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Comparing and Contrasting Fictional Treatises of Ibn Tufail and Suhrawardi

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Abstract

The term 'SciArt' refers to bilateral relations between art and science, including artistically-inclined science, science-minded art, and intertwined SciArt activities. In this definition, different disciplines from metaphysics to physics are reckoned as science, as different types of art- from literature to music are counted as art. The SciArt approach, in the fields of philosophical inquiry, can be accounted for by Farabi's works. As Farabi holds, rational well-being and rational truths just might be brought to mind of people via imagery and analogy. In Islamic philosophy, two representatives of the field are Ibn Tufail and Suhrawardi. I will compare and contrast the main characters of these two major figures in chronological order. Plus a few more philosophical and mystical issues Ibn Tufail developed in scientific matters like anatomy, autopsy, and vivisection in the non-allegorical style. Contrary to Ibn Tufail, Suhrawardi explains mystical vs. philosophical problems in his fictions, using the allegorical style. He represents the world of spheres and the sublunary realm by a variety of imageries like nine shells, eleven layers of a basin, and eleven mountains. Both Ibn Tufail and Suhrawardi use fictional manner to explain mystical as well as philosophical themes.

Keywords: Fictional, Literal, Metaphorical, Rationality, Imagery.

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Introduction

Abu Bakr ibn Tufail (c. 1105–1185) is reckoned as a polymath: physician, philosopher, theologian, astronomer, vizier, and court official. Besides being a court physician, Ibn Tufail was abreast of anatomy of his time. Expressing human anatomy, autopsy, and vivisection in his book, he constitutes an early supporter of autopsy and vivisection. And Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (1154-1191) is portrayed as the founder of the philosophical School of Illumination in the Islamic East.

I highlight another face of them into the bargain. They would be counted as a SciArtist or Scientartist. After developing the SciArt concept, I will apply it to Suhrawardi and Ibn Tufail. Serving this end, I pick out Farabi's definition of art which applies to literature. For purposes of clarification and contrast, I have formerly established Farabi's view (Maftouni, 2012: 239-248; Maftouni, 2013: 33-40).

What's Science Got to Do with Art?

What I mean by the term 'SciArt' is a relation between science and art, such as science in fiction, science in poetry, and science in theatre (Grünzweig, 2012). Example fields of science comprise in this account varied disciplines such as metaphysics[1], physics[2], medicine[3], and economics[4]. And various branches of art as diverse as painting, sculpture, music, and poetry are reckoned as art in its broader account, including literature[5].

In spite of their divergence, both art and science are brought about by creative process (Copley, 1987: 213–215). In this process, they have bilateral services to each other. Science may assist art with enriching artworks, as I explain later in philosophical fictions. Moreover, in some media, such as computer graphics, holography, and space art science have been applied for the creation of art (Garfield, 1989: 3-8). Art, on the other hand, can assist science with presenting scientific issues to the public as well as motivating their creativity.

Categorizing in three main groups, a Sciartist or Scientartist could be an artistically-inclined scientist, a science-minded artist or one involving both artistic and scientific activities, albeit I cannot place distinct borders between these three approaches.[6]

Artistically-inclined scientists are those inclined to artists. For example, James Webb who directed the start-up of the *NASA Art Program* and once put it "Important events can be interpreted by artists to provide unique insight into significant aspects of our history-making advances into space" (Webb, 2015). Science, in this approach, is front-and-center and artists are following it.

The science-minded artist might be used to refer to artists inspired by scientific issues or those who inspire scientists. Some artists describe how they are inspired by science, producing quasi-scientific artworks: "Science is the lens through which I

[1] As a Formal Science
[2] As a Natural Science
[3] As an Applied Science
[4] A Branch of Social Sciences
[5] See Two Main Definitions of Art in: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/art#nav1.

[6] It is Mentioned in *Scientist Center Community*: "Whether you're a Science-Minded Artist or an Artistically-Inclined Scientist (or both!), for our Scientist Membership you Will be Added to our Exclusive Mailing List..." (http://www.scientartcenter.org 5/12/2015).

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understand the world, particularly paleontology and evolutionary biology" (Yamade, 2015).

