

RESEARCH ARTICLE	The Popularity of Animal Literature: Kalila and Dimna as a Model	
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Abstract This research addresses the theme of "animal literature" through the study of the work Kalila wa Dimna, regarded as one of the most prominent allegorical texts that used animals as a medium for conveying wisdom and moral lessons in Arab heritage. The study aims to highlight the symbolic and cultural dimensions embedded in this genre and how it contributed to shaping collective consciousness through stories that blended animal and human traits. This narrative approach enabled readers to comprehend social and political realities in an indirect manner. The research also seeks to trace the influence of this literary form in ancient civilizations such as Indian, Greek, and Egyptian cultures, and its mutual interaction with Arab heritage. The findings reveal that animal literature played a vital role in transmitting ethical and political values, with Kalila wa Dimna standing as a comprehensive model that combines symbolic storytelling with an instructional style. This form of literature has also contributed to preserving folk heritage and communicating human experiences in a simple and accessible language, ensuring its continuity and effectiveness in Arab culture throughout the ages.		
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Introduction

Human societies, in their growth, development, and awareness, are much like a naive child who grows older, gains experience, broadens their understanding, and refines their knowledge. The only difference lies in the measurement of age: an individual's life stages are counted in years or decades, while the stages of human societies are measured in thousands of years. In each of these stages, humanity acquires new concepts, diverse experiences, and various perspectives. Indeed, the early or "childhood" stage of humanity was truly represented by this form of animal storytelling.

It is true that a child is naive in their interactions with people and life, yet a single word they speak or even imply can have a profound impact—not only on fellow children but even on adults. It may alter a real-life situation in ways that a wise and seasoned person, hardened by life, might fail to achieve with all their insight and eloquence.

That is precisely what a simple and naive animal tale can achieve, as it represents the early stages of human societal development. Despite their simplicity, animals are capable of penetrating the minds of audiences of various ages and cultural backgrounds. They attract the listener's attention, sight, and insight to the profound moral meanings embedded within their different forms and behaviors.

1- Animal Literature in Ancient Human Civilizations:

No civilization, even the most advanced among the ancient ones, is devoid of animal literature that naturally emerges among its people. It is, therefore, rare to find any literary tradition entirely lacking in animal stories—

whether originally composed within the national literary output or translated and adapted from the literature of other nations.(Wazzan, 1993, p. 171)

Thus, animal literature occupies a wide space in ancient human literary traditions and serves as a rich source of vivid imagery, engaging meanings, and symbols that reflect human interactions and both individual and collective morals. It is no less capable than human characters in representing the various facets of life.

It is therefore inappropriate to attribute this genre—so rich in expressions of universal human wisdom—to any single nation, since animals have always been a shared phenomenon among all of humanity. Ever since Cain buried his brother Abel, following the example of a bird, it is likely that this symbolic literary form originated independently among many nations, although it may have undergone some mutual influence later on. Nevertheless, certain historical records permit such a ranking and grant precedence to some civilizations in being the first to give voice to animals in their literature. Foremost among these nations are:

- **The Egyptians:** They had their own animal tales, one example being *The Lion and the Mouse*, which was discovered on papyrus scrolls dating back to the 12th century BCE.
- **The Greeks:** Their animal stories were predominantly poetic in form. The earliest known example dates to the 8th century BCE, attributed to the poet Hesiod with his fable *The Hawk and the Nightingale*. He was followed by Stesichorus in the 6th century BCE with his fable *The Eagle and the Fox*. However, the most famous Greek figure in this genre is Aesop (6th century BCE), known for his fables such as *The Dog and the Bone*, *The Fox and the Grapes*, and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*.(West, 1999, p. 64)
- **The Indians:** Although they may not have been the first to produce animal literature, their contributions are considered superior in both quality and quantity compared to other nations. Indian animal literature is also among the oldest of Eastern literatures. Some scholars date their involvement to the 4th century BCE, linking it to Alexander the Great's eastern conquests and the successive rulers who governed the region afterward. Others trace it even earlier, to between the 6th and 7th centuries BCE, which corresponds to the formation of the *Jataka Tales*, narrating the reincarnation of Buddha's soul from the lowest to the highest forms of animals.
- **The Europeans in the Latin Era:** Through figures such as Horace (65–8 BCE) and Phaedrus (30 BCE–44 CE), whose fables reflected his discontent with the injustices of his time. Latin animal literature largely imitated its Greek predecessor.

