

Article

The Role of Wonder in Creating Identity †

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† For Frank and Foruzan with love.

Abstract: Although the Bahāī Faith was born in a Shī‘ī Islamic cultural milieu it has clearly gone beyond the “gravitational pull” of Islām and assumed a distinctive social, scriptural, and religious identity. Bahāīs revere Islām as “the source and background of their Faith” and consider the Qur‘ān the only authentic, uncorrupted scripture apart from their own. However, Bahāī teachings insist that this new religious movement is more than a sectarian development. It represents a distinctive—if you will “autonomous”—religious dispensation along the lines of the development of Christianity out of its original Jewish setting. This assertion and trajectory is clear in the very earliest scriptures of the new religion revealed by the Bāb and runs through subsequent Bahāī writings. A key term, *badī‘*, used dozens of times by the Bāb in his annunciatory composition, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, denotes this sense of the “wondrously new”, something that is simultaneously ancient and unprecedented. It is suggested here that this term is a central and pivotal idea in the Bāb’s vision and that it had a major role in generating the imaginative and kerygmatic cultural energy that would eventually result in the above-mentioned escape from an Islamic orbit. The word *badī‘* eventually acquires a life of its own in Bahāī thought and practice. It is the word used to designate the new calendar whose current year is 180 B.E., “Bahāī Era” or “Badī‘ Era”. It is used in the title of one of Bahā‘ullāh’s major books, the *Kitāb-i Badī‘*. It is given as a name for one of the young heroes of the Bahāī Faith who was tortured and killed because he dared to attempt to communicate directly with the Shah of Iran to testify to the truth of Bahā‘ullāh’s mission. It is a word encountered frequently throughout the Bahāī writings and translated various ways. It functions as an emblem and symbol of the Bahāī ethos and message. The main focus here is the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, the Bāb’s proclamatory summons, disguised as a Qur‘ān commentary, in which he claimed to be in immediate and intimate contact with the hidden Imām and, therefore, the centre of all authority (*walāya*) whether political or spiritual. The clarion message of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, in which the much repeated Arabic word *badī‘* is a powerful and vibrant symbol of “the new”, is that a profound and radical covenantal renewal—as distinct from “revivification/*tajdid*”—is at hand, a renewal that would evolve into a distinctive Bahāī communal identity that is simultaneously—and therefore wondrously—new and primordial.



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1. Introduction

It is through wonder that human beings now begin and originally began to philosophize (Aristotle 1933, p. 13).

The Bahāī Faith dates its inception to the evening of 22 May 1844/5 Jumādā I, 1260, when the young merchant, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850/1235–1266) proclaimed himself to be the Gate (Ar. *al-bāb*) for the long-awaited hidden 12th Imām of the Ithnā ‘Asharī (Twelver) Shi‘a, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the expected messiah-saviour, the Mahdi, “Rightly Guided One” and Qāim, “The One Who Rises Up [to restore justice]”. According to Shī‘ī doctrine, the 12th or hidden Imām had, because of persecution, been in hiding since he was a small child. This occultation, according to Shī‘ī doctrine, is in



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two stages, the first, the Minor Occultation (*al-ghaybat al-ṣuḡhrā*) lasted from the time of his original disappearance in 874 at the young age of four until shortly before the death of his fourth deputy (*nāib*, sometimes *bāb*) in 941 when the second stage began. This is known in the literature as the Greater Occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kubrā*) and, according to Ithnā ‘Asharī Shi ‘ism (also known as Ja ‘farī, Imāmī or, least attractively, “Twelver”, Shi ‘ism), continues to the present moment. Bahāīs believe that this Greater Occultation ended 22 May 1844 when Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (hereafter, the Bāb), claimed that he was in direct contact with the hidden Imām and thus the centre of all authority and the harbinger of those dire and earth-shaking events that enliven the books of Shī ‘ī Ḥadīth. This claim was first made to a young seminarian, Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrūī (1813–1849), who was a prominent senior student in the influential intellectual movement devoted to Shī ‘ī philosophical theology that would eventually come to be known as the Shaykhī school of Imāmī Shi ‘ism, founded by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāī (d. 1826) whose successor was Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1843 or 4). This circle had grown up as something of a compromise in the frequently intense theological battles between the Uṣūlī “rationalists” and the Akhbārī “scripturalists” of Imāmī Shi ‘ism (Momen 1985, pp. 117–18, 222–25).

One of the areas in which the Shaykhiyya distinguished itself was precisely in the interpretation of the eschatological-cum-apocalyptic passages and themes in the Qur‘ān and the Ḥadīth. Shoghi Effendi Rabbānī (1897–1957), the first and only Guardian of the Bahāī Faith (*walī amrullāh*) stated in his major historical work, *God Passes By*, that the Bahāī worldwide community traces its historical development, and therefore the process by which it acquired its special identity, through a series of events “which have insensibly, relentlessly, and under the very eyes of successive generations, perverse, indifferent or hostile, transformed a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of the Shaykhī school of the Ithnā-‘Asharīyyih sect of Shi ‘ah Islām into a world religion whose unnumbered followers are organically and indissolubly united; whose independent status, its enemies from the ranks of its parent religion have proclaimed and demonstrated” (Shoghi Effendi 1970, pp. xii–xiii).

Thus, the Bahāī Faith, on its own reckoning, sees itself as having developed its distinctive identity directly out of the eschatological expectations of Shī ‘ī Islām as, however creatively, interpreted by the Shaykhī school’s first two masters, al-Aḥsāī and Rashtī. As one scholarly observer noted some years ago, of all the various Muslim sectarian and communalist movements, whether or not they arose in direct response or reaction to 18th and 19th century European encroachment on Islamic lands, the Bahāī Faith is the only one to have moved beyond the “gravitational pull” of Islām (Moayyad 1990, p. 47 citing Amin Banani). At the same time, the Bahāī faith honors Islām, the Qur‘ān, the prophet Muḥammad, his Family, and the inexhaustible spiritual truths they symbolize and teach.¹

Such a move “out of Islām” brought with it a new and distinct identity in much the same way a new identity was acquired by the early Christians and ensuing Christianity which may be thought, likewise, to have escaped the gravitational pull of Judaism. While many features of Judaism remain in Christianity, they are enlivened and interpreted in new ways which therefore put them beyond a Jewish identity. The same process may be seen at work in the history and development of the Bahāī Faith.

2. The Great Announcement

Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrūī was one of the more learned and talented younger adherents of the “Shaykhī” circle. “Shaykhī” here is in quotation marks because it seems indisputable that this was a term their detractors used to suggest that they propounded an unacceptable veneration of their teachers, their Shaykhs, and not one by which they recognized themselves. They themselves seem to have preferred the designation *Kashfiyya*, a word standing for mystical disclosure and revelation (cf. Rafati 1979, pp. 47–48), and a term which would have particular salience with regard to the Bāb’s revelation, shortly to occur. Mullā Ḥusayn had set off from Karbalā, headquarters of the second Shaykhī master, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, some weeks before his meeting with the Bāb. This journey was in obedience to the final instructions of Rashtī who had not appointed a successor but had

indicated in terms allusive yet unmistakable to his students that they should now expect the appearance (*zuhūr*) of the hidden Imām. Thus, it was in search of the hidden Imām, in accordance with the final instructions of the school's second leader, that Mullā Ḥusayn encountered the Bāb in Shiraz and was warmly welcomed by him. At the Bāb's insistent invitation, Mullā Ḥusayn accompanied him to his home. It was now during a conversation about Mullā Ḥusayn's travels that the Bāb, who was also an admirer of Shaykhī ideas and interpretations of the eschatological teachings of Shī'ism, voiced his claim to be the focus and centre of all authority, spiritual or worldly—essentially claiming to be the very hidden Imām for whom his guest was searching. The young, pious seminarian was initially most sceptical. However, when the Bāb started to compose the opening chapter of his proclamatory book, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, the subject of this article, Mullā Ḥusayn's scepticism began to dissolve and he eventually devoted himself to the Bāb and his distinctive, innovative call for a renewal of the covenant (*Dawnbreakers* 52–62). The *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is structurally based on the Qurān's 12th chapter, the Sura of Joseph (*Sūrat Yūsuf*). A brief word about the covenant, first in Islām generally, then specifically in the Sura of Joseph is necessary before proceeding.

3. The Covenant in the Qurān, Islām and the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*

Covenant is a major theme in the Qurān, a book which may certainly be read as a summons to a renewal of the so-called Abrahamic covenant. There is no space here to treat the topic at anything near the length it deserves. For its importance in Sunni Islām there is a growing library of specialized studies (al-Qadī 2006; Lumbard 2015; Jaffer 2021). Its importance in Sufism has long been an object of excellent scholarship (Ritter 2003; Böwering 1980). However, the literature on the covenant in Shī'ism is rather under-developed. This is ironic, because it may be in Shī'ism that the divine institution of the covenant is most emphasized. According to Shī'ism, it was precisely a violation of the renewed ancient covenant, through Muḥammad, that caused the division of the early Muslim community into competing, sometimes fractious and definitely fissiparous Islamicate sub-identities. It was a breaking of the covenant, in the first place, that cruelly violated the divine message of unity which Muḥammad had been sent to proclaim and about which the Qurān is so eloquent and insistent.

The *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is much preoccupied with the divine covenant and its healing and renewal in the message of the Bāb. One of the messianic hopes which had functioned as a prayer of the Imāmī Shī'a was that God might hasten the glad advent of the promised one, the Mahdi or the Qā'im, so that justice be restored and the rift in the covenant be healed. Then, the Muslim community might be reunited in relative harmony as it was during the lifetime of the prophet Muḥammad. To anticipate here the next section on the Sura of Joseph, such a dream of reunion is addressed in the final scene at Q12:100 when Joseph's family is reunited, after long, nearly fratricidal and heart-breaking separation. The *locus classicus* for the Qurān's covenant doctrine is Q7:172. Because of its importance, it is quoted here together with Q7:173.

