

# Al-Jahiz's Techniques in His Book "Kitab Al-Bayan Wa Al-Tabyin" ("Elegance of Expression and Clarity of Exposition") – A Critical Study

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**Abstract :** *This research basically focuses on one of the distinctive techniques of writing used by Al-Jahez as one of the most outstanding writers of Arabic literature during the Abbasid era; exclusively in his famous book: Kitab Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyin. In this book, there is a variety of technical styles, which Al-Jahez used in his writings about general or private subjects. He invested those styles in so creative texts of Arabic literature, which made Kitab Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyin as one of the most distinguished books of Arabic literature. Therefore, the book still attracted more readers and scholars due to the richness of its rhetorical arts. So this study concentrated on revealing the details of these different styles, which made Al-Jahez as a more distinctive writer than his contemporaries and his distinguished way of writing as a subject for literary criticism*

**Keywords:** *Jahiz's, Al-Bayan, Critical Study*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Abū 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Kinānī al-Baṣrī, commonly known as al-Jāḥiẓ (born 776; died 868/ 869) was an outstanding Arab prose writer and author of works of literature, and Mu'tazili theology, during the Abbasid era. He was characterized by exceptional as intelligence, power of intuition, reason and logic, and due to his extensively vast knowledge, he developed a distinctive style of writing, which left a great impact on many other writers. The style devised by him was known as Al-Jahiziyah. He used to hire whole bookshops at Al-Warraqian market to read and write overnights because he could not buy books for his poverty. Even at home, he was also always preoccupied with reading and caring for book, which he was able to buy. Abu Hufan said about him, " I have never known anyone who has such love and infatuation for reading books such Al-Jahiz; whenever a book came in his hand, he devoured it in no time, despite its being large or small. Al-Jahiz was renowned for brilliance as one of Mu'tazili school scholars, who were greatly credited with prosperity and development of the Arab literature of that period. Such development was largely based on analysis, interpretation and authorship. In Basrah, Al-Jahiz contacted the flourishing scholars, especially (Ibrahim bin Sayyar), who introduced him to the Mu'tazila thought. He believed in Mu'tazili theology in early time and then he became became the spokesman of the Mu'tazilites and their loyal disciple to the extent Mu'tazila was named (Al-Jahziyya), after his name. He enjoyed all the glory and importance of the Mu'tazila among the Abbasid caliphs. Not only was he Mu'tazili, he zealously gathered all ideas of Mu'tazili theology and remained a faithfully committed to it word and deed. Despite the development underwent by sciences, literature and language during this period, and the large number of men of letters in the various Arab cities, especially in Basra, Kufa and Baghdad, Al-Jahiz can be said to have been more prosperous in science, argument, research investigation, opposition, and eloquence than his peers. He penetrated deeply down in the Mu'tazili theology and Greek philosophy; he unlike other scholars, was a monotheist, whom many others followed, making a group called "Aljahizyah". He participated almost in all available sciences, and he was a well-versed investigator and writer. He was the first scholar to use humor and satire together with seriousness in his writings. He was elaborate in his lectures, and classifications, he wrote about animals, plants and ethics. He was colorful and rich in his literature and sciences. He was also creative in Adib, criticism, rhetoric, philosophy

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and history, and sociology; yet, his thought was not confined to a certain domain of knowledge. Even he tried his hand at writing poetry, but it was a failure. His verses centered around his being proud of self, literary and genial brilliance as a man of letter. Kitāb al-bayān wa al-tabyīn ("Elegance of Expression and Clarity of Exposition"), was his most important achievement altogether. It took him a long time to finish. The book focuses on methods of the Arab eloquence and rhetorical arts; it is an anthology of Arabs' sayings, Khutabs, verses, Saj' "rhymed prose", iambic poems, proverbs, besides rhetorical texts and memorable samples of Arabs' eloquence. Kitāb al-bayān wa al-tabyīn was a challenge to populism that emerged and spread in his time, in which he defended for the Arabs, their history and heritage. He devoted a part of the book called "Kitab Al-Asah" (The Book of The Stick) to attack the emergent populism.

Kitāb al-bayān wa al-tabyīn falls into three parts; the first part consists of prelude and a description of the people of Quraish tribe as eloquent and preponderant. It also deals with the other tribal dialects, the languages of the metropolises around and the like such as foreign words spreading in Madina, Basra and Kufa. It also focuses on the letters, and the errors that are associated with their articulation like lisps and orators' physical defects. Then, it also covers the defects and errors of the tongue and also what had been said about the Arab tribes which were famous for eloquence. Al-Jahiz in this part, talked about meanings and words, and their signs and signification, in addition to Arabs' sayings on intellect and eloquence. While the other two parts include a lot of the Arabs' famous speeches, and much talking about their habits and methods of oratory. The most prominent among these methods is the holding of the stick by the orator while addressing his audience, as considered one of their virtues, showing the benefits of holding the stick, citing some Qu'ranic verses and Arab poems on such benefits.

