
Schippers, A.

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ARABICA


This book is the result of a three-year project supported by St John’s College (Oxford University) about the Imaginary in Arabic Poetics. It is divided into two main parts: Part One consisting of translated Classical Arabic texts on Poetics, selected, translated and annotated by Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond, and Part Two consisting of several articles by modern scholars on the Imaginary in Arabic literature. In the preface (pp. ix-xv) Anne Sheppard sketches related terminology of the fantastic in the classical tradition (Aristotle and the Hellenistic tradition and the Roman writers). Visualisation is an important element of Aristotle’s thinking, which conceives the dramatist as visualising his play in performance.

The introduction to part One by Wolfhart Heinrichs, entitled “Takhyil: Make-Believe and Image Creation in Arabic Literary theory” (pp. 1-14), states that the term takhyil has to be split up in several terms, since it has been used in different disciplines and several contexts. So he deals with several subchapters: 1. Takhyil in philosophical poetics; 2. Takhyil in the rhetoric of poetry; 3. Takhyil in the theory of imagery; 4. Takhyil in Qur’anic exegesis and 5. Takhyil as a rhetorical figure: namely tawriya (often translated as “double-entendre”).

The translations of Part One are partly done by Geert Jan van Gelder and partly by Marlé Hammond; it contains translations from al-Farábí’s Treatise on Poetry and Great Book of Music (d. 950; p. 15), followed by Ibn Sína’s Syllogism, Remarks and Admonitions, and Wisdom for al-‘Arádí (d. 1034; p. 24); “Abd al-Qáhir al-Jurjání’s Secrets of Eloquence
The articles in Part Two are dealing with the various subjects, after an acknowledgment and an introduction on the contributors (p. 131).

Katrin Kohl’s “Poetic Universals?” (p. 133-146) deals with the general theoretical aspects of phantasia. She deals with philosophical and rhetorical concepts of phantasia, the classical ideas about the faculty of imagination and the mental image. She first dwells upon the Aristotelian theory (in his Poetics) about nimaext as the universal of poetry, nime- sitis being for Aristotle the relationship between poetry and the world within the framework of philosophy. Then she investigates language, poetry and the role of imagination in poetic literature (p. 134).

James E. Montgomery’s fantastic article “Convention as Cognition: On the Cultivation of Emotion” (pp. 147-178) deals first with Arabic poetic convention, for instance, the complexities of the ‘Abbasid ghazal which are constructed around a number of recurrent images which are conventional.

He mentions the role of Music, the Cosmos, and the Soul and the classical theories behind these. In the philosophic tradition music was capable of effecting wondrous changes in the soul and body of the listener. The emotions (tarab) aroused by music, associated with inebriation, in the Arabic context, are not exclusively inner states of mind or the mental products of physiological effects. They are public gestures, actions performed in the social sphere. Taking music and theories on music as a point of departure, he stresses the performative character of classical poetry. Music and poetry are techniques of psychotherapy which include both cognitive habits (thinking, imagining, recollecting, remembering) and external actions (emotional and sentimental responses).

The conventions provide the poet and his audience with transhistorical schemes of cognition and communication. They are communal acts which persist through repeated rehearsal. Within the system of adab, control of the articulation, cultivation, and performance of emotion would be one of the means whereby ideological systems would ensure survival and continued hegemony. To master takhyïl is to cultivate emotion.

Yaron Klein’s contribution entitled “Imagination and Music: Takhyïl and the Production of Music in al-Fârâbî’s Kitab al-Musîqî al-Kabîr” (pp. 179-195) deals with various aspects of al-Fârâbî’s theory of music, he deals with the different writings on music, such as the Comprehensive Great Book of Music, deals with his distinction between practical and theoretical arts of music, the cause of melodies, the reason why certain melodies are more pleasant than others. He makes the distinction between the disposition to perform melodies, and the disposition to compose melodies. He also made the distinction between song music and instrumental music. His last chapter is about the defence of music against the accusations of religious scholars.

Beatrice Gruendler’s thorough article, entitled “Fantastic Aesthetics and Practical Criticism in Ninth-Century Baghdad” (pp. 196-220) sketches the cultural atmosphere in early medieval Baghdad, with its controversy between admirers of “ancient” poetry and those who favoured the “new” poets. She mentions commentaries on verses that contain takhyïl with references to poet’s biographies. Within the practice of bādi’ style, the new style of accumulation of metaphors and comparisons, phantastic style was much appreciated by the ruling class. She gives many examples from literary circles.

Geert Jan van Gelder’s article, entitled “A Good Cause: Fantastic Aetiology (Husn al-ta’lîl) in Arabic Poetics” (pp. 221-237) deals with this figure in Arabic and Persian literature starting with ‘Abd al-Qâhir al-Jurjânî (d. 1078) and his Asrâr al-Balâghâh (Secrets of Eloquence). Many rhetoric and stylistic works are dealt with, and he ends the article on fantastic aetiology, called once by Helmut Ritter, the famous translator of the Asrâr into German, ‘a magic formula’ with a statement: “It is certainly a major technique of reinterpreting the world, which is what Arabic poets are supposed to do: not to represent it as it is (what would be the point of that?) but to represent as it is not but might be, or should be, or would be or seems to be. It is a magic formula, that is sometimes as insipid and banal as a conjurer’s abracadabra or hey presto, but which often enough produces true poetry (p. 234)”.

