

English and Arabic Comedy
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Abstract:

In recent years, comedy has been used as a powerful tool to reflect a better goal of society, including the humorous detection of social, psychological, religious and political problems. In addition, nowadays, comedy is so popular and it has many characteristics which differ from one society to another, but there are certain characteristics which can be considered in one way or another as characteristics fixed works which, therefore, can be considered as basic elements of any comic work.

The purpose of this study is to show these characteristics and to show how English comedy differs from Arab comedy. Another objective is to show how comedy can be seen as a mirror of Arab society through different historical periods. The present study concludes that Arab writers continued to use the same features and components and types of English comedy simply because the modern sense of comedy was adopted by the Western world and that it was not a original Arabic literary genre.

Key words: Comedy, Powerful, Society, English, Arabic

الملخص:

في السنوات الأخيرة ، تم استخدام الكوميديا كأداة قوية لتعكس هدفاً أفضل للمجتمع ، بما في ذلك الكشف الهزلي للمشاكل الاجتماعية والنفسية والدينية والسياسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، في الوقت الحاضر ، تحظى الكوميديا بشعبية كبيرة ولها العديد من الخصائص التي تختلف من مجتمع إلى آخر ، ولكن هناك خصائص معينة يمكن اعتبارها بطريقة أو بأخرى كخصائص الأعمال الثابتة التي يمكن اعتبارها عناصر أساسية لأي عمل كوميدي.

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو إظهار هذه الخصائص وإظهار كيف تختلف الكوميديا الإنجليزية عن الكوميديا العربية. هدف آخر هو إظهار كيف يمكن أن ينظر إلى الكوميديا على أنها مرآة للمجتمع العربي عبر فترات تاريخية مختلفة. وتلخص الدراسة الحالية إلى أن الكتاب العرب واصلوا استخدام نفس خصائص ومكونات وأنواع الكوميديا الإنجليزية لمجرد أن العالم الغربي قد استخدم الحس الكوميدي الحديث وأنه لم يكن النوع الأدبي العربي الأصلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوميدي، قوي، مجتمع، انجليزي، عربي

INTRODUCTION

Comedy is a type of beautiful diagnosis or acting, by embodying certain people in funny pictures and templates by making paradoxes, and they are mostly theater or television shows, and It may use radio or cinema, Or it is a literary work whose fun presentation aims to make you feel cheerful or happy.

Comedy and comedy literature arose from the ironies of events in Europe from loud group songs, and from the dialogue between personalities who perform fertility rituals on religious occasions

English Comedy

Shakir (2003:20) states that there are several reasons and motivations for people's laughter. Generally speaking, laughter usually occurs due to social, economical, political, psychological reasons. Classen (2010:1522) mentions that as a rule, there is a causal relationship between laughter and comedy. This relationship can be explained by saying that comedy evokes laughter, i.e, where there is comedy there is laughter. Al-abo (2005:31) mentions that in general, the term comedy is defined as a form of entertainment that is intended to be amusing and humorous, whether in literature, film, television, theatre, or stand-up. The main goal of comedy is to produce laughter. In literature, the term "comedy" is defined as a kind of dramatic work that is satirical in its tone and mostly has a happy ending. Although comedy entertains audience, it has a much more important function which is to portray social institutions and persons as corrupt and makes fun of them by using parodying, satirizing their vices. In other words, by using this genre of literature (comedy), writers are able to uncover weaknesses and vices of society and individuals.

Moreover, Broskovich (2002: 6) points out that as a matter of fact, the word comedy is a Greek word "Komoidia" which means the song of the Komos. A Komos is a communal ritual carouse. The ancient Komos was marked by the ritual abuse of individuals, in addition to wearing costumes and masks.

Al-abo (2005: 32) states that concerning the division of Greek comedy, it is divided into three ages, namely, Old Comedy, Middle Ages Comedy and New Comedy. The original material of the poets are old comedies. The comedies are portrayed by the free comic fantasy where the most outrageous projects are given as reasonable solutions to contemporary problems. The main function of old comedy is ridicule. Later on, a transition occurred in the genre of old comedy with the collapse of Athens in 404 BC. The gradual and continuous loss of strength in the quality and value of old comedy gives raise to Middle ages comedy. It is identified by a diminishing role of chorus and less direct social and political comment. As for New comedy, it is characterized by declining of the chorus and political issues of the old comedy. It is much less indecent. This new type of comedy pays particular attention to the family issues with complications in love relationships (ibid.:33f).

