

Deconstructing Cultural Structures through Satire in Contemporary Maghrebian Literature: An Analytical Reading of Ezzeddine Djlaoudji's Novel

Ben haffaf hadda

University of ziane Achor Djelfa

h.benhaffaf@univ-djelfa.dz

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Abstract:

This article aims to examine satire as an effective artistic and cultural mechanism for questioning the symbolic and social structures underpinning the contemporary Maghrebian space, through an analytical reading of the novel *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* by the Algerian writer Ezzeddine Djlaoudji.

The study is based on the hypothesis that satire in this text does not merely serve an aesthetic function, but also performs a dual critical role: deconstructing dominant cultural discourses and revealing the fragility of the values upon which systems of power, identity, gender, and social relations are founded.

The novel reappropriates the traditional symbol of “Ali Baba” in a contemporary context by subverting its conventional meanings, transforming it into a satirical tool that exposes contradictions within the cultural and social reality. Satire operates through multiple linguistic and narrative mechanisms, such as irony, parodic intertextuality, and caricature exaggeration, which destabilize culturally unspoken norms, particularly those related to consumer culture, masculinity, and social hypocrisy.

The study concludes that satire in Ezzeddine Djlaoudji's novel constitutes a symbolic resistance strategy, reshaping the relationship between literature and culture and positioning the novel as a critical space for interrogating societal constants and reconsidering patterns of cultural representation within contemporary Maghrebian society.

ResearchProblem:

How does satire in Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers function as a critical mechanism for deconstructing dominant cultural and symbolic structures in the contemporary Maghrebian space?

What narrative and linguistic tools does Ezzeddine Djlaoudji employ to achieve this deconstruction?

Keywords:

Satire – Maghrebian Literature – Cultural Deconstruction – Symbolic Structures – Algerian Novel – Ezzeddine Djlaoudji – Critical Discourse

Introduction:

Contemporary Maghrebian literature has witnessed profound aesthetic and intellectual transformations, rendering it increasingly engaged in interrogating social, cultural, and political realities. Among the most significant artistic tools employed by writers in this context is satire, which functions simultaneously as an aesthetic and critical strategy. Satire is not merely a means of eliciting laughter or ridicule; it is a cognitive and cultural mechanism that enables literary texts to expose structural contradictions within society and to reveal dominant discourses that seek to consolidate power and symbolic authority.

In M&_aghrebian novels, satire has emerged as a counter-discourse aimed at challenging cultural and social norms, achieved through the deconstruction of stereotypical representations associated with identity, power, and social relations.

In this context, the novel *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* by the writer Ezzeddine Djlaoudji is situated among the narrative texts that employ satire intensively to reveal the paradoxes of contemporary reality.

This study adopts a cultural approach that seeks to uncover the role satire plays in the novel as a mechanism for deconstructing dominant cultural structures within Maghrebian society, through an analysis of the narrative discourse and its linguistic and symbolic mechanisms.

An analytical reading of *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* demonstrates that satire in this text does not merely serve an aesthetic function; rather, it performs a dual critical role in deconstructing dominant cultural discourses. The novel reappropriates the traditional symbol of “Ali Baba” in a contemporary context, subverting its conventional meaning and transforming it into a satirical tool that exposes the ironies of cultural and social reality. Satire operates through multiple narrative mechanisms, such as irony, intertextuality, narrative caricature exaggeration, and stylistic hybridization, allowing for the exposure of culturally unspoken issues, particularly those related to consumer culture, masculinity, and social hypocrisy.

Satire in Ezzeddine Djlaoudji’s novel represents a strategy of symbolic resistance that reshapes the relationship between literature and culture, positioning the narrative text as a critical space for reconsidering patterns of cultural representation within contemporary Maghrebian society.

From this arises the central research problem: How does satire in *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* function as a critical mechanism for deconstructing dominant cultural and symbolic structures in contemporary Maghrebian society?

And what narrative and linguistic tools does Ezzeddine Djlaoudji employ to achieve this deconstruction?

Satire in Contemporary Maghrebian Literature: Towards a Conceptual and Aesthetic Foundation

In modern literature, satire represents a critical discourse that transcends the traditional aesthetic function. It establishes a critical distance between the text and reality, thereby allowing for the exposure of cultural and social contradictions.

