

Joycean Modernism in a Nineteenth-Century Qur'an Commentary?

A Comparison of the Bab's *Qayyūm al-asmā'* with Joyce's *Ulysses*

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We are the first generation in the West able to read the Koran, if we are able to read *Finnegans Wake*. ~ Norman O. Brown¹

Introduction

NUMEROUS STRUCTURAL, THEMATIC, AND RECEPTION PARALLELS exist between two otherwise quite incommensurable literary works. The one is James Joyce's well-known, controversial and vastly influential *Ulysses*, generally considered the first major work of the modernist movement in European literature. The second, entitled *Qayyūm al-asmā'*,² is the virtually unknown, unpublished and unread yet highly distinctive and unusual commentary on the 12th sura of the Qur'an by the Iranian prophet Seyyed Ali Mohammad Shirāzi (1819–50), better known to history as the Bab. By suggesting the existence of parallels and similarities between these two works it is not also suggested that there is any sort of connection between them or their authors, genetic, social, historical, or otherwise. But, both authors wrote at specific and intense moments of cultural crisis and change in their respective socio-historical situations. And each was profoundly and acutely aware of the particular centrality of the literary tradition in which they wrote and the literary weight of the sources and models for their respective compositions. In the case of Joyce and *Ulysses*, the weight and

1. "The Apocalypse of Islam," *Social Text* 8 (Winter 1983–1984): 155–71, 168.

2. "Sustainer of the Divine Names" There are two other titles for this extraordinary composition: *Commentary on the Chapter of Joseph (Qur'an 12)/Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* and *The Best of Stories/Aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ*. *Qayyūm al-asmā'* – though difficult to translate properly – is probably the most common. See Todd Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse in Islam: Qur'an, Exegesis, Messianism, and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 77.

authority of this literary history is represented by the *Odyssey* and Joyce's appropriation (and simultaneous celebration and critique) of the epic tradition, exemplified by the *Odyssey*. In the case of the Bab and his *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, the quite considerable and truly unique weight and authority of his tradition is represented by the Qur'an, on which this ostensibly exegetical work is modeled.³ In actuality, with this composition, which is better thought of as being in the disguise of exegesis, the Bab is claiming the same authorial independence and originality exemplified by the Qur'an itself. The adoption of the similarly monumental and sacrosanct genre of scriptural exegesis (*tafsīr*) for this disguise is only a little less daring than the Qur'an imitation that it "hides." Our author, a merchant by profession and class, came from outside the typical learned class and was indeed unschooled in the Islamic sciences according to prevailing standards. He was also only 25 years old at the time of writing and would have thus been regarded as far too immature, even were he of the scholarly class, to attempt such a work. The grandiosity and brashness of presuming to compose a new Qur'an is analogous to Joyce's rewriting the epic in his *Ulysses*, but actually outstrips it in terms of outrageousness because of the Qur'an's unique place in Islamic religious scholarship and culture. In both authors their work is simultaneously a literary fiction paying homage to tradition and an authentic occasion for unprecedented – if not shocking – originality. This is the primary structural analogy: both the *Odyssey* and the Qur'an (and its traditional exegesis) occupy monumental and epic space in their respective cultural contexts, and both will appear to be deeply violated and disfigured by our authors. Such innovative, thoroughgoing and self-conscious imitation and improvisation on these venerable symbols and metonyms of culture had not been previously achieved or attempted to the degree we have in these two works.⁴ (See below figures 1 & 2). In what follows, we will give some brief introduction to the generally well-known life and celebrated works of James Joyce, some necessarily more extended introduction to the much less well-known life and works of the Bab. After this, we will focus on a comparison of the two works at hand to illustrate formal and thematic similarities. This comparison will focus on a few major topics: (1) the formal structure of the two works and (2) the thematic concerns of the two works, such as (a) time, (b) polarities or oppositions and their resolution, (c) the relation between form

3. Todd Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muhammad Shīrāzī, the Bāb," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 223–253.

4. On epic as metonym for culture see Richard P. Martin, "Epic as Genre," in John Miles Foley, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Epic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 9–19.

and content, (d) the prominence of epiphany, manifestation, advent and apocalypse, (e) the theme of heroism, reading and identity.

James Joyce and His Work

James Joyce (1882–1941) was born in Dublin, acquired from the Jesuits a thorough education including the classics and theology, excelled as a scholar of modern languages at University, and at the young age of twenty-two left Ireland, more or less for good, in 1904. He is considered *the* father of literary modernism because of his two major books, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Both works represent radical innovations in the art of the novel and changed forever the way literary art was construed and practiced. The works were also highly controversial, attracting censorship, ban, derision, and condemnation on the grounds of obscenity and general structure and style of which the famous (or infamous) “stream of consciousness” (perfected by Joyce) was a major feature and which challenged the reader in ways no earlier work of literary art had done. Today, Joyce has been vindicated and recognized as a great literary genius. No less an authority than Northrop Frye deems his *Finnegans Wake* a uniquely powerful example of literary art in our time.⁵ The library of Joyce scholarship is massive, with commentaries, concordances, dedicated journals, analyses, appreciations, imitations, criticism and *explications de texte* seemingly without number. During his life he struggled with poverty, ill-health and family crises and is distinguished by his heroic dedication to his art – which he never abandoned, even momentarily.⁶ In the case of the author of the older Arabic work, there is really no reason to believe readers should have even the barest notion of who he was. In fact, one of the somewhat ironic facts that the present comparison records is that on the one hand, in the case of *Ulysses*, a daring literary experiment resulted in universal renown (and/or infamy), celebrity and veneration, highly productive literary influence and a continuous tradition of scholarship devoted to the study of Joyce and his works.⁷

5. “This is the only twentieth century book that I find myself living with, in the way that I live with *Tristram Shandy*, Burton’s *Anatomy*, Dickens, and the greater poets. It is an inexhaustible word hoard of humor, wit, erudition, and symbolism; it never, for me, degenerates into a mere puzzle, but always has on every page something to astonish and delight.” Northrop Frye, in *The American Scholar* 30:4 (Autumn 1961): 606. (My thanks to Robert Denham for this quotation.)

6. The standard biography is Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

7. It is very difficult to choose a single title for a comprehensive study of Joyce, his art and influence, however the interested reader will be handsomely repaid in the recent *James Joyce*

The Bab and His Work

The daring literary experiments of the Bab resulted in the opposite: obscurity, disregard, contumely, and ultimate imprisonment and death by firing squad.⁸ The literary innovations of the text were not pursued or emulated by later authors because of such extra-literary and extra-artistic factors as the deeply embastioned cultural and religious attitudes toward the Qur'an as inimitable and final revelation. It will be of some useful interest to provide a very brief outline of this author's life and career before continuing further with the more purely literary comparison of the two works, *Ulysses* and the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*. "The Bab" is an Anglicization of the Arabic *al-bāb*, the usual word for "door" or "gate" in that language. In the present instance, it functions as a title with a very long history, especially in Shi'i Islamic religious literature. The general understanding is that the word designates one who represents the twelfth or hidden Imam of *Ithna-'ashari* (so-called Twelver) Shi'ism, even though it is clear that the word has frequently indicated statuses other than mere representative to suggest the Imam and the prophet himself. It is also true that in the Islamic philosophical tradition the intellect was frequently termed "the gate" [to knowledge].⁹

The Bab was born in Shiraz in 1819 into a family of merchants. His precocity and piety caused remark and anxiety amongst his family, and teachers were challenged by his intellect and originality. The time, according to Shi'i sacred history, was propitious and pregnant with eschatological event, it being 1,000 years since the disappearance of the long-awaited hidden Imam. In his early twenties, the Bab abandoned the life of a merchant to join the circle of a prominent millenarian teacher based in the holy shrine cities of Iraq. This teacher, Seyyed Kāzem Rashti (1793–1844), was a learned Persian mulla and mujtahid and successor to the Arab polymath, philosophical theologian, and mujtahid Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā'i (1753–1826). These

in Context edited by John McCourt, Cambridge University Press, 2009. Of course, there is no substitute for reading the major works of Joyce himself, beginning with the collection of short stories, *Dubliners* (1914), *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922) and finally *Finnegans Wake* (1939). In what follows, reference to *Ulysses* will be indicated by *U*, standing for James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), to *Finnegans Wake* by *FW*, standing for James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

8. The work may be thought to have had quite considerable influence from another angle, inasmuch as it was the first announcement of a powerful if short-lived messianic movement in Iran which ultimately led to the rise and world-wide expansion of the Baha'i Faith. But this is not literary influence as usually understood.

9. Todd Lawson, "The Terms Remembrance (*dhikr*) and Gate (*bab*) in the Bab's Commentary on the Sura of Joseph," in Moojan Momen, ed., *Studies in Honor of Hasan M. Balyúzi*, *Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions*, volume 5 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1989), 1–63.

two teachers had, on the brink of the Twelver Shi'i eschaton, attracted a large following especially of young seminarians, because of their creative and compelling interpretation of the standard topics of Shi'ism, including the idea of the return of the hidden Imam, the imminent resurrection and day of judgment (*qiyāma*), or rising of the Qā'im who, as Mahdi ("rightly guided one"), would lead an army of spiritual warriors against the forces of darkness at the end of time. This following, which burgeoned throughout Iran during the middle half of the nineteenth century came to be known as the *Shaykhiyya* – "the Shaykhis" – an eponymous reference to the above-mentioned Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā'i. The main thrust of the eschatological teaching of the first two masters of the Shaykhi School was that while the return of the hidden Imam is assured, the end of time and creation is not. Rather, what ends is a cycle of prophecy that will be replaced by a new cycle of fulfillment.¹⁰ They furnished a vocabulary and method for thinking about and perhaps domesticating the potentially unruly and mysterious forces that were gathering at the time and would issue in profound social and historical change. In short, they provided a discourse for the emergence of a distinctive Qajar modernity from its traditional past.¹¹ There was also much about the form and content of the Shaykhi doctrine that appealed to an Iranian audience; not least, was the way in which the masters of the school combined the mystical with the rational in the interest of solving the many supra-rational problems confronting Shi'i religion. In addition, the prolific writings of the first two teachers are characterized by a strong literary and poetic aesthetic very much in keeping with the general élan of Islamicate scholarship in which style is as important as substance. In the case of the Shaykhis, their technical terminology, deriving from the broader Islamic philosophical and mystical tradition, is at times transmuted into a kind of poetry of metaphysics. Thus, one may also be justified in thinking of it as a literary movement as well as a theological movement in which theological connections and resonances have literary *value* and literary connections

10. A specifically Viconian cyclism eventually would be adopted by Joyce, not in *Ulysses*, but rather in his last work, *Finnegans Wake*. However, cyclicism is not absent from *Ulysses*, as will be seen.

11. Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); Juan Ricardo Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Denis MacEoin, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Nineteenth-Century Shi'ism: The Cases of Shaykhism and Babism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110:2 (April 1, 1990): 323-329; Todd Lawson, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Twelver Shi'ism: Ahmad Al-Aḥṣa'ī on Fayḍ Kashanī (the *Risalat al-'Ilmiyya*)," in Robert Gleave, ed., *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 127-54.

and resonances have theological *implications*. Such a movement and such a discourse was evidently irresistible for our author, Seyyed Ali Mohammad Shirāzi (1819–50), soon to become known as the Bab. And he, accordingly, abandoned his career as a merchant to study at the feet of Seyyed Kāzem Rashti. At the time of composition of the work at hand, his beloved teacher had died and his followers were left to search or wait for the realization of the Shi'i eschaton: the return of the hidden Imam, the promulgation of the true Qur'an, the establishment of justice throughout the world through the defeat of the forces of darkness and the establishment of the rule of the Mahdi. At the time, this doctrine had generated numerous interpretations and was teeming with a variety of possibilities including (1) the appearance of a general age of enlightenment, as distinct from (2) the actual triumph of an individual messianic figure, or to (3) a combination of both.¹²

Composition of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*

We have precise, if enchanting, details of how the Bab came to compose his revelatory exegesis, the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*. As these circumstances are inseparable from the resulting literary form of the work, it is important briefly to relate them. The actual composition began during a meeting with one of the senior students of the recently deceased Kāzem Rashti, the young and talented mulla, Hoseyn Boshru'i (1813–49). Upon the death of Rashti, he, together with a few companions, set out from Karbala in quest of the long-awaited advent: the manifestation of the hidden Imam and the beginning of the new cycle of fulfillment. Their search had taken them to Shiraz where Boshru'i encountered the young merchant, Ali Mohammad (the Bab), whom he had apparently known from his Karbala sojourn. The year was 1844CE (1260AH) and our author was 25 years old. He invited Mulla Hoseyn to his home and there, in discussions about how the hidden Imam was to be identified, the Bab is said to have suggested that he himself could be the promised one as he fulfilled many of the descriptions outlined in the traditions. Mulla Hoseyn, nonplussed by what he took as unwonted arrogance and perhaps thinking to quench the impudent and impertinent messianic pretensions of his host, remembered to himself that their teacher, Seyyed Kāzem Rashti, had added to the list of requirements and physical attributes that would identify the promised one another more purely literary requirement: the promised one would compose a commentary of the Qur'an's Sura of Joseph. At this point, so the story goes, the Bab, apropos of apparently nothing, announced that it was now time for him to reveal the commentary on the Sura

12. Todd Lawson, *Exegesis as Mystical Experience* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), chapter 5.

of Joseph and then proceeded to write the first of the 111 chapters of this highly unusual work, the *Sūrat al-mulk*, the Chapter of Divine Dominion or Ownership.¹³ So important is this literary event in the mind of the author, its date is fixed in Babī and Baha'ī scripture: 22 May 1844, corresponding to the early evening of the Islamic date 5 Jumada I, 1260, almost exactly 1000 (lunar) years since the assumption of the Imamate by the "hidden" Twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Askari in the year 260AH/874CE. In addition, the actual astro-chronological moment for the beginning of the new cycle is fixed by the Bab, in a later work, at 2 hours and 11 minutes after sunset on that date.¹⁴ Amanat is doubtless correct when he suggests that this unusual precision in timing the beginning of the long-awaited resurrection, the day of judgment, represents the moment when Mulla Hoseyn assented to the Bab's claim.¹⁵

The author of the completed commentary, which he tells us was composed over a forty-day period, eventually attracted a large and active messianic following, known to Iranian Religious history as the Babi religion. Announcing that with these new revelations the new cycle of fulfillment had been inaugurated and the *qiyāma*, the resurrection and day of judgment, were now in play, it was now necessary to recognize the Bab as the source and focus of all religious authority, the word for which in Islamic theological terminology is *walāya/wilāya* (Persian *valāyat/velāyat*). His mission would last nearly six years until he was executed in Tabriz for blasphemy and heresy on 9 July 1850. The remnants of his movement eventually formed the Baha'ī religion in which followers saw the fulfillment of prophecies found in the remarkably voluminous writings of the Bab. These writings may be briefly summarized as an attempt to reorient and recast the sacerdotal and political hierarchical authority in the social imagination of Shi'ī Iran in which the main elements were: the Prophet and the Imams (including Fātima, the daughter of Muhammad and wife of the first Imam Ali); the royal family,

13. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*; Nabīl Zarandī. *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabīl's Narrative of the Early days of the Baha'ī Revelation*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Baha'ī Pub. Trust, 1974); Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Denis MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Boston: Brill, 2009); Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*; Juan R. I. Cole, "Individualism and the Spiritual Path in Shaykh Ahmad Al-Ahsa'i," *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'ī Studies* 1:4 (1997): <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/ahsaind.htm>; Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Bab* ([Waterloo, Ont.]: Wilfrid Laurier University Press and the Association for Baha'ī Studies, 2008); Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*.

14. The Bab, *Bayán-i Fārsī*, vahid II, bab 7, 30–31: INBA62 (Tehran: Azali Publication, 1946). Reprinted, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Baha'ī, 1999, 30–31. Cited in Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 170. See also Nabīl Zarandī, *Dawn-Breakers*, 62–65.

15. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 170.

the Qajars, their retainers and officials; the religious estate, comprising the classically educated religious classes, and others, unevenly divided between scripturalists and rationalists; and of course the general population of believers, the Shi'ī community.¹⁶

An attempt to clarify lines of authority in a culture, it has been suggested, is also intimately related to the perennial problem of and quest for identity, which presents a single and powerful literary theme in world literature and one of the main themes of the epic genre as such.¹⁷ The writings of the Bab may be thought an attempt to provide orientation in a highly turbulent period during which standard and traditional notions of identity, authority, and allegiance were in flux and were being debated in various quarters throughout Iranian society, from the very highest levels of courtly life, to the religious seminaries, to the bazaar and its environs. Another similar attempt may be discerned in the decisive developments at this time in understanding the “sacerdotal” office of universal authority for the Shi'ī community, the *marja' al-taqlid* (authoritative exemplar), closely related to what has come to be known after WWII as the office of Grand Ayatollah, a relatively recent religious innovation.¹⁸ However much the literary activities of the Bab were fraught with profound and dramatic religious and theological implications, in the present somewhat experimental exploration, I am studying the Bab's writings from the point of view of artistic and literary considerations. Although it was thought important to provide some theological background as context, in what follows, I will, as much as possible, avoid theological and religious questions, even though there is an obvious deep connection between the artistic/aesthetic and the religious in Islamicate culture in general, Iranian Islamic culture more specifically, and the life and the work of the Bab himself as heir to these cultural realities and predispositions. In the case of the Bab the seamless interplay between the artistic/aesthetic and what might be thought the more purely “religious” dimensions of his life and ministry has been noted from the very

16. In his *Risalat al-sulūk*, the Bab delineates the levels of authority and application of religious truth and allegiance (God, the Prophet, the Imams and the Shi'a) and says that they are all dependent on each other. See Todd Lawson, “The Bab's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God,” in Moojan Momen, ed., *The Baha'i Faith and the World Religions: Papers Presented at the Irfan Colloquia* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005), 231, 237, 241. For a discussion of these factors from a socio-historical perspective, see Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*.

17. Northrop Frye, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of the Bible and Literature* (New York: Viking, 1990), 125.

18. On the various ways in which this quest for authentic identity were debated and contemplated, see Linda Walbridge (ed.), *Most Learned of the Shia: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

beginning.¹⁹ It now remains to focus on the two texts that are the subject of this chapter.

Form and Structure

The form and structure of both works suggests a veneration or sacralization of the past and a simultaneous desire to replace the old with the new. The following tables illustrate to some degree the way in which each work is structured by its author to represent a reworking of two culturally central texts, the *Odyssey* and the Qur'an. And because these structures are themselves so symbolically meaningful, their adoption has implications for thematic and narrative content.

Joyce himself made two different tables illustrating the close relationship between his *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*.²⁰ The schema in Figure 1 was prepared in 1921 for his friend Stuart Gilbert and demonstrates how Joyce simultaneously took great liberties with and venerated the *Odyssey*, rearranged it and recast its stories and myths which in the original take place over a twenty year period (a generation), in order to fit it all within a single day in the life of Dublin: 16 June 1904.²¹ Further, the events and narrative flow of Joyce's epic are, according to his schema, intricately coordinated with numerous other factors and elements. Thus, the first episode, not marked off in the actual published novel, may be identified with Telemachus, the name of Odysseus' son who searches for his father and awaits his return back home in Ithaca. There is in *Ulysses* a correspondence between this and the opening scene and the time of day. Joyce also assigns to this episode a particular color and science or art (theology) and literary tech-

19. For a recent comprehensive discussion of the Bab's artistic nature and aesthetic preoccupations see Moojan Momen, "Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Bab."

20. Nicholas A. Fargnoli, and Michael Patrick Gillespie, *Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Works* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2006), 392–93 for a reproduction from Hugh Kenner's finished composite of Joyce's two schemata for his friends and colleagues Linati and Gilbert.

21. This Joycean turn may be thought to have been anticipated by the ancient Arabian poetic tradition, which saw in the idea of "the day" – *al-yawm* (pl. *ayyām*) – a certain epic dignity and challenge as in "the days of the Arabs (*ayyām al-'arab*)," where the word connotes battle and the heroic resources required to survive the day through struggle for survival. The Qur'an's (and the Bible's) a "day with thy Lord is as a thousand years" would also seem to resonate: Qur'an 22:47; Psalms 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8. See Sebastian Günther, "Day, Times of," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 1:499–504 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001) and Eugen Mittwoch, "Ayyām al-'Arab," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014. Reference. University of Toronto. 16 September 2014.

Title	Scene	Hour	Organ	Colour	Symbol	Art	Technic
Telemachus	The Tower	8am	-	White / gold	Heir	Theology	Narrative (young)
Nestor	The School	10am	-	Brown	Horse	History	Catechism (personal)
Proteus	The Strand	11am	-	Green	Tide	Philology	Monologue (male)
Calypso	The House	8am	Kidney	Orange	Nymph	Economics	Narrative (mature)
Lotus Eaters	The Bath	10am	Genitals	-	Eucharist	Botany / chemistry	Narcissism
Hades	The Graveyard	11am	Heart	White / black	Caretaker	Religion	Incubism
Aeolus	The Newspaper	12pm	Lungs	Red	Editor	Rhetoric	Enthymemic
Lestrygonians	The Lunch	1pm	Oesophagus	-	Constables	Architecture	Peristaltic
Scylla and Charybdis	The Library	2pm	Brain	-	Stratford / London	Literature	Dialectic
Wandering Rocks	The Streets	3pm	Blood	-	Citizens	Mechanics	Labyrinth
Sirens	The Concert Room	4pm	Ear	-	Barmaids	Music	Fuga per canonem
Cyclops	The Tavern	5pm	Muscle	-	Fenian	Politics	Gigantism
Nausicaa	The Rocks	8pm	Eye, nose	Grey / blue	Virgin	Painting	Tumescence / detumescence
Oxen of the Sun	The Hospital	10pm	Womb	White	Mothers	Medicine	Embryonic development
Circe	The Brothel	12am	Locomotor apparatus	-	Whore	Magic	Hallucination
Eumaeus	The Shelter	1am	Nerves	-	Sailors	Navigation	Narrative (old)
Ithaca	The House	2am	Skeleton	-	Comets	Science	Catechism (impersonal)
Penelope	The Bed	-	Flesh	-	Earth	-	Monologue (female)

Figure 1: Joyce's own diagram of the structural and thematic correspondences between *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey* (this example is from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilbert_schema_for_Ulysses).

nique (narrative). Each of the following 17 sections of the novel is similarly structured. Thus the famous, if not notorious, Joycean stream of consciousness disguises an almost unbelievably and meticulously structured work of art. But apart from this, we may discern in this vast system of connections, correspondences, and resonances what might be thought – and surprisingly in this modernist literary experiment, a somewhat medieval certitude about the essential meaningfulness and interconnectedness of life, the kind of euphoric certitude that such totalizing devices as “The Great Chain of Being” or “The Diapason” bespeak.²² In sum, Joyce takes great liberties with the *Odyssey* while at the same time remaining faithful to it. Such has been characterized as Joyce’s “art of mediation,” an art that seeks to negotiate the space between two apparently diametrically opposed elements, in this case the opposites are innovation and tradition.²³

The interplay between tradition and the new is also the main focus of the Bab’s work, whether from the point of view of structure or content. That we find a similar web of correspondences in the Bab’s work is, perhaps, to be expected given the medieval ontological and mystical presuppositions of his tradition and his audience. So we see in his writing a vast grid of correspondences (even if a complete table illustrating them has yet to be made) in which climates, prophets, heavenly spheres, colors, hierarchical levels of Being, types of individuals and so on, provide both the flesh and the skeleton of his compositions.²⁴ For example, many of these compositions exploit to a very high degree the traditional *abjad* system of numerology, in which every word has a numerical value to be read and considered in a given context.²⁵ If we remain at the level of literature in comparing both compositions we see that they embody to a remarkable degree a great deal of exquisitely and intricately designed literary “hanging together,” much of which has to do

22. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

23. David Weir, *James Joyce and the Art of Mediation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

24. Vahid Rafati (translated by Omid Ghaemmaghami), “Colours in the Writings of the Báb,” in Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami, eds., *A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of the Báb, ‘Alí Muḥammad Shírází (1819–1850)* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012), 33–51. Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*.

