INTRODUCTION

METAPHOR AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Vivid imagery abounds in the Hebrew Bible. Raging storms, calm waters, dark valleys and bright pastures boldly depict the moods of the psalmists; Isaiah and Ezekiel majestically portray God's throne, palace and chariot; the Song of Songs playfully uses botanical and zoological imagery to capture the unpredictable turns of youthful love. These and other scenes, which, in the words of one recent critic, derive from "the enchanted planet of the imagination" and comprise the "glory . . . [and] essence of [biblical] poetry,"[1] have become paramount in the literary school of biblical study. As this school reveals, metaphor and related imagery-evoking techniques such as simile, allegory and symbolism, enrich Scripture's meaning and heighten its emotive charge. The impressive results of this scholarly trend arouse interest in earlier treatments of biblical metaphor and draw attention to another milieu that celebrated literary beauty: the Jewish exegetical tradition in al-Andalus (= Muslim Spain) that coincided with an era of vibrant Hebrew literary activity inspired by Arabic poetry and poetics.[2] This book aims to show how three great authors in this tradition harnessed the literary tools available to them to devise a hermeneutic for analyzing biblical metaphor. Using modern linguistic and literary studies as a gauge, we will show that the Andalusian school is not monolithic with respect to metaphor, but rather represents a progression that led to an appreciation of its expressive potential.

Twentieth-century literary criticism and the associated method of "close reading," i.e., a "concern for nuances of words and shades of

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[1] Alonso Schöckel 1988:95.

[2] On the new interest in traditional Jewish exegesis sparked by literary studies, see Berlin 1997. The poetics of the Andalusian school has been explored by Pagis 1970; Dana 1982; Kugel 1981:172–200, Berlin 1991; the tension created by its use of Arabic poetics by Scheindlin 1976; Brann 1991. Midrashic exegesis has also benefitted from the new literary approach; see Hartman and Budick 1986; Fishbane 1985; 1993. Representing a different convergence of the modern interest in metaphor and medieval readings of Scripture, Matter (1990) analyzes the allegorical exegesis of the Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity.

meaning,"[3] have sparked a new interest in biblical metaphor. (In this work, we use "metaphor" as short for "metaphor and related techniques, simile, allegory and symbolism,"[4] except where greater precision is required). Once viewed as mere ornamentation, it is now recognized as a powerful expressive tool that "activate[s] . . . emotional and conceptual overtones."[5] The earlier view, popular in the nineteenth century, led to the "conceptual translation" of metaphor, i.e., its replacement with abstract, non-metaphorical language. L. Alonso Schöckel (1988:101) contrasts his modern literary reading with that older method:

> Anyone who tries to apply this sequence throughout the biblical material will neither understand nor be able to explain biblical language, but will put something else in its place. . . . Conceptual translation may gain in precision but it loses in richness, it may gain in clarity but it loses in allusiveness, it may be more manageable but it loses its immediate impact.

F. Landy (1983:104–05) illustrates this contrast in his discussion of Song 4:12, "A locked garden is my sister, my bride," which "has most frequently been understood to be a banal reference to virginity." That, he argues,

> . . . may be only one of its implications. The potentiality of a metaphor, while not inexhaustible, is usually multiple; otherwise it would be superfluous. A garden is private, secure and beautiful; in it, nature is humanized, like the girl, whose genetic endowment is perfected through culture. She, like the garden, is her own creation, fostered by her parents and society, secluded, both as a girl in the ancient world and as a human being with an innate sensitivity and capacity for growth. She is enclosed in her person, protected by the defenses that preserve her identity, her unique privacy.

This example typifies the efforts of the modern literary school to capture the expressive potential of biblical metaphor.[6]

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[3] *PEPP*, s.v. "New Criticism," 567.

[4] This convention, common in literary scholarship, helps us to speak about these techniques together based on their shared properties; see below, n. 49.

[5] Weiss 1984:130.

