Introduction to Arabic Literary Journalism: A Critical Study

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Abstract: *This paper examines Al Adab Al Sahafi: (Arabic literary journalism) as a possible branch of Anglo-American literary journalism, analyzing extracts from works of Al Jahith, Abu: Hayan Al Tawhedi:, Yaᶜaqub Sanu:ᶜ and Ghassan Kanafany according to the criteria set out by a number of Anglo-American literary journalism scholars such as Thomas Connery, Kevin Kerrane, Ben Yagoda, and Norman Sims. This paper also briefly surveys humor in Al Adab Al Sahafi: to the end of understanding its role at overcoming challenges of limited freedom of expression in the Arab world.*

Keywords: literary journalism, Al Adab Al Sahafi, Al Jahith, Yaᶜaqub Sanu, Kanafany.

1. Introduction
Connery defines literary journalism as "nonfiction printed prose whose verifiable content is shaped and transformed into a story or sketch by use of narrative and rhetorical techniques generally associated with fiction" (1992:xiv). It was popularized in the sixties by journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson and Joan Didion. However, according to Connery, its tradition goes back to before the nineteenth century when precursors such as Daniel Defoe, William Hazlitt and Charles Dickens wrote a variety of the genre (ibid:17). In *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism,* Connery examines the works of Mark Twain, John McPhee, and James Agee, who were not strictly literary journalists. They were best known for a more traditional category of writing like fiction. Similarly, Arabs have been producing journalism with a literary flare since the turn of the ninth century. Al Jahith as such was described by Mahmoud Adham, author of *Adab Al Jahith Min Zaweya Sahfiya (Literature of Al Jahith, A Journalistic Prospective)* as the pioneer of those who were half journalists, half fiction writers (1986:14). Egyptian theatre man Yaᶜqub Sanu:ᶜ started his own newspaper in 1878. *Abu Naddara (The Man with Spectacles)* was the first of its kind in terms of political daringness, detachment from formal Arabic, utilizing satire as well as other techniques usually associated with fiction. It was also the first newspaper to make use of pictorial sketches alongside its stories.

2. Arabic literary journalism: obstacles and pathways
In an article titled *Literary Journalism in the Middle East: The Paradox of Arab Exceptionalism* David Abrahamson and Ibrahim Abu Sharif argue that there is a "relative absence" (2012:23) of literary journalism in the Arab world. They claim that "Exceptions exist, extraordinarily skilled journalists whose work can

comfortably be located within the genre – but their rarity support the validity of the generalization" (ibid:2).

Their argument is based on three assumptions. First; much of the world's literary journalism finds its expression in a western form, therefore a rarity in English translated texts or others that have been originally written in English, equals an overall absence thereof. Second, the article eliminated the possibility of some variety of literary journalism written in Arabic speculating that "a dearth of a literary form in one language may reasonably lead to the inference that there is a similar dearth in another, namely English and Arabic" (ibid:2). And third, they put freedom of expression as a precondition for any form of journalism to flourish.

Indeed, most of the world's leading literary journalism is of Anglo-American origins. Yet, literary journalism in essence is about extrapolating universal significance from isolated experience (Ashdown ed.1985:xxx), as well as extracting a reality found by focusing on the internal rather than the external (Connery 1992:17).True there are issues with regards to censoring and restricted freedom of press in the Arab world, but an argument can be made for such to become a motivation to stretch creativity and actually write better nonfiction.

Furthermore, holding the American interpretation of literary journalism on a pedestal, is pigeonholing and goes against the universality of the genre, as John S. Bak wrote in the introduction to *Literary Journalism Across The Globe* "we should pit international literary journalists against Wolfe's manifesto at times, if only to demonstrate that a European, African or Asian literary journalism is not like an American … but that it nonetheless advances our understanding and appreciation of the form" (Bak& Reynolds ed. 2011:18). This paper attempts to do just that, analyzing Arabic extracts and juxtaposing them against Anglo-American criteria, only to further explore the features of Arabic literary journalism. These include excerpts from Al Ja<u>h</u>ith's *Book of Misers,* and *Book of Animals*, Y ᶜaqub Sanu: ᶜ whose journalism, according to kendall, was the starting point for nineteenth century Egyptian literary journalism, and Ghassan Kanafany, as a fairly recent example of contemporary Arabic literary journalism.