With regard to the Romans, they had their own native form of drama like the Greeks. The Greek were witty and their language was easy and flexible, so there were admirably qualifications for comedy. The Romans who conquered them and who fell in love with the Greek comedy were so serious people and not likely to appreciate the comic drama. Having a language which lacked lightness and fluidity, made the early Roman forms of comedy very primitive compared to the Greeks (Matthews, 2002: Int.). Al-abo (2005: 33) points out that new comedy suited citizens of Rome flourished between 323BC and 260 BC. The new comedy placed less emphasis on slapstick and farcical humor and more interest in the interactions between observable social types as well as eliminating the chorus. Roman Comedy

flourished through the merging of Greek elements. Plautus (254 to 184 BC) and Terence (185 to 159 BC) were the most famous Roman comedians. The mockery of the father was a common inversion technique used by Roman writers. This was unheard of in the real Roman society due to father's absolute power. Broskovich (2002: 7) mentions that the middle ages (500-1500) instituted a dormant period in the development of the comedy genre. Slight evidence of comedy occurs in the Middle Ages where the comic elements were resurfaced in the mystery plays, church's morality as well as interludes. The concentration was to educate people about God and Bible since the majority of people were not literate.

Concerning the Renaissance, it was based on two main principles, a revival of classical forms originally elaborated by ancient Greeks and Romans an intensified concern with secular life, and an interest in humanism and the assertion of the importance of individuals. Al-abo(2005: 34f) states that thanks to Renaissance, a new and important drama emerged. During the 16th century in England, the interlude developed by John Heywood blended with Latin classic comedy produced the greatest Elizabethan comedy with prominent playwrights such as Shakespeare and Ben Johnson. Shakespeare was the master of romantic comedy, however his comedies ranged from farcical to tragicomical. Johnson's writing was strongly affected by the classics, and he was noted for his satires. In Restoration, comedy was treated to be a true picture of themselves. In this period, William Congreve wrote "Way of the World" which is considered as one of the most brilliant comedies of the English language, but it came an effective end of Restoration comedy.

Oscar Wilde brought England into the modern era of comedy. He reintroduced the comedy of manners to the stage of England. He made fun of the Victorian society and emphasized values of the Victorian upper class and how they judged everything by appearance (ibid.). Radcliff (1969: 4) mentions that in modern comedy, the characters might try to get rid of their absurd situation and or circumstances, but their subsequent actions were often incompatible with their hopes and thoughts. Furthermore, the comic effect usually depended on ludicrous characters and much more on happy ending.

Finally, in the 20th century, comedy tends to depict the main characters as modern men who live in an ever more absurd world. The major comic device of joyous plot movement is too idealistic in an ever more menacing society. Richard Duperoy's "What Ever Happened to Comedy? (1962)" exposes that our everyday life has itself become the comic but in a modern world (ibid.).

II - Characteristics and Components of English Comedy PREPARER LE DOCUMENT

Broskovich (2002: 9) states that comedies are made to make us laugh. The general characteristics include the defeat of an imposer figure, the struggle of the lovers, son triumphs over father, the presence of violence without consequences. Al-abo (2005: 36f) mentions that other characteristics are complexity, ambiguity, detached emotionally, reversal, light-hearted, anti-heroism, equality, authority questioned, social integration and forgiveness.

As for complexity, Al-abo (2005: 36f) states that comic heroes are more flexible. Their lives are full of mess and unexpected events keep happening. While ambiguity

makes humor possible, regardless of the fact that it may not make any sense. In fact, in comedy, everything does not make sense. On the other hand, detached emotionally means that comic heroes are generally ironic, and in a way and another they are disconnected from the situation. For reversal in comedies, the change in fortune is in almost, if not all cases for the better.

