

A Pragma-stylistic Study of Humour in Ahmed Matar's Poetry

دراسة تداولية أسلوبية لأساليب (الفكاهة) في شعر احمد ماطر

Lect

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Abstract

This study aims to review and investigate the role and function of humour in Ahmed Matar's poetry pragma-stylistically. Furthermore, it attempts to identify the ways and strategies in which he employs humour negatively. In a sense, he uses strategies of humour or joking so as to mock the socio-political situation in the case of Iraq. Thus, he creates acceptability and sympathy on the part of the audience. The focus of this study is concerned with verbal mockery, which is produced by means of language or text. Additionally, the study postulates that there is no clear cut amongst humour types categories-that is the categories may interchange and merge in a few cases. Of the stylistic figures presented in this study is mockery, irony, exaggeration, comparison, and sarcasm.

Key Words: Pragmatics , mockery, sarcasm, exaggeration, humour.

0.Introduction

This study is an attempt to deal with strategies of humour in Ahmed's Matar poetry .Since pragmatics and stylistics are interrelated, especially, in poetry (Nofal, 2011) , it is required to deal with both disciplines while approaching a poem.It is not unclear that the stylistic figures , which are employed in the corpus have got pragmatic implications .In this perspective, the current paper aims to find out how " strategies of humour" are reflected and manifested in Matar's poetry.More specifically, the study aims at:

A.Showing the pragma-stylistic devices of humour, which are utilized by Ahmed Matar.

B.Evaluating the effect of such utilization.

C.Finding the most common strategies.

In view of the aforementioned aims, it is hypothesized that :

A.Ahmed Matar heavily relies on strategies of humour to convey his message, the message of mockery and criticism;

B. he intentionally utilizes humour- he aims at, both, entertaining and mocking the public.

C. the most common strategies are : irony, exaggeration, and sarcasm

To accomplish the aims of the study and test its hypotheses, the following procedures are adopted :

A. Reviewing the literature on humour and pragmatics;

B. Developing a model for analysing the corpus;

C. Conducting a pragma-stylistic qualitative method of analysis of some randomly extracts chosen from Ahmed's Matar poetry;

D. Discussing the results of analysis, however the discussion is done within the analysis-that is no separate heading is dedicated for discussion. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the translation of the corpus is made by the researcher himself.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Definition of Humour

Humour has been undertaken from different disciplines : psychology, sociology and linguistics. Indeed, there is no consensus on a definition of humour and humour categories. Linguistically speaking, it is seen that humour and pragmatics are interdisciplinary. Thus, humour is defined by Martin (2007) as " involving the communication of multiple, incongruous meanings". This premise leads to a " positive cognitive or affective response from listeners" (Crawford,1994). While the Oxford Online English Dictionary defines humour as " the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocular imagination or treatment of a subject". In the same context, Unger,(1996) has defined humour as the audience's perceptual response .In other words if the hearers find the stimulus funny, therefore it is categorized as humour. This view elucidates the impact of humour on the audience.

Similarly, Lin-quiong (2007) asserts that a lesser degree of relevance between the utterances displays the unexpectedness of the response utterance, which refers to the way of the humorous effect creation. He (ibid) adds that humour is socially permitted violations of cultural norms. As such, the relation between culture and humour is not unclear; however, it varies from culture to culture.

Consequently, it is viewed that humour is, but, a reflection of culture. In this respect, Alford and Alford (1981: 162) point out that " no society was reported to be without humour". However, humorous

communication, definitely, recognized as being diverse due to culture , race , gender, or the experience to employ humour.

1.2 Categories of Humour

Although humour is an interesting topic that has attracted linguists to account for, there is no agreement upon the classification of all types of humour. The study does not comprise all humorous instances in the

A Pragma-stylistic Study of Humour.....(81)

corpus. Martinetal (2003) classifies humour into positive and negative; they are sub classified into: self-enhancing humour,affiliative humour, self-defeating humour, and aggressive humour. Similarly, Sala et al (2002) classify humour into positive and negative facets; however, they add a general type, which is neither positive nor negative. That is a general type, which resembles" incongruous" humour in terms of violating the hearer's expectations. As such the number and types of categories of humour vary accordingly. For instance, Catanescu and Tom (2001)refer to seven types of humour such as comparison, exaggeration, personification, pun, sarcasm, silliness, and surprise. Whereas, Alden etal. (1993) accounts for two types: incongruity, and incongruity-resolution

Furthermore, it is argued that irony is regarded as one of the strategies that produces humour ; however, not all ironic utterances create humorouseffect. This view is highly maintained by Partington(2006,2007) and Attardo(2001).

