
**UNVEILING THE LITERARY TREASURE OF AL-JÂHIZ'S *KITÂB AL-BUKHALÂ'* :
AN IN-DEPTH ANALYTICAL EXPLORATION**

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Abstract

The *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'* (Book of Miser) is an important literary treasure written by al-Jâhiz. In the introduction to this book, al-Jâhiz mentions that he wrote it for one of his close friends who was deeply impressed by his writings. The book focuses on misers in general, particularly those from the city of Marw in Khorasan. Within the narratives of this book, al-Jâhiz shares stories and anecdotes about misers he encountered in his life, especially those from his personal surroundings in Marw. Al-Jâhiz's portrayal of these characters and situations serves to both entertain and educate. His unique artistic style portrays comic situations in a manner that encourages reflection and criticism of social realities. The portrayal is not only comedic but also rooted in the genuine experiences of life, enhancing its connection with reality. In the domain of Arabic literature, this paper attempts to unveil the human nature of miserly individuals treasured in al-Jâhiz's *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*.

Keywords: al-Jâhiz, *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*, Literary Treasure, Analytical Exploration, Arabic Literature, Classical Literature etc.

Introduction:

The *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'* is regarded as one of al-Jâhiz's most valuable works. This book is marked by the author's light-hearted touch that brings a rejuvenating essence to its readers. It stands as a blend of both literary and scientific comedy. Through its pages, al-Jâhiz skilfully depicts the social situation of the Abbasid era, delving into the hidden aspects of households, their interactions, and the interplay between personal and public matters.

In the introduction of *Kitâb al-Bakhlâ'*, al-Jâhiz alludes to his motivation for writing it, indicating it was intended for one of the prominent figures of the time. Although the individual's name is not disclosed, there's a high likelihood that it was dedicated to Ibn Al-Mudabber, a close friend of al-Jâhiz, or perhaps to Al-Fath bin Khaqan, who held great admiration for al-Jâhiz's writings and consistently encouraged his literary pursuits. Another possible recipient could have been Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyât, who shared a close bond with al-Jâhiz.

It has been noted that the anecdotes of misers recounted by al-Jâhiz are imbued with a delightful and amusing sense of humour. This aspect of his work is a reflection of al-Jâhiz's own personality, wherein he masterfully blends humour and seriousness in a harmonious and remarkable manner. His writings are infused with joy, and the book is infused with al-Jâhiz's distinctive style, characterized by a fluid and composed narrative. His skilful selection of comedic stories lends the book a unified tone, and his writings stand out for their clear and precise expression.

Al-Jâhiz meticulously depicted the misers, capturing their gestures and the contrasting expressions of contentment and distress that would manifest due to their inner struggles with fear,

anxiety, and solace. With the finesse of a painter, he skilfully portrayed the psychological idiosyncrasies that plagued them. His approach revolved around unveiling their hidden facets, shedding light on the enigmatic occurrences within their households, as well as the conversations that unfolded among them.

Through the remarkable ingenuity displayed in his work, Al-Jāhiz managed to avoid instilling negative sentiments toward misers within the hearts of his readers. He skilfully navigated the fine line, steering away from generating hatred or aversion towards them. Instead, his writing evokes a sense of human empathy and understanding.

This book stands as a mirror reflecting the Abbasid era, offering insights into its civilized aspects and distinctive features. The author critiques certain societal traits, aiming to uproot their influence. Simultaneously, he occasionally lends support to such traits by highlighting the advantages of frugality, including the economic benefits it brings about.¹

Biography of al-Jāhiz:

Abū 'Uthmān 'Amar ibn Bahr al-Jāhiz (780-869 A.D. / 163-255 A.H.) was born in the vibrant city of Baṣra, a renowned hub of knowledge and literature during his time. Naturally inclined towards learning, he diligently sought wisdom from eminent linguists and litterateurs like al-Asma'ī and Abu 'Ubayda. He honed his scholastic knowledge under the guidance of the Mu'tazilite scholar Abū Ishāq al-Nizām, closely following the teachings of Abū Ishāq. His contributions to the Mu'tazilite doctrine were highly regarded.