“And remember when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify. (That was) lest ye should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! of this we were unaware;

Or lest ye should say: (It is) only (that) our fathers ascribed partners to God of old and we were (their) seed after them. Wilt Thou destroy us on account of that which those who follow falsehood did?” (Pickthall slightly adjusted).

According to a prominent theme of Qurānic exegesis, this scenario happened in a time before creation of even time and space. God, in the persona of “your Lord”, desired to be known and so gathered all humanity to his presence, before they were created, and presented them with the primordial question “Am I not your Lord” to which the unanimous and instantaneous response was “Yes indeed!”. This Qurānic verbal “icon” has been deeply contemplated by all Islamic intellectual and religious traditions. For the present discussion,

it is sufficient to know that the covenant here, according to Islām, is the same one about which the Hebrew Bible speaks with regard to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and further, it is the same covenant that Jesus claimed to renew. The words for covenant in the Qurān are *'ahd* and *mīthāq*. These words occur throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* in numerous contexts, most prominently with the sense of renewal. The following examples are characteristic. The first one combines the important word *badī'* with covenant.

“Verily we have taken with you in the station of pre-existence (*mashhad al-dharr*) a mighty covenant (*mīthāq ghalīz*)” (QA6:35).

“This is a covenant of love for our followers (*ḥubb^{am} li-shī'atinā*) from the presence of one who is wondrously innovative in the act of divinely creative speech (*min ladun badī'*) [namely, the Bāb]. Indeed the Cause in the estimation of God is Sublime (*al-'Alī*) and Mighty” (QA6, *Sūrat al-Shahāda*, vv. 35–36; SM75).²

This is a reference, in the first place, to the primordial covenant in which God lovingly summoned all future human beings to his presence and posed his (rhetorical) question, at Q7:172 “Am I not your Lord”. All humanity answered “Yes indeed! To this we testify” (*balā shahidnā*). Apart from answering the question about why this sura was entitled, Sura of the Witnessing (or Martyrdom) *Sūrat al-Shahāda*, the Bāb’s language joins pre-existence, the primordial day of the covenant, to the actual present. We see here also a frequent instance of paronomasia in the Bāb’s use of “the Exalted” (*al-'Alī*) to refer to both God and himself—‘Alī (Muḥammad Shīrāzī)—at the same time. This is discussed more fully below.

The clear message here is that this is in fact a new Day of the Covenant, joined wondrously to the Day of Judgment, which represents the starting point for a totally new world—covenantal renewal. The prepositional phrase, “from the presence of one... / *min ladun badī'* ” indicates that the Bāb himself is a wondrously new creative being and is repeated in the text at *Sūrat al-Musaṭṭar* (*The Writing*) (QA11:14) and frequently elsewhere.

Another example is:

“Fear ye God and breathe not a word concerning His Most Great Remembrance other than what hath been ordained by God, inasmuch as We have established a separate covenant (*al-'ahd al-qayyim*) regarding Him with every Prophet and His followers. Indeed, We have not sent any Messenger without this binding covenant and We do not, of a truth, pass judgment upon anything except according to the covenant of Him Who is the Supreme Gate (*dhālika al-bāb*) that hath been established. Ere long the veil shall be lifted from your eyes at the appointed time. Ye shall then behold the sublime (*al-'alī*) Remembrance of God, unclouded and vivid” (QA5, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, v. 33; SM70, SWB 46).

Note here again the repeated use of the divine name, the Exalted – *al-'Alī* as a simultaneous reference to both God and the Bāb.

4. The Story of Joseph and the Renewal of the Covenant

In the Qurān, the story of Joseph may be read as a renewal of the Abrahamic covenant which occurs in a frankly scandalous or shocking manner, one that could not have been predicted based only on tradition and social expectation. Such revolutionary change is symbolized in the Hebrew Bible with the heretical dream of the young Joseph in which he sees the sun, the moon and stars bow down to him as if he were a god or worse, God (Genesis 34:9). He recounts his dream to his father Jacob who warns him not to tell anyone about it. This feature of the story challenges tradition and “theology” which hold that only God himself is worthy of being bowed down to. As is well known, from this point forward, Joseph’s vision or dream calls down upon him the ill-will, jealousy and hatred of his brothers. Both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Qurān’s 12th sura, this theological scandal, and the jealousy and hatred it provoked, is ultimately understood as having been necessary for the salvation of the “divine remnant”, Jacob and his tribe and, by association, the rest of humanity, symbolized by the Egyptians. It represents the preservation of religion as such and the renewal of the covenant (Genesis 50:15–21; Q12:91–92).

In the Qurān, the denouement of this forgiveness is celebrated in the final scene of the Sura of Joseph when his entire family come to Egypt after having recognized the truth of his original dream and actually bow down to him in reality (Q12:100). Thus is Joseph's shocking dream "made sense of" as promised in the beginning of the sura at Q12:6 where the Qurān says that this sura will fully explain otherwise puzzling events, *tarwīl al-aḥādīth*. This second bowing may also be seen as a performance of the original gesture of assent on the Day of the Covenant mentioned at Q7:172 (Lawson 2024). Such a narrative bespeaks a prevailing valorisation of change and renewal as sacrament, that in which God's presence or wisdom may be detected. With the Bāb's work, studied here, we will come to understand a similar valorisation of creativity and originality as an essential dimension of the divine and its relation to (perpetual) origination, humanity and "religion". Joseph and his story figure in Shī'ī sources as a symbol for the return of the hidden Imām (e.g., al-Ḥuwayzī 1963–1965/1383–1385, III:333–412). In addition, the story of Joseph is a favourite among Sufi mystics whether Sunni or Shī'ī. Muslims of all confessions and identities regard it as the most beautiful sura in the Qurān (Firestone n.d., EI2). Such universal and universalizing symbolism will be elaborated and emphasized both in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* by the Bāb, discussed here, and in later Bahā'ī scriptures.

5. The *Qayyūm al-Asmā*

In the context of Islamic religious culture, whether Sunni or Shī'ī, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is, like Joseph's dream, also most shocking and scandalous, whether from the point of view of contents or form. With the rise of the Bābī religion and its attraction of thousands of supporters and followers, it becomes clear that what is shocking and scandalous for some is wondrous, highly creative and inspiring for others, a sign of hope. This work is ostensibly a Qurān commentary (*tafsīr*) on the Chapter of Joseph (*sūrat Yūsuf*), the 12th sura of the Qurān. It is known by several titles in Arabic: (1) *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, "The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph"; (2) *Aḥsan al-Qaṣaṣ*, "The Best of Stories"; and (3) *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (see below for translation). This third title most perfectly captures the all-important feature of innovation and newness which the work represents in both form and content because it alludes to categories and realities yet unknown or experienced. The word *Qayyūm* ("self-subsisting"), originates in the Qurān where it occurs three times and always in tandem with another essential divine attribute, the Ever-Living (*al-ḥayy*) (Q2:255 (the seminal Throne Verse), Q3:2; and Q20:111).

The divine attribute *al-Ḥayy* "The Ever-Living" will, as it happens, also feature prominently in Bābī identity, especially in the designation the Bāb eventually gave to the first group of Muslims to recognize him. Collectively, these eighteen persons are eventually called by the Bāb "Letters of the Living/*ḥurūf al-ḥayy*", the first of whom was Mullā Ḥusayn. This title was chosen, at least superficially, because of the numerical (*abjad*) value of the word *ḥayy* (18), but this was obviously not the only reason given the strong connection in the Qurān between *al-Qayyūm* and *al-Ḥayy*. According to the Bāb, the designation "Letters of the Living" may apply, in turn, to his first 361 converts and, ultimately, to the entire body of his followers (Amanat 2005, pp. 190–93).

The title, *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, may be literally translated as "the self-subsisting of the [divine] names" with the sense that it is this very self-subsisting that places *qayyūm* "self-subsisting" beyond all other divine names by virtue of it originally having given rise to them in all their multiplicity and variation. Bausani's translation of this challenging title remains the best one, *Colui s'erge su gli attributi* "He who rises beyond the [divine] attributes" (Bausani 1959, p. 460).³

For all its connotation of utter transcendence, this title, which was given to the work by the Bāb himself, is meant also to evoke the figure of the decidedly not transcendent Joseph, and his highly fraught very earth-bound epic, because its numerical, *abjad* value is the same as Yūsuf: 156 (N.B., 1 + 5 + 6 = 12, symbol of the 12th or hidden Imām). Thus the title indicates a metaphysical or spiritual truth: the divine cannot be encountered except through created reality. *Qayyūm* as *Qayyūm* is beyond thought, experience and

being. However, *Qayyūm* as Joseph (and his story), is its spiritual metaphor, symbol or manifestation (*mazhar*), and also part of the world. The title *Qayyūm al-Asmā* implies, then, that the more we can understand Joseph, the more we can understand the otherwise unknowable divine, hidden, self-subsisting, ever-living reality which is the source of all creation and existence.

In the Qurān, one important name for this source of all creation and existence, as we will explore more fully below, is precisely *al-Badī*, the Absolute Originator (i.e., from nothing, *ex nihilo*) whose act of Origination, the non-Qurānic *al-ibdā*, is also referred to numerous times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. Unlike in the Qurān where there are only four instances of this term, *badī* occurs dozens of times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. It is also significant that this word hardly appears at all in the Bāb's earlier major work, the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*, which was completed just a few months prior to his meeting with Mullā Ḥusayn when he began to write the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. Nor does this word appear in what is generally regarded as the Bāb's oldest surviving work, the *Risāla al-sulūk* whose exact date of composition is unknown but which can be dated from internal evidence to within the lifetime of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, probably during the last year of his life (MacEoin 1992, pp. 44–45).

The prolific use of the Arabic word *badī* in this text is a major stylistic innovation, among many others, from the Bāb's pre-manifestation writing and marks, perhaps, a profound change in the way he saw himself, or at least a change in the way he wished to present himself to others. This change is no doubt connected with those mystic and spiritual encounters the Bāb says he had with the Imām, encounters which likely took place between the time of the death of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī in late December 1843 or early January 1844 and the meeting with Mullā Ḥusayn, nearly five months later (*Dawnbreakers* 253). Several of the changes in style between the pre-manifestation and post-manifestation writings have been noted elsewhere (Lawson 2012). However, the distinctive use of this word *badī* has not been treated previously.