As for light-hearted, although the comedy work has a serious side, large parts of comedy life are treat as something not serious. Besides, anti-heroism, means that the characters in comedy are down to earth. As a matter of fact, many comedies attack and insult authorities. Concerning equality, a comedy work includes people from all classes. Even if the people from the lower class are the target of jokes, but they still unexpectedly emerge triumph. The next quality is authority, which means that heroes in most cases examine tradition as well as those in authority. As for social integration, comedies often emphasis on spending time on larger groups and communities. Finally, forgiveness in comedies' former enemies may forgive each other or even become friends.

Sypher (1980: 79) points out that men and women who are cultivated are necessary components of comedy. Also, twins are funny elements of comedy. Seeing two faces are alike though neither one excite laughter by itself, make the audience laugh together, due to their likeness. Moreover, repetition is another key ingredient in comedy recipe. In a comic repetition of words, audiences generally find two terms: a repressed feeling which goes off like a spring and an idea gladdens in repressing that feeling anew (ibid.:108). Furthermore, inversion is another technique used by comic writers. That is, imagining a specific situation, reverse the situation, and invert the role, and thus one will have a comic scene. As in the scene of a child teaching a parent or lecturing a prisoner. In simple words, the idea involves an inversion of roles (ibid.: 121).

Different types of comedies are stated in the literature, namely comedy of manners, farce, satirical comedy, sentimental comedy, comedy of humors. Khanjar (2015: 47f) mentions that comedy of manners or what sometimes called Restoration comedy, is a literary genre deals with plots and relations of gentlemen and ladies who live in a sophisticated society. Comedy of manner explodes the conflicts between the classes or what is called 'class distinction'. For example, It deals with characters of fashion and rank as well as country bumpkins and ambitious social climbers, and so on.

Farce provokes laughter through placing flat character in ridiculous situations. Most writers of this type of comedy uses word play and different types of verbal humor in order to make the audience laugh. Farce is one of the ways to make fun of human habits and social customs (ibid.).

Hartnoll (1995: 357f) mentions that the theme of love is dominant in romantic comedy. In this type of comedy one can notice that there are young lovers who will be united at the end. In other words the love story has a happy ending.

Khanjar (2015: 44) states that satirical comedy tries to expose and ridicule political, social or personal failing in order to correct them through using humor, irony, and wit. The main purpose is to expose and get rid of human weakness and stupidity.

Sentimental comedy emerges as a reaction against immoral comedy of manners which exposes vices and faults of people. It contains exaggerated scenes of extreme emotions, revealing excessive pity (ibid.:).

Comedy of humors is considered as a special type of comedy and which originates its comic sense mainly from the display of humorous characters (Trall and Hibbad, 1960: 100).

Arabic Comedy

This section deals with the history of Arabic comedy and its components, characteristics and its relation to Arab world.

2.1 General Survey

Generally speaking, it is believed that the emergence of Arabic comedy in the Western sense started with the establishment of the Arabic modern theatre. In other words, it is established in middle and late of 19th due to the works of Maroon al-Naqash whom in return imitates Moliere Theatre. Molière's comedy is the mirror of the life of Roman people, with some kind of exaggeration. Also, he uses elements from circus (Al-Rae, 1999: 65). It is worth to mention that some researchers as mentioned by (Ghanem, 2011: 162), believed that the Arabic theatre or drama in the form evolved in Western Europe was completely unknown until Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. It was established by Egyptian writer called Maroon al-Naqash in the middle of 19th century.

Al-Naqash's *Al-Bakheel* is considered the first Arabic play, as well as the first Arabic comic play in the Western sense. However, another Arabic writer, called Yaqub al-sanua wrote comic plays with more sophisticated language that is not used in Al-Naqash's first comic play (Al-Rae, 1999: 65). Another writer that has an effect on the Arabic comedy theater is Yusuf Idris. Idris is an Egyptian dramatist, he wrote *al-Farfur*, the shadow plays of the Cairo oculist Ibn Daniyal. This play can be considered as a major Egyptian comic drama. The main character is *Farfur* who is a clown. The character of clown is presented in Western drama in every era, from Greece classic and Rome on word, but Idris claimed that the character of clown is well grounded in the Egyption folk tradition, as stated by (Kolk and Decreus, 2005: 227).

