

“Miserliness between Reality and Symbolism: A Study of Al-Jahiz's *al-Bukhala* and Moliere's *The Miser*”

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Abstract:

This study explores the topic of miserliness, defines it terminologically, and sheds light on its manifestation in literature and philosophy. It aims to show the difference between the two literatures, the literature of the Arabs and the Western literature, in terms of depicting the phenomena of stinginess. Al-Jahiz and Moliere are two writers of two different cultures who reviewed the concept of miserliness differently. In their stories, Al-Jahiz's *The Book of al-Bukhala* and Moliere's *The Miser*, they address the impact of stinginess on human life and society and highlight its negative consequences on the soul and social relationships. They both portray stinginess as a reprehensible trait that makes its owner lose his humanity for the sake of a few coins but in a different way and styles. The study pined important results about the ways the miser is viewed in the literature of Arabs and Western literature. The study is qualitative, and it depends on textual analysis.

Keywords: Miserliness, The Literature of Arabs, Al-Jahiz's *The Book of al-Bukhala*, Western Literature, Moliere's *The Miser*.

INTRODUCTION

Miserliness is considered a negative trait in literature and culture, as those characterized by it are portrayed as stingy and greedy and not good at

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spending their fair share. In literature, it has been depicted in Arabic and Western literature through many stories that have appeared to deal with the characteristic of stinginess, such as the story of the misers Al-Jahiz's *al-Bukhala* and Moliere's *The Miser*". Al-Jahiz presents many stingy people in his book, *al-Bukhala*. In the world of theatre, Moliere portrayed the miser Harpagon in his play, *The Miser*, as a man addicted to money who puts his material interests before everything else. The degree of miserliness varies among some people, but it remains reprehensible if it leads to exaggeration or restrictions on others. This study delves investigate the notion of miserliness differently in Al-Jahiz's *The Book of al-Bukhala* and Moliere's *The Miser*.

1. The concept of 'Miserliness' in Language and Literature

In language, a miser is a person who is famous for saving money and spending little of it. It is so common passion of human beings (Merryweather, 1850). In the Holy Qur'an, God described the miserly as concealing what God has given them of His bounty while God encourages spending and fair distribution of wealth (Bonner, 2005).

In literature, it has been portrayed in Arabic and Western literature through many stories that have appeared to deal with the characteristic of miserliness, such as the story of the misers of *Quraysh*, *al-Bukhala*, and others. Al-Jahiz presents many stingy people in his book, *al-Bukhala*. In the world of theatre, Moliere portrayed the miser Harpagon in his play, *The Miser*, as a man addicted to money who puts his material interests before everything else. Stinginess is considered a negative trait in literature and culture, as those characterized by it are portrayed as stingy and greedy and not good at spending their fair share. The degree of miserliness varies among some people, but it remains reprehensible if it leads to exaggeration or restrictions on others.

2. Definition of stinginess in the Arabic Language

As it is a very rich language, in Arabic, we have many names for the 'Miser'; among the names of the miserly are miserly, Scarce, Tight-fisted, Penny-pinching, and stingy (al-Asfahani, 1985). The stinginess can be

defined as being scarce with money and not spending. Miserly means extreme in spending money, very careful with all his dinars and dirhams. Scarce is the one who clings to all the money he has and is negligent in spending it, even on himself. Tight-fisted is the one who is stingy with people and does not give them their rights. Penny-pinching is the one who is extreme with money to the point of greed and extreme miserliness. Scarcity represents lack of generosity and benevolence, and intentional lack of spending even on one's own needs (Ibid).

A person's miserliness is shown through that he is very keen on money to the extent that it harms his interests or the interests of others. It is true to say that stinginess is a negative trait that includes frugality, greed, and extreme spending to the detriment of oneself or one's goal.

Al-Jahiz believes that stinginess is one of the ugliest human qualities, and he portrays the miser as one who is extremely keen on accumulating money and possessions and does not spend anything. It deals with the types of misers, such as the one who does not spend on himself or his family (Marshall, 1970).

1. The Definition of stinginess in English language

According to Cambridge Dictionary, it can be defined as a person who is 'unwilling to spend money'. As for Moliere, he portrays the miser as a figure who is extremely keen on money to the point of madness, even if it endangers his/her health and reputation. Moliere mocks the miser's exaggerated actions and shows their negative effects on his family and those around him (Moliere, 2004).