25. Here, we follow Frye’s insight about the function of “numerology” in the Book of Revelation in such topoi as “the seventh seal” and the 144,000 companions of the Lamb of God, where we understand that the first function of such occult-esque passages in the Bible is, in fact, a literary one – one which helps the reader to experience coherence and cohesiveness in the text, to experience, in Frye’s simple phrase, how the words “hang together.” Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: Bible and Literature* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1982), 60; Robert Denham, *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 227.

with the relationship of their respective works to their monumental and epic exemplars. In Joyce's case this model is the *Odyssey*. In the Bab's case, it is the *Qur'an*.²⁶

The Sacramental Day

The Bab, like Joyce, goes to great lengths to innovate and improvise while also preserving and honoring the sanctity of tradition. In this, one could also refer to his as the “art of mediation.” The central narrative at the core of the Bab's work, the Biblical story of Joseph son of Jacob, is the epic quest of a son for his father and a father for his son after separation. The structure of the work, which is divided into suras (“chapters”) and āyas (“verses”), is explicitly patterned on the *Qur'an*, a feature Muslims would and did consider heretical.²⁷ At the same time, it is clear that the Bab is also concerned with a single day, that day outside time and space when all humanity – “God's children” – were gathered in God's presence. This is the day referred to at Q7:172 and known to the Islamic tradition as the day of the covenant. In mythic terms, it symbolizes for the Islamic tradition the birth of both consciousness and history.²⁸ In *Qur'anic* terms, it is the essential prelude for the creation of the world as told, for example, in the Biblical book of *Genesis*.²⁹ Evidence of the Bab's deep concern for this mythic event is woven into the very structure of the composition, through versification (explained below) and in innumerable explicit textual references. The covenant and its renewal is the central concern of the work because it supplies a sacred paradigm for the Josephian theme of separation and reunion through the cyclicism mentioned earlier. For the moment, suffice it to remark that the day of the covenant involves also another day, the day of judgment. According to the *Qur'an*, all of humanity was gathered in the presence of God on the day of the covenant at a time and place before actual creation so that they would have no excuse on the

26. Todd Lawson, “The *Qur'an* and Epic,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 16:1 (2014): 58–92.

27. The words *sūra* ‘chapter’, (Arabic plural, *suwar*) and *āya* ‘verse’ (Arabic plural *āyāt*) are only used for the *Qur'an*. Tradition forbids their use to describe the corresponding elements of any other work.

28. Todd Lawson, “Typological Figuration and the Meaning of ‘Spiritual’: The *Qur'anic* Story of Joseph,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132:2 (2012): 221–244. Todd Lawson, “Paradise in the *Qur'an* & the Music of Apocalypse,” in Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson, eds., *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam. Volume I: Foundations and the Formation of a Tradition. Reflections on the Hereafter in the Qur'an and Islamic Religious Thought*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 49–94.

29. Wadal al-Qadi, *The Primordial covenant and human history in the Qur'an*. The Margaret Weyerhaeuser Jewett Chair of Arabic Occasional Papers, edited by Ramzi Baalbaki (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2006).

day of judgment for not having obeyed God and his prophets. It is clear that the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* is also a new rendition or performance of the day of the covenant.³⁰ When Mulla Hoseyn Boshru'i accepted the claims of the Bab, the momentousness of the act was enshrined in its exact time being recorded in the Bab's later book of laws, the *Persian Bayan*. Such momentousness resides in its making present the drama of the original primordial covenant mentioned in the Qur'an (Q7:172). This was when God interrogated Adam and all of humanity with the question: "Am I not your Lord?" (*A lastu bi-rabbikum*) and to which Adam and all humanity immediately responded "Yes! Indeed! (*balā*)."³¹ Here the Bab, from the literary (metaphorical and spiritual) perspective is God – or more accurately the face of God (*wajh allāh*) and Mulla Hoseyn is Adam/Muhammad.³¹ And to the degree that the work is concerned with the journey between affirmation of the covenant and judgment it may be thought to assume a circular form where the two ends of the composition are indicated in each other. This is of course one of the more prominent features of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: its end is its beginning and its beginning is its end, what Joyce calls "Doublends Jined"(FW20).³² Such points to the multi-layered meaning of the title: revelation/awareness, resurrection (*Wake*), cyclical repetition (Man [*finn*] again), and the concomitant circular nature of history, the wake of human activity. Such continuity and stability as is represented in this totalizing design, whether of the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* or *Ulysses*, seems to offer solace and assurance for chaotic times, in the promise of a new day that is in the case of simultaneously and mysteriously ancient. Joyce's day, we have a compression of thousands of days (the 20 years of the original *Odyssey*) into a single 24-hour period. In the case of the Bab's day, it is the opposite. Rather than a condensation of time, we have what might be thought, in musical terms, the melismatic cantillation over ages, generations, verses, words, and syllables of the original and originating power of that mysterious and momentous day (or moment) of the covenant represented by the word *balā* – Yes! Thus the considerable spiritual energy of the myth of the day of the covenant is joined with that of the day of resurrection. It is not only a powerful literary trope, it is, given the basic apocalyptic structure of the Qur'anic revelation, the central

30. Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 6, 29, 36, 90–91.

31. The Bab explicitly fixes this day and time in the *Persian Bayan* (see Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 191–192).

32. On the Qur'anic resonances in this circularity see Aida Yared, "In the Name of Annah': Islam and Salam in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*," *James Joyce Quarterly*, ReOrienting Joyce, 35:2/3 (Winter-Spring 1998): 401–38 (408 & 410). It has also been argued that a similar structure is discernible in *Ulysses* in which the last letter –"s" – of the first word of the text is the last letter of the all important last word of the book: "Yes!"

element of Islamic religious consciousness, which believers are called upon by the Qur'an continuously to remember or call to mind, the practice instituted in Sufism known as *dhikr* (Persian *zehr*).³³ Thus is the original (and originating) moment present in every other moment.³⁴ Indeed, one of the other important titles by which the Bab refers to himself in this work is precisely “the Remembrance” (*al-dhikr*) – embodiment or personification of the day of the covenant. Both the Bab and Joyce offer an implicit commentary on and radical interpretation of the idea of time and history in relation to the nature of consciousness. They demonstrate in their respective works the subjectivity, malleability, and shape-shifting quality of time and what the otherwise commonplace notion “day” can possibly mean. For both authors, the extraordinary “enchanted” quality of the epiphany is in contrast to the humdrum and “mundane” occasion of its occurrence.³⁵ Both the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* and *Ulysses* in some ways turn time into a literary trope, or, express concern with the unity and literary significance of time in interesting and innovative ways demonstrating that both authors seem intrigued by the recurrence of character types and cycles in the wake of which normal historical and chronological time becomes transmuted into something approaching sacrament.

Ulysses came at a time in the history of the English novel when traditional notions of literature and authorial vocation were in flux. The Babi movement also arose during a transition period in which the nature of orthodoxy and religious authority was being negotiated. In the first case we use the term modernism as signal and “symptom” of the change.³⁶ The Bab and his audience used the word *qiyāma*: resurrection and judgment (Persian: *rastākhiz*). The Bab takes even greater liberties with the Qur'an than Joyce did with the *Odyssey* in composing this new work, one that he explicitly

33. *Dh-K-R*, the trilateral root upon which the word remembrance is formed, occurs 292 times in the Qur'an. Of these, the majority of occurrences indicate the obligation and command to remember God and the day of the covenant. Remembrance is thus a major theme of the Qur'an (as it is in Plato). For the specifically mystical aspects of the institution of the covenant, see Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d. 283/896)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980).

34. During the Iranian revolution and the protracted and tragic war between Iraq and Iran, the battle cry was frequently heard, in both Persian and Arabic: “Every day is the day of resurrection (*kullu yawm qiyāma*)” and “Every day is Ashura,” the day on which the martyr-hero par excellence of Islam, Husain, the son of Ali, was massacred along with his family. It is a nationally sanctioned holy day in Iran and observed elsewhere throughout the Muslim world.

35. Morris Beja, “Epiphany and the Epiphanies,” in Zack Bowen and James F. Carens, eds., *A Companion to Joyce Studies*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 707–25 (p. 719).

36. Jacques Aubert, “Lacan and the Joyce-Effect,” *Joyce Studies in Italy* 1 New Series/14 Old Series (2013): 79–88.

presented as an emblem of the arrival of the resurrection: namely, the True Qur'an that had been in the safekeeping of the hidden Imam during his occultation.³⁷ Figure 2, below, gives some indication of the Bab's iconoclastic desire to compose a "new Qur'an". Note here the pervasive use of the uniquely Qur'anic literary device of the mysterious disconnected letters (*al-hurūf al-muqatta'āt*) that appear in various combinations at the beginning of 29 of the 114 *suras* of the Qur'an.³⁸ As can be seen, in the Bab's composition the disconnected letters are used in all but four of his new *suras*, i.e., in almost all 111 of them.³⁹ We will return below to some of the other ways in which the Bab's work imitates the Qur'an and in some senses "out-Qur'ans" the actual Qur'an. Suffice it here to say, that the implications of such an unprecedented outrage were not lost on his contemporaries. Even during the Bab's lifetime, a combined Sunni and Shi'i court of Islamic jurists was convened in Baghdad to deliberate on the legality of the provocative literary act. Their joint fatwa condemning the author of the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* for composing an imitation of the holy Qur'an demonstrates how a contemporary audience would be scandalized by such a daring and provocative literary event.⁴⁰ As is well known, Joyce's work was repeatedly challenged in the courts, most frequently for obscenity. While there is nothing that could be construed as obscenity in the Bab's compositions, the religious scandal his writings provoked was, in the context of this cross-cultural comparison, analogous in the intensity of the outrage it provoked.

Epic, Monomyth, and Epiphany

Both artists rethink and reconstrue their respective "monomyths" – a word coined by Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* as a near synonym for the epic telling of collective humanity's genealogical, historical, and mythic experience. Joyce wants us to understand the epic dignity and value of the mere quotidian: the grand interconnectedness of the ordinary. The Bab wants us to understand something similar, but in reverse, if you will. All time and history is a perpetual and continuous performance of a single day, the day of the covenant. In both Joyce and the Bab, the idea of the day acquires a distinctive sacra-

37. Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 4.

38. See the recent discussion of their importance in the Sunni tradition in Martin Nguyen, "Exegesis of the *hurūf al-muqatta'a*: Polyvalency in Sunni Traditions of Qur'anic Interpretation," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 14:2 (October 2012): 1–28.

39. It is possible that this figure will change once all the 15 or so known manuscripts of the work have been properly collated.

40. Moojan Momen, "The Trial of Mullá 'Alí Bastámí: A Combined Sunní-Shí'í Fatwá against the Báb," *Iran* 20 (January 1982): 113–43.

