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the largest philosophical encyclopedia in the world, catalogues the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* under “Productive Sciences”, and makes no mention of them having any logical value or being historically considered to through the context theory.\(^{53}\)

An enigma lies in the existence of the *Poetics* itself: if Aristotle believed the poetic and rhetorical arts to be productive sciences, then they would require no philosophical discourse. By the fact that these treatises exist, Aristotle’s interest in them is apparent. His interests were

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51 Black, 19, note 5: *Les Listes Anciennes*, 172, 177-79.
extensive, but Black tells us that in her analysis of the *Metaphysics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, productive science is not “a subject of intrinsic interest for Aristotle”. If this is the exception, and Aristotle decided that the productive science of writing poetry deserved the inquiry that he gave the *Poetics*, it is highly likely that he would have focused on discussing its efficient cause, for the efficient cause includes the knowledge that dictates the agent’s role in productive science. The *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* are not treatises on these arts’ respective efficient causes, however, but inquiries into their value as intellectual constructs:

The analyses offered by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, and especially in the *Poetics*, do not seem primarily aimed at teaching the reader techniques for the successful composition of poems and orations. The *Poetics* is a work that explores the imaginative faculties of human psychology; it has little to do with the art of being a good poet, and much to do with the reasoning that follows the creation and reception of a poetic work. Thus, I consider the best argument against the productive label of the *Poetics* remains the question ‘why did Aristotle write it?’ If it describes a productive science, then the answer is ‘to describe a productive science’, but it doesn’t; there is almost nothing in the *Poetics* that teaches a would-be poet the secrets of writing poetry. The *Poetics* is philosophically relevant, and Aristotle recognized that value; that is why he wrote it.

The dependency upon language and reasoning present in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* distinguish them from productive science, and makes theoretical knowledge essential in understanding them. In that a poet creates a product in their generation of a poem, the product itself, as a separate entity created by the poetic knowledge of the poet, may be considered a

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54 Black, 29.
55 Ibid, 25.
product of the poet’s productive knowledge. However, because the concern of the poet is not of the product itself, but of the meaning expressed in the product, the creation is theoretical.

Similarly, in analyzing the creations of poetry, philosophers and literary critics are not concerned with using the productive knowledge of poetry to create additional products, but to rationalize the concepts present in the original product. This is due to the theoretical nature of language, which establishes the aim of poetics not to create verse, but to “impart knowledge of some sort…through poetical modes of discourse”.

Black recognizes the similarity in how the *Poetics* discusses literature and the Organon discusses logic. She explains that “to the extent that rhetoric and poetics are to be classified as productive arts, logic itself will be productive in precisely the same respects”. The *Poetics* and the Organon do not appear to differ in purpose: if the *Poetics* is a work on productive knowledge for the creation of poetry, then the Organon is a work on productive knowledge for the creation of arguments. This does not appear to be the case, of course, as no Aristotelian philosopher would classify logic as productive due to its theoretical properties. However, literature has those same properties: it is a theoretical construct that explores the imaginative faculties of human psychology. “Organon” is usually translated as “instrument” as a reference to logic being the instrument of analyzing theoretical knowledge through discursive reasoning; the *Poetics* can claim a similar distinction, with Aristotle’s poetic theory being an instrument of analyzing practical knowledge through emotional responses. The similarities between Aristotle’s poetic and logical theories justifies the *Poetics* in having its productive label removed.

56 Black, 25.
57 Ibid, 29.
We have successfully identified why the *Poetics* are labeled as a productive science and how well the work fits into that classification. In the sense that the goal of poetic and rhetorical imitation is to create a product through the understanding of the poetic or rhetorical art (and language), they may be considered productive sciences. This enhances the *Poetics*’ relationship with Aristotle’s other logical works, which can be applied in the same way: the goal of philosophical reasoning is to create a product through the understanding of logic (and language), but logic, like poetry, creates a product that is abstract and intellectual. The productive sciences require a product to be concrete, and in the sense that the products of logic and poetry are theoretical, they cannot be considered productive sciences. At the very core of the argument for reclassifying the *Poetics* lies Aristotle’s decision to theorize on poetics at all – strong evidence supporting the philosophical value imbedded in its pages.

C. Alexandrian School & the Poetic Syllogism

The main issue remaining in certifying the logical value of the *Poetics* is the lack of a “poetic syllogism”. The syllogism is an Aristotelian discovery, often translated as “deduction”, that serves as the distinctive form of expressing discursive reason, using deductive inferences to conclude and certify declarations. It is through these deductions that logic is exercised. Recall the example stated in Chapter Two (all men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal). Thus, while Aristotle exemplifies the logical structure of stories and the theoretical aspects of poetic imitation in the *Poetics*, he does not explain what a formally structured poetic syllogism would look like, or how we could apply our reasoning to it. This task is left to his commentators, and over two thousand years later, it is still being discussed.

The first to undertake the task of creating a poetic syllogism were the philosophers of the Alexandrian school. The inquiry into the existence – or even the necessity – of the poetic
syllogism is at the very root of the context theory. Aristotle discusses the use of different syllogisms (apodeictic, dialectical, and sophistical) in the Organon; thus, in arguing the Poetics belongs among it, these philosophers had to demonstrate the existence of a poetic syllogism.