Equally important for the study of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, is the fact that the Arabic word *qayyūm*, discussed above, is a derivation of the Arabic tri-literal consonantal root, Q W M, from which the related words *qā'im* "messiah", *qiyāma* "resurrection", *mustaqīm* "straight" (path), and *qayyim* "true" (religion), are derived. Because of the structure of the Arabic language and especially word formation from common roots, those who first read the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* would immediately see reference to the return of the hidden Imām, the Qā'im and his identification with Joseph, in the title alone. At the time and place of the composition of this *tafsīr* by the Bāb, there was probably no more urgent or powerful symbol than *al-qā'im*, the messianic figure expected by Islām and more specifically Imāmī Shī'ī Islām, who, it was firmly believed would appear from occultation to restore justice and usher in a new cycle of history (Amanat 2005). At the time of the Bāb's writing this work, 1000 or so years since the disappearance of the hidden Imām, expectation of his appearance was running very high. In addition to allusions to the Qā'im and *Qiyāma* "Resurrection/Judgment Day" the title also alludes to one of the major concerns of the Qurān and Islamic religion, "the path of righteousness" or "the straight path", *al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*, mentioned 33 times in the Qurān, and its near synonym, *al-dīn al-qayyim*, "the true faith" mentioned five times. These words are repeated dozens of times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* in quite multifarious contexts. In return, of course, these words are understood as standing for the Qā'im and his nearness. Such is the distinctively dynamic hermeneutic circuitry at work in this text.

6. A New Music and the Grammar of Spiritual Revolution

Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation. All

existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. Bahá'ulláh (1971, p. 166)

To return to the word *badī'*, and the various derivations of the key trilateral consonantal root, B-D- 'Ayn, the last consonant, the Arabic letter 'ayn, has no direct equivalent in English. It is pronounced with an initial deep, swallowed, pharyngeal stop. This word occurs dozens of times throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* as an emblem of newness, originality, and, perhaps, what will come to be called "modernity" and even "the avant-garde" in analogous social and artistic developments in contemporary "Western" society (Lawson 2017; cf. Martin 1996). Such, however, would not be the first time in the history of Islamic culture that the term *badī'* became a symbol for what we call modernity. The "*badī'* movement" among the so-called literary "moderns" (*muḥdathūn*) of the Abbasid period brought profound and long-lasting changes in poetics, changes reflecting the social, political and religious transformations that had developed by this time since the founding of Islām, two and a half centuries earlier (van Gelder n.d., EI2; Heinrichs n.d., EI2). This particular cultural transformation has recently been linked to developments in scriptural exegesis (Stetkevych 1981, 1991, esp. 5–37) and thus is not irrelevant as background for the present discussion, even though the Bāb's main concerns were far from literary, as commonly understood. Because of the foundational theory of the Arabic language as holy, it is accurate to say that on some level all of the Bāb's concerns were literary. Certainly he uses the word *badī'* to refer to his remarkable literary abilities and authorial role in producing what is also called revelation, in addition to its meaning as an attribute of the transcendent God. Such can give rise to what might be thought of as a "theophanic confusion" which is the subject of the following section.

7. Paronomasia and Anagram: *ibdā'* (Divine Creation) and *'ibāda* (Servitude)

Such confusion may be further intensified as a result of the quite natural and much esteemed "paronomastic" genius of the Arabic language.⁴ One of the results of the classical *badī'* modernism was the efflorescence of a new and daring use of paronomasia, the technical term for punning or wordplay. In Arabic, punning does not have the same low status it does in English. Quite the contrary. In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* it is dizzyingly frequent and must be understood as one of the chief factors in the Bāb's writing being seen as divine revelation. The degree and mastery of such wordplay by the Bāb is utterly breath-taking. Indeed, it is such wordplay that contributes in large measure to the phenomenon of identity melding mentioned above.

For example, it would not have been lost on the Bāb's readers that the word *badī'* is also an anagrammatic evocation of the spiritual value of servitude, *'ibāda*. Seen as an anagram of the important Qurānic religious term *'abd/ 'ibāda*—for which the root is 'Ayn-B-D—"servant", "slave", "worshipper" and even "lover", *badī/ibdā'* incorporates its meaning. In such a way, the universally esteemed virtue of servitude, *'ubūdiyya*, a term which lends itself as the name for the 35th sura of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (see below), may be understood to be in semantic harmony with an admittedly quite theoretical *budū' iyya* "wonderment", a word not found in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (or perhaps elsewhere), but is silently suggested through the poetics and verbal storm of the text. A word that does occur, however, is *ibdā'*. Fortunately, these two words, *ibdā'* and *'ibāda*, and their mutually referential dynamics have been explicated by Henry Corbin in his ground-breaking study of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240). Here, Corbin refers to Ibn 'Arabī's profound discussion of prayer. While divine manifestation began, not necessarily temporally but ontologically, with the process called Origination (*ibdā'*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), also known as divine service or worship (*'ibāda*), and its three movements of the body: (1) standing (verticality, a symbol of the human aspiration, growth), (2) bowing (horizontality, a symbol of animal growth) and (3) prostration (descending, a symbol of vegetal growth, root-sinking) is actually a performance or recital of divine Origination. *Ibdā'* (divine origination) and *'Ibāda* (divine service or servitude) are, in some sense, spiritually equivalent.

“Thus, Prayer is a recurrence of creative Creation. *Ibdā* ‘ (Origination) and *ibāda* (worship) are homologous; both proceed from the same theophanic aspiration and intention. The Prayer of God is His aspiration to manifest Himself, to see Himself in a mirror, but in a mirror which itself sees Him (namely, the faithful whose Lord He is, whom He invests with one or another of His Names). The Prayer of man fulfils this aspiration; by becoming the mirror of this Form, the orant sees this ‘Form of God’ in the most secret sanctuary of himself” (Corbin 1981, pp. 261–62).

Corbin observes here a salient and important truth about the way in which Arabic generates meaning. The resonances and connections between such otherwise vastly different words as *ibdā* ‘ and *ibāda*, thought in the same mental “breath”, cause the mind to construct analogies and mutually enhancing meanings or intensification of meaning that unaided “rational dialectics would never have been able to discover” (Corbin 1981, p. 265). In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* there are innumerable instances of just such divine “punning” (more properly, *jinās*) with these two words and countless others. We have encountered some of these above and will encounter more below, especially those involving the tri-literal consonantal root patterns B-D-‘Ayn and ‘Ayn-B-D. As we have seen, the Bāb’s name, ‘Alī (lofty, exalted, sublime, also a divine attribute) is used in such a way.

8. Verily I Am God, Authorial Presence and the Melding of Identity

In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, there is a deliberate blurring, or better, melding of authorial identity. This is such a pervasive feature of the text that it is important to discuss it at least in broad outline with one or two textual examples in order to better understand our key word, *badī* ‘. The topic or problem of confusion or reversal of identity, especially in Islamic mysticism, is certainly not new with this composition by the Bāb. One might consider the basic and characteristic Sufi preoccupation with annihilation, *fanā*, of the self and the perdurance, *baqā* of God (or at least the divine attributes) in its place as an earlier instance. However, here in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* it is articulated with such thoroughgoing consistency in numerous different combinations of terms, and in such a wide variety of contexts that it must be accounted as one of several “wondrously new”, *badī* ‘ features of the text. The ultimate focus of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is the renewal of the pre-eternal covenant mentioned at Q7:172. Just as that covenant may be seen as the prelude to a new world, this covenantal renewal proclaimed by the Bāb is understood as the starting point for the next new historico-spiritual cycle or world this text is presented as inaugurating.

Shī‘ī spirituality and religion rely on a melding of the identity of God with the Fourteen Infallibles, those immune (*ma‘ṣūm*) from error. They are: Muḥammad the Prophet, Fāṭima, ‘Alī and the remaining eleven Imāms including the last, the hidden 12th Imām, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, the Qā‘im or Mahdī. This is a major theme of Shī‘ism and much scholarly discourse is devoted to making clear that even though there seems to be such a divine confusion in the various statements of the Imāms, as a matter of fact God is still quite transcendent above them (Amir-Moezzi 1994; Cole 1982; Bausani 1972). This theological and philosophical problem represents a continuing source of what might be thought a noetic tension of ambiguity that has been a productive generator of meaning, including prayers and commentaries, from the earliest days of Shī‘ī scholarship. Indeed, such theophanic ambiguity is intimately combined in what has been described as an essential and enshrined cultural ambiguity in Iran in general (Mottahedeh 1985). Such ambiguity or, to use Corbin’s preferred term “amphiboly”, has created throughout Islamic history a highly appreciative audience from within Sufism, from Ḥallāj (d. 922) to Niffarī (d. 965) to the Ghazālī brothers (d. 1111 & 1123), to Rūzbehān Baqlī (d. 1209), to Ibn ‘Arabī and beyond to the Ḥikmatī school and the elaboration of what must be seen as neo-Twelve Shī‘ī philosophy in the Safavid period (1501–1736), and finally the writings of the first two Shaykhī masters.

The basic structure of this melding of identity is based on classical Aristotelian hylomorphism which is then reconstrued according to the specific concerns of a specific mystic, philosopher or theologian. This theory says every existent is a combination of two elements, matter and form. Form here is understood as an unseen emanative element that both causes

matter to exist and enlivens it. The understanding of form in Islamic thought has relied on various metaphors, from Avicenna's "being (*wujūd*)", to Suhrawardī's "light (*nūr*)", to Ibn 'Arabī's "mercy (*rahīma*)" to Ḥaydar Amulī's "divine friendship (*walāya*)" to Mullā Ṣadrā's "essential motion (*ḥaraka jawhariyya*)". By whatever name the form is known, it is understood as a metaphor for the divine creative energy without which nothing would exist. Thus, every existent (Aristotle's *ousia*) is a marriage or amalgam of comparatively "dead" matter and this divine energy. We say comparatively dead because in later Islamic thought even this deadness was understood as simply a less intense instance of the divinely originated form. In the writings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāzīm these various notions of divine energy or "form" are combined and used in innovative ways, even if these authors from time to time express disagreement with this or that philosopher, such as Shaykh Aḥmad's condemnation of certain of the philosophical doctrines of Mullā Ṣadrā or his son-in-law, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī. Ultimately, matter is a veil for the sacred form which simultaneously reveals and conceals spiritual reality. (Rashtī in Lawson 2012, p. 69).