Al-Jāhiz, a prolific scholar, also associated with a group of Arabian writers and Persian interpreters, which greatly influenced his writing style. His passion for study was insatiable; upon encountering a new book, he delved into its contents with a profound understanding of the subject matter. He even rented houses to house book manuscripts and immersed himself in studying them. Al-Jāhiz explored various subjects to offer solutions to the pressing questions in knowledge and science. His contributions to Arabic literature were unparalleled, and he is credited as a pioneer in creating literary genres.

The majority of his life was spent in Basra, where he wrote extensively, garnering the attention and respect of rulers due to his literary prowess. He authored numerous treatises (*rasā'il*) and books, marking a significant milestone in the development of Arabic literature, especially during the Abbasid era. Later, he resided in Baghdad during the reigns of al-Mamun, al-Mu'tasim, al-Wathiq, and al-Mutawakkil. However, his relationship with Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt soured during the latter's third ministry. Afterward, he permanently settled in Basra following the collapse of his ministry. In his later years, he suffered from a debilitating semi-paralysis, which eventually led to his passing in 868 A.D., having lived for nearly a hundred years.

Al-Jāhiz had a distinct appearance, with a gloomy countenance and goggled eyes, earning him the nickname "al-Jāhiz." Despite his eccentricities, such as humour, jesting, and light-hearted remarks to mock others, he possessed a compassionate soul, an intelligent mind, a penchant for humorous conversations, and genuine empathy for the underprivileged.

Al-Jāhiz's extensive knowledge and literary achievements place him in the same league as Nābigha among the Arabs and Voltaire among Oriental scholars. He possessed a wealth of

knowledge, strong argumentative skills, research-driven discussions, a penchant for rigorous debate, and eloquent speech. He delved deeply into Scholastic Science (*'ilm al-kalâm*), incorporating elements of Greek philosophy. Among theologians, he stood as an unrivalled figure in advocating the oneness of Allah, and many theologians followed his doctrine, known as *al-Jâhiziyya*. He contributed significantly to various fields of study, producing extensive works on animals, plants, morals, and society, thereby advancing Arabic literature.

Al-Jâhiz's writing style introduced a new paradigm to Arabic literature. His compositions, particularly his treatises (*rasâ'il*), set a precedent for writers and authors, offering a fresh mode of expression that departed from excessive metaphorical language, as noted by al-Badî', who remarked, "Certainly, his speech is straightforward, expressive, and sparing in metaphor."²

His reputation in the realm of prose literature far surpasses his contributions to poetry. In his poetic works, he often adhered closely to established conventions without introducing innovation or creativity in the art of expression.

Al-Jâhiz left an indelible mark on Arabic literature, penning approximately 200 books. Professor Ibn al-'Amîd succinctly stated, "The intellect of al-Jâhiz should be foremost in your estimation, followed by his literary contributions." Unfortunately, only a handful of his works have been published, including *Kitâb al-Bayân wa al-Tabyîn*, which delves into literature, the art of essay composition, and oratory. *Kitâb al-Hayawân* stands out as a significant contribution to the field of zoological science. Additionally, *Kitâb al-Muhâsin wa al-Aqdâd*, *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*, and *Dîwân Rasâ'ilihi*, an anthology of his treatises, are among his noteworthy writings.³

The Death of Al-Jâhiz:

In his old age, al-Jâhiz's health deteriorated, and he suffered from hemiplegic, as described by al-Mubarrad. When asked about his condition during this time, al-Jâhiz humorously replied, "One half of me is so paralyzed that I wouldn't feel it if I were cut with saws, while the other half is so sensitive that a fly's touch causes excruciating pain. I've experienced this for my entire ninety-six years."

Despite his severe illness, it did not directly cause his death. A legend goes about him, stating that he met his end when part of his extensive library collapsed, burying him under falling volumes of books. This tragic incident occurred in 868 AD when al-Jâhiz was approximately ninety-six years old.⁴

Ahmed bin Yazid bin Muhammad Al-Muhallabi recounted an anecdote from his father, mentioning that news of Al-Jâhiz's passing reached al-Mu'tazz Billah. In response, Al-Mu'tazz Billah expressed his condolences, saying, "Long life and continued blessings." This event took place in the year two hundred and fifty-five of the Islamic calendar.

