

Satire and subversion in Medieval allegories: “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*

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Abstract

“Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* demonstrate the emergence of satire and subversion as important themes in medieval allegories. The authors of both texts utilized the trickster-protagonist to portray dualism in society—especially right versus wrong. In both stories, the trickster figures have two roles: as protagonists and as villains. Both medieval allegories criticize the hypocrisy of their societies, in which mediocrity was praised and excellence was ignored. “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* are forms of constructive social criticism that readers desperately need today. An analysis of “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural contexts in which these works emerged, as well as of the literary techniques employed to convey their satirical messages. Hopefully, this article will enrich the study of medieval literature by providing valuable insights into the role of satire and subversion in allegorical narratives.

Keywords: Arabic literature, comparative literature, *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*, medieval allegories, Reynard the Fox, satire, subversion.

Introduction

As a literary device, satire has a long history that dates back to ancient times. It is a form of artistic expression that uses irony, sarcasm, wit, and humor to criticize and ridicule individuals, institutions, and societal norms. Satire is a genre of literature, and sometimes of graphic and performing arts, in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, governments, or societies toward improving. Although satire is outwardly humorous, its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit to draw attention to both major and minor social issues. In the context of medieval literature, satire played a crucial role in challenging the existing power structures and societal norms. The Middle Ages were a period marked by feudalism, in which social structures were rigidly hierarchical, and power was concentrated in the hands of the nobility and the Christian clergy. Satire emerged as a means for writers to question and subvert these established authorities, providing a platform for social criticism and commentary (Elliott, 2004).

Satirical authors are usually highly regarded by social critics, since they want to solve problems in their community. Sometimes, satire utilizes irony to harshly criticize personalities or society at large. By using irony and humor, authors can effectively convey their discontent with the prevailing order by disguising their criticism within allegorical narratives to mitigate potential backlash. Satire is characterized by its subversive nature, since it seeks to expose the follies, vices, and hypocrisies of its targets, often with the intent of provoking change or encouraging critical reflection (Monroe, 1983).

Moreover, satire in medieval literature often had a didactic purpose, seeking to educate readers about the shortcomings of their society, provoking them to question the prevailing norms and values. Satirical allegories presented moral dilemmas, exposed the consequences of unethical behavior, and encouraged readers to reflect on their own actions and beliefs. In this way, satire served as a tool for moral instruction and social commentary (Griffin, 1994).

In medieval allegorical works, satire also was a form of entertainment and intellectual engagement. Works such as “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* captivated readers with their witty and satirical portrayals of characters and situations. Through the use of humor, the authors engaged readers emotionally and intellectually, challenging them to consider the deeper meanings and implications of the satirical content.

In this article, I explore satire as a subversive tool in the service of constructive social values in two works: the story of “Reynard the Fox” (“*Le Roman de Renart*”) from medieval French literature and the stories of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* from medieval Arabic literature. I especially focus on the role of the villainous trickster-protagonist

in both stories, since this character, through satirical means, catalyzes reversals in societal norms, helps to reshape his world, and ultimately reveals truths about our world.

By examining the satirical elements within these narratives, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how satire functioned as a powerful tool for challenging the status quo and inspiring social change. I will explore the techniques and themes employed by the authors to convey their satirical messages. I will also examine the cultural context in which these works were produced, considering the specific social, political, and religious dynamics that influenced the use of satire.

Background on satire

Satire as a Literary Device

Satire has long been employed as a powerful literary tool for social commentary and critique. Through the use of irony, satire enables writers to expose and criticize vices, follies, and flaws in individuals, institutions, and society at large. By highlighting absurdities and contradictions, satire aims to provoke reflection, challenge established norms, and incite change (Awadh, 2020).

The origins of literary satire can be traced back to ancient times, when it was utilized by renowned authors such as Aristophanes (446-386 B.C.) in Greek comedy and Juvenal (55-199 A.D.) in Roman poetry. However, satire's popularity and significance reached new heights during the medieval period, particularly in allegorical works. As symbolic narratives, allegories allowed authors to present complex ideas and social criticism in a metaphorical manner, often with a moral or didactic purpose (Highet, 2015).

Medieval allegories, such as "Reynard the Fox" and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*, employed satire as a key element to convey their messages. These allegorical works were not only sources of entertainment, but also platforms for societal critique, challenging the prevailing order and exposing the flaws and hypocrisy of individuals and institutions. By employing satire within the allegorical framework, these works offered a multilayered approach to commentary, engaging readers intellectually and emotionally (Fletcher, 2021).

Furthermore, satire as a literary device provides authors with a certain level of protection. The use of humor and irony in allegories enabled writers to present their criticisms with a degree of subtlety, which shielded them from direct retribution or censorship. Satire's ability to entertain and engage readers while challenging societal norms made it an effective means of communication at a time when dissent was often met with severe consequences (Parsons, 2009).

Satire also played a role in fostering a sense of collective identity among readers. The shared experience of recognizing the satirical elements within an allegorical work created a sense of camaraderie among those who were critical of the existing social order. This shared understanding and critique could potentially lead to collective action, as readers found solidarity in their dissatisfaction with the status quo (Bogel, 2001).

Satire's ability to evoke emotions such as amusement, irony, and outrage served as a powerful catalyst for change. The emotional responses elicited by satire compelled readers to question the absurdities and injustices depicted in the allegorical narratives. This emotional engagement fostered a sense of empathy and understanding, encouraging readers to empathize with marginalized characters or victims of social injustice. Through this emotional connection, satire in medieval allegorical works had the potential to motivate readers to take action, whether it be advocating for social reform or challenging oppressive systems (Keane, 2015).

Political and social satire

In medieval allegorical works, political and social satire served as a socially acceptable and even admirable vehicle for authors to critique the power structures, institutions, and societal norms of their time. Through its use of irony, humor, and exaggeration, satire allows writers to expose the shortcomings, vices, and follies of political leaders, religious authorities, and social hierarchies. By employing satire within an allegorical framework, authors were able to challenge the status quo, provoke critical reflection, and stimulate discussions about pressing political and social issues (Astell, 1999). Satire reveals individual or group corruption in ways that may be more difficult to convey by ordinary speech (Albucard & Sohadjaderi, 2020). Therefore, one of satire's tasks is to provide solutions to political and social issues, which makes the literature form a kind of truth-telling.

Satire and Political Critique. The medieval authors of political satire in allegories aimed to unveil the flaws and hypocrisies of political leaders and systems. To expose corruption and abuse of power, these writers often featured humorous animal characters that represented various political figures (Hutcheon, 1994). In "Reynard the Fox," the cunning fox represents the deceitful and manipulative nature of political leaders. Through his interactions with other animal characters, the narrative exposes the duplicity and moral bankruptcy of people in positions of authority (Yun, 2016).

