

The Interaction of Literary Genres in Al-Jahiz's *Kitāb al-Bukhalā' (The Book of Misers): A Narratological Approach in Light of Gérard Genette's Theory

Dr. Mebarka Mostefaoui ¹, Dr. Lyamine Lakel ², Dr. Chahrazad Bakour ³

¹ Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Languages, University of Echahid Hamma Lakhdar – El Oued, Algeria.

² Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Si El Haouas University Center – Barika, Algeria.

³ Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts, Ziane Achour University – Djelfa, Algeria.

Email: mostefaoui20172018@gmail.com, Lyamine.lakel@cu-barika.dz, chahrazad.bakour@univ-djelfa.dz

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Abstract

This research paper examines Al-Jahiz's Kitāb al-Bukhalā' (The Book of Misers) through a rereading informed by modern narratology, particularly the theoretical framework developed by Gérard Genette. It seeks to assess the applicability of these analytical tools to a classical Arabic text that has often been classified within the genres of anecdotes and narrative reports.

The study is based on the hypothesis that Al-Jahiz's text is characterized by a complex narrative and discursive structure that transcends the boundaries of a single literary genre, without necessarily requiring its classification within modern literary categories. Accordingly, the central research question is formulated as follows: To what extent can modern critical approaches offer a new reading of a classical text such as Al-Jahiz's The Book of Misers, viewing it as a text that traverses multiple literary genres and moves beyond the traditional distinctions between narrative, maqāmah (literary assembly narrative), tale, and intellectual discourse?

Keywords: Literary genre, reading, interpretation, narrative, miserliness.

Introduction

Modern literary criticism has undergone profound methodological transformations, shifting its focus from the author and the text as an expression of individual creativity towards the study of textual structures and the processes through which texts are read and interpreted. These transformations have been associated with changing conceptions of the nature and function of literary works, as critics have sought to develop more precise analytical tools for understanding literary phenomena. Consequently, critical approaches evolved from methods primarily concerned with the author, such as the historical and psychological approaches, to those focusing on the text itself rather than its author, as exemplified by formalist criticism, and subsequently to approaches emphasizing the reader's role in the production of meaning, as reflected in reception theory.

Amid these developments, increasing attention was devoted to the study of literary genres as theoretical frameworks that facilitate the classification of texts and the identification of their distinctive characteristics. A

literary genre may be defined as a set of conventions and features shared by a group of literary works, such as poetry, the novel, and drama. This concept has been examined across different historical periods, beginning with the ancient Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle, and extending to contemporary critics such as Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette. Genette regarded literary genres as part of the broader literary system, contributing to an understanding of the relationships between different texts and elucidating the ways in which literature develops throughout history. From this perspective, genres are not fixed or immutable categories; rather, they evolve over time through their interaction with cultural and social transformations. Genette also introduced the concept of transtextuality, which emphasizes the openness of the text, its capacity to transcend the confines of a single literary genre, and its connections with other textual forms and genres.¹

Accordingly, the concept of literary genre is closely intertwined with the history of literary criticism, as it reflects the evolution of perspectives on literary texts: from viewing them merely as expressions of their authors to understanding them as open, multifaceted linguistic structures that permit multiple readings. The study of literary genres therefore extends beyond the classification of texts to encompass an examination of the conventions governing their production and reception. In this respect, genre analysis constitutes an essential tool for examining literary discourse and uncovering its internal structures.

Based on the foregoing, we formulate the following hypotheses through which we examine Al-Jahiz's *Al-Bukhalā'* (The Book of Misers) from this perspective:

Al-Jahiz's *The Book of Misers* is not merely a collection of anecdotes or reports, but rather a complex narrative and cultural text.

Al-Jahiz employs narrative and argumentative strategies that transcend the boundaries of any single literary genre.

A cross-generic approach is better suited to explaining the structure of the text and its cultural function than traditional literary classifications.

These hypotheses have led us to formulate the central research question of this study:

To what extent can contemporary critical approaches offer a new reading of a classical text such as Al-Jahiz's *The Book of Misers*, viewing it as a text that transcends literary genres and goes beyond the traditional classifications of narrative, *maqāmah* (literary session narrative), anecdote, and intellectual discourse?

Alternatively, and more precisely, can an analysis of *The Book of Misers* through contemporary critical approaches deconstruct its generic boundaries and reveal its complex discursive structure, which brings together narrative, caricatural representation, and cultural argumentation?

This central research problem gives rise to several subsidiary questions:

How does the phenomenon of generic hybridity manifest itself in Al-Jahiz's *The Book of Misers*?

To what extent are traditional generic classifications, such as anecdotal literature, historical and narrative reports, and *maqāmāt*, adequate for analysing this text?

How do analytical tools such as discourse analysis and contemporary narratology contribute to uncovering the text's cultural function?

Can Al-Jahiz's *The Book of Misers* be regarded as an early model of cross-generic writing that predates its modern theoretical conceptualisation?

These are the questions to which the subsequent sections of this study will seek to provide answers.

1. Gérard Genette's Concepts in Textual Analysis

Gérard Genette introduced and distinguished between several concepts and terminological categories in the course of his study of narrative temporality. He began his discussion of time by distinguishing between three dimensions of narrative reality, namely the story, the narrative act, and the narrative discourse.²

Story: The sequence of events occurring within a particular temporal and spatial framework and involving characters constructed by the narrator's imagination. These events generate reactions and behaviours that fall within the scope of functional analysis.

Narration: The process carried out by the narrator or storyteller, through which the narrative text is produced, encompassing both the verbal articulation of the narrative (discourse) and the story itself.

Narrative discourse or text: The linguistic elements employed by the narrator in presenting and recounting the story within the narrative text.

With regard to his emphasis on the study of time, Genette argues that the analysis of the temporal order of a story consists of "comparing the order in which events or temporal segments are arranged in narrative discourse with the order in which those same events or temporal segments occur in the story."³

Genette's perspective on this aspect can be summarised through the theoretical framework presented in his book *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. By distinguishing between story time and narrative time,* he establishes three principal dimensions for the analysis of temporality: order, duration, and frequency.

A. Order

Genette defines order in terms of "the relationships between the temporal order of the succession of events in the story and the pseudo-temporal order of their arrangement in the narrative."⁴

This definition indicates that the sequence of events in a narrative or literary work does not necessarily correspond to their actual or chronological order. The discrepancy between these two temporal sequences—that of the story and that of the narrative—is referred to as anachrony. This term is used broadly to denote "all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders."⁵

The identification and measurement of such temporal discrepancies implicitly presuppose the existence of a hypothetical zero degree, representing a correspondence between story time and narrative time. This condition, however, is primarily a theoretical construct inferred from the analysis of temporal discrepancies rather than an actual or independently existing narrative situation.⁶

Temporal Anachronies and Duration in Narrative Discourse

These temporal anachronies arise from the manipulation of the temporal order of events. As Gérard Genette explains, "An anachrony may reach back into the past or forward into the future, to a greater or lesser distance from the present moment—that is, from the moment in the story at which the narrative is interrupted to make way for the anachrony. This temporal distance will be referred to as the reach of the anachrony. An anachrony may also cover a narrative duration that is more or less extensive, which will be referred to as its extent."⁷ The reach of an anachrony therefore refers to the temporal distance between the point at which the narrative is interrupted and the beginning of the events recalled or anticipated, whereas its extent measures the amount of narrative material occupied by the retrospective movement across the pages and lines of the literary work.⁸

Accordingly, temporal anachrony comprises two main forms: prolepsis and analepsis.

A. Analepsis or Flashback

Several terms have been used to refer to this narrative procedure. Gérard Genette defines analepsis as "any evocation, after the fact, of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story at which the narrative has arrived."⁹ Other scholars use the term retrospection, defining it as "the subsequent narration of an event that occurred before the moment reached by the story."¹⁰ Genette classifies analepsis into three types:

- External analepsis: This refers to "an analepsis whose entire extent remains outside the extent of the first narrative. External analepses never risk overlapping with the first narrative, since their sole function is to supplement the first narrative by informing the reader about this or that antecedent."¹¹ In this type, the reach

of the analepsis extends to a period outside the temporal boundaries of the primary story as established before the narrative interruption that introduces the analepsis.