Al-Jâhiz left this world, leaving behind an immense literary and scientific legacy. His works spanned a wide array of fields, encompassing theology, news, wisdom, literature, language, humour, politics, history, philosophy, religion, ethics, botany, zoology, industry, women's issues, and much more. Despite his unassuming appearance, characterized by his prominent eyes, dark complexion, and short stature, he possessed a robust physique and an active disposition.⁵

In a nutshell, Al-Jāhiz was a polymath, a beacon of knowledge, and a well-connected figure within his intellectual circles. His scientific contributions continue to be the subject of study and admiration to this day. We draw from the wealth of his literary works and the depth of his knowledge, finding joy in his wit and humour. It's a rarity to encounter a writer, a literary scholar, a critic, a humorist, or even a proponent of religious or intellectual doctrines who doesn't reference Al-Jāhiz. His books are a treasure trove of quotations and opinions.

The enduring evidence of his precedence, virtue, authenticity, style, and thought lies in the fact that his name remains eternally relevant, transcending generations, much like the perpetual cycle of day and night. ⁶

Kitāb al-Bukhalā' (The Book of Misers):

The *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* of al-Jāhiz stands as a remarkable compilation of narratives centred around the avaricious individuals, and this book is widely recognized, because al-Jāhiz made it replete with distinctive gaze into social atmosphere. Among the writers of his contemporary period, he held a position of prolificacy par excellence. Notably, his prose exhibits a blend of humour and satire, a distinctive stylistic approach.

It is a matter of fact that al-Jāhiz conducts a perceptive exploration of human psychology in this famous work of *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'*. His literary work takes a mocking stance towards figures such as schoolmasters, beggars, singers, and scribes, all characterized by their acquisitive behaviours. The anecdotes contained within continue to find their way into various magazines across the Arabic-speaking sphere. Regarded as one of al-Jāhiz's paramount achievements, this book maintains its prominence, even in contemporary Arab society, as an integral element of children's literary heritage. ⁷

Al-Jāhiz, a unique writer, employed a distinctive literary style characterized by the frequent use of humour and satire to address societal issues. His renowned work, *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'*, serves as a prime example of this, as it features sarcastic responses aimed at opponents, effectively silencing them. He utilized humour not only for entertainment but also to shed light on the human condition, thereby alleviating the burdens of life for his readers.

In addition to his humour, al-Jāhiz skilfully employed the technique of digression, avoiding excessive repetition and boredom in his writings. He critiqued various aspects of human society with ridicule and often utilized an elegant style in his introductions. ⁸

Literary Styles of *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* (The Book of Misers):

It is a matter of fact that *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* is a literary work; which has achieved widespread renown, despite its relatively concise size. This work is distinguished by several notable artistic styles and approaches; they are mentioned as follows:

1. **Realistic and Humorous Approach:** Al-Jāhiz adopted a realistic and humorous approach in his book. He connected with his readers on a personal level, using language that resonated with the common people.
2. **Departure from Prevailing Style:** Al-Jāhiz notably departed from the prevailing style of his time, which was characterized by a strict and serious tone. Instead, he infused his writing with a lighter and more accessible tone.

3. Minimal Elaboration on Meanings: He refrained from excessive elaboration on many meanings unless he could draw upon the words of others to clarify his points.
4. Explanation of Terms: Al-Jāhiz took the initiative to explain a range of terms used in the text, such as "the punch", "the sector", and "the ink", ensuring that readers could grasp the context.
5. Artistic Imagery: Throughout his work, Al-Jāhiz employed numerous artistic images to convey his ideas, adding depth and vividness to his descriptions.
6. Vivid Portrayal of Misers: al-Jāhiz went beyond merely recounting stories of misers. He delved into their psychology, portraying them in a humorous and sensuous manner. He skilfully depicted their movements, expressions, and unveiled their secrets. His keen observations extended to their behaviour within their homes, their speech patterns, and all aspects of their lives.

In fact, this distinguished work *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* stands out as a literary gem due to its realistic, humorous, and relatable approach, its departure from the prevailing seriousness of its time, its effective use of imagery and terminology clarification, and its vivid portrayal of the misers within its pages.⁹

Indeed, *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* stands as a masterpiece in the body of Al-Jāhiz's work, offering a vivid portrayal of the misers he encountered and became acquainted with in his immediate surroundings, particularly in the town of Marv, the capital of Khorasan. Within the pages of this remarkable work, al-Jāhiz presents a realistic, sensual, psychological, and humour-filled depiction, meticulously laying bare their actions, anxious expressions, and the clandestine secrets concealed within their homes. He delves deep into their varied conversations, providing profound insights into their personalities and the circumstances that shaped them. *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* serves as a multifaceted study, delving into facets of society, education, psychology, and economics, with a specific focus on this unique group of individuals.