Sometimes, artists captivate and inspire scientists. Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* could be counted as a quasi-scientific artwork which fascinated American inventor Simon Lake, known as the father of modern submarine.[7]

Ibn Tufail's Non-Allegorical Manner

Describing mystical as well as philosophical affairs, Ibn Tufail is an awesome representative of the SciArt approach. His treatise of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* may very well be considered a masterpiece not only in the field of philosophy but also in science and technology. Being a physician as well as a novelist, Ibn Tufail constitutes a landmark in the history of medicine. In his novel, he elaborates scientific issues of human anatomy, autopsy, and vivisection. This matter I will take up in the immediately succeeding sections.

Novel of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*: *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*[8] is the name of two rather distinct treatisesof Ibn Sina (c. 980—1037) and Ibn Tufail. Drawing the name of his novel from Avicenna's treatise, IbnTufail set a totally different plot and characters as well. His treatise is the story of an autodidactic feral child, a gazelle raised in a desert in the Indian Ocean. Without contact with other human beings, Hayy discovers ultimate truth. Connecting Asal, comes Hayy into contact with civilization and religion. Ibn Tufail's work proves there is no conflict between philosophy and religion. Narrating two versions of the birth of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, Ibn Tufail goes on with the story. Based on the first version, Hayy came into the world in an Indian island under the Equinoctial, where men came into the world without parents.

The second version has much in common in some respects with the birth of Prophet Moses.

There lay, not far from this our island, another great island …, which was then governed by a prince of a proud and jealous disposition. He had a sister of exquisite beauty, which he confined and restrained from marriage, because he could not match her to one suitable to her quality. He had a near relation whose name was Yaqzan, that married her privately, according to a rite of matrimony then in use among them: it was not long before she proved with child, and was brought to bed of a son; and being afraid that it should be discovered, … put him into a little ark …, and that very night the strong tide carried him ashore on that island we just now mentioned. … It happened that a roe which had lost her fawn, heard the child cry, and following the voice (imagining it to have been her fawn) came up to the ark (Ibn Tufail, 1708: 29-30).

Human Anatomy: Ibn Tufail discusses human anatomy in great detail, when he recites the account of those who contend Hayy generated without parents. Starting by explaining three major internal organs, the heart, brain, and liver, he continues with the arteries and veins.

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[7]. See: http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/ten-inventions-inspired-by-science-fiction-128080674/?no-ist 24/12/2015

[8] *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* For the First Time was Translated into English by Simon Ockley in 1708 (London: Printed and Sold by E. Powell).

The history of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan Translated from the Arabic by Simon Ockley, Revised, with an Introduction by A.S. Fulton. London: Chapman and Hall, 1929.

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They … give you a particular account of the formation of all the parts, as the physicians do of the formation of the fetus in the womb, omitting nothing till he was completely formed, and just like an embryo ready for the birth. In this account, they are forced to be beholding to this vast mass of fermented earth, which you are to suppose contained in it all manner of materials proper for the making man's body, those skins which cover it till at last, when he was complete in all his parts, as if the mass had been in labor, those coverings, which he was wrapped up in, burst asunder, and the rest of the dirt dried and cracked in pieces (Ibid, 35-36).

In such a way, Hayy came into the world, and started crying for help and food until the roe which had lost her fawn found him.

Autopsy: Autopsy does stand as a topic of interest in the treatise of *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. The idea is that between Hayy and the roe, the emotion of parenting and childhood developed. The roe kept maintaining Hayy. She stayed by him and never left him, but when hunger forced her; and he grew so well acquainted with her, that if at any time she stayed away from him a little longer than ordinary, he would cry pitifully, and as soon as she heard him, came running instantly (Ibid, 37).

But the situation would not last forever. The roe grew lean and weak, continuing a while in languishing circumstances until she died and naturally ceased all her actions and motions. Hayy called the roe, but there was no answer. Then he began to examine the roe, peeping into her eyes and ears. However, Hayy perceived no viewable defect. Then he continued to examine all parts of her body but found nothing. Since the external examination didn't pay, Hayy was led to perform an autopsy. He was anxious to find the hurt organ and remove the defect, thereby giving body back its functions. In the bodies of wild beasts and other animals, he had formerly observed that there were just three cavities, i.e., the skull, breast, and belly. Then Hayy thought this major organ that all members stood in need of which, must be in the center in the breast. In addition, he felt such an organ in his breast. So examining it, he resolved to open her breast and remove the impediment. For this part of the novel onwards, Ibn Tufail is considered an early supporter of autopsy and vivisection.