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that satirical discourse is closely linked to what he terms “carnival,” which allows for the inversion of social and cultural hierarchies and the disruption of the symbolic authority of a singular discourse, thereby opening space for multiple voices within the literary text.

In the Arab and Maghrebian context, satire has been associated with literature’s capacity to challenge dominant discourses and expose the contradictions between declared values and actual reality. Consequently, satire has become an artistic and cultural tool that contributes to the deconstruction of dominant cultural systems within society.

In Ezzeddine Djlaoudji’s novel *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers*, the narrative is infused with satirical language, employing heritage as a critical instrument. Ali Baba, the woodcutter from the folk tale, and the forty thieves in the cave, are transformed into a redemptive figure who embodies the ruler tasked with restoring order and exercising regulated leadership in the modern era—a symbolic icon that reshapes the world.

Reconfiguring the Traditional Symbol in a Satirical Horizon: From Thief to Leader

The novel *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* reappropriates the figure of Ali Baba from the Arab narrative heritage (*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*) within a contemporary narrative context. Ezzeddine Djlaoudji crafts a new configuration for the character, transforming him from a poor woodcutter who stumbled upon a treasure in the folk tale into a “symbolic icon” embodying a morally conscious form of governance. This reconstruction portrays the psychology of modern, regulated banditry, where the despotic institution commands the herd unconsciously.

Satire, in Ezzeddine Djlaoudji’s hands, functions like a meticulous surgeon, exposing glaring contradictions between dazzling slogans and the filthy realities concealed under the guise of integrity. In his narrative, Ali Baba represents a transitional stage that erases the preexisting moral ambiguity, yet without incriminating the thief who emerges from the cave, for whom banditry was both method and constitution. By the conclusion, he becomes a hero, embodying chivalry and the poetic spirit of *Urwa ibn al-Ward*, who established the principles of brigandage and codified them for his knights, whom he trained rigorously. They rebel against the societal rules and laws, dwelling in forests, wilderness, and caves, eventually becoming figures admired by both men and women—the chosen and the strategic leader whom all rely upon. Through this, Ezzeddine Djlaoudji exposes the contradictions of society, highlighting the disparity between professed integrity and repeated acts of desire, expropriation, and redistribution of wealth, thereby moving Ali Baba from the realm of epic heroism to a depiction of real sovereignty: from banditry to blessed leadership.

As Ezzeddine Djlaoudji writes:

“The prince’s face shone as he stood, stepping with exhilaration: ‘This is victory, then, and I shall grant Ali Baba every authority, placing him at the head of my army,

empowering him to develop his leadership and combat skills. Our emirate requires a strong army, and we have enough youth; we only need a talented leader.”

The narrative deliberately reframes the traditional symbol not for glorification, but to render it appropriate to the ugly realities of contemporary life:

“No one in the emirate speaks of anything but Ali Baba. News has reached everyone of his repentance from banditry and his separation from his companions after many years of establishing and training the group, and after hundreds of successful raids. In the morning, people gathered in the public square that branched into two roads... ‘People, people! Ali Baba’s resignation from banditry will be a great calamity for us all. It is a grave betrayal of his comrades. I have been informed they will not spare him; they will pursue him wherever he goes, and he will find no safe refuge like his own people. When he seeks protection with us, we will all be victims of his comrades’ vengeance. Will you remain silent? What will you do? What are you...?’”

A voice of an elder interrupts in anger:

“How contemptible you are, wretch! He was a great hero when he provided for you and your family through his banditry, and became a looming threat when he resigned. Ali Baba is from us and we protect him with all we have, so shame on you!”

This passage illustrates how cultural concepts shift according to necessity; they are not fixed or eternal, but follow a pragmatic logic that adapts whenever the old system fails to deliver the desired outcomes. Divisions and fractures emerge suddenly when the system collapses, causing losses to those who previously profited under its shade. The situation becomes critical when others exploit the chaos, leveraging the bandits’ expertise to secure their planned future, thereby elevating such a figure into a leader.

The novel undertakes a deconstruction of the symbol of Ali Baba and reinterprets it within a new cultural context, thereby exposing the harsh realities of contemporary life. This transformation and distortion are evident in several passages that present Ali Baba as a model of the modern human being, torn between the desire for power (as the leader of the outlaws) and the pursuit of pleasure in its various forms—wealth, women, and authority.