2. Brief Biographies of the Authors

4.1. Al-Jahiz (159-255 AH)

He is Abu Othman Amr bin Bahr Al-Kinani Al-Jahiz. He was born in Basra in (159 AH) and died in (255 AH), which indicates that he lived for approximately one hundred years, as he lived a long life. He contributed to the acquisition of extensive knowledge and experiences that greatly contributed to his scientific formation and the richness, depth and breadth of his literary and cognitive production. It is evident from the abundance and

diversity of the fields of knowledge that he presented in his works, including *The Book of al-Bukhala* (Omri, 1998).

Al-Jahiz learned from the Arab preachers in Al-Marbad and the most eminent scholars of his time, especially in Basra, which was a centre of radiance and cognitive and scientific polarization in all arts at that time. Then, he was fond of reading and buying books, which increased his learning. Al-Jahiz also mastered Greek through the theologians of his time, such as Hussein bin Ishaq, Salmon, and the like, and in Persian and Indian culture from the books of Al-Muqaffa. He expanded his knowledge of Arabic through his contact with narrations and oral communication with some of the scholars of his time, such as Abu Ubaidah (Khalil, 2009).

Al-Jahiz left a huge number of works in various forms of knowledge and literature, the most important of which are: "Al-Hayyah," "Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyin," "Al-Bikhalu," and "Al-Taj" (Khalidi, 1975). Al-Jahiz's writings and works and his sober and artistic literary style had the greatest influence on the works of his contemporaries and successors.

2.2. Moliere (1622-1673 AD)

Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, known as Moliere, was born in Paris in 1622 AD, near a place called Bonnef, which was a meeting place for clowns, jugglers, and singers. His maternal grandfather, who was fond of frequenting the theatre, used to take Jean with him when he was still eleven years old (Scott, 2002). Meanwhile, his paternal grandfather owned a shop in Saint-Germain Market Square, where popular theatrical performances were held.

From that early age, and through this atmosphere and upbringing, the boy began to be imbued with the artistic spirit. Features of intelligence and superiority began to appear in him as he studied at the Clermont School, where the children of the noble class gathered, who later became of great importance in society, such as (Brenier, the writer, and Chappelle, the poet, and de Bourbon) who was destined to become "Conte", the patron of literature, and Moliere's protector and supporter. (Bulgakov, 1986).

After the Clermont School, Jean moved to the school of Gassendi, the free and cheerful philosopher, where he was later influenced by philosophical

studies that were reflected in some of his theatrical works. When his father wanted to prepare him for service in the court of King Louis XIII, he directed him towards the Faculty of Law at the University of Orleans (Scott, 2002).

Jan has a law degree. However, he did not practice this profession, in which he saw what he called (twisted justice). Because his ambition, which was aspiring to the world of acting, prompted him to declare to his father that he would become a professional comedian.

3. A comparison between the miserly of Al-Jahiz in *The Book of al-Bukhala* and the miserly of Moliere in *The Miser*

Al-Jahiz did not stray in his literature from the scenes of private life. It was as if he had entered, in his ‘*al-Bukhala*’, group of peoples’ homes and observed their food, drinks, and clothes. He mingled with them in managing their homes, and he did not miss anything of their cooking methods, eating, dressing, treatment, bathing, and the like. I said: "To whom belong these cooking pots that I spy, On which the wind scatters sand with debris and dust to lie?" Answered they: "Is it hid from any onlooker aware?" (Al-jahiz, 202). It was as if he had witnessed how they treated coughing with bran water and how they cooked the lamb so they did not waste any of its parts and how they ate with barges, cut with knives, remained silent when eating, and refrained from engaging in food. So kitchens, tables, and utensils were the subject of his literature. He was not disgusted by this literature by filling his nose with the smells of meat, spices, ghee, vinegar, garlic, or the smells of ‘Alskbaj and Altabahj’ which were famous Arabic food, “They choose savoury stew sikbaj merely because it lasts for days and does not soon go bad” (Al-jahiz, 19).