Al-Jahiz's Technical Styles in Kitāb al-bayān wa al-Tabyīn:

#### 1. Digression

It means that the speaker digresses the topic, which he is talking about to another subject since the two subjects are closely associated, and then he resumes his first subject after he has much detailed his second subject. Maybe, this device is the most prominent method, which Al-Jahiz applied in most of his writings, particularly in his book "Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn". That is why his critical ideas can be found scattered in his authorities, lost among the bends of his subjects, for he mentions them casually and digressively, without having devoted a specific book for literature, poetry and criticism as his contemporaries, Ibn Salam and Ibn Qutayba, did. This might be attributed to his commitment to a certain intellectual end, concentrated on the defense of the original faith and refining it from the impurities of other Islamic groups, and this was,

in fact, the goal of Mu'tazilah in general. Intellect was Al-Jahiz's best means of persuasion and argumentation, which is Mu'tazilites approach, but presented in his distinctive literary style, in his discussion of intellectual and literary issues. Since his aim was to convince and persuade his audience as much as possible, he found digression as the optimal way to communicate his views and thoughts so quickly and successfully without making his readers feel boredom and tedium. Consequently, his books were read by highly educated and even by less educated readers who lacked culture and knowledge.

#### 2. Formulation of words and their meanings:

Al-Jahiz was a alim of Kalam "a scholar of speech" and also a rhetorician, who made of Kalam "speech" his stronger argument and deeper meaning. Therefore, he, in particular and Mu'tazilites, in general, gave science of rhetoric great interest as an element of persuasion, which is considered as the end of Kalam. So, most of Mu'tazilites were teachers of rhetoric.

The value of rhetoric lies in the accomplishment of mutual understanding between communicators as long as they share common qualities that facilitate the process of understanding exactly as Al-Jahiz says, "the purpose of communication is to accomplish mutual understanding between communicators". He had made of listening and understanding a basic shared quality, by which communication occurs through language. He cited some more sayings in this respect, in which he talked about the consistence between words and meanings such as; "Kalam does not deserve to be rhetorical unless it is quickly

comprehended and equally appeals to both hear and ear". Thus, the consistence between words and meanings was paid great attention by Al-Jahiz for he considered it an important element that lies behind the aesthetical aspect of rhetoric, which imposes magic and solemnity on Kalam and makes it acceptable for both heart and ear.

Al-Jahiz was famous for his style of formulating words in all of his authorities, among them was the Kitab Al-Bayan wa al Tabyin. He was so careful and interested in the formulation of his words, and their appropriateness to the occasion of the Kalam as he indicated, " words are once eloquent and serious and once tender and sweet, so each word should occupy its proper position in both Kalam and perform the meaning intended, he seriously seeks in his Kitab "Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin" and other books to achieve consistence between the Kalam and context ; as he referred, " words should not be as much colloquial and vulgar, as odd and primitive but when the speaker is a Bedouin Arabian. The savage Kalam is understood by savage people as exactly much as the vulgar understand the jargon of the vulgar. On this basis, Al-Jahiz's style of writing is characterized with the beauty of statement, which effortlessly attains its purpose without being alien and affectionate; his language is flexible, radiant of clarity and comprehension, and it is pleasing to both heart and ear, attractive to the intellect for what it conveys of visions and thoughts. Perhaps, the most precise objective of literary his rhetoric lies in the achievement of clarity of meaning through well-selected diction, brevity and suggestiveness:" best diction performs best understanding", emphasizing that Kalam should be of clear content and expressive form, and this is what Al-Jahiz calls "eloquence", which is to demonstrate what is intended through rhetorical, concise words capable of performing mutual understanding. Eloquence, probably, lies in the comprehensiveness of meaning that performs clarification, revelation and mutual understanding, as saying: "Eloquence is a core noun of everything that revealed you the ambiguity of meaning without distortion or damage so that the listener can penetrate into its fact". It can be noticed that the term "eloquence" is the most common and popular word in his book because it is closely related to the concept of rhetoric. Not only was Al-Jahiz interested in Arabic rhetoric, but also in that of other nations as evidenced by the examples he provided from the Persians, the Romans, the Greek and Indians. So, the formulation and generation of words and meanings are considered as Al-Jahiz's most important methods in "Kitab al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin" as most represented in his different sayings on figures of speech and rhetorical devices such as brevity, expatiation, equilibrium in words and meanings, and in association and disassociation, simile, metaphor and metonymy and so on. There are a lot of examples of such rhetorical arts provided in his book Kitab Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin as regarded an integrated Encyclopedia of Rhetoric.