Vivisection: In order to view the trajectory of life, Hayy practiced vivisection on live animals. At first, he fixed his attention on the substance which was departed from the heart of the roe. As per his observations, all animals, as long as they lived, were constantly warm and got cold after death. In the bargain, he found that there was a greater degree of heat in his breast, near the place where he had made the incision in the roe. Thus Hayy thought of dissecting live animals. For this purpose, Hayy took a wild beast and tied him down, and dissected him in the same fashion he had dissected the roe until he came to the heart. Then he opened the left ventricle and learned it was full of an airy vapor hotter than he could well endure it, recalled a little mist or white cloud. In such a way died the animal instantly.

From whence he assuredly concluded that it was that hot vapor which communicated motion to that animal, and that there was accordingly in every animal of what kind so ever, something like it upon the departure of which death followed. He was then moved by a great desire to inquire into the other parts of animals, to find out their order and

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situation, their quantity and the manner of their connection one with another and by what means of communication they enjoy the benefit of that hot vapor, so as to live by it, how that vapor is continued the time it remains, from whence it has its supplies, and by what means its heat is preserved (Ibid, 54-55).

Dissecting all kinds of living and dead animals, Hayy landed in first place of naturalists and arrived to the highest degree of knowledge in this kind.

Suhrawardi's Allegorical Manner

The SciArt approach could be also seen in Suhrawardi's works. He describes the issues of cosmology, psychology, and metaphysics in the language of metaphor (Suhrawardi, 1999) while Ibn Tufail uses the format of novel without metaphor. As a case study, I pursue the matter in Suhrawardi's cosmology and Ibn Tufail's medicine.

In traditional cosmology, the nine spheres and the sublunary realm managed by ten intellects are on the well-known descending route of the Origin. As Chittick points it out: "The basic outline is the same as that already present in the Arabic Plotinus: intellect, soul, heavenly spheres, four elements…. Some of the philosophers have developed it into several degrees as did Farabi and Avicenna, who spoke not of one intellect and one soul, but of ten intellects and ten souls. (Chittick, 2001: 57).

The Peripatetic philosophers believed in ten separate intellects emanating from the First Being. The tenth one, the Active Intellect, gives rise to the sublunary realm. However, philosophers did not assert that they were acquainted with the manner in which all the other numerous existents emanated, but concerned themselves only with the nine spheres. They have claimed ten intellects, only because it is impossible for there to be less than that in view of the nine universal spheres and the sublunary realm (Jami, 1979: 69).

Suhrawardi in the book *Hikmah al-Ishraq* holds that the intellects are more than ten, twenty, and two hundred (Suhrawardi, 2002, Vol. II: 139-140). In *Alvah Emadi* (Ibid, vol.: 148-149; vol. IV: 65.), he also emphasizes that there are too many intellects, quoting Quran's verse: "None knows the armies of your Lord save Himself (Quran, 74/31). Therefore, the heavenly bodies would be more than nine. Because intellects figure corresponds to spheres figure. But in his allegorical treatises, Suhrawardi symbolizes the theory of nine spheres and ten intellects.

In *A Day with a Group of Sufis,* Suhrawardi himself has decoded his allegories about this theory. First, he mentions the theory in allegorical form. When a wayfarer said to his master, "The engraver's craft is amazing," his master replied, "There is a well-known tale in their craft, but no one tells it fully, and no one knows the meaning of it." "What is this tale?" the wayfarer asked. His master went through the story:

Once, an engraver had a jewel. He wanted to display his skill on it. So from it he made a round shell like a ball. Then, from the residue left in the middle of the shell he made another shell inside the first. Again, from the residue of the second he made a third, and so on until he had made nine shells. Afterwards, from the remainder of these shells he made a jewel, which he wrapped in two pieces of cloth, one of which had no color and the other of which was whitish. These he placed in the middle of the shells. He then polished the first shell and engraved a few medallions on the second

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shell and gilded it. On the third, fourth, and so on to the ninth shells he engraved one medallion each.

