Actuality and Visualization in the Dramatic Description of Eternal Bliss

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Abstract

The concern in this paper is to investigate how actuality and visualization unify the setting, the dramatis personae and the promise in the Qur'anic description of the Eternal Bliss. By tracing the dramatic structure, I tend to answer the following questions: Where does actuality along with visualization reside in the Qur'anic descriptive structure of Eternal Bliss? How are these two techniques integrated to give the full description encompassing the beginning and the becoming in regard with owning heaven? I opt to the comparative approach in examining the verses that focus on the topic of Bliss where people are declared immortal. Several diagrams are used to demonstrate the role of each technique within the dramatic structure of setting, dramatis personae and finally the reward. Physicality explains the differences implied in the blissful places granted to people who made their choice of the path to the prosperous longevity early in the earthly life.

Key words: Dramaa; structure; eternal; bliss; actual; visual

1. Introduction

Dramatic structure has been discussed by philosophers and critics of drama since the Greeks. Aristotle argues the significance of setting one whole action with a beginning, a complicating middle and the resolving end. Horace and other classists give more attention to the concept of division of acts in the conveyance of the plot. Whatever divisions they suggest, the dramatic structure begins with an introduction followed by the plot then the denouement. The dramatic structure, depicting the divine Bliss in Qur'an follows a more concise pattern based on less dramatic elements where setting and personae prevail and the theme is Eternal Bliss. Aristotle’s argument, that “Most important of all is the structure of the incidents, not of man, but of action and life,” is significant in this study.(2008: 16)

Qur'anic verses presenting the Eternal Bliss vary in their length and in their settings referring to people in their earthly life proceeding towards their everlasting destiny. In some Qur'anic structures the whole scene is embraced in one single verse while in other blissful structures several subsequent verses depict the journey between the two lives. The absence of conflict and classical Hamartia in the Blissful scene gives place to the proposition that actuality and visualization act as the “force which will unify all parts” in the dramatic scene. (2008: 18)

The Bliss in Qur'an:

The topic of bliss, paradise and heaven has been argued by contemporary scholars in recent publications. In The Return of Idrisi: the Story of Return from Stability to Motion (Audat Idrisi: Quessat Alawdah Min Aljumood to Alharakah) (2015), Nadine M. Alsulaimi draws attention to the mission of man on Earth. She argues that Qur'an incites people to build civilized societies counting on knowledge, investigation and steady labor. Seeking to sustain one's society is highly encouraged in Qur'an. (2015: 12-23)

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Those people who learn, think, discuss and generate ideas for the welfare of humanity and earth, win the bliss promised by God. Referring to Qur’anic verses, Alsulaimi argues the depiction in Qur’an of the role of knowledge and integrity. Those who empower themselves with the continuous search and erudition recognize that the earthly world is for a short stay while the hereafter is the eternal life. (2015: 116)

In her Take Off your Shoes (Fa-ikbila’ Na’layk) (2016), Nadine M. Alsulaimi argues the different means to relate Qur’an to one’s life. She quotes Take Off your Shoes and proposes that the imperative suggests to undertake a new approach in reading and understanding the Qur’anic text that align with one’s “reality and presence”. She lists the evil forces which man encounters in his journey in the earthly life. They are the inner constraints, the outside tyrant, the inclination and the devil. People who overcome those forces and live to sustain society with high productivity are rewarded by Allah, the Almighty. In her analytical approach, Alsulaimi provides Qur’anic verses insinuating to enhance the intellect and the morale. (Alsulaimi: 2016: 17-8, 34,53, 88)

Mohammad Abdel Haleem has devoted a whole chapter to “Qur’anic Paradise” in his Exploring The Qur’an: Context and Impact (2017). He opts to investigate those three questions: “who will get to Paradise?” along with “what qualifies them to do so?” and “what can they expect when they get there?” In addition to the Qur’anic context and the values relevant to the reward, Abdel Haleem seeks to explore the depiction of the paradise promised. He gives a thorough demonstration of those who enter paradise and their “essential qualification.” He quotes those verses exhibiting that “the hereafter is better and more lasting.” (2017: 69, 71, 72).