It is not unlikely that these civilizations simultaneously contributed to and were influenced by this genre throughout its long history.(Chatti, 2017)

As for the Persians' acquaintance with animal literature, it came later than that of the Indians—if we consider Persian literature as distinct from its Indian counterpart. However, some historical studies of ancient literatures see no clear distinction between Persian and Indian literatures, especially before the Common Era. In addition to being kindred peoples, they once shared a common homeland, similar beliefs, ideas, and imaginations. The closeness of their languages made them almost like two dialects of a single language. *Kalila wa Dimna* had a profound impact in solidifying the tradition of animal literature among the Persians.(Munshi, 2019, pp. 26-27)

2- The Firm Establishment of Animal Literature in Arab Heritage: The prominent presence of *Kalila wa Dimna* in Arab heritage raises many questions—perhaps the most important being the enthusiastic reception it received from Arabs, their deep engagement with its content, and their creative interaction with its text through both adaptation and contribution. For centuries, Arabs drew inspiration from its discourse in their literary productions, both in prose and poetry. More significantly, the Arab common folk insisted on their right to be the ones to transmit it to other nations, even though this honor could have gone to the Indian, Persian, or Kashmiri people, who had accessed or transmitted the text earlier than the Arabs. The Persians, for instance, retranslated it from Arabic around the 12th century CE, at a time when the Arabic version had not yet begun its journey into the languages of other peoples.

If animal literature is the dominant genre in *Kalila wa Dimna*, then what was it that the Arab common man understood from this literature that others from the aforementioned civilizations did not? And what elements of Arab and Islamic folk culture—its customs, traditions, and social norms—managed to infuse *Kalila wa Dimna* with meanings that other popular cultures could not transmit into it?

Despite attempts to marginalize animal literature within the popular literary heritage—especially in oral storytelling—and the neglect shown by some studies, including Arab ones, regarding the scope and depth of its presence, *Kalila wa Dimna* remains a testament to the falsehood of such marginalization. The Arab world's openness to both its general message and its specific discourse (animal literature), as well as the continued production of works in its

style in both prose and poetry for many centuries, is clear evidence of the depth and rootedness of the Arab experience in this genre.

That said, *Kalila wa Dimna* undoubtedly played a major role in deepening this engagement, just as it did for the Persians, who enriched the work with elements of their own culture. The same can be said for what was translated into Arabic from Greek sources, such as Aristotle's *Book of Animals* and works attributed to Democritus. However, this does not negate the authenticity and deep roots of animal literature in Arab popular culture. In our view, there are several indicators of this, among them (Abdulla, 2020):

- The Arab common people engaged deeply with the content of *Kalila wa Dimna*, transmitting it through oral storytelling and writing, a practice they did not extend to other works. This reflects their wide openness to the cultures of neighboring nations at the time.
- The Arab people were involved in both wisdom literature and exemplary literature, which share close ties with animal literature, and they were able to fulfill the purposes of these genres effectively.
- The Arabs were among the closest peoples to a nomadic lifestyle. The nature of the Bedouin, with its familiarity and close observation of animals, helped deepen their understanding of animal behaviors and their symbolic as well as physical traits. The Bedouin's simplicity and naivety made them naturally inclined to use animals in allegories and to penetrate the animals' inner world to express some of their own life experiences.
- The Qur'anic discourse employs animal literary motifs in many of its chapters, taking into account—due to its miraculous nature—the cultural background and intellectual references of its Arab audience, including their knowledge of animal literature. (Khalidi, 2014)

Animal literature appeared in Arab popular culture before *Kalila wa Dimna* in two forms

- **Innate mythological stories:** embodied in popular proverbs, as found in works like *Majma' al-Amthal* by Al-Maydani and *Jamhara al-Amthal* by Abu Hilal al-Askari. (al-Maydānī, 1955)
- **Historical religious stories:** preserved in popular narrative, such as those told by Al-Nadr ibn al-Harith about Persian kings, tales about Rostam and Esfandiar, or the story of the dove and the crow on Noah's Ark. (Abdulabbas et al.)

Therefore, we believe that the Arab common man was only challenged by one element among the various artistic components that form the general structure of *Kalila wa Dimna*—namely, its narrative framework and the interweaving of its forms within a coherent storytelling system, especially the long, continuous narrative. As for its other artistic elements, they were already familiar in his creative experiences, both in prose and poetry. (Jayyusi, 2010) These include the animal content, the tale itself, the elements of admonition and teaching, as well as proverbs, wisdom, and symbolism.

