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FĀRĀBĪ’S CANONS OF POETRY

The chance discovery of a manuscript of al-Fārābī’s treatise on Poetics in the India Office Library adds another interesting link to the chain of transmission of the Aristotelian Philosophy of Poetics. That such a treatise was written by al-Fārābī was already well-known, and the fact that no copy of it appeared to have survived is deplored by Margoliouth and Tkatsch. No less regrettable is the loss of al-Kindī’s treatise on the same subject. Unless and until a copy of this latter is forthcoming, al-Fārābī’s tractate is the earliest extant Arabic work on Poetics consciously based on the teaching of Aristotle.

It is highly probable that al-Fārābī was familiar with Mattā b. Yūnus’ version of Aristotle’s Poetics, for he writes throughout Chanā’at al-shu’ara, and in so doing evidently follows the phrasing of Mattā’s title, 1434. The question how far al-Fārābī is indebted to this version is a complex one; and since Professor Guidi has announced that he is studying the whole question of Aristotle’s influence on Avicenna and Averroes, it has seemed better to me—and he has graciously consented to this—that al-Fārābī’s debt should also be discussed in that context. All that the present article contributes, therefore, is an edition of the text, as accurate as possible on the basis of a single, rather late manuscript, and a tentative translation. It is hoped that this will provide a basis for other investigators to work upon.

1 O. MS. 3832, ff. 42b-45a; good nastaliq, probably Indian; 17th century.
3 Analecta Orientalia, p. 22.
7 Margoliouth and Tkatsch agree that this is probably an error for 434.
8 RSO, xvi, p. 414.
Farābī’s Canons of Poetry

 رسالة في قوانين صناعة الشعر: المعظم الثاني.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، مسألة في قوانين صناعة الشعر للمعظم الثاني. قال قسناً في هذا القول إنها إثبات أفكاروي وذكر منائع تنفيذية عن معرفة إلى اللوق في ما أثبتت الم najbli في صناعة الشعر من غير أن نقصدي إلى استياء، جمع ما يتراقص فيه في هذه الصناعة، وتبنيها أو الحكم لا القول في صناعة اللغة فناماً من القول في صناعة الشعر وذلك أنه لم يقدم تتقيمة، أم ين ولا قوانين حتى كان يتغذى هذه، ويبني عليها ويعمها حقلاً على ما يذكره في آخر أفكاروي في صناعة المعنى، ولو رسمي اعتما الصناعة التي لم يرم الحكم إفاضتها مع فضاهة، وربما كان ذلك مهماً لا يليطينا فالأول بأن نبيّم إلى ما يعترضنا في هذا الوقت من القوانين والأشياء والأقوال التي ينتفع بها في هذه الصناعة. فنقول إن الألفاظ لا تأخذه من أن تكون إلا إذا جاء الله وإمس الله، والأشياء الدالة منها ما هي مفردة ومنها ما هي مركبة، والكلامية منها ما هي أفكار ويمنها ما هي غير أفكار، والأفكار منها ما هي جازمة ومنها ما هي غير جازمة، والشيء منها ما هي صادقة ومنها ما هي كاذبة، والكلامية منها ما يوقّل في هذه السامعين الشيء المعب عن بلغ القول ومنها ما يقع فيه المعاحلي للشيء. هذا هي الأفكار الشعرية. ومن هذه المعاحلي ما هو أدنى عناية ومنها ما هو أدنى عناية، والنشقة في الأنماط منها (32) والأنغام إمس إما نبثق بالشعر، وأمل المعرفة بشعر لسان لسان ولغة، ولذلك لا يقال عن القول فيهما أفكار، ولا ينال أن أن المعاني والمعاحلي قول واحد وذلك أن آمنة تتعلق منها أن غرض الأفكار غير غير المعاحلي، إذا امتدح هو الذي يبلغ السامع إلى لغب المثلي، حتى يفهم أن الموجود غير موجود وأن غير الموجود موجود فأما المعاحلي للشيء فيض.
ويهم التقييم لكن الشبهة، ويوجد نظراً لذلك في المسّ، وذلك أنّ المغل المفهوم.