Satirical allegories also provided a means for authors to comment on specific political events and social issues of their time. By disguising their critique within a fictional narrative, the writers could express dissent without facing

direct repercussions. This allowed them to navigate the delicate political climate and engage readers in critical discussions without directly challenging the ruling powers (Gibbs, 2011). For example, the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* presents satirical portraits of political figures and societal elites, highlighting their flaws and satirizing their behavior in a way that resonated with readers (Shoshan, 1991).

Satire and social critique

Social satire in medieval allegories played a crucial role in exposing the vices and inequalities prevalent within society. These works employed satire to challenge societal norms, question the morality of established hierarchies, and highlight the contradictions between professed ideals and actual behavior. Satirical allegories often featured characters that embodied different social classes (Knight, 2004).

Through satire, authors aimed to spark conversations about social injustices and advocate for change. They used humor and exaggeration to shed light on the absurdities and injustices of the social order, inviting readers to critically examine their own roles within these systems. By exposing the contradictions and hypocrisies embedded within societal structures, allegorical works sought to inspire readers to question and challenge the prevailing norms and values (Knight, 2004).

The use of satire in allegorical works also provided a platform to critique the role of religion in society. Satirical narratives often mocked religious figures and practices, highlighting instances of hypocrisy, corruption, and other moral failings. The aim was not to undermine religious faith or belief but to draw attention to the discrepancies between religious teachings and the behavior of religious authorities. This served as a call for introspection and a reminder to hold those in positions of power accountable for their actions (Ogonna, 2015).

The effects of political and social satire

The political and social satire employed in medieval allegorical works had significant effects on readers and society at large. Satire encouraged readers to question the status quo, inspiring them to reconsider their beliefs, values, and societal structures. It challenged the complacency and acceptance of injustice, fostering a spirit of critical thinking and empowering individuals to take action (Astell, 1999).

One of the key effects of political and social satire was the creation of a shared sense of critical awareness among readers. By exposing the flaws and contradictions of the existing social order, satire invited readers to reflect on their own behaviors and challenge the norms that perpetuated injustice. This shared understanding and critique formed the basis for collective action, as readers found solidarity in their dissatisfaction with the status quo (Griffin, 1994).

Satire also had the power to humanize marginalized groups by highlighting their struggles. By satirizing the behaviors and attitudes of the privileged and powerful, allegorical works brought attention to the plight of the disadvantaged and gave them a voice. Through humor and irony, these narratives challenged social prejudices and stereotypes, promoting empathy and understanding among readers (LaMarre, 2009).

In "Reynard the Fox," the character of Reynard, despite being portrayed as cunning and deceitful, also represents the underdog, the marginalized voice challenging the established order. Through his struggles against the powerful and corrupt, Reynard becomes a symbol of resistance and defiance. This satirical portrayal not only entertained readers but also created a sense of sympathy and identification with marginalized characters, leading to a reevaluation of societal hierarchies (Paulson, 2019). Similarly, the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* uses satire to shed light on the lives and experiences of ordinary people. The narratives often depict the struggles, aspirations, and limitations faced by individuals from different social backgrounds. Through humor and wit, al-Hamadhani exposes the realities of social inequality, providing a platform for empathy and understanding (bin Tyeer, 2016).

The humanizing effect of satire on marginalized groups extended beyond the fictional realm of allegorical works. By challenging societal norms and prejudices, satire has the potential to influence public opinion and promote social change. Satirical literature acts as a mirror to society, reflecting its flaws and shortcomings. It exposes the injustices faced by marginalized communities and forces readers to confront their own biases and prejudices (Keane, 2015).

Furthermore, satire in medieval allegorical works served as a form of catharsis for readers. The humorous and satirical elements provided an outlet for the frustrations and grievances experienced by individuals within the existing social order. By laughing at the follies and absurdities of those in power, readers found solace and a sense of empowerment. Satire allowed them to express their discontent and gave them hope for a different and more just society (Birney, 1973).

Characteristics of political and social satire

Political and social satire is a form of artistic expression. It serves as a powerful tool for social commentary, challenging the status quo, and provoking critical reflection on the prevailing power structures. One of the defining characteristics of political and social satire is its subversive nature. Satire aims to disrupt the established order by questioning and undermining authority (Holoch, 2012).

Humor plays a crucial role in political and social satire, serving as a vehicle for conveying critical messages in an entertaining and engaging manner. Satirists employ wit, wordplay, and comedic techniques to capture the attention of their audience and disarm them with laughter. Through humor, satire can penetrate the defenses of readers or listeners, enabling them to reflect on societal issues without feeling attacked or defensive (LaMarre, 2009).

Political and social satire often relies on irony to convey its message effectively. Irony involves a contrast between what is expected and what actually occurs. Satire employs situational irony, verbal irony, or dramatic irony to expose the contradictions, hypocrisy, and incongruities in political and social situations. By highlighting the gaps between stated ideals and actual behavior, irony exposes the discrepancy between what society claims to be and what it truly is (Hutcheon, 1994).

Another characteristic of political and social satire is its ability to utilize exaggeration and caricature. Satirists often amplify and distort certain traits, behaviors, or situations to create a heightened sense of absurdity and ridicule. Through exaggeration, they draw attention to the excesses, follies, and moral failings of individuals or institutions. Caricature, in particular, involves the exaggerated depiction of physical features or personality traits to satirize public figures or social types (Bal et al, 2009).

Satire also involves the use of parody, which imitates or mocks a particular style, work, or individual. By adopting the conventions of a specific genre, art form, or cultural phenomenon, satirists can subvert them. Parody allows satirists to expose the flaws or contradictions within established narratives or cultural symbols, challenging their authority and inviting critical reevaluation (Kreuz, 1993).

Furthermore, political and social satire often incorporates intertextuality, referencing and alluding to other texts, events, or cultural phenomena. These references provide additional layers of meaning and context, enriching the satirical commentary. Intertextuality can include literary allusions, historical references, or popular culture references that resonate with the audience and enhance the satirical impact (Wiggins, 2019).

Satire is not confined to a specific medium or art form. It can be found in literature, drama, visual arts, cartoons, television shows, and even political speeches. The medium through which satire is expressed can influence its reception and impact. Satirical literature allows for in-depth exploration and analysis of political and social issues, while visual satire in the form of cartoons or illustrations often relies on visual cues and symbolism to convey its message concisely. Satirical literature provides a platform for authors to delve into complex social and political issues in a nuanced and comprehensive manner. Through the use of narrative, characterization, and dialogue, satirical works can present multifaceted critiques of the existing power structures and societal norms (LeBoeuf, 2007).