One whole chapter in Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Style is assigned by Mohammad Abdel Haleem to “Paradise in the Qur’an”. He argues that “people are given time in the present world to make real choices for themselves.” Abdel Haleem focuses on the “Garden” as a reward and the style used to address ‘People of varying tastes, at different times and places” through exhibiting “The Physical Picture”, the “Proper Perspective” and “The Real Nature of Reward in Janna” which are rendered throughout Qur’an but still not known to humans. (Abdel Haleem, 2016: 96, 106)

Mohammad Shahroor argues the concept of being and becoming throughout Qur’an. He discusses the tenses of verbs from “was” in the state of being towards “is going” proceeding into “becoming”. Shahroor explains that the state of “being” is the starting point moving into the “process” with the passage of time reaching to the state of “becoming”. Time and the process to Shahroor is void unless its impact is sensed in the state of becoming. He concludes that “there is no existence without development and no development without being.” Therefore existence is promoted with achievement and fruitful results. (Shahroor, 2016: 23)

Stephan Wild comments on the sensual side of “the utopian paradise of the hereafter that fulfills all human dreams” described through vivid linguistic images and metaphors. Those visualized dreams of peace, prosperity and eternity are no longer farfetched but actually attainable. (2010: 643)

2. Aim of the Study:

The concern in this paper is the dramatic description of Eternal Bliss in Qur’an. Bliss in the hereafter has been given different terms such as “Garden”, “Gardens”, “Heaven”, “The Room”, “Rooms”, “The Paradise”, “Garden of Paradise” and “Gardens of Eden”. Eternity has been indicated through immortality, eternity and everlasting. In this study I tend to investigate the role of actuality and visualization as the two dramatic techniques unifying the dramatic elements prevailing in the Qur’anic description of the Eternal Bliss. The questions in my research are: Where does actuality along with visualization reside in the Qur’anic dramatic structure of Eternal Bliss? How are actuality and visualization related to give the blissful description?

3. Methodology:

Among the different approaches to study Qur’anic narratives that deal with one topic is Angelika Neuwirth’s comparative approach. She opts to examine the verses that focus on one single topic, with a marked difference, giving attention to the historical context of those verses. With such a topic as the Eternal Bliss, I shall consider the different dramatic elements incorporated in Qur’anic verses to actualize the vivid images of paradise to the reader of Qur’an today. To confine this research to scenes where Eternal Bliss is articulated helps focus on the dramatic structure, dramatic persona and the incidents aspiring for the reward. Though Paradise and the blessed abound in Qur’an, the Eternal Bliss is the aim in this study. The wording of eternal varies in the Qur’anic depiction of the bliss. (2010: 644)
Heavenly joy and happiness in Qur’an may be highlighted as everlasting, endless, perpetual, continuous or even permanent. I shall use diagrams to underline the role of actuality and visualization in regard with those dramatic elements prevalent in the Qur’anic blissful structures. In tracing the dramatic description of the Eternal Bliss, I shall examine the scene which might be a sentence, a verse or a part of two verses or more verses that constitute the context for the blessed where immortality is rudimental.

Reading the verses in Arabic Language, I seek accurate translation to convey the setting given by God, the creator where the dramatis personae are involved as speakers, mediators, and recipients along with their words, actions, and aspirations. I tend to rely partly on M. A. S. Abdelhaleem’s translation in The Qur’an (2005) quoting the reference with page number such as ‘Whenever they are given sustenance.’ (2005: 29). To render the sense in the adjectives and the tenses in verbs included in the visualized description of the bliss and the actuality of the experience, I opt to give my own translation between quotation marks, e.g. “Theirs will be Gardens” (Q.2:25).