The Arab popular imagination has repeated many story models containing these elements but lacking a clear narrative structure. One example is the story of: "A rabbit picked up a date, but a fox snatched it and ate it. They took their dispute to a lizard. The rabbit said, 'O father of strength!' The lizard replied, 'I hear your call.' She said, 'We came to bring our dispute to you.' He said, 'Fair and wise.' She said, 'Bring him out to us.' He said, 'The judge is visited at his home.' She said, 'I found a date.' He said, 'It's sweet, eat it.' She said, 'The fox snatched it from me.' He said, 'He sought the good for himself.' She said, 'So I slapped him.' He said, 'You took it rightfully.' She said, 'Then he slapped me.' He said, 'You are both justified.' She said, 'Then judge between us.' He said, 'I have judged.'"

In our Arabic literature, there are many works of animal literature in which their authors addressed various types of animals such as camels, horses, sheep, wild beasts, birds, bees, insects, falcons, pigeons, snakes, scorpions, and others. These topics were extensively covered by authors like Al-Asma'i, Abu Ubaidah, Abu Hatim Al-Sijistani, Abu Ziyad Al-Kilabi, Al-Nadr ibn Shumayl, Al-Shaybani, Ibn Al-A'rabi, Ahmad ibn Hatim Al-Bahili, and Abu Al-Hasan Al-Akhfash.

Some of our most important Arabic sources were not exempt from this. We mention, by way of example but not limitation, *Adab al-Katib* by Ibn Qutaybah, *Al-Imta' wa al-Mu'anasa* by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, and *Al-Iqd al-Farid* by Ibn Abd Rabbih. However, the most famous among them are those whose authors dedicated themselves exclusively to animal literature, such as *Kitab al-Hayawan* by Al-Jahiz, *Hayat al-Hayawan al-Kubra* by Kamal al-Din al-Damiri (742–808 AH), and *'Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat wa Ghara'ib al-Mawjudat* by Zakariya ibn Mahmud al-Qazwini (600–682 AH). (Qutaybah, 1985)

Modern Arab research and studies have also pointed out that animal literature has touched many areas of Arab life — intellectual, religious, literary, and others — as is evident from the following works:

- Dawood Saloom: *Animal Stories in Arabic Literature*.
- Shaker Hadi Shukr: *Animals in Arabic Literature*.
- Okasha Abd al-Mannan al-Taybi: *Stories of Birds and Animals in the Qur'an and Sunnah*.
- Muhammad Mahmoud Abdullah: *The Animal World between Science and the Qur'an*.
- Iyad Mousa al-Awami: *Animals in Arabic Proverbs*.

However, despite its abundance in Arab culture, the Arab approached it from the perspective of reality or fact, not imagination. The animal's image remained closer to its natural animal form than its human form. The animal thus remained "isolated in its animal world, not elevated to a level equivalent to the human world... [because the Arab] is realistic in his view of what surrounds him and does not follow the path of distant abstraction." (Marzolph, 2025)

It was closer to the science of animals than to its literature, as it concerned itself with studying animals descriptively, explaining their types, bodily structures, habits, and natural characteristics – such as the differences in their limbs, udders, wombs, wool, and colors, as well as their temperaments, virtues, and faults. It sometimes "spoke" through the instincts with which nature endowed them, or distinguished between the natures of animals and humans, praising or blaming accordingly, without neglecting the rulings of Islamic law concerning them. As al-Damiri stated regarding the ruling on the ostrich: "Eating ostrich meat is permitted by consensus because it is among the wholesome foods, and because the Companions (may God be pleased with them) ruled on it... It was narrated from 'Uthman, 'Ali, Ibn 'Abbas, Zayd ibn Thabit, and Mu'awiya (may God be pleased with them)... but there was disagreement concerning ostrich eggs..." (Al-Damiri, 1956)

However, despite this, his works were not intended for pure scientific critique, but sometimes for purely linguistic purposes. They served as linguistic lexicons because their main concern was the study of language, not the nature of animals, their instincts, conditions, and habits. And if there was a scientific tendency, it was only incidentally and as an accompaniment to the discussion, nothing more

Perhaps this perspective on animal literature was one of the reasons for its limitation within Arab culture, and possibly other reasons as well, such as the lack of care by narrators in transmitting it from the Bedouins, as well as by the chroniclers, which caused it to be incomplete, fragmented, and abridged (Posnett, 1886). Another possible reason is the poverty of Arabic literature in the art of storytelling and representation, which are the very elements that enliven animal literature and enrich it with various aspects of life. (Van Leeuwen & Marzolph, 2004)