Ammonius of Alexandria (fl. 500 CE) was one of the most important Aristotelian philosophers of late antiquity. In the introduction to his commentary on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics, he includes a very strange system for the classification of his logical theory. He accepts the core of the Organon’s modern classification system: that the only types of syllogism are apodeictic, dialectical, and sophistical. In order to fit the Poetics into the Organon without a poetic syllogism, Ammonius claims that some logical processes do not require a syllogism. He argues that poetic and rhetorical theory can be logical without having a syllogistic aspect. This concept is unique and widely unaccepted, as the syllogism is the core of Aristotelian logic, yet it reveals Ammonius’ recognition of the logical value of poetic theory. By Ammonius’ reasoning, there are three types of syllogistic logic – apodeictic, dialectical, sophistical – and two types of non-syllogistic logic – poetic and rhetorical. While groundbreaking, Ammonius fails to explain how the Poetics and Rhetoric can be non-syllogistic and still logical, and his theory comes up short. However, Ammonius’ willingness to include the Poetics and Rhetoric among the Organon despite their lack of a syllogistic aspect is telling of how fully he recognized their logical value. Ammonius’ intellectual successors will abandon his theory and create systems in which they can include poetics in syllogistic logic while avoiding the creation of a formal poetic syllogism.

John Philoponus of Alexandria (c. 490-570), commonly known as John the Grammarian, plays an important role as an intermediary between Ammonius’ and the rest of the Alexandrian school’s approaches. According to Philoponus, the five mental faculties that contribute to reason are intellect, discursive reason, opinion, imagination, and sensation. He argues that discursive
reason is the mode of syllogizing, while the other faculties provide the material for what is to be
syllogized. Philoponus creates a hierarchy of logic based on truth-value, that is, the more factual
a syllogism’s conclusion is, the more valuable it is. He ranks them through their faculties of
reasoning and respective syllogisms: intellect provides fact, and leads to apodeictic syllogism;
opinion provides partial truths, and leads to dialectical syllogism; imagination, together with
sensation (which is unable to create syllogism) provide fallacies, and lead to sophistical
syllogism. Philoponus is similarly unwilling to part with the Poetics and Rhetoric as logical
works, but accepts the necessity for syllogism in logical processes. By establishing faculties of
reason, he retains the theoretical value of imaginative reasoning through the faculties of
imagination and sensation without establishing a syllogism for poetics.

Elias of Alexandria, writing in the 6th century CE, approved Philoponus’ categorical
division of syllogism based on mental faculty and truth-value, but expanded it to include five
syllogisms. He divides opinion into three categories: claiming that if a syllogism is based on
what is mostly true, it is dialectical, half true, it is rhetorical, or mostly false, it is sophistical.
Where Philoponus had argued that the imaginative faculty creates sophistical syllogisms, which
are entirely false, Elias disagrees, claiming that this is the role of the poetic syllogism. When the
poetic syllogism is said to be based on fallacies, they are placed on the bottom of the hierarchy of
logical discourse based on truth-value. This does not make it any less logical, just less true: an
apodeictic syllogism generates facts that logically follow from other facts, while a poetic
syllogism generates images which are only real in their being a necessity that follows from
fictitious statements. Elias’ theory is apparent in the Arabic commentaries, where sophistical
syllogisms are omitted but “imaginative reasoning” becomes the psychological process in
analyzing and understanding poetry and the poetic syllogism.
The philosophers of the Alexandrian school’s inability to agree upon and justify the existence of a poetic syllogism maintained the ambiguous understanding of logic in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Their many theories display interesting ways to understand human reasoning and Aristotle’s philosophy of logic, but ultimately fail in the task of conclusively demonstrating that the *Poetics* belongs in the Aristotelian Organon. This task thus fell to the inheritors of their Aristotelianism – the Medieval Arabic philosophers – whose attempts to determine the existence and function of the poetic syllogism and to create a better understanding of Aristotle’s logical and poetic theories will be discussed in Chapter Four.

We now have a firm grasp on the importance of classification in understanding the *Poetics* and how the different classifications generate meaning and demonstrate value. While Bekker cannot be blamed or praised for his categorization system, the decision by scholars to agree with him in labeling the *Poetics* as productive science can. A close analysis of Aristotle’s theory of science reveals how poorly this label fits the *Poetics*, both in the theoretical attributes of poetry and in how similar it is to logic. Furthermore, due to the Alexandrian philosophers thoroughly understanding of Aristotelian philosophy and their being adamant in the logical interpretation of the *Poetics*, it is safe to move past Hardison’s remark and understand that the context theory does not apply to an ignorance of the Arabic tradition. Instead of “warping” Aristotle, the context theory grants us a distinct perspective and a deeper understanding of his poetic theory, even allowing for “an expansion of the realm of logic itself”.

59 It is worth noting that the same task is necessary in qualifying the *Rhetoric* as a legitimate inclusion in the Organon, and significant potential is shown in the “enthymeme”. Unfortunately, an analysis of the enthymeme and the logical characteristics of rhetoric realized through the context theory falls outside the scope of this study.