إن اليقين الساكن آلة ساحرة مثل ما يعرّف لراكب السفينة عند نظره إلى الأساطش التي هي على السطح، أو من على الأرض في وقت الريج عند نظرة إلى القمر والكوكب من فوق العين السريعة السريعة هي المغل المفهوم للهؤلاء، فأما المغل الذي يدور للناظر في المرآة، والجسم القبيحة فهي المغل المفهوم للعبة، وهو يمكن أن ينضم الأقول بقسمة أخرى، وهي أن يقول: القول لا يخلو من أن يكون إذاً جامعاً إذاً غير جامع، والجائز منه ما يكون قياساً منه ما يكون غير قياساً، والعقياس منه ما هو بالقياس ومنها ما هو بالقياس، وما هو بالقياس إذاً أن يكون مستقراً إذاً وإذاً يكون قابلاً، والقياس أكثر ما يستعمل بأّم يستعمل في صناعة الشعر، فقد تبين أن القول الشعرى هو المشابه، وهو يمكن أن ينضم القياسات وجعله الأقول بقسمة أخرى.

فإنّ القول إذاً أن يكون صادقة لا تقال فلا يقال بالكال، وإذاً أن تكون 6 كان الكال لا تقال بالكال كيفاً أن تكون 7 صادقة بالكال، وإذاً أن تكون 8 صادقة بالكال، وإذاً أن تكون 9 من مساوية الصداق والكتب، فالصادقة بالكال لا تقال هي الرسائية وصداقه بالكال بيناعدة فين الصادقة بالكال لا تقال هي الرسائية، وقادرة على القول الشعرى هو الذي ليس بالرسائية ولا بالكال، ولا تحذي ولا المغالطة، وهو مع ذلك يرجع إلى نوع من أنواع السوسيلسموس أو ما ينتمي السوسيلسموس وأثنى.

ويقلي ما ينتمي الاستقراء والثناء والفراسة، وما ينتمي إليها جميعها معه 10 قياس.

وأما إذاً وصفت ما تقدم 12 ذكره فلخاب بين أن نصف الأقول الشعرية وأنها.

كيف تنمو ؟ فإن القول الشعرية إذاً أن تكون بهاء breach، وإذاً أن تكون بهاء breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach، فإما تكون بها breach.
p123

[Image 0x0 to 798x620]
نعمت وذکروا فيها الأخلاق المندوبة التي يشتركت فيها: النص والبهاء والصور المشتركة الفقيدة أيضاً. أما إبامسو فهي نوع من الشعر له وزن معلوم يذكر فيه الأقواف المشهورة سواء كانت تلك من الألفاظ أو الكلمات. بعد أن كانت مشهورة مثل الأمثال المذرحة، وكان يستعمل هذا النوع من الشعر في المقابل والمغرب.

وعند الغضب والصدور، وأما إبرامسا فهذه الصنف بعينه إلا أنه يذكر فيه الأمثال والأقواف المشهورة في أئمذ مؤلفين في أئمذ معلميين. وأمام إيبا: فهي نوع من الشعر يذكر فيه الأقواف المذرحة. أما إفراط جدتها، وأمام أن يذكر فيه أئمذ المشهورة، و التي تنتلها أنفس البشر إذا كانت غير محدبة ولا مقوسة، وأمام أنيقي وورطوري: فهي نوع يوصف به المقالات السياضية والخالصية. وذكر بها النوع شعر المذاك وأذنهم وأذنهم وظلمهم، وأمام ساير وغيرهم: فهي نوع من الشعر له وزن أحدثه فيه المستقلين ليعدنوا بإنشادهم حركات في المجالس وبجعله في جميع المبادئ، ما يتمتع بها من خروجها من المرفقات الطبيعية: وأمام فيوموا: فهي نوع من الشعر يوصف به الشعر المبدع والنشيد المستقيم وتبعض ويشبه كل نوع من أنواع الشعر بما يشبه من الأمور المصنفة في القدر والقصيدة الواسعة، وأمام الشجاعنات فهمه نوع من الشعر لحدثه عليه. الطبيعية وسما فيها: العلوم الطبيعية، وهو أشد أديب الشعر سماينة لصناعة الشعر، وأمام أكشاف: فهي نوع من الشعر يصف به تمكن الملحيين لصناعة الموسيقى وهو مقصور على ذلك ولا يتنفع به في هذا الباب، فيما له أصناف الشعر المؤلفين ومعلوماته على ما تؤهله البيان من المرفقات، ومن ما جدناه 15 في الأقواف المنعسة إلى المكان أرسطو في صناعة (ألف) الشعر، وإلى نابضين وفريهما من القضاة، ونابضين للقديمة، وقد جدنا في بعض أقاليمهم معنا ألقنها بأولى تمكنهم هذه أصنافه ومن ذكرها أيضًا ما وجدناها فنقول. 