It is worth noting that *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* serves as an invaluable archival source for forthcoming generations, offering rich material for both educational and creative pursuits. This work can be rightfully regarded as Al-Jāhiz's magnum opus, as he meticulously gathers narratives related to miserliness and those who exemplify this trait, particularly in the context of their frugality, especially when it comes to food. While most of these stories are firmly rooted in reality, al-Jāhiz discreetly veils the identities of certain individuals. Through this work, al-Jāhiz endeavours to depict the diverse characteristics and behaviours of individuals, particularly those who prioritize thriftiness over indulgence, often at the cost of enduring physical and personal hardships to amass wealth. Many of their cherished aspirations are willingly set aside in pursuit of this singular goal.

Furthermore, the author of *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* skilfully offers insights into a facet of life during the Abbasid era: the existence of a frugal lifestyle that shunned extravagance. This work also sheds light on the lives of individuals who underwent a transformation from poverty to sudden affluence due to the expansion of their trade, industry, or the appreciation of their land values during the economic upheavals that characterized the early Abbasid era.¹⁰

The Contents of *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ* :

A significant number of stories can be discovered within the pages of "*Kitâb al-Bukhalâ*." Here, we endeavour to shed light on the content of this work as follows:

1. Risâlah Sahl b. Hârûn
2. Qişsa Ahl al-Başra min al-Musajjidiyîn
3. Qişsa Zubaida b. Hamîd
4. Qişsa Layla al-Nâ'itiyya
5. Qişsa Ahmad b. Khalf
6. Hadith Khâlîd b. Yazîd
7. Qişsa Abî Ja'far
8. Qişsa al-Hazâmî
9. Qişsa al-Hârithî
10. Tafsîr Kalam Fâtik
11. Qişsa al-Kindî
12. Qişsa Muhammad b. Abi al-Mu'mal
13. Qişsa Asad b. Jânî
14. Qişsa Tamâm b. Ja'far
15. Qişsa Ibn al-'Aqadî
16. Qişsa al-Asma'î
17. Risâlah Abî al-'Âs b. 'Abd al-Wahhâb b. 'Abd al-Majîd al-Thaqafî ila al-Thaqafî.¹¹

Summary of *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ* :

In the introduction to his book *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ*, al-Jâhîz indicated that he dedicated this work to a prominent figure in the state, although he did not explicitly mention the individual's name. However, it is highly likely that his intended recipient was either Ibn Al-Mudabir, a close friend of al-Jâhîz, or al-Fath bin Khaqan, an ardent admirer of al-Jâhîz's writings who consistently encouraged his literary pursuits. Another potential recipient could have been Muhammad bin Abdul Malik Al-Zayyât, with whom al-Jâhîz shared a close relationship.

The subject matter of *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ*, both in general and with specific reference to the misers of the city of Merv in Khorasan, served as the foundational material that Al-Jâhîz masterfully crafted in the stories contained within this book. In *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ* readers are introduced to the tales and dialogues of the misers encountered by Al-Jâhîz throughout his life, all set within the backdrop of his personal environment. The book is replete with humorous anecdotes and comic situations that serve as vehicles for both entertainment and critique of the social realities of the time. Al-Jâhîz's remarkable artistic style brings these stories to life, creating a vivid and sensorial connection with the depicted reality.

Al-Jâhîz's portrayal of miserly individuals is characterized by meticulous descriptions of their movements, their expressions of happiness and sorrow, their reactions to fear, anxiety, or relief, and their psychological quirks. He skilfully paints their inner worlds, akin to a skilled artist, and endeavours to unveil the secrets and intricacies concealed within their homes, as well as the

dialogues exchanged among them. Al-Jāhiz's storytelling prowess ensures that readers do not harbour negative sentiments towards these stingy characters, but rather encourages empathy and a humane understanding of their motivations.