#	السورة	الحروف لمقطعة	#	السورة	الحروف لمقطعة
١	سورة الفاتحة		٤١	سورة الكتاب	كَيْهَض
٢	سورة العلماء	الم	٤٢	سورة العهد	المرا
٣	سورة الإيمان	طه	٤٣	سورة الواحد	النع
٤	سورة المدينة	ألمه	٤٤	سورة الرؤيا	طسرا
٥	سورة يوسف	المع	٤٥	سورة هي	كَيْهَض
٦	سورة الشهادة	المسن	٤٦	سورة العراش	طه
٧	سورة الزيادة	طس	٤٧	سورة الحجّة	المضسرا
٨	سورة السرّ	المصن	٤٨	سورة النداء	المهن
٩	سورة العمام (I)	المعن	٤٩	سورة الأحكام (I)	طه
١٠	سورة العمام (II)	المع	٥٠	سورة الأحكام (II)	المصن
١١	سورة المسطر	طهع	٥١	سورة المجد	طه
١٢	سورة العاشوراء	كهن	٥٢	سورة التعليل	
١٣	سورة القرون	طهع	٥٣	سورة الصنبر	كهن
١٤	سورة القدس	المط	٥٤	سورة الغلام	المصن
١٥	سورة الشفة	مطهض	٥٥	سورة الركن	كهمع
١٦	سورة العرش	المق	٥٦	سورة الأمر	حصرا
١٧	سورة الباب	المعرا	٥٧	سورة الأكبر	حصرا
١٨	سورة الصراط	كَيْهَض	٥٨	سورة الحزن	المهن
١٩	سورة السجدة	المرا	٥٩	سورة الألفدة	كَيْهَض
٢٠	سورة الذر	لمس	٦٠	سورة الذكر (I)	طهض
٢١	سورة البحر	المصن	٦١	سورة الحسين	كهن
٢٢	سورة الماء	مطعل	٦٢	سورة الأرواح	كَيْهَض
٢٣	سورة العصر	المع	٦٣	سورة الرحمة	طسرا
٢٤	سورة القدر	كَيْهَض	٦٤	سورة المحمد	
٢٥	سورة الخاتم	المصن	٦٥	سورة الغيب	المق
٢٦	سورة الخيل	المرا	٦٦	سورة الأندية	المصن
٢٧	سورة الأوار	المق	٦٧	سورة الإسماء	
٢٨	سورة القرابة	الم	٦٨	سورة الرعد	المصن
٢٩	سورة الحورية	كَيْهَض	٦٩	سورة الرجح	كَيْهَض
٣٠	سورة التلحين	المع	٧٠	سورة القسط	المرا
٣١	سورة المرز	المع	٧١	سورة القم	المصن
٣٢	سورة الحن	كَيْهَض	٧٢	سورة الفجر	النع
٣٣	سورة النصر	المهض	٧٣	سورة الكهف	الم
٣٤	سورة الإثارة	حصرا	٧٤	سورة الخليل	
٣٥	سورة العبودية	الم	٧٥	سورة النخس	المرا
٣٦	سورة العمل	طه	٧٦	سورة الورقة	حصرا
٣٧	سورة التعبير	فصن	٧٧	سورة السلام	المصن
٣٨	سورة الفاطمة	طه	٧٨	سورة الظهور	المصن
٣٩	سورة الشكر	المرا	٧٩	سورة الكلمة	المط
٤٠	سورة الإسنان (I)	طه	٨٠	سورة الزوال	كَيْهَض

Figure 2: A provisional Table of Contents for the Bab's *Qayyūm al-asmā'ih* the *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*. The first column shows the sura (chapter) number, the second the title of the sura and the third shows the mysterious disconnected letters chosen to head the sura. I am grateful to Dr. Omid Ghaemmaghami for assistance in preparing this table.

mental value: the day looms as a central integer and quantum of experience, revelation/epiphany and being.

The epic, whether Homeric or Qur'anic, seeks, among other things, to demonstrate or imitate the interconnectedness and therefore meaningfulness of experience, consciousness, and history. Such interconnectedness may be thought a given of the Bab's religious perspective. Joyce, forging a new understanding of the existential and psychological realm, has Stephen contemplate "the ineluctable modality of the visible," the realm in which Stephen is called upon to read "the signatures of all things."⁴¹ The implication is, of course, that there is much else besides the visible and the sensible to which this visible is somehow connected, even if it is only connection itself. And, we know that much more than connection itself is indicated namely, the great unseen and unknown inner world of the psyche or soul to which access is gained precisely through the epiphany and which would remain incompletely known without it.⁴² Such an attitude towards the natural, visible world has a great deal in common with the Bab's logocentric universe where the true believer is really a true reader who has been charged with reading and contemplating the "signs of God" that have, according to Islamic teaching, been placed in the Qur'an, the physical universe and the souls of human beings:

We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth. (Q41:53)

Creation, whether divine or artistic, has profound literary implications. The Bab wishes to emphasize the interconnectedness of being-as-such (*wujūd*) symbolized by the central notion of spiritual and worldly authority that circulates through these three distinct "modalities": the readable Book, the visible Cosmos and the invisible Soul. *Walāya*, the word for this authority, has a special charisma as the all-important Qur'anic divine attribute which stands for religious (and, for that matter, "secular") authority, allegiance, guardianship, friendship, intimacy, sanctity, love, and being. The Prophet Muhammad and the Imams were bearers of this divine quality and as such are the sources of all authority in the cosmos (which was, in fact, created for them), whether construed as secular and political or spiritual and religious. The Bab as representative of the hidden Imam would also be a bearer of this authority. Ultimately, *walāya* may be understood as a metaphor for consciousness itself: that through which all things are connected and thus endowed with or acquire meaning. Recall that it is really *walāya*,

41. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 37.

42. Weir, *Mediation*, 39.

God's guardianship, that is set in play on the mythic day of the covenant described at Q7:172. As "divine friendship," the notion is preeminently participatory and renders even the most ordinary thing or event holy or sacred through a distinctly islamicate version of holy communion.⁴³

Coincidentia Oppositorum

Both Joyce and the Bab may be thought, therefore, to explore the possibilities of what is sometimes referred to these days as an enchanted reality. Nowhere is concern for such enchantment more palpable than in the way both authors contemplate and demonstrate the essential fundamental unity or resolution of oppositions – the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the Scholastics, including the alchemists.⁴⁴ This ancient philosophical theme has enjoyed a similar life in both Christian European and Islamic Middle Eastern thought where it is frequently encountered in writers of a more mystical orientation. More than any other conceit or trope, it speaks of the paradoxical nature of reality and calls into question such manmade notions as "good" and "evil," "justice" and "tyranny." This is the apperception behind Blake's "Fearful Symmetry." As a frequent feature of paradox, the *coincidentia oppositorum* has, as it were, one foot in the realm of philosophy and theology and one foot in poetics and the art of literature. There is an ongoing debate in Joyce Studies, as to which preponderates in his thought and work. One argument suggests that he took the idea from Bruno's theological work and adapted it to a more or less purely literary usage.⁴⁵ Others suggest that Joyce's interest in and use of the *coincidentia oppositorum* goes deeper than this, that it indicates a faith that true knowledge rises above such "logical entanglements" as result from a slavish devotion to the epistemic value of such notions as saved and damned, heaven and hell, up and down, here and there, past and present, day and night and so on. Joyce's interest in the "figure" has been studied with regard to the final chapter of *Ulysses*, the Penelope episode.⁴⁶

43. On the prominence of the topic in the Bab's writings, see Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, passim; on *walaya* see Hermann Landolt, "Walayah," *Encyclopedia of Religion*. 2nd edition, Lindsay Jones, ed. (Detroit: MacMillan Reference USA, 2005), vol. 14, 9656–62.

44. On *coincidentia oppositorum* see the major study by C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

45. Northrop Frye, "Cycle and Apocalypse in Finnegans Wake," in Robert Denham, ed., *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974-1988* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 371.

46. Joseph C. Voelker, "'Nature It Is': The Influence of Giordano Bruno on James Joyce's Molly Bloom," *James Joyce Quarterly* 14:1 (October 1, 1976): 39–48; Roland McHugh, *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), 27–31.

“Penelope” begins and ends with the word “yes,” emblematic of the circularity of lived experience, the circle being a representation of the resolution of polarities. The resolution of opposites is also evident in the character Molly Bloom whose heroic response “yes” to the otherwise unjustifiable and perhaps unbearable contradictions and defeats offered by life is the goal to which the entire novel has been traveling on its epic journey. For Joyce, the greatest man in literature was Odysseus whom he had encountered for the first time as a schoolboy through Charles Lamb’s retelling of the story.⁴⁷ Lamb highlights how Odysseus was saved from Circe by the intervention of the god Hermes/Mercury, who gave him the ugly and black-rooted plant with the beautiful white flower (and the instructions how to use it) called *moly* as a magical protection. The entire passage deserves to be quoted:

But neither [Mercury’s] words nor his coming from heaven could stop the daring foot of Ulysses, whom compassion for the misfortune of his friends had rendered careless of danger: which when the god perceived, he had pity to see valor so misplaced, and gave him the flower of the herb *moly*, which is sovereign against enchantments. The *moly* is a small unsightly root, its virtues but little known and in low estimation; the dull shepherd treads on it every day with his clouted shoes; but it bears a small white flower, which is medicinal against charms, blights, mildews, and damps. “Take this in thy hand,” said Mercury, “and with it boldly enter her [Circe’s] gates; when she shall strike thee with her rod, thinking to change thee, as she has changed thy friends, boldly rush in upon her with thy sword, and extort from her the dreadful oath of the gods, that she will use no enchantments against thee; then force her to restore thy abused companions.” He gave Ulysses the little white flower, and, instructing him how to use it, vanished.⁴⁸

In a recent study of duality in the *Odyssey* (having nothing directly to do with Joyce or Joyce studies) it has been suggested that the magical power of the *moly* comes from none other than its joining the opposites of mortal and divine, ease and difficulty, black and white, root and flower in its

47. Charles Lamb, *The Adventures of Ulysses, Edited with Notes for School* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1886). According to Joyce himself, from this time on he was preoccupied with the *Odyssey*; Richard Ellmann, “The Backgrounds of Ulysses,” *The Kenyon Review* 16:3 (1 July 1954), 341. See also Richard Ellman, *James Joyce, new and rev. ed.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 46; Zack R. Bowen, and James F. Carens, eds. *A Companion to Joyce Studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 43; Joyce advised several people who complained of the obscurity of *Ulysses* to read Lamb’s *Adventures* for guidance and clues to the text.

48. Lamb, *The Adventures of Ulysses*, 18.

very biological and botanical structure. It was this structure and composition that rendered it a “saving device” for Odysseus.⁴⁹ In short, the magical plant, the *moly*, is a *coincidentia oppositorum*. Molly Bloom is also a *coincidentia oppositorum* and may also be thought to embody a kind of salvific function. She is: Madonna and whore, mother and daughter, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, joyful and sad, tender and scold, dismissive and loving, jealous and faithful; she “saves” (gives meaning to) the epic of *Ulysses* with her affirmative engagement with life.⁵⁰

Joyce’s interest in the *coincidentia oppositorum* as something of a foundation for his personal religious and spiritual vision was, as is well known, deeply influenced by his great admiration for the fifteenth-century “heretic” Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). It is from the “trope” or “device” of the coincidence of opposites that the much-studied Joycean epiphany emerges out of the “ineluctable modality of the visible (at least that if no more)” (U37). This background is useful for coming to terms with Joyce’s highly personal relationship with the numinous, as distinct from his relationship with the Catholic church.⁵¹ It also provides a firm basis upon which to proceed with the comparison of the two otherwise literally incomparable works examined in this essay. This basis is none other than the ontological presuppositions from which and because of which the *coincidentia oppositorum* and its expressive power emerges as both literary trope and philosophical axiom. The coincidence of opposites speaks to the possibility of a noetic experience with creation (viz: epiphany) as the “device” through which God’s presence as imminent in matter is encountered or at least witted. It bespeaks an adamantly non-dualistic view in which “flesh” is no longer the enemy of “spirit” but one half of a syzygy that comprehends both and rises above “logical entanglements”—precisely, Blake’s “fearful symmetry.” And the description of Joyce’s epiphanic experience resonates beautifully and harmoniously with the Islamic apophatic mysticism that was the central pillar of the Bab’s religious universe in which Absolute Being and Reality were frequently considered synonyms, if not “improvements,” for the word

49. Chet A. Van Duzer, *Duality and Structure in the Iliad and Odyssey* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 4–6.