Animal literature transcended the superficial culture of the Arab popular individual to reach his deeper culture when animal material found its way into his immediate mystical beliefs (the *hulm*). Thus, "... the roar of the lion is fear of a cruel ruler, the meow of the cat is a reproach of a servant thief, the sound of the gazelle is a striking image of a beautiful foreign slave girl, and the cry of the fox is the deceit of a lying man..." for there is no animal that does not have a position in this belief. (Al-Nabulsi, 1994)

3. The Narrative Nature of Animal Literature and Its Popularity:

It is absolutely impossible to imagine animal literature without the storytelling act; otherwise, it would be literature of stagnation and confinement. The narrative imagination ignites this art and expands the space of creativity within it. It requires intertextuality with many other arts such as proverbs, wisdom, and symbolism, all of which are deeply intertwined with the expressions of popular communities, embedded in their interactions, customs, traditions, perceptions, and behaviors. "Animal tales explain, narrate, entertain, and teach, blending all these purposes in a wonderful mixture. It is an amazing blend, sometimes puzzling but stimulating to activity" Thus, animal literature adopted two expressive means to reach the understanding of the popular audience, namely:

- **Wisdom, Admonition, and Advice:** This appears in short, concise expressions such as proverbs, maxims, and well-known sayings, like those recorded by al-Maydani, including: "Caution before releasing the arrow." (Badawi, 1993) The story behind this is that a young crow saw a hunter placing an arrow on the bow to catch him. The crow flew away, and his father told him, "Wait until we know what the man intends," to which the young crow replied with the aforementioned proverb. Similarly, among their sayings are: "The beetle stinks when touched," used to describe someone with hidden malice; also, "If the mouse and the cat reconcile, the grocer's shop will be ruined," "Worse than a donkey's offspring," "More cunning than a wolf," "Quieter than a partridge," "More twisted than a lizard's tail."
- **The Tale:** In these, the animal plays a central role either alone or alongside human characters. It is not surprising that it is given a soul and awareness, behaving like a human. Although its world "is independent and self-

contained, it parallels the human world; its creatures behave like humans – they love, hate, deceive, and scheme” (Badawi, 1993)

Animal storytelling is the better of the two means because hearts are drawn to it, souls find comfort in it, and it spares one the boredom that results from prolonged listening to pure admonitions [the first expressive means], which sometimes weigh heavily on the ears and repel some temperaments. Its suitability for popular society also lies in how it exploits its knowledge of animal nature to weave the lines of the story and clarify the intended moral lessons and experiences . It may also give animals a voice to express opinions or reveal attitudes toward the overall surrounding phenomena.(Ziolkowski, 2016)

Therefore, it is rare to find successful animal literature, whether poetry or prose, separated from the act of storytelling or from popular collective human experiences. Undoubtedly, this includes animal literature that the common people shaped into living, vibrant material, such as the stories of *Kalila wa Dimna*.

4. Animal Literature in *Kalila wa Dimna*:

At the beginning, animal tales had no artistic rules to define their features. However, over time, and after popular society recognized the significance and meaning these stories could convey to their community, some artistic principles began to be established, obliging themselves to express in that style. Therefore, neither the Persians nor the Arabs could avoid following the same method used by the Indians in shaping what they added to the stories of *Kalila wa Dimna*, which increased the suspicion among many scholars who observed the unified composition across its Indian, Persian, and Arabic sections and thus favored the theory of a single author.(Ziolkowski, 2016)

The most important characteristic that animal tales in *Kalila wa Dimna* and others observed was the careful similarity between their fictional symbolic characters (animals) and the real symbolic ones (humans) within the narrative or storytelling context. This was intended to stimulate the audience’s mind to understand the latter. As a result, the descriptions of the former (the animals) were kept brief, as were those of the latter (the humans), or vice versa, so as not to disrupt the intended meaning and desired moral. Although the description of the animals in *Kalila wa Dimna* is noticeably less detailed in favor of the real characters, this seems to reflect the perspective of the realistic-minded Arab popular individual, as previously mentioned.

As for other features and traits related to this art, they are less significant, as some relate to the nature of storytelling and narration, while others are connected to the stylistic poles of poetry and prose and the like.