Moreover, it is also arguable that this type of cultural expression has not reached its highest potential yet. Indeed, there are obstacles in the face of producing the kind of writing reminiscent of John Hersey's immortal depiction of the horrors of war in *Hiroshima.* Such masterpiece was only possible through appropriate financial and creative support. The very kind Hersey received from his editors at *The New Yorker* (Roiland 2011:26-27). Moreover, it is as Sims Correctly concluded "funny thing about giving writers lots of time, money, space, and freedom—you tend to get the best writing in the country in return." (Sims 2008:169).

Journalists in the Arab World lack such support. However, what Abu Sharaf considers an obstacle, can be viewed differently. If there is one thing that tyranny does is that it breeds creative writers, and equally, "sharp readers" (Douglas and Malti-Douglas 1994:5). Oppression has fueled the production of

literary journalism as much as, if not more than, freedom has. Having been denied the freedom to express the truth, censored journalists simply experiment with literary techniques to couch the truth in subversive ways. An example of such was the literary journalism produced in communist controlled Slovenia, where journalists disguised their take on the current state of affairs, as stories (Bak& Raynolds 2011:6). Likewise, the absence of free press in the Middle East, encouraged resorting to literary techniques, therefore going back to an art form that was practiced as early as the eight century, by philosophers like Al Jaḥith, for a different purpose.

Unlike Slovenians, Arab censored journalists, often use humor to mask criticism. One reason is that it is difficult to condemn a humorist. An accusation needs to be based on either what has been said literally or what rests between the lines. What has been said literally is usually not the point, thus the accusation does not have an effect. If the accusation is based on what has been said between the lines, the humorist can always claim he never said it (Qassim 2007:22-23).

3. The father of Al Adab Al Saḥafi

Literary journalism in the region arguably dates back to the eight century. The work of the Al Jaḥith, is not only important for its literary journalistic merit, but for the study of humor therein. There are possibly two functions to humor in Arabic literary journalism in general, and the satirical column specifically; both a disguise and means to draw a broad audience. These are functions imposed by demands of an era in which opinions cannot be explicitly expressed. However, Al Jaḥith and many before him witnessed a different time, one that scholars were not suppressed. Abu: Ḥaya:n Al Tawḥedi: wrote *Mathaleb Al Wazi:rayn (Flaws of the Two Ministers)* lashing out at princes and ministers of his time (Ibrahim n.d:44) without fear or discretion. Literary journalism as well as humor of that time was means of expressing the reality of an incongruous community. Roiland wrote "there has historically been a need for literary journalists to both thoroughly report on an event and present it in a manner that will engage and incite the public" (2011:20). Abu: Othman ᶜAmro Bin Baḥr Al Jaḥith lived at such time. The Abbasid Caliphate was built on the ruins of the Ummayed Caliphate in 132 AH. On the one hand, it was the Golden Age of Islamic knowledge. Mosques were the equivalent of open universities. Libraries such as the House of Wisdom (Husain 1988:25) were built on a massive scale to encompass the huge amount of works written as well as exported and translated from other languages. On the other hand, the empire was being torn apart by internal strife. The Abbasi Caliphs depended heavily on the support of Persians to overthrow the Ummayed rule, that Arabs were beginning to feel alienated, therefore several fractions of the empire rebelled and started their own autonomous states, among which were the Fatimiyas in Egypt, and Al Ḥamdaniyas in Syria (ibid:20). Persians, followed by Turks continued to grow more powerful to the point where they had total control of the Caliphs.

There was also the incongruity manifested in the spread of prostitution, same sex relationships, and extravagant life style, against the massive numbers

of mosques overflowed with the pious. Such environment breaded a kind of journalism that depicted the mishaps of society in a style governed by *Al zurf* (humor). Al Jahith's society, according to Husain "veered away from its natural course, thus becoming a target for ridicule" (1998:26). A statement supported Al Jahith who said "when limits are exceeded, even in religion or wisdom, which are the best of things, they become ugly and disrespected" (Husain 1988:26).

