IBN ṬABĀṬABĀ ON THE PERCEPTION AND INFLUENCE OF POETRY

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The famous book of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā al-ʿAlawī[1] (d. 334/933) from tenth-century Isfahān, titled *ʿIyār aš-šiʿr* (The Standard of Poetry)[2], has a special place in the history of Arab criticism[3]. In this work Ibn Ṭabāṭabā analyses the main elements of literary communication: the author, the literary work of art and the perceiver (actually, the *sāmiʿ*, hearer). Ibn Ṭabāṭabā describes the literary process as a complete unit and at the same time he demonstrates its main elements in progress, *in statu nascendi*. He is the first author in the history of medieval Arab criticism who studied systematically the perception of literary work and its effect on the perceiver. The purpose of this paper is to outline Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's concept of this perception and his ideas on the effect of the literary work.

The book has a short theoretical introduction[4], and, for the greatest part, it contains practical criticism and stylistics (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 25-219). If we are to understand Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's idea, we have to follow the main issue of the theoretical introduction.

Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's work is poetics, a systematic doctrine of poetry in the classical meaning of the word. This conception states that "poetry cannot be anything except: 1) poems which 'narrate' (*yuqtaṣṣ*) things (*ašyāʾ*) already present (*qāʾima*) in men's souls and minds (*an-nufūs wa-l-ʿuqūl*)..., 2) poems which 'give' wisdom (*ḥikma*), and 3) poems which contain truthful descriptions (*ṣifāt ṣādiqa*), suitable similes (*tašbīhāt muwāfiqa*) and appropriate parables (*amṯāl muṭābiqa*), or poems which contain these elements"[5]. Keeping in mind these general statements concerning the content, the author defines poetry as: *kalām manẓūm bāna ʿan al-manṯūr ... bi-mā ḫuṣṣa bihi min an-naẓm* (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 5). This definition and its background constitute the most important side of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's concept in examining the author's activity.

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[1] On his life and activity see Sezgin 1975:634-645, Scarcia Amoretti 1972, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* edited by al-Ḥāǧirī & Salām, Preface, and edited by al-Mānīʿ, 10-34.

[2] There is only one copy of this work in the Library of the Escorial (No. 327, 22-57). al-Ḥāǧirī and Salām edited it from a photocopy in 1956. The revised version was produced by Salām in 1980 from the same source. The last and the most reliable edition by al-Mānīʿ appeared in 1985.

[3] For an evaluation of this work see Heinrichs 1973.

[4] We used al-Mānīʿ's edition. Further references are to this edition. The introduction covers pp. 5-24.

[5] Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 202. I used Abu Deeb's translation (Abu Deeb 1990:366).

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First of all he makes an important distinction at this point between two preliminary conditions of poetry, seated in the personality or subjectivity of the author. These are natural disposition (*ṭabʿ*) and the knowledge of the whole Arabo-Muslim literary culture, named in this context as 'the tools of poetry' (*adawāt aš-šiʿr*), mastered by the intellect (*ʿaql*) of the poet.

Ibn Ṭabāṭabā does not deal with natural disposition at length; it can be regarded as a kind of natural sense (talent) or literary taste (*ḏawq*). It is an inborn faculty of the author, but it may be acquired by studying as well (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 6). This idea, however, gives us a free hand in the interpretation of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's concept: it seems to us that this inborn capability is *restricted* to the natural sense of rhythm, does not mean an imaginative faculty[6], and does not include at all the poem's mythical formation, its inspiration, the urge or devotion that sets a poet to work. We do not find in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's work the usual stories about the inspiration of poets by demons (*ǧinn*)[7]. Naturally, the question arises: what is the cause of this lack? Although Arabic literary traditions have preserved the testimonies of pagan poets about these phenomena[8] and it is probable that our author knew of these data, he excluded them from his investigation. I think that this is a conscious step, and it seems to be dictated by his own understanding of poetics. The exact answer needs more investigation concerning the ideological issues of Islam and the *Weltanschauung* of medieval Muslim civilization. Leaving now aside these general elements, let us examine our text for an answer. If we follow the way of expression present in the concept of *ṭabʿ* (also meaning 'natural disposition, the sense of rhythm'), we can detect a kind of literary phenomenon known in the history of literary criticism: the usage of this word vaguely reminds us of the two main constituent elements of lit erary theory, *i.e.*, *ingenium*, and its opponent, *studium*. The traditional pre-Islamic concept states that the poet's inspiration comes from outside of himself, and now, in this work, we read that the source of this operation is in the inner, inborn world of the poet. This is a new concept, a new understanding of poetry. Poetically it is expressed in Abū Nuwās's poem: "*ġayra annī qā'ilun mā atānī * min ẓunūnī mukḏibun li-l-ʿiyānī // āḥiḏun nafsī bi-ta'līfi šay'in * wāḥidin fī l-lafzi šattā l-maʿānī // qā'imun fī l-wahmi ḥattā iḏā mā * rumtuhu rumtu muʿammā l-makānī*"[9]. The answer may be that it was a conscious decision not to mention inspiration.