60 Black, 1.
Chapter Four

Avicenna and Medieval Arabic Philosophy

Avicenna is one of the most important philosophers of the medieval period and most prolific Aristotelian commentators in history. Ismail Dahiyat, whose 1974 translation of Avicenna’s *Commentary on the “Poetics” of Aristotle* is the only version of the text in English, claims that Avicenna’s commentary “has the central place in the Medieval Arabic tradition of the *Poetics*”.61 Despite the importance of the text, Avicenna’s inclusion of the *Poetics* within logic, conceptualized by the context theory, leaves it neglected by the literary community and underemphasized by the philosophical community. This inclusion does not exclude Avicenna from understanding the *Poetics*, as explained in Chapter Three, but instead adds an interesting outlook on the work. To judge the legitimacy of Avicenna’s philosophy and the context theory’s accuracy in interpreting Aristotle’s poetic theory, we can compare the *Poetics* with that of Avicenna’s commentary, and decide for ourselves. Avicenna’s interpretation of Aristotle’s poetic theory reinforces the theoretical conceptualization of imitation and expands the emotive power of poetry into his theory on logic.

A. Transmission of Aristotelian Thought

The transmission of Aristotle’s works and the state of Aristotelian thought in the Arabic world at the time of Avicenna’s writing plays an important role in his commentary. Having no knowledge of Greek, he relied heavily on the translations and interpretations of previous

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philosophers to understand Aristotle. This is specifically problematic in the Poetics due to the adoption of the context theory and understanding cultural-specific terminology.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Black discusses concerns with the validity of Avicenna’s commentary due to the problematic textual tradition that it is founded upon. In regards to the context theory, this is shown to be a baseless argument, as the context theory was inherited by Greek philosophers and not a problem of transmission.62

Some of the main issues with Avicenna’s commentary are semantic. Hardison and the skeptics of Avicenna’s legitimacy are quick to point out important “mistranslations” as evidence of misunderstanding, but this is overly critical. Most notable is the famous misstep in which Abū Bishr, an important Arabic translator, interpreted “tragedy” and “comedy” as “encomium” and “satire”, respectfully.63 This leads Avicenna to refer to tragedy as “poetry of praise”, and comedy as “poetry of blame” at times. This problem does not display Avicenna’s misunderstanding of Aristotle’s poetic theory to the extent that it is presupposed to, as it was popularized by the fictional short story Averroes’ Search by 20th century Argentine novelist Jorge Luis Borges. The story describes Averroes, a successor to Avicenna, in his attempt to understand the Poetics, specifically in making sense of the Greek words “tragedy” and “comedy” and relating them to genres found in the Arabic tradition. Since its publication, the image of Arabic commentators struggling to properly translate these words has become famous, and Borges tells his audience that this struggle serves “to narrate the process of a defeat”.64

62 See Chapter Three, Section A.
63 Commentary, p. 6. Dahiyat compares the definitions of tragedy in Abū Bishr’s translation and Avicenna’s commentary, claiming Avicenna to “understand that tragedy is distinctive in nature from non-dramatic encomium”.
were of course “defeated” by Aristotle’s words, written in a language they could not read about a genre that did not exist in their culture. However, instead of translating the Greek words themselves as Abū Bishr does, Avicenna transliterates, being careful to recognize them as purely Greek words which have no counterpart in Arabic. Instead of labeling them as what they are not, he occasionally describes them by what purpose they serve: tragedy, to elevate noble actions; comedy, to mock the ridiculous. The Medieval Arabic philosophers’ inability to perfectly translate the specific poetic terms used by Aristotle displays their ignorance of Classical Greek theater, not of Aristotle’s poetic theory. Avicenna’s ability to recognize and respond to the improper translation of Abū Bishr shows the depth of his understanding the Poetics, and it is wrongly used as evidence to disqualify his commentary.

B. Avicenna’s Interpretation of Imitation

Avicenna is very accurate in his analysis of Aristotle’s theories on the role of imitation in poetry. He mirrors Aristotle’s discussions on the role of education and pleasure on audiences, as well as the abstract quality of imitation in commenting on the universal, thus also classifying poetic imitation as philosophical.

Avicenna recognizes Aristotle’s teachings that poetry is an imitative art designed to produce an emotional response in an audience through logical means. Avicenna begins his commentary with this in mind. His introductory section does not have a counterpart in the Poetics, but serves as an informational preview before he dives into the text. The basis of poetry, according to Aristotle, is mimesis, or imitation, and Avicenna’s first line echoes this point: “poetry is imaginative speech”. The adjective in use by Avicenna for “imaginative” is

65 Commentary, I.1.
mukhayyil, which carries the dual meaning of describing something as imitative as well as emotive. The emotional property of imitation comes up again a few lines later, again through mukhayyil, when Avicenna first considers the role of logic in poetry, saying:

It is the [proper] concern of the logician to examine poetry with regard to its being imaginative. The imaginative is the speech to which the soul yields, accepting and rejecting matters without pondering, reasoning, or choice. In brief, it responds psychologically rather than ratiocinatively, whether the utterance is demonstrative or not.