[6] For other literary studies of biblical metaphor, see Alter 1985:185–203; Alonso Schöckel 1988:95–141; Weiss 1984:130–135. For an overview of the recent scholarship on biblical and cognate Semitic metaphors, see Watson 1984:251–72. For a comprehensive analysis of biblical metaphor from a linguistic perspective, see Caird 1980. Macky (1990) builds on Caird and other modern studies of metaphor to analyze its role in Scripture from a theological perspective. Brettler (1989) has devoted

Until now, however, attempts to find precedents for this literary approach in the Andalusian school have been frustrated.[7] If anything, its most poetic authors adopt the hermeneutical mode of conceptual translation. A prime example is Moses Ibn Ezra (c. 1055–1138), an eminent Hebrew poet whose exegetical work, *Maqālat al-Ḥadīqa fi Maʿna al-Majāz wa-l-Ḥaqīqa* (*The Treatise of the Garden on Figurative and Literal Language*) reveals the wide range of metaphors in Scripture. But that work is essentially a dictionary for deciphering biblical metaphors rather than exploring their special expressive potential. The key to this seeming lack of literary sensitivity can be found in his *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-l-Mudhākara* (*The Book of Discussion and Conversation*), a handbook for writing Arabic-style Hebrew poetry. This Hebrew poetics, almost unique in medieval Jewish literature, lauds the literary merit of metaphor and outlines its workings in Scripture. But it embraces the ornamentalist attitude of Arabic poetics and describes metaphor as an ornate garb superimposed on an idea that could be expressed more directly, if less beautifully, in literal language. Having defined poetry in *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara* as the art of embellishing prosaic ideas, *Maqālat al-Ḥadīqa* aims to get at the divine content beneath Scripture's poetic exterior.[8]

Moses Ibn Ezra reveals the literary outlook shared by other authors more prominent in the exegetical tradition. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164),[9] also a poet, represents the culmination of the Andalusian school of *peshaṭ*, i.e., an empirical, contextual reading of Scripture that adheres to the rules of language, biblical literary conventions and historical context.[10] He illustrates this method by contrast with

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a full-length study to the manifold implications of the single conceptual metaphor *God is king* in Scripture (see chapter one, n. 242).

[7] See Weiss 1984:37; Simon 1992:134.

[8] On Moses Ibn Ezra's exegesis in these two works, see Cohen 2000b.

[9] Not related to Moses Ibn Ezra. In this work, we refer only to Abraham Ibn Ezra simply as "Ibn Ezra"; Moses Ibn Ezra is always referred to by his full name.

[10] For this definition of *peshaṭ*, see Kamin 1986:11–17, Rosenberg 1969; Sarna 1993:10–12; Garfinkel 2000; Simon 1992, 2000; Japhet 2000:54–78. This concept, of course, shares much with modern biblical scholarship (see Greenberg 1983:567), and the term *peshaṭ* is therefore popularly used among Hebrew speaking Bible scholars to denote *a scientifically sound biblical reading*, as opposed to *derash*, i.e., a subjectively imposed reading (see, e.g., Fraenkel 1991:11–12). (For a different analysis of the *peshaṭ-derash* dichotomy informed by modern literary theory, see Fishbane 1989:114–120.) In modern Hebrew parlance, then, *peshaṭ* has become simply a label of approbation. However, when discussing the various medieval exegetes, it is important to maintain a perspective of *peshaṭ* as a method ("an empirical, contextual reac-

Midrash, which takes Scripture to be *sui generis* by virtue of its divine origin and aims to show its "omnisignificance"[11] by extracting meaning from every biblical word.[12] Defying literary context and conventions, as well as the rules of language, the Rabbis make dramatic inferences from textual nuances.[13] But the *peshat* hermeneutic, in a tradition dating back to Saʿadia (Baghdad, 882–942), assumes that Scripture adopts human literary conventions.[14] Arabic poetics provided Saʿadia's successors in Muslim lands with a powerful literary theory and hence, in their view, the keys to biblical interpretation. Ibn Ezra tapped into this source of exegetical energy to interpret metaphor. Whereas the Rabbis fancifully explored the nuances of biblical imagery, he argued that it was used by biblical authors simply as a literary ornament. To remain faithful to Scripture's intent, Ibn Ezra thus distinguishes between its purely aesthetic aspect and its core message, which he expresses in conceptual translation.

Maimonides (1135–1204), another son of the Andalusian tradition, made metaphor the exegetical focus of his *Guide for the Perplexed*. He, too, adopts the *peshat* conception of Scripture as a literary text and invokes the notion of poetic embellishment to undercut fanciful rabbinic readings of metaphor. But as a rationalist with other demons to fight, he also used metaphor as a hermeneutical tool for reconciling Scripture with science and purging the popular anthropomorphic notion of God that resulted from a literal reading of Scripture. Drawing upon a tradition established by Saʿadia, his goal was to get

ing of Scripture that adheres to the rules of language ...," as above), not necessarily the correct interpretation (a point made by Kamin 1986:12–13). This acknowledges the subjective dimension of every interpretive method and leaves room for different varieties of *peshat* based on different underlying philosophical, hermeneutical and even scientific assumptions (see, e.g., below, n. 33). The claim we will make, in fact, is that Radak devised a new *peshat* method by revising the literary assumptions of his predecessors.