The stories narrated by al-Jāhiz about misers are infused with humour and captivating wit, a reflection of his own personality and disposition, which seamlessly blend humour with seriousness, creating a harmonious and profound narrative. *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* by the polymath al-Jāhiz can be regarded as one of the most renowned works of satirical literature globally. It exudes a spirit of humour that permeates the entire narrative, while remaining rooted in al-Jāhiz's distinct style, characterized by lucid and precise expression. *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'* stands as a unique literary creation, offering insights into the social life of the Abbasid era and unveiling the mysteries of that period.¹²

Discussion:

"The Book of Misers" (*Kitāb al-Bukhalā'*) is considered the finest jewel in al-Jāhiz's literary crown. In fact, it was this very book that he presented to the people of the twentieth century as his magnum opus when he first published it as an editor in Leiden in the year 1900. The esteemed scholar Van Vleuten was responsible for this publication, and it marked a significant moment in the history of al-Jāhiz's works. Subsequently, the prominent orientalist of that era, Theodor Noldeke (d. 1930), received the book with great acclaim and recognized its significance. He called for its translation into European languages, recognizing its value to a broader audience.

It comes as no surprise that "The Book of Misers" has secured a place as one of the four most important books in the history of Arab culture, according to the consensus of its ancient critics. Furthermore, it is hardly astonishing that all of al-Jāhiz's works have become synonymous with enjoyment and enlightenment. To illustrate this point, I recall a conversation in which Ibn Duraid (d. 933 A.D), the author of "Jamharah al-Lughah," inquired about the "Parks of Hearts." Perplexed, others asked, "What is it?" Ibn Duraid explained that it was a work by al-Jāhiz, encompassing anecdotes of Abu al-Ayna and the poetry of hadith scholars, showcasing the wide-ranging appeal and influence of al-Jāhiz's writings.¹³

From the texts found within the Book of Misers, it becomes evident that its content can be divided into two distinct factions. The demarcation between these factions is generally clear, though there are some instances of overlap.

The first faction comprises a collection of letters, commandments, and lengthy responses. These materials constitute the theoretical groundwork put forth by proponents of parsimony. They serve as a comprehensive exploration of the principles and ideologies behind miserliness.

In contrast, the second group of texts consists of short stories and concise anecdotes that provide glimpses into the daily lives of misers. These narratives can be seen as practical applications of the theoretical concepts elucidated in the letters and directives. They offer a tangible perspective on how the theories and principles of miserliness manifest in real-life scenarios.¹⁴

Al-Jahiz mentions a letter from Sahl ibn Harun to his cousins from the Rahyoun family, who had criticized his doctrine of miserliness and had traced his words in various books. In this

message, Sahl writes, "May God set your affairs straight for you, reunite you, teach you goodness, and make you among its people."

Al-Ahnaf ibn Qays advises, "Oh People of Banu Tamim, do not hastily embrace conflict, for those who rush into battle are often the least hesitant to retreat." It was a common saying among them: "If you wish to identify many faults, scrutinize a perceived fault, for it is considered flawed solely due to the fault it harbours. The primary fault lies in faulting what is not faulty." ¹⁵

In this context, Ahmed bin Muhammad bin Embirick remarks, "I am uncertain whether the value of the Book of Misers lies in its eloquence and straightforwardness of meaning, in the richness of its interpretations, or in its unparalleled precision in depiction, which defies comparison. It vividly portrays the life of Basra and Baghdad during the era of Al-Jahiz." Charles Ball adds, "One would search in vain for a parallel to The Book of Misers in Arabic literature." ¹⁶

Georg Lukács once quoted Heinrich Heine, who astutely observed, "I am amazed by the sentiment of the people. They seek their history through the hands of artists rather than historians." This assertion finds validation in the literary works of Al-Jahiz, who crafted his writings with artistic precision, as well as in the hadiths of Ibn Duraid and the maqamat of Badi' al-Zaman, including the maqamat al-Mudayriyah, maqamat al-Baghdadi, al-Rusafiyya, al-Basriyya, and others. These maqamat featured characters derived from the tapestry of real life, portrayed with authenticity through vivid narratives and dialogues.

Al-Jāhiz's artistic pursuits extended beyond mere depictions of miserly characters in various cities and states, be it in Iraq or Khorasan. He delved deeper into the art of portraying misers, rendering them in eloquent, lifelike detail. The theme of food and consumption dominated a substantial portion of his Book of Misers.