These are not the only things that he witnessed and observed, but it is difficult to investigate their remembrance, for success has entered through every door and flowed with every wind, but it has not entered through all of these doors except to emerge from them with a funny pretext, cute tricks, or strange, rare things;

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Sayyar al-Nazzam, said: "A neighbour of ours invited us in and served us with dates and ghee of fresh butter, we being at a low table with nothing on it. The Khurasani being with us, eating. I watched him letting drops of ghee drip onto the table, till he had done this repeatedly. So I remarked to a man beside me: 'What's the matter with Abu So-and-so,?... 'Don't you know why he does it?' he replied. 'No, walliih.' I said. 'The low table belongs to him,' he said, 'and he wants to grease it, to be like a sort of tanning for it. Already he has divorced his wife, though she is the mother of his sons, because he found she had washed his table with hot water, saying to her: "Why didn't you wipe it? (Al-jahiz, 87)

In his 'Albukhala', Al-Jahiz tried to point out a well-known defect, which is stinginess. He presented to us many examples of stingy people and showed how they eat, how they drink, how they dress. He hells in his description of The Master of the Armoury at the Karkh "he would sit wearing his waist-wrapper and when he found I wasn't noticing he washed it... He went on at dawn every day applying depilatory paste (to his body)... I have even seen him with lime paste on the band at the top of his trousers" (Al-jahiz, 35). Al-jahiz also explores more about how they hoard and other apparent images that make the reader laugh above all else, to the point that this laughter almost distracts him from knowing the characteristics of stinginess, and if we tend to be fair to compare Arab methods of describing such defects and the methods of some Westerns. It has become clear to us that we celebrate in our literature the externals and that they are not satisfied with the externals alone, so they seep into the interior.

One of the natures of the Al-jahiz's stingy is that he notices the morsel, for example, so if he chooses the morsel of this miser, he will eat it up and he chooses everyone who is obsessed with it and is fascinated by it. The miser will snatch the morsel from his hand faster than the Goshawk snatches it. He tells:

When 'Ali al-AswarI became apprehensive of losing (some) and anxious not to miss out, being next of them to 'Isa, he snatched the morsel from his hand more swiftly than a falcon seizes and an eagle swoops... ,' they said to him.

'You've snatched the Amir's bit from his hand when he has already lifted it up to his (lips) and opened his mouth to receive it, without any friendly familiarity and pleasantries beforehand (Al-jahiz, 58).

Al-Jahiz depicted the movements of the eye, how it notices the morsel, and the movements of the hand, how it seizes this morsel from the one in need, or how he tied him up so that he cannot contract or extend. One of the characters described by Al-jahiz, named Ramadan, said "he looked at me while I was looking at him and said: 'You fellow, I'm a man who eats well and eats only good food, but I am afraid you may have a greedy/malevolent eye'" (Al-jahiz, 128).

This is an apparent picture that shows us one type of movement, which is the movements of the eye, hand, or the like, but does it show us about the movements of the soul? Is the stingy person universally recognized and not specific to a country or era, but rather he is stingy for all eras and all countries. Hence, the nature of the stingy person is the same in any era and any country?

This question is easy to answer if we compare our description of the defects of the soul with the Western's description of these defects. What is the purpose of investigation in this comparison? Rather, the purpose is to point out one thing, in most of our literature we are concerned with the outward appearances, while the Western are concerned with the inner things. We may excel in paying attention to these phenomena with special skill, for every story of the stories of the stingy Al-Jahiz might be the subject of a novel in the mind of a Western writer who has mastered examining the insides of the miser? Whether this miser is cooking something, renting a house, recommending a child, feeding a guest, lighting a lamp, has he mastered examining the insides of the miser? There is no doubt that he knew the insistence of the misers and knew their intrusions, but did he photograph all of these?

We do not know all of this unless we compare the 'miserly' person of Al-Jahiz to the miserly of one of the Western writers, such as the miserly of Moliere, but in this comparison, we do not resort to any expansion. Moliere

established in his *The Miser* the model of the true miserly. His play was not limited to depicting the worries of the owner of money, but it depicted miserliness in all of his sarcasm, hatred, and atrocity (Brunoro, 1983). Moliere's miser is no longer the old miser who hoards his gold, but rather, he is a different miser, a ruler who lends money and exaggerates usury. He is a modern usurer who makes his money fruitful until the love of profit almost makes him forget the duty of good manners. Moliere's miser sounds very rude when he talks to others as in Paragon's words to Cleante, "Get out of here, this moment; and let me have no more of your prating. Now then, be gone out of my house, you sworn pickpocket, you veritable gallows' bird" (Moliere, 4).