It is worth noting that there are several classifications of animal stories, among which we highlight the most important, along with the position of *Kalila wa Dimna* within these categories:

- One of these classifications divides them into poetic stories and prose stories . The poetic ones are relatively recent, influenced by the French poet La Fontaine, who was himself influenced by *Kalila wa Dimna*. It is clear from this classification that the animal stories in *Kalila wa Dimna*, from this perspective, are prose, although some parts were composed in poetry by Ibn al-Habbari in an attempt to bring its style closer to the Arab audience, but without success, as *Kalila wa Dimna* remained better known for its prose identity than for its poetry.(Abdulla, 2020)
- Another classification, by Mary Hall-Arbethnote , divides animal stories into three types, the first of which (including *Kalila wa Dimna*, from our point of view) is the **Talking Animals** category, where animals assume human personalities with all their traits and features. The second is **The Animal as It Is**, in which animals speak but do not go beyond their animal characteristics. The third type represents the animal with its full animal traits, including the absence of speech or thinking similar to humans, leaving it to the audience to interpret and explain the actions, behaviors, and conduct of the animal.
- In a more precise classification than the previous ones, animal stories narrated by animals themselves are divided into four types: **The explanatory (causal/interpretive) animal tale**, in which the ancients explained the differences between one animal and another... as well as the supernatural explanations primitive people gave for phenomena such as the shining of cats’ eyes in the dark, the elongation of the ears of the rabbit and the donkey, the bats hiding from sight during the day to escape creditors... and also the melodious singing of the skylark, the dove’s prayer for blindness upon whoever stole her eggs... There is no animal or bird that was not accompanied by a collection of traditional sayings and tales that specify its features and characteristics, encompassing the explanations from the pre-scientific era .(Dundes, 1984)
Kalila wa Dimna did not lack this type of animal tale, as the research showed in two such stories within its collection .

- The origin of the hostility between the owl and the crows, in the chapter of the owl and the crows.
- The reason for the ugliness of the crow’s gait, in the chapter of the ascetic and the guest.

The second type is the symbolic or didactic animal tale, best represented by *Kalila wa Dimna*. Then comes the poetic animal tale or animal epic. Finally, the long prose animal tale or animal novel.

However, it is worth noting that *Kalila wa Dimna* employed a wide variety of animals, ranging from the smallest in size (the flea) to the largest (the elephant), including livestock, beasts, wild animals, whales, reptiles, birds, and insects. It is important to say that the popular human deliberately harnessed this vast number of animals of all kinds and types with the aim of fully expressing the greatest possible variety of his own diverse stances—political, social, religious, intellectual, cultural, ethical, and so forth—especially since the historical period during which the text of *Kalila wa Dimna* was formed (the first ten centuries AD) witnessed many changes and transformations on all levels of life in the ancient Near East region, the geographical area that forms the context of *Kalila wa Dimna*.

5- The Share of *Kalila wa Dimna* in Animal Literature:

The presence of animals in the stories of *Kalila wa Dimna* parallels that of humans, as some stories feature exclusively human characters, while the roles in other stories are divided between animal and human characters. Thus, the material of animal literature in *Kalila wa Dimna* is relative, despite the prevailing view that restricts *Kalila wa Dimna* solely to animals.

Looking at its characters, the stories of *Kalila wa Dimna* divide into three categories:

1. **Human Stories:** These take place between human characters and can be among:
 - Human and human.
 - Human and supernatural forces, such as the story of the ascetic, the thief, and the devil in the chapter of the owl and the crows.
 - Human and animals who do not actively participate in the events of the story because they are not personified. An example is the story of the monkey and the carpenter from the chapter of the lion and the bull.
2. **Animal Stories:** In these, animals take on the roles of humans in speech, action, and thought, and events occur among:
 - Animal and animal.
 - Animal and objects, such as the story of the fox and the drum from the chapter of the lion and the bull.
 - Animal and human as a passive character, where the human's role is limited to building the moral of the story, such as the story of the three fishes from the chapter of the lion and the bull.
3. **Human and Animal Stories:** These involve humans and animals in their human form, sharing the roles in the story as active characters. The best example of this type in *Kalila wa Dimna* is the story of the king and the bird Fanaza, which is one of the chapters of the book. Features of the animal in this type of story include:
 - Its multiple roles, sometimes assisting humans or opposing them, representing good at times and evil at others.
 - Assistance to humans is not limited to domesticated animals; wild ones do so as well.
 - Sometimes animals appear stronger than humans and may be closer to high human principles and virtuous ethical values.
 - There is a transformation between them, such as an animal turning into a human, like the mouse transformed into a beautiful girl in the story of the ascetic and the transformed mouse, from the chapter of the owl and the crows.