- Internal analepsis: This type “recalls events that occurred within the temporal framework of the story, that is, after its beginning, and constitutes the opposite of external analepsis.”¹² This form may give rise to problems of overlap between narrative sequences. Genette further distinguishes between complete and repetitive analepses, as well as between partial and complete forms¹³

- Mixed analepsis: This refers to analepses “whose point of reach precedes the beginning of the first narrative, while their point of extent extends beyond it ... This category is rarely employed and is also characterized by a particular feature of its extent, since it consists of external analepses that continue until they join the starting point of the first narrative and extend beyond it.”¹⁴ This type is characterized by its combination of external and internal temporal dimensions, as the retrospective movement begins before the primary narrative and continues into its temporal framework.

B. Prolepsis or Flashforward

Prolepsis is the opposite of analepsis and refers to “the narration or prior mention of a later event.”¹⁵ Genette similarly distinguishes between three types of prolepsis:¹⁶

- External prolepsis: Its extent lies outside the temporal boundaries of the primary narrative. According to Genette, this type generally serves a concluding function, as it can help bring the literary work towards its logical ending.

External prolepsis: Its extent lies outside the temporal boundaries of the primary narrative. According to Genette, this type generally serves a concluding function, as it can help bring the literary work towards its logical ending.

- Internal prolepsis: Its extent falls within the temporal boundaries of the primary narrative. Genette argues that this type of prolepsis “raises the same problem as analepses of the same type, namely, the problem of overlap and the possible interaction between the first narrative and the narrative undertaken by the proleptic passage.”¹⁷

- Mixed prolepsis: Its extent extends across both the interior and exterior boundaries of the temporal framework of the primary narrative.

V. Duration or Narrative Time

Duration constitutes the second major dimension of temporal variation in narrative discourse. It is manifested through the relationship between the time of the story, measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years, and the length of the narrative text, measured in lines, pages, paragraphs, and sentences.¹⁸ The narrator may recount events that extend over a long period in only a few lines, or devote several pages to an event that took place within an hour or even a fraction of an hour. The former produces a sense of narrative speed, whereas the latter creates an effect of narrative slowness.

Genette defines duration in terms of the comparison between “the duration of a narrative and the duration of the story it recounts.” He considers this comparison more difficult, primarily because “no one can measure the duration of a narrative, and what is automatically referred to by this term can be nothing other than the time required to read it.”¹⁹

Although measuring the exact duration of a narrative, and determining its temporal extent, is difficult and perhaps impossible, observing its temporal rhythm remains both possible and accessible. This is due to the differences and variations among narrative sequences, which create in readers and recipients a general impression of acceleration or deceleration in the passage of narrative time.²⁰

As a result, Gérard Genette proposed two levels for studying duration: narrative acceleration and narrative deceleration.

1. Narrative Acceleration

Narrative acceleration refers to “a contraction of story time in relation to the corresponding narrative time, whereby actual time is condensed into a phrase, a sentence, or an indication suggesting that a certain period has elapsed and been left behind” ²¹

Narrative acceleration is therefore based on condensing an event and referring to it in a general or summary form, thus allowing it to occupy less narrative space than the time it takes up in the story. To achieve this effect, Gérard Genette identified two techniques: ellipsis and summary.

- Ellipsis

Also referred to as omission, deletion, or suppression*, ellipsis represents the portion of story time omitted from the narrative text ²²In this case, discourse time is suspended while story time continues to advance. Ellipsis is often indicated through temporal expressions such as “a week later” or “years passed.” According to Genette, ellipsis can be divided into three categories:

- Explicit ellipsis: This type of ellipsis is clearly indicated in the text through “an explicit statement of the omitted period of time, whether this statement appears at the beginning of the ellipsis, as is common in ordinary usage, or whether the reference to that period is postponed until the narrative resumes its course” ²³Explicit ellipsis can be achieved in two ways: either through an explicit indication of the duration omitted, “which corresponds to very brief summaries such as: ‘A few years went by’” ²⁴or through an absolute ellipsis, which Genette describes as “degree zero in ellipsis” ²⁵

- Implicit ellipsis: In this category, the omission is not explicitly indicated in the text. Rather, the reader infers its existence from a disruption in chronological continuity. This is what Genette means when he refers to “those ellipses whose existence is not explicitly stated in the text itself, but which the reader may infer from a gap in the chronological sequence or a disruption in narrative continuity” ²⁶

- Hypothetical ellipsis: This refers to an omission “whose position in the story cannot be precisely determined, although it may be brought to the reader’s attention retrospectively” ²⁷This type of ellipsis is not supported by explicit textual clues; instead, it is inferred from an interruption in temporal continuity.

- Summary

Also referred to as overview by some researchers, summary consists of narrating events and occurrences that are presumed to have taken place over several years, months, or hours, while condensing them into a few pages, lines, or words without presenting their details ²⁸In this technique, the narrative space allocated to the events is relatively limited, as it provides a condensed account of occurrences that extend over a longer period of story time.

2. Narrative Deceleration

Narrative deceleration is the inverse of narrative acceleration. According to Genette, it relies on two techniques: scene and pause.

- Pause

In a narrative pause, story time comes to a standstill while discourse time continues. It is defined as “the interruption of the course of events for a semantic purpose, namely, to heighten suspense” ²⁹This technique is commonly realized through description, which generally interrupts the chronological progression of events and suspends their movement. Such an interruption creates space for the construction of the narrative setting or the delineation of the characters’ features ³⁰

- Scene

A scene is “a technique in which story time and discourse time coincide, achieved by the narrator’s withdrawal and the opening up of narrative space for the characters to engage in direct dialogue” ³¹In this case, story time and discourse time are equal, as the duration of the narrated events corresponds

approximately to the time devoted to their narration.

3. Frequency

Frequency refers to the set of “relations of repetition between narrative and story. An event is not merely capable of occurring once; it may also occur again or be repeated”³² According to Genette, there are four types of frequency relations³³:

- Singulative narrative: This occurs when an event that takes place once in the story is narrated once in the narrative discourse. This type of frequency relation is the most commonly used in narrative texts and constitutes one of the principal techniques through which events are conveyed.
- Multiple singulative narrative: This refers to narrating more than once an event that has occurred more than once in the story. It is a form of singulative narration in which the repetitions in the narrative correspond to the repeated occurrences of the event in the story.
- Repeating narrative: Also known as repetitive narration, this occurs when an event that has taken place only once in the story is narrated more than once in the narrative discourse.

1. The Book of Misers and the Question of Literary Genre

Modern literary and critical studies of classical Arabic works have encountered difficulties arising from disagreements over their generic classification. This is largely because the concept of literary genres has Western origins, and Arab scholars have attempted to apply it to the classical Arabic heritage. This raises the question: how have scholars classified *The Book of Misers*?

Researchers have disagreed over the literary genre to which al-Jahiz’s *The Book of Misers* (*Kitab al-Bukhala’*) belongs. Reading a classical text from a modern critical perspective requires identifying the genre to which it belongs. A text cannot be read as an isolated and independent entity; rather, it is connected to and shares similarities with other texts in terms of narrative techniques and compositional methods. Among the studies that have sought to classify *The Book of Misers* are the following:

Saleh Ben Ramadan’s reading: Ben Ramadan considers the book a work containing a variety of textual forms, including “the brief, witty anecdote that does not attain the level of a fully developed comic tale; the structurally complete anecdote that employs correspondence as a narrative element; the anecdote that contains no letter; the independent epistle, such as the letter of Sahl ibn Harun, which al-Jahiz included as a documentary account of the sayings of misers; descriptive passages portraying certain marginal social types, such as different categories of beggars; and passages discussing various kinds of food.”³⁴

Accordingly, Ben Ramadan argues that *The Book of Misers* encompasses several literary forms, including brief witty anecdotes, descriptive passages, and discursive accounts, in addition to other established forms such as anecdotes and epistles. This interpretation is based on a genre-oriented criterion, whereby the text is classified according to the different literary forms represented within it.

Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ambirik’s classification: Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ambirik classifies *The Book of Misers* on the basis of al-Jahiz’s own introductory statement, in which the author declares: “As for what you have asked me to provide concerning the arguments of the stingy, the anecdotes and accounts of misers, I shall present these to you, God willing, dispersed throughout their stories and summarized in their arguments.”³⁵

In this statement, al-Jahiz employs two terms: stories and arguments. Drawing on this distinction, Ambirik divides the texts contained in *The Book of Misers* into two broad categories: argumentative texts and narratives. He also points to the considerable overlap between these categories, noting that no text necessarily belongs exclusively to one category.

First: Argumentative texts

Argumentative texts account for more than half of the book. They take the form of letters, admonitions, and lengthy responses, featuring well-known misers such as Sahl ibn Harun, al-Kindi, al-Thawri, Ibn al-Taw'am, and others. These texts are characterized by prolixity and the extensive use of rhetorical and stylistic devices, as well as various techniques intended to influence and persuade the recipient. Such techniques include exaggeration, hyperbole, misleading argumentation, and the construction of hypothetical possibilities.³⁶

Second: Narratives

Ambirik further divides the narrative material into three categories:

Long or short narrative collections, such as the stories concerning the mosque-goers.

Witty anecdotes, including anecdotes about the people of Khurasan and miscellaneous anecdotes.

Independent stories attributed to their protagonists in their titles, such as the story of Layla al-Na'itiyya and the story of al-Asma'i, among others.³⁷

Muhammad al-Mubarak's perspective: In his book *The Art of Storytelling* in al-Jahiz's *The Book of Misers*, Muhammad al-Mubarak considers the work a representative example of what he calls "the literature of human dispositions." This classification stems from the book's exclusive focus on miserliness in its various dimensions and manifestations, whether psychological or material, with particular emphasis on the psychological characteristics of misers.³⁸

The classification of the book as a collection of anecdotes: Another group of scholars regards *The Book of Misers* primarily as a work devoted to anecdotes and has attempted to classify the anecdotes it contains. However, their approaches reveal disagreements concerning the generic status of the anecdote. Some scholars consider it a humorous narrative form that may fall within the broader genre of *khabar* (report or account), while others regard it as an independent genre in its own right. Other critical readings, however, suggest that what these scholars designate as anecdotes should instead be classified as *khabar*, as in the approach adopted by Muhammad al-Qadi.³⁹

The genre of *khabar* itself has been the subject of differing interpretations among scholars. One example is Shukri Ayyad, who refers to it as an art form without providing a precise definition. He states:

"...As for us, we are discussing a literary genre whose development we cannot precisely trace, because it has never been subjected to an in-depth study. Nevertheless, we know that it accompanied our ancient Arab civilization from its earliest beginnings, developed alongside the increasing complexity of that civilization, and yet retained its original, spontaneous form."⁴⁰

Muhammad al-Qadi, in his book devoted to the study of *khabar*, defines it as "an independent narrative unit."⁴¹ It is founded on the dual process of seeking information and conveying it. Accordingly, *khabar* may be understood as a simple report in which the narrator's role is limited to attributing the transmitted account to the person who originally uttered it.⁴²

The Genre Classification of The Book of Misers and the Manifestations of Generic Transgression

Al-Qadi uses the term *khabar* (report or narrative account) here to refer to a set of events and characters that constitute the fundamental material and the basis upon which narrative texts are formed. It is thus the basic unit that contributes to the construction of a more complex unit.⁴³

Following an extensive investigation, he concluded that classifying the *khabar* as a literary genre is a difficult task. The reason for this difficulty is that "on the one hand, it encompasses several genres within its structure; therefore, the most accurate approach would be to consider it a form. On the other hand, it did not develop exclusively within the domain of literature; rather, it was shared with other fields of knowledge, the most important of which is perhaps history."⁴⁴

Dr. Saïd Yaqtin also discussed the khabar in his classification of Arabic discourse into three categories: hadith (discourse or narration), khabar (report), and poetry. He considered the act of reporting to be an “accomplishment” of discourse concerning something that has occurred. The narrator reports something in order to inform the addressee of what has happened. In this context, the relationship between the informant, the act of reporting, and the addressee is generally characterized by separation, since communication takes place across distances that differ in their characteristics and dimensions.⁴⁵

Accordingly, Yaqtin considers the khabar to be a form or genre encompassing a variety of subordinate types, namely the khabar, the hikaya (tale), the qissa (story), and the sira (biographical narrative), in that order. The relationship among these types is one of accumulation at the levels of events and characters. The khabar constitutes the smallest narrative unit, while the accumulation and connection of several reports form a hikaya. A qissa emerges from the accumulation of several tales, whereas biographical narratives (siyar) are formed through the accumulation of several stories⁴⁶

The same classification of *The Book of Misers* is found in Ali Obeid’s work, where he states:

“Thus, we can discern that, although al-Jahiz’s text falls within the category of literary khabar, which flourished in the third century AH and whose artistic characteristics it incorporates, it also encompasses another emerging genre, namely the nadirah (anecdote). This genre exhibits several distinctive features, the most prominent of which are the explicit establishment of a context for amusement, the principles governing naming and language, adherence to the law of correspondence, the use of conciseness and humour, as well as irony and satire. Perhaps this interplay and tension between the khabar and the nadirah further supports the argument that literary genres interact with one another within literary texts, particularly those belonging to the classical tradition.”⁴⁷

Muhammad Meshbal is another proponent of this position. He considers the book to belong to the genre of the nadirah, despite the diversity of the terms used to designate its constituent narratives. He argues that “assuming the existence of qualitative differences among the various labels al-Jahiz assigned to his narratives should not diminish our conviction that they must be incorporated within a unified framework, namely that of the nadirah, the designation most widely used and most representative of the identity of al-Jahiz’s humorous tales.”⁴⁸

Researchers have adopted different criteria for classifying the nadirah, resulting in a variety of taxonomic approaches. Examples of this diversity can be found in the works of Fadwa Malti-Douglas,⁴⁹ Mahmoud Al-Masfar,⁵⁰ Abdelfattah Kilito,⁵¹ and other scholars interested in the classification of the anecdote as a literary genre

Al-Jahiz himself addressed this issue in his book, stating in the introduction that he had adopted an approach combining seriousness and humour in his treatment of the phenomenon of miserliness. Through his various stories, he sought to portray Abbasid society in all its cultural, social, and political dimensions. He writes:

“You will find three things in this book: the discovery of a witty argument, the learning of a clever stratagem, or the enjoyment of a remarkable anecdote. You may laugh at it whenever you wish and find amusement in it whenever you grow weary of seriousness.”⁵²

This statement does not merely point to the combination of seriousness and humour; it also seeks to highlight the narrative forms or types that constitute the book. These can be classified into three categories:

- Letters (Rasa’il): This category is based on presenting witty arguments advanced by both parties: those who condemn miserliness and those who defend it. Such texts are distinguished by their length, as exemplified by the letter of Sahl ibn Harun.

- Humorous Episodes (Turf): These consist of amusing stratagems employed by misers as a means of achieving their objectives. They are generally characterized by their brevity, as illustrated by the humorous episodes concerning the people of Khurasan.

- Anecdotes (Nawadir): This form highlights the peculiar characteristics and unusual behaviours of misers. These narratives are also relatively short, as exemplified by the story of the mosque-goers of Basra.

A researcher attempting to classify al-Jahiz's *The Book of Misers* therefore encounters a wide range of terms used within the book itself, including *mulah* (witty remarks), *nawadir* (anecdotes), *qisas* (stories), *turf* (humorous episodes), and *ahadith* (narrative accounts). These terms must also be considered in relation to their counterparts in modern literary studies, particularly the concept of short narrative, which is characterized by its entertaining and purposeful humour, intended to amuse the reader.⁵³ This diversity of narrative forms encourages us to situate *The Book of Misers* within the broader category of satirical literature.

