

## Tasting the Culinary Humor of Ash'ab at-Tamma'

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### Abstract

*Gordon, in his writing on the culinary comedy, said that humor about food serves as an effective social satire. Culinary Humor can be used to mock oneself or others. Likewise, Clogan said that the culinary humor can be used as a tool to criticize, interpret, and entertain relating to the evolving issues. The Culinary Comedy serves as a social satire or literary parody that contains the institutional and social behavior with regard to food. In Classical Arabic culture, also known culinary humor. One of entertainer and comedian who was known for his culinary humor was Asy'ab, therefore he was known as the at-Tamma ' (The Greedy). In this article, will be discussed the form and content of his humor, to see the functions are contained in it.*

**Keywords:** Ash'ab at-Tamma ', humor, culinary, arabic culture

### 1. Introduction

In his essay on humor in Arabic literature, Margoliouth said that in the early days of Islam was not only a professional entertainer and comedian in the palace who entertained the rulers, but in some cities, were known entertainers and comedians. One of them who make a living by telling funny stories to the rich man was Asy'ab, commonly called "the greedy". His funny stories were known until the Abbasid era. (Martin, 2004:320). The behavior of Asy'ab which famous for its playful and greedy was the main element that caused his story was preferred. The stories are written in full in the book of al-Aghani, works of Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani, still known until now. The books of Asy'ab humor that tell about the figure Asy'ab popular as people are stingy and greedy. More than 200 anecdotes scattered in classical literature. (Meisami, 2003: 108)

Ash'ab born in the first century of Hijra. He was a client of the az-Zubayr family. His real name was Shu'aib, whereas his nickname was Abu al-Alaa', but more popularly known as Asy'ab. He grew up in Yatrib city in the counseling of Abi Talib family. Asy'ab was a funniest guy in his time. So greedy, people called Ash'ab at-Tamma '(Ash'ab the Greedy). In addition to good at singing, dancing and making funny movements, so that he could be a friend and entertainer of officials in the palace. He was good at making words, facial expressions and body movements that made people laughed. The books of classical literature considered him as one of the funny in Arabic. He left Yatrib to various regions. Last city that he visited was Baghdad during the reign of the Abbasid Al-Mansur, then he returned to Madinah al-Munawwarah and died there (Al-Fakih, 2005).

Ash'ab bin Jubair, who died in the year 771 H was born and raised in Medina. His age was very long, he lived from the age of companions of the Prophet (khulafa'ur rashidin), the period of followers companions of the Prophet (tabi'in) up to the time of the followers of the companions of the Prophet's followers (tabi 'tabi'in). He visited Baghdad during the reign of Caliph Al-Mansur and lived there until the reign of Caliph Al-Mahdi. In addition to good at singing and reciting the Quran, he also often become prayer leader in the mosques. Although greedy, but his mind was sharp. He was good at answering any asked him. He died at a very advanced age in Madina (Ali, 1998: 21).

Ash'ab referred to as `amiir at-tufaylin. The word `amiir means "leader" (Wehr, 1980:27), while tufaylin means "people who like to come to the party uninvited to obtain food ". In the *Kitab al-Bukhala'*, the work of al-Jahiz, mentioned that once, in Kufa, there was descent of Abdullah ibn Gathafan dubbed *Tufayl*.

So called, because he was the farthest walk to attend the feast or weddings. This title is actually given only for himself, but gradually everyone obtaining eat as he is also called *thufayliy* (Lesmana, 2009:21). Ash'ab figure is considered as a unique figure in the history of Islamic Arab. This figure is famous for funny stories about him when he was in the wedding parties and other parties. Almost no books in Arabic literature that did not mention his funny stories. This figure lived almost a century in the Age of the Umayyad and Abbasid. Like in the original Arabic sources, Ash'ab came from the nobility who was born in Madinah al-Munawarah, but some assume that he came from Persia. The phenomenon of luxury and wealth at the end of the Hijri century, especially in Madinah al-Munawwarah have contributed to the show this cute figure. He always acts as an uninvited guest in the parties. However, because many minds, though not invited, he could get into the party. In addition to acting as an uninvited guest, he is also known for being greedy in food, so that people who had a party feared if the party was attended by him. Many researchers mentioned that the stories Ash'ab plenty, of whom was Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahani (356 H) in his book *al-'Agaaniy*. ([www.alawazm.com](http://www.alawazm.com), 17 August 2011). Because of the greedy, there was an Arabic proverb that used his name, namely *atma'u min 'asy'ab* which means "He is more greedy than Ash'ab" (Burckhardt, 25)

