Article

Fādil Al-Samarra'ī's Contribution to Literary and Rhetorical Exegesis of the Qur'an

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Abstract: This article explores and assesses Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's contribution to literary and rhetorical Qur'anic exegesis, especially regarding the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an. The article looks at how al-Samarrā'ī approaches the Qur'anic text to reveal its miraculous expressional secrets and its rhetorical inimitability with mere Arabic linguistic tools while giving contexts high priority in his analyses and interpretations. Al-Samarrā'ī was able to reach the semantics and purposes of the Qur'an based on the Qur'anic language itself, relying on its sentence structure and order, as well as on the structures, significance, and special meanings of words (which distinguish them from their synonyms), and how all of it relates to the purposes and objectives of the Qur'an. Al-Samarrā'ī sought to use morphology, semantics, and syntax to reach the purposes of the Holy Qur'an and discover its miraculous and inimitable eloquence. To achieve this, al-Samarrā'ī relied on the rich and vast literature on the subject. Guided by the intellectual language and empirical questions of his time, his tremendous effort and contribution to the literature has helped to demystify this complex subject.

Keywords: rhetorical exegesis of the Qur'an; literary interpretation of the Qur'an; Qur'anic eloquence; Qur'anic inimitability

1. Introduction

1.1. Fādil Al-Samarrā'ī

Abū Muhammad Fādil bin Saleh bin Mahdi bin Khalil Al-Badri was part of the "Al-Badri" clan, one of the Samarrā clans. He was born in Samarrā in 1933 AD to a middle-class family with high social and religious status. At an early age, his father began taking him to Hassan Pasha Mosque to study the Holy Qur'an, which revealed his considerable intelligence.

Al-Samarrā'ī completed his primary, intermediate, and secondary education in Samarrā, then moved to Baghdad, where he studied to become a teacher. He excelled in all his courses and graduated in 1953. He was hired as a teacher in the city of Balad in 1953 AD, after which he continued and completed his studies at the Higher Teachers' House in the Arabic Language Department (at College of Education) in 1957 AD and graduated from it in 1960 AD. Al-Samarrā'ī obtained a (Bachelor's) degree, with distinction, and returned to teaching in a secondary school. He enrolled in a postgraduate scheme that was established for the first time in Iraq to offer master's degrees in the department of linguistics. He was the first to obtain a master's degree in the College of Arts. In the same year, he was appointed as a teaching assistant in the Department of Arabic Language at the College of Education at the University of Baghdad. He received his PhD in 1968 from Ain Shams University in the College of Arts in the Department of Arabic Language. (The summarized and translated extract is from what is published about Al-Samarrā'ī in the following Web address: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%84_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A, accessed on 8 January 2022).

1.2. Research Context

Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's work in the literary and rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an is an extension of Muhammad Abdu's exploration of Qur'anic eloquence within the parameters of his procedural approaches to the Qur'an, namely his revivalist thoughts, intellectual activism, and renewal efforts in interpreting the Qur'an. This rhetorical endeavor has its roots in the works of scholars such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 225 AH), Ibn Qutybah (d. 276 AH), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rummānī (d. 386 AH), Abū Sulymān Ḥamad bin Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388 AH) and al-Qadī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 315 AH), Abū Bakr al-Bāqilanī (d. 403 AH), Imam Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH), Abū al-Qāsim Jārullah al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) and Abū al-Iṣbu' al-Maṣrī (d. 654 AH), al-Imām Yaḥyā bin Ḥamzah al-'Alawī (d. 749 AH), al-Imām al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH), and al-Imām as-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) (al-Bayumī 1971).

These rhetorical and literary studies of the Qur'an continued throughout history, according to the epistemological questions and intellectual challenges of each era. In the 19th century AD, 12th century AH, with the dawn of the intellectual revival movement, attention to the literary and rhetorical aspects of Qur'anic interpretation saw a remarkable renewal thanks to the works of Imam Muhammad Abdu and his student (a promotor and implementer of his exegetical and reformist thoughts), Sheikh Rashīd Riḍa. Other aspects of the regenerative and exegetical intellectual renewal were dominated by religious guidance and social reform. These efforts resulted in the emergence of a two-pronged literary and rhetorical interpretive school, represented by the al-Manār School and the al-'Umanā' School.

In the modern period, the following prominent scholars in the Arab world contributed immensely to the existing rhetorical and literary studies of the Qur'an, demonstrating excellence and originality in their works:

1. Mustapha Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī (1880–1937 AD) in his book *I'jāz al-al-Qur'ān wa al-Balāghah al-Nabawīyyah*.
2. Al-Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī (1896–1966) in his book *Manāhij Tajdīd fi al-Naḥw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab*.
3. Sayyid Quṭb (1909–1966) in his books *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān*, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāmah fī al-Qur'ān*, and his prominent *Tafsīr Fi Dhilāl al-Qur'ān*.
4. 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi') (1913–1998) in her book *al- al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī lil al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*.
5. Fādil Ṣaliḥ al-Samarrā'ī (1933-) in his numerous books that I explore in this article.

