



THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF ARABIC RHETORIC IN ḤAYY IBN YAQẒĀN BY IBN SINA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC STYLISTICS

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Abstract

This article investigates Arabic rhetorical features in Ibn Sīnā's Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, showing how symbolic narrative supports philosophical meaning. Using textual examples, it analyzes allegory (al-ramz), metaphor (isti'āra)—especially light as knowledge—rhetorical economy (ījāz), and contextual appropriateness (murā'āt muqtaḍā al-ḥāl). The study argues that these strategies enable clear, persuasive philosophical prose and influenced later Arabic stylistics by establishing restraint and clarity as key ideals.

Keywords: Arabic rhetoric, al-balāgha, Ibn Sīnā, Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, allegory, symbolism (al-ramz), metaphor (isti'āra), rhetorical economy (ījāz), contextual appropriateness (muqtaḍā al-ḥāl), Arabic stylistics, philosophical prose

Introduction

Arabic rhetoric (البلاغة) constitutes a foundational element of classical Arabic prose, particularly in works that merge philosophical inquiry with literary expression. Ibn Sina's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* occupies a distinctive position in this tradition, as it presents a philosophical vision articulated through symbolic narrative and refined rhetorical techniques. Although Ibn Sina is primarily celebrated as a philosopher, this epistle demonstrates his conscious and skillful employment of Arabic rhetorical devices such as *الإيجاز، الاستعارة، والرمز* and *مراعاة مقتضى الحال*. This thesis examines the characteristic features of Arabic rhetoric in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*



through direct textual evidence and evaluates its influence on the evolution of Arabic stylistics.

Allegorical Narrative and Symbolic Expression (الرمز)

The most prominent rhetorical feature of *حي بن يقظان* is its reliance on allegory as a mode of philosophical exposition. The narrative framework itself is symbolic, a fact made clear from the opening address of the text:

«...اعلم أيها الأخ أنه كان من أمر حي بن يقظان ما أذكره لك»

This introductory formula reflects what classical rhetoricians describe as *براعة الاستهلال*, preparing the reader for a discourse that transcends literal narration. The character of *حي* is not a historical individual but a symbolic representation of the human intellect in its natural disposition toward knowledge. Ibn Sina reinforces this allegorical dimension by describing the gradual ascent of the soul:

«...فلم يزل يرتقي من حال إلى حال، ومن مشاهدة إلى مشاهدة»

Here, rhetorical progression mirrors epistemological development. The use of repetition and parallel structure enhances semantic cohesion while guiding the reader through an abstract intellectual process.

Metaphor and Figurative Language (الاستعارة والتصوير)

Ibn Sīnā extensively employs metaphor to render abstract philosophical concepts intelligible through sensory imagery. One of the most frequently recurring metaphors in the text is that of light as knowledge:

«...كأن نوراً أشرق عليه من عالم آخر، فاستضاء به باطنه»

This passage exemplifies *الاستعارة التصريحية*, where intellectual illumination is expressed through the physical phenomenon of light. Such imagery aligns with established Arabic rhetorical traditions while serving a philosophical function.

Similarly, the separation of the soul from corporeal constraints is articulated through vivid figurative language:

«وانحلَّت عنه عُرى البدن، ومالت نفسه إلى عالمها الذي منه كان مبدؤها»

The metaphorical dissolution of bodily “bonds” demonstrates how rhetorical imagery is used to convey metaphysical transcendence. Rather than explaining the concept discursively, Ibn Sīnā allows the image itself to carry the philosophical meaning.



Lexical Precision and Dichotomy (الدقة اللفظية والإيجاز)

A defining characteristic of Ibn Sina's rhetorical style is his commitment to lexical precision. The language of *حي بن يقظان* avoids excessive ornamentation while maintaining philosophical rigor. This balance is evident in passages dealing with self-awareness and intellect:

«فإنّما هو قد عقل ذاته، وعقل أنّه يعقل، فعقل المعقول والعقل معاً»

This statement exemplifies *الإيجاز*, condensing complex epistemological claims into a concise syntactic structure. The parallelism reinforces clarity and emphasizes the unity of subject, act, and object of cognition. Such rhetorical economy had a lasting impact on Arabic philosophical prose, establishing clarity as a stylistic ideal.

Contextual Appropriateness (مراعاة مقتضى الحال)

One of the central principles of Arabic rhetoric is *مراعاة مقتضى الحال*, which refers to adapting discourse to the intellectual and emotional state of the audience. Ibn Sina carefully modulates his style to suit the contemplative nature of the subject matter. Philosophical conclusions are not imposed abruptly but emerge organically from narrative experience:

«فعلّم أنّ السعادة كلّها في اتصال هذا الجوهر بما هو من جنسه، ومفارقة ما ليس منه»

The rhetorical force of this passage lies in its presentation of philosophical truth as an experiential realization rather than a doctrinal assertion. The reader is rhetorically persuaded through identification with the protagonist's journey.

Persuasion through Narrative Progression (الإقناع غير المباشر)

Rather than employing explicit argumentative rhetoric, Ibn Sina relies on indirect persuasion through narrative sequencing. The reader follows the intellectual development of *حي* step by step, arriving at metaphysical truths through contemplation. This strategy reflects a sophisticated understanding of rhetorical psychology:

«...ثمّ تبيّن له أنّ هذا الإدراك ليس من جنس إدراك الحواس»

Such passages demonstrate how rhetorical *ترتيب* and gradual exposition function as persuasive tools. The absence of polemical language enhances the contemplative tone of the work and reinforces its stylistic coherence.



Influence on Arabic Stylistics

The rhetorical model established in *حيّ بن يقظان* exerted a profound influence on later Arabic prose, particularly philosophical and allegorical writings. Ibn Sina demonstrated that Arabic rhetorical resources could accommodate abstract philosophical discourse without sacrificing elegance or clarity. This legacy is evident in later works that adopt symbolic narration and rhetorical restraint as stylistic principles.

The author himself explicitly acknowledges the limits of disclosure, a notion deeply rooted in Arabic rhetorical ethics:

«وليس كلّ ما يُعلم يُقال، ولا كلّ ما يُقال حان وقته»

This aphoristic statement reflects an acute awareness of audience, context, and rhetorical responsibility, principles that became central to later stylistic theory.

Conclusion

A close examination of *حيّ بن يقظان* reveals that Ibn Sina's contribution to Arabic literature extends far beyond philosophy. Through deliberate use of *الرمز*، *الإيجاز*، *الاستعارة* and *مراعاة مقتضى الحال*, he crafted a rhetorically sophisticated text capable of expressing complex metaphysical ideas with clarity and aesthetic balance. The work played a crucial role in shaping Arabic stylistics by legitimizing symbolic philosophical prose and establishing rhetorical economy as a stylistic norm. Consequently, *حيّ بن يقظان* stands as a seminal text in the history of Arabic rhetoric and literary expression.

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