

**The Figurative Structure of Eschatological Arabic**

by Christopher Buck

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### ABSTRACT

A significant linguistic fact for the study of classical Arabic is that its first literary monument--the Qur'ān--has a very high incidence of figurative discourse. Around one-third of the text overall concerns eschatology--imaging heaven and hell and the final judgment to come. This "eschatological Arabic" (EA) has been analyzed by traditional Arabic linguists into various kinds of figures of speech: majāz (transference/non-literal use of language); isti<sup>c</sup>āra (metaphor); tamthīl (conceit); tashbīh (simile); takhyīl (phantasm); ramz (symbol); and others. This paper treats three distinct approaches to figuration within the Islamic tradition: (1) figures as phenomenological; (2) figures as cognitive process; (3) figures as meaning-intention.

The "basis" and "genius" of Arabic, according to Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), is its "eloquence" (balāghah), of which the supreme exemplar is the Qur'ān by virtue of its "inimitability" (i<sup>c</sup>jāz). One of the four "pillars" of Arabic language sciences is known as "the science of expressivity" (ilm al-bayān). The strictly phenomenological approach is typified by al-Bāqillānī (d.1013) who classified 34 kinds of figures in the Qur'ān. A pioneer in the study of figurative language as cognitive process is al-Jurjānī (d.1078) whose theory of "structure" (nazm) describes the imaginative process inherent in figuration as "meaning and the meaning of meaning" (al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā wa ma<sup>c</sup>nā al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā).

Al-Jurjānī's theory on the relationship between semantic and syntactic relations (ma<sup>c</sup>ānī al-naḥwī) as inseparable elements of construction (min muqtaḍayāt al-naẓm) anticipates modern approaches, such as Max Black's distinction between the linguistic "frame" and the semantic "focus" of a metaphor, or E.R. MacCormac's theory of "knowledge process", entailing three levels: (1) Surface Language; (2) Semantics and Syntax; (3) Cognition. Despite the theoretical relevance of modern linguistics, it was methodologically expedient to invoke traditional Arabic linguists, whose contributions are more adapted to Arabic itself, and whose command of Arabic is without peer. Moreover, as M.J. Geller states: "The Semitists have generally not entered into the arena of semiotics and 'the meaning of meaning', because so much of the basic work of lexicography and the production of text editions remains to be done."

As to meaning-intention, or "m-intention" (Grice), the question as to what the Qur'<sup>ān</sup> intentionally means in its eschatological discourses is obscure and often is literalized as a result. Two interpreters of Qur'<sup>ān</sup>ic figurative verses are cited, due to the clarity and methodological "elegance" they are known for: (1) Abū Ya<sup>c</sup>qūb al-Sijistānī (d.943); and (2) Bahā'u'llāh (d.1892). The former is Ismā<sup>c</sup>īlī and achieved a synthesis of reason and revelation based on Neoplatonism and Shī<sup>c</sup>ī doctrine. The latter was charismatic and ultimately post-Islamic, having laid claim to revelation (wahy) and founded an independent world religion, the Bahā'ī Faith.

Al-Sijistānī's hermeneutical approach is to view a figurative text in terms of thought-world correspondences. Thus, eschatological "earth" symbolizes "knowledge" as the ground of spiritual awareness. His approach is somewhat similar to that of Maimonides: each sees "heaven" as sharī<sup>c</sup>ā (religious law) and "religion", respectively. Bahā'u'llāh similarly takes the eschatological "sun" and "moon" as tropical (vs. veridical), and are periphrastically exegeted as fictio personae. Is this the m-intention of the Qur'<sup>ān</sup>? This is impossible to verify or reject.

## Proposed Revision

### I. Introduction

#### A. Figurative Quranic discourse

#### B. <sup>C</sup>Ilm al-Bayān

##### 1. Exemplars cited by al-Bāqillanī:

Q 17:25, 24:35, 22:54, 2:175, 55:24, 37:47, 2:132,  
67:8, 74:4, 30:18, 21:38, 16:55, 13:30, 5:43,  
7:200, 14:24, 7:175, 16:50-51, 18:45.

##### 2. Exemplars cited by al-Rummānī:

Q 12:82, 24:39, 7:171, 57:21, 25:23, 6:27.