The image of a miser often emerged within the context of eating. Al-Jāhiz recounts, "Abu Nuwas once shared a voyage with us en route to Baghdad, accompanied by a man from Khorasan known for his wisdom and erudition. He dined in solitude, prompting my inquiry: 'Why do you eat alone?' His response was profound: 'My solitude in this matter is not an issue, but the real issue lies in the company. Dining with a group is mere pretence, while eating alone is the essence. Dining with others is an augmentation of the fundamental principle.'" ¹⁷

Al-Jahiz also recounts another incident: "A friend of mine once shared an encounter with me, describing how he entered the home of a certain individual, the son of another certain individual. Upon his arrival, he found the table already set, and the guests had eaten, raising their hands in prayer. My friend extended his hand, ready to partake in the meal. However, the host admonished him, saying, 'Prepare a plate for the injured, but do not touch what's meant for the healthy.' Then he added, 'Look for the chicken that has perished.' My friend managed to procure a portion of it, which had the thigh removed. The pristine portions, he was informed, were strictly off-limits, as were the loaves that had been nibbled upon or moistened by broth."

This same individual shared another anecdote, revealing his peculiar eating habits. He explained, "We once dined with him in the presence of his father, and his father repeatedly attempted to join us at the table, but disagreements arose, causing delays. Throughout this spectacle, the young boy observed us as we began to eat. Annoyed, he turned to us and exclaimed,

'How much longer must you eat? May God withhold sustenance from your stomachs!' In response, his grandfather, who happened to be present, interjected, 'My dear son, I swear by the Lord of the Kaaba!' ¹⁸

Al-Jāhiz, in his portrayal of miserly individuals, extended his scope beyond the confines of Arab society, venturing to depict characters from the region of Khorasan, specifically those hailing from the city of Merv. Al-Jāhiz recounted an intriguing anecdote, stating, "Our associates narrate that Al-Marwazi had a peculiar custom when hosting a guest or accommodating someone for an extended period. He would inquire, 'Did you partake in lunch today?' If the guest replied in the affirmative, Al-Marwazi would remark, 'Had you not already eaten, I would have offered you a sumptuous meal.' However, if the guest admitted to not having eaten, Al-Marwazi's response would be, 'If I had eaten, I would have provided you with five cups, ensuring that neither scarcity nor excess would disrupt the balance in your hands.'" ¹⁹

From the aforementioned examples of Al-Jāhiz's artistic prose writing, one notices a distinct absence of artificiality in his language. He refrained from employing contrived or forced assonance to connect his sentences. Instead, his speech maintained a simplicity closely aligned with the everyday language of the people. This simplicity was instrumental in constructing a linguistic framework that harmonized with the nature of the depicted daily events. Al-Jāhiz presented these events in an accessible language, devoid of unnecessary artifice or embellishment.

Within such prose, we encounter well-defined elements: events, characters, narrative dialogues, familiar settings, specific and open timelines, beginnings, and conclusions. These elements, employed by writers of novels and stories in the modern era, form the foundation of artistic techniques. They are the product of a language that serves as a malleable medium for creating literary genres, standing in equal prominence with poetry. Consequently, Al-Jahiz, along with his contemporaries like Al-Hamdhani, Al-Hariri, and Ibn Duraid in his chronicles, deserves credit for adopting artistic prose language to forge new forms of prose writing. These innovations, including Al-Jahiz's, laid the groundwork for genres such as the maqamāt.

In a notable anecdote, Al-Jāhiz sheds light on the peculiar habits of some misers from Khorasan. He recounts, "Our companions claimed that the Khorasani people gathered in one house, enduring the absence of light with the aid of a lamp for as long as they could bear it. When their patience waned, they sighed and departed, each sharing the cost of the lamp's oil equally. However, one among them refused to contribute or engage in any dispute over the expenses, refusing to pay his share. In response, when they eventually illuminated the lamp, they covered his eyes with a handkerchief. They maintained this gesture until they all fell asleep, and the lamp extinguished itself. Only then would they remove the handkerchief from his eyes." This anecdote illustrates the extent to which frugality and miserliness could manifest in everyday life, a theme that Al-Jāhiz skilfully wove into his prose. ²⁰