2.Pragmatics and Humour

Crystal (1985 :240) defines pragmatics as " the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication." While, Leech (1983) classifies pragmatics domain into two sub-branches: pragma- linguistics and socio-pragmatics.On achieving successful communication, he postulates that a speaker requires to make informed decisions on both pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmaticaspects. Likewise, Fromkinetal (2003:595) maintain that speech act is" the action or intent that a speaker accomplishes when using language in context, the meaning of which is inferred by hearers."

Consequently, three elements are to be scrutinized while approaching pragmatic research. They are: speaker , hearer, and context. In the same context, Verschueren (1999)indicates to four factors as ingredients of the communicative context: language users: utterer and interpreter; presented as focalpoints in context, Thus, those factors enable us in shaping meaning.

As far as humour is concerned, Raskin (1985:109) focuses on the oppositeness in this topic whereby he refers to sharp contrast between real and unrealsituations. He(ibid) demonstrates three subtypes : actual versus non-actual, a normal opposed to an abnormal, and possible situation contrasted to implausible situation. Thus, Linqiong(2007) opines that unconformity between these utterances results in the unexpectedness of the response utterance, which is exactly how the

humorous effect is produced. Similarly, it is viewed that violating Gricean maxims, almost, leads to humorous situation.

In the same vein, Grice (1975 : 53) asserts that speakers and hearers share a cooperative principle (CP). This principle enables hearers to understand the speaker's utterances, otherwise, they will be misled. Spontaneously, this unconformity between participants causes humorous effect. Similarly, Dynel (2008) postulates that humour does not conform to the cooperative principle and its maxims. Owing to this premise, it is argued that humour is socially permitted violations of cultural norms. Additionally, Cutting (2000) sees humour as " flouting ", in a sense, linguistic humour that arises out of the pragmatics of the situational context rather than through telling funny stories or using funny or parodic voices. Thus, the context of the situation, ultimately, determines the possibility of creating humour's effect in the given data.

2.1 Strategies of Humour

Generally speaking, it is reported that employing humour in written discourse is different from spoken discourse. That is the strategies used are not similar. For instance, humour in spoken discourse seems easy to be perceived by the recipients; however, it is not easy for readers. Of course, this is due to the medium of communication, whereby face to face speaking, almost, sooner to be recognized than the genre of writing. In this respect, it is viewed that extra- linguistic means may contribute to conveying humorous effects, such as facial expressions, gestures, and the tone of voice.

By contrast, on approaching strategies of humour in written discourse, it is required to consider the whole context of the utterance. In a sense, an analyst ought to relate the instigators that result in humour's effect, whether satirical, ironical, or mocking clues.

More specifically, in the case of Ahmed Matar's poetry, it is seen that his poetry is mainly characterized by mockery, sarcasm, exaggeration, and comparison. Thus, the study aims at identifying and analysing the pragmatic features of the above strategies throughout selected extracts from Ahmed Matar's poetry.

3. Model of Analysis

Since the hallmark of Ahmed Matar's poetry is mockery (Ghunaim, 1998 :10), the study intends to pursue and investigate the whole manifestations of mockery, which are cloaked in all types of humour in the corpus. Primarily, the poet employs exaggeration, comparison, metaphor, irony and sarcasm to elucidate the sense of mockery all through his poems. However, it seems that Matar, heavily impinges on strategies of humour to express his bitterness through

employing direct or indirect speech acts. Consequently, the study adopts an eclectic model depending ,principally, on Martin et al, (2003) to explore the whole potentialities of the poet, though. With respect to humour, they generally maintain that humour falls in two major categories as either positive or negative in type. Positive is classified into self-enhancing humour and affiliativehumour. Whereas, negative is divided into self-defeating humour and aggressive humour. Due to the negativity of the poet in employing humour throughout his poetry, the study, intentionally scrutinizes the concept of negativehumour in the data. In a sense, the poetpurposefully deploys both self-defeating and aggressivehumour so as to account for stressful and critical situations. With regard to self-defeating humour, it is commonly directed at the speaker/ author himself. While for aggressive humour, it is directed to hearers or readers (Martin et al., 2003).