ففيها 6 إبامسو، 7 وورطوري والمواسيط 9 ديوان، 10 فيهما 11 الفوسي ووجدناها 13

" للمثل البلي: أنه لا يكونوا نم وبايتمهم في المال الزينة من أعمال خام، خامدات التسجيلات، أما أن يكونوا بما وينتون لما وقته، ونل، واحد لع كذا البعض من الهجاء، ربه من بينه وناء: عن قهر الشعراء في تام وما من بريق، في البقية إبرامسا عيده القول، لحيدة، من الأمرين: فيكون ناقص 6"
In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. A discourse on the Canons of the Art of Poetry, by the Second Teacher. He said:

Our intention in the present disquisition is, to set forth statements and mention ideas which will assist those who are acquainted therewith to understand what the Philosopher laid down on the Art of Poetry. We do not, however, propose to describe in detail and due order all that is requisite to the practice of the said art: for the Philosopher himself did not even complete his discourse on the Art of Sophistry, much less that on the Art of Poetry. Now the reason for this was, as he himself declares at the end of his disquisitions on the Art of Sophistry, that he found nothing written by his predecessors which he could use as foundations and canons, to put in order and build upon and assess at a true evaluation. It would hardly be proper, therefore, that we should attempt to complete what the Philosopher, for all his skill and genius, did not venture to bring to a conclusion: rather we should limit ourselves to indicating such canons, examples, and sayings, profitable to the study of this Art, as may occur to us at the present time.

Words, broadly speaking, are either significant or lack significance. Of the former, some are simple, some compound. Compounded words may either be statements, or not statements. Of statements, some are categorical, others not: of the categorical, some are true, others false. Of false statements, some register in the mind of the hearer the object referred to, taking the place of a direct statement, while others register in his mind an imitation of the object: these last are poetical statements. Of such imitations some are more perfect, some more imperfect: to investigate fully the nature of such perfection or imperfection comes within the province of poets, or students of poetry, in the various languages and dialects, and they have indeed written on this subject.

1 Sc. al-Farābī, who is commonly so designated.
2 Sc. Aristotle.
3 Referring to ARISTOTLE’S, De Sophisticis Elenchis.
4 This is almost a literal translation of the concluding paragraph of Aristotle’s work, where he states that he is the first to write on the subject, and that therefore any imperfections in his treatment of it are to be excused.
Now let no man suppose that the terms "sophistry" and "imitation" are identical: on the contrary, they differ in several respects. To begin with, their purposes are different: the sophist deludes his hearer into supposing that he is listening to a contrary proposition, so that he imagines that what is is not, and what is not is; the imitator, however, causes his hearer to imagine, not a contrary, but a like proposition. A parallel to this is provided by sensation. A person at rest is sometimes in a state which causes him to imagine that he is moving, as when he is on board a ship travelling, and looks at persons on the bank; or when he is standing on the ground, in springtime, and looks at the moon and stars behind fast-travelling clouds: these are circumstances which actually deceive the senses. When, however, a man looks into a mirror, or any reflecting body, that circumstance makes him fancy that he is seeing a likeness of the object.

Statements may also be divided in another way as follows. A statement must be either categorical, or the reverse. If a statement is categorical, it must either be an analogy, or not. If it is an analogy, it must be either potential, or actual: if potential, it may be either a deduction or an imitation. Imitation is mostly used in the Art of Poetry: it is therefore clear that a poetical statement is an imitation.

Analogies, and in fact statements generally, may be divided in yet another manner. Statements are either absolutely true, or absolutely false, or mainly true but partly false, or the reverse of this, or true and false in equal proportions. The absolutely true statement is called demonstrative; that which is mainly true, disputative; that which is equally true and false, rhetorical; that which is mainly false, sophistical; that which is wholly false, poetical. This analysis proves that the poetical statement is one which is neither demonstrative, nor argumentative, nor rhetorical, nor sophistical: yet for all that it belongs to a kind of syllogism, or rather post-syllogism (by "post-syllogism" I mean a deduction, image, intuition, or the like, something which has the same force as an analogy).

Having proceeded thus far, it is now proper for us to describe the different varieties of poetical statements.

