Hijāʾ as Cognitive–Ethical Theater: A Pedagogical Case Study of Al-Mutanabbī

Layla Darwish

Academic Researcher at University Of Manouba, Department of Letters, Arts and Humanities, Tunisia
rosalinerodaina@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper reconceives al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' as a form of cognitive ethical theater, where conflicts of identity, power, and value are enacted through carefully crafted linguistic performance. Hijā' operates via cognitive mechanisms such as foregrounding, ostensive communication, and metarepresentational reasoning, guiding audience attention and structuring moral evaluation. The study also proposes a pedagogical framework in which students analyze linguistic and performative cues, reconstruct social hierarchies, and reflect on ethical inversions, cultivating critical thinking and literary sensitivity. In this perspective, classical Arabic satire is revealed not merely as a historical genre but as a dynamic practice of reasoning, judgment, and interpretive engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' poses distinct pedagogical and analytical challenges. Traditional approaches often reduce it to rhetoric or verbal aggression. This overlooks the cognitive, ethical, and theatrical dimensions of the poetry. This study proposes a framework grounded in cognitive-pragmatic and ethical principles. It emphasizes foregrounding, ostensive communication, and metarepresentation (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995: 58–64, 141–143, 213–217; Sperber, 1997: 147–153; Pilkington, 1992; Scott-Phillips et al., 2009: 316–319; Miall & Kuiken, 1994a: 389–407; 1994b: 45–68). This framework shows how satire functions as a structured theatrical performance. The poet, the target, and the audience are engaged cognitively and ethically. Each analytical lens transforms reading from passive reception into active interpretation.

Al-Mutanabbī's invective is not a simple verbal attack. It operates through ethical inversion and hierarchical evaluation. Virtues such as generosity, courage, and al-'iffa (moral restraint), normally praised, are reversed against the target (Ibn Rashīq, 2002: 4). The target's social and moral position is reframed using allegory, hyperbole, or animalized representations. For example, a praised individual may be diminished or compared to a donkey. Meanwhile, a horse may be elevated in contrast. Natural elements, such as water, are morally coded. Clear water aligns with virtue, while stagnant water signals baseness (van Peer, 1986: 21–25; Mukařovský, 1964: 34–37). These inversions guide audience perception and reveal the poet's manipulation of moral hierarchies.

Metarepresentation plays a central role. It allows the poet to reconstruct both the target and his own ethical stance. Beings and values are reassigned within a moral framework. Hierarchies of high and low, noble and base, positive and negative are carefully organized. For instance, the donkey is contrasted with the horse. Stagnant water is opposed to clear water. Ordinary beings and elements are transformed into symbols of ethical or social value. This reordering helps the audience recognize contrasts between virtue and deficiency.

Foregrounding reinforces these effects. It highlights hyperbole, inversion, paradox, and metaphor. Positive attributes are first invoked in a laudatory frame and then subverted. This creates cognitive and ethical tension. Ostensive communication, through vocatives, deixis, and irony, signals deliberate intention. It guides the audience to infer ethical meaning and evaluate the target (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995: 63–64; 1997: 118–120; Pilkington, 1989, 1990).

Combining foregrounding, ostension, and metarepresentation allows students to experience Hijā' as dynamic cognitive and ethical theater. Learners simulate the triangular interaction of poet, target, and audience. They reflect on social hierarchies, moral values, and the poet's manipulation of praise and blame (Scott-Phillips et al., 2009: 316–319; Miall & Kuiken, 1994b: 45–68; Pilkington, 1990). This approach cultivates analytical skills, ethical discernment, and metarepresentational insight.

Al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' exemplifies the convergence of ego, rhetorical mastery, ethical evaluation, and theatricality. His invective is not mere literary ornament or aggression. It is a structured, socially meaningful performance. By staging his ego and manipulating praise, irony, and censure, Hijā' becomes cognitive and ethical theater. Moral and social hierarchies are dramatized for audience reflection.