Al-Jāhiz eloquently expressed, "Men manifested as men, a repository of knowledge embodied as a pen, a virtuous instructor distilled into thought and conveyed through language, and countless treasures. The flames of deduction were ignited, and the crucible of scrutiny came to

life, causing its inaccuracies to wither away and revealing what proved beneficial to humanity—a resilient alloy whose enduring legacy was firmly established." Indeed, time itself bore witness to Al-Jāhiz's profound impact, marking his "tughra" with distinction.²¹

We are aware of the fact that "The Book of Misers" holds immense scientific significance as it offers profound insights into human psychology, behaviour, and nature. Its pages are filled with a multitude of names, ranging from the widely known to the obscure, along with intricate details about countries, regions, their inhabitants, and a treasure trove of poetry, hadiths, and historical data. This compilation serves as an interdisciplinary encyclopaedia, encompassing a broad spectrum of scientific, literary, societal, geographical, and historical dimensions.

Technical features of *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*:

Kitâb al-Bukhalâ' (The Book of Misers) distinguishes itself from other works through a blend of technical features, a result of the unique fusion of the author's individual spirit and the collective essence that emerges within the narratives. Among these distinctive attributes, the following stand out:

1. **Integration of Humour and Realism:** This fusion plays a pivotal role in mitigating potential monotony within critical social studies. By incorporating humour, the book effectively engages readers with societal realities.
2. **Literary and Artistic Language:** Al-Jāhiz employs a language that not only showcases his profound understanding and extensive knowledge but also highlights his linguistic prowess. This amalgamation of logic and philosophy not only identifies him as the author but also underscores his mastery of the language.
3. **Objective Unity:** Al-Jāhiz skilfully centres his book around the common theme of miserliness, ensuring cohesion in the stories he presents.
4. **Abundance of Words and Clarity of Meaning:** The copious use of words, coupled with clear meanings, aids in reader comprehension, enabling them to grasp Al-Jāhiz's social observations on misers.
5. **Conciseness:** The book delivers various events through succinct, separate stories, preventing reader boredom and distractions.
6. **Alternation Between Dialogue and Narration:** Al-Jahiz adeptly weaves dialogue and narration to exhibit the author's influence on events while simultaneously conveying critical reflections.
7. **Contrast Emphasis:** A hallmark of Al-Jāhiz's style, he masterfully employs contrast to highlight oppositions. This technique effectively showcases the despicable nature of misers by juxtaposing their behaviour with contrasting ideals of Arab generosity.
8. **The "Book of Misers" (*Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*)** not only serves as a repository of social insights but also stands as a testament to Al-Jāhiz's literary ingenuity. Through a blend of humour, clear language, and astute observation, he sheds light on human behaviour and societal dynamics, creating a work of enduring significance.

9. Technical features distinguish the book of misers from others, stemming from the unique combination of the author's individual spirit and the collective essence that coalesces in the storytelling. The foremost among these distinctive attributes are:
10. Integration of Humour and Realism: This fusion plays a pivotal role in alleviating the potential monotony associated with critical social studies. By incorporating humour, the book engages readers more deeply with societal realities.
11. Literary and Artistic Language: Al-Jâhiz employs a language that showcases his profound understanding and extensive knowledge. This amalgamation of logic and philosophy not only identifies him as the author but also underscores his linguistic prowess.
12. Objective Unity: Al-Jâhiz centres his book around the common theme of miserliness, ensuring cohesion in the stories he presents.
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15. Alternation Between Dialogue and Narration: Al-Jâhiz adeptly weaves dialogue and narration to exhibit the author's influence on events while simultaneously conveying critical reflections.
16. Contrast Emphasis: A hallmark of Al-Jâhiz's style, he masterfully employs contrast to highlight oppositions. This technique effectively showcases the despicable nature of misers by juxtaposing their behaviour with contrasting ideals of Arab generosity.

The "Book of Misers" (*Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*) not only serves as a repository of social insights but also stands as a testament to Al-Jâhiz's literary ingenuity, employing a blend of humour, clear language, and astute observation to shed light on human behaviour and societal dynamics.²²

In addition, we are aware of the fact that in reality, the Book *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'* encompasses three fundamental aspects, namely:

1. Clarity in Argumentation: It elucidates the art of presenting arguments with clarity and precision.
2. Proficiency in Subtle Strategies: It imparts knowledge of intricate strategies and clever tactics.
3. Attainment of Extraordinary Feats: It guides one in achieving remarkable and exceptional accomplishments.