In a statistical analysis of the main (*mother/central/pivotal*) stories of *Kalila wa Dimna*, it was found that out of a total of seventeen stories, eleven are animal stories, four are human stories, and two are shared between human and animal stories, as follows:

A - Animal:

1. The Lion and the Bull
2. Investigating Dimna's Matter
3. The Ringed Dove
4. The Owl and the Crows

5. The Monkey and the Ghilam
6. The Cat and the Rat
7. The Lion and the Jackal
8. The Fences and the Lioness
9. Mehraiz, King of the Rats
10. The Dove, the Fox, and the Heron
11. The Heron and the Duck

B - Human:

1. The Ascetic and the Weasel
2. Iladh and Biladh Iraht
3. The King's Son and His Companions
4. The Ascetic and the Guest

C - Human / Animal:

1. The King and the Bird Fanaza
2. The Traveler and the Goldsmith

As for the subsidiary (included) stories, the total number among the four introductions and the seventeen chapters circulating in the book *Kalila wa Dimna* is about fifty stories. Their division into the three types is as follows:

1. Human: approximately 28 stories
2. Animal: approximately 18 stories
3. Human / Animal: approximately 4 stories

These stories and their types are distributed across the introductions and chapters of *Kalila wa Dimna* as shown in the following table:

No.	Introductions and Chapters	Human	Animal	Human & Animal	Total Stories
01	Introduction to the Book	0	1	0	1
02	Borzūya's Mission to India	0	0	0	0
03	Borzūya the Physician	4	0	0	4
04	Ibn al-Muqaffa's Presentation of the Book	8	0	0	8
05	The Lion and the Bull	5	10	1	16
06	Investigating Dimna's Matter	4	0	0	4
07	The Ringed Dove	1	0	2	3
08	The Owl and the Crows	4	3	1	8
09	The Monkey and the Ghilam	0	1	0	1
10	The Ascetic and the Weasel	1	0	0	1
11	Iladh, Biladh, and Iraht	0	2	0	2
12	The Cat and the Rat	0	0	0	0
13	The King and the Bird Fanaza	0	0	0	0
14	The Lion and the Jackal	0	0	0	0
15	The Traveler and the Goldsmith	0	0	0	0
16	The King's Son and His Companions	0	0	0	0

17	Mehraiz, King of the Rats	1	1	0	2
18	The Fences and the Lioness	0	0	0	0
19	The Ascetic and the Guest	0	0	0	0
20	The Dove, the Fox, and the Heron	0	0	0	0
21	The Heron and the Duck	0	0	0	0
Total		28	18	4	50

After determining the quantitative volume of animal and human stories in *Kalila wa Dimna*, we now move on to identifying the percentage each category occupies within the total volume of its main and subsidiary stories:

1 – **Main stories** (17 stories): After distributing the shared stories between them, the share of each (human and animal) is as follows:

- **Human stories:** 5 stories (4 + 1), representing **29.42%**.
- **Animal stories:** 12 stories (11 + 1), representing **70.58%**.

2 – **Subsidiary stories** (50 stories): After distributing the shared stories between them, the share of each is as follows:

- **Human stories:** about 30 stories (28 + 2), representing **60%**.
- **Animal stories:** about 20 stories (18 + 2), representing **40%**.

After combining the percentages from both the main and subsidiary stories, the overall percentage of each within the total content of *Kalila wa Dimna* is:

- **Human stories:** approximately **44.70%**.
- **Animal stories:** approximately **55.30%**.

This confirms that animal literature in *Kalila wa Dimna* represents only slightly more than half of its narrative material—not all of it, as commonly believed. Thus, it should be seen as a **means**, not an **end**—a narrative method like any other chosen by the common people to express their views.

6- The Popular Man's Stances in *Kalila wa Dimna*: When it becomes clear that animal literature is merely one of many methods chosen by the popular man to express his various positions, it becomes appropriate to examine the relationship between these stances and the chosen method—specifically, how suitable it was for expressing the concerns, pains, and hopes that filled the heart of this man, and the reality of his social group. He sought to realize or embody these hopes through animal storytelling, especially since other means of expression were not available to him due to the oppressive circumstances in which he lived—circumstances that prevented him from voicing his opinions, coupled with the very limited resources of his community.

Perhaps the animal served as a **mask** behind which the popular man could take positions he dared not state openly. Instead, he made animals speak on his behalf, voicing many social and political opinions that were difficult to declare directly out of fear of the ruling class—particularly the despotic rulers who would not hesitate to destroy anyone who opposed them or exposed their faults in dealings with their subjects.