4. Qur’anic Dramatic Structure depicting the Eternal Bliss:

This paper seeks to explore how actuality and visualization are incorporated in the dramatic structure whenever Eternal Bliss is highlighted in Qur’an. The term actuality is defined as “the quality or state of being actual” and actual is explained as “existing in fact or reality.” Visualization is defined as forming “mental images or pictures” and making something “perceptible to the mind or imagination.” Each technique will be explored within the dramatic structure of the blissful scene beginning with the setting, featuring people involved and finally proceeding into images of the reward prepared for the winners.

Figure 1. The Dramatic Structure of Qur’anic Eternal Bliss.

5. Actuality and Visualization in The Setting:

Reading the Qu’anic verses containing bliss and eternity, actuality takes different forms in the setting of the scene. Each scene is set in those verses, depicting the sense of being of the personae involved, their actions, sayings, and reactions while proceeding into life reaching their destiny, and the eternal state.

Figure 2: Types of Setting in the Blissful Scenes
Some verses of the bliss, quoted in this research, begin with verbal introductory affirmation either in adverbial setting of the scene as “Surely” or “truly” (Q.11:23, Q.18:107, Q.98:7), or in statements “They are the inheritors” (Q.23:10) or “Those are the bounds of God” (Q.4:13) preceded by a list of inheritance rules. Those affirmations build up actuality in the scene described by Allah, the Almighty. However, at other times, the scene begins with the past tense setting the scenes in actual tones. Examples of the past tense are promoted in God’s affirmations “God has rewarded them” (Q.5:85), ‘God has promised’ (Q.9:72) (2005:122), “God has sent you citation, A messenger” (Q.65:11) and “God blessed” (Q.9:100). The use of the passive structure to introduce the blissful scene intensifies actual visualization of the reward and the winners “And the Garden is brought close to the mindful, not far” (Q.50:31).

Actuality and visualization integrate in God’s interaction setting the scene underlining its actuality while it is imaginatively described but not yet experienced. The scene may also begin with the divine reference to the personae apt to own Heaven “To those who did best” (Q.10:26) or those who are granted “The Room” due to their prayers “Our Lord, grant us blessings with our spouses and our offspring” (Q.25:74).

Another form of the visualized actions takes place in the divine addressing by God to both the Prophet and the people. God addresses the prophet, the messenger of God “tell the good news to those who . . .” (Q.2:25) and “say, ‘Would you like me to tell you of things that are better than all of these?’” (Q.3:15). (2005:35) God’s requests to the prophet resonate with actuality in their content as they are directed to human beings. Affirmation abides in the beginning of the scene when God addresses the messenger “you will not find people who . . .” (Q.58:22). Actuality is declared by God addressing his messenger “the Day when you see the male believers and the female believers” (Q.57:12) and “The Day when He gathers you” (Q.64:9).

The call of God upon people ‘My servants’ introduces the characters involved in the scene (Q.43:68-73) (2005:319). The addressees are not named or defined when the request is to “hurry towards forgiveness by your Lord” (Q.3:133). The addressing of God to people sets the endearing tone affirming peace and compassion “My servants, there is no fear about you today, and you shall never grieve.” (Q.43:68). Hence, the breeding affirmational along with the visualized divine discourse set utmost blissful exposition in the dramatic structure in those verses devoted to Eternal Bliss.

7) Actuality in Dramatis Personae:

Actuality in the description of the eternal dwellers in the Bliss resonates in the reoccurrence of the collocation of the spiritual and behavioral, in the categories declared in Qur’an, and in their worldly features.

![Figure 3. Actuality in the Personae.](image-url)
Actuality, also, resides in the elaboration given in “the male believers and female believers” (Q.9:72, Q.57:12) and ‘those who believed in Our revelations and devoted themselves to Us’ (Q.43:69) (2005: 319) and ‘the Messenger and those who’ believed ‘with him’ strove hard with their’ money and their souls” (Q. 9: 88) (2005: 140).

Yet, the emotional scope in those believers is significant in ‘you will not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose God and His Messenger, even though they’ were ‘their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations.’ (Q.58:22). (2005: 364) Although the past tense prevailed in the above mentioned verses, the present tense is also there in “Whoever believes in God and does good.” (Q.64:9) Therefore, believing and doing good renders the sense of being and incites people to aspire for the reward.