In the novel, Ali Baba states:

“People may see us merely as petty bandits, driven by the circumstances of life to plunder property. There may be some truth in this, yet you and we know that we were nothing but warriors against the injustice of the wealthy, who hoard money unfairly, to deliver it to those who deserve it among the poor and needy. I do not regret what I have done, and surely, neither do you.”

This illustrates a facet of Ali Baba who has forgotten that he was originally a thief. He now judges both the free-spirited thieves and the virtuous, presenting himself as the wise and just arbiter who restores the rights of the oppressed through plunder and banditry, in accordance with the cave’s code. He establishes rules he considers morally upright: not to steal from anyone who has earned their sustenance and not to harm women. If these rules are violated, the act is deemed a breach of the bandit code.

The narrative continues:

“Ali Baba fell silent for a moment, his eyes downcast, while those around him stared in confusion and awe. Everyone held their tongues. Ali Baba continued, tears welling in his eyes: ‘Forgive me for surprising you with my irrevocable decision. I have resolved to retire from banditry... Shall I tell you what compelled me to make this decision?’... As

the protest subsided, he repeated: ‘Shall I tell you what compelled me to make this decision?’”

Here, Ali Baba, having resigned from banditry, symbolically knocks at the door of the fox and dons the robe of the ascetic to convince the audience of his sincerity. This act presents him as morally purified and positions him as a potential savior of the ruler, whose authority had previously been usurped by the illegitimate prince—who himself comes to admire Ali Baba deeply. The narrative culminates with Ali Baba being officially endorsed by the prince and the populace, becoming the ruler of a kingdom instead of the cave.

Towards the end of the novel, the rightful, yet previously absent, prince is reintroduced in a modern legitimate succession:

“People, soon our valiant knight will arrive among us, vanquisher of the righteous and the wicked, Ali Baba son of this land. My lord, the noble prince, commands everyone to prepare to welcome him in the best attire, as well as the streets, houses, and balconies, and with hearts and souls, with both healthy and ailing faces, excluding only dogs, donkeys, all demonic beasts, and also the beautiful young women, and all fools and lunatics.”

This transformation is evident in numerous passages where Ali Baba is presented as a model of the contemporary human, torn between the desire for power and the pursuit of pleasure.

The novel states:

"He interlaced the fingers of his right arm and said confidently: Ali Baba has fallen in love. From the moment he saw the beauty of the women, everything turned upside down, as if a jinn had touched him and toyed with his small heart.

The left arm smiled and said: I do not agree with your assumption, my friend. Ali Baba was not created for love or women. He was created for pursuit and flight; I have never seen him inclined toward women, nor heard him speak of love. In all our raids, he never considered having a share of the women, despite the numerous beautiful and enchanting women we encountered."

This illustrates Ali Baba's inner conflict between the obsession with power and domination and the pursuit of pleasure and possessive instinct, which he exercises deliberately through organized theft encompassing women, gold, and territories: "In Glaougi's novel, Ali Baba no longer seeks the cave's treasure but rather other treasures, brighter in the eyes of women." Consequently, Ali Baba chooses to become a ruler, seizing territories and metaphorically enslaving the hearts of women to solidify his political position through this human accessory.

Satire as a Tool for Deconstructing Dominant Cultural Systems: Through his novel, Glaougi attempts to dismantle old mental idols that have become sacred in popular consciousness. Using satire, he deconstructs the cultural structures that imprison collective Arab thought.

Glaougi does not adhere to traditional presentations of myth; though he draws on popular heritage, he uses it as a solid foundation to address contemporary human problems that traditional methods fail to resolve. He reconfigures heritage in a new form and relies on various symbols:

Ali Baba: symbolizing a leader drawing on a past steeped in banditry and its multifaceted connotations.

The skull: with its multiple symbolic meanings, even ashes are reanimated, and ideas thought dead are brought back to life. Glaougi implies that despite the impossibility of organizing the political game, it is inevitable that this will happen.

The magical herb: representing fate, social climate, and unforeseen societal influences.

The enchanted ring: illustrating wonder and how people fall under the influence of magic.