### 3. Doubling of meaning and Saj' "rhymed prose":

In Kitab Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin, Al-Jahiz devoted a chapter for doubling of meaning and another for Saj' as being his most important device as being for other prose writers. Al-Jahiz preferred the use of Saj' very much for its musicality similar to the rhythm of poetry, and also for the arrangement of its sentences, which makes it easy to be memorized and communicated. Doubling of meaning is based on precise parallelism between statements that come in paralleling rows, and rhyme equally, where each word in the first statement corresponds to the opposite word in the second sentence. While in "Saj", the final words rhyme together, producing an external rhythm similar to that of poetry.

Al-Jahiz was so creative and distinct in this kind of prose writing that many of his contemporaries followed him. He cut his sentences into short pieces similarly to those of poetry, but without meter and rhyme. This mode of composition was initiated by Al-Jahiz, and imitated by many of his contemporaries like Ibn Qutaba, Al-Mubarad and Ibn Thwaba and others. Al-Jahiz mentioned some typical examples of this style, such as he narrated from Ibn Abbas as saying, "And God does not give the one who disobeys the Most Merciful and obeys the devil and falsifies" and his saying describing an Arabian as, " low, short minded, narrow chested, arrogant and self-conceited, Arabs were impressed by this type of prose because it is easy to memorize and convey it from generation to generation, in addition to its rhetorical beauty; it attracts and harms readers and listeners due to its unique musicality that increases beautifulness of its language.

### 4. Humor and Gravitas:

Al-Jahiz developed a remarkable literary style, based primarily on the blend of "humor and gravitas", mainly in his book "Kitab Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin". This style became one of Al-Jahiz's literary qualities, because he used to blend what is humorous with what is serious and what is ironical with what is sober, though humor was not known in the literary Arab heritage. Al-Jahiz, unlike other men of letters, employed this mode of expression so creatively that he made the Arab literature open to atmospheres of anecdotes, funny. Al-Jahiz, in Kitab Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin, blended humor and gravitas and established it as a new literary device that distinguished his literature from the other's. Although they did not assume equal value for him, he used it when gravitas occasion needs humor or when humorous needs gravitas. Al-Jahiz did not prefer any of them over the other, yet, he was decisive to prefer seriousness to humor and irony at all. And this is an evidence that gravitas for him is the utmost end in his literature, but he used humour to reduce the burdens of hard thinking associated with reading of very serious subjects. An example of this blend can be found in his saying; (Ibrahim Ibn Haneesaid, and he was buffoon, libertine, much playful, and rebellious, unless he meant by his humorous talk seriousness as obliged by the prior speech, any senseless speech would not fit any appropriate context.

#### 5. Subjecting philosophical issues to literary style:

Al-Jahiz was a pioneer of comparison between other nations literatures, especially the comparison among the characteristics of peoples in the domains of thought, art, and literary creativity. He was a distinguished man of letter and scholar, who read Aristotle, Galen, Ptolemy, and Philemon and acquainted a lot of knowledge about the Persians' life and myths and traditions. He also knew much about Jews and Christians and Arab heritage, stories and traditions. This encyclopedic knowledge enabled him to compare the intellectual and literary arts of these peoples. He also wrote a lot about some of the philosophical and logical lessons left by the Greeks in his clear literary language that made it easier for readers to comprehend them despite their difficult terminologies even in their native language. Al-Jahiz left remarkable intellectual achievements, which the following writers and men of letter who were influenced by him can develop and enlarge as he mentioned in his book "Kitab al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin" (Generally speaking, we only know that oratory is Arabic and Persian art, while the Indians have their own scribed meanings and memorable literatures, not attributed to any a specific author or a learned scholar, they are their inheritance. The Greeks are known for the industry of philosophy and logic, even their flourishing logician, reference to Aristotle, wept tongue, was not described as eloquent despite his being competent linguist. And though Ptolemy was claimed to be the most eloquent among them, he was not mentioned as an orator or rhetorician. In Persia, they are orators, but they think hard, exert much effort, consult long and need much time and study until their they put down their speeches in words. Al-Jahiz made available some of their sciences and knowledge, particularly in the domains of philosophy and logic through his creative literary language with aim of making a comparison only because he did not interpret them profoundly and in details; yet, this does not underestimate his efforts and favor of his presentation of such complicated philosophical issues in his unique and easily grasped literary style.