The confusion about knowing the divine from the not-divine was expressed by Ruzbehan Baqli (d. 1209) with the word *iltibās* "disguise". Divinity disguises itself in this or that existential instance consisting of a combination or melding of Matter and Form. This is one of the ways in which the cloak of Joseph (on whose Qur'anic sura, #12, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is a commentary) is understood: that which disguises the divine beauty of Joseph. Thus Ḥallāj's scandalous "I am the Truth", or the countless theopathic expressions in the Sufi tradition and the Imamology of later 12er Shī'ism, are more immediately pertinent. As Bausani and Corbin and many others have emphasized, the nature of the Imām is not divine incarnation but rather manifestation: *mazhar*. This Arabic noun of place, not agency, means location where appearance occurs, not the cause of the appearance, which would be *muzhir* (Cole 1982). The Imāms, according to Shaykh Aḥmad are, precisely, such divine manifestations Whom it is sometimes impossible not to think of as God; but, because God as divine essence is totally and forever protected and inviolable beyond thought or even being and non-being, then it is permissible, or rather unavoidable, to experience such divine confusion or amphiboly. It is part of being human. The Imāms, in short, represent the most that human intellectual and spiritual effort (*himma*) can ever know about divinity.

This divine confusion is very much at work in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. One might with profit employ a musical metaphor to describe the extraordinary degree to which the Bāb's writing evokes this sacramental tension in every verse of the composition. The effect is nothing short of symphonic, especially if we think in terms of a music of ideas or "pure thought" (Scholem 1961). The same may be said of the Qur'an, a work which also raises important questions about authorship and the nature of divine revelation, and which is also ever present in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. One could choose any verse as an example, but there is a type of verse in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* which shows this phenomenon most directly, the "I am God" verse.

In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and throughout his writings to the very end, such as the *Arabic Bayān*, the Bāb frequently quotes, either in whole or in part, the distinctive Qur'anic verse at Q20:14, part of the story of Moses at Mt. Sinai. Here, God says: "Verily verily I am God: there is no god except Me so worship Me and establish prayer for My Remembrance".

Innanī anā l-lāhu lā ilāha illā anā fa-u'budnī wa-aqimi ṣ-ṣalāta li-dhikrī

There is, of course, wide variation among the various English translations of this verse. The most important is the two ways in which *lā ilāha illā anā* is translated, either as "There is no god but Me" or, as in Yusuf Ali, "there is no God but I". Such a choice raises numerous grammatical questions, of course. However, the most important question has to do with the "I am" motif in Abrahamic monotheism, as in the famous, grammatically disconcerting, statement by Jesus "Before creation I am" (not "I was") (John 8:58 cf. Exodus 3:14). The above Qur'an verse also disturbs the simultaneous extreme or stark apophaticism of Islām (and Judaism) while at the same time emphasizing the absolute power of God. In uttering "I am God" the person who is saying it, originally the prophet Muḥammad, is tinged by the divinity of the statement and his voice is blended with (or "disguises") the voice of God.

It is important, also, to point out that the following Qurānic verse, Q20:15, speaks of the Day of Judgment, here referred to as “the Hour, *al-sā‘a*” which God “has willed to keep hidden”. While not quoted explicitly at every instance of the “I am God” verses by the Bāb, his audience would certainly have been aware of the inference and no doubt actually heard the following verse in their minds, having more than likely memorized the Qurān. The point in discussing the “I am” motif here is to draw attention to its ubiquity throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, a ubiquity which in the music and poetics of the composition causes an important and obviously intentional blurring of identity between the author(s) of this text (God, the hidden Imām and the Bāb) and the author(s) of the Qurān (God, the angel of revelation and Muḥammad).

One instance of this first-person usage is in “The Chapter of the Yearning Perceptive Hearts”. The Bāb, in the mode of revelation, writes:

“Say: Verily verily I am the wondrously new creative law from the wondrously ever new (and simultaneously ever ancient) creative God. Indeed God is Mighty All-Wise” (QA59, *Sūrat al-Afida*, v.15; cf SM476).

Qul innanī āna al-farḍu al-badī‘ min allāhi al-badī‘ wa kāna allahu ‘azīza‘ ḥakīma‘

Visually, rhythmically, and “theologically” there is a perfect parallel here with the Bāb’s writing and the Qurān verse quoted above. Notably, in the Qurān, the verse ends with a mention of “My remembrance, *dhikrī*” which is, of course, one of the more important and frequent titles assumed by the Bāb and used by his followers (In fact, it may be more frequent in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* as one of his titles than the current most popular one, the Bāb. See Lawson 2012, pp. 46–74). To the extent that the Remembrance of God may be thought to communicate something of God’s otherwise unknowable reality, here at QA59:1, the same communication of “divine substance” is echoed in the repetition of the word *badī‘*. The Bāb is commanded to say, “I am the wondrously new creative law” and this on the authority of God whose attribute, *al-Badī‘*, is precisely the same: wondrous, new (and simultaneously ancient) and creative. He is the one who creates from absolute nothingness, *creatio ex nihilo*: the Absolute Originator. Here, the discourse is complicated in a Socratic way because the context of the Bāb’s composition, a pious fiction that the hidden Imām is transmitting the text to him, raises the attendant question: Who is saying “Say!”? This word is not used in Q20:14 as it happens, though as is well known the “Say” verses are a distinctive and frequent feature of the Qurān, a feature that emphasizes the revelational status of the Qurān. In these verses, God is explicitly telling Muḥammad to “Say” something so that there can be no question of the identity of the real author.

A response to this question returns us to a remarkable feature of the composition. Much of its textual charisma resides in the fact that its four separate voices, (1) God, (2) the Imām, (3) the Bāb, (4) Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad, are frequently presented in a kind of noetic confusion or harmony which may first appear as dissonance. Here, it could be God or the hidden Imām commanding the Bāb to say that the hidden Imām and/or the Bāb is the “wondrously new creative divine law”. This confusion or, better theophanic (viz., symphonic) harmony is similar to that expressed in the potentially confusing image in the Qurān with the Light verse (Q24:35) and the image of divine complexity and confusion in the phrase “light upon light”. Such conditions the entire *Qayyūm al-Asmā* but comes to a kind of apogee in a verse such as the one quoted above. There are many instances throughout the text that use precisely the same Qurānic “trope”: “verily verily I am” followed by either an exact quotation of the original Qurānic verse or some other combination of sacred themes and symbols. It is indeed overwhelming. Additionally, here it is no less overwhelming and inspiring because of the special word that is used to end the verse, *badī‘*, whose main semantic valence is newness, unprecedentedness, creativity, imaginative power and even beauty.

Another instance of this usage occurs as follows:

“O People of the Divine Cloud! Harken to my call: Verily I am the servant of God and his most great remembrance, is there any summons apart from God your

Lord, the Truth, that can attract you? Indeed, he is the possessor of tenderness for his servants and what is in your souls ye women of the most great swooning (*al-ṣa' al-akbar*). Return to your chambers and abide in the wondrously new creative cause from God, the Truth and await my cause coming from the upright alif (*al-alif al-qā'im*) with the Truth. Verily, the victorious help of God and his days are, according to the Mother Book, close at hand" (QA91, *Sūrat al-Rabī'*, v.22; SM749).

The first-person phrase at the beginning of this passage is *innī 'abdu llāh wa dhikruhu*. It would not have been possible for his earliest readership, highly educated in the scriptures of Islām, to read or hear this without thinking of the verse at Q20:14 and all of the theophanic implications it communicates. The Bāb deploys this spiritual energy in connection with the word *badī'* as if to suggest that one of the wondrous features of God's creation is the way in which the words or verses of God, when channelled through the human soul, actually "dye" (cf. *ṣibgha*, Q2:138) that soul with divinity. So, in our sample of verses concerning *badī'* there are a few uses of the first person in which the identities of God, Muḥammad, the hidden Imām and the Bāb are blended in a single locution in ways that cannot be sharply distinguished. It is one of the many distinctive revelatory features or "literary events" in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, it is suggested, that thrilled and enthused the early readership and presented them with an evidentiary miracle of the first order. Additionally, this occurred on a number of counts. First is the fact that this text was revealed with great rapidity, without lucubration or study, in the presence of witnesses; second, it was composed by one who was not a professional religious scholar, poet or litterateur but a young man of the merchant class comparatively uneducated; three, and perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates that the author had a truly awe-inspiring control over the entire Qurān whose verses, partial verses, words and references here are just so many keys of a textual piano played by a master—if self-taught—musician, extempore.

This happens quite frequently so that, for example, in the following passage when the third person pronoun is used and modified as *badī'* it is impossible not to think of God, the Imām and the Bāb as being indicated simultaneously. Closely following Qurānic diction here (as throughout the text) the Bāb, incorporating two Qurānic verses which describe God as being the most truthful (*aṣḍaq*) of speakers (Q4:87 and 122), writes:

"God, beside Whom there is no god! He, *huwa*, (TL: or he, the Imām and by association the Bāb) is the most truthful of speakers according to the truth with the truth most newly creative, wondrously new" (QA5, *Sūrat Yusuf*, v.11; SM70; in other MSS. this sura is entitled *al-Ḥusayn*).