In his research on the texts of classical Arabic literature, Kilpatrick (1998) found that there are two dimensions in the texts of humor Ash'ab at-Tamma', ie historical and fiction dimension. It was found after he was researching information about Ash'ab in Classical Arabic sources, such as *Al-Bayan wa at-Tabyin* and *al-Bukhala*, the work of al-Jahiz (d 868-9); *Uyun al-Akhbar* and *Kitab wa ash-shi'r Shu'ara*, Ibn Qutayba (d 889); *Kitab al-Mahasin wa al-Masawi*, by al-Bayhaqi (early 10th century), *Al-'Iqd al-Farid*, Ibn Abd Rabbih (d 940) and *Kitab al-'Agani* of Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani (died 971) and last *Tarikh al-Bagdadi*, the work of al-Khatib al-Bagdadi (d 1071). Regardless of whether these texts in the form of fiction and non-fiction, this article aims to look at the form, content and function of these stories, especially texts on the theme of food, according to the nickname given to him, *at-Tamma'* (the greedy),

## 2. Form and Content of Ash'ab Humor

Gordon in his writings about the culinary comedy in French literature of the Middle Ages said that both the food and humor, both have the power to give satisfaction, entertain and build identity. This power is getting to be bigger if the two are combined. The use of the theme of food in humor, because the food is universal, necessary and part of everyday life. (Gordon: 2007: 12). History of culinary humor as long as the history of food. According to Smith, the form commonly used in culinary humor is a joke. However, in America, at this time, the shape is more freely and often overlap, there is a long story, a play on words and essays (Smith, 2004:298). Meanwhile, according to Gordon culinary humor is usually tied to the narrative structure (Clogan, 2004:28).

Of several culinary humor stories played by Ash'ab, this article found that there was humor in the form of questions and answers, but in the passive voice, not mentioned anyone who asks, as the following example:

*Asy'ab wife asked about what kind of fit with what he wanted,  
Ash'ab then replied, "I want women to feel full  
if I burp and clean it if I eat a goat. "*  
([www.salsabiil.net](http://www.salsabiil.net) Juli 2011)

To see the humor effect of the story is not difficult, because the text is short, so it can easily be found which part is considered funny. That makes this story funny is the answer of Ash'ab. Usually, when people are asked about what kind wife in accordance with what he wanted, then the answer is something that is either owned by his wife, for example, beauty, wealth, education or the other, but in this story is not. Wife desired by Ash'ab is the wife who feel full when he burps and clean goat legs after he ate. Is not this something funny? Because in the minds of Ash'ab just something related to food.

Al-Hufi (in Lesmana, 2011: 171) calls this humor as *al-'Tjaba gayr bi al-matlub*, that humor occurs, because the person answers the question with something that is not requested. As mentioned above that the answer Ash'ab not as expected by the asking. Therefore, the answer to be funny. If the answer is as desired by asking, for example, a wife who wants Ash'ab is a rich woman, beautiful or educated, then the above text will not be funny.

In addition to in the form of question and answer, there are also other forms of Ash'ab story, ie in the form of description, as well as the following example.

*At his home, Ash'ab never intestate to his son.  
The contents of the will was as follows.  
First, when his son comes to a party, he must come earlier and return later,  
because according to him, the best food  
was for people who come earlier. Then, he suggested that  
his son sat earlier and washed hands later.  
Second, he told his son not to stand at a distance  
of food, he suggested that his son stand in front of  
the food, and suggested that his son ate before the other guests  
saw it and added food before people ate it. Third,  
he suggested that his son did not look here and there as  
confused, show to who had party, so they though  
if his son was one of his relatives, so that  
they will welcome his son well and  
it would benefit his son.  
(Al-Fakih, 2005)*

The above text is too funny, because the contents of the will is not the same as a will in general. In Islam, a will is giving ownership by one person to another person, so that he is entitled to have it when the giver dies. While Ash'ab, do not give anything to his son, except for an advice. Even if want to give advice, must contain good something that can be used to equip the child later in life, after his parents died, instead of advising his son on strategies to get food at the party. Such humor can be incorporated into the kind of incongruity theory. As mentioned in the Jonas that something strange, absurd, inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate are included in the examples incongruity theory (Jonas, 2004:58).