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[6] Grunebaum (1952:323) stressed the importance of this question: "medieval Muslim thought never abandoned Aristotelian psychology, which assigns imagination a comparatively low place, ranking it with the animal faculties".

[7] See in this respect Goldziher 1896 "Ueber die Vorgeschichte der Higâ'-Poesie", esp. I-II, pp. 2-25.

[8] See the story of ʿAbīd b. al-ʿAbraṣ (*Dīwān* 1-2).

[9] Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān* 18, *wa-mu'ātī ṭ-ṭarfi*, ll. 4-6.

As to the second preliminary condition, it includes the knowledge of Arabic vocabulary, the grammatical, historical and genealogical traditions as well as the poet's familiarity with the whole of Arabic poetry (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 6-7), inherited from the pre-Islamic and the early Muslim centuries. It contains elements of the cultural background of poetry, structural requirements, language, imagery etc. This enumeration demonstrates a kind of "classicism", the basis of which is a belief that the great age of poetry is in the past and that it contained all the models of poetic excellence. To sum up the second preliminary condition of poetry, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā says: *ǧamʿ hāḏihi l-adawāt kamāl al-ʿaql ... wa-īṯār al-ḥasan, wa-iǧtināb al-qabīḥ wa-waḍʿ al-ašyāʾ mawāḍiʿahā* (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 7).

The distinction between *ingenium* and *studium* reminds us of the Hellenistic concept of *dynamics* and *techne*, or *natura* and *ars*, as sources of poetry and shows that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, consciously or not, belongs to this tradition in the study of the poet's activity. The poet's natural sense of rhythm together with literary education and qualification are the main sources of a poetic work. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's opinion follows the scheme of the well-known philological tradition embodied in the works of Ibn Qutayba (*Šiʿr*, author's introduction), Qudāma b. Ǧaʿfar (*Naqd*) and others.

As an inevitable consequence of the preliminary factors, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā presents the poet as a conscious worker and gives dominance to functions of intellect, *ʿaql*, in his activity. The poet works out the poem in details, fits words together according to his intention (*irāda*) under the continuous control of intellect. The poetic tools, metre, rhythm and rhymes, of traditional Arabic poetry become formal elements of a *pattern-store*; the genres, motifs, images become *matter* for the poetic intention. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā describes the literary composition as a unity of matter, pattern and poetic intention. This structure of the construction in poetry is identical with that of the painter's and the goldsmith's. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā uses the method of weaving, building and goldsmith's work in order to illustrate his main issue: poetry belongs to the special human activity of the arts, it is a *ṣināʿa*, and the poem is an artefact (Grunebaum 1952:325).