Mahmoud Adham described Al Jahith as a "literature man and a journalist all in one" (1986:223). In a section titled Al Adab Al Sahafi:, Adham puts forward a number of criteria that a piece of 'literary journalism' needs to have, one of which is innovation, saying

> Just as a literary figure needs to be innovative when choosing a concept for a piece, a well practiced journalist needs to be just as innovative in finding the right concept. An idea that is new, fresh and unvisited, or perhaps an old concept viewed from a different angle (1986:25).

Adham, therefore predated Kerrane and Yagoda who suggested innovation as a precondition for literary journalism (1997:14) in their book *The Art of Fact.* Furthermore, he suggested that pictorial representation alongside a story, or what we now call Caricatures to be part of the growing genre (1986:27), an art form introduced by Al Jahith and envisaged by other Arab literary journalists such as Yaᶜqub Sanu: ᶜ.

Journalistic writing before Al Jahith was dry and void of character, until he started a new trend through which the written word became a "mirror of life and society" (Adham 1986:42-43). His stories were product of what Kerrane and Yagoda call a process of active fact gathering (1997:13), observing, testing his sources and letting the reader know where he got the information from, sometimes citing two sources for the same story. He also warned the reader whenever was skeptical of the authority of the narrator; in *The Book of Animals* he said:

وقد زعم البحريون انهم يعرفون طائرا ....

> Sailors "claimed" they knew a bird that ….. (Al Jahith 1965:234)

Note his choice of wording, *zaᶜam* or 'claimed' suggests that he neither trusts nor questions the credibility of the source. Yet when he is certain he lets the reader know by saying, for instance:

فقد خبرني من رآه ممن اثق بعقله واسكن الى خبره

> As for Rhinoceros, one that I trust his intellect and rest upon his word, saw it and informed me ... (Al Jahith 1968:129)

Whenever he was dubious of a story told to him, he would insinuate such, for instance:

لكنها رواية احببت ان تسمعها, ولا يعجبني الاقرار بهذا الخبر وكذلك لا يعجبني الانكار له ولكن ليكن قلبك الى انكاره اميل.

> But it is a story I wished you to hear, I do not fancy validating, or rejecting it, though your heart should lean towards rejection. (Al Jahith 1967:34)

He also stated in the following section titled Al Shak Wa Al Yaqi:n (Doubts and Affirmations);

بعد هذا فاعرف مواضع الشك و حالاتها الموجبة له, لتعرف بها مواضع اليقين و الحالات الموجبة له
وتعلم الشك في المشكوك فيه تعلما, فلو لم يكن في ذلك الا تعرف التوقف ثم التثبت.

> Know when to place doubt, and know when to rest assured. Learn to
> doubt what needs to be doubted. This process is necessary to learn how
> to stop and verify (ibid:35).

By asserting the importance of verifying one's data Al Jahith not only
supports but predates Talese's argument that while literary journalism reads like
fiction, it is not fiction, and should be "as reliable as the most reliable reportage"
(1993:vii).

In the *Book of Misers* Al Jahith collects, interprets and by the same token,
mocks misers, beggars, fishermen, traders, singers, panders and even the
Baghdadian elites, debunking the mishaps of his society as well as human
weaknesses in general. A function he shares with Palestinian journalist/novelist
Ghassan Kanafany, who views Al Maqala Al Sakhera (the satirical column or
essay) as a weapon that exposes and destroys masks (Kanafany 1996:14).

Adham wrote "Al Jahith's misers were not recollected from the pages of
history, they came out of his environment, he stemmed their stories from friends
and neighbors from Al Basra or Bagdad and others" (1986:66). He was a great
"photographer, one that knew exactly how to transfer a scene with all its details
on paper, aided by a miraculous ability to observe. Such gift enabled him to stay
true to the original scene, all the while perfecting his story telling techniques"
(ibid:80), again fulfilling another criteria, set many centuries later by Kerrane
and Yagoda, Wolfe and Barbara Lounsberry; the art of constructing scenes.
Al Jahith's style was characterized by simplicity of language and attention to
detail. He, as ᶜAbd Al Hali:m Husain, author of *Al Sukhreya fi: Adab Al Jahith
(Satire in The Literature of Al Jahith)* claimed "steered clear of metaphors
unless needed to highlight the overall picture. He did not fictionalize, for he
believed the reader would drift away from the reality, the author was trying to
convey, and so his books were conceived as factual, honest and unembellished"
(1988:44-45). He often resorted to dialogue and other such techniques
associated with literature. As Husain wrote:

> Al Jahith resorted to some techniques associated with theatre, even
> though Arabs did not get acquainted with theatre until centuries after his
> time. He depicted the character of "Ahmed Bin ᶜAbd Al Waha:b" at
> *Resalat Al Tarbeᶜ wa Al Tadwi:r (Letter of Squaring and Circling)* in
> artistry unprecedented in the history of Arab Literature, combining in
> his depiction of the latter as a human symbol of arrogance, the psyche of
> a philosopher with the spirit of a scholar (1988:239).

The Jahithian approach fueled generations to write in a way that acts as
both; a *window* for his mastery in capturing real life onto paper, and a *mirror*
because he allowed readers to relate and reflect upon their lives (Masse n.d:Slide
8).

Ibn Qutaibiya, Abu Al Mutaher Al Azdi:, Al Washa , Abu: Haya:n Al
Tawhedi:, Ibn Al Jawzi:, and ᶜAbd Al ᶜAzi:z Al Beshri: were among many that
were influenced by the Jahithian style. Al Beshri: specifically is of grave

importance here for his articles arguably act as a bridge between Al Adab Al Sahafi: (Arabic literary journalism) and Al Maqala Al Sakhera (the satirical essay). True, Al Jahith's literary journalism is vastly different from what we identify now as Al Maqala Al Sakhera or satirical column, for he wrote volumes varying in subject matter, factual, using humor both as technique and as an end by itself. On the other hand, Al Maqala Al Sakhera is closer to what the west identifies as the *Sketch,* which is significantly shorter, and could contain fictional elements. Al Beshri: a pioneer of Al Maqala Al Sakhera, and according to Husain "was imitating Al Jahith in style, mockery and lightheartedness, he was – just as his predecessor- excellent at depicting scenes" (1988:122) which made him known in Egyptian circles and around the Arab world as Sheik Al Sakheri:n (master satirist). Therefore, an argument can be made that the origin of Al Maqala Al Sakhera leads back to Al Jahith as well.

4. Al Adab Al Sahafi: and the Sketch
Exploring Arab literary journalism is –for the most part- the aim of this paper, but because Arab scholarship in this area is scarce compared to its Anglo-American counterpart, There is a need to apply the latter's criteria to the end of, investigating the differences as well as the similarities which in turn will further our understanding of Arabic literary journalism specifically and the whole discipline generally.

There have been at least four distinct time periods, where a significant amount of literary journalistic works were produced in America: 1890s, 1930s-1940s, 1960s-1970s, and today (Roiland 2011:22). My concern is the nineteenth century, which manifested itself in the art of the *sketch*. Defined as a "brief vignette often about a seemingly inconsequential aspect of daily life, which allowed the writer to experiment with his writing voice and perspective, these could be factual or fictional, funny or straight, informative or descriptive" (Sims 2008:46). Sketches were simple and widespread in newspapers and the foremost practitioner of this art form was Mark Twain, whose stories "challenged readers to get into the habit of being skeptical of all texts and to exercise judgment about the voice of the newspaper narrator." (Sims 2008:50) Twain's sketches often contained fictionalized elements, which later writers would subsequently eschew due to the rising professional standards of the job (Roiland 2011:22).