In addition to two forms above, almost all of humor texts used in this research was a narrative, as well as the following example

*One time, Asha'b would tell at one of the princes.  
However, when he said, "There's a man ...", suddenly  
he saw a dish that will be served. Knowing, if  
he continued his story, the dish would run out, so he discontinued his story.  
The Prince was curious, want to know the continuation of the story, and  
He asked, "How about the man, Ash'a'b?"  
Then, Ash'ab replied, "The man died"  
( www.darrrmm.com 18 Jul 2010)*

The first part that looks funny in this story is when Ash'ab interrupts his story, because he saw there was a dish that will be served by the host in the party and that he continued the story, the dish would run out. That makes this story so funny is excessive attitude to food, so he ignored the prince. Excessive attitude like this is one of cause of cuteness. The other part that makes this story funny is Ash'ab expertise in finding answers to questions prince with the words "the man died."

These words are used so that the story was finished and he can enjoy dishes that are served immediately. Al-Hufi (in Lesmana, 2011: 170) called this humor as *al-takhallusu al-Fakihu*, i.e. humor that occurs because someone can give an answer when he is in a tight squeeze. In the above text, Ash'ab was asked by the prince of the continuation of the story of the man. Because, at the time, Ash'ab wanted to enjoy dishes that are served, then he answered with the words " He has died". This is that causes the story is funny, because Ash'ab is ingenuity in finding answers in a tight squeeze. If he answered with another words, it would be a long story and he could not enjoy the meal.

Other forms of narrative can be seen in the following text

*One time, Asha'b present at a banquet with  
some prince. In the banquet, was prepared  
a grilled goat , so that Asha'b accelerate  
eating, in order to more eating. Then  
The prince said to him, "I see you eating with*

angry, as if the goat mother had crashed into you! "  
 Then Ash'a'b replied, "I see you pity  
 the goat as if the goat mother has been breast-feed you".  
 ( www.darrrm.com 18 July 2010)

Al-Hufi, in his book, *Al-Fukahā fi al-'Adab: Usuluha wa 'Anwa'uha*, said that one type of humor was *al-tahakkum bi al-'khuluqiyah wa al-Nafsiyah*, i.e. humor that occurs because the person's ability in mocking the bad conduct of other people (Lesmana, 2011, 170). The above text can be included in this type. Because Ash'ab eat the billy goat greedily, so the prince mock him, such as being hit by a goat mother. That makes this text funny, because the prince uses parable "the goat mother had bumped into you.". Besides that, al-Hufi also mentioned other types of humor, i.e. *al-du'abah*, humor occurs, because one's ability in humiliating his opponent. (Lesmana, 2011, 170). Ridiculed like that, then Ash'ab answered by using parable also to mock the prince. Prince makes a parable by using the word "angry", "goat mother" and "crashing", as well as Ash'ab makes the same parable in his answer by using the word "goat mother", but is connected with other words which is a mockery of the prince, i.e. "pity" and "breast-feeding".

In addition to the above types, the theory of al-Hufi mentioned also another type of humor, which is called *the al-gafla wa al-tagaful*, i.e. humor that occurs, because the attitude of forget or pretend to forget that done by someone. (Lesmana, 2009, 47) Ash'ab story below may be one example of the kind of humor.

*Ash'ab wanted to go to a wedding. When they reached the door, he was forbidden to enter. Then Ash'ab away from where it to find a way to get into in that place. Then, he returned again to the house by bringing one of the shoes and hide the other one in her bag, while occasionally wiped his mouth with a handkerchief. Then he approached the door of the house and said, "Earlier, after eating, I rush out, so that pair of my shoes left behind. If I may, please get me my shoes "*  
*Then, the doorman said, "Now I'm busy, Take yourself. "Then, Ash'ab entered, ate with fed and out again.*  
 (www.salsabiil.net July 2011)