1. Manifestations of Genre Transgression in *The Book of Misers*

This section seeks to analyse a selected example from *The Book of Misers*, approaching it not merely as a tale but as an integrated discursive structure. The aim is to demonstrate the text's interweaving with, and expansion across, various literary genres, thereby highlighting its transgression of generic boundaries through an examination of several key aspects.

- Narration: The construction of the tale and the chronological sequence of events.
- Dialogue: Rational argumentation used to justify miserliness.
- Caricatural description: Exaggerated imagery bordering on satire.
- Intellectual discourse: A discussion of concepts such as reason, reflection, and economy.

These elements will undoubtedly demonstrate that *Al-Bukhalā'* (*The Misers*) does not conform to a single literary genre, but rather moves between a combination of forms, including the anecdote, the short story, the intellectual essay, and social satire, among others.

The choice fell upon the section entitled "The People of Khurasan" from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Al-Bukhalā'*, as it comprises a collection of diverse anecdotes that the author assembled under this heading.

Through these anecdotes, al-Jāḥiẓ seeks to highlight the miserliness generally associated with the people of Khurasan, particularly the inhabitants of Merv, portraying stinginess as an ingrained characteristic among them. His presentation of these anecdotes is distinguished by occasional digressions* and by the incorporation of stories that do not directly concern the people of Khurasan. One example is the account narrated by 'Umar ibn Nuḥaywī about al-Kindī:

"'Umar ibn Nuḥaywī told me: One day, I went to have lunch at al-Kindī's house, when a man entered upon him [...] This account does not concern the people of Merv, but it belongs to the same category as the preceding account."⁵⁴

Al-Jāḥiẓ begins his anecdotes by passing an initial judgment on the miserliness attributed to the people of Khurasan and Merv. This preliminary judgment constitutes a proposition that he subsequently seeks to substantiate through his anecdotes. He states: "We shall begin with the people of Khurasan, because people have spoken extensively about them, and we shall focus particularly on the people of Merv, in proportion to the particular attention they have received."⁵⁵

It may therefore be argued that these anecdotes are presented by al-Jāḥiẓ to his intended readers with the aim of persuading them of his judgment concerning the miserliness of the people of Khurasan, and especially those of Merv, which he depicts as a deeply rooted trait among them. Furthermore, these anecdotes prepare the readers to encounter unusual events in the stories that follow and to recognize the extent of the miserliness attributed to these communities.

The section entitled “The People of Khurasan” is characterized by the diversity of its characters, whose identities vary according to the anecdotes in which they appear. We shall therefore select and analyze several examples from among the twenty-four anecdotes included in this section

The Story of al-Thawrī

Al-Jāḥiẓ included the story of Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Thawrī in *Al-Bukhalā’*. The story comprises several different episodes involving this character. What distinguishes al-Thawrī is that he is portrayed as a prosperous man who does not suffer from poverty. He is also known for his familiarity with Islamic religious culture, as he attends the gatherings of religious reformers in the mosque.

This characterization is provided by the narrator, al-Khalīl al-Salūlī, in the narrative introduction to the story, where he states:

“One day, al-Thawrī came to see me. He owned five hundred jarībs of land extending from the site known as Kursī al-Ṣadaqah to the Nahr Murrah canal. He purchased only the finest properties, selecting land renowned for the fertility of its soil, the excellence of its location, and the abundance of its produce.”⁵⁶

The narrative subsequently unfolds through a series of episodes in which al-Thawrī is the central character. These may be summarized under three main categories:

The different forms of anecdote in the story of al-Thawrī

Miserliness toward family members and children.

Miserliness toward oneself.

Miserliness as a doctrine that one advocates and passes on to others.

Following the narrative introduction, in which al-Thawrī’s character, personal qualities, and moral disposition are presented through the technique of description, the narrator moves directly to an anecdote concerning his conduct toward his family.

This episode is characterized by al-Thawrī’s insistence that his family make use of every part of their food. He specifically refers to date pits, fresh dates, and broad-bean pod skins, supporting his position with numerous arguments intended to reinforce his claims and leave little room for doubt in the minds of his audience. He maintains that such practices are beneficial to physical health and contribute to financial savings. He also anticipates the possibility that his family, or readers more generally, might regard this behavior as resembling that of a camel, and therefore offers additional arguments to defend his position.

All these events are conveyed in the following passage:

“He used to say to his family: ‘Do not throw away the pits of dates, whether dried or fresh; accustom yourselves to swallowing them, and train your throats to let them pass down easily. The pits consolidate the fat in the abdomen and warm the kidneys [...] Why, then, should you become food for your own food, and nourishment for that which has been made nourishment for you?’”⁵⁷

Perhaps this story may be considered acceptable if the arguments put forward are taken into account, although it undoubtedly represents a form of miserliness. What no reasonable person, however, could accept is the account of the miser’s delight and happiness at saving a single measure of food after he, his children, and his servant had fallen ill and suffered from fever. He had actually wished for such an occurrence so that he could save the flour and sell it to make some money. This is an exaggerated form of miserliness that has gone beyond all limits. How could a father wish for his children to become ill merely to save money? This story reveals an extreme degree of greed, avarice, and miserliness that a human being may exhibit. In these two stories, al-Thawri embodies the first type of miserliness: being miserly towards one’s family and children.

The second type of miserliness in al-Thawri’s character is manifested in his account of being miserly towards himself. One example is his discussion of clothing and how it can be preserved for as long as

possible, an act he considers a form of proper conduct that ought to be observed.

The second type of miserliness in al-Thawri's character is manifested in his account of being miserly towards himself. One example is his discussion of clothing and how it can be preserved for as long as possible, an act he considers a form of proper conduct that ought to be observed. He advocates repairing worn-out shoes by patching their soles and shortening garments so that passers-by do not step on them and tear them. Such practices are particularly associated with the clothing worn by ascetics. He further insists that it is a sign of righteousness to turn a skullcap inside out when it becomes dirty and to wash it once both sides have become soiled. He also recommends keeping one's summer shirt rather than discarding it, transforming it into a jubbah (a loose outer garment) for winter. Elsewhere, he discusses the importance of the donkey in his life and the extent to which its use enables him to save money by employing it for various daily tasks. He travels on its back and uses it to grind grain, thereby saving a considerable amount of money.

All these ideas are expressed in the following statement: "He said: The first step towards putting things in order—and this is an obligation—is to patch one's shoes, use good-quality soles, and grease them regularly throughout the days ... All these things involve expenses which, when combined, would amount to a considerable sum over the course of a year."⁵⁸

Al-Thawri then moves on to discuss his purchase of a large piece of cloth and how he managed to derive numerous benefits from it. Indeed, he used it as both a cloak and a wrap, making the most of his investment by cutting it into several different pieces. He first used part of it to make a jubbah, then fashioned cushions from the remaining material, and used its cotton stuffing for lamps. He also sold the pieces that remained intact. In this way, the cloth served multiple purposes and enabled him to meet various needs. His behaviour reveals a form of miserliness directed towards himself: rather than purchasing the items he needed, he manufactured them from the same piece of cloth. He made a cloak and a jubbah from it and did not discard the remnants, but instead put them to other uses. Thus, he achieved what appeared outwardly to be thrift and economy, while its underlying motivation was miserliness.