#### C. Approaches to figuration within Islamic tradition

##### 1. Figures of speech as linguistic phenomena

##### 2. Figures as cognitive process

##### 3. Figures as meaning-intention

### II. The Phenomenological Approach by Arabic Linguists

#### A. Types of figures of speech

##### 1. majāz (transference/non-literal use of language)

##### 2. tawriya (double entendre, lit. "disguising")

##### 3. isti<sup>C</sup>āra (metaphor)

##### 4. tamthīl (conceit)

##### 5. tashbīh (simile)

##### 6. takhyīl (phantasm)

##### 7. ramz (symbol)

#### B. Attempts at Classification

##### 1. Abū <sup>C</sup>Ubayda: 39 types of majāz

##### 2. Al-Bāqillanī: 34 types of figures of speech

### III. Figuration as Cognitive Process

#### A. Al-Jurjānī

##### 1. Theory of "construction" (naẓm)

##### 2. "Image of meaning" (ṣūrat al-ma<sup>C</sup>nā)

##### 3. "Meaning and the meaning of meaning" (al-ma<sup>C</sup>nā wa ma<sup>C</sup>nā al-ma<sup>C</sup>nā)



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Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), the last of the major medieval Islamic scholars, states that "eloquence" (balāghah) is "the basis, genius, spirit, and nature of Arabic speech".<sup>1</sup> Ajami:1984:71 The Qur'ān as the first literary monument in Arabic has ever been regarded as preeminent in its eloquence, and it is al-Jurjānī's theory of naẓm ("construction", "order", "structure") of eloquence which gave rise to conclusions consonant with "the greatest school in linguistics, namely that of F. de Saussure and A. Meillet".<sup>2</sup> Abu Deeb:1979:25 Dated though such an estimate may be, it is a further credit to al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) that the occasional reference to his thought appears in Western scholarship in linguistics.<sup>3</sup> Mooij:1976:67-69 The linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf sums up the theoretical position taken centuries prior by al-Jurjānī: "Sense or meaning does not result from words or morphemes but from patterned relations between words or morphemes."<sup>4</sup> Abu Deeb:1979:27 It is to the supervision of the great Arabicist A.F.L. Beeston that we owe Abu Deeb's Oxford doctoral thesis on al-Jurjānī<sup>5</sup> Abu Deeb:1979:viii thus making more accessible to the West the work of one who represents the culmination of four centuries of Arabic literary criticism. It is the intent of this paper to investigate the extent to which such literary studies--which arose out of an impulse to fathom the eloquence of the Qur'ān--may be reflexively applied to the Quranic text itself as a tool of exegesis. The discipline of ʿilm al-bayān--one of Ibn Khaldūn's four pillars of Arabic language sciences--concerns eloquence and it is this discipline which is "needed most by Qur'ān commentators".<sup>6</sup> Rosenthal:1958:319 & 338 The most figurative of Arabic, apart from poetry and proverbs, has to be eschatological--especially apocalyptic--Arabic, characteristic of the Meccan sūras, recurring extensively throughout the Qur'ān.

What, then, may be said of the "structure" of eschatological Arabic (hereafter, EA)? To state the obvious, it is highly figurative. The inimitability (ī<sup>c</sup>jāz) of the Qur'ān, according to al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), is indeed exemplified by its rhetorical beauty (badī<sup>c</sup>) as shown in the 34 figures of speech al-Bāqillānī specifies (though ī<sup>c</sup>jāz al-Qur'ān is not itself based on its badī<sup>c</sup> alone).<sup>7</sup> Grunebaum: 1950:55). Al-Jurjānī's study of the structure of figurative Arabic entails a theory of correspondence between the structure of meanings and the structure of words or morphemes: "since words are the bearers of meanings, it follows that their order inevitably accords with the order of meanings."<sup>8</sup> Abu Deeb:27. Furthermore, words of and in themselves are not independent acts of thought: "Words were not set in the language convention in order that their own meanings may be known, but in order that these meanings may be related one to another."<sup>9</sup> Abu Deeb:40. This symbolic view of language sees human communication as originating in the declarative form, such that the process of thinking operates on structures rather than on independent words. Thus it would be indeterminate to think of a verb without it seen related to an implicit or explicit agent-- the same principle holding true for nouns. Nor does a word of itself possess any inherent quality which makes it eloquent. Once a word enters into a construction (naẓm), then and only then can it be said to be expressive.<sup>10</sup> Abu Deeb:40. Al-Jurjānī's concept of language is grounded in the principle that language is a system of relations. It is this theoretical framework which generates al-Jurjānī's concept of the "image of meaning" (ṣūrat al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā).

Al-Jurjānī's theory of ṣūrat al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā requires that poetic imagery be seen as involving two processes of signification producing two kinds of meaning: "meaning" and the "meaning of meaning". This in turn serves as a theoretical backbone in support of his argument that the ī<sup>c</sup>jāz of the Qur'ān inheres in its construction and harmonization (al-naẓm wa al-ta'līf).<sup>11</sup> Abu Deeb:58,61. Nowhere is this approach better illustrated than in the Qur'ān's use of metaphor (isti<sup>c</sup>āra). One such metaphor occurs in Q.19:3, where Zechariah petitions God, saying: "...and my head is all aflame with hoariness", or, more literally, "the head blazed with hoariness":

"...when we say that the word 'ishta<sup>c</sup>ala (burnt, blazed) in the Quranic verse 'wa 'ishta<sup>c</sup>ala al-ra'su shaiban' has achieved the highest degree of eloquence and expressiveness, we do not attribute these qualities to it as an isolated word, but because of its relation to the word 'head' which is defined by the particle 'the', and because of the relation of both of these words to the word 'hoariness' used in the indefinite and being a tamyiz (specification)."<sup>12</sup> Abu Deeb:62

Al-Jurjānī's theory of imagery is, as far as Abu Deeb has determined, "unique even with reference to modern criticism."<sup>13</sup> ibid. Whether one speaks of the isti<sup>c</sup>āra, or kināya (metonymy), or tamthīl (conceit), or other figures of speech, al-Jurjānī sees all figurative usages in the Qur'ān as inseparable elements of construction (min muqtadayāt al-naẓm), the meanings (ma<sup>c</sup>āni) of which are inextricably bound up with the special grammatical and syntactic relations (ma<sup>c</sup>āni al-naḥu) which together form a unity, or "being". What for al-Jurjānī are primary figures of speech--tashbīh (simile), tamthīl, isti<sup>c</sup>āra--act as "poles around which meanings, in their various types of behaviour in their spheres, rotate", the inner significances of which are "comprehended by the heart, and realized by the intellect...and not by the sense of hearing."<sup>14</sup> Abu Deeb:66,67 There are at work psychological factors in figurative meaning beyond cognition of literal meaning in which "you feel in your soul a thrill and a ∫sense of∫ liberation"--a specific imaginative process stimulated by "the meaning and the meaning of meaning" (al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā wa ma<sup>c</sup>nā al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā).<sup>15</sup> A/D: 74,75 Al-Jurjānī's concept of "the meaning of meaning" is a unique contribution to Arabic criticism. Of the aesthetics thus intrinsic to isti<sup>c</sup>āra, the metaphor has the power to render "the inanimate alive and communicative, the inarticulate eloquent, dumb objects expressive, and hidden meanings clear and revealed to the eye." Isti<sup>c</sup>āra, in and of its significatory merits, moreover:

"...shows you delicate ideas...buried in the intellect as if...the eye actually sees them; if you will, it ∫isti<sup>c</sup>āra∫ shows you bodily attributes as if they were spiritual entities incomprehensible except to the imagination."<sup>16</sup> A/D:83

As to figurative language in classical Arabic, a few exemplars from the Qur'ān, cited in al-Baqillani's I<sup>c</sup>jāz al-Qur'ān, are illustrative: "Lower to them the wing of humility" (Q 17:25); "light upon light" (Q 24:35); "a barren day" (Q 22:54); "in retaliation is life" (Q 2:175); "(ships) towering up in the sea like landmarks" (Q 55:24); "as though they (maidens) were eggs, well guarded" (Q 37:47); "the savor of Allah" (Q 2:132); "almost shall it (Hell) burst asunder for fury" (Q 67:8); "thy raiment (body)--purify it!" (Q 74:4); "He (Allah) bringeth forth the dead out of the living" (Q 30:18); "man was created of haste" (Q 21:38); "when hardship touches you, to Him do ye roar" (Q 16:55); "If only by a Qur'ān the mountains had been moved, or the earth been cleft, or the dead been spoken to" (Q 13:30); "Allah will repent" (Q 5:43); "a phantom from Satan" (Q 7:200); "they (mankind) stepped forth to Allah in a body" (Q 14:24); "so he is to be compared to a dog, which, if one attacks it, lolls out its tongue" (Q 7:175); "whose shadows extend themselves on the right and on the left, doing obeisance to Allah" (Q 16:50-1); "the earth stepping forward" (Q 18:45).<sup>17</sup> Grunebaum:1950:passim To which al-Rummānī adds many other examples in his al-Nukat fī i<sup>c</sup>jāz al-Qur'ān: "Ask the town" (Q 12:82); "their works are like a mirage" (Q 24:39); "when We shook the mountain above them as if it were a canopy" (Q 7:171); "a garden as wide as the width of heaven and earth" (Q 57:21); "We shall turn to what they did and shall make it dust scattered about" (Q 25:23); "when they stood in the fire" (Q 6:27).<sup>18</sup> Rippin:1986:50-7 passim Of the Quranic figurative language which is of immediate interest in this paper is that which is perhaps the most exegetically enigmatic, viz., eschatological (and especially apocalyptic) imagery.

Prior to examining some of the apocalyptic imagery in the Qur'ān, a word should be said about al-Jurjānī's Dalā'il al-i<sup>c</sup>jāz and Asrār al-balāgha: al-Jurjānī draws more from Arabic poetry to expound his theory of nazm and analyses of figures of speech than from the Qur'ān itself. With this limitation in mind, we shall attempt to apply his conceptual framework<sup>19</sup> Boullata:1988:146-147 to certain of the more striking Quranic vaticinations.

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Al-Jurjānī classifies metaphors in three types, the third of which would seem most appropriate to EA, viz., the revelation of a similarity in intellectual images (ṣuwar <sup>C</sup>aqliyya). The analysis of isti<sup>C</sup>āra as an "intellectual image" is developed in the following explanation:

"Do you not see that the similarity here is revealed between a perceptible (concrete entity) and an intellectual (abstract one)? Do you not see that light is visual and perceptible by the sense of sight, whereas eloquence and coherency are conveyed to you by the intellect...? This is because the similarity does not lie in what is understood from the letters and sounds, for the significance of the words is what enlightens the heart rather than the words themselves.

"Moreover, light can be borrowed also for knowledge itself and for belief and faith as well. This is also the case when darkness is borrowed for doubt, ignorance, and disbelief (kufr). ...The point of similarity is that the heart is rendered by uncertainty and ignorance in the same state as that of sight when it is bound by the darkness of the night...".<sup>20</sup> A/D:85-6

There evidently was an expression current in Islam in which the Companions of the Prophet were referred to as "the stars of guidance". Al-Jurjānī gives instances in which "stars" are used in expressions which are, by contrast, "sensuous": the word "stars" is applied to "lanterns" or "scattered fires" in the desert.<sup>21</sup>

A/D:86-7 It would stand to reason, then, that if Quranic occurrences of isti<sup>C</sup>āra of the third kind can be established, their interpretation would, it follows, be of an abstract nature rather than a literal one--<sup>the latter</sup> slavish to the text but not to its significance if so construed. Hence al-Jurjānī can figuratively express what figurative expression is all about:

"Words are ornaments and embellishments for meanings... Meanings are like maidens and words are like grand, beautiful, intricately patterned, elegant, appealing garments for them."<sup>22</sup> A/D:99

In what way might Quranic apocalyptic imagery be determined to be of the type al-Jurjānī classifies as "intellectual image"? Below, a representative text is cited, inviting such analysis:

"And there was a blast on the Trumpet--

Lo! it is the threatened Day!

And every soul is summoned to a reckoning--

with him an impeller and a witness.<sup>23</sup> Q 50:20/1:Rodwell:

"Thou wast heedless of this; (altered to a more  
now We have removed from thee thy veil, literal rendering  
and sharp is thy sight this day.'"<sup>24</sup> by Shoghi Effendi  
Q 50:22; Sher <sup>C</sup>Alī

Though dramatic--and a bit chilling in the original Arabic--  
this passage is not all that striking compared to other Quranic  
descriptions of the Day of Judgement. The significance of the  
text should become apparent once its assumed reference to the  
future is called into question! What of course needs to be ascer-  
tained is the sense of the Arabic original with respect to time:

wa nufikha fī aṣ-ṣūri thalika yawm'u'l-wa<sup>C</sup>īd<sup>i</sup>  
wa jā'at kullu nafsin ma<sup>C</sup>ahā sā'iqun wa shahīdun  
laqat kunta fī ghaflatin min hāthā fakashafnā <sup>C</sup>anka  
ghaṭā'aka fabaṣaruka al-yawma hadīdun