Ash'ab idea to take the shoes from his home, carry one of the pairs of shoes, hide and pretend to miss the shoes in the house to get into the house and can enjoy food that is in it, is a good idea and something unexpected. In sense of humor, it is necessary things like that, as proposed by White that in psychology, there are two important things in humor, which unexpectedness and though. (Lesmana, 2009: 47). That's what causes the text to be funny Al-Hufi theory that contained in Ash'ab culinary humor, may also be seen in the following text

*Ash'ab wanted to help one of his friends, who had invited people to eat at home, but can not afford provide it. When the guests arrived at his friend's house, Ash'ab said, "Go home to somebody house, there was a wedding. " When people went there and left it alone, Ash'ab said to himself, "Perhaps, It was true, there was a wedding. "So, he went quickly in order not to be missed by his friends to the house*  
 (www.salsabiil.net July, 2011).

There are two points that cause this text is funny. The first is Ash'ab attitude that has the initiative to enjoin some people to go to another house and said that in that house there was a wedding. It's a funny thing, because Ash'ab dare to replace a dining event that actually held at a friend's house, but because his friend was not able to, he changed to another place. Humor like this, in the theory of al-Hufi, called *al-qalbu wa al-Aksu*, that humor occurs, because someone distort or contrapose a state to another state (Lesmana, 2009, 251). The second is Ash'ab attitude who do not believe to the statement itself, whereas people have believed in his words.

Such humor can be incorporated into the kind of *al-hazalaqah*, that humor occurs, because the attitude of someone who feel smarter or have a higher capacity than others, but on the contrary. (Lesmana, 2009, 251).

The last example of Ash'ab culinary humor which will be discussed in this article are as follows

*A woman went into the Ash'ab house when he was having lunch with his wife. They both invited the woman to eat. The woman sat and began to eat his food by taking a tendon. Seeing the courage of women who take the tendon on the dishes, Ash'ab really shocked, because according to the custom of Medina People, only the host is entitled to eat the tendon. Then Ash'ab stood up and came out of the house. After that, he returned again and knocked on the door. Ash'ab wife who looked strange behavior of her husband, then asked, "What's up, Ash'ab?". Then Ash'ab asked, "May I come in?" Then she replied, "Of course, not you were the host of house?" Then, Ash'ab replied again, "If I was the host, why that woman who eat the tendon?"*  
([www.salsabiil.net](http://www.salsabiil.net) July 2011)

Among the texts of Ash'ab culinary humor, this is the longest text, while examples of text at the beginning of the discussion in the form of questions and answers is the shortest text. To see the effect of the humor in a long text is rather difficult and often not very visible. As well as in the text above, the funny part of this text lies on the back and it was not very funny. The funny part of this text is when Ash'ab acts as a guest, whereas he was the host. This kind of humor also exist in the theory of al-Hufi, namely *al-shakhsi tahakkum bi nafsihi*, that humor occurs, because the person who made himself like everyone else. (Lesmana, 2009: 251)

### 3. Conclusion

Seeing the kind of humor that are in Ash'ab the stories, this article found that viewed from its shape, it seems there are similarities between Ash'ab humor with that proposed by Smith, i.e in the form of jokes and presented by Gordon, i.e bound by narrative structure. However, in contrast to that proposed by Smith who said that culinary humor exist in the form of long story, a play on words and essays. Meanwhile, if viewed from its kind, the culinary humor of Adsh;ab different from medieval culinary humor proposed by Clogan, which states that the main elements of medieval culinary humor is transgression, exaggerated, unexpected, incongruity and physical violence (Clogan, 2004:28), while Ash'ab humor is more variety.

Likewise, in respect of the function, the function of culinary humor of Ash;ab different from Clogan opinion which states that humor, especially culinary humor, is a multifaceted tool in criticizing, interpreting, entertaining relating to issues were burning, like about the weakness of the human body and human appetite. Culinary Comedy serves as a social satire or literary parody that contains institutional and social behavior with respect to food, (2004:16). Gordon opinion which said that humor about food serves as an effective social satire. Humor about how one person to eat and what to eat are included in the evaluation of humor which aimed at the group or other group. Culinary humor can be used to mock themselves or others (2007, 12) and Classen opinion which said that culinary humor has a strong epistemological function, for inviting laughter from people who hear it from various sides.(2008: 119) The difference in this view is a natural thing. This is caused by the differences in the form and content of the object studied, resulting in different conclusions.

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