After the allegorical tale, Suhrawardi starts decoding it. When the wayfarer heard the tale from his master, he said, "I do not understand what you are saying to me. Tell me clearly that I may benefit fully." His master started explaining the allegories, "When the Creator created these spheres, he sent a light to the first sphere." For a sphere is an intermediary between being and non-being, the first sphere was too subtle to bear it. It borders on existence. Then again, it is continuous with nonexistence. As a consequence, the light reached the second sphere, which was able to bear it.

The light was broken up against the second sphere, and every part became a star. What was left over from these stars, came to the third sphere, and from that residue Saturn came into being. Again, what was left over from Saturn reached the fourth sphere, and the body of Jupiter came into being. And so on, Mars from residue of Jupiter, the Sun from the residue of Mars, Venus from the residue of the Sun, Mercury from the residue of Venus, and from the residue of Mercury, the Moon (Suhrawardi, 1999: 34-35).

Sometimes Suhrawardi speaks of eleven spheres, adding two spheres of *zamharir* and *ether*.[9] In *A Day with a Group of Sufis*, the wayfarer asks, "Why is the body of the Sun bigger and brighter than the other stars?" His master says: "Because it is in the middle. If you count seven planets, the Sun is in the middle. And just as there are two spheres above the seven, there are two other spheres below them, *ether* and *zamharir*. Therefore, by any reckoning, the Sun is in the middle" (Suhrawardi, 1999: 36).

Hence Suhrawardi is clear about his cosmology, we are allowed to decode his cosmology, corresponding the allegories to nine and eleven spheres.

In *A Day with a Group of Sufis*, the nine shells symbolize the nine spheres. The first shell is polished, and there are a few medallions on the second shell. On the third, fourth, and so on to the ninth shells, there is one medallion.

Cosmology issues in Suhrawardi's writings encompasses *A Day with a Group of Sufis* (Ibid, 33-42) and these five other treatises: *The Sound of Gabriel's Wing* (Ibid, 8-19), *The Red Intellect* (Ibid, 20-32), *On the State of Childhood* (Ibid, 43-57), *On the Reality of Love* (Ibid, 58-76), and *The Language of the Ants* (Ibid, 77-90).

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[9]. The Eleven Spheres System Is Attributed to Ptolemy and His Disciples. "Ptolemy Has Established the Generally Accepted Order of the Heavens, From Bottom to Top: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Fixed Stars or Starry Heaven, and Had Added A Ninth Heaven, the Primum Mobile. This Heaven Was Added By Ptolemy In Order to Account For Two Observed Movements of The Heavens. First, Their Daily Motion East to West Around The Pole of The Equator Was Attributed to What Ptolemy Called the 'Sphere That Moved the Sphere of the Fixed Stars' (The Primum Mobile). Ptolemy Attributed the Other, Slow Movement of the Planets From West to East at the Rate of 1° Every Hundred Years Around the Pole of the Ecliptic Known as the Precession of The Equinoxes, First Discovered By Hipparchus (190-C.120), to the Heaven of the Fixed Stars. Initially Astronomers Have Supposed That the Eighth Sphere That of the Fixed Stars Was Affected By As Many as Three Different Motions, and on the Principle That a Single Sphere Must Be Assigned to Each Distinct Celestial Motion, Additional Spheres Plus an Immobile Empyrean Were Often Added For a Total of Eleven Spheres" Theodore J. Cachey Jr, 'Cosmology, Geography, And Cartography, Eds. Zygmunt G. Barański And Lino Pertile, *Dante in Context*, (Cambridge, 2015) Pp. 221-240.

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I have just explained the account of *A Day with a Group of Sufis*. *The Sound of Gabriel's Wing* is the next treatise in my account.

In this treatise, ten intellects are symbolized by ten old men seating on a bench. The wayfarer says of them, "When I looked I saw ten old men of beautiful countenance seated on a bench. I was so amazed by their magnificence and splendor and so staggered by the sight of their throne, their beauty, their white hair, their garments and trappings that I could not speak" (Ibid, 9-10).