Ibn Ṭabāṭabā examines the poem (*qaṣīda*) on different levels. He says that the poem *ʿalā taḥsīl ǧinsihi wa-maʿrifat ismihi mutašābih al-ǧumla mutafawit at-tafṣīl* (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 10). This statement shows us that our author recognized the poem as an entity, as an independent unit. Further, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā says, that poems differ from each other *ka-ḫtilāf an-nās fī ṣuwarihim... wa-kaḏālika al-aš*ʿ*ār mutafāḍila fī l-ḥusn ʿalā tasāwīhā fī l-ǧins* (*ibid.*). These statements deserve consideration in many respects. The most important for us is that in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's opinion the poem is a *unity* which appears in different forms and shapes. The relative evaluation examines the inner relations in a given poem (like harmony, symmetry, appropriateness etc.) between the poetic instruments. This is the question of the relationship between concepts (*maʿānī*) and expressions (*alfāẓ*). Ibn Ṭabāṭabā says: *li-l-maʿānī alfāẓ tušākiluhā fa-taḥsunu fīhā wa-taqbuḥu fī ǧayrihā* (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 11). This idea reminds us

of the concept of "classical" art. We can read in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā that the poet, composing a new work of art, connects contents and appropriate expressions. There work two registers in the process of poetic work: the register of content, concepts (*maʿānī, res*), and the register of expressions (*alfāz, verba*). We are familiar with this Horatian idea in the history of literary criticism from the antiquity, and we know that the theory of imitation (or the lack of originality) is among the distinctive features of the pre-romantic concept of art. Medieval Muslim and Christian poets were expected to imitate the classical pattern in classical matter and in classical literary forms[10]. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, turning himself and his readers to the past, fits into this tradition, or we can say that his activity shows parallel features.

Historically, it is clear that it is not Ibn Ṭabāṭabā who first expresses these requirements in the history of Arabic literature. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, claiming a coherent theory of poetry, uses the results of philological, exegetical and other literary activities[11], and outlines the theoretical background of medieval Arabic literary "classicism".

The linguistic tools of classical Arabic poetry are description (*wasf*), simile (*tašbīh*) and proverb (*ḥikma*). The word *ḥikma* means 'wisdom, sentence, gnome, proverb' and expresses the concise reflections of mankind about themselves and the surrounding world. In this context, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā enumerates the main linguistic tools of poetic work, therefore the word *ḥikma* does not mean 'maxims, gnome etc.' but it denotes a vehicle, a *proverb-like* structure of poetic expression, a characteristic syntax of poetic sentence. Actually, the usage of *ḥikma* in poems reminds us the well-known problem of "molecular structure" in Arabic literature, initiated by Kowalski in the thirties of the century[12]. Now, these linguistic-rhetorical tools belong to the formal elements of a poem, and their main concern is to guarantee the structural connection between concepts and expressions.

On a different, conceptual level, there works a special dichotomy in the description of these rhetorical instruments, too. It seems, on the one hand, that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā stresses *wasf* and *tašbīh* as representing mankind's environment, *Lebensraum*. They also might be used to reflect the outward appearance of the world. On the other hand, he does not completely preclude the possibility of understanding *ḥikma* as giving exact summary of ethical norms and maxims. As for description and simile, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā stresses the importance of truthfulness and agreement between the reality of the outward world and the poetic world created by these tools and instruments. The value of traditional literature lies in its truthfulness. Poets in the past

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[10] See Quintilianus, *Institutio* (chapter II) 68 ff. about imitation.

[11] See Grunebaum 1955, Trabulsi 1956, Heinrichs 1973, ʿAbbās 1978, Gelder 1982, and other works about the beginning of Arabic literary criticism.

[12] See: Heinrichs 1968:14.