50. James Van Dyck Card, “‘Contradicting’: The Word for Joyce’s ‘Penelope,’” *James Joyce Quarterly* 11:1 (October 1, 1973): 17–26, 20–21. See the impressive litany of opposites in James Van Dyck Card, *An Anatomy of “Penelope”* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1984), 50–52 and 66–67. It should be remarked, in passing, that Card makes no substantial mention of Voelker’s insights in this book and seems to have no interest at all in the Brunonian substrate of Joyce’s writing. Neither Voelker nor Card observe that Molly, whose birth name was Marion Tweedy, may be thought to take her “heroic” or “magical” name from the magical plant known in the *Odyssey* as the *moly*.

51. Gert Lernout, *Help My Unbelief: James Joyce and Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

“Allah” or “God” vis-à-vis the type of “entity” those words were meant to indicate.⁵² Pointing out that Bruno himself was deeply influenced by the pre-modern “father of the *coincidentia oppositorum*,” Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), Voelker quotes from one of Joyce’s favorite books about his martyr hero on the topic of Being:

Knowledge is posterior both in time and in value to Being, or Reality, of which it is at best a copy or sign, hence Reality can never be wholly comprehended by it. Every human assertion is at best a “conjecture,” a hypothesis or approach to truth, but never the absolute truth itself. Only in the Divine spirit are thought and reality one; the divine thought is at the same time creative, human only reflective, imitative, thus the Ultimate Being is and must remain incomprehensible.⁵³

At U782 Molly says “well who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they dont know neither do I so there you are” – in perfect demonstration of Brunonian apophaticism. Molly is also singled out as expressing most perfectly the metaphysical and poetic implications of this same Brunonian existential monism and its influence on the young Joyce, who, in a 1903 review of the then new book on Bruno by Lewis McIntyre, wrote:

As an independent observer, Bruno ... deserves high honour. More than Bacon or Descartes must he be considered the father of what is called modern philosophy. His system by turns rationalistic and mystic, theistic and pantheistic is everywhere impressed with his noble mind and critical intellect ... In his attempt to reconcile the matter and form of the Scholastics ... Bruno has hardily put forward an hypothesis, which is a curious anticipation of Spinoza ... It is not Spinoza, it is Bruno, that is the god-intoxicated man. Inwards from the material universe, which, however, did not seem to him, as to the Neoplatonists the kingdom of the soul’s malady, or as to the Christians a place of probation, but rather his opportunity for spiritual activity, he passes, and from heroic enthusiasm to enthusiasm to unite himself with God.⁵⁴

Inhabited or possessed by God, the literal translation of the word “enthusiasm,” is the sense one has of Molly in the closing pages of *Ulysses*. The “Penelope” episode represents a crescendo of the meeting of contraries and

52. Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 75–92.

53. J. Lewis McIntyre, *Giordano Bruno* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 142–43.

54. James Joyce, *Critical Writings of James Joyce*, edited by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1959 [hereafter CW]), 133–34.

contradictions in the person of Molly, who was, as it happens, born on the Feast of the Virgin, 8 September.⁵⁵ The following underlines what might be thought, for want of a better term, the “sacramental value” of the *coincidentia oppositorum* in *Ulysses*⁵⁶ and its apotheosis in Penelope and the character of Molly who therefore emerges as something of simultaneous (living) martyr saint to and high priestess of Joyce’s powerful spiritual or mystico-poetic vision:⁵⁷

God of heaven theres nothing like nature the wild mountains then
the sea and the waves rushing then the beautiful country with the
fields of oats and wheat and all kinds of things and all the fine cattle
going about that would do your heart good to see rivers and lakes and
flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours springing up even
out of the ditches primroses and violets nature it is as for them saying
theres no God I wouldnt give a snap of my two fingers for all their
learning why dont they go and create something I often asked him
atheists or whatever they call themselves (U 781–782)

This passage is revealing on another level. It provides yet another entree into the comparison between Joyce and the Bab. In Bruno, as in the Qur’an and the Islamic philosophical tradition, nature is not the opposite of the divine but a vehicle for its expression and encounter. To one familiar with the Qur’an, a decidedly non-dualistic book,⁵⁸ it is impossible to read the above lines without thinking of such verses as:

Hast thou not seen how that God sends down out of heaven water, and
therewith We bring forth fruits of diverse hues? And in the mountains
are streaks white and red, of diverse hues, and pitchy black; men too,
and beasts and cattle – diverse are their hues. Even so only those of

55. James Van Dyck Card, “Contradicting: The Word for Joyce’s ‘Penelope,’” *James Joyce Quarterly* 11:1 (October 1, 1973): 17–26, 21. Incidentally, Card points out that the roses mentioned in this passage “‘Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses” (U782, and elsewhere in *Ulysses*) may allude to the ecstatic religious vision in Dante symbolized by the multifoliate rose. See William York Tindall, *The Literary Symbol* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 199–202 and William York Tindall, *A Reader’s Guide to James Joyce* (New York: Noonday Press, 1959), 91–92. Joyce himself had quite early on expressed his interest in the “history of religious ecstasies.” CW, 134.

56. The existence, function and form of the *coincidentia oppositorum* thus explicated by Voelker, it is clear that the figure occurs not only in Penelope with Molly, but on almost every page of the novel. Gian Balsamo, *Joyce’s Messianism: Dante, Negative Existence, and the Messianic Self* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

57. On the poetry in this passage see Card, *Anatomy*, 80.

58. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 12.

His servants fear God who have knowledge; surely God is All-mighty, All-forgiving. (Q35:27–28; see also, for example Q67:19; Q24:43; Q24:45; Q13:2–4; Q13:13; Q16:48; Q16:68–69)

Such exemplifies a cardinal presupposition of Islam, universally applicable regardless of which Islamic community we are studying, Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi, traditional or modern. This is the theory (or "doctrine") of signs, briefly detailed above, in which everything other than God is in fact a sign or portent, precisely "epiphany" of God. This applies to the verses of the Qur'an, the material universe including nature and its constituents, or to the ideas, thoughts and feelings that compose the interior of the individual. Thus the Qur'an and eventually, but not exclusively, the mystical philosophers of Islam, such as Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240) anticipate the theology of Eckhart (1260–1328), Cusanus (1401–1464), and Bruno and such modern spirits as Berdayev (1874–1948).⁵⁹

The Bab was fully at home in and indeed celebrated this deeply mystical and religious existentialism. In addition to the centrality of Q7:172 in the Bab's composition, the above verse (Q41:53), much beloved by the Islamic tradition as a whole, is quoted or alluded to literally hundreds of times in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* as well as in other of his works.⁶⁰ The two authors, Joyce and the Bab, may have much more in common than initially suspected.⁶¹

Chaosmic Epic and Reader as Hero

All this seems to suggest that Joyce knew the Qur'an, and of course this is true, as Atherton, McHugh, and Yared have convincingly demonstrated.⁶²

59. Todd Lawson, "Duality, Opposition and Typology in the Qur'an: The Apocalyptic Substrate," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10:2 (2008): 23–49. It should be remarked that the question of Bruno's indebtedness here to Cusanus has recently been questioned: Leo Catana, "The Coincidence of Opposites: Cusanian and Non-Cusanian Interpretations," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 17:2 (2011): 381–400.

60. Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, passim.

61. Another evidence of Joyce's exposure to the Qur'an may be read in Molly's rhetorical question "why dont they go and create something I often asked him atheists or whatever they call themselves" (U782) which is also remarkably similar to the so-called challenge verses in the Qur'an. These are five passages which have been read traditionally as a response to the skeptics and cavaliers who doubted Muhammad's mission. One will suffice: And if you are in doubt concerning that We have sent down on Our servant, then bring a sura like it, and call your witnesses, apart from God, if you are truthful. And if you do not – and you will not – then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for unbelievers. (Q2:23–24)

62. James S. Atherton, *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake* (Mamaroneck, NY: P.P. Appel, 1974); Roland McHugh, "Mohammad in Notebook VI.B.31," *A Wake Newslitter: Studies in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake* n.s. 16:4 (August 1979):

Whether or not this specific passage is the direct result of such knowledge is not possible to confirm at this time. However, the idea that joining, reconciling or resolving the nearly infinite instances of opposition and duality encountered during mundane lived experience in the sublunary realm provides the modality or occasion for epiphany is one held both by Joyce, as has been demonstrated, and by the Bab, especially in the work at hand, the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*.⁶³

Ulysses emerges as a critique, an interpretation and a typological re-presentation-cum-appropriation of the traditional epic. It is also a representation and critique or commentary on social reality. It is massive, creative, inventive, very rich and difficult to read. The modern world is in Joyce's word "chaosmic."⁶⁴ Neither purely chaos nor cosmos, it is both together and it represents serious problems for the thinking and feeling individual who would like to make sense of it all. The task of making sense of it all, in the case of *Ulysses* is most definitely left to the reader in much the same way the aware individual must reconcile the oppositions and contradictions of lived experience to perceive the truth of their revelatory message. The relationship between the reader and the text here is a microcosmic example of the relationship between the individual and the world. Apart from the epic tasks of the main characters in *Ulysses* (Leopold Bloom, Stephen Dedalus, and Mol-

51–58; Yared, "In the Name of Annah"; Idem, "Introducing Islam in Finnegans Wake: The Story of Mohammed in VI.B.45," *Genetic Joyce Studies* 1 (Spring 2001). It would appear to be no accident, given the interest in Islam and the Qur'an evident in his Newsletter article mentioned above that McHugh in *The Sigla*, had devoted an entire chapter to the topic of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. In addition, there are a number of studies dealing generally with Joyce and the Middle East and/or the Saidian theory of "orientalism" in the special edition of the *James Joyce Quarterly*, ReOrienting Joyce, mentioned above. In addition to the excellent article there by Yared, see also those by Bouazza, Bowen, Ehrlich, Harris, Kershner, King, and Shloss. Another related publication is Suheil Bushrui, and Bernard Benstock, eds. *James Joyce, an International Perspective: Centenary Essays in Honour of the Late Sir Desmond Cochrane*. Irish Literary Studies 10 (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Totowa, NJ: C. Smythe ; Barnes and Noble Books, 1982). See here, especially, the article by Bushrui, "Joyce in the Arab World," 232–37. (The possibility that Dante also transmitted Islamic and Qur'anic influence to Joyce has not been noted.) See the interesting comment, available online, in a blurb for Firoozeh Dumas' "Funny in Farsi" which discusses the censorship issues surrounding her best-selling memoir in Iran. She says: "A translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* has been with censor's office for seventeen years!" http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/RHI_magazine/pdf3/Dumas.pdf

63. Todd Lawson, "Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyūm Al-asmā': The Terms 'Point' (*nuqta*), 'Pole' (*qutb*), 'Center' (*markaz*) and the Khutbat al-Tatanjiya," *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 5, no. 1 (2001): <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/vol5/tatanj/tatanj.htm>.