Abu Naddara, a newspaper started in 1878 by Egyptian theatre man Ya^cqub Sanu: ^c is an example of the earlier Arab sketch. Elisabeth Kendall, author of *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde* wrote that the real birth of Egyptian journalism with both a political and literary impact was achieved through his efforts, for he identified with ordinary Egyptians and expressed his political opposition through satirical journalism (2006:14). Ya^cqub made a name for himself through theatre, and was nicknamed Egypts Molière *(Baignieres 2009:27). Kendall views* Abu Naddara *as a continuation of* Sanu: ^c*'s theatrical activity, for it contained theatrical sketches and dialogues incorporating narrative and satirical elements (2006:15). However, it is important to point out that materials for his sketches were solely derived from his surroundings;* Abu

Naddara was "the tongue through which Egyptians expressed their sentiment" (Abdu 1953:53). He also drew much of his inspiration from letters sent to him by the public, and was successful in capturing the tone of Egyptian national consciousness and hostility towards the Khedive and the British (Kendall 2006:15). Sanu: ᶜ *wrote* Abu Naddara *in Egyptian dialect, thus identifying with ordinary Egyptians. He also wrote in standard Arabic, Turkish, Levantine and sometimes French (Abdu 1953:54) which helped increase readership.*

The first run of *Abu Naddara,* however, lasted only two months and Sanu:ᶜ was allegedly exiled to France for having incurred the wrath of the Khedive through his satire (Kendall 2006:15). Two months afterwards he started a sister newspaper called *Abu Naddara Zarqa: (The Man with Blue Spectacles)* and continued to lash out at the Khedive and the British.

Perhaps the two most distinguishable literary techniques, that sat Sanu:ᶜ apart from contemporaries like ᶜAbd Allah Nadi:m were his unique dialogues and heavy use of symbolism. His dialogues at times would assume a rhythmic flow that made it read like a poem. The following is an example from the first issue of *Abu Naddar Zarqa:,* dated 7ᵗʰ August 1878 (Abdu 1953:86).A dialogue between Sheik Al Hara (the mayor) symbolizing Khedive Isma ᶜel, Abu Naddara symbolizing Sanu: ᶜ and by a larger context Egyptian middle class, and Abu Al Ghulb Al Falla:h symbolizing the peasant population in Egypt. The sketch features pictorial representation of Sheik Al Hara on his knees begging Abu Naddara to stop publishing his newspaper, while Abu Naddara is standing tall with his cane and spectacles and Abu Ghulb Al Falla:h next to him insinuating unity among the Egyptian public. Abu Ghulb is conversing in rural Egyptian dialect, encouraging Abu Naddara to keep writing. The dialogue makes use of masculine rhyme and is written in both Cairene and S ᶜaidi dialect, the two most spoken varieties of Arabic in Egypt.

- شيخ ال   :   اشفق يا ابو نظارة على عمك شيخ الحارة, جريدتك ضربها قاسي
اخاف منها على راسي, دي حطت فقلبي الرعبة بأقوالها المخيفة الصعبة, اذا رفعت عني الجريدة ارجع لطرايقي الحميدة.

-   :   الجميع معلوم بقى كيف
اشفق عليك يا مشوم.

-   : ما تشفجش يا ابونظارة, الشفجة في الغاير ده خسارة,
علينا زي ما ينزل السواج على التور. (1953:87)

Shiek Al Hara: have mercy Abu Naddara, your paper is hitting me hard. It is petrifying me with its strong discourse. If you stop writing, I will behave myself. Abu Naddara: you will never change. How can I pity you when everyone is aware of your doings.

Abu Ghulb Al Falla:h: don't pity him Abu Naddara, it is a waste on him. His unfairness is making us suffer, beating us up like bulls.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Al Maqala Al Sakhera continued to evolve, focusing more on literary techniques, while staying true to the facts. Humor remained the running thread and go-to technique to mask political agendas in addition to it being a way for identify with different demographics.

Ghassan Kanafany, a Palestinian activist and novelist wrote a column between 1967 and 1972, in "Al Saya:d" magazine, "Al Mu<u>h</u>arrer" and "Al Anwa:r" weekly annex. All were published in Lebanon, and were widely read. In the preface to *Fares Fares*, titled "On Ghassan-Fares Fares- Kanafany's serious humorous essays" Mo<u>h</u>ammed Dakroub wrote:

> Through these collated articles, scholars can now study the art of 'the essay' according to Ghassan Kanafany, and how he artistically sculpts them to take the form of short stories through an eye catching opening, a peek, a slow process of finding resolve and finally, an unexpected conclusion that opens the door for other questions to be asked (Kanafany 1996:22).