"*kānū yu'assisūna aš'ārahum fī l-maʿānī llatī rakkabūhā ʿalā l-qaṣd li-ṣ-ṣidq fīhā madīḥan wa-hiǧā'an*" (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 13). On the other side, he gives us a catalogue of the ethical values. It is a full list of positive and negative ethical categories. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā examines their place and the role they play as dominant elements in constituting the panegyric and satirical genres of Arabic poetry. We can also observe that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, dealing with the linguistic tools of poetry, and, more closely, with the initial moment of poetic activity, speaks about the virtues and their opposites[13]. In Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's opinion, as we have seen, the poet constructs his poem on the basis of ethical categories, to compose a panegyric or satirical poem, he uses description, simile and proverb-like sentence-structures (the truthful methods of poetry construction), and builds up his artefact under continuous intellectual control. Also, in the last analysis, we find here "ein Beispiel für Ethisierung der Poesie" (Rundgren 1970-71:99). The examination of the elements of the poet's activity, and the genre-foundation show us that in this system of ideas truth and ethics are the main sources of poetry. We can also state that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā have laid the foundation of a literary theory which includes the main points of the author's activity and shows us a comprehensive, logical system of ideas. According to this theory, the poet constructs a perfect poem, by an active intellect, on the basis of morality and truth, and following the patterns of the traditional art. This concept corresponds with the literary theories of antiquity and that of the Christian Middle Ages (Curtius 1954:527-529). This concept of art opposes the so-called "inspired" art, which does not recognize the meticulous work of the artist, but originates the poetry in the poet's supernatural inspiration.

Turning now to Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's opinion about the reception of the poem, we read that the "keen wit", the understanding mind evaluates the poem: "*wa-ʿiyār aš-šiʿr an yūrada ʿalā l-fahmi ṯ-ṯāqibi fa-mā qabilahu wa-ṣṭafāhu fa-huwa wāfin wa-mā maǧǧahu wa-nafāhu fa-huwa nāqiṣ*" (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 19). Ibn Ṭabāṭabā reports to us that there is an analogy between the function of understanding (*fahm*) and the function of organic senses. He enumerates the organic senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch), to illustrate his thesis. Two principles serve as the background for this analysis. The first is that the sense reacts upon the impression which corresponds to its own nature; and the second is that the effect can be either pleasant or disagreeable. Moreover, the good or bad effect in the senses depends on the nature of the impression: if it is agreeable, the effect is likewise good, pleasing; if it is unpleasant, the effect too is unfavourable and bad. This theory has been well-known and held valid for the organic senses from the antiquity. As far as we know, it is Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's effort in the Muslim Middle Ages, to extend this pattern to the territory of the understanding (*fahm*) and, more precisely, to analyse the influence of a poem in this

[13] See Rundgren 1970-1971:98-99.

framework. I think that this idea corresponds with the psychology of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's cultural environment, and, as the terminology used in the source matter shows us, this idea or its main tenets were accepted by his successors, as well[14].

Ibn Ṭabāṭabā introduced the function of understanding, and rendered it in a way of epistemology, but, unfortunately, he did not explain its nature, its structure and its relations to other functions of the human psyche. Is it the *sensus communis* or is it an other element in the human entity? The question is unanswerable at the present stage of our work. The only thing we know is that *fahm* is the receptive element of speech in the human being, and, secondly, that the cognitive ascertaining or judging of a poem fulfils its valuation. Our author says in this concern that "*al-fahmu ya'nasu min al-kalāmi bi-l-ʿadli ṣ-ṣawābi l-ḥaqqi wa-l-ǧā'izi l-maʿrūfi l-ma'lūfi wa-yatašawwafu ilayhi wa-yataǧallā lahu wa-yastawhišu min al-kalāmi al-ǧā'iri l-ḫaṭa'i l-bāṭili wa-l-muḥāli l-maǧhūli l-munkari wa-yanfuru minhu wa-yaṣda'u lahu*" (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 20). These lines give us a sketchy picture of the connection between understanding and speech (*kalām*) on a general level, and at the same time they show that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā insists on truth and gives it a favoured and distinguished position.