Positivity refers to the positive intention of the writer or speaker where it aims to exaggerate intimacy, solidarity, entertainment, friendship etc... Thus, positive humour aims to melt the freeze of communication. On the other hand, negative humour involves a negative intention of criticism, mocking, impoliteness, aggression and the like (see Crawford,1994).It is worth mentioning that the study adopts a qualitative pragma-stylistic method in approaching the corpus so as to explore the essential traits of the poet, especially the language of Ahmed Matar is evasive and tricky.(see Kamal Qunaim,1998)

3.1 Exaggeration

According to the OxfordOnline Dictionary,exaggeration can be defined as " a statement or description that makes something seem larger, worse or more important than it really is ; it would be an exaggeration to say I knew her well- I only met her twice" .It is noted that exaggeration and hyperbole are interchangeable. Hence, Van Dijk (2006d:73) postulates that hyperbole is a semantic rhetorical device that is implied for extremely enhancing, overstating, and exaggerating meaning to increase impact or to attract attention, for instance, " the bomb attack at the World Trade Center, in which only a few people died, or other, possible terrorist attack, are compared with a nuclear holocaust.

3.2 Metaphor

A metaphor is one of the tropes, a device by which an author turns, or twists, the meaning of a word. For example, Wordsworth wrote metaphorically when he said of England that " she is a fen of stagnant waters." (Harry Shaw, 1976: 171).Pragmatically speaking, it is argued that metaphor is a semantic persuasive device, which is highly employed by poets to highlight, criticize, and comment on a specific aspect of a

phenomenon (Lakoff and Johnson,1980:10).It is viewed that metaphor is integral , not peripheral to language and understanding.Likewise, (ibid: 3) state that metaphor is "pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action.Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorically in nature".

3.3 Sarcasm

It is almost clear that sarcasm is one of the influential means, which is commonly employed by speakers or writers to show mockery.It is not uneasy to recognize sarcasm in a given utterance since it conveys something trivial or absurd yet mocking. According to Harry Shaw (1976: 241), " sarcasm is a form of irony; bitter and often harsh derision. Sarcasm consists of sneering or cutting remarks; it is always personal, always jeering, and always intended to hurt." Byron's comment on Robert Southery, another English poet, is filled with sarcastic remarks, such as

He first sank to the bottom-like his work,
But soon rose to the surface-like himself;
For all corrupted things are buoyed like corks,

By their own rottenness

Viewed linguistically, on consulting the Macmillan English Dictionary (2007), sarcasm is defined as " the activity of saying or writing the opposite of what you mean, or of speaking in a way intended to make someone else feel stupid or show them that you are angry".As such, sarcasm is seen as an indirect speech act in which speakers convey their messages implicitly.

3.4 Irony

Grice (1975) postulates that irony is a form of nonliteral language in which the speaker means more than what is said. In this stance, Sperber and Wilson (1992: 54) maintain that a verbal irony is a trope in which the figurative meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning: " Irony is the figure used to convey the opposite of what is said : in irony, the words are not taken in their basic literal sense" (ibid).

Similarly, Grice (1975 : 53) asserts that the ironist deliberately flouts the maxims of truthfulness, implicating the opposite of what was literally said. It is noted that the major difference between Grice's definition and the classical definition is that irony is analyzed rhetorically, in a sense, it is dealt with as a figurative meaning.On the other hand, it is redefined by Grice as a figurative implication (ibid).