All of this aims to create a novelistic experience that requires a discerning reader—one attentive to the shadowy corners of the text, equipped with analysis and skepticism, navigating the depths hidden behind the interplay of myth and reality, the real and the fantastical. It portrays a bandit practicing “righteous” theft, presenting him as a symbol of strength and courage, ultimately preparing him for sovereignty and leadership, endorsed by all. This depiction may mirror reality unintentionally, yet reality itself is revealed through it.

Glaougi repurposes the symbol to suit contemporary life, using satire to expose the entrenched corruption in society, showing that the real “cave” is not in the mountain but in the depths of our societies and the blind herd mentality, which ignores errors for personal gain. In this culture, superficiality, astrology, and illusion prevail, elevating a ruler with a discredited past into a point of pride for the community, which blindly blesses and legitimizes him.

Ali Baba enjoys assuming the role of the just, restoring rights through banditry, claiming a sacred moral code, earning respect from beneficiaries of the spoils he claims to return, or from those who wish to benefit from his calculated banditry to govern in a system devoid of rationality or legitimacy.

Deconstructing the Masculine Discourse (Questioning False Virility): Glaougi, with sharp satire, exposes gender relations in society, showing that Ali Baba’s authority renews in every era. Ali Baba, the cave-dwelling bandit with forty thieves, who drew his strength, courage, and audacity from the cave, also asserts his masculinity through the number of women he possesses and seduces, legitimizing his virility among humans and jinn alike. The novel narrates: "Prince Al-Amjad said: 'How fortunate is Ali Baba, as you requested to adorn our daughter as his bride, and now all the women of the emirate are adorned.' The princess laughed and said: 'The unanimous attachment of women to one man is a rare fate.'"

The narrative continues with the orphan prince Al-Amjad, who had seized the emirate, offering his daughter Badr Al-Budur in marriage to Ali Baba, who had already fascinated her with his virility: "She smiled faintly, rising with determination to marry Ali Baba. Her perception of his strength and sternness only increased her attachment; for this is what she adored in a man."

Ali Baba, in turn, responded with his heart and body: "In the morning, the prince, sitting with Ali Baba, ensured Badr Al-Budur was presented with breakfast. As she stepped in, Ali Baba's eyes and heart clung to her... his heart raced and the foundations of his chest shook... 'God protect her for you. Among all I have seen, none are more beautiful or sweeter, and happy is he who is blessed with her.'"

Additionally, his story with the fortune-teller's daughter, Badr Al-Akwan, who was captivated by his masculinity, demonstrates how the fortune-teller sought him for her daughter, orchestrating a perilous encounter unbeknownst even to Ali Baba: "Trust your mother, my beauties, and follow my commands. 'Heard and obeyed, my lady,' replied Badr Al-Akwan, laughing: 'Your infernal plans, my lady, are formidable. I cannot forget what happened to Ali Baba when I disguised myself as a knight and sat to his right. I occasionally extended my pale hand to touch his bare arm unnoticed, and the poor man was so agitated he nearly jumped from his place. I felt chills run through his body, and he was certain I was a woman and dared not act. When the encounter ended, I watched him search among the crowd, tracing every feature, only to return his gaze defeated and frustrated.'"

Here, the novel portrays Badr Al-Budur, the sister of the slain prince and his cherished wife, as well as Ali Baba's marriage to the forty jinn women. The narrative describes the encounter following the magical bird's abduction of his wife's amulet and the pursuit that led Ali Baba to the cave of the jinn, where the bird transforms into a beautiful woman delivering the amulet to the queen of the jinn. The queen then attempts to lure Ali Baba, demanding he marry their women, as illustrated in their dialogue:

“Do you know where you are?”

He wanted to tell her that he was not in the human world, but fear overcame him, so he remained silent.

‘Welcome to the world of the jinn.’

‘The jinn?’

Ali Baba muttered, seeking refuge, barely able to speak. She continued to watch him intently. Summoning his courage, he said:

‘Give me my wife’s amulet.’

The queen smiled... and said: ‘That is not what we want. We jinn are not bound by time like humans... we want you for something different. If you comply, we will let you go with the amulet; if not...’

Before she could finish, Ali Baba quickly replied:

‘At your command. The important thing is to recover the amulet and return to my wife, whom I left in the wilderness.’

...She continued: ‘We will marry you to our women, so they bear children part jinn, part human.’

He replied apologetically: ‘No problem, I will marry one.’

She turned to him angrily: ‘We determine the number, not you. We did not lure or kidnap you for just one; our count starts at forty, and one bears a hundred.’

Ali Baba stared in astonishment, swallowed hard, and returned to his seat muttering: ‘Oh my God.’

The queen, folding her arms, added: ‘Do not fear; we will not keep you longer than a year.’”

Thus, Ali Baba, instead of being a hero solely for his daring raids as in the traditional legend, becomes a hero also for his overwhelming virility, attracting both human and jinn women with his muscular, alluring body.

Deconstructing Social Hypocrisy (From Appearance to Revealed Essence):

This is evident in the character of the jeweler and his wife, whose social hypocrisy is revealed as greed and self-interest triumph. The jeweler exploits Ali Baba's physique for business purposes:

“Let me use him for a time, even just one year; I will not increase his wages beyond what suffices for his food and drink, and this will yield us great profits.”

Eventually, greed overtakes them, and they steal the magical amulet, replacing it with a fake and framing Ali Baba for theft, leading to his imprisonment. There, he encounters the country's judge—his wife in disguise—who recognizes him without his awareness, returns the original amulet, and exacts revenge on the jeweler. She then reveals her true identity and recounts her adventures, explaining how she navigated uncertainty guided by the old sorceress, and detailing the wonders Ali Baba experienced. They continue their journey to the imprisoned father's palace to rescue him, exposing social hypocrisy, showing how individuals adopt roles and personas that conceal their true selves, often enabled by influence and wealth, which mislead society into mistaking them for moral authorities. Appearance thus becomes a mask concealing corruption and avarice.

The Fortune-Teller (Mask of the Unknown):

The fortune-teller justifies actions through fate and written destiny, exploiting mystery to serve power interests. She symbolizes institutions that legislate corruption under the guise of spirituality and tradition, exposing social hypocrisy that publicly condemns theft but secretly endorses it under the mask of sacredness. This is evident in her dealings with Prince Al-Amjad:

“At the emirate palace, the prince was about to end the daily meeting... Meanwhile, the fortune-teller received visitors in the harem as usual, her influence with the prince’s wife, daughters, and entourage was very strong. This time, however, her reception was exaggerated... She set aside all accumulated foods, fruits, and sweets to respond to the prince’s call, who awaited her at the palace gates. She exclaimed: ‘Glory to my lord the prince; years burden all humans except you, which you overcome to appear youthful...’ She was led by the prince to his council chamber. As they sat, he began: ‘I always need you, and you must stand by my side.’

‘Your command is ours, and obedience, my lord prince. I believe things are moving for the better.’

The prince pursed his lips, interlacing his fingers, and said confidently: ‘Almost, almost; everything is proceeding as we plan.’”

The fortune-teller assists the prince in all his schemes, applying her rituals to achieve his goals. The emirate is thus under her influence and that of the illegitimate prince who seized the throne, humiliating the rightful heirs, until both are eventually exposed:

“Her actions aroused Prince Al-Amjad’s suspicion. He sent spies to observe her and discovered much of what she had done to his family to keep Ali Baba away. He decided to hang her publicly, erecting a gallows and summoning the people to witness the greatest

event. The prince declared: ‘I will surprise you. The one before you is not a fortune-teller as we believed, but a cunning witch, who sought to spoil Ali Baba’s marriage to my daughter for her own daughter, and to disrupt my relationship with my wife and daughter using her magic and deceit.’”

The climax reveals the futility of appearances, as the fortune-teller exposes the prince’s illegitimacy and the corruption of his rule, shaking the people’s faith and demonstrating that truth cannot be permanently silenced:

“The people were shocked by the fortune-teller’s words. The prince’s men hanged the witch and her daughter, but they could not hang the truth. The fortune-teller’s words became storms of resentment that the prince could neither comprehend nor divert. One morning, the populace stormed the palace to discover the truth, only to find the prince and his family vanished... and the rightful, wise prince in a pitiable state of illness and neglect.”

Mechanisms of Satire in the Narrative (Narrative and Linguistic Approaches):

Irony:

The novel relies on irony as a central tool of satire, where meaning arises from the contradiction between what is said and what actually occurs. Irony functions as a core narrative mechanism producing satire through stark contrasts, undermining apparent meanings and revealing deep cultural dysfunctions. Ali Baba’s character embodies structural irony: he is sometimes presented as socially acceptable, even nominated for leadership, while his past is tethered to banditry and deceit:

“Ali Baba, I appoint you to the emirate. No one else can control this disorder. Your fate is to be a prince—congratulations,” said the wise prince, staring at Ali Baba, who held the prince’s hand and kissed it, replying: ‘No, you are our prince and master. I will arrange everything...’ He was surprised by thousands gathering outside the palace... unveiling their faces. Ali Baba muttered in astonishment: ‘The bandits... we are your men... we have come to pledge allegiance and crown you prince over all.’”

Here, the irony lies between the discourse of legitimacy granting Ali Baba a leadership role and the past that exposes this legitimacy as fictitious. The text satirizes mechanisms of authority in society, showing how rhetoric can confer legitimacy on that which is inherently illegitimate.

This paradox deepens in the character of Prince Al-Amjad, the foundling who ascends the throne of the emirate. While he is presented as a symbol of lineage, authority, and legal continuity, the narrative structure reveals a murky origin, making this ascension an act based on illusion, illegitimacy, and lack of merit: “a mere foundling raised by the wise prince, who then turned against him and seized power after eliminating the rightful heir.” Thus, a stark paradox emerges between the political discourse that reinforces the ruler’s image and the narrative truth that strips him of this privilege, turning power itself into an object of satire—not as a solid structure, but as a mask that can be uncovered.

The character of the jeweler embodies another type of paradox, appearing as a wealthy and refined city notable, whose social prestige and wealth construct his image. Yet beneath this façade lies a thief who practices theft and fraud with almost legitimate skill, relying on a fragile social façade. He uses his influence to frame Ali Baba: after lending him a magical necklace to adorn his daughter for the wedding he was invited to, he covets the necklace and plans to steal it. He then orchestrates a scheme to trap Ali Baba, accusing him of theft, bribing police officers and poor workers with money and food to

witness the event out of greed and ignorance. Instead of returning the necklace to Ali Baba, he accuses him of stealing jewels from his house. The jeweler, a wealthy and influential town notable who purchases the testimony of the weak-minded, states: “I devised a hellish plan with solid material evidence and eyewitnesses. He is accused of robbery, theft, and physical assault against me and my servants, and I have imprinted the event precisely in the minds of the servants and the police, especially that fool of a commander, who will unleash his fury on poor Ali Baba until he collapses and confesses to what he did not do.”

Here, the satire emerges from the contradiction between the polished social façade and the underlying reality: a thief who claims rights through illicit means, or a wealthy thief appearing righteous, exploiting his position to conceal greed and avarice. This reveals the nature of a society that values wealthy thieves and assesses individuals pragmatically or based on appearances rather than actions. The jeweler, who does not stop at being a thief, successfully reproduces himself as an honest figure, a town elite, within the discourse of the upper class, exposing the mechanisms of collusion between wealth and prestige in constructing social status.

These three models demonstrate that paradox in the novel does not merely operate on a rhetorical or decorative level but serves a profound deconstructive function, revealing the separation between language as a tool of concealment and reality as a field of truth. In this sense, satire based on paradox becomes a tool to expose the cultural structures that allow falsehood to pass under the guise of discourse, whether in authority, morality, or social status.

Satirical Intertextuality:

The novel invokes traditional texts, especially the One Thousand and One Nights tales, but rereads them satirically, deconstructing their conventional meanings.

Intertextuality in *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* is among the most prominent narrative strategies used to generate satire. The text does not merely reference literary and traditional sources for humorous effect; it reappropriates them satirically, subverting their original functions and infusing them with critical significance. This is evident in the intertextuality with *One Thousand and One Nights*, where the classic narrative structure is reconstructed with fundamental alterations in narrative roles. Instead of Scheherazade being the narrator telling the story to King Shahryar to delay her death, the narration shifts to Dunyazad as the storyteller, while Scheherazade herself becomes the subject of narration. This transformation is not merely formal but produces a satirical paradox that undermines the authority of traditional storytelling, dismantling narrative centrality and turning it into a tool to expose the absurdity of reality, as if declaring that the story can no longer save anyone but has become a space to reveal illusions.

This satirical intertextuality extends to popular and folk poetry, notably referencing the poem *Ras Al-Mahna* by the Sufi-popular poet Al-Akhdar bin Khalouf. Excerpts are incorporated into the narrative:

I came to ask you while you answer me

By God, *Ras Al-Mahna*, speak to me

O head remaining in the desert lands

We summon you to the Generous, the Sustainer

East or west, oh great affliction
Or north or south, I came traveling to my homeland
Is this your land or am I a stranger?
O Ras Al-Mahna, answer me, by God

Here, satire is achieved by deconstructing the original poetic structure and rephrasing it in a modern narrative language, creating distance between the original and the transformation. The discourse shifts from an emotional or contemplative register to one imbued with irony, reflecting alienation and identity loss. The character addressing the skull revives a traditional ritual but practices it absurdly, saturating the dialogue with satire toward reality rather than mere reflection.

Proverbs are similarly repurposed, not as fixed moral rules but as discourses deconstructed internally. For example, the proverb “The bride is praised by her mouth and her mother” is presented to reveal the falsity of social courtesies, while “Men are believed when water passes through a sieve” is used ironically to highlight the impossibility of truth in a society governed by appearances and deception.

Thus, proverbs transform from instruments of value reinforcement to tools for exposing these values, placed in contexts contradicting their original meanings.

This complex use of intertextuality—whether with traditional tales, folk poetry, or proverbs—shows that satire in the novel is built not only on paradox but also on rewriting previous texts in ways that reveal their structure and strip them of symbolic authority. Intertextuality becomes a mechanism of cultural deconstruction, reinterpreting tradition

not merely as material for satire but as a medium for critical reassessment in light of contemporary reality.

Narrative Caricature: (Satirical Representation of Reality and Its Transformations)

The novel exaggerates certain traits to the point of caricature, turning characters into almost cartoonish figures that reveal social flaws. Narrative caricature in *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* is a technical device that magnifies attributes to create characters whose contradictions expose the inner structures of social reality. Caricature here is not merely for amusement but functions as a deconstructive tool highlighting the paradox between essence and appearance, amplifying one trait until it dominates the character.

This is evident in *Ali Baba*, where the narrative exaggerates virility and courage as a dominant heroic trait, almost erasing his history of thievery. Sometimes portrayed as a bold hero confronting dangers, the overemphasis carries implicit satire, as this “courage” becomes a mechanism to resell the character within society. Caricature creates a semantic imbalance: courage, instead of being a moral value, becomes a tool to conceal thievery. The novel implies that society can morally rehabilitate an individual by exaggerating one positive trait, even if dubious, revealing a social mechanism producing false heroes, where narrative substitutes reality.

The same device applies to the jeweler differently: wealth and material abundance are exaggerated to the point of becoming a dense veil hiding limitless greed. The jeweler appears as a refined elite man, surrounded by social respect. Yet this exaggerated depiction of wealth becomes a tool for exposure, as excessive portrayal uncovers a pathological relationship with money, based on monopoly, accumulation, and deceit. Wealth thus shifts from a status marker to a caricatured mask concealing—and confirming—moral emptiness.

The satire arising from narrative caricature emerges from the tension between the inflated image presented by the narrative and the implicit truth hinted at in the text. When courage is magnified to hide thievery, or wealth to mask greed, the text does not aim to convince the reader of these images; rather, it undermines their credibility, turning caricature into a cultural critique revealing how social status is built on false foundations and how visible traits justify deep contradictions in the value system.

1. Conclusion:

Satire in this novel can be seen as a culture of resistance and a counter-discourse deconstructing dominant narratives. It does not merely describe reality but exposes the cultural structures producing social contradictions. Consequently, the novel becomes a critical space reshaping social consciousness, granting the reader the ability to perceive reality from a different perspective.

A cultural reading of the novel *Ali Baba and the Forty Lovers* also reveals that satire represents a central artistic and intellectual mechanism in modern Maghrebi literature. Through paradox, intertextuality, and caricatured exaggeration, the author succeeds in deconstructing the cultural structures underpinning social relationships in contemporary society.

Thus, the novel asserts that literature is not merely a reflection of reality; rather, it is a critical discourse capable of questioning dominant values and reshaping cultural consciousness.

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