It is worth mentioning that al-Samarrā'ī comes as the third most prominent modern scholar in the field of rhetorical exegesis in the Arab world after Amīn al-Khūlī and 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'). His literary analysis is comparable to that of Sayyid Quṭb in some of artistic concepts and terminologies they both explored. A comparative study of Sayyid Quṭb and Fādil Ṣaliḥ al-Samarrā'ī in their exploration of artistic aspects of the Qur'anic expressions in its stylistic compositions will be interesting but will need a full-fledged article; thus, that cannot not be accommodated in the scope of this article. I hope to undertake that task in future by God willing.

We can include Fādil al-Samarrā'ī within the methodological structure of the al-'Umana' School, which is led by its founder al-Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī, who established its foundations and methodology, and his wife 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'), who applies his method of rhetorical interpretation and promotes his innovative thoughts in this field (Abd al-Raḥman n.d., pp. 7–9), and Dr. Shukrī 'Ayyād, among others. However, Fādil al-Samarrā'ī held different views on some of the intellectual and scientific principles that they embraced, such as their rejection of scientific miracles of the Qur'an, among others (al-Ghuryb 2018, see: pp. 99–190 and pp. 335–81). For a brief exploration of Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī's methodology, and his wife 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'), who summarized and applied his method of rhetorical interpretation, see: (Wald al-Nabiyyah 2020, pp. 23–26).

2. Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's Appreciation of the Qur'an's Literary and Rhetorical Inimitability

Fādil al-Samarrā'ī wholeheartedly engaged himself in studying the Qur'an to discover its stylistic and rhetorical inimitabilities. He did so after not being fully convinced of what he read and heard about the miraculous nature of the eloquence of the Qur'an, being the highest level of speech that can neither be matched nor be competed against by humans and invisible beings even if they combine their efforts to do as the Qur'an challenges (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a). He saw this concept of miraculousness and inimitability as an exaggerated claim because of religious enthusiasm and doctrinal intolerance.

He also considered claims about the manifestations of the transcendency and miraculous aspects of the Qur'anic expressions in its stylistic compositions to be unscientific and unusual. He thought that if the expressions claimed to be inimitable were otherwise, those who claim the Qur'an to be inimitable and miraculous would have found similar and justified explanations for describing the Qur'an as such a miracle. Nonetheless, after learning from books on the Arabic language, Qur'anic exegesis, Qur'anic inimitability, Arabic rhetoric, etc.—by virtue of his competence in linguistics—he began to agree with claims about the miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an and its inimitability, as he found that much of what had been written on the subject was characterized by a high scientific spirit; however, he still found much of it unconvincing. He therefore decided to read the Qur'anic text to see for himself whether claims about the credibility of this imitability of the Qur'an were true. He conducted comparative analyses between many Qur'anic verses in terms of similarities and differences in foregrounding (*al-Taqdīm*), backgrounding (*al-Ta'khīr*), mentioning (*al-Dhikr*), and omission (*al-Ḥathf*), as well as other syntactic and rhetorical features. He was impressed by the Qur'an's specific and very effective way of using language in its expressions and the level of the accuracy of those expressions in portraying Qur'anic concepts, objectives, and purposes with perfection in art and superiority in workmanship. He found a deliberate artistic expression according to each word that was well calculated, but also for each letter in the word. He was impressed by the accuracy of the expressions in terms of forms and contents, perfection in art and the height of workmanship, where he found a deliberate artistic expression according to each word that was well calculated and even for each letter in the word. This changed his opinion on the inimitability of the Qur'an, as the more carefully he considered, scrutinized, and compared, the more certain, understanding, and convinced he became, recognizing that the Qur'anic text could not be the words of human beings. Al-Samarrā'ī then asserted that humans and Jinn would not be able to produce something like the Qur'an or come close to, even if they came together with combined efforts (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 5), which is an attestation of the verse 88 of Surah al-Isrā' 17 (Q: 17:88). Therefore, although he initially denied it, al-Samarrā'ī strongly acknowledged the Qur'an's inimitability.

Al-Samarrā'ī's belief in the Qur'an's miraculous nature and inimitability stems from experimental studies and research based on deconstruction and reconstruction, analysis, declaration, and explanation of the Qur'anic compositional structure order system or "Qur'anic expressions" as al-Samarrā'ī calls it. al-Samarrā'ī (2010a) conducted this research at the following levels:

(a) The word level of an expression, which is represented in the study of the eloquence of the Qur'anic word or the Qur'anic vocabulary and its perfect choice.

(b) The structure of the word, be it a verb or a noun. The mentioning or deleting of some of the word's radical letters in its original form or derived form. The role of all that in achieving the expressional purposes and objectives of the Qur'an in that context of the usage.

(c) The sentence structure and composition as represented in al-Samarrā'ī's study of a Qur'anic sentence and its role in different contexts of the surah in achieving its purposes, and in other contexts in other surahs in achieving the overall purposes of the Qur'an.