6. There are also some other rhetorical devices, which Al-Jahiz did not mention their modern terminologies. However, he talked about them in Kitab Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin through citing some examples and sayings, which he analyzed them so thoroughly that made of his book a rich treasure for the researchers of rhetoric and literature. These devices are outlined as follows:

#### A. Brevity

Brevity is an important expressive method, which the Arabs favored more than expatiation, and considered it as the first number art of rhetoric. Al-Jahiz cited some specimens of this style of eloquence such as Mauwiyah's question to Sahar Ibn Ayash: What is brevity? "Brevity is to answer without slowness, and to speak without mistakes " he replied and his saying, too, " An Arabian was asked, " what is rhetoric? He answered, " To speak as briefly as elaborately without falling short". Al-Jahiz also explicated the concept of brevity in his reference to the words of Prophet Mohammed(PBUH) as saying: I am mentioning another art of his Kalam, whose meanings are more comprehensive than his words , natural and not fabricated

and unaffectionate , and his saying too, "in order to know that God gifted him with brevity and comprehensiveness of meanings, you have to return to his hadith " I have been given words which are concise but comprehensive in meaning ". Al-Jahiz defined brevity as conciseness of words with comprehensiveness of meaning.

#### B. Expatiation (circumlocution)

It is an expressive method which has other synonyms such as circumlocution, prolongation and enlargement. It, unlike brevity, means redundancy of words. Al-Jahiz mentioned that expatiation is not considered prolongation unless it exceeds the required amount of words, as narrated from Shibeb Ibn Shabah as saying, " if it happens that you are on an occasion that requires prolongation, you have to expatiate so as to avoid failing short.". Then he numerated some occasions which need prolongation of Kalam such as the Khutbat "speech" of marriage. He also narrated from Elias as was told," your only vice is you talk too much- he answered- am I correct or incorrect? " Definitely correct" they answered, so he said, " well, lemons to lemonade". Al-Jahiz attributed in a comment on the criticism leveled on Elias's talkativeness despite the fact that he was correct, to the Arabs inclination to brevity and refraining from redundancies for they consider expatiation as a kind of affectation and hyperbole, ostentation and whimsicality ; they hate rhetorical curiosity as obscenity unless what requires precaution and this is a kind of redundancy acceptable on the given occasion, particularly when it is with so sophisticated eloquent rhetorician. 3. Repetition: Repetition is a literary and rhetorical device that repeats the same letters, words or phrases or even sentences a few times to make an idea clearer and more memorable. It is also called reiteration. Al-Jahiz narrated in his book that Ibn Al-Samak was, once, made to deliver Khutba "a speech" and there was a maid listening to him, and when he was over, he asked her about his speech ? " Definitely very well – she said- otherwise you reiterated very much, he said," I reiterate to make the one who does not understand, understand, she said, until he understands, but it may bring boredom to one who understands. Reiteration is considered a vice for the most of Arab rhetoricians, however, Al-Jahiz has a different point of view; he sees repetition as a rhetorical device by which Mutakaliums make common people understand what is being intended, citing some Qur'an verses in which God reiterated, such as Moses, Aaron,Ibrahim, Lot, and Shoaib, Ad and Thumad people's stories, God also repeated the mention of the Paradise and Hell and other things because he addressed all nations of Arabs and non-Arabs, yet, most of them were negligent or stubborn or absent-minded, and no one dared to criticize Qur'anic repetition, which implies much orientation and aggravation of fear of torture.

#### 7. Arts of Eloquent Expression

The concept of rhetoric for Al-Jahiz is closely related to the concept of eloquence; he sees rhetoric as a one of eloquence styles, so he labels all expressive devices which man uses to reveal his intentions and needs. Rhetoric is sometimes seen as a synonym of eloquence when he privatizes it as an expressive device of the tongue as a legacy of both addresser and addressee, who use it privately, referring to spoken language and not to any other semantic signs as considered speech performance is the method of rhetoric for being the most important and complete device. The most important arts of eloquent expressions are three types:

##### A.Simile

Simile is unsurprisingly recurrent in Al-Jahiz's books and his letters because it is one of the figures of speech used by writers and poets to communicate their intentions and meanings best. Al-Jahiz mentioned a lot of examples of similes, such as the one used the Prophet (PBUH) in his Hadith: people are equal like the teeth of the comb, show the goodness attained by the Prophet's simile. Then, he narrated from some poet his satirical verse, which was influenced by the Prophet's Hadith:

Whether like the donkey's teeth,

The old are not more privileged than the young.

Al-Jahiz commented on the two similes that any precise comparison between the two similes would certainly show which simile is best.