The narrator recounts other episodes that point to a third type of miserliness in the story of al-Thawri: miserliness as a philosophy of life. This is further confirmed by his attitudes and the advice he gives his son. One example is his reaction to the advice offered by one of the wealthy men during a gathering at the mosque. The man recommended taking precautions in all matters, striving for the everlasting Hereafter, and renouncing the transient pleasures of worldly life. Al-Thawri found little merit in these recommendations, approving only the final one, which he interpreted as an encouragement to reduce food consumption. He claimed that he had understood none of the man's statements except that particular piece of advice. Al-Jahiz relates the incident as follows:

"Al-Khalil said: Al-Thawri sat in a gathering of reform-minded men at the mosque and heard one of their wealthy members say: 'Make everything well-lined, for this makes it more durable. God has made the abode of the Hereafter everlasting and the abode of this world transient ...' Al-Thawri then said to him: 'Of everything you have said, I have understood only this one statement.'"⁵⁹

After digressing to recount the events involving al-Thawri, his family, and his miserliness towards himself, the narrator returns to an account of al-Thawri's philosophy and his habitual stinginess. He begins by describing al-Thawri in a manner that emphasises how he had adopted miserliness as a doctrine that he actively promoted during his gatherings, despite his wealth and financial prosperity. Miserly individuals would gather around him to learn from his teachings, for he was regarded as one of the leading authorities on the subject. Al-Jahiz emphasises this point in the following passage:

"I saw him and heard him speak at length about miserliness. He was one of the people of Basra and resided in Baghdad, at the Mosque of Ibn Raghanban. I have never seen a wealthy shaykh around whom so

many misers gathered and to whom so many of them turned for guidance ... Nor do I know of anyone who devoted an entire book to this subject except Sahl ibn Harun, who was ...”⁶⁰

Having established al-Thawri’s philosophy of miserliness, the narrator proceeds to recount the advice he gave his son, urging him to adhere to this doctrine and refrain from spending money. According to al-Thawri, spending even a small amount inevitably leads to greater expenditure. He therefore warns his son against spending a single dirham inappropriately, arguing that doing so will bring him anxiety and bring him closer to Hell. He states:

“My son, spending qararit (small fractions of a dirham) opens the doors to spending dawaniq (small monetary units), and spending dawaniq opens the doors to spending dirhams ... Ill-gotten earnings undermine one’s moral integrity, destroy one’s sense of honour, make one liable to punishment under the law, and lead one into Hell.”⁶¹

His interpretation of the dirham is derived from the teachings of ‘Abd al-A‘la al-Qass. Al-Jahiz digresses at this point, quoting and introducing al-Qass before referring to the statements of several Qur’anic exegetes. He then returns to al-Thawri’s account, beginning with his relationship with animal heads, which reveals yet another aspect of his miserliness towards himself. Al-Thawri would eat meat only on the day of Eid al-Adha, from the remainder of his sacrificial animal, or on occasions such as banquets and weddings. He assigned alternative names to the head, calling it al-jami‘ (the comprehensive one) or al-kamil (the complete one). He then describes its various parts, the benefits of eating them, and their particular merits, presenting arguments and evidence to support his claims. Al-Jahiz writes:

“Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman was fond of animal heads, praised them, and described their merits. He would eat meat only on the day of Eid al-Adha or from the remainder of the sacrificial animal ... When he had finished with it, he would throw it into the firewood to be used as fuel for burning the rest of the wood.”

Following this extensive discussion of the virtues and merits of eating head meat, al-Jahiz returns to recount al-Thawri’s advice to his son. On this occasion, he focuses on the meal devoted to sheep’s heads, instructing his son to eat head meat when invited to such gatherings, even if he has eaten meat recently, while warning him against consuming it in excessive quantities because of its harmful effects on the body. He also emphasizes the importance of observing proper table manners, supporting his advice with arguments drawn from traditional wisdom. He states: “Whenever the day of the heads arrived, he would seat his son beside him at the dining table, but only after imposing a lengthy set of conditions and explaining precisely what he expected of him... One of the ancients said: ‘The two red things that destroy men are meat and wine, while the two red things that destroy women are gold and saffron.’”⁶²

He then proceeds to offer his son another piece of advice: he must not surrender to the desires of the self but should instead struggle against them. He urges him to avoid excessive eating and to exercise sound judgment in regulating his appetite. To substantiate his counsel, he draws upon religious references and Arabic poetry, stating: “My son, train yourself to put others first and to struggle against your whims and desires. Do not devour food as serpents do, nor gulp it down as horses do... Al-A‘sha said: ‘Gluttony is among the things that impair sound judgment.’”⁶³

Al-Thawri continues his dietary instructions, urging his son not to eat excessively. Overeating, he explains, leads to illness, which may ultimately result in death. Anyone who dies because of greed for food and excessive indulgence in eating has, in effect, brought about his own death, whereas God forbids the taking of human life. This entire argument is expressed in the following statement: “Know that satiety leads to indigestion, indigestion leads to illness, and illness leads to death. Whoever dies in this manner has died a despicable death... If one of us were to kill another, this would constitute an interpretation of the verse.”⁶⁴

He continues to elaborate on his position, warning his son of the consequences of excessive eating and overindulgence. In doing so, he introduces the views of medical practitioners, rejecting the prevailing Arab proverb, “A meal and death,” in favor of the medical maxim, “One meal may prevent many others.” He reinforces his position with arguments drawn from the Arab intellectual heritage and the Prophetic tradition. This is evident in his statement: “My son, both the killer and the one who is killed are in the Fire. If you were to consult the most skilled physicians, they would tell you that most of those who lie in the graves died from overeating... My son, one weighed down by excessive fullness has not properly fulfilled the obligation of bowing, nor has one who is bloated performed the prescribed prostration with due devotion. One whose belly is full has not truly humbled himself before God. Fasting promotes health, and eating at regular intervals is the way of life of the righteous.”⁶⁵

He subsequently emphasizes the benefits of reducing food consumption, illustrating how moderation helps preserve bodily health, prolong life, and promote well-being. He cites examples from among the Indians, the Bedouin Arabs, and even animals, encouraging his son to follow their example and supporting his argument with a Prophetic hadith. He then concludes by highlighting the personal benefits he himself has derived from this practice: despite reaching the age of ninety and becoming an elderly man, he has never suffered from illness, which he attributes to his restrained eating habits. Thus, anyone who wishes to prolong life must adhere to moderation in food consumption. As he explains: “He then said: ‘This is why the Indians have lived long lives and the Bedouin Arabs have enjoyed healthy bodies. How excellent was al-Harith ibn Kalada, who maintained that the remedy lies in eating sparingly... If you love life, this is the path to life; but if you love death, may God distance Himself from no one except the wrongdoer.’”⁶⁶

All these admonitions are delivered to his son during a meal of sheep’s heads. Al-Jahiz then returns to emphasize the doctrine of miserliness that characterizes al-Thawri, as manifested in his particular methods of purchasing these heads. He buys young animals’ heads because they contain more meat, and he prefers sheep’s heads to goats’ heads because they are fattier, meatier, and less expensive. Moreover, he purchases heads exclusively on Saturdays, when they are more readily available and cheaper. This is because slaughtering increases on Fridays, whereas purchases decline on Saturdays, as people tend to leave an interval between eating meat and consuming the head. He also prefers buying heads during the summer, when their prices fall because people generally consume less of them.

The elaborate discussion of al-Thawri’s purchasing habits provides further evidence of how deeply the doctrine of miserliness governs his daily life. Al-Jahiz states: “He would not buy a head except during the latter part of the month, because the brain would then be larger, and he would purchase only the head of a young animal because of the abundance of brain matter... He used to say: ‘If I eat it after I am already full, I cannot be certain that it will not bring about my ruin; and if I leave it for them in the summer, without their knowing the reason, they will ask me for it in the winter.’”⁶⁷ In this way, al-Thawri achieves his objective: transmitting his doctrine of miserliness to his son, ensuring its continuation across generations, and propagating it further.

Al-Jahiz’s literary genius in *The Anecdotes of the People of Khurasan* becomes particularly evident in his subversion of the conventions of a single literary genre. The text moves beyond the narrow confines of the anecdote and expands into the broader domain of the philosophical essay. This transition begins with the titles “The Miserliness of the People of Merv” and “Anecdotes of the People of Khurasan,” which initially direct the reader’s expectations toward the genre of historical narrative. Yet the text soon moves beyond parody and satirical imitation, characteristic of humorous literature, to incorporate quotations from the Qur’an and Prophetic hadiths through intertextuality. By employing analogical reasoning and deductive inference, al-Jahiz demonstrates how religious and intellectual authorities can be appropriated and reinterpreted to

rationalize miserliness. Through this strategy, he exposes the contradictions inherent in al-Thawri's attempts to present stinginess not merely as a personal disposition but as a practice supported by religious, medical, and moral arguments.

Amid this discussion, al-Jahiz intervenes to comment on the eloquence and strength of his misers' arguments, thereby transforming the story from narrative storytelling into metalinguistic and descriptive criticism.