The old man who was at the end of the bench greeted the wayfarer in a most kindly-disposed manner, saying, "We are a group of abstracted ones, come from the direction of Nakuja-abad" that means they are ten Separate Intellects.

"Why do the elders seated above you keep silent?" The wayfarer asked. "Because the likes of you are unworthy to approach them," the tenth and last of them, the Active Intellect said, "I serve as their tongue, for they will never deign to address the likes of you".

Then the wayfarer saw in the courtyard a basin with eleven layers (Ibid, 11). By these eleven layers, Suhrawardi allegorizes the eleven spheres. There is no crack or no crevice on the surface of upper nine levels of the basin. This means there is no crack and no crevice on the surface of nine spheres according to a traditional theory. "Although no hole could be made through the nine upper levels, one could easily pierce through the lowest level" (Ibid, 10-12). For the lowest level refers to the sublunary world.

The first level had no button at all, whereas the second level had many luminous buttons on it. Because the first level of the basin is an allegory of Sphere of the spheres and the second level is an allegory of sphere of the Fixed Stars.

"On each of the remaining seven of the upper nine levels of the basin a bright button was fastened." These buttons refer to Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon.

When the wayfarer asks the old man what this basin is, he explains the relation between the intellects and the spheres. Then he explains the relation between the intellects themselves. The elder who is at the highest place is the master and tutor of the second elder, who sits beside him. He has signed the second elder's order of investiture, the second has signed the third's order, the third the fourth's order, and so on down to the tenth.

The next allegories of the spheres, in *The Sound of Gabriel's Wing*, are son as the soul of the sphere and mill as the body of the sphere.

"Do you have children and property and things like that?" the wayfarer asks. "We have never had spouses," he said, "but each one of us has a son. Each of us also has a mill and we have appointed our sons to supervise the mills. We have never looked at the mills since we built them, but our sons maintain them in good running order by keeping one eye on the mill and the other on their fathers.

The mill of tenth intellect, the Active Intellect, is a dismal place and fraught with dangers and pitfalls, consisting of four levels, i.e., four elements: earth, water, air, and fire, (Ibid, 10-12) for the sublunary world is so.

Also in *The Red Intellect*, Suhrawardi speaks of eleven spheres by allegory of eleven mountains. The first one of the Seven Wonders of the World is the Mount Qof that surrounds the world consisting of

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eleven mountains (Ibid, 22). The Red Intellect who instructs the wayfarer approaches him as politely as possible, describing that every white thing that is connected to light appears red when admixed with black, like the sunset at the beginning of evening or the end of dawn, which is white where it is connected to the Sun's light. One side of it is toward the light, which is white, while the other side is toward the night, which is black. Therefore, it appears red. When the crescent moon rises, although its light is borrowed, it is nonetheless described as light. Since one side of it is toward day and the other side toward night, it appears red. A flame has the same quality (Ibid, 21-22).

The white side is the allegory of the Separate Intellects versus the black side is the allegory of the sublunary world. For the Active Intellect is the last Separate Intellect and is responsible for the sublunary realm, he has located between the white and the black sides.

The origin of the Active Intellect or Red Intellect is Mount Qof whose position is above all the eleven spheres.

Then the wayfarer asks the Red Intellect about wonders he had seen in the world. He answers that he had seen Seven Wonders. First of all is Mount Qof, which is their realm, surrounding the world and consists of eleven mountains. When the wayfarer is delivered of his bondage he will go there." The second is the Pearl-glowing-night that refers to the Moon. The third one is the Tuba tree that refers to the Sun. The fourth wonder is the Twelve Plants that symbolize the sphere of Fixed Stars. The fifth is David's chain mail and it probably refers to human's body. The sixth is the sword Balarak. Maybe it symbolizes the Death. And seventh is the Spring of Life (Ibid, 22-23).

The fourth treatise, in my account, is *On the State of Childhood* which gives some clear hints on the Moon, the Sun, the Earth, and the sphere. Moreover, the Moon is allegorized in it by the Pearl-glowing-night like *The Red Intellect* (Ibid, 47-49).