(d)   The compositional construction (al-Naẓm), which reveals the secrets behind the Qurʾanic expression, its rhetorical peculiarities as represented by similarities and differences in expressions, and the role of all that in achieving the purposes of the Qurʾan.

(e)   In his search for the secrets of the rhetorical features of the Qurʾanic word, al-Samarrāʾī addressed the eloquence of the word in Qurʾanic expressions in his book titled: *Balāgah al-Kalimah fī al-Taʾbīr al-Qurʾānī, The Eloquence of the Word in Qurʾanic Phraseology* (2009). He studied the Qurʾanic vocabulary and found that the significations of the Qurʾanic word are multifaceted, and its subject matters are broad and complex. Many of these significations of the Qurʾanic word had been addressed by researchers before him, but a lot of them remained untouched. He was fascinated and inspired by this untouched section of the Qurʾanic word and chose to explore, for example, omissions of letters in the form of a word, such as (اسطاعوا) where the (التاء) is omitted, or stating or retaining that letter in the same word (استطاعوا), where the (التاء) is stated elsewhere in the Qurʾanic vocabulary, and the conditions of mentioning the original letter or substituting that with another in the Qurʾanic vocabulary, which, in al-Samarrāʾī's view, are relevant to the eloquence of the word and its response to the contextual requirement, as:

> "there is no doubt that each vocabulary has been deliberately formed and artistically placed to coherently conform with the situation by taking its appropriate place. Hence, the deletion in the vocabulary is intentional, that the mention is also intentional. Likewise, the replacement or substitution of a letter in the vocabulary is intentional and that using the original form is also intended, and every change in the vocabulary or recognition of the original form is intended for its purpose … ". (al-Samarrāʾī 2009, p. 6)

Al-Samarrāʾī was also driven to research Qurʾanic vocabularies because he was not convinced by some of their explanations for the reasons behind the differences between different usages of a vocabulary. Many of their explanations seemed to him superficial. This prompted him to reconsider and reexamine them; however, he did not claim to have provided better explanations than those of his predecessors. He only discusses what he discovered in the Qurʾanic vocabulary. Another pressing motive for his engagement in this kind of Qurʾanic research was the lack of a dedicated comprehensive literature that discusses the vocabularies of the Qurʾan with their different uses explained in detail. Al-Samarrāʾī acknowledges that there are indications as to why a word is chosen in a particular place in the Qurʾan and not in other similar contexts places in some of the tafsir and mutashābih books, for example. There are also books in the vocabulary of the Qurʾan that may discuss the difference between one word and another, which is like what is written in lexical differences. However, he did not find a book that examines the vocabularies in the Qurʾan, categorizes that on thematic basis, explores similarities and studies those similarities. In writing his book, he endeavored to make a modest foray into the subject so that others could build upon his work (al-Samarrāʾī 2009, p. 7).

Al-Samarrāʾī also discusses topics related to the vocabulary in the Qurʾan that he did not study in this book, which considers its subjects. He discusses, elsewhere, topics related to the Qurʾanic vocabularies such as doubling one of the radicals by way of assimilation (al-Idgām) or opening the doubled radical (al-Fakk) and their semantic and rhetorical connotations. These kinds of morphological aspects of words or vocabularies, be they nouns, verbs, or the forms and meanings of verbal nouns or infinitives, have certain rhetorical meanings and connotations that are required by the different contexts in which they appear in the Qurʾanic expressions.

These books include *al-Taʾbīr al-Qurʾānī, The Qurʾanic Phraseology, Al-Jumlah al-ʾArabīyah wal-Maʾnā* (*The Arabic Sentence and the Meaning*) and *Meanings of lexical forms in Arabic*. Al-Samarrāʾī acknowledges that there remain many topics related to the uniqueness of the words or vocabularies in the Qurʾan that he did not study or discuss. In *The Qurʾanic Phraseology*, al-Samarrāʾī writes:

"There is no dispute among scholars that the Qur'anic expression is unique in its exaltedness and eminence and that it is the highest and subtlest speech. The Qur'an dazzled the Arabs, and they were not able to approach it and come up with the like of it, even though the Qur'an challenged them more than once". He continues: "Qur'anic expression is a deliberate artistic expression, every word or even every letter in the Qur'an is formed with a deliberate artistic objective, and neither the verse alone in that place nor the surah alone was considered in that place, but the entire Qur'anic expression was considered in that place" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 7, 9). Al-Samarrā'ī then provides examples of the uniqueness of Qur'anic expressions that the ancient scholars observed, including that it is the surahs that began with the single letters and repeated these letters in their words and compositions more than other letters. He discusses this and other fascinating discoveries and secrets they reached after conducting a statistical survey of the manifestations of these letters in the surah in question. Al-Samarrā'ī also presents the wondrous secrets of Qur'anic expression that were discovered after statistical studies that proved that Qur'anic words were not placed in vain or without calculation, but rather in precise positions with accurate calculation. As examples of some of the findings based on some of these statistics, he cites Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal in his book *al-I'jāz al-'adadī* (*The Numerical Inimitability of the Qur'an*); he refers to the repetition of the words "dunyā" (this life) and al-Ākhirah (the hereafter) in the Qur'an, both of which are repeated 115 times. Moreover, Al-Malā'ikah (the angels) and al-Shayāṭīn (the demons) are both repeated 88 times. These and other examples indicate that such precise usage and deliberate calculations of words was only the measuring of the Mighty, the Wise (See: al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 12–13). For a critical assessment of al-Samarrā'ī's elucidations of the Qur'anic vocabularies related to different Qur'anic recitations, see: (al-Lahwu 2020).

In his treatment and discussion of the manifestations of the miraculous inimitability of Qur'anic expressions, which was discovered by ancient 'ulamā', al-Samarrā'ī did not hide his fascination and belief based on experienced and self-sense of the inimitability of the Qur'anic expression and that the Qur'an in all these miraculous manifestations enacted the norms and the patterns of the Arabs in expression (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 12). Al-Samarrā'ī reverberated this by talking about the specifics of the Qur'an in the use of words in what ancient scholars such as al-Jāḥiẓ and others discussed, where the Qur'an distinguishes many Arabic words with its own special usages, which indicates a clear intent in expression. He cites some examples of this, such as the use of the word al-Riyāḥ (the winds) in the plural form in the context of goodness and mercy, and al-Rīḥ (the wind) in singular form in the context of evil and punishment (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 12–13). After providing a few examples, al-Samarrā'ī concludes that "the peculiarities of Qur'anic use of words are many that we do not want to explore now, but we wanted to give examples of this to show (intent, purpose) and accuracy in the choice of the words of the Qur'an. With this mathematical statistical use of words, the Qur'anic expression is at the top of literary and artistic expressions. If you look at any form of expression in it (the Quran), you find it an integrated organic unit without being far off nor having disparity" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 10). Al-Samarrā'ī provides additional brief examples of the special characteristics of Qur'anic expression, stating that the style of emphasis (Asālīb al-Tawkīd) in the Qur'anic expression has integrated artistic unity consistent with the special contexts in which it was contained and coordinated with all other places in which the emphasis was mentioned. After citing some examples of the specificity of emphasis in Qur'anic expression, he concludes that the emphasis in the Qur'an is "a harmonious high artistic painting despite the capacity of the emphasis, the different types of emphasizing methods and the diversity of its tools" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 16). He describes the interrogative style (al-Istifhām), foregrounding (al-Taqdīm), and backgrounding (al-Ta'khīr) styles in Qur'anic expressions, how the Qur'an has all put in a very wonderful and beautiful artistic situation, and how the Qur'an "combines different types of words and composes them in an amazing concentration that does not leave anyone with expertise in philology and rhetoric without prostrating in reverence, exalting and glorifying the author of this speech".

Confirming his acknowledgement of the inimitability of the Qur'an, al-Samarrā'ī cites the Qur'anic verse that says "Allah hath (now) revealed the fairest of statements, a Scripture consistent, (wherein promises of reward are) paired (with threats of punishment), whereat doth creep the flesh of those who fear their Lord, so that their flesh and their hearts soften to Allah's reminder. Such is Allah's guidance, wherewith He guideth whom He will. And him whom Allah sendeth astray, for him there is no guide" (Q:39:23 as cited in al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 17–18).

At the end of *The Qur'anic Phraseology*, which represents a general prelude to what he would study in this book, which concerns the special characteristics of Qur'anic expression, such as the examples he provides and other peculiarities of Qur'anic expression, al-Samarrā'ī asserts that the subject of Qur'anic expression has been studied extensively and given more consideration than any other text in the world. He refers to examples of studies on Qur'anic expression such as the study of its artistic portrayal, the study of its structural composition and music, the study of its coherence ayah by ayah and surah by surah and the starts and ends of its surahs. It is one piece of art tightly tied together with magnificent threads. The Qur'an is also studied in terms of its miracles and miraculous aspects, which were innumerable. Al-Samarrā'ī states the following in a sequence of rhetorical questions about the Qur'an's inimitability:

> Is it in its style and expression, or is it in its legislation and its law, or in its dealing with the different aspects of life to the fullest and most beautiful picture, or is it in its narrations about past nations and perished nations, or is it in its telling of a what will happen, or is it in what it's established about scientific and cosmic facts that people discover only part of those facts over time, or is it in what it laid down from the rules and principles of education and its knowledge of the diseases of hearts and souls? Or is it in what it mentions of the laws of history and creation, or what it mentions of the principles of sociology, or in anything other than that? Or is it in all of that and other things on top of that? Is the Qur'an a language book, a book of literature, a book of legislation, a book of economics, a book of education, a book of history, a book of sociology, a book of politics, a book of beliefs, or is it all and above? (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 18).

After posing these questions, al-Samarrā'ī shows his fascination with the Qur'an and its miraculous inimitability, confessing and acknowledging this inimitability with respect to all of those questions:

> The literary criticism scholar sees it (the Qur'an) as miraculous and the linguist sees it as miraculous, the Master of Law and Legislation see it as miraculous, economists see it as miraculous, educators see it as miraculous, psychologists and psychologists see it as miraculous, sociologists see it as miraculous, reformers see it as miraculous, and every firmly established in his discipline sees it as miraculous. The Qur'an revealed to them while they were searching for the manifestations of its inimitability, seas that have no coast, and they sank into depths that have no bottom, and each returned with a precious pearl or an elegant necklace, and there remained treasures beyond counting that were not penetrated by those who entered, and treasures that could not be counted, to which hands did not reach, the world perishes and it perishes not, and all new things wears out and it does not wear out. It is one of the wonders of God's making that if you look at it, you would not know how to make it, and you will be overwhelmed with endless wonder and dazzled with infinite admiration. The key to this discovery is constant reflection and contemplation. Hence, give the Qur'an some reflection, it will in turn give you of its wonders and secrets what you have never thought of and will give you multiple folds of what you have given. (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 18–19).

From al-Samarrā'ī's foregoing arguments and statements, as well as his acknowledgment and affirmation of the foundations of the discourse of the imitability of the Qur'an

and its miraculous nature as established by the earlier Muslim scholars, we can deduce that he has reproduced those fundamentals through the rhythms and epistemological questions of his time, adding to them some of the findings of his modern time regarding the miracle of the Qur'an. Al-Samarrā'ī's words also imply that studying the Qur'anic expression to discover its miraculousness in these different manifestations sometimes requires teams of specialists—one for each scientific specialization. Knowing the literary and rhetorical secrets of structures in the Qur'anic expression remains the cornerstone of realizing the miraculousness of the Qur'an in every aspect of its dazzling miraculousness. However, given his specialization, al-Samarrā'ī's exploration of the secrets of the inimitability of the Qur'an is limited to exploring the linguistic, literary, and rhetorical miraculousness of the Qur'anic expression.

After this general exploration, al-Samarrā'ī began to explore detailed manifestations of these expressive peculiarities of the Qur'anic phraseology to show how it outclassed other Arabic expression to the extent that it could neither be matched nor challenged, thus confirming its miraculous and inimitable nature. He then studied the structure of Qur'anic expression in terms of similarities and differences in foregrounding (al-Taqdīm), backgrounding (al-Ta'khīr), mentioning (al-Dhikr), and omission (al-Ḥathf), as well as forms of affirmation/emphasis (Asālīb al-Tawkīd), verse breaks (Fawāṣil al-Āyāt), and the expressive feature of context. He further addressed what he called al-Ḥashd al-Fannī (artistic intensity), which is a kind of ascendancy in al-Samarrā'ī's exploration of the expressive peculiarities of Qur'anic phraseology. Al-Samarrā'ī limited the examples of rhetorical devices to only one point in the ayah in question to point out the expressive peculiarity. However, when exploring artistic intensity in Qur'anic expression, it was found that every word, as well as every letter, was placed in an artistically intended position, with precision, accuracy, and beauty, to develop a precise, beautiful, and intentional artistic situation. Al-Samarrā'ī's approach to choosing the Qur'anic expressions in his exploration of Qur'anic artistic intensity was to consider many matters, including the following:

- The surah in which the particular Qur'anic expression occurred.
- Other contexts in which a similar expression occurred.
- Other surahs in which similar or different expressive peculiarities occurred.
- All other surahs in the Holy Qur'an and their structures.

Al-Samarrā'i provides examples from the surah al-An'ām to illustrate some of the artistic relationships that the Qur'an takes into account in this surah itself and in other surahs. Here, al-Samarrā'ī does not directly address rhetorical and artistic aspects in his analysis of those examples. He then studies the artistic relationship between the opening of the surah and its closing, beginning with al-An'ām, al-Nisā', al-A'rāf, Hūd, al-Mu'minūn, Yūnus, Ṣād, and Qāf, clearly indicating the exquisite coherence between them. He concludes that "the coherence between the openings of the surahs and its conclusions or closings is not something accidental nor a passing conformity, but rather it is a prominent feature of this noble book and an intentional matter in this lofty speech" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 259). He then returns to al-An'ām again to further elucidate those artistic relations in Qur'anic expressions that have similarities with other ayahs in different surahs, where coherence and the specificities of different contexts in the ayahs and surahs were considered in a manner that makes it impossible to be identical or interchangeable. He mentions other examples of this unique expressive and rhetorical feature (al-Ḥashd al-Fannī), mentioning an ayah from surah al-An'ām similar to that of an ayah in surahs al-Nisā' and al-Zumar to infer and confirm that each expression was chosen based on the consideration of the context in which the ayah was mentioned, as well as the frequency of a specific word in each of the surahs al-An'ām, al-Nisā', al-A'rāf, and al-Zumar (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 260).

He then returns to al-An'ām again for further elaboration of these artistic relations in similar Qur'anic expressions, in which coherence and the specificities of different contexts in the ayahs and surahs were considered. He mentions other examples of this expressive and rhetorical feature, which al-Samarrā'ī terms as artistic intensity, mentioning a verse or an ayah from surah al-An'ām similar to that of the verse/ayah in the al-Nisā' and al-Zumar

to infer the expression that was chosen based on the consideration of the context in which the ayah/verse was mentioned, as well as the frequency of a specific word in each of the surahs al-Anʿām, al-Nisāʾ, al-Aʿrāf, and al-Zumar (al-Samarrāʾī 2010a, p. 260).

Al-Samarrāʾī was dissatisfied with the number of representations and analyses of the artistic intensity in Qurʾanic expression he offered, so he further provided more examples of artistic intensity from other surahs. He benefited from some of the analytical tools and approaches of his predecessors and their efforts, studying Mutashābih al-Nazm al-Qurʾānī (similar Qurʾanic compositions) such as al-Iskāfī, al-Gharnāṭī, and Abu Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, (al-Samarrāʾī 2010a, pp. 260–87). He further extends his exploration of artistic intensity (al-Ḥashd al-Fannī) to include the Qurʾanic stories, addressing what might be thought at first glance to be a repetition of the same story when it is narrated in more than one place in the Qurʾan. He proves that these stories are not really a repetition because what is presented from the story in each surah is an aspect of the story that is required by the context, called upon by the requirements of the situation and brought in by the specific purpose that requires detailing of the story or summarizing it, mentioning some of its particular aspects or omitting them, or making a variation in expressions as appropriate and purposeful and making all of that in great artistic intensity (al-Samarrāʾī 2010a, pp. 261–87).

He then addresses the story of Ādam (A.S.) in its various manifestations in al-Baqarah and al-Aʿrāf and in al-Aʿrāf and Ṣād. He also deals with the story of Musa (Moses) (A.S.) in the same way in al-Baqarah and al-Aʿrāf and in al-Aʿrāf and al-Shuʿaraʾ. He then concludes the book with an interpretation of the short surah al-Tīn in which he elaborates on some of its artistic features (see al-Samarrāʾī 2010a, pp. 344–57). Al-Samarrāʾī's efforts in dealing with this issue of assumed repetition in the Qurʾanic stories need and deserve to be explored further in a full-fledged article.

It should be noted that, in his quest to illustrate the literary and rhetorical inimitability of the Qurʾan, al-Samarrāʾī did not directly claim to offer the literary, rhetorical, and linguistic miracles of the Qurʾan; however, to anyone familiar with the characteristics and classes of Arab literary and rhetorical compositions, from the literary and rhetorical styles of the Qurʾan he explores, he clearly shows what is truly beyond human capabilities. It is as though he follows the examples of his predecessors, the previous researchers or 'Ulamlā' in this field, when studying the inimitability of the Qurʾan such as what Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī did when he studied the indicators and evidences of the miraculous Qurʾanic inimitability instead of pointing directly at what is inimitable (for more on Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's approach, (see: al-Jurjānī 1989, pp. 38–328) and beyond). In his book, *Lamasāt Bayānīyah fī Nuṣūṣ mina al-Tanzīl*, al-Samarrāʾī even mentions that some readers of his book *al-Taʿbīr al-Qurʾānī* suggested that it should have been called *al-Iʿjāz al-Qurʾānī* (*The Qurʾanic Inimitability*), to which he replies that the title is too great for him and that he could not assume the power of explaining the Qurʾan's inimitability or something of that. He explains that he has merely conducted a study explaining some of the secrets of the great Qurʾanic expressions whose wonders do not end, which is not equivalent to explaining the Qurʾan's inimitability, but rather a step on the path that leads one to discovering this inimitability (al-Samarrāʾī 2010b, p. 5):

> The inimitability of the Qurʾan is multifaceted, and it is impossible for a single person, not even a group, to rise to explain the Qurʾan's inimitability in an era, regardless of the breadth of their knowledge, their intelligence and the multiplicity of their specializations. Rather, they can explain some of the secrets of the Qurʾan in various ways up to their own time, and the Qurʾan remains open to those who search after us in the future and to find things that will appear for the first time. In it, future generations will find features and signs of inimitability that we had not thought of. (al-Samarrāʾī 2010b, pp. 5–6).

Al-Samarrāʾī gives numerous examples of the Qurʾan's inimitability whose diversity and complexity make it impossible for a person or group to illustrate that inimitability and limit its manifestations and aspects. He further claims that the most that can be done is to explain the manifestations of the inimitability of the Qurʾan, so the linguist can explain

its linguistic inimitability in terms of its expressive peculiarities, the medical doctor can explain it from the point of view of medicine, and so on. Perhaps this is what inspired Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī to title his unique and remarkable book in this field *Dalā'l al-I'jāz* (*Directions/Evidence of [the Qur'anic] Inimitability*); indeed, his influence on al-Samarrā'ī's work is clear. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this can be traced to his search for the rhetorical miracles or inimitability of the Holy Qur'an, where he deals with the stylistics of foregrounding (al-Taqdīm), backgrounding (al-Ta'khīr), mentioning (al-Dhikr), omission (al-Ḥathf), and emphasis (al-Tawkīd), as well as other syntactic and rhetorical devices in the Qur'anic expression and their peculiarities in the Qur'an. These are the same rhetorical devices that Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī adopted, along with other rhetorical devices, to study the signs of the Qur'anic inimitability in his study of high artistic expressions in Arabic poetry (for more details on this, (see: al-Jurjānī 1989, pp. 5–26). It is also no secret that al-Samarrā'ī was significantly influenced by al-Zamakhsharī, which is evident in many of his linguistic and rhetorical analyses of the verses of the Qur'an that he studied while investigating the specifics and secrets of Qur'anic artistic expression. However, al-Samarrā'ī discusses the limits of exploring the linguistic, literary, and rhetorical aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'an in the following passage:

> We are demonstrating some of the elements of art and beauty in this high artistic expression, and we are putting our hands on some of the transcendences of this expression, and we show that this expression cannot be matched by human being, even not by all human beings.

> However, we do not say: these are the inimitable spots, but they are features and signs, that lead, and lights placed in the way, indicating that this Qur'an is a deliberate artistic speech, tailored in a precise manner and woven together in a unique and tight texture, that no speech resembles it nor rises to its status. {Let them come up with a hadith like that if they are honest}. (Phase 34). As for the matter of miraculous inimitability, it is far from the mark! For it is greater than all that we say, more eloquent than all that we describe, and more amazing than all that we stand upon of the reasons for wonder. (al-Samarrā'ī 2010b, pp. 5–6).

Like those previously discussed, the following books by Al-Samarrā'ī also discuss the Qur'an's miraculous eloquence and use the same explanatory and analytical methods and literary and linguistic approaches:

- *As'ilah Bayānīyah fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*;
- *Bayan al-Qur'ani fi al-Ay al-Mutashabih*;
- *Min Asrār al-Bayān al-Qur'ani*;
- *Muraāt al-Maqām fī al-Ta'bīr al-Qur'ānī*;
- *Shadharāt min al-Qaḍā' wa al-Jazā'*;
- *al-Tanāsub byna al-Suwar*;
- *Fi al-Muftataḥ wa al-Khawātīm*;
- *'Alā Ṭarīq al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* (three volumes).

He also wrote many more books on philology, syntax, and morphology. With his in-depth knowledge of Arabic philology and linguistics, al-Samarrā'ī is well placed to explore the inimitable aspects of the Qur'anic eloquence. His book *'Alā Ṭarīq al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* (*On the Path of Rhetorical Exegesis*), which is in three volumes, is the broadest book he wrote on the study of miraculous Qur'anic eloquence. The title of this book indicates that the book is intended to develop a method of rhetorical or literary exegesis/interpretation, rather than to make the desired rhetorical or literary interpretation itself. In the introduction to this book, al-Samarrā'ī writes:

> This is a book in my series of Qur'anic expression books that I chose to call: *'Alā Ṭarīq al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* (On the Path of Rhetorical Exegesis), and I did not want to call it al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī (Rhetorical Exegesis) because it is not really a rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an, but it may be a step or a step along the

path of rhetorical interpretation or a point in which it may be useful to those who want to follow this path. (al-Samarrāʾī 2011, p. 5).

This work represents the quintessence of al-Samarrāʾī's reflections and thoughts on Qurʾanic expression and the maturity of his methodological approach to exploring its miraculous nature and inimitable eloquence, the fundamentals and nuances of which he laid down in his previous works on Qurʾanic vocabulary and composition. We can safely say that al-Samarrāʾī's work in this book should be regarded as a rhetorical/literary exegesis of the Qurʾan; however, I believe that out of modesty and humility, he refuses to call or regard it as such. He begins the book with what it usually began with in the books of al-Tafsir, the exegesis of the Qurʾan, which is the definition of al-Tafsir. He defines tafsir as "the science by which the understanding of the Book of Allah revealed to His Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, is known, and to clarify its meanings and extract its rulings and wisdoms" (al-Samarrāʾī 2011, p. 5), conveying this definition from al-Zarkashī (d. 1392) in his al-Burhan. He then defines rhetorical interpretation as follows:

> "As for the rhetorical exegesis/interpretation, it is the one that shows the secrets of composition in the Qurʾanic expression. It is part of the general interpretation in which attention is focused on clarifying the secrets of expression from the artistic point of view, such as foregrounding, backgrounding, mentioning, omission/ellipsis, the choice of one word over another, and so on, which is related to the conditions of expression". (al-Samarrāʾī 2011, p. 6)

He then mentions the fundamental needs of every exegete who wants to explore rhetorical interpretation, or more precisely, the terms and conditions for engaging in rhetorical interpretation of the Qurʾan:

The one who addresses the rhetorical interpretation (of the Qurʾan) needs what the one who addresses the Qurʾanic interpretation in the general needs, but he has more need for the following:

1. Thorough knowledge of Arabic philology.
2. Thorough knowledge of the science of morphology.
3. Thorough knowledge of the science of grammar.
4. Thorough knowledge of the science of rhetoric.
5. Knowledge of the science of the Qurʾanic readings
6. Knowledge of the occasions of revelation.
7. Considering the context.
8. Revising the Qurʾanic contexts in which there are examples of the Qurʾanic expression that is intended to be interpreted to derive the intended meaning.
9. Reviewing the different Qurʾanic contexts in which the Qurʾanic vocabulary that is intended to be interpreted occurred, as well as its uses, meanings, and connotations.
10. To know that there are peculiarities in Qurʾanic usages of some words, such as the use of wind (al-Rīḥ) in singular form for evil and in plural form winds (al-Riyāḥ) for good, shower (al-Gayth) for good, rain (al-Maṭar) for evil, (al-ʿUyūn) in plural form for water springs, fasting (al-Ṣaum) for silence, (al-Ṣiyām) fasting for known worship, and so on.
11. To look at the pausing and the resuming and the effect of that on the semantics and expansion of the meaning or the restriction in it and so on.
12. To draw his attention to any change in the vocabulary and the expression, even if it seems to him insignificant, then it is significant. If he finds an explanation for it, then that is the case. Otherwise, Allah will bring someone to whom He facilitates the explanation and interpretation of that, such as replacing the (التاء) of the vocabulary (يتطهّر) "he purifies" with (الطاء) in (يطّهّر) "he purifies" . . .
13. Constant contemplation and reflection are among the most important aspects that open secrets to a person and guide him to new meanings.

14. He should have read a volume of what was written by famous commentators/exegetes and looked at books on the sciences of the Qur'an, books on the inimitability of the Qur'an, books on similar expression compositions in the Qur'an, and books on the coherence of verses and surahs of the Qur'an, etc., and other books which were written about the secrets of the Qur'anic expression, as they contain rhetorical and artistic secrets of great superiority.

15. The basis of all of that is talent, for talent is the basis of all science, art, and craftsmanship. To the extent that an individual is endowed with talent, for talent is the basis of all science, art, and craftsmanship. To the extent that an individual is endowed with talent, will be the extent of his importance in science and art practices provided that he does not depend on talent alone, but rather, he must develop and refine it with a lot of insight, consideration, scrutiny and contemplation. (al-Samarrā'ī 2011, pp. 5–13).

In setting these conditions for anyone who endeavors to engage in Qur'anic exegesis in general and rhetorical exegesis of the Qur'an in particular, al-Samarrā'ī is not unique, as his predecessors also set such conditions. Al-Samarrā'ī cites them to support what he suggests and sees as mandatory requirements, especially for rhetorical exegete. He justifies the pressing need to meet the conditions with rigorous explanation and reasoning, especially regarding the need to know these matters in-depth. However, among the fifteen conditions, only the first six, in my view, represent direct conditional requirements. In my humble opinion, the other nine conditions constitute procedural and methodological matters in reflecting on and contemplating, studying, and analyzing the Qur'anic expression to extract its eloquence and rhetorical secrets and derive the knowledge of its miraculous eloquence and rhetorical inimitability. It goes without saying that the Arabic language and its various sciences and analytical tools are the main reliable tool force in this descriptive, analytical, and explanatory approach that is based on exploring the expressive peculiarities of the Qur'an.

3. Conclusions

Al-Samarrā'ī's approach to rhetorical interpretation can be deduced from his conditions of Qur'anic interpretation in general and rhetorical interpretation in particular. In this approach, al-Samarrā'ī relies on the sciences of the Arabic language to proceed from it to the language of the Qur'an, which was revealed in a clear Arabic tongue. He explores the peculiarities of the Qur'anic eloquence or the Qur'anic expressions, as he calls it, utilizing Arabic linguistic tools such as syntax, morphology, and rhetoric, and relying on context in his explanations, analysis, and justifications for the discovered secrets of Qur'anic expressions/inimitable eloquence and how all Qur'anic phraseology and expressions, in its uniqueness, respond to the contextual needs, purposes, and objectives of the Qur'an. This has earned al-Samarrā'ī a prominent place among contemporary literary and rhetorical exegetes, though he refuses to call his work rhetorical interpretation/exegesis. It is worth noting that what distinguishes al-Samarrā'ī's work in rhetorical interpretation/exegesis is his intense interest in al-Mutashābih al-naẓm fī al-Qur'ān (the similarities of verbal compositions in the Qur'an). In studying these aspects of Qur'anic miraculous eloquence, al-Samarrā'ī relies heavily on the works of previous scholars in the field, such as al-Iskāfī (d. 420 AH), al-Gharnāṭī (d. 708 AH), al-Karmānī (d. 975/983 AH), and others. He added some original explanatory interpretations to the literature, for which he has been commended by most scholars and criticized by some. In my view, it suffices that al-Samarrā'ī is a great scholar and contributor to this complex and sophisticated domain, and he has made a tremendous effort contemplating, reflecting on, and analyzing the inimitability of the Qur'anic miraculous eloquence. He toiled mentally where the trigger of thought struck, and his pick hit the land of the expression of the Qur'an, and the spring from it was a tumultuous and loud flow. Al-Samarrā'ī's work so far represents the peak of the current literary and rhetorical exegesis research in the field of the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an.

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