The model developed here can be sketched out via the following figure:

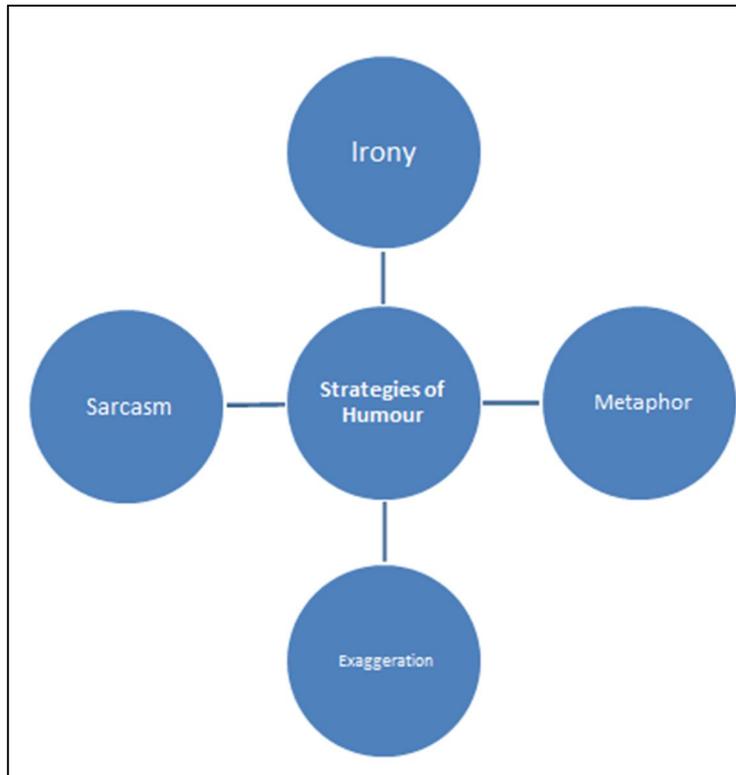


Fig. (1): Strategies of Humour.

4.Data Analysis

The study attempts to identify and investigates selected extracts chosen from various poems of Ahmed Matar's poetry. The analysis deals with the communication strategies, which are employed in the corpus: irony, exaggeration , sarcasm, and metaphor. Additionally, negative humour is to be scrutinized throughout the data. This is due to the fact that, partially, the purpose of humour is laughter; however, it is noted that other purposes arise such as mockery, irony, and satire. Accordingly, a selection of representative examples are listed below :

Text (1)
 وبنو للكبرياء في دمي، سوق نخاسة
 كيف لا يهتز جسم عندما يفقد رأسه !؟

-They built for pride in my blood, a market to slavery trade.

How could a body not be shaken when it loses its head ?

Here, the poet mocks the situation of (the regime) ; he employs indirect speech act as he uses the past tense (built) ; however, it refers to both present and future tenses. He selects the word prideto show his

sarcasm towards the case of Iraq. He implicitly expresses his bitterness and ignominy concerning their bad deed. How can my blood be a market? This is a violation of principles of communication. Although the humorous effect is produced in this extract, it is argued that humour is just a tool to convey purposes other than laughing. Therefore, humour strategies and values depend on the speaker/ author, context, hearer/ reader and the purpose.

Consequently, Hamlyn (1995: 806) views that humour will not sound funny, laughable if it is not understandable, emerging antipathy attitude, and breaking one's feelings and not meeting the appropriate time, place, and situations.

In the second line, the speaker, again, draws a comparison between the state of the body "dancing" to suggest happiness and the state of "beheaded head" to suggest terror. What is the purpose behind associating the opposites in this way. Spontaneously, humorous effect is produced; however, the ultimate end of the poet is sarcasm, criticism and mockery.

كانت تسمى سابقا .. كرامه !تقول: هذي جيفه (2)
Text

-If (the sign) says , " This is a cadaver " , which was formerly called dignity .

It is seen that the speaker illuminates his criticism of the atrocities of Iraqi regime during the era before 2003 as he compares between two contradicting features. The feature of being " dead " or more disgusting , a cadaver and the feature of dignity. It is a ridiculous comparison between the past and the present. Indeed, both pictures are dim. Here, the "sign" says not the speaker himself says. This tendency of manipulating the audience aims at gaining aesthetic values- that is, the poet implicitly satirizes and making fun of the present and the past. He is fittingly ironical while he compares between the dead and dignity. Hence, it is observed that incongruous comparisons evoke humour.

من يملك القانون في اوطاننا هو الذي يملك حق عزفه ! : (3)
Text

- In our countries whoever owns the law has the right to play it (as a musical instrument) .