Before looking at the syntactical structure of this text, there is  
a technical comment on it of sweeping importance to our understand-  
ing of it if the argument for the above reading is valid. The  
19th-c Persian prophetic figure Bahā'u'llāh (d.1892) states in  
the Kitāb-i-Īqān:

"As the commentators of the Qur'ān and they that follow  
the letter thereof misapprehended the inner meaning of  
the words of God and failed to grasp their essential  
purpose, they sought to demonstrate that, according to  
the rules of grammar, whenever the term 'idha' precedeth  
the past tense, it invariably hath reference to the future.  
Later, they were sore perplexed in attempting to explain  
those verses of the Book wherein that term did not actually  
occur. Even as He hath revealed: 'And there was a blast  
on the trumpet,--lo! it is the threatened Day! And every  
soul is summoned to a reckoning,--with him an impeller  
and a witness.' In explaining this and similar verses,  
they have in some cases argued that the term 'idhā' is  
implied. In other instances, they have idly contended  
that whereas the Day of Judgment is inevitable, it hath  
therefore been referred to as an event not of the future  
but of the past. How vain their sophistry!

"How grievous their blindness! They refuse to recognize the trumpet-blast which so explicitly in this text was sounded through the revelation of Muhammad. ... Nay, by 'trumpet' is meant the trumpet-call of Muhammad's Revelation, which was sounded in the heart of the universe, and by 'resurrection' is meant His own rise to proclaim the Cause of God. He bade the erring and wayward arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their bodies, arrayed them with the breath of a new and wondrous life.

"Thus at the hour when Muhammad, that divine Beauty, purposed to unveil one of the mysteries hidden in the symbolic terms 'resurrection', 'judgment', 'paradise', and 'hell', Gabriel, the Voice of Inspiration, was heard saying: 'Erelong will they wag their heads at Thee, and say, "When shall this be?" Say: "Perchance it is nigh."' "25  
Bahā'u'llāh:115-17

Analyzing the passage in question, the verb *nufikha* ("was blown") is an internal passive. It is clearly past tense in its surface structure, with no compelling reason to conjecture an implied '*idhā* in its deep structure. As a time-marking subordinator, this functional has a syntactical structure of a conditional, and indeed the medieval Arab grammarians construed '*idhā* as an adverbial as well as a conditional. Since an event envisaged in the future cannot be a fact (as it might not, after all, take place), the future time siting using '*idhā* would take the characteristic conditional construct. Considering the fact that the event-stating predicate is dynamic, this suffix-conjugated verb unambiguously indicates past time.<sup>26</sup> Beeston:1970:98-9;76 In any event, what follows in the text is a nominal clause (with no verb), identificatory in terms of theme and predicate, static in aspect and thus non-marked for time (expressing present tense). Bahā'u'llāh's argument for a contemporary-historical hermeneutical approach to the passage, involving what one might term a "realized apocalyptic", has force. The originality of the argument may be appreciated when one takes into account the entrenched exegetical position that all of the eschatological passages in the Qur'ān may be assumed to have a future doomsday in view, but Bahā'u'llāh challenges the assumption!

Bahā'u'llāh's argument from a present tense reading of Q 50:20 is supported by the text. The implications of such a reading are far-reaching, to say the least, but the argument is not enough to override entrenched Quranic exegesis. However, if Bahā'u'llāh's insight into the nature of apocalyptic is valid, literal readings of the text are simply out of the question, if they are contextualized within Muhammad's historical present. Bahā'u'llāh has, in any event, ruled out literalization as being contrary to the prophetic and revelatory patterns in ages past--the weight of salvation history cited as the more natural predictor of future events. And, of course, if the text is literal, it ceases to be figurative.

Granting the figurative nature of EA, what may then be said of its symbolic structure? According to al-Jurjānī, the fundamentum of all imagery is tashbīh, in the sense of "comparison" or "similarity". "As for isti<sup>c</sup>āra," states al-Jurjani, "it is a type of tashbīh." And: "...isti<sup>c</sup>āra is always based on tashbīh."<sup>27</sup> A/D:67 The role of analogy (qiyās) is at the heart of tashbīh: "...tashbīh is an analogy (qiyās), and analogy 'occurs in' qualities comprehended by the heart, and realized by the intellect...and not by the sense of hearing."<sup>28</sup> ibid. There is, therefore, on the linguistic level, a metaphoric process whereby a word which designates B is used to refer to A. This process is termed "transference" (naql) or "borrowing" (isti<sup>c</sup>āra) by al-Jurjānī--a terminology already established in Arabic literary criticism. In a departure from the traditional theory of transference, however, al-Jurjānī postulates a fusion between the original referent of a word and its metaphoric sense, in the imagination. In the expression, "I saw a lion," al-Jurjānī argues that the hearer for an instant has the impression that the speaker is referring to a real lion. It is only the context which makes the hearer realize that a real lion is not in fact intended, but that the expression refers to a man. The isti<sup>c</sup>āra "evokes in the imagination (the impression) that the referent is a man and a lion at one and the same time, both in image and in character."<sup>28</sup> A/D:179-80 Attributes are in this way shared by both.