On the other hand, In return to the old Arabic history, it can be found that the art of laughter (comedy) had emerged in performances similar to what is called theatre in the Western sense. In the pre-Islamic period, there was a comedy was introduced by al-Hakawati who was performing the roles of al characters and was trying to change his facial expressions to be suitable to the character that he was performing. By doing this, some researchers state that Arabic so-called theatre resembles Dell'arte theatre (Commedia dellarte) (Ghanem, 2011:160). In addition to al-Hakawati, in some Arab countries, they used the Aragos, a doll, in which the doll represented the actors and meanwhile the man who was moving it was telling some folk stories (ibid.:161). Furthermore, Al-Rae (1999:48) mentions that Arab people used animals in order to create comedy. They used to make monkeys to wear clothes of western people and that was making the audience laugh in hysterical way. They also used to train donkeys to do some funny movements. In 1518, there were some sort of comedy in which people criticized the local issues such as poverty and

political issues, such as the European invasion of the Arab world. There were characters of tourists which represent the occupier and wife and husband which represent the citizens.

2.2 Characteristics, Components and Types of Arabic Comedy

Said Naji, cited in Kolk & Decreus (2005:165) mentions that comedy in the Arabic culture is under siege. There are limited fields that are allowed to be invested, such as sociological, linguistic, and experiences of everyday life. There are red lines that cannot be crossed such as religion and the sacred heritage. As a result, part of the low level of comedy in Arabic theater is due to the rigid cultural system.

As a matter of fact, Al-Rae (1999:67-99) confirms that the writers of Arabic modern comedy as Al-Naqash, and almost all the writers who appeared later on, did not change or develop anything in the form of Arabic comedy. However, there were some unique elements that are used in Arabic comedies. For example, Ahmed Shawqy in his play *Al-Sit Huda* used a mixture of standard and colloquial Arabic in order to produce laughter. Furthermore, *Ela al-Doghari* which was written by Numan Ashor included some local characteristics and elements from the life of ordinary people in Egypt. As far as the researcher is concerned, it is can be concluded that Arabic writers kept using the same characteristics and components and types of English comedy simply because the modern sense of comedy was adopted from western world and it was not an original Arabic literary genre.

2.3 Comedy and Arab Society

Said Naji, cited in Kolk & Decreus (2005:165) mentions that comedy is a challenge to an authority. It is an enforcement of the underprivileged and weak who triumphs only for an hour, to the marginalized who is located at the center at least for a short time. From this definition one can comprehend that comedy is considered as a weapon or a voice that reflects the misfortunes that faces Arab people over time.

Arab people use comedy as a weapon to ridicule enemy even in the pre-Islamic times. The prophet Mohammed (God bless upon him) and the people that he surrounded himself with used sarcasm and this also reflected in the Quran. The sense of humor as Perez (2014: 331) confirms, remains part of Arab society this can be seen through the poets of Abbasid court to the character of Juha in the popular Arab folklore. Not all enemies accepted to be mocked at, in fact, according to a legend it was a caustic poem that led to the murderer of the great poet Al-Mutanabbi (915-68 AD).

Perez (ibid.) adds that Humor always provides an outlet to deal with unjust situations, with the feeling of dissatisfactions with unfulfilled promises and with the despotic regimes. They mock and trade jokes about their leaders. As a result, humor may be considered a political weapon, a social change agent and a vehicle for expressing popular indignation.

Iraq has undergone many political and social crises over history. As a result, there are many comedy plays that tackle these issues in a comic frame. One of these plays is *Mamlaka Al-Shahatheen* by Sabah Atwan performed in (1985). This play reflects the social and political life during the invasion of Mongol forces which was led by Hulagu. The invaders destroyed Baghdad and killed thousands of civilians at that period. As a result, group of the beggars decided to make a kind of revolution against

the invaders. Dressing as beggars, they managed to kill the ruler. The main character is Balbul who is in origin not a beggar, but he disguises as beggar to kill the ruler. In fact, Balbul is from a rich family, he plays three roles in order to reach the ruler as a beggar, a singer, finally a leader (Khanjar,2015:85f). One of the comedy extracts is a conversation among Balbul, Malik and Rahman:

مالك: " تعال إلى هنا ماذا دهاك يا هذا "

بلبول: " و الله عجيب أمرك، تأدب قليلا، و لما تخاطبني تحدث بلطف، فقد أنسىتمونا حتى روح الفكاهة "

Here, Balbul uses the word (يا هذا) in order to produce laughter in a way which he mocks his declaration against the political and social situations. Malik is a soldier, that's why Balbul is not satisfied with the soldiers disrespectful language (ibid.:87).