For this reason, **Suhair Al-Qalamawi** considered the discourse of *Kalila wa Dimna* to be:

“a means of saying what cannot be said, out of fear of punishment or tyranny—criticizing kings, for instance, while the king is symbolized by a lion, and the critic is a jackal.” (Suhair, 1966, p. 206)

Following this method of **disguised positions**, modern literature also treaded a similar path. For example, **George Orwell** authored *Animal Farm*, which some regard as the most famous political work of the twentieth century. Through the voices of animals, Orwell mocked modern revolutions and the political injustices they brought, targeting especially the Eastern bloc. On the other hand, there are those who argue that folk tales, including *Kalila wa Dimna*, should be: “characterized by honesty, truthfulness, and freedom in expressing the problems of everyday life experienced by ordinary people.” And that there should be no fear in expressing opinions, especially since popular productions—regardless of their form—are authored by unknown individuals, by a popular man lacking

formal identity or recognition. Therefore, what is there to fear or be cautious about? Why even use animals as a mask to deflect the consequences of the opinions expressed through them?

This leads us to assume other considerations behind this artistic use—such as the idea that **pleasure and entertainment through animals** may be the actual purpose, allowing the intended message or stance to be delivered smoothly and effectively to the audience or the target group. This is because the human psyche—as far as we know—is more receptive to criticism and reproach when they are **indirect** or delivered with a touch of **humor**, which softens their sharpness.

How effective and beneficial it is to interpret **reality through its opposite (the unreal)**—how tedious it becomes when reality is interpreted by its own likeness. Even **poetry** has made use of this artistic nuance, where the humorous animal metaphor gave the poetic stance more **strength and impact** than its sharp, direct form could achieve. One example of this is found in the lines of a poet who said:

Yā dahru mālakā wa-al-aḥrāra taqharuhum?
(O Time! What is wrong with you, that you oppress the free?)

Tudhillu kulla karīmi al-aṣli muqtabali
(You humiliate every noble soul in the prime of life.)

Tastaḥḥu al-kilābu ‘alā asadi al-sharā safahan
(Foolishly, the dogs pounce upon the lion of the wild.)

Wa-al-bāzu al-ashhabu yakhshā ṣawlat al-ḥajali
(While the noble falcon fears the charge of a mere partridge.)

Wa-al-qirdu yaḍḥaku min namirin ‘alā huzuin
(The monkey mocks the tiger in derision.)

Wa-al-kalbu yū‘idu laytha al-ghayli bi-al-ghayali
(And the dog dares threaten the lion of the thickets in his own lair.)

The same concept is embodied today in **concise illustrations or animated cartoons**, which often depict **current events in a humorous way that carries sharp criticism**, frequently taking the form of **caricatures of political figures** or **portrayals of political maneuvering**, or anything else that captures the attention of modern people. (Sorensen, 2003)

Totemic belief may also be **indirectly related** to this topic. Totemism is described as:

“An intense veneration of animals, birds, and plants, and the representation of their supernatural powers in most ancient societies around the world.” (Lvi-Strauss, 1963)

It is thus considered:

“A social and familial pattern and a primitive religious form—i.e., the emergence of the spirit of the first body and the protector of the clan in the form of an animal that is respected and sanctified.” According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the **primitive human’s reverence for animals** stems from the fact that animals fulfilled their need for food—and that need implied a territory or homeland, which in turn required protection, security, and sanctity. It is believed that **Semitic Arabs** were among the **earliest peoples to adopt this type of belief**, even before the Indo-Aryan Indians, the Hellenic Greeks, and the Romans. For example, the **camel** was one of the earliest animals to be worshipped in the kingdoms of **Palmyra, Yemen, the Hejaz, and Syria**.

One of the manifestations of **totemism among the Arabs** was, for instance:

- 1 - The Quraysh tribe were named **Quraysh** in reference to their **totem, the shark or whale (qarsh)**.
- 2 - The **Basus War**, which lasted forty years, was caused by a **camel belonging to Al-Basus**; similarly, the **Dahis and Ghabra War** was sparked by a dispute over a **horse and a mare**.
- 3 - The Arabs used **animal names as personal names**, such as: **Kalib** (puppy), **Laith** (lion), **Jahsh** (young donkey), **Tha’laba** (fox), **‘Unayza**, **Dhu’ayb** (little wolf), **Thawr** (bull), **Namir** (leopard), **Hajl** (partridge), and many others.
- 4 - Arab kings **wore bird feathers on their heads** as a symbol of pride and nobility.

There are many other such manifestations in Arab life, which, although they do not directly serve our current study, nonetheless allow us to conclude that the **folk man’s use of animals in the stories of Kalila and Dimna was a way of sanctifying his stances**. There is no doubt that the **Eastern man—and the folk man in particular—was still**

influenced by the remnants of animal totemic beliefs, which continued to permeate his thought and culture. Indeed, their influence has persisted even into the present.