The fifth and the last treatise that I want to mention, *On the Reality of Love*, includes allegorizing nine spheres by the nine-storied pavilion.

Know that above this nine-storied pavilion is a vault called the City of the Soul. It has ramparts of might and a moat of power. At the gate to that city is stationed a young old man whose name is Jawed Khirad. He continually travels about in such a way that he never moves from his place (Ibid, 64).

Accounting for the Two Manners

We've observed two kinds of allegorical vs. non-allegorical styles in the treatises of Ibn Tufail and Suhrawardi. So, we well might think why these two important philosophers should take such an approach i.e., elaborate philosophical ideas in an artistic style? Replying the problem at hand, we need to look at the Farabian rationality. According to him, final well-being is the state in which a human being successfully perceives the rational, and achieves the nearest possible status to the Active Intellect (Farabi, 1984: 31). For Farabi, people who cannot understand the rational nonetheless have full use of their imagination (Farabi, 1992: 129-130). So rational truths – and thus, well-being – should be somehow transferred to the imagination of such people. This task should be undertaken first by the Prophet, who has himself been linked to the Active Intellect, and has thus received all facts in

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their rational and imaginary forms. There are two ways to achieve understanding: one can perceive the essence of a thing and imagine it in its existing form, or one can imagine an idea, and all the things similar to it (Farabi, 1997: 225). It is not possible to speak of or bring into action the particular details of that which is non-sensible – such as the soul, the ten heavenly intellects, the hyle, and all abstract beings. It is not possible, that is, unless they are formed in the imagination. Although such things cannot be felt, we can imagine them through analogy, parallelism, or allegory (Farabi, 1996: 43).

Conclusion

The term SciArt implies to a variety of relations between art and science. Ibn Tufail's sciart approach is non-allegorical while that of Suhrawardi proved allegorical.

Regarding him as a philosopher as well as novelist, Ibn Tufail be exemplified a sciartist. Although his treatise mainly does not include allegory, literature by itself is reckoned as art in its broader fashion. That being the case, sciartist is applied to, for example, the poets, the musicians, the writers as well as the novelists. Elaborating a lot of philosophical and mystical matters, Ibn Tufail discusses in complete detail the issues of medicine.

Explaining complicated issues of philosophy and mysticism as well as cosmology in his allegorical fictions, Suhrawardi is exemplified a sciartist too. For example, Suhrawardi depicts the nine spheres and the sublunary realm by the pearl-glowing-night, the nine shells, eleven layers of a basin, eleven mountains surrounded by the Mount Qof, sons, mills, the Tuba tree, as well as the Twelve Plants.

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چکیده

اصطلاح هنر-دانش ناظر به انواع سه‌گانه ارتباطات دوسویه میان هنر و دانش است: دانش هنرگرا، هنر دانش‌گرا و فعالیت‌هایی که گرایشی بینابین به هنر و همچنین دانش دارند. در این مفهوم‌سازی، رشته‌های گوناگون علمی از متافیزیک تا فیزیک به‌عنوان دانش تلقی می‌شوند، همان‌گونه که رشته‌های متنوع هنر و ادبیات تحت نام هنر قرار می‌گیرند. تبیین رهیافت هنر-دانش در حوزهٔ تحقیقات فلسفی توسط فارابی تبیین‌پذیر است. فارابی بر آن است که عقلانیت اعم از سعادت عقلانی و حقایق عقلانی صرفاً از طریق خیال و محاکات و شعر قابل تعمیم است. ابن طفیل و سهروردی دو نمایندهٔ فلسفهٔ اسلامی عهده‌دار برقراری تعمیم عقلانیت شده‌اند. ویژگی‌های روش این دو در رساله‌های داستانی در یک بررسی تطبیقی تحلیل می‌شود. مهم‌ترین تشابه آن دو بهره‌مندی از شیوهٔ داستان‌پردازی است و برجسته‌ترین تفاوت ابن طفیل و سهروردی این است که ابن طفیل در داستان‌پردازی از زبان رمز و نماد استفاده نکرده درحالی‌که سهروردی از نمادپردازی استفادهٔ سرشاری کرده است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: داستانی، تصریحی، استعاری، عقلانیت، تخیل.

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