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## *Īhām*, or the Technique of Double Meaning in Literature: Its Theory and Practice in the Twelfth Century

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(Received 3 January 2023; revised 21 March 2023; accepted 21 March 2023)

### Abstract

This article examines the chapter on *ihām* (literary amphiboly) in *Ḥadāʾiq al-Siḥr* by Rashīd Vaṭvāt (d. 1182). *Ḥadāʾiq*, a treatise on stylistics with Persian and Arabic examples, is the oldest extant document to define *ihām*. Vaṭvāt's definition of *ihām* sheds light on the mechanism and function of this literary technique. This article argues that *ihām*, according to Vaṭvāt, operates through the creation of semantic fields and defamiliarization. Previous scholars who examined this chapter of *Ḥadāʾiq*, oblivious to this point, have made a number of misinterpretations. However, by analyzing the name he prefers for this figure of speech, the definition he gives, and the examples he cites to explain it, this article demonstrates that Vaṭvāt had this function of defamiliarization in mind.

**Keywords:** Arabic literature; *ihām*; Arabic poetics; comparative literature; *Ḥadāʾiq al-Siḥr*; literary theory; Persian literature; polysemy; Persian poetics; Rashīd al-Dīn Vaṭvāt

In the last years of his poetic career, Rashīd al-Dīn Vaṭvāt of Balkh (d. 1182), the poet laureate, minister, and special secretary of Atsiz Khawarizmshah (1098–1156), authored a short but rich bilingual book entitled *Ḥadāʾiq al-Siḥr fī Daqāʾiq al-Shiʿr* (Gardens of Magic in the Minutiae of Poetry) to describe and define figures of speech. This treatise, which is the second oldest extant Persian work on literary devices, left a profound and lasting impact on Persian and Arabic poetics. *Ḥadāʾiq al-Siḥr* is in many ways worthy of being critically studied. Not only did this treatise marginalize and displace its only Persian precedent—*Tarjumān al-Balāgha* (The Translator of Eloquence), the only available manuscript of which remained unknown for more than eight centuries—it also is the only medieval Persian taxonomy of figurative techniques, on the model of which several handbooks were composed in premodern periods. In addition, Vaṭvāt set forth a number of innovations on stylistic topics, introducing specific literary devices, for the first time in history.

One of the most detailed chapters of *Ḥadāʾiq al-Siḥr* is dedicated to defining and teaching the technique of *ihām* (amphiboly, or double meaning) through examples. None of Vaṭvāt's Arabic and Persian models had laid out an explanation of this stylistic device in this manner, making this chapter highly significant for comprehending medieval poetics. Accordingly, its contents deserve to be examined analytically and in detail. Despite its importance, however, this chapter of *Ḥadāʾiq al-Siḥr* has remained understudied. Among Western scholars, Bonebakker, in his book *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya*, which deals with the emergence of this figure of speech and its initial stages of development, has provided a survey of this

chapter and analyzed most of the examples mentioned in it.<sup>1</sup> His research is undeniably replete with valuable points, and throughout his study he takes an analytical look at the medieval scholar's comments on the technique of double meaning. On many occasions, he raises critical points regarding the definitions they propose and examples they quote. However, as will be demonstrated in the following discussion, he did not thoroughly consider all aspects of this section of *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr*, and his research does not address all the points made by Vaṭvāt. Moreover, unfortunately, some of his inferences reflect errors and misinterpretations.

This article provides a fresh analysis of *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr*'s chapter on *ihām*. I begin with a discussion of the history, in which this literary technique is identified and introduced, and then scrutinize its names and definition. Thereafter, I examine the evidentiary verses mentioned in *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* to explain the double meanings created by various types of *ihām*, with the goal of elucidating the nuances of this semantic strategy. Finally, I analyze instances of *ihām* in Vaṭvāt's poetry to demonstrate use of this figure of speech by one of its first theorizers. The primary purpose of this essay is to analyze the aesthetic mechanism of *ihām* and shed light on this subtle literary technique, as perceived and practiced in its first stages of development.

### The Historical Background of *ihām*

*Ihām* (or *tauriya*, as it is more commonly called in Arabic) is one of the most prominent semantic strategies in Persian and Arabic poetry. Although this literary technique is theorized in the twelfth century, it has a longer history in practice, and scholars have verified its examples even in the Qur'an and the works of early Arab poets.<sup>2</sup> This figure of speech becomes especially popular among both the Persian mannerist and mystic poets and is one of the essential features of their poetry.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, studying the aesthetic mechanism of *ihām*, the way this stylistic device deepens and beautifies literary discourse, paves the way for a better comprehension of some of the semantic intricacies of Persian and Arabic works of literature.

We cannot say with certainty what book first introduced this definition of *ihām*. Two contemporary literary scholars, Vaṭvāt and Usāma b. Munqidh, delineated this technique in the twelfth century, but we cannot determine who came first.<sup>4</sup> The function of this artifice differs slightly in the examples they cite; however, in general the two definitions of this technique are very similar. Nevertheless, indisputably, neither author discovered or created this figure of speech. Ibn Munqidh, in the introduction to his book, says that he only introduces stylistic devices known in his time.<sup>5</sup> Vaṭvāt also refers to another name for this technique (*takhyīl*), and we can infer that this designation was employed by some authorities of that era.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, an autobiographical anecdote Vaṭvāt narrates may indicate that *ihām* was still in its infancy at the time, and that not all litterateurs were familiar with it.

Nevertheless, in several premodern books on stylistics, in discussions of double meaning, a relevant quotation is attributed to Jār Allāh Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (1074–1143), medieval theologian, linguist, and interpreter of the Qur'an: "We do not see any category in the art of eloquence that is more exquisite and delicate, as well as more profitable and favorable than this category, especially for the interpretation of allegorical verses (*al-mutashābihāt*) in the speech of Allāh and His Prophet."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 31–37.

<sup>2</sup> The question of whether this early occurrence of *ihām* was deliberate or accidental is outside the scope of this article.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the growing popularity of *ihām* in Persian poetry after the twelfth century, see Chalisova, "Ihām."

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Munqidh, *al-Badī' fī Naqd al-Shi'r*, 60–61.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1929), 39.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-Adab*, 2: 40.

This attribution to Zamakhshari would make him the first scholar who consciously spoke about double meaning as a category in *balāgha* (the study of literary eloquence), because he was born some decades earlier than Vaṭvāṭ and Ibn Munqidh and authored his primary works before they appeared on the scene. Nevertheless, this statement is not found in the extant works of Zamakhshari. In his study, Bonebakker researched the history of these lines and painstakingly examined its sources. Citing authoritative evidentiary materials, he argues that this quotation is fundamentally erroneous, resulting from misinterpretation of the word *takhyīl* in Zamakhshari's Qur'anic exegesis, popularly known as *al-Kashshāf* (The Revealer). Without denying Zamakhshari's possible familiarity with *ihām*, Zamakhshari does not assign him a place in the history of identifying and theorizing this stylistic artifice.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Ihām*: Its Name and Definition**

As referenced above, this literary technique, at the time of Ibn Munqidh and Vaṭvāṭ, was called *ihām* (lit., creating illusions) and *tauriya* (lit., concealment). Throughout the history of Islamic poetics, these names have been considered synonymous and utilized interchangeably. Ibn Munqidh was the first scholar to use *tauriya*. Two centuries later, Ibn al-Ḥijjat al-Ḥamawī, in his relatively detailed treatise devoted to the study of double meaning in Arabic poetry, found *tauriya* the most appropriate name among the several designations that had been applied to this stylistic device.<sup>9</sup> *Tauriya* is often used by scholars of Arabic literature today. Vaṭvāṭ, however, preferred the term *ihām*, and there was no mention of *tauriya* in his book; perhaps he was not aware of it.

The term *ihām*, as utilized in this article, is not found in books preceding *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr*. Use of the word in this sense by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1150–1210) and Sirāj al-Dīn al-Sakkākī (1160–1229), two bilingual authorities of the thirteenth century who had access to the contents of Vaṭvāṭ's treatise, was undoubtedly influenced by *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr*.<sup>10</sup> This term's entry into subsequent Arabic works of *balāgha* is one of Vaṭvāṭ's direct impacts on the scholars of Arabic poetics. Persian books on stylistics have followed Vaṭvāṭ's name for this device; *tauriya* is rarely used in Persian to refer to this figure of speech.

Vaṭvāṭ begins his discourse on amphiboly by providing a definition of *ihām*:

In Persian, *ihām* means “to throw into an illusion.” They also call this artifice *takhyīl*. It consists of the prose writer or the poet utilizing in his prose or poetry words that have a double meaning, one near (*qarīb*) and the other strange (*gharīb*).<sup>11</sup> When the listener hears these words, his mind turns immediately to the near meaning, though what is meant by the word in question is the strange one.<sup>12</sup>

This succinct definition, analyzed thoroughly, offers illuminating insights. First, to Vaṭvāṭ only one of the two potential senses that a polysemous word conveys is intended by the poet; the other is merely illusive and without validity.<sup>13</sup> His primary purpose for using this technique is to create an illusion (*ihām*) and not to speak in a veiled way (*tauriya*); this is his reason for using the term *ihām*. Furthermore, Vaṭvāṭ chose to employ the words *qarīb* and *gharīb*. The “near” sense refers to the word's connections with other components of the sentence. It is near them because, in appearance, they all belong to one

<sup>8</sup> Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 26–28.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-Adab*, 2: 39.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Nihāya al-Ijāz*, 175; al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm*, 427.

<sup>11</sup> Using kinship terms, *qarīb* and *gharīb* can be translated as “relative” and “stranger,” respectively. This interpretation also supports the principal argument of this article.

<sup>12</sup> Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1929), 31.

<sup>13</sup> This technique may be different in practice. In many cases, limiting the scope of the poetical expression to one of the two possible meanings may lessen the semantic aesthetics of the verse.

semantic field. The “strange” meaning has no congruence with other words in the sentence (it is an outsider) and consequently generates a feeling of wonder and surprise when comprehended in the way it is intended.

For a better understanding of Vaṭvāt’s definition, examine the initial part of the long sentence that Vaṭvāt quotes from *al-Maqāmāt al-Baghdādiyya* (the assembly in Baghdad) of al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122): “*lam yazal ʾahl-i wa baʾl-i yaḥullūna ʾs-ṣadr<sup>a</sup>, wa yasīrūna ʾl-qalb<sup>a</sup>, wa yumtūna ʾz-zahr<sup>a</sup> wa yūlūna ʾl-yad<sup>a</sup>*” (My kin and my husband used to seat themselves at the foremost place [of the assemblies] and march in the center [of the corps], and provide [the others] with steeds, and endow [the others] with gifts).<sup>14</sup> The words *ṣadr* (chest), *qalb* (heart), *zahr* (back), and *yad* (hand), when used to refer to body organs, indeed belong to a single semantic domain, and in this regard, they are near each other. This proximity makes them come to mind sooner, but this is an illusion. Following the logic of *ihām*, one realizes the intended meanings are “place of honor,” “center,” “mount,” and “gift,” respectively. These second meanings are outsiders in a semantic field of body organs. This example illustrates Vaṭvāt’s intentional use of *qarīb* and *gharīb* in his definition.

Thus, *ihām* is not just a vague use of a polysemous word, but a deliberate tactic that embeds the concepts of semantic fields and literary defamiliarization. Semantic fields are groups of words that are related to each other based on categorization, lexical paradigms, co-occurrence, and adjacency. These fields create linguistic habits of mind, making the meaning of individual words predictable in a sentence.<sup>15</sup> Literary defamiliarization, on the other hand, is a technique that disrupts readers’ habitual ways of perceiving the language by presenting familiar objects or concepts in a new, unexpected way, thereby creating a sense of wonder and unfamiliarity.<sup>16</sup> Vaṭvāt’s definition of *ihām* involves a deliberate disruption of language patterns. It demonstrates his awareness of the context-sensitivity of meanings, and the fact that *ihām*, or double meaning, occurs intentionally through a combination of lexical items in a syntactic system. *Ihām*, according to Vaṭvāt, entails mentioning the constituents of a semantic field, where one or more of these members can receive different interpretations that are not immediately connected to the semantic field. The reader or listener is led to believe that a certain meaning is intended, based on customary language patterns, but is surprised when a different, unexpected meaning is revealed. This stylistic device prevents over-automatization of language processing and it is, in essence, a specific type of literary defamiliarization.

To reconcile the above explanation with Vaṭvāt’s terminology, it can be stated that in the mechanism of literary amphiboly, a polysemous word can convey a meaning that is not intended by the author, and this unintended meaning is linked through semantic relations to other sentence components (*qarīb*). However, the syntactic principles of the language or the logic of the context in which it is used reveal this meaning to be illusory and unacceptable. Instead, the syntax and context support the other, more hidden intention, which is unexpected by the audience as it is an outsider (*gharīb*) in the semantic field, and thus, throws them into a state of illusion (*ihām*).

<sup>14</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadāʾiq al-Sihr* (1929), 39–40. Nāṣir al-Muṭarrizī (d. 1224) writes in the explanation of this phrase that the heart (center) of the army was the place of the princes (*mulūk*); therefore, this woman is claiming that she comes from a royal family; al-Idāḥ li *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, 202.

<sup>15</sup> The notion of semantic fields was first proposed by Jost Trier (1894–1975) in *Habilitationschrift* (1931). In this work, he emphasized that “the meaning of words could not be appropriately described without taking into account their relations to ‘neighbors’ (*Begriffsverwandte*) in the semantic field (*Wortfeld*.” Stammerjohann et al., *Lexicon Grammaticorum*, 931.

<sup>16</sup> Defamiliarization is a classical term in literary criticism, proposed by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984) in his essay “Art as Technique” (1916). This term describes writing in which ordinary and familiar objects are made to look different. It is the aspect that differentiates ordinary usage from the poetic use of language that makes a literary work unique. See Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” 16–17. It will become clear that *ihām* is a semantic strategy that works in exactly the same way. However, in this discussion of Vaṭvāt, defamiliarization is not addressed in depth.

When defining *ihām*, Vaṭvāt emphasizes that its primary purpose is to create an illusion in the audience. Throughout this chapter, when explaining his examples, he insists on this point. In some cases, he uses the idiom *khātir ba [chīz-i] raftan* (drifting of mind toward [something]). For instance, after citing the aforementioned passage from Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, he briefly comments: "When the audience hears all that is contained in these phrases, their minds will drift toward the body organs, while the [author's] intention is something else."<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, he utilizes *pindāshstan* (to fall into the illusion). For instance, in a short remark after a Persian evidentiary verse, he says, "they fall into the illusion that he is referring to the foliage of the trees."<sup>18</sup> This corroborates the significance of creating an illusion as part of Vaṭvāt's understanding of this semantic technique. It also confirms that, from Vaṭvāt's point of view, although the sentence is capable of expressing two purports, only one can be considered valid; the other is an illusion.

Before closing the discussion of the definition of *ihām* in *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr*, and before starting the analysis of examples, it is necessary to consider Bonebakker's criticism of Vaṭvāt's presentation. Importantly, Bonebakker believes that Vaṭvāt's definition of *ihām* is not "very strict." He gives a translation of the passage quoted above, but he uses the word *ba'īd* (far) instead of *gharīb* and translates *qarīb* and *ba'īd* as "obvious" and "not obvious," respectively.<sup>19</sup> Relying on this inaccurate translation, he concludes that Vaṭvāt "does not specify by what means this "not obvious" meaning should come to the mind of the hearer."<sup>20</sup>

However, I have not been able to locate the source for the use of *ba'īd* in this section. In the published version of *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr*, and in all its old manuscripts, as well as its modern Arabic translation, the word *gharīb* (strange, outsider) is used.<sup>21</sup> Also, contrary to Bonebakker's translation, *qarīb* is not defined as "obvious" in reliable Arabic and Persian dictionaries; this word, in its primary usage, means "near," and even its figurative meanings are all related to the concept of nearness. In fact, the concept of nearness and close relation sheds light on Vaṭvāt's perception of *ihām* and its structure. Because Bonebakker has another interpretation of *qarīb* in mind, he apparently interpolates *ba'īd* into the text, leading to a false, distorted translation and misunderstanding. His premise is not well-grounded and, consequently, his conclusion unproven. By analyzing examples, it will become more clear that the definition presented by Vaṭvāt is helpful to our understanding of the mechanism of *ihām*.

## ***Ihām* in Practice**

Most of the examples that Vaṭvāt includes in the chapter under consideration have a structure similar to the passage cited from Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*. A set of lexical units create a semantic field, but one or more of the category members has a double meaning. The poet or prose writer clearly intends the second connotation, which is not related to the semantic field built by the associated items, and if one were to assume the first sense, which interconnects with that set, the sentence would be devoid of logical purport. For example, in Ḥarīrī's first sentence, the near meaning, which actually belongs to the category of body organs, leads to a logically weak, meaningless, and ridiculous sentence: "My kin and my husband used to seat themselves at the chest, and march in the heart."

<sup>17</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1929), 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Natalia Chalisova, in her entry on *ihām* for *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, follows the Bonebakker definition. See Chalisova, "Ihām," para. 2. In many traditional books on stylistics, the word *ba'īd* is used when defining *ihām* (or *tauriya*); see al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Iqdāh*, 266. However, Vaṭvāt did not use it. Perhaps Bonebakker relied on his memory here. Moreover, *ba'īd*, instead of being translated as "not obvious," can be interpreted as "far" or "foreign," without belonging to a specific semantic field.

<sup>20</sup> Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1929), 39; Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1945), 135.

Another illustration that follows this structure is the verse Vaṭvāṭ quotes from the *Siqt al-Zand* (The Falling Spark of Tinder) by Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī:

ʿidha ṣadaqa ʿl-jadd<sup>u</sup> ʿftara ʿl-‘amm<sup>u</sup> li ʿl-fatā / makārim<sup>a</sup> lā tukrī wa ʿin kadhāba ʿl-khālu

When fortune builds amity, the public fabricates for the man noble deeds, which will not decrease, even though the imagination lies.<sup>22</sup>

In this verse, the words *jadd* (grandfather), *‘amm* (paternal uncle), and *khāl* (maternal uncle) all belong to the lexical category of kinsmen. However, for the verse to have a logical message, other definitions of these words (respectively, “fortune,” “public,” and “imagination”) must be considered.

Literary scholars of later ages considered these examples part of a subcategory of *ihām*, known as *ihām-i tanāsub* (amphiboly through congruence). Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī (1267–1338) was the first theorist to introduce this subcategory, in a continuation of his chapter on *murā‘āt al-naẓīr* (observing associated items).<sup>23</sup> The observance of associated items here is a lexical categorization and formation of a semantic field in a context. This is a common part of language. Vaṭvāṭ seems to be aware of this point, as, at the end of his chapter on *murā‘āt al-naẓīr*, he writes: “There are few Persian or Arabic poems that are not adorned with this figure of speech; however, they are at different levels of [stylistic] grace.”<sup>24</sup> In many examples, *ihām* is creating an illusion through categorization: in the sentences quoted from Ḥarīrī’s *Maqāmāt*, we see the lexical category of body organs, and in the quoted verse from Ma‘arrī the category of kinsmen.

However, in some examples of amphiboly, the sentence may have justifiable meanings for more than one definition conveyed by the polysemous word. Vaṭvāṭ disregards this distinction and does not subdivide his examples. Moreover, despite this capacity of *ihām* to induce two logical meanings, he believes that only one of these is intended by the author, namely the one not belonging to the semantic field built by the associated items.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the examples given by Vaṭvāṭ are instances of pure *ihām*. For instance, at the end of the Persian tale of the villager and Avicenna, when the sheep-seller says: “*bara dar muqābala-yi tarāzū bāshad*” (Aries is opposite to Libra), he creates a kind of illusion by bringing two members of the category of butchery items (lamb and scales) to mind, but intending the names of Zodiac signs, because in Persian astrological terminology, *bara* (lamb) and *tarāzū* (scales) are designations of Aries and Libra, respectively.<sup>26</sup> In the context of trading, the audience might imagine that the shepherd means for the lamb to be weighed and paid for, after which the customer can take it. But according to Vaṭvāṭ, the sheep-seller wants to impress Avicenna by stating a scientific point. Therefore, in actuality, he means Aries stands opposite to (*dar muqābala*) Libra, as the first one occurs at the spring equinox and the latter on the first day of autumn. Vaṭvāṭ comments that this was uniquely intelligent speech and in proportion with Avicenna’s sagacity.<sup>27</sup> The meanings intended by the speaker are outside the category of butcher shop items. Nevertheless, unlike the previously discussed passage of Ḥarīrī’s *Maqāmāt*, interpreting this line’s message using either of these potential meanings will not lead to an irrational or absurd statement.

<sup>22</sup> Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadāʿiq al-Sihr* (1929), 40. See also al-Ma‘arrī, *Shurūḥ Siqt al-Zand*, 3: 1262. *Siqt* also is vocalized and transliterated as *Saqt*. In the commentaries on *Siqt al-Zand*, one meaning of *khāl* is a cloud that brings hope for rain, but then fails to live up to this expectation; see al-Ma‘arrī, *Shurūḥ Siqt al-Zand*, 3: 1262. Bonebakker uses this meaning of *khāl* in his translation; *Early Definitions*, 33. I do not agree with his translation.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Idāḥ*, 262.

<sup>24</sup> Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadāʿiq al-Sihr* (1929), 35.

<sup>25</sup> The evidentiary verses mentioned by Ibn Munqidh are examples of *ihām* (not *ihām-i tanāsub*). Perhaps he chose “*tauriya*” because the meaning is expressed in a veiled manner, and because the sentence has a logical message with each meaning of the polysemous words and no meaning is necessarily illusory.

<sup>26</sup> For an English translation of this story, see Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 32; Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadāʿiq al-Sihr* (1929), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadāʿiq al-Sihr* (1929), 40.

In many cases, the capacity of polysemous words to convey two logical messages in literary discourse leads to different inferences by commentators. A famous example of this interpretational disagreement comprises the following verses attributed to Jamīl ibn Ma‘mar (d.701), an Arab ‘Udhri poet, which are also quoted anonymously by Vaṭvāt in *Ḥadā’iq al-Sihr*:

*ramat-n-ī bi sahm<sub>m</sub> rīsh<sup>u</sup>-hu ‘l-kuḥl<sup>u</sup> lam yuḍir / zawāhir<sup>a</sup> jild-ī wa huwa fi ‘l-qalb<sub>i</sub> jāriḥ-ī  
rama ‘llāh<sup>u</sup> fi ‘aynay Buthaynat<sup>a</sup> bi ‘l-qadhā / wa fi ‘l-ghurr<sub>i</sub> min ‘anyāb<sub>i</sub>-hā bi ‘l-qawādiḥ<sub>i</sub>*

She threw me an arrow whose feathers were [made] of collyrium. It did not hurt the surface of my skin, but it caused a wound in my heart.

May God throw dust on Buthayna’s guardians and [throw] infamy to the greatest nobles of her tribe.<sup>28</sup>

By considering the first meaning of the words ‘ayn (eye/guardian), *ghurr* (whiteness [of the teeth]/greatness), *anyāb* (teeth/nobles), and *qawādiḥ* (blackness [of the teeth]/notoriety), which all belong to the lexical category of parts of the face, the second verse can be interpreted as follows: May God throw dust in Buthayna’s eyes and [throw] blackness on the whiteness of her teeth.

Buthayna was Jamīl’s beloved, and logically the poet does not want suffering and unhappiness for her. Vaṭvāt, with certainty, interprets the verse with the second meaning of the four above-mentioned words and considers their apparent meanings—which come to mind first because they belong to the category of parts of the face—to be illusory.<sup>29</sup> But since this sentence, even when glossing those words as body parts, is not logically devoid of justifiable meaning, other commentators have different interpretations of this verse. In *Kitāb al-Zahra* (the Book of the Blossoms), for example, after mentioning a commentary on this verse that is in complete agreement with Vaṭvāt’s, Ibn Dāwūd al-Ḥafānī (d. 909) writes that he asked Abū al-‘Abbās Tha‘lab (815–904), a renowned literary scholar and the author of *Qawā‘id al-Shi‘r* (The Rules of Poetry), for his opinion on this commentary. Ibn Dāwūd relates that Tha‘lab said this interpretation was pointless, and that he considered the presence of negative words in this verse in accordance with the traditions of ancient Arabic literature, in which cursing a magnificent thing when one is exceedingly impressed by it is a common matter and even a type of eulogization.<sup>30</sup> Of the medieval authorities, Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Zauzani (d. 1093), the famous commentator on the *Mu‘allaqāt* (The Suspended Odes), also construes this verse according to its apparent meaning and believes that it was composed to protect Buthayna by warding off the evil eye.<sup>31</sup> Other commentators, among them the Mu‘tazilī theologian al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (965/6–1044), have maintained that the meaning of the dust falling in Buthayna’s eyes signaled reduction of her vision due to her long life, and that blackening of her teeth was also a sign of old age. Therefore, Jamīl has wished his beloved longevity, and this verse, contrary to its apparent meaning, is a good prayer for her.<sup>32</sup> However, Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (1032–1073), the medieval scholar of poetics who authored *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa* (The Secret of Eloquence), taking the literal meanings of all the

<sup>28</sup> This is an elegiac amatory genre, popular with poets of the tribe ‘Udhra, in the Umayyad period. For a discussion of this genre, see Jacobi, “‘Udhri,” 10: 774–76. Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadā’iq al-Sihr* (1929), 40–41.

<sup>29</sup> It is not unlikely that Vaṭvāt borrowed this construal from *Kitāb al-Zahra* (Book of the Blossoms). This book was famous at that time in Transoxania, as it was one of the sources Rādūyānī, the author of *Tarjuman al-Balāgha*, used for suitable Arabic examples; *Kitāb Tarjuman al-balāgha*, 19. If this hypothesis is correct, Vaṭvāt was aware of Tha‘lab’s view of interpreting this verse based on the apparent meaning of the words, but he did not agree with it.

<sup>30</sup> Al-‘Aṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Zahra*, 46 (romanization of the author’s name in the citation reflects the modern editor’s choice). See also al-Bakrī, *Simt al-La‘ālī*, 1: 736.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Zauzani, *Sharḥ Mu‘allaqāt al-Sab‘*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *Ghurur al-Farā‘id*, 2: 157.

components of this verse into account, views this curse to be the result of the bard's loss of patience and calls it a flaw in his poetry.<sup>33</sup> It is stated in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (The Book of Songs), a tenth-century encyclopedic compendium of Arabic poetry, that Buthayna herself (like al-Khafājī and unlike Vaṭvāṭ and other interpreters), comprehending this poem based on the apparent purports of the words, had considered it as an imprecation and was offended by Jamīl's composition.<sup>34</sup> The poet did not deny it.<sup>35</sup> The fact that this poem conveys justifiable messages with both significations of its polysemous words has led to these controversies.

There also is a strong possibility (supported, to some extent, by *Kitāb al-Aghānī*'s narrative) that the composer of the verses was unaware of the ability of his words to induce a double meaning. This often occurs in cases in which a line has logical purports with two (or more) interpretations of its polysemous words. Quoting an autobiographical anecdote, Vaṭvāṭ addressed this phenomenon in the final example of his chapter on literary amphiboly.<sup>36</sup> He mentions an unknown bard named Anbārī with whom he had friendship during his stay in Termez, who used to ask Vaṭvāṭ's opinion about his poems. Vaṭvāṭ says that this poet was not aware of the technique of *ihām* and learned it from him. However, this figure of speech occurred frequently in his verses due to his natural disposition, rather than knowledge or intention. Reflecting on Anbārī's verse, we can see that this poem has reasonable interpretations with both meanings of the word *lab* (lip/edge [of the bread]), and that the amphiboly used in it, similar to that in Jamīl's verse, is an example of *ihām*:

*ān kūdak-i ṭabbākh bar ān chandān nān / mā rā ba lab-i hamī nadārad mihmān*

That young baker, despite such abundance of bread, does not invite us to his lips.<sup>37</sup>

*Lab*, because of its juxtaposition with baker and bread, may be interpreted in the first reading as the edge of bread (he does not treat us to a single slice). However, Vaṭvāṭ considers this an illusory meaning (*pindārand ki lab-i nān kh<sup>w</sup>āsta ast*: they might become illuded that he means the edge of the bread). The poet's intention was the young baker's lip, Vaṭvāṭ believed, in accordance with his definition: this was obviously an outsider (*gharīb*) in the lexical category of the bakery.

It should be kept in mind that the semantic field also can be created through lexical paradigms (such as synonymy, antinomy, derivation, etc.). Traditional scholars of poetics have not been oblivious to the possibility of creating illusory meanings by paradigmatic disruption, and in classifying *ihām* they have included a subcategory for *ihām-i taḍādd* (amphiboly through antithesis). Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī introduces this technique in his discussion of *al-ṭibāq* (antithesis) as a literary technique.<sup>38</sup> In this stylistic maneuver, two lexemes, at least one of which has multiple meanings, are the antithesis of each other. However, the meaning that creates semantic opposition is not the one intended by the author, and the other use of the word must be understood for the verse to have a reasonable message. This is illustrated in a humorous verse by an anonymous poet:

*man zi qāzī yasār mī-justam / ū buzurgī nimūd u dād yamīn*

I asked the judge for money; he showed magnanimity and made a vow.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Al-Khafājī, *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa*, 304.

<sup>34</sup> The historical validity of these stories is not addressed in this article.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Ṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 8: 76. See also Ibn Kallakān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, 1: 437.

<sup>36</sup> This story has been completely translated into English. See Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 34–35. See also Chalisova, "Persian Rhetoric," 156.

<sup>37</sup> Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1929), 41.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Iqdāh*, 258.

<sup>39</sup> Vaṭvāṭ, *Ḥadā'iq al-Sihr* (1929), 41.

The words *yasār* (left) and *yamīn* (right) have opposite meanings, and they build a paradigm-based semantic field. However, these meanings cannot be considered valid in this poem; rather, one must apply other senses of these two words (respectively, “money” and “vow”) for it to be commonsensical and acceptable.

Among the evidentiary Arabic verses that Vaṭṭvāṭ quotes are four lines composed by Mas‘ūd-i Sa‘d-i Salmān (d. 1121/22), a great Persian poet. Since Mas‘ūd-i Sa‘d’s Arabic divan did not survive, preserving these poems has an indescribable value for the history of literature:

*wa layl<sub>in</sub> ka ‘anna ‘sh-shams<sup>a</sup> ḍallat mamar<sup>a</sup>-hā / wa laysa la-hā naḥwa ‘l-mashāriq<sub>i</sub> marja‘u  
nazartu ‘ilay-hā wa ‘z-zalām<sup>u</sup> ka ‘anna-hu / ‘alā ‘l-‘ayn<sub>i</sub> ghirbān<sup>un</sup> mina ‘l-jaww<sub>i</sub> wuqqa‘u  
fa qaltu li qalb-ī tāla ‘l-layl<sup>u</sup> wa laysa l-ī / mina ‘l-hamm<sub>i</sub> manjā<sup>un</sup> wa fi ‘s-ṣabr<sub>i</sub> mafza‘u  
‘arā dhanb<sup>u</sup> ‘s-sirhān<sub>i</sub> fi ‘j-jaw<sub>i</sub> sāṭi<sup>an</sup> / fa hal mumkin<sup>un</sup> ‘anna ‘l-ghazāla<sup>a</sup> taṭla‘u*

A night as if the sun had lost her way, and there was no path for her to return to the east. I looked at her, while the darkness was as if crows had fallen from the sky on the eyes. So I told my heart that the night was long and I had no escape from sorrow, and my only solution was patience.

In the sky, the false dawn is shining. Is it possible that the sun also rises?<sup>40</sup>

The literary amphiboly is found in the fourth line, in which *dhanb al-sirhān* (wolf’s tail) means “zodiacal light,” and *ghazāla* (gazelle) signifies the sun. The semantic field of animals is created by mentioning wolf and gazelle, but the poet has used intended meanings that are considered outsiders in this lexical set. These four verses, or only the last verse, have been included in many books on Arabic stylistics, and the source was undoubtedly *Ḥadā‘iq al-Sihr*. Some of the scholars who quote these lines propose that this verse has *al-tauriyya al-mubayyana* (transparent amphiboly).<sup>41</sup> This subcategory utilizes the polysemous word in a context that contains attributes of the meaning that is intended by the poet. In this verse, the two words “shining” and “rising” [of the sun] indicate what the poet intends by his polysemous words.

The fourth Arabic example mentioned by Vaṭṭvāṭ is from an anonymous source. It is riddle-like in nature and structurally crucial in explaining Vaṭṭvāṭ’s view of *ihām*:

*‘inn-ī ra‘aytu ‘ajīb<sup>an</sup> fi bilād<sub>i</sub>-kum / shaykh<sup>an</sup> wa jāriya(t)<sup>an</sup> fi baṭn<sub>i</sub> ‘usfūri*

I saw something bizarre in your country: an old man and a young girl in the thorax of a sparrow!<sup>42</sup>

Bonebakker does not pay due attention to the difference in structure between this instance of ambiguity and that of Vaṭṭvāṭ’s other examples in this chapter; he writes: “I will also omit the fourth and the last of the Arabic examples and the two first examples from Persian poetry, since, in my opinion, they do not contribute to our understanding of Rašīdaddīn’s concept of *ihām*.”<sup>43</sup> This may be because he has failed to decipher this enigmatic line. In this verse, unlike the previous examples, no word carries two meanings. Instead, the words are put together in such a way that, in the second hemistich, the syntactic roles of its components can be determined in two ways, and a different meaning can be achieved

<sup>40</sup> Vaṭṭvāṭ, *Ḥadā‘iq al-Sihr* (1929), 41. According to ‘Aufī, Mas‘ūd had an Arabic divan as well; *Lubāb al-Albāb*, 2: 246. Apparently his Arabic poems have been lost, and only a few lines are recorded in books on stylistics and anthologies. See also Muḥammad Mahyār’s introduction in Mas‘ūd-i Sa‘d, *Dīvān*, 72–77.

<sup>41</sup> Transparent amphiboly is one of four categories of *ihām* (or *tauriyya*) that are based upon the relationship between the polysemous word and the indicators in the sentence, according to a taxonomy. For discussion of this classification and definitions of the subdivisions with examples, see Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 10–16.

<sup>42</sup> Vaṭṭvāṭ, *Ḥadā‘iq al-Sihr* (1929), 41.

<sup>43</sup> Bonebakker, *Early Definitions*, 34.

with each method of parsing the sentence. Due to the adjacency of the *shaykh* (old man) and *jāriya* (young girl), which through antithesis create a paradigm-based semantic field, the mind goes to the first reading recorded above. However, this is not the intended meaning of this line. To understand the poet's intention, the second half should be read in the following way: "*shaykh<sup>an</sup> wajā riya(t)<sup>an</sup> fī baṭni<sub>i</sub> ‘uṣfūr<sub>m</sub>*" ([I saw] an old man who cut a lung in a sparrow's thorax).<sup>44</sup> This verse now makes sense. The structure of this illustrative verse clearly differs from typical examples of amphiboly. This unique form is referred to as *shibh al-ihām* (similar to *ihām*) by Ḥusayn Vā‘iz Kāshifī (d. 1504), since, unlike regular *ihām*, it does not rely on polysemous words to create dual meanings.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, Vaṭvāt includes this verse as an example of *ihām*, suggesting that he does not view polysemy as a crucial component of this figure of speech. Instead, he maintains that any sentence capable of conveying multiple meanings, whether or not it incorporates polysemous words, can exemplify *ihām*.

Before concluding the analysis of examples, it is necessary to consider the last example that Vaṭvāt cites in his chapter on *al-muḥtamil li al-ḍiddayn* (the potential for two opposite meanings), because, in terms of structure, it is not different from *ihām*. To create this figure of speech, the poet intentionally places, combines, and arranges the words of a single sentence such that the verse contains meanings of both praise and condemnation. In other words, through semantic and syntactic ambiguities, it becomes possible for the reader to make two logically opposite inferences from a single statement. Vaṭvāt mentions four evidentiary verses in this chapter. In the first three, the arrangement of sentence elements and syntactic structure are designed so that two opposite interpretations are possible. However, the fourth example is based on the lexical ambiguity of a polysemous word, and in this respect, it functions like *ihām*:

*rūspi rā muḥtasib dānad zadan / shād bāsh ay rūspi-zan muḥtasib*

The sharia-supervisor knows how to beat a prostitute.  
Be happy, oh prostitute-beating supervisor!<sup>46</sup>

In this verse, there is no categorization or mention of associated items, but rather a semantic field based on lexical paradigms is created through derivation (*zadan* [infinitive] and *zan* [present stem]). The constituents of the compound word ‘*rūspi-zan*,’ used as an adjective for *muḥtasib* (sharia-supervisor) in this verse, can be parsed in two ways, depending on the two meanings of *zan* (wife/beater). If it is taken to be the present stem of the infinitive *zadan* (to strike), it becomes a hyphenated compound, meaning “prostitute-punisher,” the description of this man’s job. On the other hand, if it is interpreted as “wife,” it will be an exocentric compound meaning “one whose wife is a prostitute,” obviously an insult to the supposedly pious sharia-supervisor. Following Vaṭvāt’s definition of *ihām*, this second glossing should be considered valid, because *zan*, as the wife, is an outsider in the above-described semantic field. However, unlike his *ihām* examples, here Vaṭvāt’s comments do not confer a definitive interpretation of this verse. Instead, he considers both meanings acceptable. The structure is not different from *ihām*, except that the two different interpretations of a compound word lead to two opposite messages.

Vaṭvāt, as the first theoretician of *ihām*, selected a considerable number of evidentiary verses to illustrate this stylistic device. These examples belonged to various literary genres, such as anecdotes, panegyrics, lyrics, satires, and conundrums.<sup>47</sup> The technique of double

<sup>44</sup> This explanation is based on al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, *‘Umdat al-Ḥuffāz*, 2: 59.

<sup>45</sup> Kāshifī, *Badā‘i‘ al-Afkār*, 111.

<sup>46</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Ḥadā‘iq al-Sīhr* (1929), 37.

<sup>47</sup> All major evidentiary verses mentioned in the subject chapter are analyzed in this article; only one Persian verse by an anonymous poet was omitted, as it was not structurally different from other examples and could not add anything to the study.

meaning did not appear exclusively in one type of literary discourse, and, depending on context, it had different functions. Therefore, it may not be possible to draw a continuum of the thematic use of *ihām* in Persian literature, as variable forms of amphiboly have always been present in noble literary discourse and many literary and nonliterary jests and riddles.<sup>48</sup>

*Ḥadāʾiq al-Sihr* introduces a figure of speech that becomes the basis of the most extensive semantic strategies in Persian literature in later ages. The numerous examples that Vaṭvāt provides are comprehensive of the principal categories of this stylistic device. However, he did not think to classify them. From this it can be inferred that *ihām* was in the initial stages of theorization in the twelfth century, and that scholars of poetics had yet not proposed the taxonomies that are founded upon the subtleties of this literary technique.<sup>49</sup>

The fact that Vaṭvāt, contrary to his general approach in *Ḥadāʾiq*, does not include an example of his own poems in this chapter does not indicate that he did not apply this figure of speech in composing his panegyrics. For instance, in the following verse, which he composed in praise of Atsiz Khawarizmshah, he intended the double meaning of *barg-i bīd* and used it in an artistic manner:

*az pay-i qamʿ, bad-sigāl-i tu rā / kashad az barg-i bīd khanjar khāh*

With the purpose of eradicating your detractors, the Earth stabs them with the dagger of willow leaves.<sup>50</sup>

*Barg-i bīd* has two acceptations: “willow leaf” and “[a type of] arrow.”<sup>51</sup> The second meaning belongs to the semantic field of martial terms and is linked to *khanjar* (the dagger) and *qamʿ* (obliteration); therefore, it comes to the reader’s mind through illusion. However, it is the other meaning, an outsider to this category, that is intended. That is, the Earth, performing a service to the king, changes the willow leaves into daggers to eliminate his enemies. As another example, one may consider this laudatory verse:

*ān jā ki buvad kīn-ash, chun khār buvad gul /  
ān jā ki buvad mihr-ash, chun rūz buvad shab*

Wherever there is enmity with him, the flower becomes like a thorn.  
Wherever there is love for him, the night becomes like the day.<sup>52</sup>

In this verse, using the literary technique of double meaning, the word *mihr* (affection/sun) has created an *ihām*. The juxtaposition of this word next to “day” and “night” brings “sun” to the reader’s mind, and the second hemistich can be interpreted as: “Wherever his sun shines, the night becomes [as bright as] the day.” However, by giving heed to its opposite word in the first half of the verse, namely, *kīn* (hatred), one can gather that, in this line, the poet intends “love.”<sup>53</sup> In the history of Persian literature, many poets have created *ihām* with the meanings of *mihr*.

The stylistic minutiae of *ihām*, in theory and practice, continued to develop over the two centuries following the authorship of *Ḥadāʾiq al-Sihr*, and in the fourteenth century they reached perfection in the ghazals of Ḥafīz of Shīrāz (1325–90). In his poetry, Ḥafīz, in addition to other elements of literary ambiguity, establishes *ihām* as a semantic expedient and

<sup>48</sup> But cf. Chalisova, “Ihām.”

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of subsequent taxonomies of *ihām* in Persian poetry, see Chalisova, “Ihām.”

<sup>50</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Dīvān*, 302, l. 4149.

<sup>51</sup> Tabrīzī, *Burhān-i Qāṭiʿi*, 1: 261.

<sup>52</sup> Vaṭvāt, *Dīvān*, 35, l. 410.

<sup>53</sup> See also *ibid.*, 27, l. 313.

turns his *Dīvān* into a collection of mysterious poems. Due to their capacity to express multiple meanings, his ghazals will remain a source of contention among scholars.

## Conclusion

Rashīd Vaṭvāt's *Hadā'iq al-Sihr* is the first treatise in Islamic *balāgha* that introduces literary amphiboly, known as *ihām*. Vaṭvāt composed this treatise in the twelfth century and cites several Arabic and Persian examples to elucidate it. To create an *ihām* in a given verse, according to the definition given in *Hadā'iq al-Sihr*, it is imperative that related concepts and items be placed in the immediate environment of a word that can potentially convey multiple meanings and create a semantic field with one of its senses. The author, intending literary defamiliarization, disrupts linguistic habits and unexpectedly purports the other acceptation of the polysemous lexeme, which does *not* belong to this semantic field. The primary purpose of *ihām*, according to Vaṭvāt, is to create misinterpreted conceptions. The reader, accustomed to associated items in semantic fields, brings to mind the unintended meaning, falling into an illusion. This feature distinguishes *ihām*, in terms of structure and function, from other types of intentional and unintentional ambiguities that may appear in discourse.

In the chapter about *ihām*, which is one of the most detailed sections of his book, Vaṭvāt cites numerous examples, and although he does not classify them, these examples fall into structural subcategories of this figurative technique. These instances show different aspects of the semantic capacities of this literary device. *Ihām* is a versatile figure of speech that performs appropriate functions in different contexts. The interpretability of the text is increased by amphiboly, which can cause contention among commentators. By defining *ihām*, *Hadā'iq al-Sihr*, in addition to introducing a stylistic device, establishes a basis for theorization about one of the most prominent semantic strategies in Persian literature.

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