

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH MOST MERCIFUL AND COMPASSIONATE

## THE ONCE AND FUTURE HERMENEUTIC

Praise to Allah Most High, who inspired His slave Muhammad the Quran and Wisdom, as a mercy unto the worlds. Allah bless him and give him peace. This is the tale of a translation, related because the Arabic text *is* the Quran that shall endure as long as Allah wills, while translations are ephemera that can only last until readers' language changes beyond understanding what they disclose, necessitating a new interpretive effort. Tomorrow's translators and others interested in how and why the English in this work differs from previous renderings can read on, while everyone else may simply turn to the first page of the Quran below and begin.

The translator's first encounter with giving texts their critical due was at the University of Chicago under the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. He explicated readings from Hegel and later Mannheim, giving painstaking attention to key details, historical and recent attempts to place them in the context of the larger thought of each, and the implications they held for a greater understanding of Man through his language and meaning.

The next time the translator saw anything of comparable depth was a decade later in Damascus, where a traditional scholar at his home would devote up to an hour and a half per page in a single lesson teaching the *magnum opus* of the sapiential theosophy of Hatimi. The readings were by a man who had never entered any school or academy except as a teacher. The meanings, their relation to the book as a whole, and even the syntax itself were often baffling, and university professors would come week after week to hear the difficulties overcome. He himself had read the book with a living master for decades, through whom he had acquired a *hermeneutic*, or authoritative mode of proceeding through the text to uncover its intent. It meant, as with Ricoeur, belonging to a larger interpretative community.

The last was the scholar who collaborated with the translator on the present volume in Amman. A man who memorized the Quran by heart in its ten canonical recitations, his connection with its community of interpretation began with a degree in Quranic exegesis from the University of Jordan, and continued with three more years in Yemen, a year and a half on his own with sheikhs in San'a in north Yemen, then another year and a half in the *halaqat* or 'circles' of the Ribat at Tarim, Hadramawt, in south Yemen. The translator found he exemplified the

received wisdom in lands of the Quran that the task of understanding it requires *tafsir* or ‘uncovering’ of the Arabic text, the privilege of those who truly *know* the Quran—described by Allah as “A momentous Book whose verses have been clearly expounded, a pure Arabic Quran, for a people who truly *know*” (41.3).

What do they know? For one thing, the Arabic language. Not merely as it is written and spoken today, but the words of its lexicon with their original meanings, cognates, tone, nuances, and distribution, and how they interact with various prepositions and other particles; then its grammar; then the shades of meaning implied by the various tenses and moods of its verbs; the rhetorical force of the several plurals of various nouns, in paucity, plenitude, and other implications; its rhetoric, with its many emphatics (*ta’kidat*) found both in the syntax, and through the range of semantic meaning, morphology, and sound—and much more, both in the ancient language itself and above and beyond it, as for example needed historical details about the revelation. Most of these were second nature to the first hearers, imbibed with their mothers’ milk as it were, or lived out—while mastery of these things today requires a native or near-native fluency in literary Arabic, indomitable energy, perseverance, hundreds if not thousands of hours of reading, a working familiarity with the corpus of both general and specialized standard exegetical reference works—to say nothing of, but *especially* in the case of the Quran, leave of its Author. The translator believes such knowledge is unlikely to be found in a single individual also endowed with an English aesthetic that might convey it, and that for one person to try is to underjudge the job.

For this reason, the meanings of this Book were taught to the translator by the traditional method of *talaqqi* or ‘personal word-by-word instruction’ by Sheikh ‘Ali Hani Yusuf, a scholar trained in Quranic exegesis and the lexicology, grammar, rhetoric, and other sciences of Arabic just mentioned. The translator found him an excellent philologist, who could spend days researching the inflection of a single word to answer a question. To impart the understanding the translator has tried to convey in this volume, the two went over every word, letter, preposition, inflection, and case-ending in the Quran from beginning to end for seven years, the sheikh teaching on his low table of open books, and the student writing the translation in pencil in tiny letters in the margin of his Quran, asking questions about possible ambiguities or misunderstandings, then later typing and polishing up the text. They gave preference, among viable nuances and meanings of the text in places that bear more than one, to the most convincing positions of its greatest Imams, whose works they compared and discussed in some detail for many a verse: Tabari, Zamakhshari, Abu Su‘ud, Ibn ‘Ashur, al-Raghib al-Asfahani, Biqa‘i, Razi, Alusi, al-Samin al-Halabi, Baydawi, Qunawi, Ibn Kathir, Abu Hayyan, Sheikh Zadah, Ibn al-Munayyir, Suyuti,

Wahidi, Qurtubi, Zajjaj, and others familiar to those who know the literature, or would care to peruse the biographical notes appended immediately after the main body of the translation.

When they finished, the translator saw that his acquired facility and Sheikh ‘Ali’s knowledge and skill had increased to the point that repeating the whole procedure might well improve the result. This was effected in another eight years. Sheikh ‘Ali worked full-time, as before, in preparation and research without his previous notes. His thirst for exhaustive detail, tenacity for the research required, and even the *tone* of his delivery of the text and commentary, evoked in the translator something of what it evoked in him, and materially helped. The translator retranslated from scratch everything he heard a second time on the other margin of his Quran’s pages. The translator made audio recordings of nearly every lesson with the sheikh over the fifteen years, which covered one page at a time, as well as many of the follow-up questions finalized in subsequent lessons. During the period of the final revision, the translator’s wife Umm Sahl re-listened to the recorded sessions of the second round as she had to the first, checking the English text word for word and giving corrections and advice, with the translator returning to Sheikh ‘Ali for further research on points requiring it.

For the sake of thoroughness she returned to six previous translations—something the translator had purposely abstained from during the whole period of his own work to keep it free of ‘received English renderings’—three for the beauty of their English, and three for comprehension of the meaning from Arabic, but she found little to take from them, and that all six had missed quite a number of key areas of the Arabic essential to its meaning, most of them falling in the traditional curriculum of Quranic Arabic under the heading of *balagha* or ‘rhetoric,’ which Sheikh ‘Ali had been accustomed to point out to the translator in virtually every verse. That is, the difference in the translator’s *hermeneutic*, by *talaqqi* or ‘personal instruction, questions, and answers,’ led to substantive differences from previous translations on many verses. These differences on questions of meaning do not arise from rarities, but from ubiquitous features found throughout the Quran, the very warp and woof of its mighty language, as shown by the number of times, cited below, that they appear in its text.

Now, the six translations chosen had been among the best, but wanting to know how general such gaps in meaning were in previous translations of the Quran, the translator contacted professor of Islamic studies and history Ahmad Khan at the American University in Cairo. He was preparing an article for journal publication covering the whole sweep of previous English translations, from George Sale’s in 1734 through the end of 2021, and had acquired copies of all of them from various lands, numbering some 135 works, excluding only partial

translations, and translations from languages other than Arabic, such as Urdu to English. The translator told him of the number of crucial areas of meaning missed by all six major translations his wife had examined. He replied that these, and likely more, were absent from the entire collection of previous translations his article would cover. If true, this means the present volume's interpretive methodology has uncovered matters of Arabic meaning in the Quran that no previous English translation has seriously incorporated. We now turn, for brevity, to just seven of the most significant to show their importance in understanding the original text.