The third person singular pronoun, *huwa*, indicates one who is absent. In Shī'ism absence (*ghayb < al-ghayba*) is sacred as the abode of the hidden Imām, who in Shī'ī theology, as a result of the distinctive apophaticism it has cultivated from earliest times, is functionally equivalent to God. Messianic Shi'ism venerates an absence that is paradoxically, full of presence (Amir-Moezzi 2001) especially with regard to the teachings of the Shaykhis. As Corbin and others have demonstrated, in Imāmī Shī'ism absence is just as sacred and holy as the Imām himself (Corbin 1971–1972, i 285–329). Since the Bāb is speaking on behalf of the hidden Imām it is then not only possible but in the fervent intensity of the composition, quite natural to understand this singular pronoun as referring simultaneously to all three: God, the Imām, and the Bāb. Such a highly charged reading would be quite in line with the spirit of Akhbārī scriptural hermeneutics (Lawson 2006) and quite familiar to the Bāb's earliest readers. The hidden Imām functions for the Bāb as the angel of revelation functioned for the prophet Muḥammad. This verse represents a frequent pattern occurring throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. In this instance it is clear that the use of the adverbial *badī' a* is meant as a reflexive adjective for the text itself. As is the case with the Qurān, the subject of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is frequently the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* itself, including its ultimate unknowable source (God), its secondary source, the hidden Imām and the Bāb, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad. All these actors are blended in apposition to the third person singular pronoun *huwa* (he, him, it). Note that the subject pronoun *huwa* functions also as an object

simultaneously; thus, through a single, quite innovative and no doubt to some, scandalous “grammatical gesture”, likely to be deemed a mistake by unsympathetic readers, the Bāb also closes the gap between subject and object. A rather magisterial and, as it happens, wondrously innovative “literary” feat.

Above, we introduced the translation of this key word or “technical term”, *badī'*, as that which takes into account the most ancient remote “past”—the time in pre-eternity (*azal*) when, or even before, the original Day of the Covenant took place, and the most recent present, with an eye on the future. Not only does the word speak of wonder but it is itself, as a concept, wondrous in its meaning and operation through which worldly time is collapsed. It is not merely new; it is both new and old. The *qā'im* is equally unimaginably ancient since he was among those created even before the Day of the Covenant (Kazemi 2009) and new because of his reappearance. Time is, in a spiritual sense, vanquished, neutralized, annihilated and somehow enchanted. It is such a perspective which makes it difficult to use a term like “Eschaton/Last Things” in discussing the Bahā'ī and Bābī phenomena because here, as has recently been convincingly argued for the Qurān, there is no lastness (El Masri 2020, pp. 93–131). Life goes on, it does not end. *Al-ākhirā* has more of a sense of “next” than finality. The term *badī'* captures this meaning and, if you will, “litanises” it. Its formidable energy suffuses the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and all subsequent Bahā'ī revelations whether by the Bāb or Bahā'ullāh. A final example of an “I am God” passage is in explanation of Q12:82 and thus locutions such as “blessed community” and “caravan” are metaphorized accordingly by way of commentary.

“Say: Verily God hath inspired me [to write] this (*dhālika*) most great *tafsīr*, in this verse flaming with the fire of the perceptive yearning hearts (*nār al-afīda*) by his command. And He is God, ever knowing all things.

Verily verily I am God! He who there is no God but Him! So ask the blessed community (*qarya*) in which we were living. Verily, this divine Word is the caravan in which we arrived. Verily we are being directly addressed (*manṭūq^{an}*) by God, the Exalted, upon the Truth” (QA82, *Sūrat al-A'zam*, vv. 43 and 44; SM675).

This blending of identity carries on in many other instances, too numerous to recount here, in the very frequent phrasal construction which ends with “God, the Wondrously New Originator: *allāh al-badī'*”. This formula is repeated with a number of different nouns, Cause, Remembrance, Bāb, and Verses, among others. Thus, *amr allāh al-badī'* in the first instance means: the Cause of God, the Wondrously New Originator. However, as a result of the poetics of the text, which depends upon the underlying theory of manifestation (theophanology) it is also impossible not to read it as “the Wondrously New Originating Cause of God”. This textual amphiboly in which it is very difficult to draw a line between God and his cause, or even more to the point, between God and his Gate, the Bāb, suffuses the text from beginning to end.

9. Distribution and Frequency of *badī'* and Derivatives in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*

The frequent instances of the term *badī'* and its derivatives (including homonyms and anagrams (as seen earlier) such as words construed on the Arabic root B-D-, in which the Arabic letter *hamza* – replaces the *'ayn* –, and means “to begin (again)”, or B-D-W “to appear” or “change of mind”, as in the Shī'ī doctrine of divine change of mind (Ayoub 1986) and synonyms, such as 'Ayn-J-B “wondrous, strange” represent a sustained theme of wonder and innovation/newness throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. One might say that the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* enshrines wonder as a sacramental element of the covenant and its renewal (cf. Faber 2022, pp. 381–410, esp. 389 and 411 n.1). To give some idea of the way in which this highly charged word circulates through the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* the following breakdown is offered.

By far, the most frequent occurrence of *badī'* is in the adverbial form, *badī' aⁿ*. There are around 60 instances of this and because there are so many and in so many separate contexts it is not easy to generalize. It can occur at the end of a verse, in line with normal Arabic and Qurānic rhymed prose, *saj'*. However, it can occur in the middle of a verse to indicate

a pause. Wherever it occurs it indicates that the entire gist or meaning of the verse, and not just this or that word, such as Remembrance (*dhikr*), Cause (*amr*), or Truth/Reality (*ḥaqq*) are qualified by divine newness, change, and originality. The first instance of this is in the sixth verse of the third sura, *al-Īmān* “Faith” or “Security”. This verse may be considered a re-revelation and explanation of Q12:6 where the phrase mentioned earlier, “[this sura is an] explanation of the meaning of events/*ta’wīl al-aḥādīth*” is the main purpose for the revelation of the Sura of Joseph. In addition, the verse offers a general elucidation of Q12:2, the verse-lemma under which this sura is composed as its *tafsīr*.

“That he (the Bāb) might show you some of his verses and explain to you the meaning of events in accordance with the straight path, in truth straight in a wondrously new and original manner (*badī’ a*)” (QA3 *Sūrat al-Imān*, v. 6; SM51).

li-yuriyakum min āyātihī wa min ta’wīl al-aḥādīth ‘alā’-s- širāṭ al-qayyim bi’l-ḥaqq al-mustaqīm badī’ a

Another example of this is as follows:

“Verily, We have sent down this Book to every community in their own language and we have truly sent this (*hādihā*) Book in the wondrously new language of the Remembrance according to the Truth, with the Truth” (QA4, *Sūrat al-Madīna*, v. 6; SM59).

Innā nahnu nazzalnā al-kitāb ‘alā kulli ummata bilisānihim qad nazzalnā hādihā al-kitāb bi-lisān al-dhikr ‘alā al-ḥaqq bi’l-ḥaqq badī’ a.

Although the word occurs at the end of the verse, its adverbial force applies not only to the obvious possibilities “the tongue of the Remembrance” but it also suffuses the entire verse with the meaning of wondrous, new, and creative, both in a primal originary sense and in the sense of current actuality. This verse also incorporates and thus comments in a “wondrously new way” on Qurān 14:4:

“We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them. Now God leaves straying those whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases: and He is Exalted in power, full of Wisdom” (Yusuf Ali, slightly adjusted).

In its next most frequent occurrence, the adjectival/descriptive element is melded with the nominal/participial/verbal “energy” of the word *badī’*. For example, *al-amr al-badī’*, “this wondrous Revelation” or “new divine Cause” in “*Sūrat al-Mulk*” (Divine Dominion), v.9 (QA1:9).

Inna hādihā la-huwa al-sirr fī al-samawāt wal-arḍ ‘alā al-amr al-badī’ bi-aydi (bi-idhni) Allāh al- ‘Alī kāna bi’l-ḥaqq fī umm al-kitāb maktūba.

“This is the Mystery which hath been hidden from all that are in heaven and on earth, and in this wondrous Revelation it hath, in very truth, been set forth in the Mother Book by the hand of God, the Exalted” (QA1, *Sūrat al-Mulk*, v. 9; SM33; SWB p. 41).

In this verse, *badī’* modifies the important Qurānic covenant word *amr*, “divine Cause”, as in *al-amr al-badī’* (translated as “wondrous Revelation” in SWB). Thus, it provides commentary, *tafsīr*, on the Qurān in a “wondrously new” way through allusion, paraphrase, word association, metaphor, imitation and rhyme. It is really unprecedented or, in Arabic, *badī’*. The word *badī’*, as mentioned, is also connected to the most primal act of divine creation or “origination”: *ibdā’*. Here, the Bāb invokes this meaning when he says that this new Cause, which he declaims in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*—a new textual “mixture” or “reunion” of Text (Qurān) and Commentary (QA)—was decreed in the pre-eternal Mother Book by the very hand of God. Note again the use of the divine attribute “the Exalted” a translation of the Qurānic Arabic word *al- ‘Alī*. It is clearly no accident that this word refers simultaneously to God and to the Bāb, ‘Alī Muḥammad, in the same spiritual thought:

another “divine pun”. In addition to the Mother Book (*umm al-kitāb*, Q3:7; 13:39; 43:4), there are several other Qurānic referents, such as “heavens and earth” (Q *al-samawāt wal-ard, passim*). As a matter of fact, in many verses, such as this one, every word is Qurānic. The originality and creativity, the *badī* quality, resides in the way the Bāb so masterfully rearranges the language to apply to his own message. From one perspective, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is ancient and more familiar than anything else in the culture; from another perspective, it is startlingly, even scandalously new. This is also another example of the coincidence of the opposites so pervasive as a symbol of covenant renewal in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (Lawson 2012, pp. 75–92). The fluidity of the text and mastery of the Qurān that it demonstrates redounded powerfully to the claims implied in the repeated and emphatic use of the word *badī*.