64. Eco, *Chaosmos*; see also Michael Patrick Gillespie, *The Aesthetics of Chaos: Nonlinear Thinking and Contemporary Literary Criticism* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003).

ly Bloom), the work is also an epic that the reader accomplishes through the heroic process of reading and understanding.⁶⁵ In the nineteenth century, the “outside” third-person narrator was in complete control of everything that went on in the novel. Even if the novel was problematic and difficult and chaotic, the narrator saved us at the end by being in control and solving the problems, answering the questions. Joyce, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot and their “progeny” say it is not like this any more (if it ever was). And this is a hallmark of modernity and many works of literary modernism.⁶⁶ In the end, Joyce, through *Ulysses*, specifically through the voice of Molly Bloom, affirms a hopeful and life-affirming response to the chaotic “nightmare” of history⁶⁷ and modern life with her famous series of twelve yesses that end the novel and which transforms the chaos into not cosmos but “chaosmos.”⁶⁸

There is also an epic at the center of the Bab's composition, the Qur'an.⁶⁹ This is the story of God's relationship to humanity from the beginning on the day of the covenant, to the end, on the day of judgment. The Bab's composition is based on the Sura of Joseph, the Qur'anic model of narrative continuity and coherence as a result of which it is frequently known by its other name: The Best of Stories (*ahsan al-qisas*) a self-descriptive epithet found at Q12:2. Indeed, that sura 12, the Sura of Joseph, may be thought the narrative core of the Qur'an because it sets out the terms of the paradigmatic Qur'anic “monomyth” in clear and consecutive detail. By choosing the Sura of Joseph, the Bab demonstrates that he is alive to the special place of this sura in the Qur'an as the best and most complete iteration of the distinctively Islamic monomyth and as simultaneous emblem of the entire

65. Frye, *Cycle*, 366, discussing *Finnegans Wake*.

66. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and, to some extent *To the Lighthouse* (1927) follows the example of Joyce's meditation on the “wonders” of the epic quality of a single day in *Ulysses*. But both may be thought anticipated in the search for the epic in the otherwise drear diurnal by Baudelaire, who famously observed in 1845: “[T]he heroism of modern life surrounds and presses upon us ... There is no lack of subjects, nor of colours, to make epics. The painter, the true painter for whom we are looking will be he who can snatch its epic quality from the life of today and can make us see and understand, with brush and pencil, how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots. Next year let us hope that the true seekers may grant us the extraordinary delight of celebrating the advent of the new.” Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1845,” in *The Art of Paris* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1965), 31–32.

67. “History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I would like to awake.” (U34)

68. Not only are these rarely remarked twelve yesses prominent in the closing lines of *Ulysses*, but if we scan the pages carefully, reading with the ear, we find other yesses hiding in the foliage of the vocabulary. Quite apart from the fact that the title of the book itself, *Ulysses* is composed of Ul + ysses (= yesses), such words in the final lines as “yellow houses” “Jessamine” “cactuses” “kissed” “eyes” “breasts” all echo the sound of the affirmative English adverb.

69. Lawson, “The Qur'an and Epic.”

Qur'an, divine revelation.⁷⁰ It is not without significance that the story of Joseph, like *Ulysses*, entails a quest of a father for a son and a son for a father.

Ulysses is a retelling of or commentary on the *Odyssey*. It is an imposition of the *Odyssean* template on the events and character of modern life in Dublin, and so is simultaneously very old and completely new. In Islamic terms, Joyce confuses or disturbs an easy understanding of the difference between revelation (*tanzil*) and interpretation (*ta'wil*).⁷¹ In both *Ulysses* and the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, differences and relationships and reversals between content and form are privileged and explored. In the case of the Bab's composition, his commentary proceeds without the use of the typical and universally employed technical exegetical connectives such as "this means" (*ya'ni*) or "the intention of the text here is" (*al-murād*), devices used frequently in his earlier *tafsir* and also used in some of his later work. Rather, here the commentary is the composition and the composition is the commentary. Another aspect of *Ulysses* that is most suggestive of comparison with the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* is the way it highlights and problematizes the relationship between text ("father") and commentary ("son"). Their "re-union" in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* is indicated in the device of paraphrase offering an excellent comparative example of the way in which form and content exchange roles in this work.

This finds a parallel in those episodes in the first half of *Ulysses* in which the character, say Bloom, is the episode (as in *Lestrygonians*) through the replacement of a typical nineteenth-century-type narrator with Joyce's original and newly-crafted technique of stream of consciousness and "interior monologue." We do not read *about* Bloom, we *read* Bloom directly. The Circe episode, in the latter half of the novel, is written as a play precisely because everything in the brothel is speaking, everything has a tongue. "Everything" is connecting itself as speaking itself into existence. Again, a Qur'anic resonance may be seen in the fact that its main topic there is precisely revelation, discourse, and communication: form and content are a perfect generative unity.⁷² This Qur'anic "conceit" is continued and intensified in the Bab's *Qayyūm al-asmā'*. In *Ulysses* the form becomes content in the

70. Lawson, "Typological Figuration."

71. In English literature perhaps the most instructive and entertaining example of this Joycean insight is elaborated in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. It is interesting therefore that Nabokov himself seems to have disdained Joyce's last work *Finnegans Wake*. On this see Maria Kager, "The Bilingual Imagination of Joyce and Nabokov," paper presented at the 18th Trieste Joyce School, June 29- July 5, 2014.

72. Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Oxen of the Sun which functions also as a chrestomathy of English prose styles in forty sections (the number of weeks for human gestation), or in the chapter Aeolus in which the advertising and newspaper layout is the content. Both works embody a resounding and unambiguous – if quite *avant la lettre* – demonstration of McLuhan's "the medium is the message."⁷³

By its structure, the Bab's composition has much in common with the literary rupture represented by Joyce's *Ulysses*. The *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* (another name by which the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* is known) is, as we saw, the work through which he proclaimed his messianic mission. In this title we see, perhaps, some Joycean mischief with the word *tafsīr*, a technical term meaning "scriptural commentary," and always indicating the long tradition of Muslim scholasticism that produced it.⁷⁴ In reality, this work has virtually nothing in common with that tradition and is as much unlike a standard work of *tafsir* as it could possibly be. It is, however, a reconfiguration of the Qur'an and a rewriting of the Qur'an, in the same way that Joyce's *Ulysses* is a creative reconfiguration of the *Odyssey*. That Joyce did not have to resort to such a disguise for his work and could proclaim openly that it was an imitation of the *Odyssey* says something about the differences in the respective cultural settings and the differences between the two texts, the *Odyssey* and the Qur'an and their respective functions.

The word *al-Qayyūm* comes from the Qur'an (Q2:255; 3:2; 20:111) where it always appears as a divine attribute in tandem with *al-hayy*, "the ever-living." It is frequently translated as "self-subsisting." Its choice as part of the title of this work is related to its numerological (*abjad*) value,⁷⁵ a gematric iteration of the name Yusuf: both *Qayyūm* and *Yūsuf* have the same numeric value (156) and are therefore read as equivalent in the deep "unseen" structure of the language. Additionally, the word *Qayyūm* is derived from the same Arabic root as the key messianic terms *qā'im* (resurrector) and *qiyāma* (resurrection/judgment). Thus the figure of Joseph is understood and presented in a messianic and eschatological mood. The prominence of the word, which tends to elude a "crisp" translation, especially in the title of

73. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 7–21.

74. *Tafsīr* expresses the authority of tradition in Islam the same way the word *midrash* does in Judaism.

75. *Abjad* refers to the system by which each Arabic letter has a numerical value. This is a common – and ancient – phenomenon in the alphabets of many Middle Eastern languages, perhaps related to the need for a computational system in a trade-oriented culture. The numerical value of words is part of their esoteric meaning in much mystical and theological writing throughout the history of Islamic letters.

the work *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, is explained by its connotative function as symbol of the resurrection and day of judgment through articulating the same sounds of the words *qā'im* and *qiyāma* and bearing the central semantic value of the trilateral Arabic root Q-W-M.

In the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, there are a hundred and eleven chapters designated by the author “suras.”⁷⁶ Each *sura* is composed of verses designated by their author as *āyāt*, usually translated as “divine signs.” A wordier though accurate translation is: “miraculous portents” of God’s transcendent oneness. They are miraculous in the first place because the prophet Muhammad, through whom they were spoken, was an unschooled merchant⁷⁷ and because any description of God is, according to the Qur’an, paradoxically-cum-miraculously fraught because of “His” utter unknowability (Q112). The word *āya*/sign reflects something of the idea in the New Testament’s “signs and wonders” (John 4:48; Romans 15:9) without the negativity implied in the John passage. Here it is the author, Ali Mohammad Shirāzi, who uses the term *tafsīr* in the opening words of the first *sura*. But the composition is in reality taking the form of a “new” Qur’an or more accurately, from the mythopoeic point of view, it is the “true” Qur’an that had until now been in hiding with the hidden Imam.

God has ordained the coming forth [from concealment] of this book in explanation (*fi tafsīr*) of the Greatest of Stories directly from Muḥammad bin al-Ḥasan bin Alī bin Muḥammad bin Alī bin Mūsā b. Ja’far b. Muḥammad b. Alī bin al-Ḥasan b. Alī b. Abī Ṭālib upon his servant [i.e. the Bab: Sayyid Alī Moḥammad] a conclusive and eloquent proof of God from the Remembrance before all the worlds. (QA3, *sūrat al-mulk*, 9)

76. Inexplicably, this is the same number of suras mentioned in *Finnegans Wake*. Atherton, *Books at the Wake*, 203 (see however some inconsistency in Atherton on this subject at 45 and 172). The proper number of Qur’anic suras is 114. There is no reason to believe that Joyce had any knowledge of even the existence of the Bab’s writings although he did have knowledge of the Qur’an and Islamic history and was also in some ways consciously trying to “rewrite” the Qur’an. (See Yared above in note 64). Atherton’s view (p. 203) is that Joyce’s 111 is a veiled condemnation of or expression of “hostility towards” the Qur’an because it is also an allusion to a condemnatory *sura* (#111) of the Qur’an in which the arch villain of early Islamic history, Abu Lahab, is roundly condemned to hell. I do not agree that Joyce was hostile to the Qur’an.

77. On Muhammad’s so-called “illiteracy” see Sebastian Günther, “Muhammad, the Illiterate Prophet: An Islamic Creed in the Qur’an and Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 4:1 (2002): 1–26. On the parallels between the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the biography of the Bab, see Stephen Lambden, “An Episode in the Childhood of the Bab,” in Peter Smith, ed., *In Iran, Studies in Babī and Baha’ī History* volume 3 (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1986), 1–31.

Each *āya* of the Qur'an's *Sūrat Yūsuf*, which has 111 verses, becomes the lemma for each of the *suras* in this work, the topic-heading under which the commentary is generated. The first chapter of the Bab's composition, as mentioned earlier, is entitled the *Sūrat al-mulk*. After this first element of a given *sura*, comes the *basmala* – that is the ubiquitous Islamic short prayer and invocation: *In the Name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate*, a formula that heads all but one of the Qur'an's 114 *suras* and which is also used throughout Islamic social and learned culture on countless other occasions, literary, liturgical and social as blessing or prayer. After the *basmala* comes, in the spirit of the “occasions of revelation” genre of Qur'anic sciences,⁷⁸ and in imitation of Qur'ans which typically list the number of verses at the head of each *sura*, the following statement: “this was revealed in Shiraz in forty-two verses” as part of the title section of each *sura*.

As in *Ulysses*, so in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, there is a pervading sense of affirmation, assent, acceptance, and commitment. The number forty-two, the total number of verses for each *sura*, the Bab himself points out, is the numerical equivalent of the word *bala* “*Yea verily*” which is, as mentioned earlier, the answer of humanity to the question posed by God on the day of the covenant, the day of *alast*. This “*Yea verily*” – which in the Qur'anic chronotope represents the beginning of consciousness and history – finds an unexpected yet powerful resonance in Molly Bloom's future directed affirmation in *Penelope*, ending the entire novel with “yes I will I will Yes.” And just as chaos and cosmos are combined in Joyce's modernist literary masterpiece, by making each of his new 111 *suras* 42 verses in length lends a heretofore-unimaginable regularity to the idea of “Qur'an.” But, as we saw, the number 42 is not accidental, even if the number 111 in *Finnegans Wake* is, encoding how form becomes content in this remarkable work by the Bab. It may be thought that this primordial “yes” flows through the “veins” of the entire work, all 4,442 verses, as the Bab himself explicitly says.⁷⁹ Casting new verses, braiding direct quotations from the Qur'an with his own words and words and phrases from Hadith in a seamless new verse, the author regulates it all with the familiar – and here unvarying – Qur'anic rhymed prose, *saḥīḥ*. There can be wide variation in the length of the individual verse in the Bab's composition, just as there is in the original Qur'an, from the short-

78. On this topic see Andrew Rippin, “Occasions of Revelation,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003), 69–73.