This interweaving and overlapping of genres—anecdote, jurisprudence, criticism, and exegesis—endows the text with the characteristics of a hybrid text, a composite text, or a transgeneric text. In this context, miserliness becomes a field of intellectual inquiry that transcends the function of eliciting laughter to undertake a linguistic, cultural, and anthropological examination of human nature.

The Story of al-Kindi

The story of al-Kindi is distinguished by al-Jahiz's use of digression as a narrative technique. He incorporates five anecdotes involving different events, which collectively illustrate al-Kindi's miserliness. The following is an analytical reading of these anecdotes:

The First Anecdote: This is represented by the opening passage in which the narrator, 'Amr ibn Nuhaywi, begins his account of al-Kindi, stating:

"Al-Kindi would constantly say to his tenant, and sometimes to his neighbour [...] Al-Kindi would tell his family: 'You are better off than the owners of these estates, for each of their households has only one kind of food, whereas you have several kinds.'"⁶⁸

The events depicted in this anecdote reveal al-Kindi's greed. He would ask his neighbour or tenant to send him some of his food, claiming that his wife was experiencing pregnancy cravings. He would further suggest that the neighbour might be held liable for compensation if she miscarried as a result of his refusal to provide the requested food. This argument placed the neighbour under pressure to comply, compelling him to share his food with al-Kindi, either because he was deceived by the latter's trickery or because he deliberately overlooked its manipulative nature. In this way, al-Kindi ultimately achieved his objective.

The Second Anecdote: The events of this anecdote are recounted in the following passage:

"One day, while I was having lunch at his house, a neighbour of his entered. The neighbour was a friend of mine [...] He left him without eating, for had he eaten, he would have been accused of disbelief, as though he had associated something with God."⁶⁹

This anecdote illustrates al-Kindi's miserliness and his failure to honour his guest by inviting him to share a meal, as required by established conventions of hospitality. Nor did he merely refrain from offering the guest food; he also closed off every possibility of accepting the offer when 'Amr ibn Nuhaywi suggested that they share their meal with him. Through this episode, al-Jahiz depicts the connection between al-Kindi as the subject and miserliness as the defining value governing his behaviour, manifested in his refusal to share food with his neighbour.

The Third Anecdote: This anecdote appears in the following passage:

"One day, while I was at his house, I heard the sound of a jar falling in the adjoining house. He shouted: 'O Qassaf!' She replied: 'It was the well, I swear by your life!' The servant girl proved more intelligent in her quick thinking than he was in his investigation."⁷⁰

This episode reveals the extent of al-Kindi's miserliness, as well as his persistent scrutiny and the fact that everyone was familiar with his behaviour. The servant girl employed her alertness and intelligence to extricate herself from the situation and avoid the consequences that al-Kindi's miserliness might entail if he discovered that the jar had fallen inside the house. By attributing the sound to the well, she succeeded in diverting his attention and escaping his scrutiny. Thus, through her resourcefulness and cunning, the servant

girl managed to protect herself from al-Kindi and his miserly disposition.

The Fourth Anecdote: In this episode, the tenant does not act as the servant girl did and consequently finds himself in an unfortunate predicament, confronting al-Kindi's miserliness and its consequences. The events unfold through a dialogue between Ma'bad and al-Kindi, as illustrated in the following passage:

"We stayed in al-Kindi's house for more than a year, promoting his rental business, attending to his needs, and fulfilling our contractual obligations [...] Ma'bad said: While matters stood thus, my cousin arrived with his son. A letter from al-Kindi reached me, stating: 'If these two newcomers stay for one or two nights, we can accommodate them. However, allowing tenants to remain for a single night may encourage them to seek permission for many more nights.' I wrote back to him: 'They will be staying with us for no less than a month or so' [...] You are asking me to account for the hatred of the Mu'tazilites towards the Shi'ites, the antagonism between the people of Kufa and Basra, the hostility between Asad and Kinda, and the resentment a tenant feels towards his landlord. May God help you. Farewell."⁷¹

The opening of this anecdote consists of a conversation between al-Nuhaywi and Ma'bad concerning the latter's residence in al-Kindi's house, as well as his assistance in renting out the property. The narrative also highlights the numerous demands and conditions imposed by al-Kindi, which essentially stem from his greed towards his tenants and his unwillingness to extend any generosity to them. The tenants nevertheless tolerated his behaviour because of his apparent kindness and the charm of his speech.

The narrative then moves on to recount an incident involving Ma'bad and al-Kindi. When two guests arrived to stay with Ma'bad, al-Kindi sent him a letter inquiring about the duration of their visit and advising him to keep their stay as short as possible, since one or two nights would be acceptable. Ma'bad replied that the guests would remain for approximately a month or even longer. In response, al-Kindi sent him another letter informing him that the rent would be increased on account of the additional occupants, as he calculated the rent on a per-person basis. Consequently, the monthly rent rose from thirty dirhams to forty dirhams.

Ma'bad rejected this increase and demanded that al-Kindi first provide a justification for the additional charge before he would consider accepting it. Unbeknownst to Ma'bad, however, his demand for a reason had placed him in a difficult position, for al-Kindi responded with a lengthy letter densely packed with arguments and supporting evidence.

Al-Kindi began by discussing the additional expenses allegedly resulting from an increase in the number of occupants, particularly the damage that could be inflicted on the various parts and components of the house. He described these in meticulous detail, referring to such elements as the painted rooftops and the partitioned rooms. No part of the house, however small, escaped his attention. He further argued that the damage would not necessarily be confined to the property itself but might also extend to neighbouring houses.

In presenting his case, al-Kindi reproached the tenants for their attitude towards the landlord, portraying himself as someone merely attempting to preserve the property's integrity, while accusing them of neglecting it and failing to maintain it properly. He also drew attention to tenants' habitual delays in paying rent, their failure to pay altogether, and, in some cases, their attempts to evade payment by fleeing.

He then employs the technique of prolepsis, or temporal anticipation, by shifting to the argument that a house, too, has a lifespan and requires renovation over time to repair the damage it sustains. The tenant moves into a new and beautiful house but leaves it, after a period of time, old and dilapidated. Thus, the tenant is the beneficiary, whereas the owner is the loser, as the latter is left to bear the costs of restoring and renovating the property, which may sometimes exceed the rental income itself, thereby resulting in a financial loss. Al-Kindi then highlights the relationship between the landlord and the tenant, contrasting the affection that a house has for its occupant, wishing him well, with the hostility displayed by some tenants towards their landlords. Such

tenants go so far as to invoke misfortune upon them and wish them harm, particularly when they are required to maintain the property. Moreover, they continually demand reductions in rent, using their difficult financial circumstances as a pretext, not to mention the poor manners of some tenants and the resulting troubles that landlords are compelled to endure.

Having established these arguments, Al-Kindi proceeds to discuss the risks that landlords may occasionally face, particularly when some tenants attempt to seize their properties unlawfully. He then returns to emphasise that a tenant's failure to maintain the house and the damage inflicted upon it reduce its resale value, consequently causing financial losses for its owner. His argument becomes so emphatic that he portrays the tenant as a greater threat to the landlord than the Indians and the Byzantines. He subsequently seeks to demonstrate the advantages of renting over purchasing a house, arguing that buying a property outright requires a substantial sum of money to be paid at once, thereby exposing the purchaser to the envy of others. Furthermore, such a purchase deprives the individual of the opportunity to invest that money in trade or other profitable ventures.

Al-Kindi connects this argument to his rejection of the claims advanced by Ma'bad, who had supposedly offered to help him rent out his house. In Al-Kindi's view, Ma'bad neither assisted him nor benefited him by encouraging him to avoid purchasing a property in favour of renting one. Such advice, he argues, benefits the tenant while harming the landlord. In this manner, Al-Kindi responds to Ma'bad so relentlessly that he does not attribute to him even a single commendable quality that might distinguish him. Finally, he concludes his argument by reminding Ma'bad of his obligation to accept the newly imposed rent increase, insisting that his refusal would amount to a denial of Al-Kindi's kindness towards him. He reinforces his position with poetic verses before returning to describe the relationship between the occupant and the dwelling, portraying it as one of hostility and conflict. To illustrate this antagonism, he draws comparisons with the disputes between the Mu'tazilites and the Shiites, the inhabitants of Kufa and Basra, and the Asad and Kinda tribes.