Other adjectival definite nominal uses of *badī* occur throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. Their function is to focus on specific sacred or spiritual ideas in Islām and especially in Shī‘ism. One might consider the sura titles themselves as familiar things now to be recreated for the new age the Bāb was heralding. As such, the “table of contents” of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* functions as a divine to-do list or catalogue of features of culture, religion and society to be renewed, reborn, re-originated, revolutionized (see below). These are words standing for important religious or spiritual principles and/or persons which the Bāb casts in the form where the adjectival/descriptive element is melded with the nominal/participial/verbal “charisma” of the word *badī*, from the most frequent to the least frequent. It should be noted that all of the words thus modified by *badī* are, again, Qurānic, giving the sense of a profoundly new way of reading the ancient holy book:

Remembrance <i>al-dhikr al-badī</i> , x12	“the wondrously new and creative Remembrance (of God)” Note this is one of the Bāb’s titles, along with Gate (<i>al-bāb</i>), Point (<i>al-nuqṭa</i>), and Mystery (<i>al-sirr</i>) among many others (Lawson 1988; see now Heern 2023). QA4:6; QA14:10; QA17:37; QA41:39; QA51:22; 55:28; QA56:21; QA60:42; QA61:30; QA63:29; QA63:36; QA89:11
Verses/Signs <i>al-āyāt al-badī</i> , x11	“the wondrously new and creative divine verses” QA17:30; QA26:17; QA48:37; QA51:22; QA61:20; QA65:12; QA65:35; QA92:8; QA92:13; QA98:23; QA110:34
Words <i>al-kalimat al-badī</i> , x11	“the creative, wondrous divine Word”. Though this seems to occur only once in this precise form there are numerous related expression conjoining words construed on the tri-literal consonantal root K-L-M, such as the nominal plural <i>kalimāt</i> , the verbal/participial <i>kalām</i> and so on, including the frequent <i>kalām Allāh al-badī</i> (see above the section on Identity Melding) QA11:37; QA32:24; QA48:37; QA49:11; QA61:20; QA63:36(x2); QA65:38; QA71:16; QA87:23; QA111:24
Truth/Reality <i>al-ḥaqq al-badī</i> , x11	“the wondrously new Absolute and unchangeable divine Truth” QA3:7; QA4:6; QA5:11; QA6:36; QA25:30; QA26:22; QA32:24; QA41:39; QA37:6; QA92:28; QA92:40
Cause/Command <i>al-amr al-badī</i> , x8	“the wondrously new divine eternal Cause” QA1:9; QA10:38; QA20:19; QA57:39; QA60:7; QA87:23; QA88:7; QA91:22
Permission <i>al-idhn al-badī</i> , x4	“the wondrously new divine Permission” QA25:35; QA28:37; QA61:31; QA110:7
Fire <i>al-nār al-badī</i> , x5	“the wondrously new divine Fire” this is used two ways, (1) in reference to the source of inspiration, along the lines of divine presence and (2) as punishment, Hell QA1:14; QA18:22; QA99:35(x3)
True Meaning <i>al-ta’wīl al-badī</i> , x5	“the wondrously new Interpretation” QA3:2; QA7:17; QA18:29; QA38:41 (x2)
Summons <i>al-nidā al-badī</i> , x3	“the wondrously new divine Call or Summons” QA29:13; QA75:6; QA85:25
Speaker <i>al-nāṭiq al-badī</i> , x2	“the wondrously new Speaker of the divine” QA11:37; QA91:6

1 each:

Bayān <i>al-bayān al-badī</i>	“the wondrously new divine Revelation or Apocalypse” The Arabic word <i>bayān</i> will become most important as the title of the Bāb’s last major work in which foretells the coming of “He whom God will make manifest”. The Qur’anic word is one of several meaning revelation or apocalypse (Lawson 2017, pp. 27–56) QA17:28
Law <i>al-farḍ al-badī</i>	“the wondrously new Law” QA59:15
Origination <i>al-ibdā’ al-badī</i>	“the wondrously new origination from nothing, <i>ex nihilo</i>) QA25:21
Composition <i>al-inshā’ al-badī</i>	“the wondrously new Production or Life” QA87:23
Scroll <i>al-saṭr al-badī</i>	“the wondrously new Scroll” QA76:35
Exegesis <i>al-tafsīr al-badī</i>	“this (<i>dhālika</i>) wondrously new Tafsīr/Explanation (of the Qur’ān)” QA110:41

In addition to these definite nouns in combination with a corresponding nominal adjective, there are several instances of the word *badī* in clear reference to the Bāb but also grammatically indefinite. This occurs in the Bāb’s paraphrase or imitation of the Qur’anic phrase “from One All-wise, All-aware/*min ladun ḥakīmīn khabīrīn*” at the end of Q11:1:

Alif Lam Ra. A Book whose verses are set clear, and then distinguished, from One All-wise, All-aware (Arberry).

This phrase is re-cast at least four times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* as *min ladun badī* in “from one, or from the presence of one, who is a wondrously new originator” (QA6:36, QA11:14, QA81:22, and QA84:4). It seems clear that this phrase is a direct reference to the Bāb’s distinctive and prodigious literary creativity in addition to the wondrous newness of more strictly religious themes and topics as listed in the titles of the suras below. Of course, it also refers to God, and is therefore another instance of identity melding.

In addition to such nominal instances of the ideas in the root B-D- Ayn, there are also several verbal and related participial usages such as the third person perfect verb, *bada’ a* “he originated” or in a different form *abda’ a* “he created”, *bada’ nā* “we created” (QA55:22, QA60:14), *bad’*, creation or beginning “in the beginning of the Cause” (QA29:13), “in the creation of the heavens and the earth” (QA56:21), *abda’ a al-ibdā’* “He who originated Origination” (QA65:31, QA25:21), *abḥur al-ibdā’* “the seas of origination” (QA65:38, QA71:16), *al-amr al-badī fī muḥtadī’ alā al-nuḡṭat al-nār* “the wondrously new Cause was in the [first] origination at the very beginning of the creation of fire” (QA87:23; SM713). This striking and quite apposite verse, is quoted here in full:

“Indeed, this is a Goodly Word, its root is firmly established upon the divine throne and its branches are spread and abide throughout heaven by the permission of the Bāb. We bestow its fruit, the divine verses, at all times by the permission of God, when He wants to renew creation through the most wondrous creative divine Cause in the recreation of true justice (*al- adl al-muḥtada*) at the time when primordial fire itself was originated (*alā al-nuḡṭat al-nār*) concealed in the precincts of the divine primordial (cosmogonic) water” (QA87, *Sūrat al-Nabā*, v. 23; SM713).

The translation “the precincts of . . . (cosmogonic) water” is of *ḥawl al-mā*” and conditioned by the Qur’anic presupposition, at Q21:30, that God created all things from water:

“Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? *We made from water every living thing*. Will they not then believe?” (Yusuf Ali).

The operative phrase italicised in the verse is *wa ja 'alnā min al-mā kulla shay*. In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, then, elements such as water become poetic figures for the otherwise scientific and technical term, *ibdā'*. The by now familiar original (*badī'*) water imagery flows through the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* with deep and interconnected poeticism, both intertextual, with regard to the Qurān, and intratextual, with regard to the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* itself. This deserves a separate study.

The word *al-mubtadi'* means creator, originator and also heretic. Vowelled slightly differently, *al-mubtada'*, means created, originated. The “Goodly Word” in the above passage of QA is a reference to the “Goodly Word” which is likened to a “Goodly tree” in Q14:24. The Bāb simply carries on with the simile without actually mentioning the tree. However, his audience would have understood the reference completely. The tree is a well-attested metaphor for the covenant in the Qurān and continues here in the Bāb’s writings and will continue throughout the Bahāī writings (Lawson 2003, 50-3). So when the Bāb says that the Tree has its roots in the divine Throne and its branches fill the sky, which is then a “new sky”, he is anticipating such later Bahāī usages as when Bahāullāh refers to his son ‘Abdul-Bahā, his appointed successor, as the Most Mighty Branch (*al-ghuṣn al-a'zam*). Finally, this verse emphasizes that even though the Bāb’s contemporary writing and covenant appear highly innovative and possibly even heretical, it has all been preordained before time began, precisely at the time of the primordial covenant described at Q7:172.

A final example of the deverbal occurrences of B-D- 'Ayn is the non-Qurānic word *al-mubdi'*, the originator. In Ismaili thought it designates the demiurge in charge of Origination, *al-ibdā'*, which the absolutely transcendent and utterly unknowable God “beyond being and non-being” somehow “created” to carry on the act of immediate creation (Walker 1993, pp. 53, 76, 82–85). Here, and throughout his writings, the Bāb’s basic philosophy seems quite similar to classical Ismaili philosophical theology and its uncompromising, some might even say, stark apophaticism, though we just saw how the starkness of the basic apophaticism is lent colour and intimacy by the use of such cosmogonic metaphors as “water”. The juxtaposition of simultaneous divine remoteness with intimacy would have been familiar to the Bāb’s readership whose faith was already based on such Qurānic “contradictions” as the insistence that God is remote in the sense that “no created things is even like His likeness”, *laysa kamithlihi shay* (Q42:11) coupled with God’s insistence that “We are closer to the human being than his own jugular vein” *nahnu aqrab ilayhi min hablī al-warīd* (Q50:16). Rather than being contradictory, however, such usages are indicative of the deep structure of the text grammar of the Qurān in which the *coincidentia oppositorum* is a permanent and pervasive element (Lawson 2017).

Relentless apophatic philosophical theology also has a strong presence in Shaykhī thought (Corbin 1971–1972, iv:205–300; Hamid 1998; Lawson 2005). In any case, the Bāb uses the word *al-mubdi'* in QA75:4, QA80:24 and QA109:8. All three instances seem clearly to refer to the infinitely and frankly unimaginably transcendent God’s original creative process, a standard meaning for the term, especially in classical Ismaili philosophy (Kāshānī 2014; Walker 1993, pp. 72–80; Landolt 2001, p. 87, Sijistānī, Peerwani (tr), *passim*). However, in the context of the pervasive *badī'* motif present from beginning to end of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and evoked in so many related words and textual interrelationships, the word acquires a special status as yet another reference to the Bāb’s artistic and literary creativity.