[11] This term was coined by Kugel (1981:104–05); compare Elman 1993:1–8. Fishbane (1989:33–45; 1998:12–13) demonstrates that the hermeneutical doctrine of omnisignificance stems from a view of Scripture as "ontologically unique literature" (1989:35) not subject to the "natural or scientific method" of analysis normally applied to human literary expression (1989:44).

[12] See Heinemann 1970:96–129; Rozik [= Kamin] 1976:77; Kamin 1986:16; Kugel 1981:96–109.

[13] See Kasher 1988; Fraenkel 1991:11–12; 39–232. The term *peshat* appears sporadically in rabbinic literature to indicate (1) literal or (2) contextual reading (Kamin 1986:23–48; Weiss-Halivni 1991:52–78; Ahrend 1994:237–44); but it does not represent a comprehensive hermeneutic as in the medieval tradition.

[14] See Kugel 1981:172–81; Cohen 1995/6.

behind Scripture's picturesque language and capture its true, "inner" meaning, which he did by replacing the biblical idiom with a philosophical vocabulary.[15]

Despite its poetic sophistication, the Andalusian *peshat* tradition treated metaphor as an exegetical obstacle, an elegant veneer that disguises Scripture's essential meaning. The otherwise profound *peshat* tradition culminating with Ibn Ezra and Maimonides was reluctant to explore metaphor's special suggestive power. Those authors, in the words of Alonso Schöckel, aimed for "precision ... clarity ... [and making Scripture] more manageable," to the disappointment of those seeking a medieval literary reading of Scripture that captures the "richness ... allusiveness ... [and] immediate impact" of biblical metaphor.

That prospect, however, would be unlocked a generation later by David Kimhi (1160–1235), known as Radak, a transplanted scion of the Andalusian tradition in Christian Provence, who manifests greater sensitivity to the expressive potential of metaphor. At first glance, Radak would seem an unlikely candidate to devise a new literary approach. Educated by his father, Joseph (c. 1105–1170), and older brother, Moses (d. c. 1190), both Andalusian emigrés, he aligned himself with the *peshat* ideology and, by virtue of his extensive, penetrating and lucid commentaries, became one of its most renowned champions. Unlike his predecessors, Radak was not a poet, nor did he have direct access to Arabic poetics. As a Talmud teacher,[16] he was immersed in rabbinic literature and was thus exposed instead to the anti-literary midrashic approach. Moreover, his Provençal community, which itself was in the intellectual orbit of Northern France, embraced the midrash-laden commentaries of Rashi (1040–1105), which bolstered its indigenous midrashic tradition.[17]

Yet this may have been just the right climate to cultivate a new, more literarily sensitive *peshat* hermeneutic, since Radak's position at a crossroads between conflicting methods enabled him to evaluate both critically.[18] In al-Andalus, authors let their imagination run free

[15] See Halbertal and Margalit 1992:56–57, and studies cited below, pp. 13–14.

[16] *Shorashim*, post-script; see Talmage 1975:14–19.

[17] Represented, e.g., by Rabbi Moses the Preacher (*ha-Darshan*) of Narbonne (eleventh century), who compiled older midrashic sources and devised new readings in a similar style.

[18] A generation later, a similar bi-cultural perspective would benefit the great Catalan talmudist-exegete Naḥmanides (1194–1270), who likewise aimed to integrate

in poetry, for example, in far-fetched metaphors and clever word-plays.[19] With that creative outlet, they maintained biblical exegesis as a sober intellectual pursuit, strictly bound by a formalist poetics. Radak, on the other hand, would apply his creative energy to biblical interpretation. Midrash seems to have highlighted for him the limitations of conceptual translation; but he could not accept the Rabbis' undisciplined approach, since, as a *peshaṭ* exegete, he read Scripture through the lens of human literary convention. Radak's solution was to formulate a new literary conception of metaphor as an expressive tool that the biblical authors used to convey subtle overtones. Like his Andalusian predecessors, he aimed to remain faithful to the intent of Scripture by understanding its literary conventions; but the special nature of metaphor, in his view, required a creative exegesis that matched the biblical authors' creativity and revealed the connotations of their metaphors.