### I. THUMMA

The first is the conjunctive adverb *thumma*, which invariably appears in past translations as *and* or *then*, indicating the simple succession in time between what it conjoins, or the lengthiness of the disparity between their respective times. Now traditional scholars of the Quran, including those we have mentioned above, identify a number of different meanings for *thumma*, such as:

(a) Disparity in time (tarakhi zamani), as in the verse "Whoever commits an ill-deed or wrongs himself, *then even at length* (thumma) asks forgiveness of Allah while there is still time, shall find Allah all-forgiving, all-compassionate" (4.110).

(b) Disparity in time to express perpetuity (tarakhi zamani li l-dawam), as in "Verily those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' *then follow ever after* but the right, need never be feared for, nor shall they grieve" (46.13). Or "Say, 'Journey in the earth, *and however long you take*, just look how was the end of those who cried lies'" (6.11). Or the verse "Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, *never again after* to remind those given of it, or offend them, they shall have their wage with their Lord . . ." (2.262).

(c) Disparity in rank (tarakhi rutbi), as in "So woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, *and yet more outrageous in enormity* (thumma), say over and over: 'This is from Allah Himself,' to buy a paltry price thereby" (2.79). Here, much of the point of the verse is lost if one does not realize the disparity in rank between the two crimes. Or the verse "*Then even above and beyond these primordial laws* (thumma), did We vouchsafe Moses the Book: to perfect all blessings upon whomever would excel in good, and to clearly set out everything needful, and because of a mighty guidance and mercy; That haply in the encounter of their Lord they might believe" (6.154).

(d) Disparity in rank to express incredulity (tarakhi rutbi li l-istib'ad), as in "They know the blessing of Allah; *Yet incredibly*, deny it, and most of them are rank unbelievers" (16.83), where again much of the point is missing without a sense of the incredibility of the denial.

(e) Disparity in rank of importance of the information (tarakhi rutbi li irtiqa'

al-akhbar), as in “It is He who created you all from moist clay; *And what is more*, has set a term for each of you to reach . . .” (6.2).

(f) Disparity in time and rank (*tarakhi zamani wa rutbi*), as in “And He taught Adam the names one and all, *then after, and more telling*, showed all those named to the angels and said: “Tell Me the names of these if what you say is true” (2.31). Or the verses “*Then after and more momentous*, are all of you to die. *Then after and greatest in wonder*, on the Day of Resurrection shall you be brought forth alive” (23.15–16).

These are the main uses of *thumma*, for otherwise, they often overlap or combine, according to the argument and context of the verses. The combined forms ((d) and (f)) and others are common, not rare, among the 338 instances in which *thumma* appears in the text of the Quran. The intent of these verses is not adequately conveyed by using the English words *then* or *and*, which are but a superficial representation of the first meaning above. One finds a discussion in the greatest of the classical exegeses *in situ* at the verses, or can read about them in the excellent *Min asrar huruf al-‘atf fi al-Dhikr al-Hakim: al-fa’ wa thumma* (28), by Muhammad al-Amin al-Khudari of Azhar—its publication data indicated here and for the other books cited below by each work’s parenthesized number (oo) in the present volume’s bibliography.

## II. THE EMPHATIC INDEFINITE

A second thing found throughout the Quran is the *emphatic* use of the indefinite. The ‘indefiniteness’ or *tankir* of nouns in the Quran has been uniformly rendered in previous translations the same way it is normally denoted in English: by the decidedly *unemphatic* indefinite article *a* or *an* before them. To refresh our memories, in the verse about Cain burying Abel “And Allah sent *a* crow (*ghuraban*) probing *the* earth (*fi al-ard*), to show him how to hide the shameful remains of his brother” (5.31), the word ‘crow’ is *indefinite*, that is, *any* sort of crow; while the earth is *definite*, namely *the* earth beneath our feet, which we all know.

Now, the primary meaning of the *nakira* (indefinite) in Arabic is ‘not known,’ and is the opposite of the grammatical term *ma’rifa* (definite) or ‘known’ marked by *al-* or ‘the.’ But in Quranic Arabic, the indefinite’s signifying ‘not known’ often means its subject is in some way *unheard-of*. Put simply, such an indefinite noun is not *unemphatic*, as it is in English, but *emphatic to the utmost*.

Omitting instances when it is merely used to say that the object is but a ‘single thing’ (*ifrad*)—‘*a* crow,’ as above—as the indefinite normally means in English, this other, *emphatic* meaning is found 6,100 times in the Quran, in 3,520 of its verses, or 56 percent of them: that is, in *most* of the Quran. It is remarked upon by the *tafsirs* of Alusi, Ibn ‘Ashur, Abu Su‘ud, and others, indeed hardly possible for them not to notice. What does it emphasize?

(a) *Plentitude* (takthir), such as the verses “A *multitude of faces* (wujuhun) that day shall beam with joy; At their Lord wholly agaze” (75.22–23), which give an idea of the vastness of the divine mercy. Or the verse “Or like *myriad deep shades of darkness* (dhulumatin) in a fathomless sea, spread over with mighty waves, breaking over them waves yet mightier, reaching up towards towering black thunderheads above: *Of blacknesses a multitude* (dhulumatun), one upon another; When he pulls out his hand he cannot even see it: And whom Allah gives no light has no light at all” (24.40), which stresses the plethora of adversities against the benighted.

(b) *Fewness* (taqlil), such as the verse on some of the people of the Book “And you will always find them the most grasping of all mankind for *any last pathetic shred of life* (hayatin), even more than idolaters” (2.96), where the total lack in their “faith” of any longing for the next world is laid bare by the extreme diminishment (‘any last shred’) of the word ‘life,’ together with a second *combined* meaning of *tahqir* or contempt (‘pathetic’).

(c) *Might or exaltedness* (ta’dhim wa tafkhim), such as the verse in which Solomon asks his retinue which of them will bring him the throne of Sheba “A *powerful cunning fiend* (‘ifritun) of the jinn said: ‘I shall bring you it before you even rise from holding court; And I am mighty and trustworthy enough to do so’” (27.39).

(d) *Contempt* (tahqir), such as in the verse “As soon as the envoy reached him, Solomon said: ‘Do you ply me with *paltry wealth* (bi malin)?’” (27.36). Or the verse of those of Sodom “Yet his people gave no answer but to tell each other, ‘Expel all those with Lot from your town: Verily they are *a miserable handful of “better-folks”* (unasun) who style themselves too pure to do as we do’” (27.56), which combines fewness (‘handful’) and contempt (‘miserable’) with the frequent Arabic distribution of *nas* or ‘people’ for “people of standing in society” (‘better-folks’), to express the speakers’ scorn for the godfearing. Combinations of two significations of the indefinite are very common in the Quran, especially in the Meccan passages.

(e) *Being lost to all knowledge* (ghayr mu’ayyan), as in the verse “Slay Joseph, or cast him away *hopelessly far lost in the land* (ardan), and the face of your father will be free for you; And once he is gone, you may be thoroughly righteous men” (12.9), from which the finality of his intended fate is plain.

