a subtler and more flexible version of causality, says Ormsby. I find it to be a plausible argument.

More titillating themes are addressed in this concise but highly readable and well-crafted book. Chapter six provides a delightful smorgasbord of themes derived from the *Iḥyā'*, ranging from how to read the text as a 'script' for action to topics such as creation, matters of attention and distraction in the world, love, and theodicy. Scholars and interested readers, but especially students, will find this a satisfying read, beyond a mere cursory whetting of the appetite. Ormsby has made every effort to communicate Ghazālī's ideas with elegance, flair and intelligence. In an exemplary manner he has made discourses in Muslim humanities available to a broader audience.

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Carl W. Ernst. *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, With Select Translations.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011. x+212 pages, appendices, indices. Cloth US$30 ISBN 978-0-8078-3516-6.

The last decade has seen dramatic growth in the number of college courses in Islamic studies. Almost every campus in North America now has something to offer on the Middle East or Islamic history. Beyond the ubiquitous "Introduction to Islam" survey class the typical Religion department now also offers a Qur'an course. This pedagogical context makes Carl Ernst's *How to Read the Qur'an* uniquely valuable. It is a book aimed directly at these upper-level college courses on the Qur'an. Ernst is not writing to displace what is surely the most common textbook in such courses, Neal Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an* (Georgetown University Press, 2003), instead he presents us with careful readings of key sections of the Qur'an, as worked out through Ernst's version of form criticism. In brief, the approach is literary, and the technique structuralist. Ernst draws on historical and literary criticism to pull the text apart and to consider the meaning generated by the relationship between these parts, while also situating each within its historical context. In essence Ernst's aim is to bring structural exegesis of the Qur'an into the classroom.

Structuralist reading requires the identification of language units (Lévi-Strauss called them "gross constituent units"). Following Angelika Neuwirth and others before her such as Albert Bloch, Ernst calls these textual units "building blocks." They include oaths, end-time declaratives, appeals to the signs of

creation, statements of regulation and ritual, and references to contemporary events (51–8). Ernst is thus in a position to situate these units within new configurations and patterns. Here his guiding template is ring composition (or chiasmus) as most recently articulated by Mary Douglas. This method is essentially symmetrical reading of textual units that frame a central point. For example, a lengthy text might be whittled down to "X" when analyzed according to a reading schema organized as ABCD/X/D'C'B'A'. Ernst follows the lead of Raymond Farrin, and more closely the work of Michel Cuypers, in applying this technique to the Qur'an. The order that ring reading brings to the text also signals out-of-place passages, which can often be connected to later periods in the history of the revelation. Ernst uses this technique to identify the essential message of various suras from both the Meccan and Medinan periods.

Following the introductory chapter 1, chapter 2 explores the early Meccan revelations, usually tallied at forty-eight suras. Ernst focuses on eschatology and apocalypse statements, taking the reader through a number of key suras. He lays out the structures of these texts, breaking them up into their "natural constituent parts" (77). This demonstrates not only the ring structures we are now expecting, but it also points to later insertions in the text—passages that break with the ring structure, sitting uncomfortably among the early Meccan passages. Ernst argues that these passages are explanations and expansions (e.g. 79:33, 73:20, 55:9) offered later in the timeline of the revelation, an idea Ernst recognizes is well established among academic and traditional interpreters of the Qur'an. Based on style and structure, an argument is also made against the so-called "Satanic verses" ever having been an integral part of the Qur'anic text (102–104).

Chapter three turns to the forty-two suras of the Middle and Later Meccan periods. Ernst points out the typical tripartite structure of these suras, revealed by their ring structure, and draws parallels to structures of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry as well as to the worship services of other monotheistic communities of the Near East. His close reading of sura fifteen (al-Hijr) brings out its many intertextual connections with earlier parts of the Qur'an. Ernst also makes clear that his period was one of transition, where revelation was beginning to crystalize as a fixed text (moving from *qur'ān* to *kitāb*), and a new believing community first appears in the text. He goes on to survey the story of the Companions of the Cave, the Moses-Khidr story, and ends with a study of Muhammad's Meccan audience. The argument Ernst makes about the Meccans having much more theological and scriptural knowledge at their fingertips than the Qur'an itself claims they do is important. Less developed though are the insights made on the implications of the Khidr story for the Qur'anic theory of prophecy.

The fourth chapter turns to the twenty-four suras of the Medinan period, material that differs significantly from that of the Meccan periods in style and content. Ernst looks primarily at suras two, three, and five, arguing that recognition of religious pluralism is their central message. These are long and often complicated sections of the Qur'an, yet ring analysis (here relying heavily on Farrin and Cuypers) not only identifies the gist of the suras but also marginalizes statements that appear to be at odds with that central message. Ernst's analysis weighs in on the issue of abrogation by emphasizing the Qur'an's universal recognition of religious diversity over its historically specific statements to the contrary.

This book introduces the undergraduate reader to many important insights in the field of Qur'anic studies. This is a commendable achievement, but comment must be made here regarding method. Ernst makes much of the distinction between theological and non-theological approaches to the Qur'an, identifying himself categorically with the latter. On page twenty-one Ernst claims that the historical and literary approach is neutral, and "a fair-minded and reasonable approach..." in contrast to those readers who would impose their own sectarian dogmas. One might wonder, however, if this distinction is in reality so air tight. Ernst relies heavily on the ring analysis of Cuypers who explicitly claims he is preserving "the sacred nature of the text" (210). Cuypers is fully committed to his own religious world-view, and would very likely not identify himself with Ernst's side of the theological/non-theological binary. Beyond this, a wider criticism of the book might call for greater consideration of the objection that structural analyses cannot be treated as utterly transparent processes that innocently and passively display the essences of texts. This is exegesis, after all, and Ernst has fully joined the fray.

The author provides new translations of several Qur'anic passages. He has done this admirably, but nevertheless in a few places his word choices should be reconsidered. On page seventy-nine he translates 79:5 "*fa'l-mudabbirāt amran*" as those "running a situation." On page nenty-six, 52:23 "*ka'san lā laghwun fī-hā*" appears as "a cup which holds no nonsense"; and on page 101, 53:17 "*wa mā taghā*" as "or swagger." Despite these small infelicities, the book is a major contribution to our thinking about the Qur'anic text. It is written in Ernst's now familiar easy style and clear prose, which will make it a mainstay in our classrooms for many years.

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