As for Jahiz, traces of ridicule, hatred, and obscenity did not appear in his "misers". This means that he did not depict stingy people in images that would make people laugh, in images that would make people hate them, or in images in which people would disgrace them. His concern was to make them laugh above all else, so much so that he admitted to the reader that his book did not depict everything. He used to tell some stories and wished the reader could see the story with his own eyes because some of these stories are not very good unless he sees them with his own eyes. He was not a universal miser, that is, a miser of all ages and all countries. He neglected to depict the miser's anxiety and portray what he generates in people of ridicule, hatred, and arrogance as Moliere did. If we laugh at the miserly person, then what makes us laugh is the appearance of the miser himself, not the image of the miserly or his movements.

If you want to know the true picture of the miser, miserly of all ages and all countries, then look at Moliere's miser. He does not want to see his son's servant set up in his house like a spear, noticing what happens in this house. Harpagon, the main character, addresses the servant:

Go and wait for him in the street, then; out with you; don't stay in my house, straight and stiff as a sentry, to observe what is going on, and to make your profit of everything. I won't always have before me a spy on all my affairs; a

treacherous scamp, whose cursed eyes watch all my actions, covet all I possess, and ferret about in every corner to see if there is anything to steal (Moliere, 5).

He does not want to see a spy in front of him, whose cursed eyes notice his deeds take what he owns and run around everywhere. On the one hand, perhaps they see something that can be taken away. Yes, the two geniuses (Al-jahiz and Moliere) may agree in depicting apparent situations. Among these cases is that the stingy of Moliere and the miserly of Al-Jahiz do not know the word "take," but they know the word "give." Among these cases is that they fear for the furniture of the floor lest hands reach it and are wary, people rub clothes so they don't bloat and wipe utensils so they don't break, and they don't want the guest to eat too much. Valere speaks to Harpagon, "We must eat to live, and not live to eat (Moliere, 24). Harpagon looks very pleased with Valere commenting, "Ah! How well the man speaks! Come near, let me embrace you for this last saying. It is the finest sentence that I have ever heard in my life" (Moliere, 24). This is the wisdom that the miserly "of Moliere wants to write it with golden ink on his chimney, "I will have them engraved in letters of gold over the mantel-piece of my dining-room" (Ibid)

The two geniuses may agree in all of this, but the difference is severe in depicting the psychology of the miser and in depicting its anxiety, turmoil, and madness. When Moliere's miser had his money stolen, his mind was blown away, so he began to scream these immortal screams to depict the miser's psychological state;

"Thieves! thieves! assassins! murder! Justice, just heavens! I am undone; I am murdered; they have cut my throat; they have stolen my money!"
Thieves! thieves! assassins! murder! Justice, just heavens! I am undone; I am murdered; they have cut my throat; they have stolen my money! Who can it be? What has become of him? Where is he? Where is he hiding himself? What shall I do to find him? Where shall I run? Where shall I not run? Is he not here? Who is this? Stop! (To himself, taking hold of his own arm) Give me back my money, wretch.... Ah...! it is myself.... My mind is

wandering, and I know not where I am, who I am, and what I am doing. Alas! ... my poor money! my dearest friend, they have bereaved me of thee; and since thou art gone, I have lost my support, my consolation, and my joy. All is ended for me, and I have nothing more to do in the world! Without thee it is impossible for me to live. It is all over with me; I can bear it no longer. I am dying; I am dead; I am buried. Is there nobody who will call me from the dead, by restoring my dear money to me, or by telling me who has taken it? Ah! what is it you say? It is no one. (Moliere, 37).