Firstly, the speaker portrays " law" as if it were an instrument to play on. He is indirectly satirizing and mocking the conditions of the Arab countries regimes. This " whoever" connotes sarcasm, mockery and bitterness towards rulers and monarchies. It is observed that employing speech act of satire in this manner constitutes mild aggressive humour- that is, the poet refers to " law " as a property. Intentionally, he selected law; law is a symbol of justice and equality. Here, humour overlaps with

A Pragma-stylistic Study of Humour.....(87)

irony; however, irony does not necessarily create laughter. In this text, the speaker aims at condemning and convicting Arab rulers of disobeying law. Sarcastically, they claim that they are authorized by the public. Furthermore, it can be inferred that the poet plays on words, i.e., he uses pun, especially the word "Qanoon" in Arabic is homophonous. It carries two different meanings: one denotational and the other metaphorical (Al-Hamawi, 837 A.H.). The denotational refers to "law", whereas the metaphorical refers to a musical instrument called "lyre". As such, he deliberately employs this word to create laughter and ultimately mockery.

Text (4): رأيت جرذا يخطب اليوم عن النظافة وينذر الأوساخ بالعقاب وحوله يصفق الذباب !

- Today I saw a rat speaking on cleanliness, and warning the garbage of punishment, and around it (the rat), the flies were clapping.

In this extract, it is noted that the poet is exaggerating as he saw the rat speaking on cleanliness. First, he begins with the premodifier "today" to emphasize that he is really true. Indeed, he flouts the maxims of Grice, (1975) specifically, the principle of quality, which is related to truth telling. However, it is argued that this exaggeration seems justifiable. It is known that a rat is a symbol for dirt; then how can a rat speak on cleanliness. He is sarcastic enough to mock the position of the speaker, the rat and the addressees, the flies. Both the speaker and the hearer associate with corruption and dirt. Owing to this oppositeness, humorous effect is created spontaneously (cf. Raskin, 1985:109).

Thus, it can be inferred that the speaker employs aggressive humour to criticize and attack perverted rulers—that is the rat, the fly, and rulers are all the same (see Simpson 2003:29).

Text (5) : خلعت الأخطر يا حراس ، هذا النعل يدوس ولكن.. هذا الرأس يداس !

-I took off my dangerous one, oh guards; this slipper can trample, but this head can be trampled on.

Once the poet approaches the palace of the ruler, he (the poet) soonly took off his dangerous slipper. However, he insists on the idea that this slipper can be two-edge weapon. That is, it is usually worn by people. On the other hand, it can tramp heads. In this case, the poet resorts to execute self-defeating humour so as to reduce the threat or criticism of the ruler (see Martin et al, 2003). This irony is loaded with satirical clues. The reference of the heads can be retrieved from the rulers. Those heads, which are intended to be tramped. Although the sandal is cheap, it can down heads. This is the peak of irony and sarcasm.

A Pragma-stylistic Study of Humour.....(88)

يترنح رقاص الساعة.. يضرب هامته بيسار، يضرب هامته بيمين .. والمسكين لا احد (6) Text
يسكت أوجاعه، لا ترقص.. قتلتك الطاعة.. يارقاص الساعة

The pendulum is swinging left and right, and nobody tranquilizes the poor's pain. Oh, pendulum, don't dance; you are died by obedience!

The speaker seems to compare the pendulum of the watch to a poor man. Here the metaphor of the pendulum moving right or left is due to unwillingness- that is , this tool is not free to move. It is automatically guided and instructed by unknown power. Similarly, the poor are guided and dominated by known power. In other words, both the pendulum and the poor suffer from negligence, the negligence of tyranny. The speaker addresses both victims, so to speak, the pendulum and the poor to stop dancing. Mockingly, dancing is performed by the pendulum and the poor; however, it is a manifestation of luxury. It is seen that the Poor are dancing and the power men laughing at them. Blind obedience of the poor is strongly criticized by the poet. The negative humour , which is employed in this extract, involves anger, criticism, impoliteness, and condemnation. It can be highlighted that the poet has got good will to criticize the poor (See Mey, 2001)

Interestingly, the poet includes this metaphor as an effective tool to demonstrate mockery and satire in a humorous manner (Fillmore,1994).It is noticed that the speaker heavily relies on humour as a mild tool to convey his message; humorous effect is not the purpose, but the medium of communication (Suprana,1995:9).

