



## ‘ABD-AL-QĀHER JORJĀNĪ

‘ABD-AL-QĀHER JORJĀNĪ, ABŪ BAKR B. ‘ABD-AL-RAḤMĀN, celebrated grammarian, rhetorician, and literary theorist, born in Gorgān (date unknown), where he died in 471/1078. Despite his fame and the fact that one of his earliest biographers, Bākarzī, was a neighbor of his, little is known about his life and education. The richness of cultural life in Gorgān in his time is evident from the range and depths of his interests and vast knowledge, particularly as he is reported to have received his education in Gorgān itself, not traveling “in search of knowledge” as was customary. He himself, however, laments the poor state of learning and the learned (*‘elm* and the *‘olamā*) and satirizes the times and their values in sharp, embittered poetry, as well as in his prose writings.

Although of Persian origin, Jorjānī did not write in Persian; he makes no significant use of Persian except for a brief reference to a Persian line of poetry, of which he quotes only an Arabic translation when discussing a specific aspect of imagery. He studied Arabic grammar under Abu’l-Ḥosayn Fāresī, a nephew of the famous Abū ‘Alī Fāresī; this may partly explain his keen interest in the latter’s *Ketāb al-īzāh*, on which he wrote two commentaries, one in thirty volumes entitled *al-Moḡnī*, the other a short version entitled *al-Moqtaṣad* (or *al-Moqtaṣab*).

Jorjānī also wrote two grammatical treatises (upon which his reputation rests in the early biographies), *Ketāb al-ḵomal* and *Me’a ‘āmel* (or *al-‘Awāmel al-me’a*), which represent an approach to grammar based on the formal functions of grammatical categories as they affect the surface structure of linguistic



utterance. But his more penetrating work on grammar is his structural analysis in *Dalā’el al-e’jāz*, in which he explores the nature of meaning, signification, syntactic patterns, and the interplay and correspondence between the structure of thought and the structure of language; here he concentrates on the deep structure of linguistic utterance. The two approaches complement each other; combined, they represent one of the most comprehensive analyses of Arabic syntactic structures and grammatical principles ever attempted. In his other major work, *Asrār al-balāḡa*, he explores the nature of metaphorical thinking, its implications for poetic as well as religious language and religious belief, and the nature, function, and various forms of poetic imagery. In both his major works, his training as a theologian (*motakallem*) in the Ash‘arite tradition (he was also a Shafe‘ite ) is evident on the level of convictions, analysis, and arguments.

Other writings of Jorjānī dealt with the inimitability (*e’jāz*) of the Qur’ān, commentary on the *Fāteḥa*, and prosody and etymology, and he compiled an anthology of the poetry of Abū Tammām, Boḥtorī, and Motanabbī, which reflects a positive attitude toward the poetry of modernism in the ‘Abbasid period.

Jorjānī is perhaps the only classical literary theorist who is acknowledged by both the traditional Arab rhetoricians and modern writers trained in Western literary theory to have made a genuine and lasting contribution to the understanding of the creative process. His contribution is best represented in his theory of construction (*naẓm*) and in his analysis of poetic imagery. Comparisons between his views and those of some leading modern linguists and literary critics have been made by, among others, Moḥammad Mandūr, M. L. ‘Ašmāvī, and K. Abu Deeb.

Jorjānī’s theory of construction represents the climax of three centuries of exploration by Arab writers of the mysteries of artistic superiority, expressiveness, poetic structure, the relationship between form and content, the role of individual words in literary composition, and the nature and function of poetic imagery. Discussions of these issues originated as an inquiry into the nature of the inimitability of the Qur’ān, proclaimed in the Qur’ān itself without, however, any specific mention of those aspects which rendered them inimitable. The thinking of earlier writers, with few exceptions, was dominated by a harmful duality of words (*lafẓ*) and meanings (*ma’ānī*); some argued that the inimitability was due to the Qur’ān’s words; others, that it was due to its meaning. Jorjānī developed a current of thought evident in an