This passage introduces Avicenna’s views on poetic imitation well, defining his understanding of Aristotle’s teachings of “imaginative speech”, or poetry, as being imitative, emotive, and logical. Imitation and emotion are inherent in the language that Avicenna uses, and logic is concerned “with regard to its being imaginative”. They all combine to make proper, logical poetry; imitation is the subject, it is what the language is conveying; emotion is the purpose, it is what the imitation creates in the audience; logic is the manner in which the imaginative speech creates emotion, which Avicenna claims occurs through the psychological assent of the poetic syllogism – a sort of logical image.

Avicenna’s views on imitation, according to the text, largely come directly from Aristotelian thought, and show a comprehensive understanding of his Poetics. There are two important pieces of poetic theory as it pertains to the cause and nature of imitation in the Poetics, and Avicenna’s understanding of these pieces show his ability to comprehend poetic theory, proving him to be a credible source in applying it and even expanding upon it.

66 Commentary, p. 61, note 1.
67 Ibid, I.2.
Aristotle offers two main reasons for humans being naturally inclined to imitate in chapter four of the *Poetics*. The first is that “the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood”, and that “through imitation [man] learns his earliest lessons”.68 The second reason lies in the fact that “to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to philosophers but to men in general”.69 Avicenna agrees, claiming that the two causes of the human mind that contribute to the creation of poetry are “the pleasure of imitating and the use of imitation for childhood”,70 and reiterates Aristotle’s point that “learning is pleasant not to philosophers alone but to common people”.71 While Arabic poetry was not as communal and performance-based as it was in the Greek world, Avicenna claims poetry to be common among all people in that its aim is an impression upon the mind and soul.72

As noted in Chapter Two, Aristotle discusses the difference between poetry and history in the *Poetics*. He claims that “[history] relates what has happened, [poetry] what may happen”; therefore, poetry “is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history” for “poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular”.73 He explains that the universality of which poetry attains is “how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity”.74 Aristotle argues that because history deals with what is specific and factual and poetry deals with what is abstract and fictional, poetry is more theoretical, and thus “a higher thing” than history.

68 *Poetics*, 4. 1448b5-23
69 Ibid.
70 Commentary, IV.1.
71 Ibid, IV.3.
72 It is important to note that poetry was communal in Muslim culture in regards to the Qur’an, which utilizes metaphor and other poetic devices to discuss abstract concepts.
74 Ibid.
Avicenna agrees, actively supporting Aristotle’s claims from his own point of view. He first recognizes that poetry differs from other systems of language in that it is of “situations attributed to things that do not exist”; in relation to history, this is because “poetry aims at imaginative representation” while history “aims at the statement of the result of experience”. He then follows Aristotle:

[History] tells of what was and can be, [poetry] speaks of that which only exists in words. Poetry, therefore, has become more akin to philosophy than the other kind of speech, because it has a greater grasp on the existent and a more precise execution of universal judgement.

While Avicenna may not be able to grasp Aristotle’s complete meaning in universality as “according to the law of probability or necessity”, he does recognize the universality of poetry in showing not “what has happened”, which he translates as “what was”, but “what may happen”, which he explains is that which is speculated, and can only exist in words. The potential and possibility of action in poetry allows a poet “universal judgement” as opposed to a historian’s necessity of reporting “the result of experience”, establishing poetry’s more theoretical nature.

C. Avicenna’s Logical Concepts

Avicenna focuses his commentary on the psychological power of emotion in poetry through imitation. Where Aristotle argues that generating an emotional response is vital in poetry’s ability to implant an intended message upon an audience, Avicenna takes this argument further. Avicenna’s interpretation of the emotional response generated from poetic imitation is

75 Commentary, IX.12.
76 Ibid, IX.13.
the base of his theory on the logical value of poetry. He argues that this response is a psychological effect referred to as “imaginative assent”, and that this effect is formalized through the poetic syllogism, which he claims exists in the form of metaphor.

i. Imaginative Assent

Instead of focusing on the structure of storytelling as a deductive and logical component of poetry, Avicenna emphasizes the poetic syllogism as a means of creating assent in an audience. In this syllogism, Avicenna argues that a poet can influence their audience in an intended way through creating imaginative assent. He argues that this assent is similar to conviction in deduction, but requires an emotional response through a sense of wonder in order to “force the soul” of the audience in the direction the poet desires. He further argues that this imaginative assent is easier to grasp than other convictions, and that poetry is thus a useful tool to influence an audience on a certain point.

Avicenna claims that there are four types of syllogism, the demonstrative (apodeictic), the dialectical, the rhetorical, and the poetic. Each syllogism has its own degree of conviction: demonstrative syllogism results in certitude, dialectical in strong opinion, rhetorical in persuasion, and poetic in imaginative or psychological assent.77 Avicenna differentiates imaginative assent from conviction, despite it being a type of conviction itself, claiming their similarity to be in that they are both “kinds of compliance”.7879 This assent is the cornerstone of

77 Avicenna, Demonstration (al-Burhān), ed. As volume V of Avicenna’s logic by A. ‘Affīfī (Cairo, 1965), 51 ff. This work is equivalent to Posterior Analytics. Commentary, p. 31, n. 2.
78 Commentary, I.4.
79 This paper will maintain that distinction, with “assent” referring to “imaginative assent”, and “conviction” to the other degrees of conviction, the former of which relies on images and the latter on truth.
Avicenna’s argument in the logical value of poetry. The poet must use imaginative speech to move the soul into assent emotionally, not demonstratively. This makes the poetic syllogism different from the others – it requires psychological compliance from images as opposed to intellectual compliance from truth.