‘The Believers’ is a Sura in Qur’an devoted to the reward and enactment of belief. Actual details of their characteristics are declared:

Those who are submissive in their prayer . . . turning
away from the vain talk . . . paying the prescribed alms
. . . ‘guarding’ their chastity. Except with their spouses
or their slaves . . . faithful to their trusts and pledges . . .

In addition to the believers, the mindful, Al-Muttaqin, are among the personae in the Eternal Bliss. “The mindful” recurs in relevance to Eternal Bliss in Qur’an in (Q.3: 15, Q.3: 133, Q.3: 198, Q.25:15, Q.39: 73, Q.50:31). Mindfulness along with joy can be granted through prayers to God “Make us a leader for the mindful” (Q.25:74-6). The mindful are those who “spend both in prosperity and adversity” containing their anger and yet forgiving people,” They are mere human beings who “cite God and ‘implore forgiveness for their sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves’ (Q.3: 135). (2005: 44) Yet they are the people “who never knowingly persist in doing wrong.” They are ‘those who were mindful of their Lord’ (Q.3: 198). (2005: 49)

Along with those entitled to the Eternal Bliss are “those who obey Him and His Messenger” (Q.4:13), “the first emigrants and assistants” and those who followed them in good deeds (Q. 9: 100) (2005: 125). Also “those who did well” (Q. 10: 26), those who have “endured” (Q.25:75), “those who have been blessed” (Q.11:108) and “the laborers” (Q.29: 58-9). Guidance is actually given to people to take the route to the Eternal Bliss which is promised for “everyone often returning to God maintaining the bond with Him” and “who feared God in the absence and who came with a returning heart” (Q.50:31-35).

If the Eternal Bliss is a reward for the spiritual belief and physical action, the verbal utterances are also honoured in “for what they said” (Q.5: 85) even though they are Christians among whom are priests and monks who are:

not given to arrogance, and when they listen to
what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will
see their eyes overflowing with tears because they
recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, ‘Our Lord, we
believe, so count us amongst the witnesses. Why
should we not believe in God and in the Truth that has
come down to us, when we long for our Lord to include
us in the company of the righteous?’ (Q.5: 82-84). (2005:75-6)

8. Actuality and Visualization in the Reward:

The description of the reward which is Eternal Bliss unfolds both actuality and Visualization. Qur’anic discourse integrates vivid tangible and intangible images bringing together aspects of the physical indulgence already experienced in the worldly life with entirely imaginary splendor of the everlasting stay prepared by the divine.
The rivers underneath the Gardens exhibit continuous running which entails “full of lively, vibrant actions.” (2011: 108) The “flowing water” has been argued as “the essential component of paradise.” (Abdel Haleem: 2016: 78) The motion of rivers is constant and steady. Other aspects of the bliss are actualized through the worldly joy expressed in the use of such speech acts as “enter”, “enjoy”, “desire”, “inherit The Paradise” (Q.23: 10-11) and “Go into the Garden” (Q.43:70.) Actuality also exists in their proceeding towards the reward as “There they are received” with greetings and peace (Q.25:75). (2005: 231) God’s presence is actually felt in a visualized image when “He admit them into Gardens” (Q.58:22) “He will admit them into Gardens” (Q.64:9.) Their speech actually renders the verbal remarks delivered usually by winners who say ‘Praise be to God’ (Q.39: 74). (2005: 300)

Like the earthly life, joy in the Eternal Bliss is cultivated in the presence of the loved ones. It is the yearning experienced in prayers asking God ‘Our Lord,’ grant us blessings with “our spouses and offspring” (Q.25:74). (2005: 231) People, in the Eternal Bliss, are granted the community life and assured the company of ‘pure spouses’ (Q.2:25,Q.3: 15 and Q.4:57). (2005: 50)