Poetical statements may be classified according either to their metres, or to their contents. Classification according to metres is an investigation belonging properly to the musician or prosodist, according to the language in which the statements are composed, and the class of music to which they belong. Scientific classification according to contents comes within the province of the expert in allusions, the interpreter of poetry, the investigator of poet and different objects. They are divided into various classes, and need not to be

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ator of poetical meanings, the student of the poetry of different nations and different schools. We have such experts now living, who have made a study of Arabic and Persian poetry, and have written books on the subject: they divide poetry into satire, paean, competitive verse, enigmatic, comic, ghazal, descriptive, and so on. In this fashion they enumerate the various classes in their books, which are not hard to come by, so that we need not to mention them at any great length. Let us turn therefore to another subject.

The majority of the poets of past and present nations of whom we have any information make no distinction between metre and subject-matter, and do not prescribe a special metre for each variety of poetical theme. The only exception to this rule is the case of the ancient Greeks. They reserved a particular metre for each variety of poetical theme. With them the metre of paean was not the same as the metre of satire, neither was the metre of satire the same as that of comic verse, and so on. Other nations and tribes, however, compose paeans in a variety of metres identical with those in which satire is written, using either all or the majority of such metres in common, and not dividing each class off so scrupulously as did the Greeks.

We will now enumerate the varieties of Greek poetry, following the classification used by the Philosopher in his discourses on the Art of Poetry 1, and referring to each class in turn.

Greek poetry was confined to the following classes, which I here enumerate: Tragedy, Dithyramb, Comedy, Iambus, Drama, Ainos 2, Diag­ramma 3, Satyric, Poemata 4, Epic, Rhetoric, Amphi Geneseos, and Acoustic.

Tragedy is a kind of poetry having a particular metre, affording pleasure to all who hear or recite it. In tragedy good things are mentioned, praiseworthy matters which are an example for others to emulate: governors of cities are also praised in it. Musicians used to sing tragedy before kings, and whenever a king died, they would insert in the tragedy certain additional melodies lamenting the dead king.

Dithyramb is a kind of poetry having a metre double that of Tragedy. In dithyramb good things are mentioned, universal praiseworthy characteristics, and virtues common to all humanity, without the intention of praising any particular king or person, but only universal good works are mentioned.

Comedy is a kind of poetry having a particular metre. In comedy

1 The section which follows does not of course occur in Aristotle's Poetics, and I have been unable to trace its source.
2 Possibly: Professor Margoliouth suggests δοσ (L5), in a private communication.
3 In the meaning of "decree": Professor Margoliouth's suggestion, θεσσαρ, seems however more likely.
4 Professor Margoliouth's conjecture, see Anaeæa Orientalis, p. 79.
evil things are mentioned, personal satires, blameworthy characteristics, and reprehensible habits. Sometimes additional melodies are inserted in which are mentioned blameworthy characteristics which are common to men and beasts, as well as ugly physical features likewise common to them.

Iambus is a kind of poetry having a particular metre. In iambus are mentioned well-known sayings, whether they be of good or evil works, only provided they are well-known, such as proverbs. This kind of poetry was used in disputes and wars, during the moods of anger or disquiet.

Drama is exactly the same variety as the last, except that in it are mentioned proverbs and well-known sayings relating to particular men and particular persons.

Ainos is a kind of poetry in which are mentioned sayings which give pleasure because of their exceeding excellence, or because they are remarkable and striking.

Diagramma is a kind of poetry which was used by lawmakers: in it they described the terrors which await the souls of men when they are not disciplined or educated.

Epic and Rhetoric are a kind of poetry in which are described early forms of law and government. In this kind are also mentioned the sagacity and exploits of kings, their battles and adventures.

Satyr is a kind of poetry with a metre invented by the musicians: using this metre, they contrived with their chanting to cause wild beasts, and in general all animals, to make certain movements of an astonishing kind, quite different from any natural movements.

Poemata is a kind of poetry in which is described poetry excellent and atrocious, regular and irregular: each kind of poetry representing the matters beautiful and excellent, ugly and depraved, which it resembles.

Amphi Geneseōs is a kind of poetry invented by scientists, in which they described the natural sciences. Of all varieties of poetry this is the furthest removed from the Art of Poetry.

Acoustic is a kind of poetry intended for the instruction of students of the Art of Music: to this use it is confined, and it has no utility in any other direction.