Sualad al-Mâna’s “Al-Bâdi’, Verse and the Poetic/Non-Poetic Binary in Ibn al-Bannâ’ al-‘Adâfi” (pp. 238-264) presents a very negative concept of takhyïl as found in the work by Ibn al-Bannâ’ al-‘Adâfi, who rejected it as untruthfulness, with unrealistic and imaginative elements.

In his contribution “The Lamp and Its Mirror Image: Hâzim al-Qartâjânî’s Poetry in the Light of his Path of the Eloquent and Lamp of the Lettered” (pp. 265-273), Geert Jan van Gelder, discusses the special technique in takhyïl poetry which combines something of the real world with a metaphor creating an imaginary world basing himself on Hâzim’s Mi:nhâj al-Balâghâ (Path of the Eloquent) also called Sirâj al-Udâbâ’ (Lamp of the Lettered).

Marlé Hammond’s article “From Phantasia to Paronomasia: Image-evocation and the double entendre in Khalil Hawi’s ‘The Mariner and the Dervish’” (pp. 274-286) analyzes a poem by the Lebanese poet Khalil Hawi (d. 1982) from his collection Nahar al-Râmûd (River of Ashes) demonstrating how classical concepts of poetic language are still valid for modern poetry.

This is certainly a useful book which applies critical methods for analyzing the Arabic theoretical writings on takhyïl in a balanced way. Any reader or translator should take into consideration the fact that the rhetorical treatises have their own socio-cultural context and that insights from different disciplines and literatures are useful and should be applied to better understand Medieval Arabic rhetorical and philosophical texts. We recognize that the authors have done a great service for scholars of medieval Arabic literature and literary theory by directing them to pay closer attention to the social and cultural background and context of where the actual discussions on stylistics and rhetoric in the Arabic Middle Ages might have taken place. Since in several contributions not only Arabic literature is discussed, but also Classical Greek and Roman and Persian literatures are involved, I wonder whether there are no parallels drawn with European literatures, for instance, with certain periods in Spanish and Italian poetry, in which the Imaginary played a role. After all, European culture was very close to
Classical and Arabic medieval culture. However, I strongly recommend this book to any serious student and scholar of Arabic literature and philosophy.

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The editor also mentions several love treatises that appeared after Shayzarr’s book, mentions the contents of the present book, its love theory, and has some considerations on the style of al-Shayzarri, his life and works. He also goes into the different manuscripts of the text, mentions the two on which the late professor Semah based his text, namely the Bodleian Oxford ms. Sale 14 and the Majlish shirārī millī Tehran ms. no. 5465. He also devotes attention to a Gotha ms. no. 29, the Preussische Bibliothek Berlin ms. 8459, and a Paris ms. arabic 3384 with miscellaneous contents. This introduction is dated July 2002. It is followed by an Appendix with notes of printing mistakes in vol. 6 of this series (p. 29).

The Arabic section of the book contains an acknowledgement by George Kanazi (Jrj Qanâzî) (p. XIII), the editor of the text, a word from the editor of the series Raif Georges Khouy (p. XV), an Introduction (pp. XVII-XLVI), and some sample pages from the mss. of Rawdat al-Qulūb (pp. XLVII-XLI). Thereafter comes the edition of al-Shayzarri’s text, which starts with an introduction by al-Shayzarri himself (pp. 3-4).

Then follow the different chapters of the work. We give here the English translation of the titles as provided in the table of contents:

Chapter one: On levels and qualities of love and various situations of ‘ishq (p. 5-22);
Chapter two: On those whom love led to danger and hardships (pp. 23-54);
Chapter three: On eagerness toward the beloved (pp. 55-86);
Chapter four: On those who died because of love and severe calamities (pp. 87-147);
Chapter five: On those who kept their love in secret and reached their goal (pp. 149-191);
Chapter six: On gifts exchanged between lovers (pp. 193-204);
Chapter seven: On things from which lovers drew bad omen for fear of total separation (pp. 205-210);
Chapter eight: On things avoided by the zuqā' and dignitaries (pp. 211-245);
Chapter nine: On the behaviour of lovers when they meet in solitude (pp. 247-263);
Chapter ten: On nice responses by wanton men and women (pp. 265-297);
Chapter eleven: excerpts from beautiful poetry and marvelous anecdotes (pp. 299-335);
Follows an index of Sources and references (pp. 337-361) and Indices (pp. 363-381) and an Index of Koranic verses, traditions of the Prophet, proverbs (p. 364) and an Index of poetry (pp. 365-381).

We are grateful for this edition of a hitherto unavailable text of the literature of Arabic love theory. We recognize that the editors have done a great service for scholars of medieval Arabic literature. This edition gives us a good idea of the different textual traditions and variants. We may be grateful to the late David Semah, who initiated the edition, and congratulate George J. Kanazi who completed it and brought it to press for their thorough editorial work.

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