79. See below the translation from the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*: “the Letter ‘B’ that circulates in the water of the two groups of letters.” “Two groups of letters” is a poetic way of referring to all language. The letter ‘B’ is, among other things, the first letter of the word ‘*balā'*’: Yes!!.

est, e.g. a set of disconnected letters, to the longest (the 15 lines of verse 8 of the *Sūrat al-'abd*, (QA109: 225–6). The Bab combines commentary with text, audience with performance, revelation with interpretation. In terms of European literary history, such may certainly be considered a modernist gesture.

Following this first section of a given sura, comes the citation of the Qur'anic verse from the *Sūrat Yūsuf* that is to be the object of commentary – the lemma – for the particular chapter. Then come, for all but four suras, the disconnected letters (some Qur'anic, some new). After the disconnected letters, comes the third section of the commentary. It is difficult to characterize this third section satisfactorily because it can be so different from sura to sura and sometimes highly variegated within each sura. In many of the suras, this third section represents a further level of paraphrase, gloss and commentary. For example, the Bab's composition from suras 80 to 91,⁸⁰ in addition to offering a commentary for the Qur'anic verses 12:79 to 12:91 (as would be expected following the structural logic of the work) also presents a running paraphrase of a long series of verses in Qur'anic order that takes into account the bulk of the actual Qur'an from suras 10 through 16. The final or fourth section or division is the return to the actual verse from the *Sūrat Yūsuf* under which the new sura has been written. Here the authorial creativity assumes the character of pure paraphrase. The verse itself is recast to reflect the concerns of the author. These concerns are largely to do with the appearance of the hidden Imam and the inauguration of the return, the *qiyāma* and the day of judgment all in one literary moment. In comparison with *Ulysses*, this final section may be thought a similarly life affirming response to the challenges and “nightmare” of history – in short, an awakening, a revelation. In order to illustrate what might otherwise be difficult to visualize, reproduced here is a translation of the opening of chapter 109 of the Bab's *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, the Sura of the Servant. Here the Qur'anic form will be quite apparent in the opening invocation, the mention of the number of verses and the place of revelation, and perhaps most importantly, the close relationship between commentary and text in which it is very difficult to discern at times where the Qur'anic material ends and the Bab's so-called commentary begins. In order to illustrate this aspect of the work I have employed the typographical expediency of showing the verbatim Qur'anic passages and words in small capitals.

80. QA *suwar al-zawal*, *al-kaf*, *al-a'zam*, *al-ba'*, *al-ism*, *al-ḥaqq*, *al-tayr*, *al-naba'*, *al-iblāgh*, *al-insān* (ii) and *al-tathlith*.

The Sura of the Servant⁸¹

Forty-two verses, revealed in Shiraz

IN THE NAME OF GOD THE MERCIFUL THE COMPASSIONATE

NOR DID WE SEND BEFORE THEE [AS MESSENGERS] ANY BUT MEN WHOM WE DID INSPIRE – [MEN] LIVING IN HUMAN HABITATIONS. DO THEY NOT TRAVEL THROUGH THE EARTH, AND SEE WHAT WAS THE END OF THOSE BEFORE THEM? BUT THE HOME OF THE HEREAFTER IS BEST, FOR THOSE WHO DO RIGHT. WILL YE NOT THEN UNDERSTAND? (QUR'AN 12:109)

Verse 1

Mím Ha Mím Dal [= “Muḥammad” when connected in script]

Verse 2

O People of the THRONE! Listen to the CALL of your Lord, THE MERCIFUL, He who THERE IS NO GOD EXCEPT HIM from the tongue of the REMEMBRANCE, this YOUTH son of the Sublime (*al-'alí*, also the first name of the Bab: 'Alí), the 'Arab to whom [God has] in the MOTHER BOOK testified.

Verse 3

Then LISTEN to WHAT IS BEING REVEALED TO YOU FROM YOUR LORD: VERILY VERILY I AM GOD, OF WHOM THERE IS NO GOD BUT HIM. NOTHING IS LIKE UNTO HIM while He is God, Lofty (*'alí*) Great.

Verse 4

O People of the Earth! HEARKEN to the CALL of the BIRDS upon the TREES leafy and perfumed with the CAMPHOR of Manifestation describing this YOUNG MAN descended from the Arabs, from MOHAMMAD, from 'Alí, from Fatima, from Mekka, from Medina, from Batha', from 'Iraq with what the MERCIFUL HAS MANIFESTED upon their leaves, namely that he is THE SUBLIME (*al-'ala*) and he is God, MIGHTY, PRAISED.

81. This is very slightly adapted from Todd Lawson, “The Súrat al-'Abd of the Qayyúm al-asmá' (Chapter 109): A Provisional Translation and Commentary,” in Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghani, eds., *A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of the Bab, 'Alí Muhammad Shírází (1819–1850)* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012), 116–45. This excerpt with footnotes and other indications removed from the original, is from pp. 127–28.

Verse 5

This YOUTH most white in colour and most beautiful of eye, even of eyebrow, limbs well formed like gold freshly cast from the two springs, soft of shoulder like pure malleable silver in two cups, sublimely awesome in appearance, like the awe-inspiring appearances of the Elders, and outspreading his MERCY as the two Husayns spread mercy over the land, the center of the sky (i.e. the sun) has not seen the like of the justice of the two justices, and in grace like the two Lights joined in the two names from the most lofty of the two beloveds and the ISTHMUS between the two causes in the SECRET of al-Tatanjayn, the abider like the upright *Alif (al-alif al-qā'im)* between the two scrolls at the center of the two worlds, THE JUDGE, BY THE PERMISSION OF GOD in the two later births (the SECRET of the two 'Alawīs and the splendour of the two Fatimīs and an ancient fruit from the BLESSED TREE encrimsoned by the FIRE of the Two Clouds and a group of those of the sacred veils pulsating with the shimmering light, the abider around the FIRE in the TWO SEAS the glory of heaven unto the causes of the two earths and a handful of the clay of the earth over the people of the two – these two GARDENS OF DARK GREEN FOLIAGE over the point of the TWO WESTS and those SECRET two names in the creation of the TWO EASTS born in the two Harams and the one looking towards the two Qiblas beyond the two Ka'bas, the one who prays over the incandescent THRONE twice a possessor of the two causes and the Pure Water in the two gulfs, the speaker in the two stations and the knower of the two Imams, the Letter "B" that circulates in the water of the two groups of letters and the Point Abiding over the DOOR of the Two Alifs revolving around God in the two cycles and the one made to speak on the authority of God in the two cycles, the SERVANT OF GOD and the REMEMBRANCE of His PROOF. This YOUNG MAN CALLED, because his grandfather is ABRAHAM, THE SPIRIT in the forerunners and he is the Gate, after the two later gates. And PRAISE BE TO GOD THE LORD OF ALL THE WORLDS. And he is God, indeed the one who comprehends everything concerning ALL OF THE WORLDS.

Such literary activity, in the guise of exegesis, may be understood partly as excavating or carving out of the mass and chaos of revelation a heretofore-inconceivable regularity in which the pre-existing irregular and the frequently non sequitur narratological aspect of Qur'anic suras become as formally structured as sonnets. In the context of the return of the hidden Imam with the true Qur'an, this could suggest that the irregularity of the Uthmanic codex – the basis for all published Qur'ans – was a result of textual

violence on the part of the breakers of the covenant (*al-nāqīdīn*). Whatever the implications of this new orderly Qur'an text might be, it is clear that the resulting composition mirrors the confidence of the author in claiming the authority to do such an otherwise unimaginable and heretical thing: to rearrange and re-write the Qur'an. It may be that Joyce's design, to collapse the 20-year long story of Odysseus into the confines of a single day in the life of Dublin bespeaks a similar desire to exercise control over the "nightmare of history" of which Stephen Dedalus so famously spoke (U34). Thus the name of the first sura written by the Bab: *mulk*, or [divine] ownership, may be read as his ownership and mastery of the Holy Qur'an, reorganizing it, making it regular, in a sense making it "rational," while at the same time announcing and declaiming through a torrential storm of language with "expectation on the verge of being fulfilled" inside it, anticipating a kind of Joycean "chaosmos." It should be recalled, as well, that the composition can be seen as a melding together of innumerable fragments of scripture making the resulting composition simultaneously old and new – another *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Such a storm is experienced in *Ulysses* but is even more manifest and intense in *Finnegans Wake*: a riot of language, which eventually emerges as quite deliberately and meticulously orchestrated – and this to a nearly unbelievable degree.⁸² Eventually emerges, that is, after the heroic effort of the reader has succeeded in discerning the art and craft sometimes otherwise obscured by these two remarkable compositions, *Ulysses* and the *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, in which the epic adventure of language in extending the resources and significance of language itself is central.

We do not need to emphasize how shocking and scandalous – unthinkable even – such an imitation of the Qur'an was and is. But such extreme scandal – though in a different "key" – also relates to the literary act of Joyce 75 years later, when he takes ownership of and participates quite fully in the sacred aura and dignity of the epic tradition, and appropriates its authority for himself in refiguring it according to contemporary Irish life in all its "chaosmic" plenitude, from the sublime preoccupations of Stephen, to the fatherly and husbandly quest and the attendant peripeties of Bloom and the ultimate salvific affirmation of Molly. The life is told in the – at that time –

82. There are numerous works of scholarship devoted to decoding the otherwise extremely daunting *Finnegans Wake* and revealing its intricate logic and structure, we mention here only five, beginning with the oldest: Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake: Unlocking James Joyce's Masterwork* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005 [first published 1944]); Adaline Glasheen, *A Census of Finnegans Wake: An Index of the Characters and Their Roles* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957); Clive Hart, *A Concordance to Finnegans Wake* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963); Atherton, *The Books at the Wake*; John Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark, Finnegans Wake* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

scandalous graphic depiction of sexual and other intimate bodily acts and functions, in the roiling, sometimes tawdry and racist encounters in Dublin pub life, in the private tenderness that occurs between various characters. There is also pointed criticism of the hypocrisies and paralysis Joyce saw in Roman Catholicism. He makes the *Odyssey* his own in order to express his own particular artistic vision a vision that entails a significant Brunonian “mystical” noetic. The Bab does the same thing with the Qur’an. He says this is mine. And, I am demonstrating how I am taking ownership of it now. And, I am reorganizing it. Rewriting it according to the exigencies of the moment. Thus the Bab also interrogated, disturbed and problematized the relationship between revelation (*tanzil*) and its interpretation (*ta’wīl*), in the life affirming hope to awaken from the nightmare of history marked most dramatically at his time by the mutual and frequently quite virulent heart-breaking enmity among various Muslim communal identities all of which traced their genesis to the gospel of divine unity originally preached by Mohammad. As a son of Shi’i Islam the Bab’s awareness of such disunity was particularly exquisite.

When the *Qayyūm al-asmā’* was first brought to the attention of “Orientalism” in the nineteenth century, people said it is meaningless; the man was insane; there is no sense to this; “it is an unintelligible rhapsody”; the grammar is bad.⁸³ This response is of course very similar to the kind of thing that was said about *Ulysses* when it inaugurated literary modernism in 1922. However, neither the *Qayyūm al-asmā’* nor *Ulysses* is nonsense. Both are very clearly and intricately structured, even if the warp and woof of this structure is frequently overwhelmed by torrential linguistic virtuosity. It is worth noting that by the time the Bab was writing, Shi’i philosophy had established an interesting discourse in which the hidden Imam could be identified with an individual internal spiritual or existential reality, in addition to the expected advent of history, as in the Protestant transposition of the Return of Jesus to the inner realm of the individual soul. The Bab reorganized the words and verses of the Qur’an to apply specifically to the appearance of the hidden Imam and his own role as the gate of the hidden Imam. Thus, the hidden Imam serves in some ways as a poetic reference for the “new” individual as such, in addition to being an ever-living symbol of radical historical change, which seeks to resolve the problems tradition poses to the current moment in Iranian society. This would seem to be clearly indicated in the Bab’s much recited short prayer, called in English “The Remover of Difficulties.”⁸⁴

83. Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse*, 46–47, 82.