An argument can be made here that Kanafany fits Adham criteria of those who ventured into journalism through literature or vise versa (1986:26-27). As a novelist, critic, and person, Kanafany was serious. In his fiction he maintained what Kilpatrick called "an understated realism" (1999:12) achieved through his careful depiction of the Palestinian peasant. Death was a frequent end to many of his protagonists, such as Abu Qais, Ass ͨad and Marwan in *Men in the Sun* or Jada ͨan in *Falcon*. The serious tone in *The Land of Sad Oranges* is equally inescapable, the orange; a symbol of land and to some extent, hope, is portrayed in the end as "dried up and shriveled"(ibid:80), in turn, *Letter From Gaza's* protagonist refuses to leave his country to live in the land "where there is greenery, water and lovely faces" and opts to "learn from [his cousin's] leg, amputated from the top of the thigh, what life is and what existence is worth"(ibid:111-115). However, in his column, Kanafany "was able to emancipate himself from being: the responsible, committed Palestinian activist."(Kanafany 1996:8), writing on a variety of subject matter in lighthearted humor. In an article titled "On Sexuality: Progressing Towards Decadence" Kanafany puts forward his unique perspective on relationships:

> In mating season, female spider pretentiously shies away from the male who is – like your average idiot - thinks he owns the situation, and before he knows it, she is devouring his upper half while the lower is still engaged in sexual intercourse … sometimes the male would be fully aware of the trap, so he rushes through the process and sets his six legs on fire, if he is distined to make it, he metamorphoses into a philosopher, until next mating season. … What is a man, anyway, if not a spider? Sometimes a spider is better off, for he has six arms – and us – how often are we failed by a pair of hands, helpless to put out the fire burning our loins. At least a spider dies satisfied. (ibid:164-167)

This extract, fulfils - for example – Lounsberry's four constitutive features of literary Journalism (1990:xiii): *documentable subject matter chosen from the real world*; here the author presents a unique prospective on a topic almost discussed to death, an approach extremely innovative and showcases both creativity and a sharp eye. *Exhaustive research*; the original article contains verses of poetry, classical examples from both theatre and literature as well as his own observations from the kind of conduct he witnesses on the streets of

Beirut. *Portraying a scene and fine writing using a literary prose style* ; the author uses his literary background to draw a picture of the male spider preoccupied with the mating process, negligent of the fact that the female is about to devour him.

Other criteria such as *voice* is present in the sketch titled "On Writing About Pens, Not Books" Kanafany achieves literary effect through code switching. Linguist Reem Bassiouney argues the use of Standard Arabic is a form of detachment from reality, while None-Standard Arabic is a manifestation of attachment (Bassiouney 2010). In this article Kanafany writes about a seemingly insignificant encounter, but he exaggerates giving it character, and voice. He writes:

اضمر حقدا شديدا على رجلين لا اعرفهما و لكنهما يمثلان بالنسبة لي ابشع انواع اللصوصية. هذه اليد المزودة بأظفار النهب تحت قفاز من
حرير التهذيب, ووراء اليد و القفاز توجد ذراع انعدام المسؤولية و هذه الذراع هي الخيانة بعينها. الاول رجل يلبس قميصا مخططا التقيته
ي مطار بيروت و كنا على وشك ان نسافر حين طلب مني بتهذيب لا مثيل له, ان اعيره قلمي ليملا به استمارة المغادرة.
اعطيته قلمي بالطبع, شأن أي رجل متحضر يلتقي رجلا متحضر في مطار ما -   فلطشه!

I possess grave spitefulness towards two gentlemen I do not know, but both represent the ugliest form of banditry. This robbing hand masked under a silk glove of politeness, behind the hand and glove lays an arm of irresponsibility; this arm is treason itself. The first was wearing a striped teashirt when I met him in Beirut airport. We were about to depart when he asked in unprecedented politeness, to borrow my pen. As a gentlemen who just met another gentlemen in an airport I, of course, gave him my pen - -- and he stole it! (Kanafany 1996:142).