فلمن تصقل سيفك يا عباس ! لوقت الشدة؟ اصقل سيفك يا عباس !: (7) Text

Why do you prepare your sword, Abbas ? Do you prepare it for predicament?

The speaker begins his poem by a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question is raised, which generally requires no answer (Quirk et al.,1985:825) .It is commonly known that a sword is sharpened to get ready for war. The poet is absolutely ironical as he inquires for the readiness of Abbas for war. People know that Abbas is hesitant enough to defend his land. Thus, the poet wonders whether there is any predicament superior than defending a land. Here, he repeats the verb " prepare" so as to mock and satirize the submission of Abbas.It is observed that humorous effects are already found in this extract, since the Palestinians are aware of the negativity of Abbas, as a president.

One can see that the context of the speech event is appropriate.The poet exploits the dissatisfaction and bitterness of the Palestianians to

A Pragma-stylistic Study of Humour.....(89)

employ aggressive humour; a humour, which is filled with mockery, anger, and harsh criticism.

Text (8) : ادري بان النار موقدة.. من حطب الفقر ليديفاً الدولار !

ادري.. اجل ادري واحبس الأشعار

-I know that the fire of the rich is fueled by the blood of the poor in order for the dollar to be warm ! I know.. yes, I know, but never say poetry.

However the speaker is aware of the fact that rich people are parasitically live on poor people , he never cares. He admits his mistake and his feebleness towards the poor. A poet is supposed to be a spokesman for the public. The speaker is, definitely, ridiculed by readers. Hisnegativity, spontaneously, creates joking and laughter, especially, as he repeats the phrase" I know.., yes, I know ".That is oppositeness of attitudes invoke humour .Amazingly, the speaker resorts to executing aggressive humour to facilitate his job toward mocking the case of the public (see Holmes and Marra 2002a: 1687).

This repetition affirms the sense of irony and mockery throughout the extract. Theadmission of the speaker and the (reader) of recognizing the fact of this injustice seems to be ridiculous. Identifying problems normally, accompanied by solutions. Silence and passivity are, but failure.

5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that:

- 1.Humour cannot be separated from irony, satire, and mockery; there exists an interrelationship between those concepts and humour.
- 2.No clear-cut boundary between categories of humour is shown-they can be collected in particular instances of humour.
3. Ahmed Matar intentionally employs strategies of humour in his poetry; he aims at conveying his message of mockery and criticism through mild means. It is seen that the pragma-stylistic figures are vividly implied in the corpus, among which the most salient are irony,sarcasm, metaphor, and exaggeration. Thus, the second and the the third hypotheses have been confirmed.
- 4.AhmedMatarrecurrently flouts the pragmatic principles of communication. Basically, humour is a violation of principles. It seems that this flouting is justifiable, due to the premise that the poet has got good will or intention to address the public.

5.It is revealed that irony and sarcasm are the most salient devices in the corpus. This recurrent use contributes highly to persuade and affect readers. In this way, the first hypothesis is verified.

ملخص البحث

تتناول الدراسة اكتشاف وتحليل أساليب الفكاهة المستخدمة في مقاطع منتقاة من قصائد الشاعر العراقي احمد مطر على المستويين الدلالي والأسلوبي لغرض تسليط الضوء على القيم الجمالية والقصديه في استخدام (الفكاهة)، وعلى نحو محدد الفكاهة السلبية في نقد ومهاجمة الوضع السياسي والاجتماعي السائد حينذاك، علاوة على ذلك فان الدراسة تركز على نحو محدد على موضوع (الهزأ) الناتجة من توظيف أساليب المبالغة، الاستعارة، السخرية. لقد توصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من الاستنتاجات منها إن أساليب الفكاهة متداخلة مع بعضها حيث لم تكن هناك حدود واضحة تفصل بينها، بالإضافة إلى ذلك فان احمد مطر قد وظف الفكاهة في شعره لغرض سام هو إيصال رسالة بشكل غير مباشر معبئة بالهزأ والنقد والسخرية للمنظومة السياسية والاجتماعية آنذاك.

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