84. The Arabic original is found in *Muntakhābāt āyāt az āthār Ḥaḍrat Nuqtah-yi Ūlā* (Chandigarh: Carmel Publishers, 2007), 156. For an English translation, see *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre 1976), 217.

Is there any remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God, He is God. All are his servants and all abide by His bidding.⁸⁵

An equally accurate translation, and one which acquires a certain immediacy in the exceptional context of the Shi'i "millennium" or *qiyāma* (during which time the Bab composed his various works), would alter the translation of the last five words (which in Arabic are *wa kullun bi-amrihi qā'imun*) to "and each is a *qā'im* in God's cause." In Twelver Shi'ism, the *qā'im* is typically held to be the hidden or Twelfth Imam who had, until the time of his divinely ordained return, been in occultation (*ghayba*). So, in another rendering of the original Arabic prayer a "modern" notion of the individual emerges: "Is there any remover of oppression apart from God? Say: All praise be to God! He is God. All others are His servants and are to arise (*qā'im*) in obedience to His holy cause (*amrihi*)." This indicates also that the time for waiting for a savior is over. In the new cycle, the cycle of fulfillment, maturity and resurrection, all members of the human race are potentially *qā'ims*, arisers in the cause of God. Naturally, it is also quite within the bounds of accepted usage to understand both meanings as complementary to each other.

Here, we see another point of comparison with Joyce and the Bab and another feature of the epic dimension of both *Ulysses* and the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* (and of course of the Qur'an itself): in some ways the most salient aspect of their epic qualities becomes apparent in the epic struggle of the reader himself to "complete" the journey. The individual becomes singled out as the center of narrative gravity and comprehension. Understanding is heroic. The reader is an autonomous, creative-cum-heroic participant without whom the composition would not exist. Revelation is cast in the language of the recipient:

And We have sent no Messenger save with the tongue of his people, that he might make all clear to them; then God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will; and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise. (Q14: 4: *wa mā arsalnā min rusul illā bi-lisān qawmihi*)

Related to the idea of "reader as hero" is the quest for identity, emblemized in the search of son for father in both works. It is the grand "monomythic" theme of literature as such.⁸⁶ This theme emerges in both *Ulysses* and the

85. *Bahá'i Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, The Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1982), 106.

86. On reader as hero: Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 323–324; on losing and regaining identity as the central concern of the "monomyth"; Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 55.

Qayyūm *al-asmā'* through revelation, recognition (anagnorisis) or epiphany (*zuhūr, kashf*), the Greek word for which is of course apocalypse. Both *Ulysses* and the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* are dealing in revelation. For *Ulysses*, this is intensely encountered in Penelope. For the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* the intensity of the encounter is maintained at a remarkable level throughout the entire work. Revelation, for the Bab, springs from the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which employs all created phenomena in order to demonstrate that there is something beyond logic and sense perception that shines through the “clash” of apparent oppositions. And in both the Bab and Joyce this is demonstrated over and over again through the epic adventure of language in which the *coincidentia oppositorum* has a simultaneous poetic or literary function and a philosophical or mystical function.⁸⁷

The literary fiction, that the book was given to the Bab by the hidden Imam, asserts of course an important “religious” credential, namely that he is the “official” representative of the hidden Imam and so the focus and locus of all the power in the universe (*viz. al-walāya al-mutlaqa*). But the actual work establishes an even more important “literary” credential. Certainly the earliest followers of the Bab made much of his verbal artistry and prodigious literary abilities as a proof of his claims to be in touch with the hidden Imam. Without the hidden Imam there is, of course, no Twelver Shi'ism; without the idea of the absence or the discussion about the hidden Imam's representative, there is also no Twelver Shi'ism. But, there are certain clues throughout the text that the Bab himself is actually this same hidden Imam, clues that *he himself is the one from whom he himself received the book*.⁸⁸ What might be thought clear and unambiguous indication of this is found in the titles of the hundred-and-eighth and hundred-and-ninth *suras*. The disconnected letters for these two chapters, *Sūrat al-dhikr* (QA108) and *Sūrat al-'abd* (QA 109), are respectively A-L-Y (*'ayn-lam-yā*) and M-H-M-D (*mīm-hā-mīm-dal*). Neither set of disconnected letters occurs in the Qur'an and must be thought original – as disconnected letters – with the Bab (as are many other sets of disconnected letters in this work). Further, each set when looked at as *not* disconnected but as spelling a word are seen to be the names Ali and Muhammad. These are the names, in reverse order, of (according to Shi'i Islam) the first two bearers of divine authority in Islam: Ali ibn Abi Tālib (d.661) cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632). That these are

87. “The juxtaposition of opposites, however, is thematic at least as much as it is structural ...,” Card, *Anatomy*, 52.

88. Lawson, *Gnostic*, 117. A similarly self-reflexive process is studied in Omid Ghaemmaghami, “A Youth of Medium Height: The Bab's Encounter with the Hidden Imam in *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar*,” in Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami, eds., *A Most Noble Pattern*, 175–95.

also the names of the author of the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* is obviously no accident, making the point that history is cyclical and is repeating itself in the revelation of the Bab. They are inserted here in an artistic, nearly playful, manner to underscore that he is indeed responsible for this text as its author. (See Figure 3 below.) The name of the author Ali Mohammad [viz: Shirāzi - the Bab] is thus camouflaged in these not too mysterious, “disconnected” letters, which are clearly not disconnected at all.⁸⁹ And, most importantly, with this assertion of authorship, the Bab complicates and challenges a traditional understanding of divine revelation.

The *Qayyūm al-asmā'* is the very embodiment of high seriousness and earnestness. No irony, no comedy or humor. These “disconnected letters” are striking evidence of authorial presence and an artistic gesture that combines the Bab’s inborn temperament and preoccupations with his unconventional, even iconoclastic, religious ideas. These concerns are channeled through a traditionally pietistic religious modality: the Qur’an and its exegesis (*tafsīr*). The Qur’an is the raw material out of which issues this work, just as the *Odyssey* is the raw material out of which *Ulysses* emerges as Joyce’s expression of his own unorthodoxy. Both are works that by their very nature ask questions about the relationship between tradition and change, narrative and authorial creativity, and the role of the reader. In the Bab’s composition, the relationship between revelation and interpretation is privileged. This may be thought emblematic of the basic presupposition of a distinctively Shi’i hermeneutic in which the angel of revelation is also the angel of interpretation.⁹⁰

This is of course where it parts company to some degree with *Ulysses*. *Ulysses* is not terribly religious in the traditional “institutional” sense of that word, although Joyce was himself saturated in Roman Catholicism, and much of his language and much of his point of view was formed by his early education and his conflicts coming up against Catholicism in the “modern world.” It is indisputable that he rejected Catholicism. But, we have seen how Joyce’s “religious faculty” was attracted to and stimulated by the mystical philosophy of thinkers like Bruno. It is not accurate to call *Ulysses* secular precisely because of its epic structure and élan, its seriousness, which may be thought highlighted and accentuated by the fluent, obligato-like leitmotif of humor and its revelatory observation of the hallowed interconnectedness of all

89. While I am unaware of the any of the sets of actual Qur’anic disconnected letters being identified as proper names, the reverse is certainly true. Sets of these mysterious letters have frequently been given as proper names in Islamic societies, e.g., Ta Ha (from Sura 20) and Ya Sin (from Sura 36).

90. Corbin, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971), vol. 3, 292–300.

Opening lines of *sūrat al-dhikr* (QA 108, pp. 223-225).

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الله العلي فد كان سورع الذكروا اثنتان واربعون آيات في آتم الكتاب بشيئا
 بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ه قل هذه سبيلي ادعوا الى الله على بصيرة
 انار من اتبعني وسجان الله وما انا من المشركين ه على ه هو الله الذي لا اله الا هو رب
 والسماء وهو الله كان عليا عظيما هو الذي قد انزل الاسرار في اسطر من الالواح بالحق

Opening lines of *sūrat al-'abd* (QA 109, pp. 225-229).

الما مشهورا ه وسجان الله الحق الذي لا اله الا هو وهو الله كان بكل شئ قديرا
 وهو الله كما سورة العبد بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم اثنتان واربعون عن العالمين
 وما اليلنا من قبلك الا رجال الانوح اليهم من اهل القرى اقل لم يبيروا في الارض فينظروا كيف كان
 عاقبة الذين من قبلهم ولذا الاخرة خير للذين اتقوا ان لا يعقلون ه محمد ه يا اهل
 العرب اسمعوا يدور بكم الرحمن الذي لا اله الا هو من لسان الذكروا هذا الحق ابن العلي العربي

Figure 3: The Bab's signature masquerading as disconnected letters:

things. *Ulysses* has the gravitas of scriptural purpose and the solemnity and nobility of the epic. Just as the Qur'an is concerned with a universal human experience – an epic which it casts in terms of *dīn* – sacred responsibility or “religion,” *Ulysses* locates sacred responsibility in Bloom's search for a son (Rudy), Stephen's search for a father, and Molly's exuberant and somehow also highly devout affirmation of life. We can never imagine the Bab saying anything like Joyce's: “How I hate God and death! How I like Nora.”⁹¹ However, in the opening chapter of his work, the *Sūrat al-mulk*, the sura of dominion, he says with similar vehemence and commitment that all power,

91. James Joyce, from a letter to Nora dated about 1 September 1904, in Richard Ellmann, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 27.

explicitly that of the Shah and that of the ulema, has now been returned to its rightful place: the hidden Imam (i.e. himself). And though the Bab's *balā* "Yes indeed!" is a different affirmation than Molly's series of 12 yesses that end the book, both adverbial affirmatives assent to the power of life to endure, abide, flourish in order to provide the "modality" out of which more life can be created and renewed. Earlier, it was suggested that the word *qiyāma* may in some ways reflect and indicate Qajar modernist energies. Another word, much used in the Bab's writings and by later Baha'i writers, is *badī*, which may be translated as "wondrously new." It is wondrous because it indicates a quality that is simultaneously new and eternal or ancient. It is the word used, for example to indicate the new calendar constructed by the Bab and followed by Baha'is. This same tension uniting the old and the new is clearly present in *Ulysses*.

Thus does literary modernism, in the cloak of Iranian religiosity, anticipate by 70 years or so, a much more well-known and -recognized epochal literary shift whose emblem is James Joyce's *Ulysses*.⁹² Whether this has relevance for theorizing about the relationship between such literary creativity and the more purely historical problem of the relationship between the modern and whatever its opposite might be, is a question that will have to be postponed. But for the moment, we can perhaps allow ourselves a little latitude to ask in closing whether we might not be somewhat justified in thinking of *Ulysses* as a case of Qajar literary modernism in a twentieth-century European masterpiece? Indeed, all of the Bab's literary works were condemned and demonized by the broader culture as heretical. Thousands of the Bab's followers were in fact slaughtered by the Shah's forces, at the behest of the clerical estate. Those who might otherwise have been attracted to and inspired by the literary achievements of the Bab had much more at stake than "mere" literary success or failure. But the comparison of the two works is suggestive on the level of literature precisely because of the structural and thematic parallels, the similarities between the two texts as scandalous, outrageous and "difficult," the respective authors' sense

92. The present exploration is not the first time the unique œuvre of the Bab has been likened to modernist European literary developments. Years ago, in conference presentation Denis MacEoin, prolific scholar of the Babi and Baha'i phenomena, said: "As a matter of fact, his Arabic was never as bad as his Muslim critics have suggested. There is something enticingly Dadaist about his defiance of linguistic tradition and his explosion of Arabic roots past all ordinary meaning." ("Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Shari'a: The Babi And Baha'i Solutions to the Problem of Immutability" British Society for Middle East Studies Conference 1997.) That presentation has recently been published in a collection of articles. See Denis MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 645–57, reference here is to p. 652.

of themselves as revolutionizing their own particular literary cultures and their singular and heroic dedication to their respective visions. From the point of view of the centrality of rupture, scandal and shock and the signal that something new was happening embodied by both works, there is much to commend the comparison and it is difficult to ignore their obvious similarities.

Postscriptum

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