Through this forceful and uncompromising response to Ma'bad, Al-Kindi ultimately achieves his objective: imposing a rent increase whenever the number of occupants rises. In doing so, he embodies the character of the miserly and avaricious individual.

The Fifth Anecdote

The fifth anecdote was narrated by Isma'il ibn Ghazwan and concerns Al-Kindi. It begins with Al-Kindi defending miserliness and misers while depicting those who behave otherwise as corrupt and wasteful individuals. His defence is so persuasive that the reader may be convinced that his arguments are irrefutable and that he himself is not a miser. Indeed, he establishes a connection between the dual concepts of miserliness and extravagance on the one hand, and worldly life and religion on the other. According to this reasoning, anyone who squanders wealth engages in corruption, and every form of worldly corruption ultimately leads to religious corruption. The result is therefore a double loss, affecting both one's worldly life and one's religious standing.

Al-Kindi then turns to the importance of preserving wealth once it has been accumulated, arguing that safeguarding money is more difficult than acquiring it in the first place. He condemns those who spend their wealth under the pretext of demonstrating generosity and magnanimity, maintaining that such behaviour is, in reality, nothing more than extravagance and wastefulness. To substantiate his position and persuade his audience, he invokes a hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He further maintains that preserving wealth requires the disciplined struggle against one's own desires, a principle he recommends to his sons. In his view, only through such self-discipline can wealth be preserved and prosperity maintained, both of which confer considerable advantages upon their possessor.

Indeed, Al-Kindi argues that wealthy individuals enjoy a higher social standing and greater prestige in the eyes of the public, even among kings. Those who possess greater financial means are given precedence over individuals with less wealth, even when the latter surpass them in other qualities. This entire argument is encapsulated in the narrator's admiring statement:

statement:

"May God bless Al-Kindi! How wise he was, how readily he produced his arguments, how sincerely he advised others to safeguard their wealth, and how steadfastly he adhered to his principles! I saw him addressing a group in which everyone was either engaged in corruption or encouraging others to practise it [...] so that the share of the wealthy man would be greater, even if he was inferior to his companions in every other respect, while the share of the man of limited means would be smaller, even if he surpassed his companions in every other respect." ⁷²

The careful reader of al-Jahiz's story of al-Kindi finds himself immersed in the Abbasid urban milieu in its various dimensions. The story thus transcends its initial form as an amusing anecdote about a miser, becoming a detailed description and a reflection of an entire society, which the author subjects to social criticism. Through the voice of the narrator, Amr ibn Nihiyawī, al-Jahiz seeks to convey a series of messages to his readers through the various anecdotes featuring al-Kindi. These narratives portray the circumstances of a particular segment of Abbasid society, namely tenants, and the problems they experienced in their dealings and conflicts with landlords.

At the very beginning of the story, the reader encounters the first situations that reveal al-Kindi's personality, characterized by greed and avarice in his dealings with his neighbours and tenants. He thus embodies the figure of the "aggressive miser," who appropriates other people's possessions and money, whether through cunning and deception or by exploiting his shrewdness, intelligence, and extensive cultural knowledge. His second encounter, involving a guest, further illustrates his miserliness towards his neighbours and his unwillingness to share with them. Indeed, he fails to fulfil even the basic obligations of hospitality, as he does not invite his guest to share a meal, despite the fact that hospitality was a well-established and deeply rooted Arab tradition. This custom entailed welcoming guests warmly and honouring them; failure to observe it suggests a weakening and deterioration of traditional Arab values, possibly resulting from the influence of other cultures. Such influences led people to abandon many of the noble qualities traditionally associated with Arab identity. The authentic Arab, even after moving from a Bedouin environment to an urban setting and experiencing improved living conditions, would traditionally remain committed to generosity and noble conduct. Any apparent departure from these values may therefore be understood as a consequence of external cultural influences.

Furthermore, the story reflects the social conditions of the Abbasid period through its precise descriptions of buildings, architectural structures, and the tools used in construction, to such an extent that the reader feels as though they are living among the characters. The narrative also possesses another social dimension, one related to morality, through which al-Jahiz highlights the deterioration of ethical standards and depicts aspects of moral decadence within a society shaped by cultural diversity and the interaction of different traditions. These include breaches of trust and fraudulent practices, even though such behaviours are prohibited by Islamic teachings and condemned within traditional Arab culture. The narrative also illustrates the manner in which houses were selected and emphasises the importance of good neighbourly relations, in keeping with the saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "The neighbour before the house, and the companion before the road."⁷³

Moreover, al-Kindi's response to Ma'bad reveals the various forms of conflict that characterised Abbasid society. These include conflicts between different religious and theological schools, such as the Mu'tazilites

and the Shi'ites, which point towards a broader confrontation between Arabs and non-Arabs, including Persians, Romans, and Indians. Such conflicts had significant political and social implications, reflecting the openness of Abbasid urban society to other peoples and cultures. This openness is hardly surprising, given that the Abbasid period witnessed a remarkable flourishing of translation and intellectual exchange.

In the final part of the story, al-Jahiz uses al-Kindi's position and his defence of the doctrine of miserliness to offer an implicit warning against the extravagance and wastefulness prevalent at the ruling court. The narrative thus advocates moderation in all aspects of life as a means of preserving the state. Furthermore, al-Kindi's advice to his sons to practise miserliness points to the class-based structure of Abbasid society, in which esteem and respect were often accorded to the wealthy rather than to others. This social hierarchy provides a context for understanding the miserly attitudes adopted by the more affluent members of society and reveals the pervasive influence of money across all spheres of life—in other words, the power of wealth.

Conclusion

Having examined selected examples from al-Jahiz's *Book of Misers* (*Kitab al-Bukhala'*) through the theoretical framework of Gérard Genette and modern narratology more broadly, we can draw several conclusions, which may be summarised as follows:

- Understanding the text as a complex, multifunctional work: The text combines informative narration, humour, and social criticism, thereby demonstrating the existence of a multifaceted literary form before the emergence of modern narratological terminology.
- Identifying generic transgression without detaching the text from its heritage context: The analysis reveals the text's movement across literary genres while preserving its connection to the intellectual and cultural traditions in which it originated.
- The usefulness of Genette's concepts: Applying Genette's narratological concepts makes it possible to uncover the text's internal structure and gain a deeper understanding of its movement across literary genres.
- Al-Jahiz's representation of misers as argumentative voices: In *Kitab al-Bukhala'*, al-Jahiz does not merely ridicule misers; rather, he exposes the internal logic of their behaviour and allows them to articulate their own arguments. This transforms the text from a collection of entertaining anecdotes into a cultural discourse on reason, economics, and social values. Such a transformation is achieved through the interplay of perspectives between the narrator and the miser himself, as the miserly character's dialogue constitutes a central driving force in the production of meaning.
- The integration of narration, satire, argumentation, and cultural reflection: The anecdotes and humorous episodes in *Kitab al-Bukhala'* bring together narrative, satire, argumentation, and cultural contemplation. They demonstrate the text's ability to combine informative storytelling, humour, and social reflection within a single literary work, making it a particularly clear example of cross-generic writing.
- The work as an early model of cross-generic literary discourse: From this perspective, *Kitab al-Bukhala'* may be understood as a complex narrative and cultural discourse that represents an early example of writing that transcends conventional literary genres.
- The contribution of Genette's narratology to the interpretation of classical Arabic literature: This study demonstrates that drawing on Gérard Genette's narratological framework enables a precise analytical reading of al-Jahiz's *Kitab al-Bukhala'*, bringing its narrative and discursive structures to light without imposing modern classifications upon the text in an anachronistic manner. It also confirms that modern critical approaches, when applied cautiously and appropriately, can enrich the interpretation of classical literary works and enable their reinterpretation within a contemporary critical framework. Accordingly, the significance of *Kitab al-Bukhala'* lies not in determining whether it should be classified exclusively as a

literary or intellectual work, but rather in exploring more fundamental questions: How does satire produce meaning? How does narration become an instrument of cultural criticism? And how is storytelling employed to deconstruct the structures of society?