This survey of the *badī'* vocabulary is incomplete and makes no claim to thoroughness. A more complete study is at least partly dependent upon the eventual publication of a critical edition of the text and while progress has been made here, especially in the very impressive work by Ṭālibī (referred to in this article as “SM”) many questions regarding minor variants, versification, vocabulary, grammar and other issues remain. Nonetheless, enough has been translated and analysed to make it possible to say without hesitation that a major theme of the Bāb’s *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is the renewal of the ancient so-called Abrahamic covenant and this in a highly creative and original, even heretical, manner.

10. Chapter Titles of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and the Spirit of *badī*'

The subtle and nuanced, yet powerful and uncompromising manner in which the Bāb is calling for a universal change, renewal of life, time and history may be thought symbolized in the 111 titles of the suras of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. This "Table of Contents" functions as a catalogue of things to be renewed, miraculously recreated, "re"-originated and revolutionized. These titles are words that represent the most sacred elements of Islām and especially Ithna 'Ashari Shi 'ism. Thus, the Bāb thinks not only in terms of renewal with regard to the covenant, though this is obviously a major part of the plan and the source of all other renewals. He also thinks of enchantment and vivification as these are connotations of the word *badī*'. The following table of titles gives an idea of the cornucopian intention of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*: each of the items represent a feature of life, religion and creation that is being, or is destined shortly to be, re-created through the power of *badī*', personified in the return of the hidden Imām. Each of the following titles is preceded by the word *sūra*, and so carries the definite article *al-* (even for Fāṭima and Muḥammad) except suras 5, Yūsuf, "Joseph" and 45, *Huwa*, "He/Him". For formatting purposes, some of the titles have been abbreviated and may appear misspelled in English.

1 Dominion (<i>al-mulk</i>)	38 Faṭima (<i>al-fāṭima</i>)	75 Sun (<i>al-shams</i>)
2 Clergy (<i>al- 'ulamā</i>)	39 Thanks (<i>al-shukr</i>)	76 Leaf (<i>al-waraqā</i>)
3 Security (<i>al-īmān</i>)	40 Human i (<i>al-insān</i>)	77 Peace (<i>al-salām</i>)
4 The City (<i>al-madīna</i>)	41 Book (<i>al-kitāb</i>)	78 Appearance (<i>al-zuhūr</i>)
5 Joseph (<i>Yūsuf</i>)	42 Covenant (<i>al- 'ahd</i>)	79 Word (<i>al-kalima</i>)
6 Martyrdom (<i>al-shahāda</i>)	43 Unique (<i>al-wahīd</i>)	80 Noon (<i>al-zawāl</i>)
7 Visitation (<i>al-ziyāra</i>)	44 Dream (<i>al-ru'yā</i>)	81 Kāf (<i>al-kāf</i>)
8 Oneness (<i>al-tawhīd</i>)	45 He (<i>huwa</i>)	82 Most Great (<i>al-a 'zam</i>)
9 Mystery (<i>al-sirr</i>)	46 Mirror (<i>al-mirāt</i>)	83 B (<i>al-bā the letter "b"</i>)
10 Cloud (<i>al- 'amā</i>)	47 Proof (<i>al-ḥujja</i>)	84 Name (<i>al-ism</i>)
11 The Writing (<i>al-musaṭṭar</i>)	48 Summons (<i>al-nidā</i>)	85 Truth (<i>al-ḥaqq</i>)
12 Atonement (<i>al- 'āshūrā</i>)	49 Principles i (<i>al-aḥkām</i>)	86 Bird (<i>al-ṭayr</i>)
13 Paradise (<i>al-firdaws</i>)	50 Principles ii (<i>al-aḥkām</i>)	87 Announcement (<i>al-nabā</i>)
14 Holy (<i>al-quds</i>)	51 Glory (<i>al-majd</i>)	88 Sending (<i>al-iblāgh</i>)
15 Will (<i>al-mashiyya</i>)	52 Wisdom (<i>al-faḍl</i>)	89 Human ii (<i>al-insān</i>)
16 Throne (<i>al- 'arsh</i>)	53 Patience (<i>al-ṣabr</i>)	90 Triplicity (<i>al-tathlīth</i>)
17 Gate (<i>al-bāb</i>)	54 Youth (<i>al-ghulām</i>)	91 Quaternity (<i>al-tarbī ')</i>
18 Path (<i>al-ṣirāṭ</i>)	55 Pillar (<i>al-rukṅ</i>)	92 Glorified (<i>al-mujallal</i>)
19 Sinai (<i>al-sīnā</i>)	56 Cause (<i>al-amr</i>)	93 Bees (<i>al-naḥl</i>)
20 Light (<i>al-nūr</i>)	57 Elixir (<i>al-iksīr</i>)	94 Testimony (<i>al-ishhād</i>)
21 Trees (<i>al-shajar</i>)	58 Sadness (<i>al-ḥuzn</i>)	95 Knowing (<i>al- 'ilm</i>)
22 Water (<i>al-mā</i>)	59 Perceptive Hearts (<i>al-af 'ida</i>)	96 Battle i (<i>al-qitāl</i>)
23 Afternoon (<i>al- 'aṣr</i>)	60 Remembrance i (<i>al-dhikr</i>)	97 Battle ii (<i>al-qitāl</i>)
24 Value (<i>al-qadr</i>)	61 Ḥusayn (<i>al-ḥusayn</i>)	98 Struggle i (<i>al-jihād</i>)
25 Seal (<i>al-khātām</i>)	62 Friends (<i>al-awliyā</i>)	99 Struggle ii (<i>al-jihād</i>)
26 Lawful (<i>al-ḥill</i>)	63 Mercy (<i>al-rahma</i>)	100 Struggle iii (<i>al-jihād</i>)
27 Lights (<i>al-anwār</i>)	64 Muḥammad (<i>al-muḥammad</i>)	101 Battle iii (<i>al-qitāl</i>)
28 Kinship (<i>al-qarāba</i>)	65 The Unseen (<i>al-ghayb</i>)	102 Battle iv (<i>al-qitāl</i>)
29 Hourī (<i>al-ḥūrīyya</i>)	66 ExclusUnity (<i>al-aḥādīyya</i>)	103 Pilgrimage (<i>al-ḥajj</i>)
30 Teaching (<i>al-tablīgh</i>)	67 Origination (<i>al-inshā</i>)	104 Laws (<i>al-ḥudūd</i>)
31 Honor (<i>al- 'izz</i>)	68 Promise (<i>al-wa 'd</i>)	105 Principles iii (<i>al-aḥkām</i>)
32 Living (<i>al-ḥayy</i>)	69 Return (<i>al-raj 'a</i>)	106 Friday (<i>al-jum 'a</i>)
33 Victory (<i>al-naṣr</i>)	70 Justice (<i>al-qisṭ</i>)	107 Marriage (<i>al-nikāḥ</i>)
34 Hint (<i>al-ishāra</i>)	71 Pen (<i>al-qalam</i>)	108 Remembr. ii (<i>al-dhikr</i>)
35 Servitude (<i>al- 'ubūdiyya</i>)	72 Camel (<i>al-ba 'īr</i>)	109 Servant (<i>al- 'abd</i>)
36 Justice (<i>al- 'adl</i>)	73 Cave (<i>al-kaḥf</i>)	110 Avant-garde (<i>al-sābiqīm</i>)
37 Interpretation (<i>al-ta 'bīr</i>)	74 Friend (<i>al-khalīl</i>)	111 Believers (<i>al-mu'minīn</i>)

This list then is a catalogue of things to be “re”-originated: “*badī*’-ified”. It may not include everything but what it does include certainly goes to the heart and soul of historical and cultural Islām as believed and practiced in the Bāb’s milieu. Each of these titles could be the subject of a separate article or even book, so rich is their meaning and history as background for the rise of the Bābī religion. Each and all of these various topics, ideas, things, rituals, obligations, virtues and even persons are envisioned in this text as being re-created, re-originated, re-thought, re-conceived, re-imagined, and reborn.

11. Conclusions

In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* the Bāb—and by extension his followers, the Bābīs—is remarkably uninterested in Tradition, *Sunna*, unlike most Islamic groups, even in the 19th century. This text is, instead, concerned with change, creativity, and originality—which bespeaks concern for a future. Such ideas are firmly part of the semantic make-up of the Arabic word *badī*’, which happens to be a perfect antonym for *sunna* (tradition). As it happens, the word in Islamic theology (‘*ilm al-kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) for heresy is *bid’*’a (pl. *bida*’) construed on the same tri-literal consonantal root B-D-‘Ayn. Such gives some idea, then, of the doctrinal tensions generated by the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* whether with regard to its contents or form.

Whereas Ibn ‘Arabī spoke of the “mercification” of existence as the ontological and cosmogonic process par excellence (Beneito 1998), the Bāb seems to opt for something like the “wondrification” of existence for the same phenomenon and process. As mentioned, throughout the history of Islamic thought there have been various metaphorizations for the discussion of cosmogony and ontology. For Avicenna the term was, in fact, being (*wujūd*), for Suhrawardī, the central cosmogonic and ontic principle was light (*nūr*), for Ibn ‘Arabī it was, as mentioned, mercy (*rahma*), and for Mullā Ṣadrā it was motion (*ḥaraka jawhariyya*). For the Bāb the ontic principle emerges as wonder: wonder is created through the wondrous, original and innovative creative power of God, *al-Badī*’, The Originator, *par excellence* (as in Q2:117 and 6:101) and the result of this creative power, what the uninitiated might call “mere” creation is also wonder and wondrousness (*al-inshā al-badī*’, as in QA104:5). The source of this wonder is, again, the apophatic divinity who simply cannot be known, but somehow is. Both form and contents, subject and object are saturated in wonder, originality and the new. The related word *bid’*’a “heresy” which also means novelty, is thus addressed by virtue of etymological contiguity. The Bāb seems to be saying, among many other things, that just because something was not found in the Sunna (which word, as we saw, is a perfect antonym for *badī*’) does not mean that it is de facto heretical. Thus, in some sense, the whole notion of heresy is neutralized or at least recreated, reconstructed.