In some blissful scenes, the Eternal Bliss is prepared for through physical and spiritual processes. The physical countenance of winners is illuminated as ‘Neither darkness nor shame will cover their faces’ (Q.10: 26). (2005: 130) “Forgiveness” implored for the sinner wrong doing is the spiritual preparation endowed to those who never persist in what they did (Q.3: 136.) The grant with “the good things” to the Messenger and those who allied with him prepares for eternity in “Gardens where underneath run rivers” (Q. 9:89.) The same Sura in Qur’an elaborates the mental picture of mutual bless with God prepared for “the first emigrants and assistants” (Q. 9: 100). Whatever it takes in the preparation, for the reward promised by the Almighty, it is the stage of “process” defined by Shahroor to precede the stage of “becoming”. (2016:23)

The actual entering in the Bliss is granted to the mindful of God with their spouses who are ‘filled with joy.’ (2005: 319) And golden dishes and goblets are made to pass ‘around them’ filled with whatever their souls wish and ‘their eyes delight in’ (Q.43:70-71). (2005: 319) The use of passive structure in the description of the reward has been argued by Abdel Haleem to state “finalities of action effective in its contexts.” (2016: 107) Passive forms seem to connect the process of reaching the stage of reward with the stage of actual becoming winners of the reward in “Those are rewarded with the Room . . . There they are received with greeting and peace” (Q.25:75.) Yet the mindful are led ‘to the Garden’ in throngs’ (Q.39: 73) and, “the Garden is brought close to the mindful of God” (Q.50:31). (2005:300)

Those passive forms bring those mental images closer to the human mind and feelings through verbs that indicate reality and certainty. Yet the same passive forms are means of visualizing the process of reaching the Garden, the Reception festivities and the Room. So bliss, then, is no longer imaginary but real and actual especially with joyful pleasures already known in life on earth.
Visualization in the admission into the Gardens escalates with the imaginary mutual blessing between God and people. (58: 22) God acts in “the Day of Gathering” and He not only cancels the sins of “whoever believes in God and does good,” but also admits them in a way divine but not defined yet into Gardens where they stay immortal (Q.64:9). Gardens of Eden are specified by name but still visually intangible in a place where “underneath run rivers.” The mental picture of the heavenly “Room” magnifies when described by God as “a blissful ‘home and resting place’” (Q.25:75). (2005:231)

Visualization restores in the rewards awaiting the winners with the divine declaration “We shall lodge them in Rooms in the Garden” (Q.29:58) and “We shall admit them into cool refreshing shade” (Q.4:57). (2005:56) The rewarded people are honored by God’s admission which is imperceptible for the mortal humans. However, visualization is ultimate in verbs as “God bless them” and “they bless Him.” And “As for those who have been blessed,” they are surely in Heaven, “they are immortal there” (Q.11:108). (2005:143) And in their greetings “with their Lord’s permission: their greeting there is Peace” (Q.14:23). (2005:160)

Some aspects of the bliss are experienced physically in the earthly life but aspects of becoming immortal and communicating with God and God’s agents are visualized through the actual description of moving, talking, seeing and receiving. Qur’ an informs those who believed and did good that “theirs will be ‘Gardens’ where underneath run rivers ‘Whenever they are given’ from its sustenance a fruit, they said ‘We have been given this before,’ and ‘they were provided with something like it’” (Q.2:25). (2005:6)


Visualizing the Eternal Bliss also breeds in the Divine reference and interaction with the winners. God’s heavenly blessings in the hereafter are mere aspirations to the “human beings of all varieties of mental, psychological and cultural backgrounds, at all times and in all parts of the world.” (2017:82) God’s bless precedes and pursues the reward given to winners of the Eternal Bliss “The reward for such people is forgiveness from their Lord, and ‘Gardens where underneath run rivers’” (Q.3:136). (2005:44) “God blessed “the first emigrants and assistants” and He has prepared for them Gardens” (Q.9:100).

The divine comment given by God is an affirmation “they are owners of Heaven” (Q.2:82) “those are the owners of Heaven” (Q.10:26, Q.11:23) “Those are the inheritors who inherit The Paradise” (Q.23:10) “that is the reward of the good doers” (Q.5:85), “they have whatever they wish for” (Q.25:16), and “Their is whatever they wish and We have more” (Q.50:35).