(f) *Horror* (tahwil), such as the verses “Verily it shall *shut them horrifically in* (‘alayhim mu’sadatun); *Locked and barred fast with dreadful hell-bolts, wrought massive in length* (fi ‘amadin mumaddadatin)” (104.8–9), about the utter woe of a fate with no hope of escape.

(g) *Rarity* (nudur), such as the verse “O you who believe, fear Allah, and let *any rare soul that will* (nafsun), always consider just what it has sent ahead for an

*unspeakably dire tomorrow (li ghadin)*" (59.18), where the indefinite of the former is for rarity, the latter for horror. Or the verse "That We might make it a reminder; And *the rare heedful ear (udhunun wa'iyatun)* comprehend it" (69.12), where the rarity makes the ear of hearers more attentive.

Further uses and combinations of *tankir* are found in the body of the translation below. Missing this *emphatic* indefinite is probably the greatest single leak of meaning and nuance in prior English translations. All seem to have made a false analogy between modern written Arabic, which no longer uses the indefinite for such purposes; and the Arabic of the Quran, which everywhere does. A stronger hermeneutic could have made a difference, or a stronger appreciation of the achievements of *tafsir*.

### III. REVERSED MASCULINE AND FEMININE FORMS

A third feature of the language of the Quran untranslated into English is the occasional use of feminine verbs for the actions of men (or vice versa), or to use feminine endings on otherwise masculine nouns. Both have an intended significance.

Like the yang and yin of Chinese culture, masculinity in the ancient tongue of the Arabs connotes strength, boldness, and forthright directness; while femininity represents the obverse side of the coin, tenderness, mildness, delicacy, and artifice, "And the male is not the like of the female" (3.36). When the words or deeds of men are metaphorically feminized in the Quran, for example by using 'she said' (qalat) for 'he said' (qala), it usually carries various nuances of the gentle sex that are inappropriate for men, and meant to blame them—or that they said or did something in itself errant and blameworthy. More rarely, it connotes feminine nuances that are *appropriate* for men, or intended as praise for them. Such gender reversals can imply a number of things.

(a) *Contempt and deprecation (tahqir wa dhamm)*, as in the verse "The desert tribesmen *emptily say (qalat)*: 'We have embraced true faith.' Say, 'You have not embraced whole faith, but rather say: We have submitted in Islam, while whole faith has not yet entered your hearts'" (49.14), indicating that they were not saying it with their hearts. Or the verse, "The Jews *have pathetically said (qalat)*: 'Christians are on nothing,' and the Christians *pathetically said (qalat)*: 'Jews are on nothing,' while both assiduously read the scripture; Just so have those tribesmen who know nothing of any scripture said their very words!" (2.113), 'pathetically,' because both religions share many of the same scriptures and religious values, so should be more honest than to call it 'nothing' in the hands of their counterparts.

Contempt and deprecation also apply to *noun* forms such as 'misguidance' (al-dalal) when they are given feminine endings, as in the verse "Truly We have

brought forth in every people a great messenger to ‘Worship Allah and shun the abomination of deviltry.’ So some of them did Allah guide, while others incurred *pathetic misguidance* (al-dalala); So but journey in the earth and just look how was the end of those who cried lies” (16.36), which indicates the ease with which they could have fended off such paltry means of misguidance if they had but chosen to. There are many other meanings for ‘feminizing’ masculine nouns, such as *tremendousness and horror* (ta’dhim wa tahwil), as in the verses “In the Name of Allah Most Merciful and Compassionate: When *the Inevitable* (al-Waqi’a) falls; No soul may belie its befalling; Abasing and exalting” (56.1–3), in which *al-waqi’* or ‘the actual event’ is transformed by feminization into ‘the Inevitable’ whose tremendousness and horror the translator has rendered in its place through capitalization and shortness of line length, since terseness is power in English, and an overabundance of adjectives or adverbs is generally flaccid. The terminal soft *h* sound (ha’) itself conjures up woe, shock, and horror in many an Arabic word; and the feminine ending (ta’ marbuta) or an *h* alone at the *end* of the verse line is particularly well suited to fill sapient hearts with it, as can be felt in the ‘audial inimitability’ (i’jaz sawti) of apocalyptic Meccan suras like Sura 69 The Indisputable (al-Haqqa), or Sura 88 The Whelming Doom (al-Ghashiya). Feminizing masculine nouns has been characterized in general by Ibn ‘Ashur as a ‘hyperbole of quality’ (mubalagha fi al-naw’), an intensifier of their meaning, as in words like *khalifa* in the verse “And remind them when your Lord said to the angels: ‘I shall place a *noble reigning deputy* (khalifa) on earth” (2.30), while Adam, the *khalifa*, was male.

(b) *Delicacy, tenderness, and empathy* (lutf wa riqqa wa hanan), as in the verse “Their messengers *calmly told* (qalat) them: ‘We are naught but men like you; Yet Allah bestows favor beyond thanks on whomever He wills of His servants” (14.11), praising their diplomacy in meeting scorn and denial with affability and premises that both sides could accept.

(c) *Strength and power* (quwwa wa shidda), when the masculine verb is used in place of a feminine, as in the verse “And some ladies *spitefully spread about* (qala) in the city: ‘The wife of the vizier seeks to seduce her young bondsman: She is rent to the depths of her heart with love; Verily we see her plainly astray” (12.30), indicating that this was too strong and catty an initiative to take upon themselves at their own whim, and they should have refrained from it as proper reserved ladies. Or the verse “And call on Him in all fear and hope: Verily the mercy of Allah *is very near indeed* (qaribun) to those who excel in good” (7.56), where ‘mercy’ (rahma) is feminine and would normally take a feminine predicate, for which the ‘stronger’ *masculine* predicate (qaribun) stands in to rhetorically underscore the sheer closeness of this divine attribute to those who would draw near to the Divine.

This reversal of genders is less frequent for nouns than verbs, but in both is a very significant aspect of the Quran. Zamakhshari treats it in some places in his *tafsir*, though the best to exposit it is Biqa'i, who not coincidentally is also one of the best who explain how each verse carries forward the argument, action, and theme of the sura it is found in, an aptness that requires a good sense of nuance and connotation.

#### IV. DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS FOR RESPECT OR CONTEMPT

A fourth point undiscovered in the Quran by prior English translations is the use for exalted respect (ta'dhim) or contempt (tahqir) of free-standing demonstrative pronouns such as *this* (hadha, hadhihi), male and female; *that* (dhalika, tilka), male and female; *these* (ha'ula'i); and *those* (ula'ika). Examples are many.

(a) The masculine form of *this* (hadha) is used for contempt (tahqir) in some 23 verses of the Quran, 8 of them by the polytheists of Mecca in reference to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), as in the verse "And they whisper together in hushed converse, those who commit idolatrous wrong: 'Is *this wretched soul* (hadha) but a human being like any of you; Would you embrace bewitchment, when you see full well?'" (21.3), reminding us that even when the worst revile the best, noble souls remain dauntlessly steadfast in their purpose through their knowledge of the Divine. Or the words of a devil about someone he is about to have flung into the hellfire on the Last Day, in the verse "His inseparable ominous companion shall say: 'This *pathetic being* (hadha) with me is ready!'" (50.23), though the most pathetic thing about him is that he listened to his devil. Or the verse about the Quran "And those who disbelieve say: '*This miserable wordage* (hadha) is nothing but a great fabricated lie he has forged; And another people abetted him at it'" (25.4), recording their unbelief against them. It is sometimes also used for *tremendousness* (ta'dhim), such as in the verse "Those who make remembrance of Allah standing and sitting and on their sides at rest, and who reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth: 'Our Lord, You have not created *all this* (hadha) in vain; You are far above that!'" (3.191), out of awe for the majesty of the One who effortlessly created the entire cosmos from nothing.