But, naturally, understanding refuses those poems which do not have the abovementioned formal, conceptual and structural peculiarities. Every-day speech relies on truth, but qualified speech, poetry, complies with further requirements as well. The question arises how a given poem gets formal, conceptual and structural features? The main element in the creative process is temperance. Symmetry plays a dominant role in poetry; as Ibn Ṭabāṭabā expresses: "*ʿillatu kulli ḥasanin maqbūlin al-iʿtidālu kamā anna ʿillata kulli qabīḥin manfiyyin al-iḍṭirābu*" (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 21). It is significant that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā speaks about beauty and ugliness in this respect and only in this place. He does not analyse their nature at all but repeats the traditional opinion: the criteria of beauty are temperance, harmony and symmetry. Reading again the description of composition, we see that in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's concept the mind (intellect, *ʿaql*) penetrates matter, it imposes form (*i.e.*, order, proportion, quantity and quality) upon it, and in this process concepts do get appropriate expression. At the end of composition, inasmuch as the objects which the perceiver discerns harmonize in form, or, in our terminology, make a perfect form, they are beautiful. When understanding accepts the poem, it identifies and weighs construction, proportion, the actual form of concept, and realises in it the perfection or the shortcomings of the ideal form. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā says that a poem which stirs pleasure and joy, is a perfect work (*wāfī*), and, on the other hand, a poem which incites unpleasant experiences is an imperfect work (*nāqiṣ*). The criteria of truth, ethical good and unity, which we detected in the progress of constructing a work of art, get a new dimension at the moment of perception, a new couple of parameters, the perfection – imperfection

[14] See below at the problem of *aryaḥiyya*.

dichotomy. We do see that these are the latent principles of the theory of art in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's work. In this theory truth, goodness, unity and perfection, the terms of ontology, are the most important points of orientation. It can also be said that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's principles of literary theory rest upon ontology, not aesthetics proper.

To sum up the statements about the progress and conditions of perception, we repeat, that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā connects perception to cognitive intellect, understanding (*fahm*). By analogy with the organic senses, understanding perceives the speech which is harmonious with its own temper, and refuses the effects which are inconsistent with it: "*wa-n-nafsu taskunu ilā kulli mā wāfaqa hawāhā wa-taqlaqu mimmā yuḫālifuhā wa-lahā aḥwālun tataṣarrafu bihā fa-iḏā warada ʿalayhā fī ḥālatin min ḥālātihā mā yuwāfiquhā ihtazzat lahu wa-ḥadaṯat lahā aryaḥiyya wa-ṭarab*" (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ʿIyār* 21). Two points merit our attention in this text. First, that perception demands an appropriate subjective condition in the reader; also, in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's opinion, the reader's wish and temper contribute to the influence of a given poem. The other point is that the effect of a poem results in a change in the soul, temper moves from its previous state to pleasure, joy, or to the opposite state, that of disgust and aversion. Consequently, the perceiver can or cannot appreciate the ethical message of a give poem according to this pleasure or the lack of it.

Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, analyzing the perception and influence of the work of art, demonstrates its cognitive and ethical sides. A question arises at this moment: What is the basis of these ideas, what is the source of the cognitive, intellectual view of poetry? As for the structural aspect, we have already stressed that poetry in Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's system belongs to the artificial activities like the work of a painter or that of a goldsmith. This structural analysis can explain construction, rules and formulas of a literary work, but not its nature in the progress of perception. It needs a more generalised and metaphysically valid argumentation. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's words which give a general view of poetry can be traced back into the Muslim past, referring to a well-known and important case of perception, that of the holy Qur'ān. It seems to me, that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā drew a parallel between the effect of the Qur'ān and that of poetry. The Qur'ān is the guidance, the command and the leading speech for mankind. The cognitive intellect has a distinguished role in its acceptance, in the perception of this divine message. The perceiving soul understands it by the cognitive function of the mind. It is known in the Muslim tradition that sometimes this acceptance results in an unusual psychological state. A report says that a Bedouin collapsed when hearing the Prophet's recitation. This effect is reported as a kind of purification which changed the mind of the hostile Bedouin, and changed his directions, wishes, emotions, too. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā did not refer to the Qur'ān in his argumentation. The Qur'ān and its role, however, always need to be investigated in Muslim intellectual activities. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā wrote his work in the beginning of the tenth century. This century was the formative period of the Muslim dogma, and the emergence of the concept of the Qur'ān's inimitability (*iʿǧāz al-qur'ān*) happened at this time as well.