In a study conducted by Van Gennepe in 1920, he identified

“41 different forms of totemism in Australia alone... and demonstrated that totemism continues to exert control over systems of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and kinship in many societies around the world.” (Tahir, 2016)

Moreover, many other considerations must be taken into account, the most important of which are:

1 - The use of animals as general models was intended by the folk man to lend a sense of **collective ownership** to his discourse, thereby giving his stances a **universal or widespread application** across many peoples—or at least among the peoples of the ancient East with their closely related cultural heritage. By using animals, the folk man found a form of **tactical expression** through which he could represent the **natures, instincts, and morals** of popular communities in general.

2 - The use of animals may have also aimed to inspire acceptance of the message or contemplation of its contents. After all, a **rational human** is more deserving than an **irrational animal** of doing good, achieving justice, rejecting oppression, and striving for high virtues and noble meanings characterized by **human** rather than **animal** traits. The folk man pointed to this explicitly at the end of the story *The Chapter of Mahariz, King of the Rats*, with the message:

“If this weak and despised creature [referring to the rat] managed to outsmart his enemy and avert harm through such a clever trick, then we should not despair of mankind—who is the wisest, most complete, and most prudent of animals—being able to achieve his aims against his enemies through wit and strategy.” (Qutaybah, 1985)

3 - Psychological factors may also have played a role. Human nature tends to be drawn to the **unfamiliar** and attracted to the **unusual**. This was clearly noted by Ibn ‘Arab Shah in his book *The Delight of Caliphs and the Amusement of the Witty*, which was influenced by *Kalila and Dimna*. He said:

“The words of scholars were often repeated, yet ears paid them no heed, nor did minds reflect on them—so recourse was made to something unfamiliar: beasts, predators, birds of various kinds, sea creatures, and all sorts of insects. Speech was attributed to them, so that ears would be drawn to listen, and souls would yearn to read, because wild beasts, livestock, and creeping things are not usually associated with wisdom, nor are they credited with refinement, cleverness, knowledge, awareness, speech, action, or responsibility.” (Qutaybah, 1985)

4 - Referring to modern literary criticism, we find that it often downplays the importance of character in narrative creativity, minimizing its dominance in favor of emphasizing **the significance of content**, along with “attention to the linguistic fabric, and allowing for wide imaginative engagement by drawing as much as possible from the richness of language—its verbosity, its highly branched generative capacity, and its boundless generosity” Meanwhile, (Mortaz, 1990, p. 69) exhausting intellectual effort and draining the imagination in crafting characters is seen as an artistic approach whose **negative effects reflect on the content, the reader, and reality as a whole**

The use of **animal characters**, to a large extent, fulfills some of the aims of modern criticism, as it **diverts the reader’s focus away from the character itself** and towards the various meanings of the text. The recipient of an animal character—regardless of which animal it is—already holds a preconceived image that prevents any need to explore its physical traits, emotional states, or inner thoughts. An animal is a **generalized symbol**, its name alone evoking both inner and outer qualities due to its common recognition among people. It is as if the folk man wanted us to **look past everything in his stories except their moral, message, and substantive meaning**.

Yemeni writer and critic **Abdul Aziz Al-Maqaleh** referred to this narrative technique as the **“doctrinal approach of givenness”** (*al-‘Atā’iyya*)

In any case, the animal remains a **narrative technique** employed by the folk man alongside other methods in *Kalila and Dimna*, used merely as a **vehicle for conveying his stances**, nothing more. The same approach was followed by **modern folk poets**, as can be seen in the words of one such poet:

Māni ‘al al-ḥamām naẓamtu al-ash‘ār
(It was not about the pigeons that I composed poetry)

Ḥāshā al-ḥayawān ghayr namaththil bīh
(Far be it from me to insult animals — we only use them as metaphors)

Conclusion:

At the end of this study, it becomes clear that animal literature is not merely a form of folk tale or symbolic narrative, but rather a profound cultural vessel that reflects the visions of societies and their perceptions of human reality through the masks of animals. The book *Kalila and Dimna* stands as a pioneering example of this literary genre, successfully employing animal symbolism to convey moral and political values in indirect yet effective ways. The study also shows that this literature was influenced by several civilizations, but in Arab culture, it blended with local and religious elements, giving it a unique character and securing its lasting presence in literary memory. Through this exploration, we affirm the importance of revisiting this heritage with a contemporary lens—one that leverages its symbolism to address current educational and social issues while preserving its cultural roots, which are an integral part of Arab literary identity.

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