Notes

- ¹ See Gérard Genette, *Madkhal li-Jāmi' al-Naṣṣ* [Introduction to the Architext], translated by Abd al-Rahman Ayoub, Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyya al-'Amma and Dar Toubkal for Publishing, Baghdad, n.d.
- ² Samir Al-Marzouqi and Jamil Shaker, *An Introduction to Narrative Theory: Analysis and Application*, University Publications Office and Tunisian Publishing House, Algeria and Tunisia, n.d., pp. 77–78.
- ³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, translated by Mohammed Moatasem et al., [Ikhtilaf Publications], Algeria, 3rd ed., 2003, p. 59. Genette distinguishes between story and narrative discourse. The story refers to the events conveyed by the narrator to the narratee, while story time concerns the chronological sequence of events as they are conceived within the story. Narration, meanwhile, refers to the process through which the events of the story are transformed into narrative discourse. See Gérard Genette et al., *Narrative Theory: From Point of View to Focalization*, translated by Naji Mustafa, Academic and University Dialogue Publications, Morocco, 1st ed., 1989, p. 123.
- ⁴ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 46.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- ⁸ See: Hamid Lahmidani, *The Structure of the Narrative Text*, Arab Cultural Center for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 1991, pp. 74–75. See also: Mohammed Al-Qadi et al., *Dictionary of Narratology*, International Alliance of Independent Publishers, 1st ed., 2010, pp. 255–379.
- ⁹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 51.
- ¹⁰ Mohammed Al-Qadi et al., *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 17.
- ¹¹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 60–61.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ¹³ For a detailed discussion, see: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 62, 72. See also: Ali Za'lah, *Narrative Discourse in the Novels of Abdullah Al-Ja'fari*, Literary and Cultural Club, Jeddah, 1st ed., 2015, pp. 62–64.
- ¹⁴ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 60–70.
- ¹⁵ Mohammed Al-Qadi et al., *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 21.
- ¹⁶ Ali Za'lah, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
- ¹⁷ See: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 102.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ¹⁹ See: Hamid Lahmidani, *The Structure of the Narrative Text*, p. 76.
- ²⁰ Nidal Al-Shamali, *The Novel and History*, Jidar for the World Book, Modern Books World, Jordan, 1st ed., 2006, p. 170. The terminology used to designate this technique varies among researchers. See: Muhammad Al-Qadi et al., *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 29; and Samir Al-Marzouqi and Jamil Shakir, *An Introduction to Narrative Theory*, p. 93.
- ²¹ Samir Al-Marzouqi and Jamil Shakir, *An Introduction to Narrative Theory*, p. 89.
- ²² Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 118.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- ²⁶ See: *Ibid.*, p. 119; and Muhammad Al-Qadi et al., *Dictionary of Narratology*, p. 30.
- ²⁷ See: Hamid Lahmidani, *The Structure of the Narrative Text*, p. 76.
- ²⁸ Siza Qasim, *The Construction of the Novel: A Comparative Study of Naguib Mahfouz's Trilogy*, Egyptian General Book Organization, Cairo, 1984, p. 65.
- ²⁹ See: Hamid Lahmidani, *The Structure of the Narrative Text*, p. 76; and Saeed Jabbar, *Narrative Reports in Arabic Narration: Constants and Variables*, p. 120.
- ³⁰ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 144.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ³² See: *Ibid.*, pp. 130–131.
- ³³ Iterative Narration: or Repetitive Narrative, whereby an event that occurred several times is narrated only once.

- ³⁴ Saleh Ben Ramadan, *Literary Epistles and Their Role in the Development of Classical Arabic Prose: A Project for a Poetic Reading* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi Publications, 2nd ed., 2007), p. 177.
- ³⁵ Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz, *The Book of Misers*, ed. Taha al-Hajiri (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 5th ed., 1990), p. 5.
- ³⁶ See Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ambirik, *The Artistic Representation of the Miser in al-Jahiz through the Stylistic Characteristics of The Book of Misers* (Baghdad–Tunis: General Directorate of Cultural Affairs and Dar al-Tunisia for Publishing, 1986), p. 123.
- ³⁷ See Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ambirik, *The Artistic Representation of the Miser in al-Jahiz through the Stylistic Characteristics of The Book of Misers*, previously cited, p. 123.
- ³⁸ See Muhammad al-Mubarak, *The Art of Storytelling in al-Jahiz's The Book of Misers: A Study and Selected Texts* (Syria: Dar al-Fikr, 2nd ed., 1974), p. 43.
- ³⁹ See Muhammad al-Qadi, *Al-Khabar in Arabic Literature: A Study in Arabic Narratology*, pp. 96, 118.
- ⁴⁰ Shukri Ayyad, "The Art of Khabar in Our Narrative Heritage," *Fusul, Egypt*, vol. 2, no. 4, September 1982, p. 11.
- ⁴¹ Muhammad al-Qadi, *Al-Khabar in Arabic Literature: A Study in Arabic Narratology*, p. 352.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 355–356.
- ⁴³ See the same reference, pp. 353–362.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 591–592.
- ⁴⁵ Saïd Yaqtin, *Al-Kalam wa al-Khabar: Muqaddima lil-Sard al-Arabi* [Discourse and Report: An Introduction to Arabic Narratology], Arab Cultural Center, Morocco, 1st ed., 1997, p. 191.
- ⁴⁶ Ali Obeid, "Fi Tahlil al-Nass al-Sardi al-Qadim: Al-Nadirah Unmudhajan" [On the Analysis of Classical Narrative Texts: The Anecdote as a Model], *Al-Rawi Journal*, no. 25, September 2012, p. 53.
- ⁴⁷ Muhammad Meshbal, *Balaghat al-Nadirah* [The Rhetoric of the Anecdote], Dar Jusur for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2nd ed., 2001, p. 10.
- ⁴⁸ Fadwa Malti-Douglas, Bina'iyyat al-Bukhl fi Nawadir al-Bukhala' [The Structures of Misers' Miserliness in the Anecdotes of The Book of Misers], translated by Marie-Thérèse Abdel-Massih, *Fusul Journal*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1993, pp. 65, 75.
- ⁴⁹ Mahmoud Al-Masfar, *Bukhala' al-Jahiz bayna Ta'addud al-Khitab wa Khitab al-Ta'addud: Muqaraba Sardiyya fi al-Hazl* [Al-Jahiz's Misers between Discursive Multiplicity and the Discourse of Multiplicity: A Narratological Approach to Humour], Faculty of Arts, Sfax, Tunisia, 1998, pp. 39–40.
- ⁵⁰ Abdelfattah Kilito, *Al-Kitaba wa al-Tanasukh: Mafhum al-Mu'allif fi al-Thaqafa al-Arabiyya* [Writing and Reproduction: The Concept of the Author in Arab Culture], translated by Abdessalam Benabdelali, Dar al-Tanwir, Beirut, 1st ed., 1985, pp. 70–72.
- ⁵¹ See Majdi Wahba and Kamel al-Muhandis, *Mu'jam al-Mustalahat al-Adabiyya fi al-Lugha wa al-Adab* [Dictionary of Literary Terms in Language and Literature], Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 2nd ed., 1984, pp. 17–18.
- ⁵² See Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī, *Al-Ṣinā'atayn*, p. 414.
- ⁵³ *Al-Jāhiz, Al-Bukhalā'*, p. 17.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107–108.
- ⁶² Same source, pp. 108–109.
- ⁶³ Same source, p. 109.
- ⁶⁴ Same source, p. 109.
- ⁶⁵ Same source, pp. 109–110.
- ⁶⁶ Same source, pp. 110–111.
- ⁶⁷ Same source, pp. 111–112.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁷¹ *Al-Jahiz, Al-Bukhala'* (The Book of Misers), pp. 82–90.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 90–93.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 88.