He adds 'where is the thief, where is he hiding, where did he ride? He is here, he is there, and he becomes insane to the point where he thinks he has stolen himself, so he seizes his arms. Then he realizes this and screams in mental confusion: I don't know who I am, I don't know where I am, I don't know what I'm doing, until the end of this immortal page in Moliere's novel. Both Al-Jahiz and Moliere rely on sarcasm, fun, and laughter to convey their artistic and moral message (Kaouthar, 2023). This is because this sarcasm performs a double function, as it adds a sense of amusement and entertainment and addresses the psychological needs of the recipient. At the same time, it is used as a means to portray stingy people, defame them, and criticize them without falling into vulgar profanity. Al-Jahiz says, explaining in the introduction to his book *Al-Bakhla'*, his doctrine of the importance of 'laughter and laughter,' reasoning that as long as crying is beneficial, and then it is more appropriate to laugh. He claims that crying is good for the natures and praiseworthy for the consequences if it suits the place and does not exceed the amount. Likewise, what do you think of laughter, the one who causes it to remain extremely happy until its cause ceases. Al-Jahiz is not satisfied with his use of sarcasm and spreading the spirit of fun and evoking laughter with the arguments he lists in the introduction to the book or comments within it.

As for Moliere, the careful reader of his play '*The Miser*' and some of the comments and critical works written about it will discover several artistic and stylistic characteristics that can generally be classified into two categories: the dominant artistic characteristics are the basis of the artistic

work and the basic technique for formulating and presenting the message or moral intent of the artistic work, which is mainly sarcasm and dialogue. The secondary characteristics that spread throughout the work strengthen its structural strength and give it added aesthetic value, using graphic methods such as metonymy.

4. Conclusion

It may be difficult for me to summarize the lines of Al-Jahiz's *The Book of al-Bukhala* and Moliere's words *The Miser* too. The intention is not to investigate this section, nor is the aim of a balance between the two writers. Rather, I addressed the topic from one aspect. I wanted to show the difference between the two literatures, the literature of the Arabs and the Western literature, in terms of depicting the phenomena of the soul and its habitats. Moliere penetrated human sarcasm as he depicted on the stage the faults of people, and it pained him to be reproached for saying that in the pictures he depicted, he had in mind one of the people of his time. His goal was to portray morals without paying attention to a specific man. The pictures he presented were merely imaginary pictures that did not represent real men. Al-Jahiz captured in his miserliness the conversations of his friends, his own conversations, and what he saw with his own eyes. His miserliness included the friend and the guardian, and among them the hidden and the reckless. It pained Moliere to see a similarity between the pictures he displayed on the stage and the pictures of a man of his era, because his goal was to represent the eyes in general and in particular, the faults of his era and for this, he used to apologize for it. To paint his own pictures without finding a man of his time who would agree with them. As for Al-Jahiz, his goal was not to depict miserliness in general. While Al-Jahiz's miserly was not universal. This miser may combine a variety of the characteristics of a miser from all ages and all countries, but we do not see traces of worry or preoccupation in him. So Al-Jahiz did not portray him in his pictures for us to mock him, hate him, and belittle him. If our manners lack something, it is only he who lacks this type of philosophical depth that

uncovers the movements of the soul after revealing this cover of the movements of the hand and eyes.

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البخل بين الواقع والرمزية: دراسة في كتاب "البخلاء" للجاحظ ومسرحيه "البخيل" لموليير

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة موضوع البخل، وتعريفه اصطلاحاً، وتلقي الضوء على مظاهره في الأدب والفلسفة. كذلك تهدف إلى بيان الفرق بين الأدبين، الأدب العربي والأدب الغربي، من حيث تصوير ظاهرة البخل. الجاحظ وموليير كاتبان من ثقافتين مختلفتين، استعرضا مفهوم البخل بشكل مختلف. ويتناولان في كتبهما «كتاب البخلاء» للجاحظ، و«البخيل» لموليير، تأثير البخل على حياة الإنسان والمجتمع، ويسلطان الضوء على آثاره السلبية على النفس والعلاقات الاجتماعية. وكلاهما يصوران البخل على أنه صفة مذمومة تفقد صاحبها إنسانيته من أجل القليل من النقود ولكن بطريقة وأساليب مختلفة. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى نتائج مهمة حول النظرة إلى البخل في الأدب العربي والأدب الغربي. الدراسة نوعية، وتعتمد على تحليل النص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البخل، أدب العرب، كتاب البخلاء للجاحظ، الأدب الغربي، البخيل لموليير