embryonic form in the writings of Kaṭṭābī (388/998) and the Mu‘tazilite judge ‘Abd-al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad (415/1025), who, like Jorjānī, was a Shafe‘ite and whose work may have influenced Jorjānī’s. He rejects the duality, advancing the theory that neither words alone nor meanings alone can explain literary expressiveness in general or the inimitability of the Qur’ān in particular, and arguing that beauty and expressive power are functions of the interaction between semantic constituents of a literary composition as they are organized in a specific syntactic pattern, i.e., a specific construction (*naẓm*). The construction embodies the structure of experience underlying the composition, and it consists in “a single act of formulation.” It is, therefore, indivisible into meaning and words; it exists and functions as a harmonious totality within which every element interacts with, modifies, and is modified by the total structure. No element is extraneous or superfluous, and any change in the syntactic structure engenders changes in the semantic structure itself. Construction, Jorjānī argues, is nothing but the fulfillment of the requirements imposed by the grammar of the language. But grammar here does not represent the set of criteria which determine correctness and incorrectness; it is the body of rules which organize the relationships between meanings into a given pattern determined by the structure of experience itself. For Jorjānī, meaning does not exist outside its own form, and it is a heresy to say that the same meaning can be expressed in two different ways, one being more, or less, eloquent than another. He sees in this heresy the roots of many misconceptions about language, poetry, and literary expression in general.

Underlying this concept of construction are three fundamental views of language: Language is a system of relations; language is a convention; linguistic signs are arbitrary. (These concepts have been of crucial importance in modern linguistics ever since they were identified by F. de Saussure in *Cours de linguistique générale*, 5th ed., Paris, 1955, pp. 100f.) Accordingly, a word does not possess any inherent relationship to its referent and can not reveal this referent more adequately than another word can reveal its own referent. Furthermore, a word does not mean fully until it enters into an active relationship with other words, forming a particular syntactic pattern. In isolation, a word is neither more or less poetic than any other word in the language; its beauty and expressive power derive entirely from its role within its immediate context and within the context of the literary composition.

Images are like individual words; apart from a minimal degree of beauty (which an image possesses by virtue of its being a revelation of similarity



between dissimilar objects, expressed in predominantly sensuous terms), an image possesses no inherent appeal in isolation from its context. Its artistic achievement derives from its interaction with its context and from the particular syntactic pattern in which it is formulated. The Koranic verse *wa ešta'ala al-ra'so šayban* (“and the head was set ablaze with hoariness”) has long been admired. It is beautiful because of its function within its context and of its structural properties (verb + subject defined with *al* rather than the pronoun *ya* + a noun in the accusative used as a specification [*tamyīz*], rather than because of any inherent beauty in the comparison of the spreading of hoariness to fire. If the verse were changed into *wa ešta'ala al-šaybo fī'l-ra'se*, its power and beauty would be lost. An image is also a distinct process of conveying a meaning. Two such processes are identified by Jorjānī: meaning and the meaning of meaning. Literal statement, such as “the woman smiled,” expresses a meaning which is conveyed directly. Metaphorical expressions express, rather, a meaning which does not in itself represent the ultimate statement made by the expression but which generates, after analysis and interpretation, a second, non-immediate meaning, or a meaning of meaning (e.g., in the *kenāya* “there is plenty of Ash'arite under Zayd's cauldron,” constructed in praise of Zayd). Imagery is thus viewed by Jorjānī as both a distinct act of imaginative creation and a distinct process of communication. It is neither a decorative device which ornaments an already expressed meaning nor a substitute for literal statement, as has been widely believed both in Arabic and European studies (cf. I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, New York, 1965, chap. 5).

With such a complex phenomenon as metaphorical language firmly established as an organic part of the process of poetic creation, and with many fundamental syntactic patterns in Arabic exhaustively analyzed, Jorjānī proceeds, in *Asrār al-balāgha*, to explore poetic imagery in depth. He discusses the nature and function of *majāz* (transference) and classifies its various forms. He bases his entire analysis on a clear distinction between two types of *majāz*, one pertaining to the intellect (*'aqlī*), the other to language (*loḡavī*), and between two fundamental relationships of transference, similarity and contiguity. The first relationship he asserts to be the reason d'être of *este'āra* (roughly, but not exactly, “metaphor”), denying firmly that the second relationship can produce *este'āra*. He then identifies two basic types of *este'āra*, one based on proportional analogy and involving no transference of any kind, the other based on direct similarity and involving linguistic transposition. He proceeds to classify the various forms of the second type on