In satirical literature, authors often create fictional worlds or employ allegorical devices to examine real-world issues without being bound by literal representation. This allows them to tackle sensitive or controversial topics in an indirect yet impactful way. For instance, George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* satirizes totalitarianism and the erosion of individual freedom through the fictional world of Oceania and its oppressive regime. By presenting a heightened and exaggerated version of a totalitarian state, Orwell invites readers to reflect on the dangers of unchecked power and the manipulation of truth (Hodgart, 1969; Orwell, 2021).

Satirical literature offers a rich space for the development of complex characters and intricate plotlines. Authors can create satirical personas, such as the cunning and manipulative Reynard in "Reynard the Fox," to symbolize certain vices or social phenomena. These characters become vehicles for the expression of satire, allowing the audience to engage with the underlying social commentary on a more personal level. The use of irony, wit, and wordplay in the dialogue further enhances the satirical impact, capturing the essence of the characters and their interactions (Paulson, 2019).

Examples of satire in literature and its purpose

This section will explore notable examples of satire in literature and delve into the purpose behind their satirical undertakings.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is a classic work of satire that presents the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver, a ship's surgeon who finds himself in four different lands inhabited by fantastical beings. Through Gulliver's encounters with the Lilliputians, Brobdingnagians, Laputians, and Houyhnhnms, Swift satirizes various aspects of eighteenth-century English society (Sultana, 2015). Swift's satirical targets include political corruption, religious intolerance, and the follies of human nature. The purpose of Swift's satire is to expose the moral and intellectual decay of his society, highlighting the absurdities and contradictions of the time.

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is an allegorical novella that uses farm animals to represent the major figures and events of the Russian Revolution. Through the rise and fall of the farm's leaders, the pigs, Orwell satirizes the corruption and hypocrisy of totalitarian regimes. By presenting the animals' struggle for equality and their subsequent betrayal by the ruling elite, Orwell highlights the dangers of power and the manipulation of ideology for

self-interest (Diggins, 1986). The purpose of Orwell's satire is to criticize the abuse of power and to serve as a warning against the dangers of totalitarianism.

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2003) is a satirical novel that follows the journey of Huck Finn, a young boy seeking freedom and adventure along the Mississippi River. Twain uses satire to critique racism, social hypocrisy, and the failures of society (Beslic, 2017). Through the character of Huck Finn and his encounters with various individuals, Twain exposes the ignorance and prejudice that perpetuate injustice. The purpose of Twain's satire is to challenge societal norms and advocate for individual conscience and empathy.

Voltaire's *Candide* (1988) is a satirical novel that follows the adventures of the titular character, Candide, as he travels through Europe and South America. The novel satirizes philosophical optimism and religious hypocrisy, targeting institutions such as the Catholic Church and the nobility (Ballachey, 2016). Through a series of absurd and tragic events, Voltaire exposes the absurdity and cruelty of the world. The purpose of Voltaire's satire is to critique the prevailing optimism of the Enlightenment era and to advocate for rationality, tolerance, and social justice.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2015) is a satirical children's novel that takes readers on a whimsical journey through a surreal and nonsensical world. Carroll uses satire to parody the rigidity and absurdity of Victorian social conventions, education, and bureaucracy (Sedlacek, 2016). Through the character of Alice and her encounters with peculiar creatures, Carroll satirizes the irrationality and illogical nature of adult society. The purpose of Carroll's satire is to challenge societal expectations and to celebrate the freedom of imagination.

These examples illustrate the diverse ways in which satire can be employed in literature. These satirical works offer a lens through which readers can view the world from a different angle. By exposing the flaws and contradictions within society, satire prompts readers to question the assumptions and norms that they may have taken for granted. It encourages individuals to critically evaluate the beliefs and values that shape their worldview, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of complex social issues (Paulson, 2019).

Satire is not without its limitations and challenges. The effectiveness of satire relies on the audience's willingness to engage critically with the underlying message. Satirical works can be misinterpreted, or their intended targets misunderstood. The use of humor and irony may also run the risk of diluting the seriousness of the issues being addressed, leading to complacency or trivialization. Satire must be wielded responsibly, ensuring that the underlying critique is clear and that the intended audience is receptive to its message (Highet, 2015).

Satire alone can never be a panacea for societal issues. While satire can highlight problems and provoke critical thinking, it is the responsibility of individuals and communities to translate this awareness into action. Satirical works can serve as catalysts for social movements, but they are the collective efforts and commitments of individuals who drive meaningful change (Paulson, 2019).

Using political and social satire in medieval Arabic allegories was significant for two reasons: (1) it was new; and (2) it was dangerous for the authors, since satire was not popular in classical Arabic literature, especially in prose. (Albucard & Sohadjaderi, 2020).

Background and origins of "Reynard the Fox"

Reynard was a celebrated trickster-protagonist in medieval beast epics of twelfth-century Europe, which were chiefly written in Dutch, English, French, Latin, and Low and High German. Reynard's summons by King Noble the Lion to answer accusations by Isengrim the Wolf and other animals form the nucleus and starting point of the loosely connected tales, in which cunning always conquers force, and one who lives by his wits usually survives. The French contributed most to the original story with a series of tales, *Le Roman de Renart*, which were created over a period of 75 years, from 1175 to 1250 (Boss, 2020). Caxton translated his *Historie of Reynart the Foxe* (1481) from a Flemish version. Modern English versions include: T. J. Arnold's translation (1860) of Goethe's *Reinecke Fuchs*, which itself was an adaptation of an older High German version; William Rose's *Epic of the Beast* (1924); and James Simpson's "Reynard the Fox" (2015). In this paper, all quotations are taken from Simpson's translation.

"Reynard the Fox" tells the story of Reynard, a cunning trickster fox who uses his wit and deceit to outsmart other animals and navigate the complex social and political landscape of the animal kingdom. The origins of "Reynard the Fox" can be traced back to various sources and influences, reflecting the rich tapestry of medieval literary traditions.

Folklore and oral tradition

One of the key influences on "Reynard the Fox" was the rich folklore and oral storytelling traditions prevalent in medieval Europe. The character of Reynard can be traced back to ancient animal fables and trickster tales found in various cultures. The fox, in particular, was often depicted as a sly and cunning figure in folktales, embodying both intelligence and deceit. Those oral traditions served as a foundation for the development of Reynard as a central character in the medieval narrative (Bauman, 1964).

Beast epics

"Reynard the Fox" belongs to the genre of beast epics, which were popular in medieval literature. Beast epics used animals as allegorical figures to represent human characteristics and societal dynamics. The allegorical nature of these epics allowed authors to comment on political, social, and moral issues of their time in a veiled manner. "Reynard the Fox" followed this tradition by using anthropomorphic animals as vehicles for satirical commentary on medieval society (Parker, 1976).