These are the varieties and several meanings of Greek poetry, so far as we have been informed by those familiar with their poetry, and so far as we have read in the discourses attributed to the philosopher Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, to Themistius, and other ancient writers, as well as the Commentators on their books. We have also found in certain of their discourses additional statements appended to their catalogue of these varieties: these we will now mention in the exact form in which we found them.

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1 Perhaps we should emend to "characters".
Poets may be divided into three classes. The first are possessed of a natural gift and faculty for composing and reciting poetry: these have an excellent bent for inventing similes and images, either in the majority of the varieties of poetry, or in some particular variety. These poets are not acquainted with the Art of Poetry itself in any way, but are confined to their excellent dispositions and bent for achieving what they set out to do. They are not "syllogizing" poets in the true sense of the word, for their vision is not quite perfect, and they are not firmly grounded in the Art. Such a poet is only called "syllogizing" by virtue of the activity he displays as a poet.

The second class of poet is fully familiar with the Art of Poetry: none of its idioms or canons is foreign to him, in whatever field he may enter. By reason of his Art he excels in similes and images. Such a poet fully deserves the name of "syllogizing" poet.

The third class consists of those who imitate the poets of the first two classes and their works, perpetuating their activities and following their lead in similes and images, without having themselves any poetical dispositions, or any understanding of the canons of the Art. It is among poets of this class that slips and errors are most frequent.

The products of each one of these three classes of poets must necessarily proceed either by natural gift or by compulsory invention. By this I mean, that it may happen with a man who is naturally gifted in the composition of panegyric, that circumstances may require him to compose satire, and so with the other varieties of poetry. Similarly with the man who has studied the Art, and familiarised himself with a particular kind of poetry which he has chosen above all others: it may happen, owing to a special circumstance, that he is obliged to undertake some form which he has not mastered, and so writes verse under compulsion, whether from within or without. The finest poetry, however, is that produced spontaneously.

Moreover, poets differ in their composition of verse in degree of perfection or imperfection, this phenomenon being due either to the poet's own ideas or to the subject-matter of his poem. With regard to the former, it may happen that his ideas are more helpful at certain times than at others, because the necessary psychological conditions are now overwhelming, now fail: it is not, however, proper to the present discourse to go into detail about this, and in any case it is clearly explained in the books on ethics and psychological conditions and their individual effects. As for the subject-matter of the poem, sometimes the resemblance between the two objects which are compared is far-fetched, while at other times it is close and
manifest to all: the criterion of the poet’s perfection or imperfection is in this case the question whether his subjects resemble each other closely or not. It may sometimes happen that the occasional practitioner of the Art produces exceptionally brilliant verses, which the expert artist would find difficulty in rivalling. This is due, however, to pure chance and coincidence, and such a poet cannot really be called “syllogizing”.

Similes also differ in degree of excellence. This is due either to the subject-matter itself, and whether the comparison is close and suitable; or to the skill of the poet in his craft, so that he is able to present two objects which differ from one another as though they resemble one another, by the adroit use of additional phrases, in a manner obvious to every poet. For example, a poet will compare A with B and B with C, because there is a close and suitable and familiar resemblance between A and B, and similarly between B and C: so he makes his narrative flow on in such a way as to impress the mind of the hearer or reciter with the idea that there is a resemblance between A and C, although in actual fact that resemblance is distant. There is great virtuosity in this Art in making such impressions. A similar instance is provided by the practice of contemporary poets; when they wish to place a certain word at the end of a line, to rhyme, they mention at the beginning of the line an apposite feature connected with that word, and this produces an extraordinarily graceful effect.

Now we say that there is a certain relationship between the practitioners of this Art and painters: one might almost say that the materials of their crafts differ, but their forms, their activities, their intentions are the same, or at least that they are similar. The art of poetry operates with words, the art of painting with colours, and therein they differ: but in practice both produce likenesses, and both aim at impressing men’s imaginations and senses with imitations.

These, then, are universal canons which may usefully be studied in acquiring a knowledge of the Art of Poetry. Many of these canons might be elaborated in detail: but such elaboration in an art of this kind leads a man to specialize in one particular variety or aspect of the art, and to neglect the other varieties and aspects, and for this reason the present discourse has not attempted anything of that kind.

End of the Discourse on the Canons of the Art of Poetry, by Abu Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṭarkhān.

Arthur J. Arberry.