It appears from *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'* that the author Al-Jâhiz commences his narrative with the Risâlah Sahl b. Hârûn and concludes it with the Risâlah Abî al-‘Âs b. ‘Abd al-Wahhâb b. ‘Abd al-Majîd al-Thaqafi ila al-Thaqafi.

Here, an attempt has been made to spotlight the literary artistry found in his prose fiction, particularly within the book *Kitâb al-Bukhalâ'*. In this context, an excerpt has been quoted from Qissa Layla al-Nâ‘itiyya as follows:

“The passage discusses *Layla al-Nâ‘itiyya*, a woman associated with the Shi‘a community. She held the belief that the souls of departed individuals could inhabit the living after death. Known for her extreme frugality, she had a peculiar habit of continuously repairing her gown until it consisted entirely of patches, with none of the original fabric remaining. Once, a poet recited a couplet that alluded to her habit of patching her garment, to which she replied with a hint of self-deprecating humour: “Well, in that case, I am indeed quite clumsy or full of holes. I swear by Allah, I've seen a tear within another tear, and I've mended a gap inside another gap.”

This excerpt is taken from the story of *Layla al-Nâ‘itiyya*, a lady renowned for her unique beliefs and frugal lifestyle within the Shi‘a community.²³

The preceding discussion highlights Al-Jâhiz's innate talent for fiction writing, positioning him as a pioneering figure in this regard. He deserves credit as a storyteller who keenly observed the socio-cultural attitudes within the Perso-Arab anthropological landscape. Al-Jâhiz's ability to compose stories not only reflected society but also contributed significantly to the refinement of the Arabic language.

An examination of Al-Jâhiz's storytelling prowess reveals his remarkable success in depicting society, down to the minutiae of Arabic language usage. Subsequent fiction writers in the Arab world often drew inspiration from his literary expressions. Thus, during the Abbasid period, Al-Jâhiz emerged as a precursor and pioneer of prose writing in Arabic literature.

In fact, scholars have offered various perspectives on Al-Jâhiz's work, noting that it predominantly focused on *adab* (literature and etiquette) and social issues, encompassing religious and political elements. Brockelmann, in his analysis of Al-Jâhiz's works, categorized them based on whether they have been printed or edited, spanning a wide range of subjects, including theology, politics, history, anthropology, ethics, professions, animals, languages, geography, anthologies, and polemics. He also mentioned lost works, such as those on games, plants, substances, literary history, and entertainment.

However, some scholars, like Pellat, argue that Al-Jâhiz primarily operated within two main domains: theology and politics, and *adab*. In other words, as Gibb describes it, Al-Jâhiz's work “expanded the scope of Arabic literature to encompass all aspects of contemporary life and remains to this day as masterpieces of Arabic prose.” It is worth noting that while Al-Jâhiz chose his subjects for personal enjoyment, many of his writings had specific, albeit sometimes hidden, objectives.²⁴

Conclusion:

Al-Jâhiz's "*Kitab al-Bukhalâ'*," written for an undisclosed notable figure from the state, offers a captivating exploration of the world of the miser. Focusing on the perilous city of Marv in Khorasan as its backdrop, the book weaves together a tapestry of anecdotes and teachings that both illuminate and critique social realities. Al-Jâhiz's unique artistic style shines through as he masterfully combines humour and seriousness to create a harmonious and engaging narrative. Through vivid descriptions of the miserly characters and their emotional states, he fosters a sense of human empathy without provoking negative feelings. His enthusiasm and distinctive writing

style, characterized by clear and concise expressions, make *Kitab al-Bukhalâ* a delightful and entertaining read that reflects his own personality and inclinations. Ultimately, Al-Jâhiz's work continues to be a testament to his literary prowess and ability to skilfully convey complex ideas through engaging storytelling.

Al-Jâhiz's literary approach draws from multiple sources, foremost being the linguistic traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia and the Islamic era, rooted in the Qur'ân and Sunnah. Additionally, his writings are influenced by the translated literature and philosophies of Persians, Greeks, and Indians, which have been assimilated into Arabic culture.

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