French and Dutch versions of the tales

The earliest known versions of "Reynard the Fox" were written in French and Dutch. The French version, known as "the Roman de Renart," was composed in the twelfth century by multiple authors. It consists of a collection of stories featuring Reynard and his encounters with other animals, showcasing his cunning and ability to manipulate social structures. The Dutch version, called "Van den vos Reynaerde," appeared in the thirteenth century and expanded on the French narrative, adding new episodes and characters (Blake, 1964).

Political and social satire

"Reynard the Fox" is renowned for its biting political and social satire. The narrative presents a satirical portrayal of medieval society, exposing the hypocrisy, corruption, and power struggles prevalent among the ruling class. Through the cunning actions of Reynard, the tales question the legitimacy of authority and the moral fabric of society. They critique the feudal system, religious institutions, and the courtly ideals of chivalry, highlighting the gap between the idealized notions of virtue and the reality of human nature (Cole, 1895).

Literary influences

"Reynard the Fox" drew inspiration from a variety of literary sources. The tales incorporate elements of courtly romance, with its emphasis on chivalry and courtly love. They also contain elements of fabliaux, which were humorous and often ribald tales popular in medieval France. The blending of these different literary traditions adds depth and complexity to the narratives, creating a multifaceted work that appeals to a wide audience (Willoughby, 1914).

Cultural and historical context

Understanding the cultural and historical context of "Reynard the Fox" is crucial to grasp its significance. The tales emerged during a period of significant social and political change in Europe. The feudal system was in full swing, and tensions between the aristocracy and the rising middle class were increasing. "Reynard the Fox" reflects this dynamic by satirizing the abuses of power and the inherent flaws within the social hierarchy (Lair, 2006).

Through the character of Reynard, the cunning and deceitful fox, "Reynard the Fox" challenges the traditional notions of heroism and virtue. Reynard's actions often defy societal expectations, highlighting the discrepancy between idealized values and the realities of human nature. Reynard exposes the hypocrisy of individuals in positions of authority, whether they are religious figures, nobles, or knights. By satirizing powerful and influential persons, the tales raise questions about the legitimacy of their rule and the moral integrity of the social order (Bregman, 2010).

Additionally, "Reynard the Fox" reflects the tensions and conflicts of medieval society. The tales explore the intricate web of relationships between different social classes, emphasizing the struggles for power and dominance. The portrayal of Reynard as an outsider who challenges the established order resonates with the social mobility and shifting power dynamics of the time. The cunning fox becomes a symbol of resistance against oppression and a champion for the marginalized (Boss, 2020).

Moreover, "Reynard the Fox" critiques the prevailing values and ideals of medieval society. It satirizes the courtly ideals of chivalry and the concept of honor, revealing the often hypocritical behavior of the noble class. The tales expose the dark underbelly of courtly life, with its intrigues, betrayals, and moral corruption. Through humor and irony, "Reynard the Fox" prompts readers to question the glorification of certain virtues and the implications of adhering blindly to societal norms (Bregman, 2010).

The popularity and enduring legacy of "Reynard the Fox" can be attributed to its ability to resonate with audiences across time. The satirical critique of power, social hierarchies, and moral dilemmas remains relevant in different historical and cultural contexts. The tales challenge readers to critically examine the world around them, to question authority, and to reflect on their own complicity in upholding oppressive systems (Boss, 2020).

Background and origins of the Maqamat al-Hamadhani

Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (969-1008 A.D.) is the most celebrated writer of stories called *maqamat* in medieval Arabic literature. He is most famous for writing the *Maqamat* (literally, "assemblies"), which are a collection of 52 witty tales, known for its rich and intricate storytelling. Since he died at the age of 38, al-Hamadhani did not have time to revise his stories, so they are sometimes slightly unpolished.

The tales feature a fictional narrator, Isa ibn Hisham, and a fictional trickster-protagonist, Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari, who uses his wits, wiles, and eloquent speech to achieve his ends. Al-Hamadhani's stories were popular with scholars and the upper classes, for whom they were meant to instruct and amuse. Al-Hamadhani's works invigorated the *maqamat* by devising ever new variations of the genre. In fact, his structure of the *maqamat* became the model for that genre in Arabic literature.

Satire and the trickster in allegorical stories

Typical of medieval literature from all over the world, both the Reynard stories and al-Hamadhani's *maqamat* are allegorical, which simply means they are "extended metaphors" (Varty, 2000). In an allegory, people, places, things, and events have two layers of significance. First, there is the literal level—that is, whatever actually happens within the narrative. Second, there is the figurative or symbolic level—that is, what those people, places, things, and events stand for *outside* of the narrative. Each of the works feature a trickster-protagonist: the brutal and villainous fox in the Reynard stories, and the wanderer and vagabond, al-Iskandari, in the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*.

What Varty (2000) says about Reynard the Fox can also be said of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*:

All of these stories are comic, and much of the humor depends on parody and satire resulting in mockery, sometimes the subversion of certain kinds of serious literature, of political and religious institutions and practices, of scholarly argument and moralizing, and of popular beliefs and customs (p. 302).

In other words, satire serves to subvert existing power structures. It is a process by which the values and principles of an established system are contradicted or reversed.

The stories in the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* are oriented around class and social structure, reflecting in biting satire the contemporary peasants' criticism of and contempt for both the upper classes and the clergy. In each of the stories, the archetypal trickster-protagonist subverts the existing power structures, while simultaneously reaffirming the right of what is classically termed, in Platonic terms, the "good, the true, and the beautiful" (Murdoch, 2001, p. 41). The ancient Greek philosopher Plato (n.d.) instructed teachers to impress upon their students that "this is just, and that unjust, one thing noble, another base, one holy, another unholy, and that [their duty] is to do this, and not to do that" (p. 325). These ideas uphold the human values of self-preservation, dignity, and justice.

Reynard the Fox: Summary of the main story

When Noble, the great Lion king, holds court during the Feast of Pentecost, all the animals arrive to relate their grievances against Reynard the fox. Isengrim the wolf and other animals enumerate a long list of sins and crimes committed by Reynard, especially murder and theft, as the fox uses various forms of trickery to force his way into others' homes in order to steal food and treasure and viciously assault various animals and even blind human children. Only Tibert the cat and Grimbart the badger speak in Reynard's defense. At the end of the hearing, the king orders Bruin the bear to bring Reynard to the court to answer for his crimes. Before setting out, Bruin tells the king that he will not be fooled by Reynard's flattery.

However, Reynard tempts the bear with honey, leading him to a tree where there is a bee hive. As Bruin is distracted by the honey, humans beat him mercilessly. Eventually, the bear manages to escape with his life, but returns to the court without the fox.