Affirmations of the visualized reward is defined as triumph “that is the great triumph” (Q.4:13, Q.57:12, Q.64:9) and “that is truly the great triumph” (Q.9:72, Q.9:89, Q.9:10 and Q.57:12). Other affirmations of the reward are ingrained with actual places or actions familiar to the people in “We shall admit them into cool refreshing shade” (Q.4:57). (2005:56) Affirmed is the Garden in the imaginary bliss in “Their is whatever they wish and We have more” (Q.50:35). However, the winners are affirmed definitively as God’s Allies and assured the reward “God bless them, and they bless Him. Those are on God’s allies, and God’s allies are truly the prosperous” (Q.58:22).
Several verses affirming the reward embrace the intangible visualized divine reward with actual tangible human experience. Visualized are the Lord’s permission, prosperity and good sustenance while perceived are those tangible actions in greeting, abiding by God’s instructions and doing good in “with their Lord’s permission: their greeting there is Peace.” (Q.14:23). (2005: 160) And for the one who “believes in God and does good . . . Surely God has made good sustenance for him.” (Q.65:11). The divine comments are mere affirmations in simple straightforward discourse addressing people ‘We do not burden any soul with more than it can bear’ (Q.7:42). (2005: 97) “God has promised the male believers and the female believers” (Q.9:72) pondering questions ‘Who speaks more truly than God?’ (Q.4:122). (2005:62)

The place prepared for the winners is described in a visualized mode as Garden, “Gardens where underneath run rivers . . . and blissful homes in Gardens of Eden and greater blessing from God” (Q.9:72.) However, the Room and Rooms are mentioned but never described. Yet, boundless are those rivers running underneath the Gardens.

9. How are Actuality and Visualization related?

Although actuality mounts clearly in the setting and the personae in the dramatic structure of the Blissful scene, it never ceases in the description of the reward. Actuality intercedes with those mental portraits of not only the Bliss, but also the stage of process prior to it. In this regard, actuality and visualization bind the two lives, the mortal and the immortal, the earthly and the heavenly through the good doing and the reward attained by the personae. Both techniques in the dramatic Qur’anic structure, in the verses quoted in this study, may be explained according to Shahroor’s concept of being and becoming. Actuality in the Qur’anic structure occurs in the life of winners marking the beginning in their state of being on earth when they are liable to believing, doing good and asking for God’s blessings. Visualization anticipates the eternal becoming, dwelling, owning and enjoying the envisioned rewards.

The use of the past tense in “Those who believed and did good” may be explained within the field of physics when the past and previous events determine the future behavior. Therefore their enacted belief in the good doing entitle them to the visualized eternal state of bliss. The difference in the reward granted may be ascribed to the argument in “physicalism” that causality affects the average physical behavior but not specific physical behavior.” (Muller: 2017: 276-9)
Believing in God and doing good grant believers and doers different actual and physical rewards. Difference in the visualized physical reward recounts in the different names assigned to the Bliss. Those heavenly places are visualized despairingly in Qur’an.

10. Conclusion

Actuality is a technique employed in the portrayal of the Eternal Bliss in Qur’an to make the visualized and the imaginary factual and real to both male and female believers and good doers. Believing in God incites mankind into the actual good doing in their state of being in the earthly life. Their process in doing good takes many forms proceeding into the state of becoming winners of the reward they are promised. Given different definitions and features, winners of the bliss are mere human beings featured within varied settings. The visualized ongoing reward in the hereafter is all-inclusive sustaining spiritual peace, emotional and physical indulgence. Theirs will be whatever they aspire to along with the physical joys of food, drink and family gatherings with pure spouses and good offspring.

Affirmations of the reward and longevity are never absent in the Qur’anic dramatic blissful structures to unveil those routes leading to the everlasting bliss. Whatever, the human psyche is, there is always a clear path for those who propose to reflect and the new beginning to launch. Given different definitions and characteristics, winners of the bliss are mere human beings featured within varied settings.

Reference:


