

## Symbolism in Ibn Al-Muqaffa's Prose: Kalila and Dimna as a Model

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### Abstract

The topic of this research is "Symbolism in Ibn al-Muqaffa's prose, the book Kalila and Dimna as a model." The importance of this topic is due to its connection to the ancient Arabic heritage book, which was written by Ibn al-Muqaffa in the second century AH. It is the precious book of Arabic artistic prose that we have in our hands. The research attempts to answer the question of why Ibn al-Muqaffa resorted to using symbolism, and did Ibn al-Muqaffa succeeded in achieving the goal of writing in Kalila and Dimna. The research aims to study the symbolic style of Ibn al-Muqaffa through his book "Kalila and Dimna" in an attempt to reveal the reason for using the symbolism in the book and to show how Ibn al-Muqaffa employed the symbolic technique. This technique, which he realized its value, presented in new formulas and artistic molds that served his goals and purposes. The problem of this research is represented in what some critics may claim that the ancient Arab literature lacked symbolism and that symbolism did not appear in Arabic literature except in the modern era. Therefore, the researcher felt the necessary to write this essay to reveal the artistic value and talent of Ibn Muqaffa for storytelling. The researcher followed the descriptive and analytical approaches and concluded that the narrative produced by Ibn al-Muqaffa was unique in artistic characteristics and foundational in its traditions. Ibn al-Muqaffa succeeded to a great extent in giving a symbolic character to the tales of Kalila and Dimna, and perhaps this will prompt researchers to pay attention to the ancient narrative which is still far from the interest of narrative theorists in the modern era.

**Keywords:** Symbolism, Prose, Ibn Al-Muqaffa, Kalila And Dimna, Stories.

### Introduction

The animal symbolic tale is an imaginary tale that aims to highlight a moral meaning mentioned in it, especially where the animal represents the role of the human in speech and action. While we read Kalila and Dimna, we find that they contain the wisdom that can be discovered and revealed through consideration.

### The Origin and Meaning of Symbolism

The symbol is one of the terms that have been used in different fields, but in literature, it tends to express many meanings that are mostly suggestive. Writers have found their way to

it, so they have been interested in employing it to serve their goal of achieving artistic mastery.

The word “symbol” is an ancient word that appeared in the Greek language. It refers to a piece of pottery or porcelain presented to a strange visitor as a sign of hospitality. This gift is a link between the host and the guest. The word “symbol” is derived from a Greek verb that shares two things in one. These two things are equal to the symbolizer and the symbolized.

As for the Arabs, the first to talk about symbolism in its technical sense was Qudamah ibn Ja`far in his book *Naqd al-Nathr*, in which he says: The speaker uses symbolism in his speech in what he conceals from all people and discloses to some of them, so he makes the word or letter a name of a bird or beast or other species, or a letter of the alphabet, and he informs whoever he wants to understand about that place so that it is understood between them and symbolized by something else.

This is what made the meaning of the symbol confined to a known limit between the symbolizer and the symbolized, so its meaning is limited and restricted to a meaning imposed on it. The function that the symbol performs in the literary context can be revealed by asking about the need to use the symbol, and there is no doubt that part of the answer lies in the characteristics of the symbol itself, with its ability to suggest, and its effective action in enriching the meaning of the text.

The symbol may start from reality, but it does not depict reality but rather repeats it to the self. The creator needs a means of expression that saves him from submitting to the misery of limited reality.

The symbol is the tool that can bear the needs that he put in an artistic formulation that embodies the aspects of the emotional experience and its depths. The symbol is completely linked to the emotional experience that the poet suffers from, which is what gives things a special meaning. There is nothing that is in itself more important than anything else except for the soul, which is the focus of the experience, and then the importance and value of things vary.

The concept of “literary symbolism” means the symbols in that each of them carries a kind of indicative value. Apart from this, the literary symbol is distinguished by the fact that the indicative value in it is not based on convention or convention as is the case with general symbols, but rather its basis is the discovery of a kind of essential similarity between two things, a self-discovery that is not restricted by custom or habit. The value of the literary symbolism emerges from within it and is not added to it from the outside.

Some scholars believe that the animal story is the oldest folk tale ever, and it is repeated by everyone without exception. It exists in every environment, in every nation, and among different generations and classes, and it has managed to occupy a prominent place among the narrative forms in what is called cultured literature.

The animal in the story of the folk symbolizes human behavior, to achieve a certain goal. The lion, the bull, the fox, and the monkey... are nothing but human models in the skin of an animal; and animals are symbols of people in their good and evil, their strength and weakness, their intelligence and stupidity. This symbolization is done by choosing the characteristics of the symbolic characters to be like a mask behind which the intended or symbolized characters appear. This is the most important characteristic that distinguishes the animal story from other narrative arts.

The animal in (*Kalila and Dimna*) behaves as if it were a human in the form of an animal, and the author rarely pays attention to its animal characteristics, that is, the animals that he made symbols for people in their behavior and customs, so he talks at length about the people he symbolizes, ignoring his symbolic characters. So the roles of the symbols in the story are obscured. There are many examples of this in every chapter of the book, and they appear more in the dialogues that take place between the characters, such as what Dimna said while defending himself in the chapter on investigating Dimna's affair: "Dimna said: The confirmation of what was mentioned has come; for it was said: Whoever strives to seek goodness, evil will hasten to him. And the king and his soldiers are not a bad example. And you have learned that this was only said about the company of the wicked, that whoever accompanied them while knowing their knowledge will not be saved from their evil. Therefore, the ascetics rejected the world and its pleasures and chose solitude and left mixing with people and talking to them, because they saw in it the righteous being held accountable for the deeds of the wicked, and the wicked being rewarded for the deeds of the righteous, and they preferred working for God over working for His creation; because no one rewards good with good except God, and as for those other than Him, their affairs may take on various forms, most of which are dominated by error. And no one is more deserving of beautiful qualities than the king..." In a long speech detailing the statement in The king's conditions and his relationship with those around him. Similarly, the bird Qabbarah said to the king: "I will not return to you; for the wise have forbidden the closeness of the spiteful, and they said: The kindness, gentleness, and generosity of the spiteful will only make you more estranged from him, for you will not find any security for the spiteful, spiteful that is more secure than panic and distance from caution. And it was said: The wise man considers his parents as friends and considers brothers as companions, and spouses as familiar, and sons as males, and daughters as opponents, and relatives as debtors, and he considers himself alone. And today I am the only individual...". The author elaborated on describing people's morals on the tongue of Dimna and the bird Qabbarah, to the point that the recipient forgets that the speaker is Dimna or the Qabbarah. This may be due to the dominance of wisdom and educational purpose in Ibn al-Muqaffa's thinking, and his great care in conveying it to the reader. He does not miss any opportunity that arises for him to talk about people and their morals without seizing it, and of course, this is through the tongues of his characters.

*Kalila and Dimna* is the first literary book in narrative heritage, which moved animal stories from the folkloric oral stage among the Arabs to the literary written stage, and from here its historical and artistic value is revealed together, as it is the first narrative book in the history of Arabic literature collected in one specializing in one narrative art, which is symbolic allegorical animal stories.

### **Symbolism in the Tales of Kalila and Dimna**

In the tales of Kalila and Dimna, Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa created a new type of rhetoric based on the relationship between narration and symbolic representations. It is a rhetoric based on transformation, a transformation that gives the recipient freedom of choice in actions and deeds. Ibn al-Muqaffa says on the tongue of Dimna: "The stations are in conflict and share according to the degree of chivalry. A person's chivalry raises him from a lowly station to a high station, and he who has no chivalry lowers himself from a high station to a lowly station. Rising to a noble station is difficult and falling from it is easy, like a heavy stone. Lifting it from the ground to the shoulder is difficult and placing it on the ground is easy. We are more deserving of aspiring to the stations above us and seeking that with our chivalry. Then how can we be satisfied with our station when we can give it up?" The wild and aquatic animals in Kalila and Dimna are usually found as supporting or giving characters, and they may also be enemies of the main role. Animals play their role alongside humans, some of them help him and others are hostile to him.

The animal action in stories and tales represents the manner of itself and the human. The more realistic, acceptable, and reasonable this tripartite structure is, the higher the story's narrative and readability. The manner here is being to animal or human. The animal character acquires its stereotype in animal stories from three roles:

- 1- The functional role is represented by the animal character in the story.
- 2- The role represented by the animal character is derived from the characteristics and stable perceptions of it in the reader.
- 3- From its symbolic representation of the character, this is more evident on the thematic level.

Thus the book of Kalila and Dimna was divided into chapters. In each chapter, there were proverbs within proverbs. Thus each chapter began with a question from Dabshalim, the king of India, followed by an answer from Bidpai the philosopher. Thus in each chapter, there was a topic for discussion. It was viewed from different angles employing representation, its good and bad qualities were shown by characters of animal look, but human in reality. Some of them fulfill the wisdom of the topic, so they do good and are sufficient. Others neglect thinking, so they do evil and receive the punishment for their actions. The lion and bull chapter represents the supreme authority and depicts life in the court and the troubles and endeavors that occur therein. Then it depicts the kings in their internal politics and the shortcomings in choosing assistants, distributing work, verifying statements, etc., which lead the king to collapse and the country to destruction and ruin. It treats every disease with the sayings of the wise, as it treats with representation and presenting arguments and evidence.

At the beginning of the book, after the historical presentation, Bidpai the philosopher comes up with one short story, which is a parable for his students after he gathers them together to explain to them the reason for the gathering. The parable in that is that a lark took a den and laid eggs in it on the path of the elephant. The elephant had a watering place that it frequented. One day, as usual, it passed by to go to its watering place, so it stepped on the lark's nest, smashed its eggs, and killed its chicks.