The king, enraged by this insult to his personal messenger, dispatches Tibert the cat to demand that Reynard surrender, under penalty of death if he fails to do so. However, like Bruin, Tibert is also tricked by Reynard, who traps the cat in a snare after promising him a feast of mice. When the cat escapes, he returns to court, where he no longer defends the traitorous Reynard.

Finally, the king sends out Grimbart the badger to retrieve the fox. This time, the badger, who is too intelligent to be fooled by the fox's tricks, succeeds in bringing him back to court after Reynard confesses his sins to the badger in an honest and forthright manner.

At court, Reynard is confronted by his accusers, who describe his villainous tricks and vicious crimes. But Reynard defends himself as a loyal subject of the king and a victim of others' lies and deceptions. However, the king is not persuaded by the fox's arguments and sentences him to death.

On the gallows, the fox buys time by confessing his sins, but he also lies that he did not steal because he was needy, since he already has plenty of money and jewels. Hearing that, the king becomes greedy, demanding to know where the valuables are hidden. The fox then concocts a story to indict the bear and the wolf, claiming that he was compelled by his conscience to steal the treasure and hide it because the two traitors were secretly plotting to depose the king and replace him with Bruin the bear.

Foolishly believing Reynard's story, King Noble releases the fox from the gallows and arrests Bruin the bear and Isengrim the wolf for high treason. Reynard then tells the king that he cannot lead him to the treasure before he first makes a pilgrimage to Rome for absolution of his crimes by the pope. The king sends the fox on his journey after rewarding him with the bear's warm coat and the wolf's sturdy shoes.

Cuwaert the hare and Bellin the ram accompany Reynard on the pilgrimage. First, however, they stop at the fox's home so that Reynard can bid farewell to his wife. But Reynard tricks the hare, kills him, and eats him, except for his head. Then the fox tricks the ram into thinking that the head is actually a letter to the king that he is carrying in his pouch.

When Bellin returns to the court, he brags about having written a most eloquent letter. But when the king opens the pouch, he instead finds the hare's head. Furious, Noble delivers the ram to the wolf and the bear to atone for his misjudgment of them.

When the king continues to hear complaints against the fox, he is determined to siege Reynard's home to capture him. However, Grimbart the badger warns Reynard of the king's plans and persuades the fox to return to the court to plead his case.

As the fox and the badger journey back to the court, Reynard again confesses all of his sins to Grimbart in an honest fashion. However, in his defense, he points out that his sins are mild in comparison to those of the animals who are accusing him. When the two of them arrive at court, Reynard also confesses to the king, but denies the worst of his crimes. He concludes his case by stating that if he were guilty as charged, he would not have surrendered. Fearing that the king might again believe Reynard and punish them, Reynard's accusers remain silent. Only the wolf holds fast to the accusations.

Then Reynard's Aunt Rukenawe, an ape, speaks in her nephew's defense, persuading the king once again that Reynard is the injured party. At that point, Reynard repeats that he has jewels of great value that he needs to dig up to give to the king.

Still unable to accept Reynard's lies, Isengrim the wolf challenges the fox to a fight. But then Aunt Rukenawe tells Reynard how to take advantage of the wolf's weaknesses, such as his sore feet, which gives Reynard, the physical underdog, the confidence to win. She also shaves off all of Reynard's fur and covers him with oil, which makes him too slippery for the wolf to grab hold of.

At first, Reynard is losing the fight to the much stronger wolf, until he uses his crafty words to entice the beast with a promise of rewards if he lets him go. At that point, Reynard gets the upper hand, and when he starts to beat the wolf badly, the king stops the fight and declares Reynard the winner. Then the king orders a great feast for all the animals, and Reynard promises never to commit any more crimes. In the end, the king forgives Reynard of all of his sins and makes him the most powerful lord in the land in any matters related to the administration of justice.

Examining the trickster in "Reynard the Fox"

Throughout the story, by his cunning actions and eloquent speech, Reynard reveals his keen knowledge of the vices and hypocritical nature of all the other animals. In defending himself, he blames vile acts of the others both on their stupidity and their vices, which include greed for power, worship of money, and gluttony. As for his own confessions, he names some of the other animals as willing accomplices to his crimes. "They think it just and lawful," he says, that petty thieves who steal hens and chickens should be hanged, whereas they, who steal cows, oxen, and horses, go free as lords" (Simpson, 2015, p. 165). Worst of all in this respect is the wolf, about whom he says: "We teamed up, which I now wish had not happened. We swore to each other to be faithful and to hold fast together, and began to roam as a pair. He stole the big things and I the small" (Simpson, 2015, p. 95).

Reynard also exposes the hypocrisy of the human clergy, charging that the local priest is married and therefore enjoying sexual relations with a woman, when that was expressly forbidden by Catholic doctrine. When the priest is about to strike Tybert the cat, Tybert springs free and jumps between the priest's legs, where he claws off the man's right testicle. This outrages the priest's wife, who fears that she will lose her husband's sexual companionship. "I'm shamed and hurt," she says, "for even if he's healed of the wound, he's a man lost to me. He'll never be able to play that sweet game again!" (Simpson, 2015, p. 71).

Reynard's response to the wife is pure mockery: "Dame Juloke, settle down and calm your sorrows. Even if the priest has lost one of his stones, it won't hinder his congress with you. There's many a chapel in this world in which only one bell is rung" (Simpson, 2015, p. 71).

The paradox of Reynard's trickiness is that while he himself commits the most loathsome of crimes, he is also the animal who knows best the ethical and legal values to which the court *should* adhere. He does this best in his final appearance at court, when he accuses the aristocratic animals of being extortionists. "These unreliable beasts," he says to the king, "are accustomed when they've been made lords and have achieved all they want, when they're mighty and feared, to become extortionists. They tax and fleece the people and eat them like starving dogs.... They do all this to acquire goods for their own selfish advantage. May God bring shame upon them and soon destroy them!" (Simpson, 2015, pp. 227-228). Thus, it is Reynard the villain who ironically preaches to the court in the most eloquent of speeches exactly what it is the judges need to know about administering and adjudicating the law in a just and right manner.

Interestingly, while the court absolutely needs Reynard to maintain its rule, the fox is totally aware of this dependence on him. For example, when Grimbart the badger tells the fox that the king has sworn to put Reynard to a shameful death, the fox confidently affirms: "I'll come out on top of the lot of them. They can all chatter and champ and give counsel, but the court can't do anything without me and my wily cleverness" (Simpson, 2015, p. 231).

The court's absolute and critical need for Reynard is reaffirmed when the king forgives Reynard for all his sins:

Be sure to set all matters justly, for when you turn your intelligence and good judgment to virtue and goodness, then our court can't do without your advice and counsel. There's no one here who can match you for penetrating and intelligent counsel, nor in providing more subtle remedies for legal issues" (Simpson, 2015, p. 231).