The linguistic form of the isti<sup>C</sup>āra, "A deer appeared to us," may be interpreted as the real animal; but upon analysis--by relating the expression to the meaning of the whole linguistic utterance--one comes to recognize that it refers to a woman with attributes akin to those of a deer. As such, two entities may be said to exist in this form of expression, in which a certain interrelation ('istinād) between the two takes on the dynamic of a transferal of meaning rather than name, as traditional criticism held. Unfortunately for the purposes of this present study, al-Jurjānī shies away from any real analysis of Quranic apocalyptic, possibly because it may not be classifiable as among the forms of imagery which are most commonplace in poetic discourse, viz., isti<sup>C</sup>āra, tashbīh, and tamthīl. How might al-Jurjānī, then, have analyzed the following passage from the Sura of the Rolling Up:

When the sun is rolled up  
And when the stars are thrown down  
And when the mountains are made to move  
And when pregnant camels are abandoned  
And when savage beasts are brought together  
And when the seas heat up  
And when people are coupled together  
And when the buried infant was asked  
About the sin for which she was slain  
And when the scrolls are unrolled  
And when heaven is laid bare  
And when hell is set ablaze  
And when paradise is brought near,  
Then a soul will know what it has produced.<sup>29</sup>

¶¶Rippin:  
1986:36¶¶

The term majāz comes to mind. This may be a little too facile, for, as Wansbrough put it: "Majāz had indeed become, with specific reference to the Qur'an, a vague and general designation of all phenomena requiring to be understood other than literally."<sup>30</sup>

¶¶Wansbrough:1977:237¶¶ Perhaps takhyīl is more appropriate.

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Abu <sup>c</sup>Ubayda

Al-Muthannā (d.209/824) in his Majāz al-Qur'ān describes 39 kinds of majāz. Wansbrough gives their respective loci probantes, and of the examples cited, "none of the categories described nor the examples adduced to illustrate them suggests a consciousness of figurative language."<sup>31</sup> Wansbrough:1970:254 Even so, the cited instances of Quranic employment of fictio personae are of interest:

(Q 12:4) "I saw eleven stars, and the sun and the moon,  
I saw them bowing down to me."

(Q 41:11) "They both (heaven and earth) said:  
We come willingly."<sup>32</sup> op. cit.:250

Why Wansbrough remarked that the "consciousness of figurative language" was lacking was for the stated reason that al-Muthannā was preoccupied with textual clarity rather than with literary embellishment.<sup>33</sup> op. cit.:254 For figurative clarity we turn to the authoritative Zamakhsharī, for whom takhyīl represents one of two kinds of image (taswīr)--the other type being tamthīl. Takhyīl derives from hypothetical data (mafrudāt); while tamthīl is said to derive from empirical data (muḥaqqaqāt). Both images are, in any event, equally conceivable and equally dependent upon exercise of imagination. Though Zamakhsharī was of the opinion that Q 41:11 could be either tamthīl or takhyīl, the instance of Q 33:72 was analyzed as a certain takhyīl:<sup>34</sup> Wansbrough:1977:241

(Q 33:72) "We offered (Our) covenant/trust  
to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains."

And either takhyīl or tamthīl:

(Q 59:21) "Had We allowed this Qur'ān to descend upon  
a mountain you would have seen it humbly  
collapse from fear of God."<sup>35</sup> ibid.

In discussing takhyīl, it should be pointed out that the term was rarely treated as a figure of speech in Arabic rhetorics. Rather, takhyīl evolved into an important term in Arabic poetics. Hence Averroes' succinct definition of poetry: al-aqāwīl ash-shi<sup>c</sup>riyya hiya al-aqāwīl at-takhyīliyya ("Poetic discourses are imaginatively creative discourses.")<sup>35</sup> Cantarino:1975:99 Nevertheless, al-Jurjani offers a lengthy analysis of takhyīl in Asrār al-Balāgha.<sup>36</sup>  
Ritter's ed.:1954:241-296

Al-Jurjānī's theory of takhyīl is that "its essence is the presentation of an object or entity in a linguistic construction which reveals no trace of the metaphoric process," according to Abu Deeb. In al-Jurjānī's words, takhyīl reflects the creative process wherein the poet "loses all awareness of the presence of isti<sup>c</sup>āra or majāz" to the extent that the poet writes "as if the process of isti<sup>c</sup>āra and analogy has not occurred to him at all and as if not even a shadow of it has passed before his eyes."<sup>37</sup> A/D:160 The process of takhyīl is therefore a symbolic one, and would appear to be al-Jurjānī's equivalent of "symbol" (ramz). But the use of ramz among al-Jurjānī's contemporaries (e.g., Ibn Rashīq and Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī) as a technical term failed to reflect upon the symbolic process as al-Jurjānī understood it.<sup>38</sup> op. cit.:164 This analysis has the power to explain the way in which an eschatological passage such as in the Sura of the Rolling Up instanced supra can be exegeted as highly figurative despite the fact that the text "reveals no trace of the metaphoric process".

The fantastic aetiology (ta<sup>c</sup>līl takhyīlī) adduced by Zamakhsharī with regard to Q 41:11/33:72 might well demonstrate the hidden metaphoric process in Q 81:1-14. Take for instance the passage in the Sura of The Rending (Q 84:1-5), where heaven and earth are personified precisely in the same way as in Q 41:11/33:72:

"When heaven is rent asunder  
and gives ear to its Lord, and is fitly disposed;  
when earth is stretched out  
and casts forth what is in it, and voids itself,  
and gives ear to its Lord, and is fitly disposed!"<sup>39</sup> Ar-  
berry

The obvious personification of heaven and earth occurs in an eschatological context as well as in an aetiological sense. If the aetiological verses are classifiable as takhyīl by Zamakhsharī, why not the eschatological verses as well? The metaphoric process is evident in Q 84:1-5 and, given a presumed consistency in the Qur'ān's use of eschatological imagery, it seems reasonable to analyze other such passages as covertly metaphorical. Granting validity to this approach, how then are these takhyīls explicable?