The cosmos, its source, the method by which it comes to be and everything in it is electric with a wondrous, creative ever-renewing, ever-changing energy. This truth is asserted by the verbal noun *badī*’ and its numerous adverbial deployments in the Bāb’s composition. Such calls to mind Ibn ‘Arabī’s *sarayān*, the cosmic “circulation” and “interpenetration” of the divine form or substance, Life, *al-Ḥayāt*, derived from the Qurānic divine attribute mentioned earlier, The Living, *al-Ḥayy*, a companion word with *al-Qayyūm*. This substance came to be understood as “guardianship” *walāya*, and as such a symbol of the covenant, in the works of such Imāmī Shī‘ī scholars as Ḥaydar Amuli (d. 1411) and Rajab Bursi (d. 1388) where Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas of the Perfect Man were applied to an understanding of the Imām. Although the Bāb does not use this term *sarayān* in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, there may be a somewhat veiled reference to it in his identification of himself as the “*suryānī/sarayānī* mystery” (QA109:8) in addition to the explicit reference to Bursi’s “Imāmization” of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *sarayān* in the previous verse where he refers to the “letter B which circulates in the water of the letters/*al-bā al-sā’ira fī l-mā al-ḥurūf*” (QA109:7). Browne’s original intuition, so many years ago, that the Bāb’s ideas had a connection with the mystical philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī, seems to have been a valid one (Browne 1889, p. 909; see now Rafati (1992) for an extended study of Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas in Bahāī writings).

If the Akhbārī (not to be confused with *Akbarī*) *tafsīr* project issued in a thorough-going “Imāmization” or “Imāmification” of the Qurān (Lawson 2006) the Bāb’s hermeneutical method results in what might be even more awkwardly referred to as a *badī’* fiction of the Qurān, Islām, the world of the unseen and revelation and, most importantly, perspective. Interestingly, this cosmogonic metaphor does not appear emphasized in the writings of the first two Shaykhī masters, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāī and Sayid Kāẓim Rashtī. So, when their students, the eventual Letters of the Living, encountered it in the Bāb’s writing they would have experienced a freshness in the discourse adding to the experience of the new they felt in encountering this unusual text.

This then gives some idea of the semantic, ideational and poetic range of meanings and effects his early followers would have read, heard or felt in the writings of the Bāb. In a sense, the word *badī’* energizes and provides movement and continuity throughout the composition. This movement was infectious and important because it represents a blessed relief from the stasis and paralysis which seemed to his young followers—all professional scholars at the rank of what we might term junior professor or senior graduate students—the very opposite of life. Judgment Day became Covenantal Renewal, with no end of the world in sight. This meant hope for the future for these young people, their families and, ultimately, all humanity.

Islām, as historically understood and presented with its doctrine of the finality of prophethood in Muḥammad, conflated this finality with a finality of covenantal renewal, even if there had been a “covenantal extension” put in play through the line of Imāms and, to some extent, in the Sufi orders. The covenant was always central to Islamic religious culture. In this work by the Bāb, the covenant is revived, re-enacted, and redeployed. In the above discussion, the term *badī’* was singled out for a close study because in the text grammar or literary flow of the work it is clear that this word symbolized for the Bāb and his audience the powerful forces of change they felt. There are other key words in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* a focused study of which is likely to reveal the same profound concern or sacralization of the new, of change, of wonderment, of beauty and artistry. The first of these which comes to mind is the word “point”, *al-nuqṭa*, a word repeated perhaps hundreds of times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and one of the Bāb’s best known titles, the Primal Point (*al-nuqṭat al-ūlā*). The word has a deep sense of “new beginning”, as in the dot of ink that generates script/language, or the point which generates a line, then a field, then a cube (Schimmel 1987). Unfortunately, space does not permit further exploration of this term here (See Lawson 2021).

Prior to the Bāb’s proclamation in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, the followers of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim had felt a certain newness astir in the teachings of their masters. However, for many, especially those who would eventually come to be known as the Letters of the Living (*ḥurūf al-hayy*), the Bāb’s *Qayyūm al-Asmā* manifested a newness that was much more radical than anything written by either of the two Shaykhī masters. It had been possible, heretofore, for their followers to consider Muḥammad’s as the last covenant in line with the doctrine of finality mentioned above. Such finality is patently rejected in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. However, with the rejection of finality does not come the rejection of sacredness because this newer covenant is utterly dependent upon the older covenant, just as that covenant should be seen as a renewal of the original covenant told in the Hebrew Bible, and most explicitly in the Qurān as the *Day of Alast* (Q7:172). It is the idea and excitement of covenantal renewal proclaimed in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and the fresh performance of that pre-eternal scenario it calls for that is most fervently felt in the history of the early Bābī movement.

Henry Corbin sensed this quite accurately if somewhat vaguely derisively. He insisted that the Bahāī Faith, beginning with the Bābī period, had put itself quite outside the concerns of Shī‘ism by virtue of it having violated the “secret of occultation” in claiming that an actual messianic figure had appeared on the historical plane rather than remain hidden in the spiritual world of images or the imaginal realm, the *‘ālam al-mithāl* (Corbin 1971–1972, iv:332). This of course is precisely the point the Bāb was making in the

Qayyūm al-Asmā. Additionally, it is a point which indicates a truism about Imāmī Shī'ism: without an Imām that is hidden, it ceases to exist. Not only does the Bāb insist that the sacramental waiting (*intizār*) is over, he radically challenges the idea of revelation itself by surreptitiously claiming authorship for the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, a rather disturbing idea in the context of his insistence in many passages that the book is from God, or the hidden Imām. This authorial claim, strongly hinted throughout the text in the incessant use of the word *badī'*, occurs in two sets of disconnected letters he uses to begin two sequential suras toward the end of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. There, it appears he wishes to take credit and responsibility for the composition of this avant-garde revelation by signing his name 'Alī Muḥammad in the disguise of disconnected letters for suras 108 and 109 (Lawson 2017, pp. 157–59). This is an extremely bold gesture but one that ensures that it is not wrong to classify the claim that he received the text from the hidden Imām in QA1:10 as pious fiction. That is, pious fiction if we are to consider the hidden Imām as a miraculously long-lived human whom the Bāb “met” in the same way he met Mullā Ḥusayn. However, if we are to consider the hidden Imām as symbolic of the principle of imagination and revelation, and thus always hidden, then the claim is certainly anything but fraudulent. It is a bit puzzling why Corbin could not see this. While Corbin’s scholarship is important for a study of the ideas in the Bābī and Bahāī writings (Velasco 2004) this does not mean that he had a deep interest in them, or even knew them. There is no evidence of his ever having actually read them (Lawson 2005, p. 153).

The uniqueness of the Bāb’s understanding and his interpretation of the Qurān and especially the sura of Joseph, may be appreciated further if we consider the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* as a literary actualization of the reunion of Jacob with his beloved son Joseph. *Tafsīr*, exegesis of the Qurān, consists of two parts: (1) Text; and (2) Commentary. This is true in all cases of Qurān commentary, from the very earliest to the present, whether the commentary is doctrinal, historical, mystical, philosophical or social. In light of this, and notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, the Bāb’s *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* may be considered a standard example because it is composed of two parts, Text and Commentary. However, the relationship between these two parts in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is quite different to standard Qurān commentaries. There the all-important Commentary following the Text is generally signalled by some connective language, such as “this means that” (*ya nī*) or “the intention here is” (*al-murād*). Such connectives were in fact quite present in the Bāb’s earlier *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara*.

With the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* there is no marked exegetic or hermeneutic transition. Thus, the relation between text and commentary is presented as being much more “intimate” than it is in exegeses which use such standard connective terms as *al-murād* “the intention of the text here is”, *ya nī* or *āy*, “that is:”. Or those works that arrange the text so that there is a clear typographical separation, through paragraphing or some other device, between the text and the commentary. The words of our commentator, the Bāb, are immediately and intimately entwined and braided with the words of the Text, the Qurān, as we have seen above in a few examples. Such, quite apart from being very difficult to translate and make clear in English, goes to the very centre of the spirituality of the text, thus seen as a loving literary embrace of the old with the new, of Jacob with Joseph, both of whom are esteemed in Islamic theological philosophy as Words of God and whose identities are thus blurred to some extent: together they represent the ceaselessness of divine communication. This textual structure represents a revelation of the divine presence through the powerful story of the reunion of the broken hearted Jacob with his beloved son Joseph and the simultaneous renewal of the eternal covenant and future such renewal symbolizes. Such also resonates quite powerfully with the idea of the return of the hidden Imām and, in the process, generates a new—*badī'*—sacred music of apocalypse.

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Abbreviations

<i>Dawnbreakers</i>	(see Zarandī (1974) below)
EI2	<i>The Encyclopaedia of Islām</i> , 2nd edition, online at Brill Online.
QA	<i>Qayyūm al-Asmā</i>
SM	P. Ṭālibī. <i>Sirr-i Maṣṭūr</i>

Verse numbers and sura chapter titles are taken from this. Versification here is sometimes at variance with that in QA. SM is an excellent source proposing vowelings for the entire text, Persian translation, and discussion of Qurānic verses.

SWB	<i>Selections from the Writings of the Bāb</i>
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Notes

- ¹ “[The Bahá’ís] must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islām—the source and background of their Faith—and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur’ān which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá’í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God.” ([Shoghi Effendi 1939](#), p. 49).
- ² All translations from QA, except where otherwise indicated, are by the author and quite provisional.
- ³ [Bausani \(2000\)](#), p. 381, has a slightly different translation. My thanks to Mr. Iscander Micael [Tinto \(2022\)](#) for his kind advice about the English translation suggested here.
- ⁴ On the vexed issue of using English rhetorical and grammatical terminology when speaking about Arabic literature, see the thoughtful and illuminating article by [Rashwan \(2020\)](#).

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