The archetypal trickster in literature is always a marginal figure with highly original, if sometimes dishonest, ideas. The trickster does indeed possess the quality of liminality—that is, he occupies a place between cultures. Traditional tricksters are, as Horne (1999) states, "male/female, human/non-human, good/evil, creator/destroyer, and trickster/duped" (p. 133). As such, they pose challenges to "either/or" cultural thinking, introducing the complexity that is required for refined thought to discriminate between opposing factors.

Furthermore, archetypal tricksters are "boundary-crossers," as was noted by Lewis Hyde (1998). That is, they trespass not only physical boundaries but social ones. For example, tricksters regularly disturb societal rules to break or blur connections and distinctions between, as Hyde noted, "right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead" (p. 7). This quality is revealed repeatedly in the character of Reynard the fox.

While tricksters embody unpredictability and the inversion of natural order, they also represent the inconsistencies of human existence and the potential for change (Aigbedion, 2009). The trickster's unpredictability is also related to the process of subversion. Paul Blackstock (1964) said about strategies of subversion that they can be described as an attack on public morality. When political or social institutions are penetrated (and thus revealed for their naked truth), people's pre-existing loyalties or alliances "may be detached and transferred to the political or ideological cause of the aggressor" (p. 56). In "Reynard the Fox," as Horne (1999) points out, the trickster "not only misses the mark..., but becomes the mark" (p. 133). The trickster is "shaping" the forms of the world.

The Maqamat al-Hamadhani: The focus of the stories

Most of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* begins with a new story by the narrator, Isa ibn Hisham, about a situation involving Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari, the trickster-protagonist. Al-Iskandari tries in most *maqamat* to con people out of money with his eloquent speech and various tricks, often involving *kudya* (begging). Al-Iskandari can pretend to be a preacher, a beggar, a merchant, or a madman, playing all those roles perfectly. The interactions between these two main characters, the trickster-protagonist and the narrator, are one of al-Hamadhani's innovations in medieval Arabic literature.

The focus of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* is on several themes, including literary criticism, ethics, and social satire (Mattock, 1984). Al-Hamadhani uses these themes by using *kudya* as a plot vehicle, with the trickster-protagonist of each *maqama* tricking the audience and sometimes the narrator. He also uses satire to create humor and irony (Albucard & Sohadjaderi, 2020).

Examining the trickster in the Maqamat al-Hamadhani

Al-Iskandari is a great trickster, who changes his skin color and character in each *maqama*. Depending on his principal trick in a story, he is sometimes a young man or pretends to be an old one. He uses a great variety of tricks to fool people into giving him money or some other kind of wealth.

Like Reynard the Fox, al-Iskandari blames his community for his trickery. In the first *maqama*, "*al-Maqamah al-Qaridiyyah*" ("The *Maqama* of Poesie"), al-Iskandari recites an envoi (a short quotation of verses at the end of each *maqama*) blaming his time and community as he advises ibn Hisham:

*Sirrah, the times are false,
Let not deception beguile thee.
Cleave not to one character, but,
As the nights change, do thou change, too.^{i, ii}*

Similarly, al-Iskandari blames his time at the end of “*al-Maqamah al-Sasaniyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of Sasan”) as follows:

*This age is ill-starred,
And, as thou seest, oppressive;
In it stupidity is estimable
And intelligence a defect and a reproach,
And wealth is a nocturnal visitant but
It hovers only over the ignoble (Prendergast, 2008, p. 70).ⁱⁱⁱ*

Here, al-Iskandari is satirizing his community by stating that it honors stupid people and criticizes intelligent people, which raises the question: how does al-Hamadhani take advantage of these stupid people by tricking them with an intelligent trickster?

In “*al-Maqamah al-Mafufiyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of the Blind”), al-Iskandari tricks people with poetry and music as he begs for their money. Ibn Hisham sympathizes with him and gives him a *dinar*, which al-Iskandari praises as if it were a beautiful woman:

*What beauty is hers and how intensely yellow.
Light, stamped, and round,
Water almost drops from her lustre,
A noble mind hath produced her,
Yea, a soul of a youth possessed by generosity,
Which makes him do what it will.
O thou for whom this praise is meant,
Exaggeration cannot describe the extent of thy worth.
I therefore refer thee to God with whom is thy reward.
May God have mercy upon him who will bind her to her pair
And associate her with her sister (Prendergast, 2008, p. 64)^{iv}*

Another example in the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* of the ways that stupid people can be tricked out of their money appears in “*al-Maqamah al-Rusafiyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of Rusafa”), in which al-Hamadhani names a great variety of “professional” titles for tricksters:

*Finally, the discussion led them to the mentioning of thieves and their artifices, and cut-purses [i.e., pickpockets] and their practices.
They mentioned among thieves, forgers of seals, the light-fingered, and palmers, him who gives short weight, him who robs the ranks, him who throttles by the sudden attack, him who hides in the locker till lifting is possible, him who substitutes by cajoling, him who steals in jest, him who steals by the confidence trick, him who invites to compromise, him who sweeps off the change, him who induces sleep, him who confounds with backgammon, him who deceives with the monkey, him who gets the better by means of the mantle and a needle and thread, him who brings thee a lock, him who makes a subterranean passage, him who renders men unconscious with hemp, or cheats by juggling, him who changes his shoes, him who ties his two ropes, him who overpowers with the sword, him who ascends from the well, him who accompanies the caravan, the gentry of the cloth, him who enters the assemblies, him who flees from the night patrol, him who seeks refuge from danger, him who flies the bird (Prendergast, 2008, pp. 100-101).^v*

Ballinger (1985) notes that the trickster, as a vagabond, is always traveling, during which he is usually “transgressing, becoming, transforming, making” (p. 56). In the process, the trickster shapes the world. In fact, Lewis Hyde (1998) is so impressed by this aspect of the trickster that he names one of the chapters in his book “Trickster Makes This World.”

In “*al-Maqamah al-Iblisiyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of Iblis”), even Satan is portrayed as stupid, for al-Iskandari is able to cheat him of his turban, a symbol of wealth.

In “*al-Maqamah al-Isfahaniyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of Isfahan”), al-Iskandari initially pretends to be an *imam* (a man who prays) and then a preacher (a man who makes religious and moral speeches). First, he prays a long *salah* (prayer). Then he speaks to a large audience, exhorting his listeners to abandon pleasures and worldly pursuits to atone for their past transgressions through kindness, and to part with some of their wealth by giving liberally to the poor. The crowd then heaps an abundance of coins on the “preacher” for him to distribute to the poor—but of course he keeps them for himself. As ibn Hisham describes the scene, “*Dirhems* [i.e., silver coins] poured upon him to such an extent that he was bewildered” (in Prendergast, 2008, p. 52)^{vi}

Although al-Iskandari tricks the audience to get their money in most of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*, he preaches to the audience and does not ask for money in a few *maqamat*. In “*al-Maqamah al-Wa’ziyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of Exhortation”), al-Iskandari preaches to the audience, but then leaves without asking for money. Ibn Hisham does not know that the preacher is al-Iskandari, so he follows and asks:

“O Shaikh, who art thou?”