Zamakhsharī, as with al-Jurjānī, establishes the dynamic of takhyīl within the imagination of the "hearer". It is in this sense that Zamakhsharī qualifies the following eschatological verse as takhyīl: "The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand." (Q 39:67:Arberry) Zamakhsharī comments:

"The purpose of these words, if one takes them as they are in their totality and as a whole, is to give visible form to His greatness and to make people acquainted with the essence of His glory, nothing else... The hearer will not be brought to understand this (i.e., God's great deeds which perplex his mind) unless the mode of expression follows this path which consists of setting his imagination to work (takhyīl). And in the theory of rhetoric one does not find a mode of expression more refined, more delicate, and more subtle than this, and more useful and helpful when one undertakes to explain the dubious passages (al-mushtabihāt) in the word of God--exalted is He--in the Koran, the other heavenly books, and in the words of His prophets, since the greater and more important part of it consists of phantastic images (takhyīlāt) on which the feet used to slip in former times. And those who slipped did so because they cared little for research and careful investigation."<sup>40</sup> Bonebakker:1966:25-26

Indeed, Zamakhsharī's eulogy of the takhyīl is consistent with his definition of it: "giving visible form to the essential quality of a thing to express its greatness."<sup>41</sup> ibid. The term was taken up by Badraddīn b. an-Nahwiyya (d.718) to classify anthropomorphisms in the Quranic text.<sup>42</sup> op. cit.:27 Badraddīn etymologically derives takhyīl from khayāl ("dream-image), and defines this figure of speech as "depicting the essence of a thing in such a way that one imagines it to have a visible form." In addition to Q 39:67, Badraddīn adduces Q 37:62-63: "[the Tree of Ez-Zakkoum] is a tree that comes forth in the root of Hell; its spathes are as the heads of Satans"(Arberry). The importance of takhyīl is underscored by the added comment stating that "most dubious verses in the Koran belong to this category."<sup>43</sup> op. cit.:78-79 The hermeneutical implications of takhyīl are as inviting as they are clear: one need only <sup>correlate</sup> to a given "visible form" its "essential quality".

Problems raised in the interpretation of Quranic figurative texts involve issues of authority as well as questions of methodology. We defer on the issue of authoritative status and prerogative to interpret as this entails a somewhat separate discussion of what really boils down to competing truth claims, both in terms of communities within (and without) Islam and religious figures within (and without) Islam. In the effort to document how takhyīl texts may be explicated by a self-conscious method of correlating symbol and referent ("visible form"/"essential quality"), we move beyond Arabic literary criticism, beyond the identification and analysis of takhyīl, to tafsīr/ta'wīl.

Though selective, two authors of ta'wīl commentaries on figurative Quranic texts will be cited, owing to the remarkable clarity, consistency, and methodological "beauty" of these two authors: (1) Abū Ya<sup>c</sup>qūb al-Sijistānī (d.circa 331/943); and (2) Bahā'u'llāh (d.1892). The former is Ismā<sup>c</sup>īlī; the latter post-Islamic in respect of having laid claim to revelation (wahy), with charismatic authority sufficient to have been "routinized" (in Peter Berger's model) into an independent world religion, the Bahā'ī Faith.<sup>44</sup> Smith:1987

Al-Sijistānī represents "the Ismā<sup>c</sup>īlī formulation of a new synthesis of reason and revelation based on Neoplatonism and Shī<sup>c</sup>ī doctrine."<sup>45</sup> Poonawala:1988:222 One of the spiritual forces operative in revelation is identified by al-Sijistānī as al-khayāl ("vision", "thought-image", "dream-image"). Revelation's figurization of the rationals casts truths into forms, whereby the intelligible is expressed in the sensible. We have seen how khayāl etymologically prefigures takhyīl: the ta'wīl of takhyīl therefore discloses khayāl. Here a law of correspondences applies: "earth" is the mathal ("likeness"/"image") for knowledge, and so forth. Al-Sijistānī thus divines the spiritual meanings of verses with physical objects, viz., heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, seas, beasts, trees, fruits, etc. The ta'wīl is simple but elegant.

This associative technique--characteristic as well of Bahā'u'llāh's mode of ta'wīl--represents the explication of figurative terms as if a conceptual tawriya (double entendre) were integral to the deep structure of the Qur'ān. (Such analysis is that of the present writer and does not reflect the literature consulted.) In treating of the verse, "When the Word falls on them, We shall bring forth for them a beast that shall speak unto them: 'Mankind had no faith in Our signs,'" (Q 27:82/Arberry) al-Sijistānī states that "earth" in ta'wīl means "knowledge", inasmuch as the ground of spiritual consciousness is spiritual cognition. Goodly trees are therefore upright, righteous souls who derive sustenance therefrom. "Mountains" as great masses of earth refer to amassed knowledge, in the person of religious dignitaries par excellence. In eschatological terms, the verse which states, "On the day when We shall roll up heaven as a scroll rolled up with the writings," (Q 21:105) "means the cancellation of the sharīcā and its abrogation."<sup>46</sup> op. cit.: 215 The hermeneutic principles involved in such interpretation is the use all throughout ta'wīl of an extended parallelism, in which spiritual realities are represented by Quranic mathal, while a given mamthūl (one who is exemplified) is the person(s) serving as the locus of focus for those realities in all their eschatological moment.

This Neoplatonic key to scripture finds its counterpart in Maimonides. It is interesting to note that the preeminent Jewish sage appeals to figures of speech in everyday Arabic to illustrate the nature and meaning of Hebrew scripture:

"...understand the metaphor frequently employed by Isaiah, and less frequently by other prophets, when they describe the ruin of a kingdom or the destruction of a great nation [Pines translates: "great religious community"] in phrases like the following: "The stars have fallen," "The heavens are overthrown," "The sun is darkened," "The earth is waste, and trembles," and similar metaphors. The Arabs likewise say of a person who has met with a serious accident, "His heavens, together with his earth, have been covered" [Pines translates: "his heavens were cast upside down upon his earth"]; and when they speak of the approach of a nation's prosperity, they say, "The light of the sun and moon has increased," "A new heaven and a new earth has been created."<sup>47</sup> Friedlander:204

In Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb-i-Īqān--arguably the most influential ta'wīl in the modern non-Muslim world (certainly the most diffused)--we move from what is termed rhetorical tafsīr to allegorical tafsīr.<sup>48</sup> Rippin:1987:239 Yet there are a few textual/rhetorical interpretations of interest, with respect to the "structure" of classical eschatological Arabic. The first instance I would like to cite has to do with Bahā'u'llāh's reading of Q 55:5--

ash-shams<sup>u</sup> wa'l-qamar bi-ḥusbān<sup>in</sup>

This is the Arabic text cited in the K/I, but it is clear that Bahā'u'llāh read ḥusbān ("reckoning") in the eschatological sense of yawm al-ḥusbān ("Day of Reckoning")! Hence the translation of the verse by Shoghi Effendi, reflecting from context Bahā'u'llāh's reading:

"(Verily,) the sun and the moon (are both condemned) to (the torment of) infernal fire."