The feminine form of *this* (hadhihi) is used for the same purposes, as in the verse about the denizens of hell "The strikingly strange similitude of the good that they expend in *the pathetic life of this world* (hadhihi al-hayat al-dunya) is like that of a gale-wind in which was deathly biting cold that struck the tillage of a people who had wronged themselves, and laid it waste. Nor has Allah wronged them, but they only wrong themselves" (3.117), though the pronoun here merely *strengthens* the contemptibility intrinsic to the expression *life of this world* (al-hayat al-dunya), literally 'the nether life,' wherever the two words appear together in the Quran. As too in "Nor is *the pathetic life of this world* (hadhihi al-hayat

al-dunya) but a frivolity and game; And verily the final abode, *it alone is the life that is vibrantly forever alive* (la hiya al-hayawan), did they but know” (29.64), the latter being the real word for human life.

(b) Just as the word *this* in English refers to something in some way ‘near’ while *that* refers to something ‘far,’ so too the Arabic counterparts of *that*, the masculine *dhalika* or feminine *tilka*, also refer, for the purposes of respect or contempt, to something *far* or ‘lofty in rank’ (‘aliyy al-rutba) in good or evil: that is, something ‘way up there’ in meriting respect or deserving contempt, or occasionally, in horror. Because this is often indicated in read or spoken English by tonal emphasis on a particular word, the translator has sometimes expressed it with shorter line-breaks showing where the emphasis should fall, putting the demonstrative pronoun as the only word of a line, or at the first of the line, or with various intensifiers, as in the verses “And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger shall be with those Allah has truly blessed, of the prophets, the utterly true, the martyrs, and the wholly righteous: And how excellent are those as companions! *All that is the very* (dhalika) favor of Allah, and Allah suffices to know everything” (4.69–70), which emphasize that both the obedience and its mighty reward are of the vast bounty of Allah. Or for blame, in the verse right after Cain slaying his brother Abel, “For *the utter villainy of that* (dhalika) did We inscribe upon the children of Israel that whoever shall take a life for aught but a life or wreaking baleful corruption across the earth, shall be as if he had killed all mankind together; And whoever saves a life, shall be as if he had saved all mankind together” (5.32).

The feminine *that* (*tilka*) is similarly used, as in the verse “*That incomparable* (tilka) final abode have We made for those who want no haughty supremacy on earth or any corruption; And the final issue is to the godfearing” (28.83), drawing attention to the incommensurability of the reward in the next world to the intentions and deeds that Allah wants from Man in this. Or the verses “What, do you have the males, and He but females? *Then that* (tilka) is a division rankly stinting!” (53.21–22), where the position and sound in the second verse of the first two words together, with the exclamation mark at the end, convey something of the pronoun’s contempt for the disparity.

(c) The human plural of the demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ is *these* (ha’ula’i), each of these two pronouns being ‘nearer’ to us than ‘that’ and its plural *those* (ula’ika). Each of these plural pronouns are used for praise or blame in the same ways that their singulars are above. That is, *these* (ha’ula’i) is used just as *this* (hadha/hadhihi) is used above in (a); and *those* (ula’ika)—because of the same connotation of something *far* or ‘lofty in rank’ (‘aliyy al-rutba) for better or worse—in the same way that *that* (dhalika/tilka) is used in (b) above.

Among the examples of the uses of the human pronoun *these* (ha’ula’i), used

16 times in the Quran for blame, is the verse “Here you all are, *being these fools* (ha’ula’i): you have argued for them in this world; So who shall argue with Allah for them on the Day of Resurrection, or who be their defender?” (4.109); where ‘you’ rank high in folly for pleading for the indefensible. Or the verse “Those were whom We vouchsafed scripture, judgement, and prophethood: So if *these wretched souls* (ha’ula’i) now deny these things of any prophet, We shall certainly consign true faith therein to a noble people never to disbelieve in them” (6.89), which underscores the difference in people of the Book between what their forefathers were, and what they and the unbelievers of Quraysh now do, and why Allah may supplant them with others more receptive to His message than they.

Of the examples of *those* (ula’ika) that blame, among 84 in the Quran, are the verses about people of the Book “And they say to those who disbelieve: ‘These idolators are more rightly guided in path than those who believe.’ *So vile as those* (ula’ika) are whom Allah has truly cursed; And whomever Allah curses, you will never find any to help him” (4.51–52), cursed because their animosity against the religion has led them to lie about their own convictions in order to misguide others about it. And in praise, among some 85, is the verse “*Those* (ula’ika), theirs is an incomparable share bestowed because of all they worked for; And Allah is unerringly swift to reckon” (2.202), in which the translation suffices with a pause after the word to emphasize their special rank with their Creator.

#### V. ADVERBS OF CHRONOLOGY QABL, MIN QABL, BA’D, MIN BA’D, & OTHERS

The adverbs of time *qabla*, *qabla(hu)*, *min qablu*, and *min qabli(hi)*, with and without *min*, and with other pronominal suffixes, have been uniformly rendered in past translations as *previously*, *before*, *aforetime*, *of old*, and so forth, indicating ‘simple temporal priority’ without further distinction. Some translations *omit* them in some verses as if they were completely insignificant. Now chronology, as any successful trial lawyer knows, is often of the greatest importance in understanding things, and traditional scholars of the Quran distinguish a number of different senses for such adverbs of time, which have a great deal to do with understanding the meaning of the verses in which they appear, such as:

(a) The entirety of all times before the referent (istighraq jami’ al-azmina al-qabliyya), as in the verse “Allah has shown truly boundless favor to believers when He sent them a messenger of themselves who recites to them His verses, makes them grow to full purity in faith and deed, and teaches them the Book and wisdom; While *the whole time before* (min qablu) they had been plainly astray” (3.164), where the magnitude of the divine favor is emphasized by the dire length of the situation now alleviated. Or the verse “Not a single town We destroyed *ever believed before them* (qablahum) because of such a sign: So shall these then believe?” (21.6), to drive home the force of the rhetorical question at the end,

about the superfluity of the miraculous sign being requested by unbelievers—though here the ‘entirety of all previous times’ derives not from the use of *min*, as in the previous example, but from the context of “*Not a single town*” in the verse. Or to advert to *min*, “No calamity ever strikes, on earth or in yourselves, but is written in a primal record *the whole time before* (min qabli an) We bring it with flawless wisdom forth: Verily all that is easy for Allah. So that you may not grieve in loss for whatever you miss, or exult over what He has bestowed you; And Allah loves no haughty braggart” (57.22–23), which is more telling against grief over what one “has missed” than an expression of simple temporal priority.