##### B.Metaphor

It is also one of the figures of speech, it is in fact a simile but without using like or as. It makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated, but which share some common characteristics, in other words, a resemblance of two contradictory or different objects is made based on a single or some common characteristics, which clearly reveals meanings that cannot be expressed by straightforward Kalam. There are numerous examples of metaphor in the Arab Kalam. Al-Jahiz discussed it in his book when commenting on a line of verse:

A cloud remained veiling her,  
Her eyes drizzling for her cloud,

He said that the poet, by using the metaphor, made of the rain tears and the clouds eyes. In all of the examples Al-Jahiz cited, he emphasised on the capability of metaphor to reveal the meaning for the audience in its best images.

### C. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech that replaces the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated. Arab rhetoricians paid metonymy much attention for the role it plays in clarification and impacting for it had been much stated in both Arab literature and Qur'an. Al-Jahiz also mentioned it in his book under different names such as epithet, which is to nickname a man or a woman like Abu Zaid, Abu Aubaydah, or Mum Al-Hakam. While rhetorically speaking, metonymy refers to naming the thing with with different name that has realistic and figurative ramifications as was reported from an Indian as saying , " it is rationally insightful for the speaker to use the metonymy when he find it difficult to express the intended meaning clearly, yet that not to use it remains better and best, and he said again, " some metonymy may be better than declaration", but he also said; " that metonymy and allusion do not has as equal impact as declaration and revelation do.

As exemplified by Al-Jahiz as saying: " that if somebody was said to be frugal, it means he is miser, and if a labourer was said to be marginalized, it means he is much oppressed 33". There are a lot of examples of metonymy in the "Kitab al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin".

## II. CONCLUSION

The efforts exerted by Al-Jahiz in his authority "Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin" were so huge that the book contains encyclopaedic knowledge which are beneficial for the researchers who came after him. "Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin", unlike any other reference, is an abundant treasure for anyone who wants to study Arab rhetoric, its arts, and learn more about Arabs' Khutabs "speeches". This is a fragrant evidence for Al-Jahiz's great achievement and precedence in the field of knowledge.

Al-Jahiz's style is distinguished with unique qualities that are rarely found in other writers', and this is probably attributed to the fact that Al-Jahiz was a hard reader, who acquainted himself with the achievements of the researchers who preceded him whether they were Arab or non- Arabs. His fathomless knowledge rendered his style more magnificently distinctive. Mu'tazili thought and their philosophical vision towards religion might have left great influence on the pattern of thinking, then his optimal style of prose writing. Generally speaking, Al-Jahiz, unlike his contemporaries, had a artistically distinctive style that became an independent school called Al-Jahizdhyah.

Digression was his most prominent device, which he devised and used creatively. He was such an encyclopaedic writer that he could closely associate between different subjects. It was easy for him to digress from the subject underway to other subjects and after going over them thoroughly, he came back to his main topic showing similarities between the subjects already discussed in a way that his audience or reader did not feel bored or distracted, contrarily, they accumulated great deal of knowledge and information from only one of his books. Al-Jahiz used to formulate his words aesthetically enough to express a variety of meanings by different linguistic methods. His comprehensive linguistic wealth enabled him to colour his modes of expression on different subjects. He was known for his application of multiple different technical devices such as the blend of " humour and gravitas', which gave his subjects a comedic aspect that benefits the reader and reduces his

mental efforts. So that he can understand seriously scientific subjects that need thinking and witticism, and enjoy reading away from boredom and disinterestedness. Al-Jahiz's literature did not lack any of the rhetorical, eloquent and figurative features such as rhymed prose "Saj", which enriches his writing with beautiful rhythm and musicality, particularly in the paralleled sentences. He used this device even in discussing philosophical issues, which are primarily based on seriousness and scientific experience; yet he expressed them in his renown literary style, which enabled readers to assimilate them despite their being complicated.

Al-Jahiz mentioned all the figures of speech he used in his book like brevity as a mode of expression, almost all writers cherish and prefer, adopting the proverb "the briefer the talk is, the better is". Yet, he saw brevity as equal as expatiation, both of them are needed as per the subject. Of course, People are inclined to brevity, but they also prolong to bring about understanding and persuasion. He was also excellent in using simile, metaphor, metonymy and allusion, showing their expressive and craft qualities for all those who seek to possess the technical talent of the discourse arts. Finally, it is important to refer that Kitab Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin was an original literary Arab heritage that stemmed from the depths of the Arabic language and embodied its intellectual, linguistic and literary aspects. And anyone who reads it, will feel unique enjoyment due to the approach it deals with subjects by its charming literary style.

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