Another comedy play by Atwan is *Al-Mahata* performed in (1985) dealing with the social issues that have faced Iraqi people at that time. There are several characters in the play an Islamic preacher, a teacher, a doctor, a singer and bunch of villagers who come to find and kill a girl who has fled. They represent the diversity of the Iraqi society and the extent of kindness they can be. (ibid:99f).

In Palestine, political cartoons are considered the early medium for spreading direct criticism in a comic way. Arab cartoons tackle social as well as political issues. Among the most popular Arab cartoonist is the Palestinian Naji Al-ali. He has a great influence on this field, an influence that has led to lose his life tragically in London in 1987. Handala, the Palestinian boy, is his most popular character which is considered as an icon, still in use today. The Arab cartoonists whom influenced by Naji Al-ali reflect how society suffers under the authority of the oppressor rather than attacking the historical enemy (see Perez,2014: 331-332)

Khanjar (2015:104-107) mentions that in (1993) a comedy play performed in Egypt, written by Said Al-Asim entitled *Al-Wad Said Al-shaghal*. The play deals with social themes such as class-distinction, poverty, love, in a comic way. It is about a poor Guy named Said who has escaped from prison and works as a servant in a house of a rich family. During the events Said marries their rich daughter and he ended up in prison.

Micu (2012:28-29) mentions that concerning the period that followed the attacks of 11th of September, Arab and Muslim Comedians used comedy as a way to offer positive images of their communities. Muslim and Arab stand-up comedy began to express concerns of performers and audiences concerning specific domestic and international decisions of the Bush administration by using political comments. The political comments reflects some of the issues that resulted from the scapegoating of the Arabs and Muslims after 11th of September. In *The Axis of Evil*, Obedallah, a stand-up comedian, tackles the new restrictions of carrying liquids through airport security. He uses them and ties it with increasing security measures that have been imposed on the Arab and Muslim people. He states that:

"I think more people would rather fly with snakes on the plane than Middle Eastern people at this point. Bur to keep us safe we got a thing called the Patriotic Act. {Ironic smile} Remember when we had some freedom at some point?"

Here, the comedian uses words such as Patriotic Act and freedom in order to imply the new rules has taken away former rights that once considered as granted rights (Ibid.:29f).

Perez (2014:332) mentions that new technologies unquestionably enabled an explosion of comedy works. The biggest success story is that of Bassem Youssef, the Egyptian heart surgeon who turned to be the top comedian in the Arab world. When the revolution o broke out in Egypt in 2011, he made comic videos and uploaded them on YouTube and his videos went viral. As a result, he made his comedy (Talk show)*Al Bernameg* which modeled on the philosophy and structure of American Program *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. During the presidency of Mohammed Morsi, Youssef had some degree of freedom to be able to criticize the president.

However, this was not always the case. The authorities tried to ban the program several times claiming Youssef insults the country and Islam and endangering the national security. During the following president General Sisi, the program continued in the same vein. It criticizes the new situation of the country. Unfortunately, after receiving several threats and being accused of endangering national security of the country, Bassem Youssef announced that the program would be shut down. His farewell speech in press conference was " Shutting down the show is a victory, as it means our voice will be heard louder, since we have agreed not to lower the bar, as others have done, just to keep our jobs". Here, he implies that the freedom he fights for is hard to gain (Ibid.:334f).

Nowadays, in Egypt for example, many comedy projects deal with absolutely every aspect of society, including the president Sisi. One project is a website named *Asa7by* (my friends) which is developed by Shady Sedky and Ahmed Mido. The aim of this project according to its creators, is to discuss political and social issues such as sexual harassment (Perez, 2014:334).

IV Conclusions

The main findings of the present study are the following:

1. Different types of comedies are stated in the literature, namely comedy of manners, farce, satirical comedy, sentimental comedy, comedy of humors.
2. Arabic writers kept using the same characteristics and components and types of English comedy simply because the modern sense of comedy was adopted from western world and it was not an original Arabic literary genre.
3. Arab people use comedy as a weapon to ridicule enemy even in the pre-Islamic times.

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