The common analysis of poetry and the Qur'ān was legitimated by the fact that both of them were regarded as special manifestations of the same Arabic speech (*kalām*). Ibn Ṭabāṭabā says that poetry contains the main ethical principles and values of mankind, and demonstrates it in a magic, bewitching form. This double character appears in the so-called prophetic words: *inna min aš-šiᶜr ḥikmatan* and the other one: *inna min al-bayān la-siḥran*[15]. It seems to me that these statements and the traditional perception of the Qur'ān are the central points of universe for Ibn Ṭabāṭabā in his poetics and literary criticism.

The poem results in pleasure and joy. We have seen that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā uses different words to denote pleasure and joy of the perceiving intellect. These are: *aryaḥiyya*, *ṭarab* or *irtiyāḥ*, *iltiḏāḏ*. We find these expressions at other authors, like al-ᶜAskarī (*K. aṣ-ṣināᶜatayni*, 143), al-Qādī al-Ǧurǧānī (*Wasāṭa* 4, 19, 27, 100), ᶜAbdalqāhir al-Ǧurǧānī (*Asrār* 247 and *Dalā'il* 21), al-Marzubānī (*Muwaššaḥ* 70, 422), Ibn Ḫaldūn (*Muqaddima* III, 1318) etc., too. According to al-Aṣmaᶜī *aryaḥiyya* is *ḥiffa*, while according to al-Ǧawharī (*Ṣiḥāḥ* I, 371) *aryaḥī* means *al-wāsiᶜ al-ḫuluq*, and other authors repeat these explanations and interpretations. And these explanations constitute the essence of this experience. It seems that for Ibn Ṭabāṭabā *aryaḥiyya* has a sensual and an intellectual reference at the same time. But the perceiving soul exceeds the sensual stage at the very moment of perception. Acceptable poems open the way to the very essence of a human being. This happens by a magic, bewitching and pleasure-inciting power, the sensual-oriented side of poetry. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā says: "*aš-šiᶜru l-laṭīfu ... māzaǧa r-rūḥa wa-lā'ama l-faḥma wa-kāna anfaḍa min nafṯi s-siḥri wa-aḫfā dabīban min ar-ruqā wa-ašadda iṭrāban min al-ġinā*'" (Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, *ᶜIyār* 23). The result of this state is that the very essence of the perceiver changes: "*fa-salla s-saḫā'ima, wa-ḥallala l-ᶜuqada wa-ṣaḥḥā š-šaḥīḥa wa-šaǧǧaᶜa l-ġabāna*" (*ibid.*). Pleasure originates in recognizing harmony, unity, and truth; and the mind dominated by rationality, through this recognition and perception, wishes and longs for good and beneficence.

Is then *aryaḥiyya* an aesthetic or a purely cognitive state of the soul? The answer could be very important. As for aesthetics we can say that *aryaḥiyya* is not one of its categories because the progress of perception is dominated by the cognitive function of the human soul. As for the pure cognitive function, we can say that *aryaḥiyya*, by reason of sensual references, is not one of its categories either. Ultimately, *aryaḥiyya* is a kind of enthusiasm, the intellect's appetitive activity.

The history of literary criticism shows various patterns of critical and poetical interests that are regarded as types, because they recur constantly, and independently, in different literatures. A few arise out of philosophical issues, others represent theoretical cross sections of criticism, where the evaluation of works and authors is distinguished from analytical description on one side, and literary theory on the

[15] Ibn Ṭabāṭabā uses these sentences in his argumention, *ᶜIyār* 22-23.

other, and considered as a type of judicial criticism. We have already stated that Ibn Ṭabāṭabā's present work is poetics *par excellence*, his main issue being to give a concise description of the nature and work of the Arabic poem. Dealing with the literary phenomena in question, Ibn Ṭabāṭabā uses a vague framework of ideas which are congenial with that of the late Hellenistic and Christian Middle Ages. The intellectual and cultural environment of tenth-century Iṣfahān, the historical fact that his work is among the first poetics of Arabic literature, and that it demonstrates a "frustratingly inconsistent"[16] form of descriptive *and* philosophical, prescriptive *and* regulative statements demand our interest and necessitates a further comparative analysis of his views as to what poetry is, and as to what poetry should be.

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[16] Hamori (1984:385) uses these words speaking of Ibn Ṭabāṭabā.

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