He replied: “Good Gracious! Art thou not satisfied with pondering over externals, that thou madest for the truth and then failed to recognize it? I am Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari.” (Quoted here from Prendergast, 2008, p. 89).^{vii}

Ibn Hisham may not recognize al-Iskandari in this story because the conman does not ask for money as he usually does in most *maqamat*. In this *maqama*, al-Iskandari is more sincere than usual, causing his listeners to believe that he is a faithful preacher. As a result, one of these listeners, ibn Hisham, wants to know who this honest man is. So, unlike the rogues in most of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*, al-Iskandari is a positive figure in this *maqama*.

Essentially, trickster link manners and etiquette to speech and erudition in order to trick people. In al-Iskandari’s case, he uses his literary skills (*adab*) for both good and bad purposes (Beaumont, 1994; Van Gelder, 2000). Thus, tricksters can both uphold and subvert the social order.

Like Reynard, al-Iskandari possesses a dual nature, which is perplexing. In “*al-Maqamah al-Khamriyyah*” (The *Maqama* of Wine”), he plays a dual character as an *imam* during the day and a wine drinker at night. When Ibn Hisham recognizes him at the end of the *maqama*, Al-Iskandari’s envoi continues in his typical self-possessed fashion:

Cease from blaming, but what a deceiver^{viii} thou perceivest me to be!

I am he whom every Tahamite^{ix} and every Yemenite knows,

I am of every kind of dust, I am of every place.

At one time I cleave the niche, at another to the location of the wine-shop.

And thus acts whoever is wise in this time (Quoted here from Prendergast, 2008, p. 141).^x

Here al-Iskandari is cautioning his listeners not to judge others: “cease from blaming.”^{xi} Metaphorically, he is saying that he is everyman, since everyone knows he is every kind of dust and of every place. Fundamentally, he is saying that he is just a human being and that what he does is what all people do.

Ibn Hisham recognizes al-Iskandari at the end of most *maqamat*. When ibn Hisham recognizes al-Iskandari in “*al-Maqamah al-Sasaniyyah*” (“The *Maqama* of Sasan”), he says, “Sirrah, what meaneth this fraud?” (quoted here from Prendergast, 2008, p. 70)^{xii} To which al-Iskandari comically replies,

This age is ill-starred,

And, as thou seest, oppressive;

In it stupidity is estimable

And intelligence a defect and a reproach,

And wealth is a nocturnal visitant but

It hovers only over the ignoble (Quoted here from Prendergast, 2008, p. 70).^{xiii}

The contrast between ibn Hisham’s anger and al-Iskandari’s humor runs throughout the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*.

Al-Iskandari disguises himself perfectly to deceive people, and this is reflected in his speech, where he is often ironic, saying the opposite of what he means. Thus, the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* portrays both tricksters and naïve people as they existed in the eleventh century.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have delved into the intriguing world of medieval allegories, focusing on two prominent works: “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*. My exploration has shed light on the significance of satire and subversion within these literary masterpieces and their impact on medieval society. In this section, I will summarize the key findings and arguments presented in this article, followed by several conclusions.

Satire and subversion are important themes and a significant literary device in both “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*. In both works, the authors portray the role of trickster-protagonists as social critics, objecting to the social reality and political problems in medieval times, in order to expose the negative aspects of their societies. My findings highlight the enduring relevance of satire as a means of social critique and the power of allegorical storytelling to challenge societal norms and inspire change. Through the examination of “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*, readers can witness the transformative potential of satire in highlighting injustices, exposing hypocrisy, and provoking reflection.

Political and social satire expose vices, highlight societal issues, and provoke critical thinking. Throughout my exploration, I discovered the profound influence of these allegorical works on medieval society. I found that they served as powerful tools for social critique, inspiring readers to question societal norms and challenge the existing power structures. They provided catharsis and encouraged critical thinking, fostering a sense of awareness and driving social change. Moreover, these allegories showcased the cultural and religious influences of their respective contexts—the socio-political landscape of medieval Europe on the one hand, and Islamic cultural traditions on the other.

In “Reynard the Fox,” I observed how the allegory critiqued the feudal system and the corruption within the ruling class. By employing anthropomorphic animals as characters, the author cleverly portrayed human vices and flaws, allowing readers to see themselves reflected in the satirical narratives. The cunning and deceptive character of Reynard challenged the notion of nobility and questioned the legitimacy of those in power. Through this subversive portrayal, the allegory encouraged readers to question the established social hierarchy and consider alternative systems of governance.

Similarly, the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* employed satire to critique various aspects of medieval Islamic society. The *maqamat* explore themes of greed, hypocrisy, and social inequality, shedding light on the moral dilemmas faced by individuals within the cultural and religious context of the time. By incorporating Quranic verses, cultural traditions, and courtly life, the allegory provided a lens through which readers could examine their own behavior and reflect on the teachings of Islam. Through the use of satire, the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* aimed to inspire self-reflection and moral introspection, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct and the pursuit of justice.

Both “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* reveal the transformative power of satire in challenging power structures and societal norms. They invite readers to critically analyze their own behaviors and the actions of those in positions of authority. By exposing hypocrisy, greed, and corruption, these allegories push readers to consider the consequences of their actions and the moral implications of their choices. Satire, with its wit and humor, acts as a vehicle for delivering important social commentary in a manner that is engaging and thought-provoking.

The significance of satire and subversion in medieval allegorical works cannot be overstated. These literary devices served as powerful tools for social critique, challenging prevailing power structures and questioning societal norms. By analyzing “Reynard the Fox” and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*, readers explore the multifaceted roles of satire and subversion in the medieval literary landscape, examining their historical context, thematic elements, and cultural influences.

In the modern-day world of wealth inequality and unrest, where the rich are getting richer, and the poor are increasingly marginalized, with tensions and warring factions abounding throughout the world, we can learn from trickster stories in the past, even in the medieval era, the kind of constructive social criticism and reflection that our world desperately needs today. As Murdoch (2001) noted, tricksters help to teach us about possibilities and potentials as we become catalysts for a societal transformation to the “good, the true, and the beautiful” (p. 41). Ballinger (2006) also notes how tricksters question and disrupt the social order:

Outside the system of norms established by the myths of origin and transformation, [the trickster] becomes a useful, institutionalized principle of disorder. As an “outsider,” the trickster can suggest the dangerous possibility of novel relationships between form and function: sex and role; belief and practice; kin and clan; even appetite and will. He provides, to use Barbara Babcock’s terms, the “tolerated margin of mess” necessary to explore alternatives to the present system and to contemplate change (p. 134).