Kanafany built up a scene, using a variety of techniques related to fiction such as synecdoche (robbing hand), Personification (arm of irresponsibility) and metaphor (under a silk glove of politeness). He uses Standard Arabic throughout the entire excerpt, therefore, and according to Bassiouney establishing a barrier, distancing himself from his piece and by the same token, the reader, until the very end when he swiftly switches to dialect using the verb *laṭash* which is Lebanese lexicon for *saraq*. With such technique, the author was able to achieve two purposes; first he establishes He established his *voice* as well as a humorous effect through breaking the linear stream of Standard Arabic with as few as one word, genuine and spontaneous. We know while the author is of Palestinian origin, is acquainted with Lebanese vernacular and so we process the word *laṭash* as coming from kanafany the person and not the writer, therefore establishing a connection with him on a more intimate level, hence taking down all barriers. Second, he achieves comic effect through a similar process of breaking the linear stream of Standard Arabic with dialect, and having it come at the very end, it was the equivalent of a punch line, what twelfth-century doctor, Ibn al-Mutran calls "astonishment" (Kishtainy 1985:5) or "a sudden conclusion" (Gruner 2011:8) that leads to a burst of laughter.

5. Humor in Al Adab Al Saḥafi

The Middle East is perceived, typically by the west, as a hub for conflict. In fact, Nichole Force, author of *Humor's hidden Powers* concluded at one of her chapters that the world is convinced Arab communities "lack a sense of humor" (2011:19).

Contrary to popular belief, humor is deeply rooted in Arab/Islamic culture. The word laughter appears a number of times in Quran, sometimes as one of God's blessings, as a sign of fulfillment or as an expression of ridicule (Kishtainy 1985:19). Likewise, humor is as present in Sunnah as seriousness is (Al Obaidy 2011:19). It was said that Prophet Mohammed (SAAW) used to laugh until his molars appear (Al Obaidy 2011:56). He also reportedly said "I joke and I say nothing but the truth" (Kishtainy 1985:18). Prophet Mohammed's humor was didactic and did not seek to criticize or ridicule, unlike that of Al Jaḥith, which was the offspring of an age full of contradictions (Husain 1988:16), indeed he was humorously critical, yet it was not malice. Al Jaḥith was *zarif* (funny) by nature; he spared nothing and no one from his mockery, including himself.

On the other hand, humor of Abu Ḥayan Al Tawhedi:, a fourth century (AH) philosopher files under *Gallows*. Coined by the Germans; the term refers to cynical humor that derives from stressful or traumatic situations (Force 2011:4-5). As a child Al Tawḥedi: was unprivileged, both his parents passed away while still very young. He then went on to live with his uncle, who was anything but nurturing. Al Tawḥedi:'s humor acted as a mirror of his tortured soul, it was "part of his pessimistic philosophy on escaping reality, denouncing it and by the same token, mocking it" (Ibrahim n.d:250).

Humor in Arab/Islamic history is abundant, it takes on many functions, and this section is intended to briefly highlight three facets of humor in history and contextualizes each in terms of humor in Arab Literary Journalism today. Al Maqala Al Sakhera makes use of Al Jaḥithian humor, aims to entertain, criticize and identify. ᶜAbd Al ᶜAziz Al Beshri:, Ahmed Khalid Tawfiq, Dina Rayan, Jihan Al Gherbawi: to mention a few. As for Al Tawḥedi: humor enthusiasts, Yousef Maᶜati:, Zakareya Tamer, Mahmoud Al Saᶜdani:, and Mohammed Al Maghoot are good examples. Analysis as well as a process of compare and contrast between articles from these two categories will certainly benefit the study of Arabic literary journalism, but the author will leave that to future research.

As for function of humor in Al Adab Al Saḥafi: generally and Al Maqala Al Sakhera specifically, some root for humor's protesting abilities such as Kathleen Stokker who argued in *Folklore Fights The Nazis*, that Norway's occupation humor had played a significant role in developing a resistance mentality among the people (1997:17). While Kishtainy on the other hand questions the use of humor as a positive weapon in the battle against oppression, he argues that people joke about their oppressors, not to overthrow them but to

endure them" (1985:7). Dwelling on both motives can also be subject matter for future research.

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