Where the other syllogisms must produce an intellectual acceptance on the matter that the syllogism discusses, the poetic syllogism creates “a compliance due to the wonder and pleasure that are caused by the utterance itself”. The compliance that poetic syllogism produces is a psychological one, and Avicenna tells us that it is the effects of wonder and pleasure in poetic imitation that generates this compliance. He claims that “imitation has an element of wonder that truth lacks”. While not directly claiming that poetry is above truth itself, he is making a bold claim in saying that poetry has something that even truth does not: ta’jīb. Dahiyat makes a note of this word:

Wonder (ta’jīb) combines pleasure and amazement that result from a poetic utterance. It is a psychological appreciation of a poetic image both as a form and as a vivid representation of an idea or object. This emotion is so compelling that it arrests the power of reasoning and forces the soul to pursue or avoid a potential course of action or an object of desire.

This notion of wonder is extremely important for Avicenna, as he attributes it to superseding reasoning in its power of compulsion. Emotion is granted a principal position in Avicenna’s commentary in its ability to move the soul in a way that truth cannot.

80 Commentary, I.4.
81 Ibid, I.3.
82 Ibid, p. 62, n. 5.
Avicenna recognizes the utility of false but supremely compelling syllogisms. He claims that many humans reject truth, even truths that are proven or demonstrated with certitude, and thus the poetic syllogisms are “of special use among the multitude, because most people are more amenable to imaginative representation than to logical demonstration”. Poetry, to Avicenna, is thus logical in its application of imaginative language to produce an imitation that will generate wonder to sway an audience, realized through imaginative assent.

ii. Poetic Syllogism

The structure of the poetic syllogism, according to Avicenna, is different than the structure of the other, more concrete syllogisms. The poetic syllogism, or imaginative syllogism, is a statement that creates a “potential” analogy between two terms or images. This syllogism is essentially a metaphor, or what Avicenna calls naql (“transfer”). It is complex in structure and in application, and clarifies Avicenna’s unique approach to logical theory in the Poetics.

According to Avicenna, the metaphor is able to resemble other syllogisms structurally – with two premises and a conclusion. The difference in the metaphor is that the premises are omitted, and must be presupposed by the audience. The metaphor is thus presented as a conclusion, and its poetic value is held in its ability to cause an emotional response from an audience, while its logical value is held in what Dahiyat calls the transparency of the metaphor. Usually there is a specific semantic relationship between the syllogistic terms, but Avicenna’s poetic syllogism holds only a “potential” relationship between the terms; they are not stated but must be interpreted. Due to the lack of premises explicit in a metaphor, the implied relationship

83 Commentary, p. 32.
84 Ibid, p. 44.
between the syllogism’s terms must be easily understandable and emotionally satisfying, making it “transparent”. Avicenna explains:

> The transfer (*naql*) is applying to a name with a given sense the sense of another, but not to the extent that the one becomes the name of the other and the distinction is lost between the first and the second.\(^{85}\)

The poetic syllogism, in this regard, is the revealing of a relationship between two images, or “names”, through a specific attribute, or “a given sense”, but not so specific that the “distinction is lost” between them. This “transfer” from two literal ideas to a singular metaphorical relationship generates an imaginative statement that Avicenna supports as the poetic syllogism.

The metaphorical term “the evening of life” is used by both Avicenna and Aristotle and can be exhibited as an example.\(^{86}\) The phrase itself serves as the conclusion; two premises, in this case images, must be tied to each other from the phrase in a way that is evident and emotional. It is not challenging to deduce the two images implied from this metaphor are “old age” and “evening”. This deductive process displays the logical and theoretical value of metaphor.

To justify Aristotle’s *Poetics* as a work logic that belongs in the Organon, the poetic syllogism needs to serve as the basis of poetic imitation. Unfortunately, Avicenna’s theory of metaphor as a poetic syllogism does not fulfill that requirement. The literary, imitative, emotional, psychological, and theoretical value in Aristotle’s poetic theory is too vast to be entirely rationalized by metaphor. While Avicenna failed to complete the task of proving the *Poetics* to be undoubtedly a work on logic, he succeeded in expanding Aristotle’s poetic theory to include unique concepts, and has thus furthered our understanding of poetics and literature.