Through the trickster figure in literary satire, writers taught their readers to see the world in new ways. As Ballinger (1985) observed:

The ambiguous marginal trickster brings new meaning and force to the language of experience, liberating us in the process from conventional notions, just as the ambiguity of metaphor infuses perception with creative meaning and reveals the limitations of stereotyped seeing (p. 56).

It is essential to reflect on the enduring relevance of these works in contemporary society and their continued impact on literature, politics, and culture.

One of the remarkable aspects of these allegorical works is their ability to transcend time and remain relevant even in our modern world. While they were created in medieval Europe and during the Islamic Golden Age, their themes, techniques, and underlying messages continue to resonate with audiences today. The social, political, and moral issues explored within these works are not limited to a specific historical context, but address universal aspects of human nature and society.

In contemporary society, satire continues to be a powerful tool for social critique and commentary. Modern readers see satirical elements employed in various media, including literature, television shows, cartoons, and social media platforms. Satire serves as a means of exposing hypocrisy, challenging authority, and stimulating critical thinking. These allegorical works from the medieval period have set a foundation for the use of satire as a vehicle for social change, inspiring generations of artists and writers to employ humor and irony to engage with important issues.

One of the reasons for the enduring relevance of these works is their portrayal of the flaws and shortcomings of people in power. In contemporary society, where the concentration of power and the abuse of authority are prevalent, satire provides a necessary means of holding the powerful accountable. By exposing the vices and follies of individuals and institutions, satire reminds readers of the importance of skepticism, critical analysis, and a healthy dose of humor in evaluating individuals who hold positions of influence.

Moreover, these allegorical works shed light on the marginalized and oppressed members of society. They emphasize the struggles faced by these groups and call for empathy, compassion, and social justice. In today's world, where social inequalities persist and marginalized voices are often silenced, these allegories remind us of the significance of inclusivity and the need to amplify the voices of those who are underrepresented.

Furthermore, the subversive nature of these works challenges societal norms and established beliefs. The works encourage readers to reconsider their assumptions about the status quo. In a world where conformity and unquestioning acceptance are often valued, satire serves as a powerful catalyst for critical thinking and intellectual discourse, prompting us to reevaluate our own beliefs, biases, and prejudices and to explore alternative perspectives.

Additionally, these allegorical works highlight the importance of cultural adaptation and sensitivity in satire, demonstrating how satire can be rooted in specific cultural and religious contexts, while still maintaining its universal appeal. In an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world, understanding and appreciating diverse cultural traditions and perspectives are paramount. The allegories from both the European and Islamic traditions teach us the value of cultural exchange, dialogue, and the recognition of shared human experiences.

Finally, the enduring relevance of "Reynard the Fox" and the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* in contemporary society lies in their ability to engage with timeless themes, challenge power structures, and inspire social change. These works continue to captivate audiences with their wit, satire, and allegorical storytelling. They remind us of the power of satire as a means of social critique, the importance of empathy and justice, and the need to question established norms. By studying and appreciating these allegorical works, readers gain a deeper understanding of their own society and its complexities, and are encouraged to actively participate in shaping a more inclusive, compassionate, and just world.

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ⁱAll the English translations of the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani* in this chapter are from Prendergast (2008). This quotation appears on p. 31.

ⁱⁱويحك هذا الزمان زور*** فلا يغرنك الغرور

لا تلتزم حالة ولكن*** در بالليالي كما تدور

هذا الزمان مشوم*** كما تراه غشومⁱⁱⁱ

الحق فيه مليح*** والعقل عيب ولوم

والمال طيف ولكن*** حول اللثام يحوم

يا حسنها فاقعة صفراء*** ممشوقة منقوشة قوراء^{iv}

يكاد أن يقطر منها الماء*** قد أثمرتها همة علياء

نفس فتى يملكه السخاء*** يصرفه فيه كما يشاء

يا ذا الذي يعنيه ذا الثناء*** ما يتقصى قدرك الإطراء

امض إلى الله لك الجزاء

أداهم عجز الحديث إلى ذكر اللصوص وحليهم، والطاردين وعملهم، فذكروا أصحاب الفصوص من اللصوص، وأهل الكف والقف، ومن يعمل^v بالطّف، ومن يحتال في الصف، ومن يخنق بالدّف، ومن يكمن في الرّف إلى زن يُمكن اللّف، ومن يُبدل بالمسح، ومن يأخذ بالمزح، ومن يسرق بالنصح، ومن يدعو إلى الصلح، ومن قمش بالصرف، ومن أنعس بالطرف، من باهت بالنرد، ومن غالط بالقرد، ومن كابر في الریط مع الإبرة والخيط، ومن جاءك بالففل، ومن شق الأرض من سفل، ومن نوم بالبنج، أو احتال بنيرنج، ومن بدل نعليه، ومن شد بحبليه، ومن كابر بالسيف، ومن يصعب في البير، ومن سار مع العير وأصحاب العلامات، ومن يأتي المقامات، ومن فر من الطوف، ومن لاذ من الخوف، ومن طير بالطير فلقد انتالت عليه الدراهم حتى حيرته^{vi}

من أنت يا شيخ؟ فقال: سبحان الله لم ترض بالحيلة غيرتها حتى عمدت إلى المعرفة فأنكرتها. أنا أبو الفتح الإسكندري^{vii}

^{viii}A deceiver is literally a demolisher, and also one who mixes one substance with another, a cheat. Prendergast (2008), p. 185.

^{ix}Tahamite refers to the people who live along the Red Sea coastal plain of the Arabian Peninsula from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Bab el-Mandab in Saudi Arabia.

دَغَ مِنَ اللُّومِ وَلَكِنْ *** أَي دَغَاكِ تَرَانِي^x
أَنَا مِنْ يَعْرِفُهُ كُلُّ *** لُ تَهَامِ وَيَمَانِي
أَنَا مِنْ كُلِّ غُبَارٍ *** أَنَا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ
سَاعَةً أَلَزَمُ مَحْرًا *** بَأْ وَأُخْرَى بَيْتَ حَانَ
وَكَذَا يَفْعَلُ مِنْ يَعِ *** قُلْ فِي هَذَا الزَّمَانِ"
"دَغَ مِنَ اللُّومِ"^{xi}

"ما هذه الحيلة ويحك؟"^{xii}

هذا الزمان مشوم *** كما تراه غشوم^{xiii}
الحمق فيه مليح *** والعقل عيب ولوم
والمال طيف ولكن *** حول اللئام يحوم