[parentheses added]

The eschatological "reckoning" of the sun and moon interprets the text in a tropical (versus veridical) context, wherein the sun and moon are periphrastically exegeted as fictio personae, evocative of Q 41:11 and 12:4, for instance. Thus Bahā'u'llāh comments:

"You are no doubt familiar with the interpretation of the term 'sun' and 'moon' mentioned in this verse... And whosoever is of the element of this 'sun' and 'moon', that is, followeth the example of these leaders in setting his face towards falsehood... cometh out of infernal gloom and returneth thereunto."<sup>49</sup> Persian text:29/  
Eng. tr.:38-9

From periphrastic exegesis we turn to Bahā'u'llāh's use of asbāb al-nuzūl ("occasions of revelation"):

"Moreover, this verse of the Qur'ān, revealed concerning Hamzih, the 'Prince of Martyrs,' and Abū-Jahl, is a luminous evidence ...of the truth of Our saying: 'Shall the dead, whom We have quickened, and for whom We have ordained a light whereby he may walk among men, be like him, whose likeness is in the darkness, whence he will not come forth?'(Q 6:122)"

"This verse descended from the heaven of the Primal Will at a time when Hamzih had already been invested with the sacred mantle of faith, and Abū-Jahl had waxed relentless in his opposition and unbelief. From the Wellspring of omnipotence and the Source of eternal holiness, there came the judgment that conferred everlasting life upon Hamzih, and condemned Abū-Jahl to eternal damnation. This was the signal that caused the fires of unbelief to glow with the hottest flame in the heart of the infidels, and provoked them openly to repudiate His truth. They loudly clamoured: 'When did Hamzih die? When was he risen?' ...As they understood not the significance of these noble sayings, ...therefore such fires of mischief were kindled amongst men." <sup>50</sup> K/I:Eng.tr.:121-22

The thrust of this argument is obvious; to wit, the Qur'ān's use of the terms "life" and "death" are eschatologically non-literal. Which explains the sense behind the apparent reversal of life/death in this passage. According to the sabab cited, the initial response to this revelation was that it was nonsense. The figurative nature of this passage is brought out into bold relief by the contrast in the literal way in which those who first heard the verse misconstrued its meaning.

Another instance of majāz which Bahā'u'llāh discerns in the text is that of Q 51:22: "The heaven hath sustenance for you, and it containeth that which you are promised." Bahā'u'llāh comments that "heaven" (sama<sup>c</sup>) cannot have a literal sense here (i.e., "sky") since "it is the earth that yieldeth such sustenance." <sup>51</sup> K/I:Eng.tr.:68/Persian:52) The term "sustenance" (rizq) is almost exclusively literal in meaning ("daily bread", "subsistence") comparable perhaps to the saying of Jesus, "Man does not live by bread alone." Rizq must be modified expressly as "spiritual" or by context. In this case, Bahā'u'llāh observes, the context supports the reading of rizq as spiritual.

Certain verses cannot be read literally because of the theological non-sequitur such a reading would entail. Such is the case with the verse: "The whole earth shall on the Resurrection be but His handful, and in His right hand shall the heavens be folded together."

In his comment on this verse (Q 39:67), Bahā'u'llāh reasons:

"And now, be fair in thy judgment. Were this verse to have the meaning which men suppose it to have, of what profit, one may ask, could it be to man? Moreover, it is evident and manifest that no such hand as could be seen by human eye could accomplish such deeds, or could possibly be ascribed to the exalted Essence of the one true God. Nay, to acknowledge such a thing is naught but sheer blasphemy...

"On the contrary, by the term "earth" is meant the earth of understanding and knowledge, and by "heavens" the heavens of divine Revelation."<sup>52</sup> K/I:Eng.tr.:48

On Q 25:25, Bahā'u'llāh reads the verse non-conventionally by taking the preposition bi ('in"/"by") and reading it as "by" rather than as "in": "On that day shall heaven be cloven by the clouds" (emphasis added).<sup>53</sup> K/I:Eng.tr.:72/Persian:55 It is difficult to say if Bahā'u'llāh's interpretation of clouds as "veils" reads the text as as a type of undetected tawriya ("disguising")-- a figure of speech in Arabic where a word with a double meaning is used in a context where both meanings are allowable (at least syntactically) though only one sense is actually intended by the writer.<sup>56</sup> Bonebakker:1966:9 The Arabic of the verse in question may be transliterated as follows:

wa yawm<sup>a</sup> tashaqqaq<sup>u</sup> as-samā'<sup>u</sup> bi'l-ghamām<sup>i</sup>

The entity term ghamām is a collective, yet is morphologically singular. The term does not admit of a figurative sense in normal discourse, but its root, ghamma (or ghamm), may/can mean "to cover" or "to veil". Thus the singular form of ghamām could function as an implicit tawriya in admitting of the figurative sense of "veil" or, as a collective, "veils". I do not know whether or not a preposition has ever been used as a tawriya ("with"/"by" as the two readings for bi), but in any event bi is an inseparable or enclitic preposition and in this case could not function as a tawriya independently of the same function for ghamām. The significance which Baha'u'llah attaches to "clouds" in light of his interpretation of "earth" and "heavens" is therefore:

"These 'clouds' signify, in one sense, the annulment of laws, the abrogation of former Dispensations, the repeal of rituals and customs current amongst men... In another sense, they mean the appearance of that immortal Beauty in the image of mortal man, with such human limitations as eating and drinking, poverty and riches, glory and abasement, sleeping and waking, and such other things as cast doubt in the minds of men, and cause them to turn away. All such veils are symbolically referred to as 'clouds'." 57 K/I:

Eng.tr.:  
71-72

The sense in which a realised eschatology occurred in the person of Muhammad is borne out in Q 17:51: "Erelong will they wag their heads at Thee, and say, 'When shall this be?' Say: 'Perchance it is nigh.'" The time elements in the Arabic text are of interest here:

qul <sup>c</sup>asā an yakūn<sup>a</sup> qarīb<sup>an</sup>

The pronoun theme /y/ ("it") of course refers to the Day of Resurrection which is being questioned by Muhammad's detractors. The verb yakūn<sup>a</sup> is a prefix conjugation item with notional value, in the a-subset, as demanded by the presence of the functional 'an' ("that"). The word <sup>c</sup>asā in the construction following 'an' and subjunctive carries the meaning, "it could be that" or "perchance". The term qarīb<sup>an</sup> conveys the idea of "near" or "nigh" in respect to place or time. The imperative qul ("say") has the sense of "believe" or "confess"--in the confessional context of religious affirmation. Bahā'u'llāh's comment on this verse shows the force with which the imminence, immediacy, and (obliquely) realised actuality of eschatological judgment is expressed:

"Nay, by 'trumpet' is meant the trumpet-call of Muhammad's Revelation, which was sounded in the heart of the universe, and by 'resurrection' is meant His own rise to proclaim the Cause of God. He bade the erring and wayward arise and speed out of the sepulchres of their bodies, arrayed them with the beauteous robe of faith, and quickened them with the breath of a new and wondrous life. Thus at the hour when Muhammad, that divine Beauty, purposed to unveil one of the mysteries hidden in the symbolic terms 'resurrection,' 'judgment,' 'paradise,' and 'hell,' Gabriel, the Voice of Inspiration, was heard saying: 'Erelong they will wag their heads at Thee, and say, "When shall this be?" Say: "Perchance it is nigh." The implications of this verse alone suffice the peoples of the world, were they to ponder it in their hearts.' 58 K/I:Eng.tr.:116-17

The implications of Bahā'u'llāh's analysis are far-reaching. What, one may ask, is the moon which Muhammad had cleft, if determined to be an eschatological takhyīl or ramz (symbol)? What becomes of the doctrine of physical resurrection, if Bahā'u'llāh's use of the above sahab is valid? The Kitāb-i-Īqān has yet to be "discovered" in the academic study of tafsīr/ta'wīl. Not a single monograph has been published on the text, and a dearth of secondary literature at best.

Quranic eschatological Arabic is rich in figurative ma<sup>c</sup>nā al-ma<sup>c</sup>nā. It is clearly structured along a complex of figures of speech as well as subtle linguistic features. Al-Jurjānī, "the principal theorist of rhetorical majāz"<sup>59</sup> [Wansbrough:1970:254-55], had for the first time in Arabic literary criticism developed a theory of meaning, in which every element of figurative expression is seen in relation to meaning as process.<sup>60</sup> [A/D:66] What of Western studies?

"The Semitists," writes M.J. Geller, "have generally not entered into the arena of semiotics and 'the meaning of meaning', because so much of the basic work of lexicography and the production of text editions remains to be done."<sup>61</sup> [Wansbrough:1987:ix].

Max Black makes a distinction between the "focus" of a metaphor and its "frame". The frame is linguistic, while the focus is semantic. For instance, in "the chairman plowed through the discussion", the "focus" is "plowed" while the "frame" is the rest of the sentence.<sup>62</sup> [Shibles:1971:151] E.R. Mac Cormac proposes an analytical approach to metaphor as a "knowledge process":

Level 1: Surface Language

Level 2: Semantics and Syntax

Level 3: Cognition<sup>63</sup> [Mac Cormac:1985:2]

An integrative approach to figurative language in Arabic would likely benefit from an interdisciplinary linguistic "framing" and semantic "focus" within the context of Arabic literary criticism. It is hoped that this study has integrated elements of each.

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## Corrections

Page two, line 3: i<sup>c</sup>jāz.

Page two, line 6: i<sup>c</sup>jāz.

Page three, line 15: muqtadayāt, and ma<sup>c</sup>anī.

Page three, line 17: ma<sup>c</sup>anī al-nahwī.

Page four, line 2: al-Bāqillanī.

Page four, line 20: i<sup>c</sup>jāz.

Page six, line 14: dhalika.

Page six, line 16: la-qad, and hādha.

Page seven, line 26: dynamic.

Page ten, line 1: Abū.

Page ten, line 13: Abū <sup>c</sup>Ubayda (not "al-Muthanna").

Page sixteen, line 27: samā'.

Page seventeen, lines 25-30: The entity term ghamām is a collective, yet is morphologically singular. The term does not admit of a figurative sense in normal discourse, but its verbal form ghamma can mean "to cover" or "to veil". Thus the singular form of ghamām could function as an implicit tawriya in admitting of the figurative sense of "veil" or, as collective, "veils". In the formal structure, as-samā'<sup>u</sup> is the agent of tashaqqaq<sup>u</sup> which is a 5th-stem reflexive, such that as-samā'<sup>u</sup> may be interpreted as a passive subject.

Page seventeen, lines 32-34: ...but in any event bi is a prefixed preposition which can be interpreted as referring to the agent of the action of cleaving, al-ghamam<sup>u</sup> (not to the grammatical agent) and in this case could not function as a tawriya independently of the same function for ghamām.

## Corrections

Page eighteen, line 17: subject (not "theme").

Page eighteen, line 21: The verb (not "word").

Page nineteen, line 5: sahāb.