\(^{85}\) Commentary, VII.3.
\(^{86}\) Ibid, p. 44.
Avicenna’s *Commentary on the “Poetics” of Aristotle* is an extremely comprehensive and enlightening work that reiterates, clarifies, and expands the poetic theory originating in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Despite his support of the context theory and his ultimate failure in generating a universally accepted poetic syllogism, Avicenna displays a thoughtful understanding of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and a distinct conceptualization of his philosophy. Avicenna adds an incredible amount of information and analysis to the study of poetic theory, and his work must not continue to be overlooked in both the philosophical and literary communities.
Chapter Five

Analysis of the Arabic Tradition’s “Poetic Syllogism”

The principal issue with the context theory remains the poetic syllogism; Aristotle made the syllogism a necessity for logic, but there is no instance in the *Poetics* of what later came to be called poetic syllogism. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Alexandrian school did not secure the existence of a putative poetic syllogism; some, such as Ammonius, claimed that it wasn’t necessary, others, including Philoponus and Elias, claimed that it was, but none gave any theories into the specific formalization of syllogism that the context theory demands. Avicenna attempted to create a formalized poetic syllogism and end the debate on its nature and application; however, his formulation of this syllogism through metaphor unsuccessfully grounds it as the fundamental expression of logic within poetic art.

Where Avicenna constructs the most definitive theory on what a poetic syllogism could look like and the form it could take, other Arabic philosophers also attempted to understand the nature of poetic syllogism through their commentaries. Al-Farabi and Averroes are two other Medieval Arabic commentators who theorize on the conceptualization of the poetic syllogism and relate their own understanding on how it functions. In analyzing the poetic syllogism of Avicenna, specifically through its ambiguous truth-value, in comparison to that of al-Farabi and Averroes, the Arabic tradition’s cultural ideology on how logic was formalized through poetic imitation can be comprehended and appreciated.
A. Avicenna

Avicenna’s theory on the syllogistic aspect of metaphor creates problems with the role of truth in poetry. The poetic syllogism of Avicenna is ambiguous in how it can be qualified as being valid or sound, and problems arise in how to determine the value of one, as well as in the implication of universal statements that are not explicitly mentioned. Validity is granted to a logical syllogism or proof if the conclusion follows out of necessity from the premises, while soundness is granted to a syllogism or proof if it is valid and the premises are true. Truth-value relies on a syllogism’s ability to be valid or sound; for example, apodeictic syllogisms are based on fact and must always be sound, whereas a dialectical syllogism is based on opinion, and are sometimes sound. Every syllogism needs to be valid, or else it is incorrect. The challenge of determining the truth-value of Arabic commentators’ theories of poetic syllogism falls on modern scholarship, where an analysis of this value can contribute to understanding the legitimacy of their theories.

Avicenna does not mention how a poetic syllogism can be said to follow from necessity, and thus be considered valid. Salim Kemal, in his work *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, argues that because the poetic syllogism is not discursive, the validity of Avicenna’s poetic syllogism relies on its being “good”. Salim Kemal, in his work *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, argues that because the poetic syllogism is not discursive, the validity of Avicenna’s poetic syllogism relies on its being “good”. Kemal does not clarify the requirements of labeling a poetic syllogism “good”, but it is likely dependent upon the ability for it to be imagined and the emotive response it creates, much like Dahiyat’s “transparency”. If the premises can be imagined, then they exist within the faculty of imagination, and if their relationship creates the desired effect (imaginative assent), then the syllogism is valid.

88 Kemal relies heavily on Dahiyat’s work on Avicenna’s commentary.
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On the issue of soundness in Avicenna’s poetic syllogism, Deborah Black discusses a problem with its creation of universal statements that are not explicitly mentioned or true. In his book *Qiyas*, Avicenna gives an example of the logical formalization of the metaphor “so and so is a moon, for he is handsome”, and determines the metaphor’s imaginative syllogism to be:

1. So and so is handsome
2. Everything handsome is a moon
3. Therefore, So and so is a moon

Black notes the universal implications of Avicenna’s syllogism. “Everything handsome is a moon”, noted in the second line, is the universal premise that the syllogism utilizes to relate the particular premise (line 1) to the conclusion. Black finds this is problematic from the lack of truth in the universal claim. Not everything that is handsome is a moon, yet the syllogism infers that that is so. The universal premise is not a matter of opinion or a case of probability, such as in dialectical syllogisms, but is blatantly false. If every metaphor establishes a relation that is supposed to hold universally but has counterexamples, then Avicenna’s poetic syllogism will never be sound.

Since the purpose of the poetic syllogism is not to produce conviction via truth but assent via emotion, the soundness of a poetic syllogism is not relevant. Conviction relies upon a syllogism being sound, as conviction is the process of realizing truth, while imaginative assent relies upon a syllogism being valid, or “transparent”, as it is the effect of being emotionally moved through images. In separating conviction and imaginative assent to mutually exclusive spheres, the syllogism is freed from necessitating truth, and the lack of soundness in the poetic syllogism becomes arbitrary, as its value will rely solely on its validity. However, Avicenna

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claims that an imaginative representation “may result in both conviction and imaginative assent”. This point eliminates them from being mutually exclusive, and shows that the poetic syllogism can generate conviction, and thus be sound. It is not a necessity that the poetic metaphor be sound, but Avicenna claims that it is possible.

B. Al-Farabi

Al-Farabi does not aim to create a specific poetic syllogism as Avicenna does, but comments on a poet’s ability to compare images through logical processes. Al-Farabi uses a “middle term” to create an image of likeness between two things, similar to how Avicenna uses metaphor to link images in a logical manner. Black maps this out in a logical structure:

\[
\begin{align*}
A & \text{is } B \text{ (with respect to x)} \\
B & \text{is } C \text{ (with respect to y)} \\
\hline
\text{Therefore, } A & \text{ is } C
\end{align*}
\]

Al-Farabi uses B, which shares a likeness in different respects to both A and C, to create a link between them. This relationship is imaginative and logical in structure, but does not appear valid. Black points out that this conceptualization can be applied to the metaphor discussed in Avicenna’s Qiyas, where “handsomeness” certainly relies on different qualities in men and in moons, but through the predicated handsomeness the man is concluded to be a moon. The images evoked by Avicenna’s metaphor is that of an attractive moon and an attractive man, attractive in different ways but linked by the statement of their shared attractiveness.

The problem with the poetic syllogism generated by al-Farabi’s concept of imaginative likeness lies in its validity, as the syllogism, as it is, is not valid. Black claims that this problem is

90 Commentary, I.3.
91 Black, 215.
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solved by the imaginative appeal of the premises. Since the poetic syllogism is granted through assent of the imagination and not by truth, “the recognition of a remote and even equivocal likeness, so long as it is granted as imaginable, will suffice to link the two premises of a poetic syllogism in the imaginative faculty”.92 Thus, while the conclusion deductively does not follow from the premises, the conclusion is not serving a deductive purpose, but functions as a formalization of the image generated.

Black believes this syllogistic theory to be a “compelling alternative to Avicenna’s more explicit formulation of a poetic syllogistic”.93 This compulsion is derived from its simple syllogistic structure, inclusion of only particular terms, the inclusion of every term, and its inexplicit applicability to different aspects of poetic theory.

C. Averroes

Averroes takes an entirely different approach to syllogism’s role in his logical understanding of the Poetics. He tells his audience that “even though this art is syllogistic, the syllogism is not actually used in it, nor is there any kind of syllogism peculiar to it”.94 Averroes is not attempting to define a formal poetic syllogism like Avicenna, or a logical image comparison sequence like Al-Farabi; he is clarifying that there is no poetic syllogism but the art of poetics itself. He claims that the power in poetic performance is in giving delight to spectators through skillful imitation, and that the process of drawing inferences from the images of the performance is a syllogistic process performed by the spectator. Averroes discusses the syllogistic nature inherent in poetic imitation:

92 Black, 216.
93 Ibid.
For in [the imitation] there is, in some way, a form of the instruction that occurs through
the syllogism. And that is because the image has the status of the premise and the thing
whose image one intends to evoke has the status of the conclusion.\textsuperscript{95}

With no claim at a specific expression that could be a poetic syllogism, Averroes instead argues
that the syllogism exists within the relationship between the explicit image and evoked image.

Poetic imitation undoubtedly has a tangible logical value, and Aristotle recognized the
potential theoretical benefit of exploring and discussing it. For over two millennia, scholars
searched to find an answer to the question Aristotle left us regarding the logical nature of poetic
imitation. Unlike his predecessors in al-Farabi and Avicenna, Averroes’ interpretation of poetic
syllogism declares there was no question, and that there is no missing puzzle piece to justify the
logical nature of \textit{Poetics}.

None of the theories of poetic syllogism, whether in the Alexandrian school or in Arabic
philosophy, are more Aristotelian than any others. Aristotle made no attempt at formalizing the
poetic syllogism, and that means that the theories cannot be dismissed or supported based on any
likeness to Aristotle’s opinions on the matter. That does not mean that this analysis is for
nothing. It means that nobody is incorrect. The commentators from the Alexandrian and Arabic
traditions, along with everyone else who has found meaning and understanding from problems
left by Aristotle, each have different but equally legitimate opinions in answering the questions
that he left unanswered. In analyzing, complementing, and challenging the work of others, we
can continue to grow our understanding of his revolutionary theories.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

In this survey, we have discussed numerous theories on the function of poetic imitation, its role in society, and its philosophical value. In recognizing poetry in the Greek milieu and Plato’s critique of it, Aristotle’s poetic theory advances the philosophical value of poetry through the theoretical processes of creative literature. Whether this philosophical value extends the *Poetics* into the realm of logic is unclear, yet the argument for its inclusion is compelling and offers new insight into our understanding of psychology, reasoning, language, and logic itself. Avicenna expanded the significance of poetic theory even further; he proposes that the psychological function of poetry mirrors that of reasoning in logic, and through the creation of a poetic syllogism, he produces the first conception of a concrete logical system within poetry.

The current categorization of the *Poetics* as a productive science96 is not justified in the discussion of sciences in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* or of poetic theory in the *Poetics*. Where many academics dismiss the *Poetics* and its commentaries as purely literary, the theories of Aristotle, the Alexandrian school, Medieval Arabic philosophy, the Latin West, and the growing group of contemporary philosophers who have examined these works, disagree. These philosophers find that there is philosophical value in analyzing the *Poetics*, and that it exists through the literary conventions discussed. Therefore, this analysis reveals that there is much to gain and nothing to lose in accepting the *Poetics* as a significant work of Aristotle, to recognize the theoretical value in literature, and to consider reclassifying the work. The *Poetics* does not belong at the end of Aristotle’s corpus under a heading that dismisses its legitimacy; rather, it should be placed after

the Organon and the theoretical sciences – of which the Organon is applied discursively – and placed before the practical sciences – of which the Poetics may be applied psychologically.

A. The Value of the Poetics

Where modern philosophy has deemphasized the Poetics, leaving it almost exclusively in the literary realm, its value can only be found in looking back at Aristotle’s text and the texts of its many commentators. The Poetics has been demonstrated to have philosophical value, and theorized to have logical value. O.B. Hardison once said that the acceptance of the Poetics into the realm of logic makes it a “faculty without content”. This claim displays Hardison’s belief that there is no philosophical value in the Poetics and that the acceptance of that value leads it to be stripped of its literary significance. Unfortunately for Hardison, it is clear that we can have both.

i. Philosophical Value

The Poetics can no longer be doubted to hold philosophical value. Through an in-depth analysis of Aristotle’s poetic theory and the advancement of this theory in the discussions of his predecessors of the Alexandrian school and of Medieval Arabic philosophy, it is evident that the Poetics is a work on the psychological function of literature. That Aristotle spent time analyzing and theorizing poetic imitation and compiling that analysis into his Poetics is proof of this fact, and it is evident in his discussion on imitation showing the abstract and theoretical characteristics of poetics.

97 Hardison, p. 60.
ii. Literary Value

The context theory does not exclude the Poetics from maintaining its literary value, but rather enhances it. A philosophical or logical interpretation of Aristotle’s poetic theory does nothing to hinder an aspiring poet or literary critic’s ability to read the Poetics and retain the same literary commentary. Rather, the difference would be in the ability for the reader to go deeper, and understand not only the literary constructs present but the practical and theoretical effects of those constructs. Through a philosophical interpretation of the Poetics, the literary community could recognize that their work is of even greater importance, and understand the metaphysical attributes and psychological effects of imaginative language. Having the ability to analyze poetic imitation as both literary and philosophical will expand our understanding of Aristotle’s theory and allow us to apply it more effectively.

iii. Logical Value

The logical value of the Poetics is not certain, and whether we can comfortably include it in the Organon remains unclear. There are differences present between Aristotle’s poetic theory and his theory of logic, but there are also many similarities. Both theories serve as “a metalogical attempt at formalization of the structures implicit in valid reasoning”, and are utilized in applying this reasoning on abstract concepts. Many believe that a poetic syllogism is required in order to declare Aristotle’s poetic theory as logical, and this reservation is warranted. If the syllogism attributed to al-Farabi through image likeness or Avicenna through metaphor is not fundamental enough to poetics, and if that of Averroes is too unspecific and conceptual, then the Poetics are yet unable to be included in the Organon. This is a problem that only further analysis will solve.

98 Black, 25.
B. Classification Suggestions

The current classification of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in his corpus has proven to be problematic and deserves renewed attention. The two primary options that have thus far been taken by philosophers are the inclusion of the work into the Organon, or the dismissal of the work as a productive science. As far as the text of the *Poetics* itself is concerned, it does not fit perfectly well into either of these categories. On the other hand, it would be much more accurate to include the work among the Organon and study its logical characteristics than to leave it as a productive science bereft of philosophical value. These two extremes do not display the only options available, however, as a mending of this classification would allow us to place the work wherever we wish, or even create a new classification scheme to better fit our understanding of Aristotle’s corpus.

i. The *Poetics* as a Productive Science

The *Poetics* is not a work of productive science, and it deserves to be reclassified. Based on Aristotle’s own teachings in the *Metaphysics*, as explored in Chapter Two, we can understand how he viewed productive science and how little his poetic theory shares with it. The philosophical and literary value of Aristotle’s poetic theory are both clear, and the logical value must be considered and properly analyzed.

99 See *Metaphysics*, 9.2 (1046a36-b4), 11.7 (1064a28-b5), 7.9. (1034a31-b7).
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ii. The Poetics as an analyzing tool of Practical Science

The Organon outlines how philosophers can utilize logic in order to reason through theoretical concepts, while the Poetics and Rhetoric outlines how poets and logicians can utilize poetry and speeches to reason through practical concepts. As Black states, logic and poetry serve the same function in regards to their purpose as instruments, and in the Greek tradition, poetry largely commented on issues of politics and ethics, the main tenets of practical science. Plato argues that poetic imitation is so powerful in discussing politics that it can incite people into political uprising, and Aristotle tells us that the practical realm is about an agent performing actions, much as his poetic theory displays. Halliwell’s words again come to mind:

all poetry is the representation of human purpose striving for realization, and therefore
falls within the purview of ‘practical’ or ethical philosophy.100

It is not hard to imagine that if the Organon is a tool to produce conviction for theoretical concepts, then the Poetics and Rhetoric could be a tool to produce assent for practical concepts. Aristotle’s poetic theory does not fit into any classification easily, as logic similarly does not fit into any of the sciences. The Organon was given its own classification section among Aristotle’s works because of the importance of logic in the philosophical community. Perhaps, if we analyze the Poetics on a deeper level, we will find that it is not so different from Aristotle’s works on logic, and that this new classification may not only be valid, but necessary.

100 Halliwell, p. 140.
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