This pedagogical framework positions students as active participants. They explore moral hierarchies, analyze ethical inversions, and simulate the dynamic between poet, target, and audience. Learners develop critical reflection, cognitive empathy, and active participation. They become not just interpreters but participants in the poetic and ethical performance.

Teaching al-Mutanabbī's satire in this way aligns with contemporary reader-centered pedagogy. Situating Hijā' within a cognitive-pragmatic framework links classical literary appreciation with modern educational strategies. It demonstrates that classical Arabic satire is culturally significant. It also provides a rich ground for developing analytical, interpretive, ethical, and metacognitive skills.

1.1. Problematic

The study of al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' presents profound interpretive and theoretical challenges. It calls for a reevaluation of Arabic satire beyond conventional frameworks. Muhammad Hussein, in his work al-Hijāʾ wa al-Hajjāʾūn fī Ṣadr al-Islām (2002), provides a descriptive historical account that situates early Islamic satire within social and moral contexts. His analysis illuminates the social functions of Hijā', yet it remains largely documentary. It does not examine how satire organizes moral hierarchies, engages the audience cognitively, or enacts the poet's self as an ethical and epistemic arbiter. This raises a critical question: how

does satire transcend mere documentation to become a vehicle for ethical deliberation and the cultivation of evaluative consciousness?

Muʿizz Jaʿfūra interprets al-Mutanabbī's invective through philosophical reflection and discourse analysis. His more recent study, "The Art of Satire in Al-Mutanabbi's Poetry" (Jaʿfūra, 2018, Al-Madawwana, 5(2), 639–660), further examines the poet's strategic deployment of satire. Yet his frameworks remain largely focused on stylistic, rhetorical, and psychological dimensions. They emphasize the artistry of expression rather than the structural and ethical architectures through which satire organizes knowledge, constructs moral meaning, and enlists the audience in evaluative judgment. To what extent does Hijā' operate as a metarepresentational and ethically infused discourse, staging virtue and vice within cognitive and moral reasoning?

A conceptual lacuna persists. Hijā' has not been fully appreciated as a self-reflexive, cognitively, ethically, and theatrically structured practice. It is often treated as limited to rhetorical or psychological effects. A cognitive-philosophical approach is particularly appropriate. It allows analysis of mental schemata, ethical patterns, and evaluative operations governing both the creation and reception of satire. By attending to mechanisms such as foregrounding, ostensive signaling, and the inversion of virtues and vices, this approach reveals the systematic ethical architecture and performative intentionality of Hijā'. Satire emerges as a discursive medium of cultural reasoning, moral reflection, and epistemic engagement. The poet's self becomes an ethical and epistemic benchmark, while the audience is invited to participate actively, witnessing and adjudicating social, moral, and theatrical hierarchies. Linguistic, ethical, cognitive, social, and performative dimensions are integrated within a unified analytical framework.

1.2.Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to develop a teaching framework for al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' that highlights its cognitive, ethical, and theatrical dimensions. Rather than viewing the poetry as mere verbal aggression or rhetorical display, the framework shows how satire engages the mind, shapes moral evaluation, and stages social hierarchies. By emphasizing foregrounding, ostensive communication, performative cues, and metarepresentation, reading and teaching Hijā' become active and reflective experiences.

This approach helps students engage with satire on multiple levels. It guides learners to analyze how linguistic and stylistic features signal meaning, direct interpretation, and create ethical tension. It provides strategies for reconstructing the target figures and social contexts implied in the poetry. Students simulate the interplay between poet, audience, and opponent. Through this process, they consider the poet's intentions, the audience's expectations, and their own interpretive choices.

Ultimately, this framework bridges classical literary analysis with contemporary pedagogy. It demonstrates how studying Hijā' fosters critical thinking, ethical reflection, and metarepresentational awareness. Students are encouraged not only to analyze and interpret but also to participate mentally in the theatrical and moral dimensions of the text. Teaching Hijā' in this way transforms it into a dynamic performance that engages students

intellectually and ethically. It enriches their understanding of literature and strengthens their capacity for reflective judgment.

2. ANALYTICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Teaching and analyzing al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' requires an approach beyond seeing satire as verbal aggression or ornamentation. This framework emphasizes three interrelated elements: foregrounding, ostensive communication, and metarepresentation. Together, these elements help students engage with the poetry as a structured theatrical performance while exploring its ethical and cognitive dimensions.

Foregrounding draws attention to linguistic and stylistic deviations such as hyperbole, inversion, paradox, and metaphor. These are not decorative but highlight virtues like courage, generosity, and chastity, only to reverse them against the target. Someone praised for bravery may be recast as weak or dishonorable, or likened to a lowly animal. Positive qualities are invoked and subverted, creating ethical tension that engages the audience's moral and cognitive faculties. This manipulation of social hierarchies aligns with observations by Ibn Rashīq, who emphasized the contrast of virtues and deficiencies within cultural values (Ibn Rashīq, 2002, p. 45).

Ostensive communication clarifies the poet's intentions through direct address, irony, and contextual cues. Even when the target is absent, the audience reconstructs their presence and anticipates reactions. Each poem becomes a social and ethical performance, where the audience infers meaning, anticipates consequences, and reflects on the poet's judgments (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, 63–64; Sperber, 1997, 118–120).

Al-Mutanabbī intensifies this theatrical effect by bringing the satirized figure into the scene. Deixis, including pronouns, vocatives, and spatial or temporal markers, makes the target present. The audience witnesses an enacted confrontation where the poet, target, and audience interact within the same dramatic space. Hijā' becomes a live ethical and cognitive display.

Metarepresentation structures the satire. The poet creates a mental space where the target's flaws mirror his own ethical stance. Virtues are inverted to emphasize deficiency. Animals or allegorical figures may gain higher moral or social value than the target. This double layer, with the self as reference, allows the audience to see satire as multi-dimensional. Learners explore how the poet balances social critique, ethical reasoning, and dramatic presentation (Miall & Kuiken, 1994a, pp. 45–68; Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, pp. 213–217).

This framework encourages active participation. Students identify foregrounded elements, decode ostensive signals, and analyze metarepresentational staging. They inhabit the triangular relationship of poet, target, and audience, reflecting on social and ethical hierarchies while considering their own perspective. Hijā' becomes a socially engaged, morally rich, and intellectually stimulating performance.

Al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' is not only a literary craft but a deliberate ethical and cognitive exercise. Foregrounding, ostensive communication, and metarepresentation transform satire into a staged, reflective experience. Teaching it in this way allows learners to appreciate the

poetry's depth, understand its social and moral commentary, and engage with it as a dynamic theatrical performance.

The problematic at the core of this study is understanding how al-Mutanabbī uses Hijā' to mediate between self, other, and societal norms. The poet stages his ego as the standard for ethical and social evaluation while representing the target within moral values. Through metarepresentation, the target's deficiencies contrast with idealized virtues. The audience judges within a dynamic cognitive and ethical framework. This theatrical inversion challenges conventional readings that reduce Hijā' to verbal attack, highlighting the nuanced cognitive, ethical, and performative dimensions of the poetry. Teaching and analyzing al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' requires moving beyond viewing satire as mere verbal aggression or ornamentation. This framework emphasizes three interrelated elements: foregrounding, ostensive communication, and metarepresentation. These elements help students engage with the poetry as a structured, theatrical performance while exploring its ethical and cognitive dimensions.

Foregrounding is the first step. The poet draws attention to linguistic and stylistic deviations such as hyperbole, inversion, paradox, and metaphor. These are not merely decorative. In Hijā', they highlight virtues like courage, generosity, and chastity, only to reverse them against the target. For example, someone praised for bravery may be recast as weak, dishonorable, or likened to a laughing monkey. Positive qualities are invoked and then subverted, creating tension that engages the audience's moral and cognitive faculties. This manipulation of social hierarchies aligns with Ibn Rashīq, who stressed satire's contrast of virtues and deficiencies within cultural values (Ibn Rashīq, 2002, p. 45).

Ostensive communication adds another layer. The poet makes intentions clear through direct address, irony, and contextual cues. Even if the target is absent, the audience can mentally reconstruct their presence. This transforms each poem into a social and ethical performance. Readers infer meaning, anticipate consequences, and reflect on the poet's judgments (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, 63–64; Sperber, 1997, 118–120).

Al-Mutanabbī heightens theatricality by calling the satirized figure into the scene. Deixis becomes central. Pronouns, vocatives, and spatial and temporal markers bring the target onto the poetic stage. The audience does not merely receive a description; they witness an enacted confrontation where poet, imagined target, and audience interact. This makes Hijā' a live ethical and cognitive display, with meaning unfolding through active participation.

Metarepresentation is key. The poet constructs a mental space where the target's flaws mirror his own ethical perspective. Virtues are inverted to emphasize deficiency. Animals or allegorical figures may gain higher moral or social value than the target. This dual representation allows the audience to see satire as a multi-dimensional, thoughtful performance. Learners explore how the poet balances social critique, ethical reasoning, and dramatic presentation (Miall and Kuiken, 1994a, pp. 45–68; Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, pp. 213–217).

This framework encourages active student participation. They identify foregrounded elements, decode ostensive signals, and analyze metarepresentational staging. They mentally

inhabit the triangular relationship of poet, target, and audience. By situating Hijā' within this cognitive, ethical, and theatrical framework, learners move beyond surface reading and experience the poetry as socially engaged, morally rich, and intellectually stimulating.
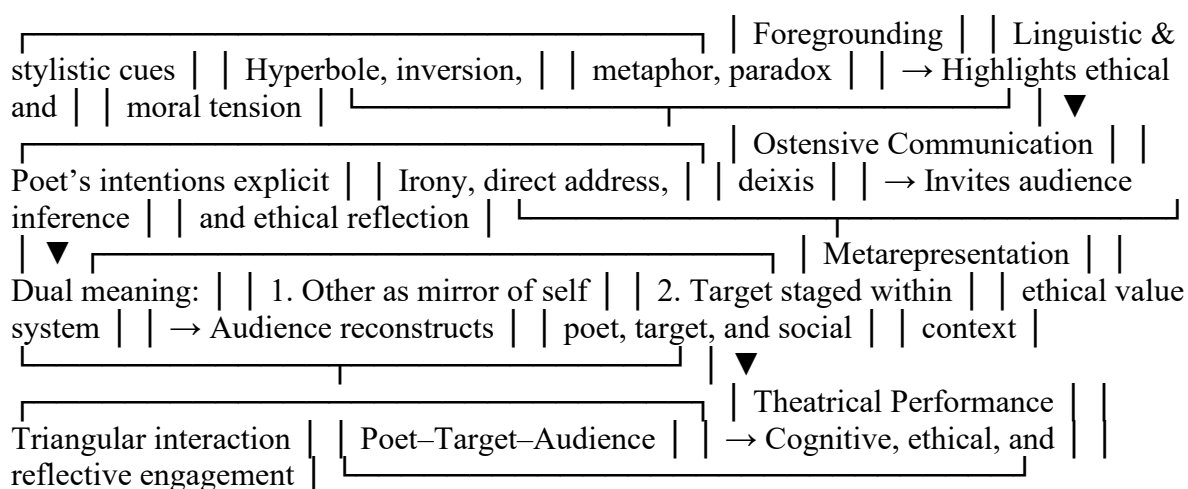
In short, al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' is not only literary craft but also a deliberate ethical and cognitive exercise. The interplay of foregrounding, ostensive communication, and metarepresentation transforms satire into a staged, reflective experience. Teaching it this way equips learners to appreciate the poetry's depth, understand its social and moral commentary, and engage with it as a dynamic theatrical performance.

Foregrounding highlights deviations in language and style, creating ethical reflection and theatrical tension. Ostensive communication signals deliberate ethical acts while inviting the audience to infer meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, 63–64; 1997, 118–120). Metarepresentation serves a dual function: it positions the other as a mirror for the self, allowing the poet's ego and evaluative framework to structure the satire, and it stages the target within Arabic ethical values. Virtues such as courage, generosity, and chastity become markers for contrastive evaluation. This dual process ensures the audience reconstructs poet, target, and social hierarchy, forming a polyphonic theatrical scene.

The core problematic is understanding how al-Mutanabbī uses Hijā' to mediate between self, other, and societal norms. The poet stages his ego as the standard for ethical evaluation while representing the target within moral norms. Through metarepresentation, the target's deficiencies contrast with idealized virtues. The audience is invited to judge within a dynamic cognitive and ethical framework. This theatrical inversion of values challenges readings that reduce Hijā' to verbal attack.

To clarify these processes, the following schema outlines how foregrounding, ostension, and metarepresentation combine to produce a staged satirical performance.

2.1. Diagrammatic Schema of Cognitive-Ethical Flow

│ Foregrounding │ │ Linguistic & stylistic cues │ │ Hyperbole, inversion, │ │ metaphor, paradox │ │ → Highlights ethical and │ │ moral tension │ │ ▼

│ Ostensive Communication │ │ Poet's intentions explicit │ │ Irony, direct address, │ │ deixis │ │ → Invites audience inference │ │ and ethical reflection │ │ ▼

Dual meaning: │ │ 1. Other as mirror of self │ │ 2. Target staged within │ │ ethical value system │ │ → Audience reconstructs │ │ poet, target, and social │ │ context │ ▼ │ Metarepresentation │

│ Theatrical Performance │ │ Triangular interaction │ │ Poet–Target–Audience │ │ → Cognitive, ethical, and reflective engagement │

In this framework, both polyphony and metarepresentation are essential for understanding how al-Mutanabbī constructs meaning. Polyphony, as understood in enunciation theory, refers to the coexistence of multiple voices or perspectives within a single utterance. In al-Mutanabbī's poetry, this often takes the form of a layered dialogue between the poet, the

heroic persona, the critic, and even the imagined audience. These voices do not simply coexist; they interact, contradict, and illuminate one another, creating a rich and dynamic enunciative space.

Metarepresentation adds another layer to this complexity. It allows the poet to represent not only his own perspective but also how others might perceive, judge, or respond to him. Al-Mutanabbī frequently anticipates criticism, incorporates it into his verse, and then responds to it within the poem itself. In doing so, he constructs a kind of satirical mirror where he becomes both the target and the creator of critique. This self-reflexive performance blends admiration, irony, and self-satire, revealing a voice that is at once confident, self-aware, and sometimes self-mocking.

Through this interplay of polyphony and metarepresentation, al-Mutanabbī does not present a unified self. Instead, he stages a dynamic, self-conscious persona, demonstrating control over his own image while also destabilizing it. His poetry becomes a cognitive and ethical theater in which the audience is invited to navigate these multiple perspectives, reflecting on both social norms and moral hierarchies.

Foregrounding plays a critical role in shaping this theater. The poet highlights contrasts between himself and the target, amplifying virtues such as courage, honor, and generosity in his own persona while depicting the target as deficient in these same qualities. This contrast creates cognitive tension, prompting the audience to actively evaluate social and moral norms. By emphasizing these differences, foregrounding functions both as a cognitive tool and as an ethical device, guiding attention and reinforcing the moral stakes of the satire.

Ostensive communication further supports this process. Through direct address, irony, and deictic references, al-Mutanabbī signals his intentions clearly, allowing the audience to follow the logic of his satire. Each line becomes a performative act in which ethical and social judgments are conveyed, and the audience is positioned as an active participant rather than a passive observer. They mentally reconstruct the interactions between poet, target, and society, engaging in ethical reasoning alongside aesthetic appreciation.

Metarepresentation extends beyond the self to include both the target and the audience. The poet mentally models the absent target, making them cognitively present for judgment, while the audience becomes a co-enunciator, invited to assess, infer, and reflect. Animals and allegorical figures are often employed to represent the target, collapsing natural and social hierarchies to emphasize deficiencies or moral failings. These figurative inversions entertain, instruct, and challenge the audience's ethical reasoning, creating a layered, participatory cognitive experience.

This dual function of metarepresentation, self-reflection and target modeling, is reinforced by the systematic inversion of virtues. Traits praised in the poet are distorted or absent in the target, creating staged scenes of ethical contrast. The audience is required to track these inversions, recognize the poet's evaluative stance, and reflect on broader social norms and moral values. In this way, Hijā' becomes not just a form of verbal attack but a structured exercise in cognitive and ethical engagement. From a pedagogical perspective, these mechanisms offer a rich framework for teaching. Students can identify foregrounded linguistic and stylistic elements, interpret ostensive cues, and reconstruct metarepresentational hierarchies. Role-playing, reflective writing, and

analysis of figurative inversions allow learners to experience Hijā' as an ethical, cognitive, and theatrical exercise. By reflecting on their own interpretations, students develop metacognitive awareness and ethical insight, bridging literary analysis with social reasoning.

Ultimately, situating al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' within this cognitive-ethical-theatrical framework demonstrates that satire is far more than verbal aggression. The poetry functions as a space where ethical evaluation, cognitive reasoning, and performative artistry intersect. By foregrounding values, staging contrasts, and enacting layered scenarios, al-Mutanabbī transforms invective into an instrument of moral reflection and social engagement. Teaching Hijā' in this way engages students actively, inviting them into a living, ethically informed, and intellectually stimulating performance that integrates cognition, social insight, and aesthetic appreciation.

To demonstrate how foregrounding, metarepresentation, and ostension structure the logic of classical Arabic hijāʾ, we revisit the Ḍabba hijāʾ (al-Dīwān, 2008, V1, p.239) and the Kāfūr hijāʾ (al-Dīwān, 2008, V 1, p.231) as paradigmatic scenes in which al-Mutanabbī transforms satire into a complex cognitive and ethical practice. In these poems, verbal aggression functions not as a lapse of decorum but as a disciplined aesthetic technology that reorganizes moral perception.

In the Ḍabba hijāʾ, al-Mutanabbī refrains from direct insult and constructs meaning through contrast, because at the beginning of the poem, he gives the impression that he is praising. Qualities are assigned not by explicit accusation but by negating their opposites. This is a precise instance of foregrounding, where significance arises from what is not said but is structurally implied. The logic of hijāʾ operates through naqd; the systematic undoing of assumed virtues by projecting their contraries. Apparent praise becomes a mode of negation, exposing ethical deficiencies beneath a surface of neutrality. Through metarepresentation, the audience infers the gap between cultural ideals and the qualities superficially attributed, reconstructing the target's moral identity by recognizing the distance between explicit language and underlying meaning.

This layered perceptual effect is reinforced by rhyme, antithesis, and disciplined imagery, all of which locate the target within a moral topography of high versus low, noble versus base. This symbolic placement exemplifies ostension: the poet directs the audience's attention by pointing through contrast and spatial metaphors rather than through direct denunciation. The satirical gaze becomes spatial and ethical at once.

The Kāfūr hijāʾ intensifies this dynamic through ostension via pronominal deixis. The repeated deployment of "I," "you," and "I satirize you" constructs a dramatic arena in which the poet summons Kāfūr into the discursive space as if physically present. Deixis becomes a theatrical device that performs judgment and exposes the target before an implied audience. Foregrounding creates moral contrast; metarepresentation shapes the target's ethical profile; ostension renders him visible and judgeable.

At the same time, al-Mutanabbī transforms Kāfūr into a mirror reflecting his own ideals of nobility and chivalric virtue. As the poet of fursān and heroic excellence, he stages Kāfūr as the negative image of his own aspirations. The target's flaws become the inverse outline of the virtues the poet claims for himself. The hijāʾ thus operates as a double process: the construction of Kāfūr as ethically deficient and the reinforcement of al-Mutanabbī's self-image as the embodiment of honor and courage. This mirroring is a form of metarepresentation, where the poem comments not only on the target but also on the poet's self-fashioning.

Al-Mutanabbī further represents Kāfūr as a laughing monkey. In doing so, the animal departs from its natural classification and is re-situated within an ethical and evaluative hierarchy. The satire does not rely on mere physical ugliness or grotesque depiction; rather, it negates

the value of rationality itself. By displacing Kāfūr into a category of intellectual nullity, the poet enacts a philosophical critique: the essence of ethical and human worth is tied to reason and virtue, and the target's deficiency is most pointedly expressed through its absence. The animal imagery thus becomes a vehicle for moral reasoning, reconfiguring the audience's perception of cognitive and ethical hierarchies while embedding the satire within a reflective, philosophical frame.

Within this ethical-theatrical architecture, even harsh elements such as sexual insinuations or references to taboo behavior function as purposeful rhetorical tools. They reinforce, rather than disrupt, the poem's cognitive frame. Through metarepresentation, the audience reconstructs Kāfūr's moral collapse; through foregrounding, the absence of virtue becomes striking; through ostension, Kāfūr is displayed as an object of judgment. By transferring culturally recognized vices into the body of the ridiculed subject, al-Mutanabbī transforms these vices into exemplary scenes of moral failure. Hijāʾ becomes a cognitive instrument that entertains while clarifying ethical boundaries.

Al-Mutanabbī also exploits the cultural ambivalence surrounding desire and shame. What is attractive and what is repulsive coexist in a tense symbolic economy. Aesthetic pleasure in verbal violence intersects with the moral expectation that poetry guide and elevate. Actions ordinarily neutral, such as desire, are reframed as signs of humiliation, exposing contradictions in social values. This ambivalence heightens ethical distinctions and dramatizes the erosion of virtue.

Taken together, the Ḍabba and Kāfūr cases show how foregrounding, metarepresentation, and ostension form the cognitive engine of hijāʾ. Al-Mutanabbī's precise use of structure, imagery, sound, and rhetorical contrast produces an ethical vision in which vice becomes legible and socially consequential. Even the strongest invective remains within the artistic frame because it serves a clear function: redefining moral boundaries and reorganizing value systems. Classical Arabic hijāʾ thus emerges as a sophisticated medium for shaping perception, teaching values, and cultivating ethical discernment.

3. DISCUSSION

The study of al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' offers a lens into the sophisticated interplay of cognition, ethics, and linguistic artistry in classical Arabic satire. Teaching his invective reveals how language, moral reasoning, and audience engagement converge, transforming satire into a cognitive and ethical theater.

Metarepresentation is central to this process. The poet positions the target as a mirror for the audience, reconstructing their moral and social identity through cues, irony, and staged reactions. This layered presence fosters analytical reasoning, empathy, and ethical judgment, enabling the audience to navigate the triangular dynamic of poet, target, and observer (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995: 213–217; Pilkington, 1989: 119–135).

Inversion and reclassification of values further enhance cognitive engagement. Virtues traditionally associated with praise, such as courage or generosity, are subverted against the target, while animals or allegorical figures may be elevated, generating contrastive ethical hierarchies. Foregrounding amplifies these effects by highlighting hyperbole, syntactic inversion, and paradox, signaling the ethical stakes of each utterance (Mukařovský, 1964: 34–37; van Peer, 1986: 21–25).

Ostensive strategies, including direct address, deixis, and irony, make the poet's intentions explicit. Pronouns and rhetorical markers summon the target onto a symbolic stage, orchestrating a performative trial that renders moral failings immediate and vivid. Audience engagement is heightened as ethical evaluation is dramatized through staged interaction (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995: 63–64; 1997: 118–120).

Foregrounding, metarepresentation, and ostension together create ethical theatricality. The audience mentally reconstructs hierarchical, social, and moral dimensions, witnessing the inversion of praise and blame. This cognitive-ethical layering cultivates reflective judgment and demonstrates how classical Arabic satire communicates complex social knowledge while engaging reasoning faculties (Miall & Kuiken, 1994a: 50–52; 1994b: 62–64).

Pedagogically, this framework allows students to analyze linguistic cues, simulate poet-target-audience interactions, and explore ethical inversions. By actively engaging with these mechanisms, learners develop analytical precision, moral insight, and intellectual empathy, transforming the classroom into a space of active cognitive and ethical inquiry.

Ultimately, al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' operates as a performative act of moral judgment. Language, values, and social hierarchies are enacted for reflection, making his satire a sophisticated medium for cultivating multidimensional literacy encompassing analytical, ethical, and reflective skills while underscoring the enduring relevance of classical Arabic invective.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' operates as a complex cognitive, ethical, and theatrical system, far surpassing conventional notions of satire as mere verbal aggression or rhetorical flourish. By integrating foregrounding, metarepresentation, and ostensive communication, al-Mutanabbī structures ethical hierarchies, manipulates virtues and vices, and stages his targets within a mental and moral theater, producing a layered interplay between poet, target, and audience. The audience does not passively consume satire; it reconstructs the poet's intentions, anticipates the target's responses, and interprets the broader social and ethical framework in which the invective is embedded.

Metarepresentation emerges as the linchpin of this system, enabling audiences to perceive simultaneously self and other, trace inversions of moral values, and engage in reflective evaluation. Foregrounding emphasizes linguistic and stylistic deviations that make these cognitive and ethical effects salient, while ostension ensures the poet's interventions are visible, intelligible, and morally framed. Together, these mechanisms transform Hijā' into a staged, participatory performance in which cognition, ethics, and social critique are inseparable from aesthetic experience.

Al-Mutanabbī's invective also shares affinities with ethical caricature and the philosophy of humor. Caricature condenses a person's ethical and intellectual traits into a diminished representation, reducing a rational, dignified individual into a figure lacking reason or moral worth. This often involves animalization or deformation, drawing on cultural associations in which certain animals signify subservience or base instincts, such as the dog as a symbol of submission. Bergson's theory of laughter similarly emphasizes that humor often arises from stripping the subject of rationality, exposing brutish impulses, and enacting moral judgment. In Hijā', the reduction of the target's ethical qualities parallels the denial of humanity itself, as moral failings are dramatized alongside animalization or symbolic forms. This inversion underscores how the absence of virtue equates to diminished personhood, reinforcing the cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic impact of satire.

Beyond demonstrating the internal mechanics of al-Mutanabbī's satire, this model has broader implications for understanding Arabic literary tradition. It situates al-Mutanabbī not only as a master of poetic language but also as a moral and cognitive innovator, whose invective actively shapes social perception and ethical reasoning. It also provides a framework for analyzing other Arabic satirical traditions, from jāhiliyyah poetry to later classical and medieval works, in which invective operates as a performative cognitive practice rather than a mere rhetorical ornament. The principles of metarepresentation, foregrounding, and ostension are also translatable to other cultural contexts, illuminating the function of satire in early European epigrams, modern political caricature, and comparable traditions of ethical ridicule.

Pedagogically, this framework reconceives the teaching of Hijā' as an integrated cognitive, ethical, and theatrical exercise. Students engage with social hierarchies, ethical evaluation, and linguistic artistry simultaneously, reconstructing the triangular relationships between poet, target, and audience. By treating satire as both literary art and cognitive-ethical performance, learners develop analytical, moral, and reflective skills, deepening their appreciation of the intricate interplay between aesthetics, ethics, and cognition. Al-Mutanabbī's Hijā' thus exemplifies a sophisticated fusion of literary mastery, social critique, and ethical instruction, demonstrating the enduring relevance of classical Arabic satire as a tool for understanding human values, social dynamics, and the mechanisms of moral reasoning.

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