the basis of the nature of the dominant trait upon which an *este'āra* is constructed. Throughout, he reveals the fascination, beauty, richness, and precision of *este'āra*, considering it the highest manifestation of creativity. Rejecting the widely held (and basically Aristotelian) view that *este'āra* is based on transference, i.e., using a word in a meaning other than its original one, he demonstrates that *este'āra* is not a verbal device but an interaction between meanings and contexts. He thus defines *este'āra* as a double unit, originating in the fusion of two entities in the imagination and in borrowing a meaning (trait or set of traits) which belongs to one object to attribute it to another. This process is embodied on the linguistic level in applying the word which designates the first object to the second. (But there is a type of *este'āra* in which the application of the word occurs without there being a second identifiable object, as in religious language describing the physical attributes of God.) *Este'āra* is thus defined on the basis of similarity and borrowing. No expression which lacks either of these two features can form an *este'āra*; hence the copula, as in "John is a lion," does not form an *este'āra* but a compressed and intensified simile (*tašbīh balīḡ*). Indeed, all forms of the image are defined through two criteria, i.e., as acts of imaginative creation embodied in distinct linguistic formulae. Thus Jorjānī distinguishes between *este'āra*, *tašbīh*, *tamṭīl*, and the other forms of imagery. He refutes the view (which derives from Aristotle and still dominates Western criticism) that *este'āra* is nothing but a compressed simile, arguing that these are two different figures and offering subtle analysis of their similarities and dissimilarities. Then, with equal sophistication and depth of treatment, he explores *tamṭīl*, complex simile, reversed simile and *ta'līl takyīlī* (imaginative explanation). In the process, he describes with remarkable precision the imaginative basis for the creation of symbolist imagery and the nature of symbolization.

At the roots of Jorjānī's analysis lies a basic distinction between two types of similarity, one easily comprehensible and requiring no interpretation (*ta'avvol*), the other complex and requiring various degrees of subtlety and intellectual effort for its comprehension and revelation. This division is generated by a more basic division arising from the nature of the very process of simile. Similes can be based either on an attribute in itself (*fī'l-ṣefate nafsehā wa ḥaqīqate jensehā*), as in comparing cheeks to roses, or on a quality generated by an attribute and resulting from it (*fī ḥokmen li'l-ṣefa wa moqtaḏā*), as in comparing the impact of eloquent words to honey. Images differ in their appeal according to the degree of interpretation required for their revelation and understanding. Jorjānī thus establishes freshness,



strangeness, unexpectedness, and ambiguity as fundamental aesthetic criteria. Furthermore, he defines creativity itself in terms of the power of imagery to reveal the hidden affinities between dissimilar objects; the more hidden the affinities are, the more creative the poet who reveals them and the greater the thrill generated by the image. In the revelation of similarity, the poet becomes a genuine creator. Nowhere are these beliefs of Jorjānī more evident than in his analysis of the power of *tamtīl*, in which he identifies the real creative function of imagery as being the discovery of pattern, the revelation of the essential unity of the universe.

Jorjānī's analysis of similarity, and the impact of imagery in particular, is underlined by psychological principles pertaining to the nature of the human psyche and human comprehension. The recognition of similarity between dissimilar objects, especially when embodied in sensuous images, generates an incomparable thrill. This is due to the fact that man's comprehension of reality derives from his first physical contact with it, from direct sense experience. Abstraction is a later process. An image which presents a sensuous detail in order to convey an abstract notion is thus stirring something deeply rooted in man. And the more detailed the points of sensuous similarity, the greater the pleasure and effectiveness of the image, for the comprehension of details requires heightened perception, intuition, and sharpness of vision, which are the mark of the creative poet, whereas the comprehension of totalities and generalities (*jomal*) is common and immediate and, therefore, less exciting. Jorjānī's work here is dominated by a strongly Gestaltist view of the psyche.

Jorjānī's exploration of imagery reaches its climax of sophistication and originality when he discusses the role of the image within the total context of the poem. Here, he demonstrates that only contextual criteria can determine whether an image is a genuine act of imaginative creation enriching the semantic structure of the poem or merely a superfluous act of linguistic virtuosity. Furthermore, he explores the structure of the single image and the interaction between two functions of imagery which may be called "the sense-communication function" and "the psychological function," suggesting structural criteria for the understanding and evaluation of imagery. He thus develops an organic and structural approach to imagery (and to poetry in general) which anticipates some major trends in post-Coleridge Western literary criticism. This, as well as many other aspects of his work, makes Jorjānī the closest of all classical Islamic critics to the spirit and critical mentality of our modern era. It is not accidental that, since the beginning of



the modern Arab cultural renaissance, he has received far greater attention and acclaim than any other critic or rhetorician in the Islamic tradition.

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