(b) Immediacy before the time of the referent (al-qabl al-qarib), as in the verse “As often as they are given, of any fruit of them, ample delicious regular provision, they say, ‘This is fully what we have been brought *just before* (min qablu)!’ and they are given its very match in perfection” (2.25), the difference of which from earthly fruits, whose quality varies, tells why they are overjoyed in wonder. Or in the verses “And Man actually says: ‘What, when I am dead and gone, shall I indeed be raised up alive?’ Or can Man not even remember that We created him *just before* (min qablu), when he was nothing soever?” (19.66–67), to emphasize how little Man remembers what should not be yet forgotten.

(c) Immediacy before something is missed (min qabli fawat al-awan), as in the verse “Eagerly respond to your Lord *in time before* (min qabli) an unutterable day comes of a sudden, not to be turned back by Allah: No refuge shall you find on that day, nor anyone to even object” (42.47), where the urgency of the command is underscored by language evoking the usual human reaction to losing an irreplaceable chance to head off disaster. Or the verse about some of the hypocrites in Medina, “If the slightest good befalls you, it dismays them, and should a calamity strike you, they say, ‘We took our fitting precautions *in time* (min qablu),’ and they turn away exulting” (9.50).

(d) Metaphorical immediacy before the time of the referent (al-qabl al-qarib majazan), by way of *hyperbole* to emphasize the recentness of all times in the time-frame of the Divine, as in the verses about two ancient peoples who defied Allah in His command: “And that He alone destroyed the former ‘Ad; And Thamud, nor of either spared a man. And the people of Noah *but before* (min qablu): Verily were they even worse in wronging, and in transgression” (53.50–52), though ‘Ad and Thamud were separated from Noah by whole eras. Or the verse which tells believers not to seek answers about things of no benefit to them, which if disclosed in new divine commands would only dismay them, “A people *not so long before you* (min qablikum) once asked about them, yet incredibly, then flouted them in unbelief” (5.102), lest they follow the path of those of no great space of time (or other essential difference from themselves) before—though the previous prophet delivered his message more than a half a millennium prior.

These and related adverbials of *qabl*, with or without *min* and the pronominal suffixes of their instances, appear 242 times in the Quran. The above four uses are merely the main ones, and like *thumma*, they sometimes overlap or combine, according to the purpose and context of the verses. The relegation of all these meanings to ‘simple temporal priority’—antecedent and subsequent—does not do justice to what is intended by the original. The same may be said for *ba’d* and *min ba’d*, with or without pronominal suffixes, which appear some 199 times. Confining the list for brevity to but two of the several senses identified by Quranic scholars, analogous to the first two senses given above for *qabl* and *min qabl*, there are:

(e) The entirety of all times *after* the referent (istighraq jami‘ al-azmina al-ba‘diyya), as in “And all *who ever came after them* (min ba‘dihim) say: ‘Our Lord, forgive us and our brethren who won unto true faith before we; Nor put the slightest rancor in our hearts for any who believe: Our Lord, verily You are all-tender, all-compassionate’” (59.10), in which this prayer to Allah for tolerance and forgiveness in one’s heart towards other believers is mandated, in word and spirit, for everyone with faith until the end of time. Or the verses “The believer said: ‘My people, verily I fear for you the like of the awful day that befell those leagued against their prophets: Like the same invariable wont of the people of Noah, ‘Ad, Thamud, and all *who ever came after them* (min ba‘dihim): While Allah never so much as even desires the least wrong for any servants’” (40.30–31), which underscore the justice and inevitability of the fate of the wicked by its being Allah’s invariable wont as long as men may exist.

(f) Immediacy after the time of the referent (al-ba‘d al-qarib), as in the verse “Nor did those before divide into factions against each other *but just when* (min ba‘di) the knowledge of the Truth forbidding it had reached them . . .” (42.14), which emphasizes the sordidness of their factious hatreds, to the point of *knowingly* flouting the Divine to indulge them. Or in the same sura, “And those who dispute about Allah *just when* (min ba‘di ma) He *has been* responded to with men’s whole acceptance of Islam, their argument is a floundering failure with their Lord, and upon them is utter wrath, and they shall have an implacable chastisement” (42.16), which tells those who argue about Allah to know when to give up.

To render such expressions with simple temporal posteriority by *after* and the like, does not do justice to either the intended generality of passages like those given in (e); or the affront to the Divine in the immediacy of the examples of (f).

Two related adverbials that also take *min* before them are *fawq* or ‘above,’ found 41 times in the Quran, and *taht* or ‘beneath,’ found 51 times; though *min fawq* usually differs from *fawq* in but the *immediacy* of the relation: *right* above, *just* above, *atop*: as does the more immediate *min taht* or ‘*just* beneath,’ which is

closer and more proximate than the simple *taht* or ‘under’: as in the verse “Had only they upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what has now been sent down to them from their Lord, they had eaten their goodly provision *from right above them* (min fawqihim) and *beneath their very feet* (min tahti arjulihim)” (5.66), in which the proximateness emphasizes the *ease* of obtaining one’s needs from one’s Lord when genuinely trying to uphold His commands. Or the verse “Say, ‘It is He who is well able to loose against you a devastating chastisement *from just above you* (min fawqikum) or *right beneath your feet* (min tahti arjulikum)” (6.65), which brings the threat of devastation lethally close to home. Or, “All those before them laid wiles, and Allah had at what they erected from its very foundations, and the whole roof gave way *right on them* (min fawqihim); And the chastisement took them from whence they could not even tell” (16.26), where the impossibility of getting out from *right under* the collapse of the metaphorical ‘roof’ of their machinations exemplifies the hopelessness of their getting the better of Allah.

A nuanced translation requires a feel for the nuances of the original. Such adverbs of time and their uses are explored in works like *Min asrar huruf al-jarr* (29) by Muhammad al-Amin al-Khudari, whose other work we have mentioned above at I, and in the *tafsirs* themselves, particularly that of Ibn ‘Arafa (14), but also in places in those of Biqa‘i (12), Ibn ‘Ashur (15), and the excellent *Ma‘ani al-nahw* (46) by the contemporary Iraqi scholar Fadil Salih al-Samarra‘i.

## VI. PLURALS OF PAUCITY AND PLENITUDE

A sixth feature of Quranic Arabic unnoted by previous translations is plurals of paucity and plenitude: that the several plurals of a single Arabic noun may express *many* of the referent (takthir), or *few* (taqlil), just as indefiniteness (tankir) does to its referent, as in II (a) and (b) above. Such plurals may *also* be indefinite to further amplify the paucity or plenitude. And they may bear directly on the very point of a verse.

(a) The plural of paucity (jam‘ al-qilla), signifying three to ten in number, is used by the Creator praising His prophet Abraham in the verse “Full of gratitude (shakiran) for *the most insignificant of His blessings* (an‘umihi); And He chose him and guided him to an exalted straight path” (16.121), where the former indefinite (shakiran) magnifies his gratitude, and the latter plural of paucity (an‘um) signifies: *let alone the greatest of His blessings*—indicating an even loftier gratitude, and more praiseworthy. Or the verses “So as for ‘Ad, they waxed high and haughty on earth without right, and said, ‘Who is mightier than we in force?’ Or could they not see that Allah who created them was mightier than they in force? And they knowing full better denied Our very signs. So We loosed upon them a shrieking wind of deadly cold *for a paltry few luckless days* (fi ayyamin nahisatin), to let them taste the chastisement of utter humiliation in this life” (41.15–16),

showing the ease with which they were destroyed despite all their vaunted might, the whole thrust of the two verses. Or “So when they beheld it, a mighty cloud filling the horizons drawing inexorably nearer, *dwarfing their valleys* (*awdiyatihim*), They said, ‘This is a vast cloud that shall plenish us with rain.’ Rather, it is what you have been hastening against yourselves: A blasting wind in which is an agonized chastisement” (46.24), referring also to ‘Ad, a great people dwelling in *many valleys*, while *awdiya* is a plural of paucity, indicating but a tiny handful of settlements—which were here only made to look so in comparison to the utter enormousness of the cloud of death *dwarfing* their valleys.

(b) The plural of plenitude (*jam’ al-kathra*), signifying more than ten, is used in the verse “That was because there graciously came to them *their many messengers* (*rusuluhum*) time and again with unmistakably clear proofs; Yet they said: ‘What, mere human beings should guide us?’ So they disbelieved, and turned away, and Allah did without them; And Allah is far exalted above need for any, all-laudable in bounty” (64.6), whose plural of plenitude for ‘messengers’ (*rusul*) underscores how many chances they were given. Or the verse “Or can you have not considered those who fled their homes *by the thousands* (*wa hum uluf*) out of cowardice to die fighting? So Allah told them, ‘Die all of you!’ and only after a time did He revive them. Allah is truly bounteous of favor upon mankind, yet most men show no thanks” (2.243), in which the many *thousands* (*uluf*) of cowards to uphold the truth typify the thanklessness of Man. Or the verse “So precisely for breaking their fearful covenant did We do to them what We did; And their disbelief in the unmistakable signs of Allah, and slaying *so many prophets* (*al-anbiya’*) without the slightest right, and saying, ‘Our hearts are innately grown over shut from heeding you’; Rather, Allah has set an indelible stamp of wrong on their hearts for their unbelief, so they believe not at all, but pitifully little!” (4.155), in which the plenitude of ‘prophets’ (*anbiya’*) casts in high relief the serial crimes committed against them. Or “Then ultimately and greater, We placed you on a mighty guiding path of the whole momentous matter: So follow it wholeheartedly, and follow not the *innumerable vain fancies* (*ahwa’*) of those who know nothing” (45.18), emphasizing the fruitlessness of catering to the illusions of the ignorant that one is trying to cure them of.

The outstanding work of Fadil al-Samarra’i *Ma’ani al-abniya fi al-‘Arabiyya* (45) discusses many examples of both kinds of plurals, which are also treated by the *tafsir* of Biqa’i at their verses.

## VII. ARABIC LEXICOLOGY AND ETYMOLOGY

The seventh matter with previous translations is an over-reliance on English-Arabic dictionaries, previous translators, or even biblical renderings. The original Arabic derivation (*ishtiqaq*) and lexical usage (*lughah*) of words play a key

part in grasping the intent of the Quran, both for individual verses, and for the forward movement of the themes of the various suras they appear in. While it is not possible to be as succinct here as in the preceding matters, the problem can be elucidated by ten examples of meanings significantly missed.

(a) ‘Lush-shaded grove’ (*janna*), as in the verse “And We said: ‘O Adam dwell in peace, you and your wife, in the *lush-shaded grove of paradise* (al-*janna*), and eat of it in abundant ease wherever you wish, but come not even near to this tree, lest you be of the grave wrongdoers” (2.35), in which the root meaning of the term *janna* signifies a grove of trees whose shade is so dense it blocks out (jann) all sunlight. Now a ‘garden,’ the invariable (and biblical) rendering, unless it is more neglected than most, seldom reaches above chest-level, so does not bear the Quranic implication very well.

(b) ‘As but the first round of hospitality’ (*nuzulan*) is rendered in translations as ‘everlasting hospitality,’ or merely ‘hospitality,’ ‘reward,’ or ‘gift of welcome,’ but signifies a great deal more, whether literally, as in “Verily those who believe and work righteous deeds; Theirs shall be vast luxuriant groves of supreme Paradise, *as but the first round of their hospitality*” (18.107), or ironically (*tahakkuman*), as in the verse “Or do those who disbelieve deem they shall take My servants beneath Me as powerful protecting allies? Verily We have prepared the glowering hell abyss for unbelievers *as but the first round of their hospitality*” (18.102). In each verse, the word *nuzul* means ‘the first tidbits offered to guests *before* the main meal is brought out,’ a metaphor that what comes on top of that will be infinitely more undecipherable, and Man’s ignorance thereof remains far greater than his knowledge. Note also the word for hell *jahannam* in the latter verse, the opposite of *janna* above, etymologically derives from ‘horrific depth’ or ‘menacing frown,’ combined in the translation as ‘glowering hell abyss.’

(c) A ‘man’ (*mar*) in the Quran is not the mere counterpart of a female, but the very type of *murū’a* or ‘consequence,’ ‘manliness,’ and ‘worth as a man’; which is essential to understand such verses as “O you who believe: wholeheartedly answer Allah and the Messenger when he summons you to what brings you to life: And know at your peril that Allah may come between *even a very able man* (al-*mar*) and what he has set his heart to one day do. And to Him shall you inevitably be massed” (8.24), where the word is used to emphasize that even the most effective of men—let alone anyone else—should hang back no longer, but wholeheartedly respond to the muster for battle before it is too late. Or the verses about Judgement Day “A day when *even a real man* (al-*mar*) will flee from his own brother; And mother and father; And his long-loved wife and very sons. Every last man of them will have too weighty a care for anything else” (80.34–37), emphasizing the sheer terror of the events, which shall daunt even the most dauntless—save those who matter with Allah.

(d) Nor is the word ‘woman’ (imra’a) in the Quran used in mere contradistinction to a male, but rather to a ‘wife’ (zawj). A ‘wife’ (zawj) is someone her husband is at accord with, as in “Verily the dwellers of paradise this day are supremely occupied at bliss, in unending joy with converse; They and *their wedded mates* (azwajuhum) in luxuriant shade, reclining at their ease on high canopied daises” (36.55–56). The word ‘woman’ (imra’a) is rather used to note a marital rift, whether in point of religion, or lack of children for example, as in the verse “And Allah has struck as a wondrous strange similitude for those who believe, *the estranged wife* (imra’a) of Pharaoh, when she said: ‘My beloved Lord, build me an unsurpassed home with You in the luxuriant grove of paradise, and wholly deliver me from Pharaoh and all he does; And deliver me from the people of the wrongdoers’” (66.11), while she neither bore him issue, nor followed his religion; and Allah answered her prayers and perfected her.

(e) A ‘year’ (sana) in the Quran is not just the elapsing of the four seasons, as in modern Arabic, but is used exclusively for bad, hard, or lean years, as in the verse about some of the people of the Book “Any of them burningly wishes if only he could have his life prolonged beyond others by *a thousand dreary years* (alfa sanatin); While it shall not wrest him from the grip of the chastisement to have his life made long; And Allah sees all they do” (2.96), indicating an insatiable greed for life, even to the point of making oneself completely miserable, that pays no heed at all to eternity. Or in Joseph telling what the king’s dream portended, “He said, ‘You are to diligently sow for seven *hard years* (sinina), and whatever you reap leave in its ear, save for a little of which you eat’” (12.47), meaning years of painstaking toil. Its complementary term is another word for ‘year’ (‘am) or *good year*, as in the portent of the end of the king’s dream “Then finally after that shall come *an excellent year* (‘amun) in which men shall be wholly saved, and in which they shall press out the very juice and oil” (12.49). Or the verse “And verily We sent Noah to his people; And he bode among them *a thousand hard years* (alfa sanatin), *save for fifty good years* (‘aman) at the end;—And the deluge took them as they committed wrongs” (29.14), the final fifty years referring to the blessed and happy period to the end of his life, after the flood had destroyed the evildoers of his people.

(f) An example particularly interesting for its lexical derivation is ‘striven-for exalted standing’ (qadam sidq) in the verse “Do men wonder that We have inspired unto a man of them to warn mankind, and give bounteous glad tidings to those who believe that they shall have *a flawless exalted standing* (qadama sidqin) with their Lord *for which they strove?*” (10.2), where *qadam* means ‘foot,’ as in the phrase “on a high *footing*,” but implying that it was reached by *striving*, as one strives with footsteps; meaning that mankind should take advantage of the tidings by getting moving towards their eternal stations.

(g) Derivation (ishtiqaq) and lexical usage (lugha) of a particular word often disclose multiple meanings inseparable from it, such as the reiterated verse in ‘The Moon’ (al-Qamar) “Verily have We made the Quran memorable with ease, so is there *anyone to heed, fear, and remember* (muddakir)?” (54.32), where the *ease* of the Quran’s memorability throws into high relief the final telling question. If a surfeit of words is feared, good translation, for its part, must come to the point. If more words are needed to do so in a ‘gloss’—even of a line or two—of the full meaning, such is translation. Brevity is power, but clarity even more powerful. Our final three examples are of glosses to render single Arabic words.

(h) The ‘oft penitent’ (munib) is the special object of Allah’s loving attention among mankind, and has been glossed wherever it appears, to tell readers how to be one, as in the verses “And the earth have We outspread; And cast in it firm-anchoring mountains; And raised in it herbage of every delightful pair: All to give lucid insight, and as a momentous reminder to every servant *who turns to his Lord from every error in sincerity and love* (munib)” (50.7–8), which disclose what kind of heart such a reminder benefits most.

(i) To grow pure (tazakka) is a fifth-form verb, implying painstaking, persevering effort to attain the meaning of the root, as in the verse “And no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another; And did a sin-laden soul call on another to help bear it, not the slightest of it would be borne at all, even were the called-on of nearest kin. You can warn only those in dread awe of their Lord though He be unseen, and who well keep the prayer. And whoever *strives to grow to full purity in faith and deed* (tazakka) but *does so* (yatazakka) to his own gain; And to Allah is the final return” (35.18)—all of which are reasons never to give up until purity is attained.

(j) Allah strikes a similitude of hypocrites in the sura of that name (al-Munafiqun) by saying “And when you see them, their sleek bodies please you, and should they speak, you heed their eloquent words:—As though they were *a bunch of fair-seeming great planks of wood, worm-rotten inside, left sitting for useless against the wall* (khushubun musannadatun). They deem every cry raised to be against them; They are the enemy, so beware them” (63.4). Now a gloss of this length to translate but two Arabic words may strike some readers as overdone, florid, or too emphatic, yet fewer words do not do justice to what they say. Sheikh ‘Ali derived it point by point from Mustafawi’s fourteen-volume *al-Tahqiq fi kalimat al-Qur’an al-Karim* (36), Muhammad Hasan Jabal’s four-volume *al-Mu’jam al-ishtiqaqi al-mu’assal li alfadh al-Qur’an al-Karim* (21), together with the *tafsirs* of Zamakhshari, Ibn ‘Ashur, Alusi, Abu Su‘ud, Abu Hayyan, Biqa‘i, and others. The meanings are there, and what the two words signify is a group of people of affluence and standing in the society who are faithless, hollow, eaten by doubts, as discarded by their Creator as rubbish piled against a wall, where they sit talking

with each other to the detriment of others—as men still congregate together, though not necessarily for detriment, in rural villages in Eastern lands today seated against a shady wall in the afternoon to pronounce on matters of moment.

#### VIII. WHAT THE PRECEDING SEVEN POINTS MEAN

The often considerable meaning gaps in previous translations seem due to having turned a blind eye toward traditional Muslim exegetical, etymological, and lexicographical literature. Most educated people today are willing to concede with Malcolm Gladwell in his *Outliers* that 10,000 hours of practice can and do produce extraordinarily successful sports champions, computer programmers, and software magnates. But few in the history of Western studies of Islam and the Quran seem to have been able to grasp that the same number of hours spent in analysis, research, and work by some of the greatest Muslim scholars of their age can produce works about the Quran that deserve to be read by those who would understand it today. Translators of the future may know better.

#### OUTSTANDING INTERPRETIVE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

We will close on the present translation's solutions to some of the more difficult and remaining interpretive problems of conveying the Quran to readers of English. Some in the text below have proved good enough, others merely acceptable, while some are tentative and wait for better solutions from future translators. This essay concludes with them because readers who understand the problems will have a better idea what the translation is saying.

A website, as long as it lasts, bearing the name *Quran Beheld Tafsiir* allows interested readers to listen to the lessons given by Sheikh 'Ali to the translator the second time they went through the Quran together; though probably another 30 percent more material on follow-up or separate questions took place later over the intercom between their two offices, so was not recorded. The sound files of these lessons are numbered verse by verse—to which questions recorded later have been appended where they pertain. They give an idea of what the translator was trying to do in each verse, and also explain what follows here.

First, the word 'Lord' has been used to express the Arabic *Rabb*, which was originally a verbal noun (masdar) meaning simply *tarbiya* or 'bringing something from its present state to a preferable higher state.' Allah applies this to Himself as a *hyperbole* for the universal, unending, and invariable way which He does this; just as in English the magistrate who *judges* between people for a living may be called a 'justice' or 'chief justice.' Further, the connotations of *Rabb* are solicitude, nurturing, mercy, and kindness, evoking love and devotion; as opposed to *Allah*, whose connotations are ultimate power, terrifying might, and inexorable majesty and justice, evoking dread and awe. The translator was unable to find a

match for the former other than ‘Lord,’ prefaced by an occasional ‘good’ or ‘kind.’ Anything but a single-syllable word like ‘Lord’ would retain little of the original’s power, as more polysyllabic solutions or glosses are out of the question not only due to the word’s frequency in the Quran, but also to the clumsiness of putting the text’s many possessive pronouns like ‘my,’ ‘your,’ and ‘their’ before a long word or construct.

‘Ellipses’ mean the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence has been purposely left out. They are denoted in the body of the translation by a dash (—). They are used in the language of the Quran because a meaning is more emphatic when a speaker says but *part* of it, then the hearer discovers the rest by himself; a bit like emphatic understatement in some dialects of English. The subjective “Aha!” moment of discovery etches it into the hearer’s memory, because most people tend to prize their own discoveries more than those of others, so that the hearer takes the discovered meaning to heart as his own—which, in a sense, it is. Now the first hearers of the revelation were accustomed to frequent ellipse in their day-to-day speech (and still among bedouin in our day), and moreover familiar with both the idioms and contexts of the revelation. Many people today are neither, and a translator must judge how readily an omission may be understood by the average reader. Some ellipses are easily understood, as in the verse “And when mighty wave after wave break over them like canopied storm-clouds, they implore Allah, making their religion sincerely His; Yet when He delivers them to dry land, though a few among them take the true way—And none knowingly denies Our momentous signs but every faithless traitor bereft of gratitude” (31.32), where the content of the ellipse, namely ‘*most of them do not,*’ is so obvious that a translator can leave it as it stands in the original without spelling it out. In other verses, the omitted words are less obvious to a modern readership, and the translator has not done his job if he does not spell it out, such as the verse in answer to skeptics’ demands for a miracle to confirm the veracity of the revelation “Were there any recited scripture by which mountains could be set moving forward, or the earth cut into pieces, or the very dead spoken with—*it were this*—But rather the weighty matter of miraculous signs returns entirely to Allah” (13.31), where the italicized words, easily guessable by the first hearers, but less so by most modern readers, have been added from foremost scholars by the translator. Each case of ellipse requires a separate solution, and a translator is bound by duty to consult the greatest *tafsir* scholars, who have studied, weighed, compared similar passages, and decided on convincing reasons for supplying the content of the particular ellipse. The larger community of interpretation *embody* his hermeneutic, which cannot depend on just one or two of them.

Another difficult term to render is *ayah*, which is derived from *ta’ayyi* or ‘to

stand upright in place showing the way’; and can mean a ‘verse’ of the Quran, a ‘miraculous sign’ attesting to the truth of revelation, or both of these, or ‘a shocking catastrophic event as a sign’ to wrongdoers, or to mark the end of days. Each of these have been rendered in their place in the translation. As for ‘verse’ however, though the term’s *denotation* is plain, namely the written letters and words—like ellipses, the *connotation* is also and equally signified by the *ayah* through nuance, historical setting, and its context in the theme of the sura. In a word, such unspoken elements are an inseparable *part* of an *ayah*, which is thus more than is normally signified by the English word ‘verse.’

The importance of this may be illustrated by the Quranic use of the *hyperbolic* word-form of superlative action *dhallam*, an active participle for ‘greatly-wronging’ in the verse “That is for what your own hands have sent ahead; And that never would Allah greatly wrong *other* servants *by leaving the wicked unpunished*” (3.182), in which the italicized words are the best solution, through connotation, to the exegetical mystery of why ‘greatly wrong’ (*dhallam*) is denied of God, when “Allah never so much as wills the slightest wrong to any being” (3.108). Different solutions have been offered by major figures of *tafsir*, but none fits all *five* contexts where this wording appears in the Quran but this one, and also makes perfect sense in the Quranic ethos; so it has been used for all. It is mentioned by Biqa’i in several places in his *tafsir*. Like this, in showing the integrality of connotation and nuance to the very meaning of an *ayah*, is the verse “No calamity ever strikes but by the leave of Allah, and whoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart *to be firm and turn to Him*; And Allah well knows every single thing” (64.11), where the added italicized words gloss the precise connotation of ‘guides his heart,’ without which it cannot be sufficiently understood to guide the reader’s way.

The translation also attempts to convey to the reader, through the cadence, feeling, and sound of the English, something of the sheer force of the many emphatics found in virtually every verse of the Quran, and whose numbers—often up to six or eight in a single verse—would defy translation without a surfeit of adjectives and adverbs. As Ricoeur wrote in one of his last works:

Now excellent translators, modeled on Holderlin, on Paul Celan, and in the biblical domain, on Meschonnic, fought a campaign against the *isolated meaning*, the meaning without the letter, contrary to the letter. They gave up the comfortable shelter of the *equivalence of meaning*, and ventured into hazardous areas where there would be some talk of tone, of savor, of rhythm, of spacing, of silence between words, of metrics and of rhyme. Undoubtedly, the vast majority of translators rush to oppose this, without recognizing that translating the isolated meaning means repudiating

an achievement of contemporary semiotics, the unity of meaning and sound, of the signified and signifier . . . (*On Translation* (42), 38).

With a view toward sound too, the present text has been typeset in the only way the translator felt it could to preserve certain meanings of the original made possible by the great flexibility of the Arabic word-order, which serves in the Quran by turns to emphasize, magnify, demean, create suspense for, and in other ways range and qualify its objects. Ordinary English paragraphing and punctuation seemed inadequate to convey such features, which proved more amenable to a shorter line length. Usage questions, such as the right pronoun or term for groups of mixed sex, return to language rather than politics, and in these the translator has followed such figures of letters as Milton, Austen, Irving, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, and others with a greater sense of our English tongue than predominates today.

To summarize everything, the inimitability (i'jaz) of the Quran remains. Even with the utmost care, the Divine cannot be reduced to the human. That the present work is not strictly speaking a 'translation' of the Quran is not a mere pious disclaimer, but an acknowledgement of its supreme succinctness (ijaz) that no translation can reproduce if it is to deliver the meaning. It can only be unpacked. Comparing the Arabic original side by side with the English, especially with the audio files of the above-mentioned website, is probably the best way to see what has been done, though the attempt has been to express the Book of Allah in a literary form that enables readers to grasp the meaning, fill in the ellipses, and most of all, follow the divine plan and theme of each sura—with as much of the tone, power, and rhetoric of the original as the translator has been able to summon in English. To the best of the translator's effort and knowledge, everything found on each page represents the meaning and intention of its divine Author, whether explicitly, or implicitly in connotation, nuance, or context. The occasionally added glosses or words of exegesis from reliable authorities are things the text could not be understood without, out of his conviction that the essence of good translation lies in *clarity*, making the very point the Author is making in any given passage, no matter how few or many words it may take. At the same time, verses of legal rulings (ahkam) require a legal scholar ('alim) to explain to readers in light of the hadith and the expert opinion of a school (madhhab) of Sacred Law, which is beyond the scope of this or any translation to provide. A table of the Quranic suras follows next here with a brief word after the name of each sura outlining its main themes. A fairly detailed Quranic subject index at the back typifies rather than exhaustively cites all the verses that deal with each heading as a concordance would, for its aim is to provide answers to the existential question "How should I be as a person?" Finally, for the future,

Allah willing, the hermeneutic that works will probably always have something to do with the Quranic paradigm of personal word-by-word *talaqqi*, the traditional teacher-based instruction of Islam, with the teacher being a part of the greater interpretive community, until Allah inherits the earth and everyone on it.

May Allah out of His pure favor accept this work, reward all who helped, and make it a light for every true heart to true peace and the supreme happiness of closeness to Him in this world before the unutterable next. Allah bless and give peace to our liegelord Muhammad, the Final Seal upon the line of the prophets; and all praise is Allah's, Lord of all Worlds of Beings.