The elephant here is a symbol of the oppression and brutality of the ruler as a treacherous enemy who smashed the eggs of the lark. He does not respect everyone under his control. The elephant is the largest animal, and in this, it surpasses all those who are light-bodied.

The end of the elephant is tragic which is beaten by the unit of lark and frog. The images of animals here appear in the unification of the ranks of animals resorting to amphibians and birds as follows: This story explains to us that the strong should not underestimate the weak and the poor, weak and poor necessarily use their wisdom to confront them with the strong and the rich.

The elephant is one of the wild animals that has a large share in the stories of Kalila and Dimna since the beginning of the book and through the fifteen stories. For example, in the story of the man fleeing from the elephant: A man escaped from the fear of a raging elephant to a well, so he hung down in it and held the branch. But one black rat and one white rat were gnawing at the branch, snake also had stuck his head out of their holes. While he was contemplating his situation and worrying about himself, he saw a jar near him in which there was honey from bees. He tasted the honey, but its sweetness and pleasure distracted him from thinking about anything about them and from seeking salvation for himself. He did not remember that his feet were near snakes and he did not know when he would land on them. He did not remember that the rat was constantly gnawing at the branch and when it was broken, his feet would land on the snake. He remained engrossed, oblivious, and preoccupied with that sweetness until he fell into the snake's mouth and perished.

Here we see that Ibn al-Muqaffa was ascetic in comparison to the sensuality of his time, and he explains that asceticism became a philosophical position during that period. To prove the seriousness of the human condition, we find him searching for an example that depicts this condition and embodies it for those who do not pay attention. Here he used the symbol to embody the intended purpose and described that man is besieged and pursued by many forces, some of which are hidden and man does not see them. Some of these are present within him, his thirsty senses, for example. As for hope in life, it is weak for the man who is busy with a little honey that he is exposed to while in his situation.

The well to which the fleeing man has fled is a life filled with plagues and evils. It is a well of water inhabited by snakes, but man holds on to his fate. With the branch at the top of the well, he is connected to the light and can be saved if it weren't for the two black and white rats constantly nibbling on the branches, and here the black and white as symbols of night and day, whose movement constitutes the completion and passing of days. As for the snake, it is at the bottom of the well, opening its mouth to eat the man, it is the inevitable fate, but man is preoccupied with this little sweetness, not thinking about what will save him from the dangers surrounding him, as he is satisfied with the desires of an hour without thinking about the fate of an entire life, so we see him eating, hearing, smelling and touching. That is, he lives with what he has of senses and instincts, preoccupied with his fate, heedless of his affairs, so he does not move forward in his life towards a purpose or an effort because he is a hostage to his desires, trapped in the well until dying.

The escape of man from the raging elephant is his escape from the physical fate that gave him life and pursued him to throw him into the world, and his seeking refuge in the well is a symbol

of seeking refuge in a vast place, which resembles the world, as it is filled with horizons, evils, fears, and disabilities, and the world is the center of the thoughts and the center of dangers and desires that await man as he descends into the world.

There is a basic dual axis, which is the axis of the symbolic animal part in the tales of Kalila and Dimna most of the time, such as Kalila and Dimna, the lion and the bull, the rabbit and the lion, the rabbit, and the elephant king, the rat and the cat, the lion, and the jackal. This basic dual axis can be found in the details of the book and remains in the frequency and continuity of its narration. It is the skeleton of all the themes that grow on its basis. The lion is the ruler and the bull is the advisor, counselor, and friend. The character of the ruler in the kingdom moves from cruelty to mercy, and one obsession dominates the main narrative moment, which is the existence of a healthy relationship between the lion and his kingdom. The relationship between the animals embodies the political relationship in the absolute system. It is embodied in the duality of the king, the lion, and the bull. This relationship undergoes a violent transformation when Dimna the jackal enters this relationship and incites the lion against the bull and vice versa, transforming him from a companion and advisor to an enemy. The killing of the bull seems to be the strongest dramatic story in the entire book. Although the character of the good companion and advisor remains dominant in the narrative presentation. The bull is a herbivore. The lion said to Dimna about the bull: He eats grass, and I eat meat. The bull said to Dimna about the lion: If it were not for the time of destruction, I would not have been with the lion. He eats meat, and I eat grass.

In the chapter of The Lion and the Ox, the chapter investigating the matter of Dimna, it appears that Dimna is a character with a distinctive characteristic, which is his continued resort to spreading discord and defending himself. It is said about him: If he lets his tongue loose in a house, a dispute will arise among its people.

The choice of animal sense instead of human reason to express the problem of man, the world, and being comes intentionally in the tales of Kalila and Dimna to call for the necessity of complete neutrality towards the judgments issued by man, which are mostly ideological. Perhaps someone will ask about the usefulness of this metaphor from the animal, while the borrower, the writer-narrator, is himself a human being and ultimately uses human language that he projects onto the animal. The tales of Kalila and Dimna are filled with opinions and ideas that raise intellectual questions in the reader without reassuring him intellectually and without searching for logical frameworks to crystallize and understand them.

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