Medieval Terminology

Though endowed with keen literary intuition, Radak could not have devised his new concept of metaphor without drawing upon the poetic terminology and categories defined by his Andalusian predecessors. Those analytic tools enabled him to discuss metaphor with a precision unavailable to authors ignorant of Arabic learning, even those showing an acute sense of language such as Rashi and his students Joseph Qara (c. 1055–1125) and Rashbam (c. 1080–1160) in northern France (below, n. 22). Indeed, one of the strong points of the Andalusian *peshaṭ* tradition was its ability to differentiate among linguistic and poetic categories through careful definitions and use of technical terminology, a subject to which we devote the first half of this book.

A study of this kind, however, poses significant challenges, since we investigate how an intellectual continuum from Saʿadia to Radak, which spans three centuries and three languages (Arabic, Hebrew and Aramaic), analyzed what we now call "metaphor," "simile,"

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strands of the rationalist *peshaṭ* school that had developed in al-Andalus with the midrashic exegetical mode represented by Rashi; see Septimus 1983 and below, pp. 198, 244, 330; chapter three, n. 57; chapter six, nn. 13, 48.

[19] See Pagis 1976:78–104; see also Heinrichs 1986; Cohen 2000a:13–17.

"allegory" and "symbolism." Although the medieval Jewish authors did not use these actual terms (which Western tradition inherited from Greek learning), most of them were familiar with Arabic equivalents from their exposure to Greco-Arabic poetic learning.[20] Moses Ibn Ezra thus distinguishes among *istiʿāra* (metaphor), *tashbīh* (simile) and *mathal* (allegory, symbolism). His definitions differ slightly from the Greek ones, but this three-fold division is a good point of departure for our study of the medieval terminology.

Other authors of this school, who knew the Arabic terminology, however, did not take advantage of this detailed classification. Abraham Ibn Ezra, who fled al-Andalus for Christian countries and wrote for audiences who did not read Arabic, limited himself to the single Hebrew term *mashal*[21] (cognate of Ar. *mathal*) to label all three categories.[22] Maimonides, still writing in Arabic, shared no such linguistic restraint, but draws upon the logical (rather than poetic) strain of Greco-Arabic learning and distinguishes only between *istiʿāra* and *mathal* (a term he used also for simile and symbolism). A generation later, Radak develops a fuller system of Hebrew terms by supplementing Ibn Ezra's *mashal* with *meliṣah*, borrowing a coinage by Rashi, and *hashʾalah*, a loan-translation of *istiʿāra*, which by then had been standardized in Hebrew translations of Maimonides' *Guide*.

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[20] Jewish authors learned of Greek poetics through the Arabic tradition much as they studied Greek philosophy in Arabic translation. The theory that Arabic poetics in the ninth century responded to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* has been challenged (see Bonebakker 1967:192–93, 208–09; 1970:77, 90–95; 1981:586–88; Heinrichs 1973:32; Van Gelder 1982:4–5). Yet by the twelfth century, Greek poetics had acquired adherents among Arab critics, though others avoided it for nationalistic reasons. A Jewish author like Moses Ibn Ezra naturally had no such compunctions, and cites Aristotle and other Greek thinkers frequently: see Cohen 2000a:1–3.

[21] Compare the observation by Caird that the biblical authors themselves did not have the specialized terms "which we use for the figures of speech [based on a tradition] inherited from Aristotle and the Greek rhetoricians.... but [rather] used one term, *mashal*, to cover a variety of kindred forms" (1980:183).

[22] Unlike Ibn Ezra, who could not *express* the three-fold Arabic distinction in Hebrew, northern French *peshaṭ* exegetes such as Rashi, Joseph Qara and Rashbam were ignorant of it entirely. Those authors may have had contact with like-minded Christian exegetes during the so-called twelfth-century renaissance in northern France (see Touitou 1979; Grossman 1995:473–75) and were certainly exposed to Christian hermeneutics in polemical contexts (see Grossman 1995:475–97). It is thus conceivable that Rashi and his students were familiar with Latin literary terms such as *allegoria* and *metaphora* (see Kamin and Saltman 1989:12–15; Kamin 1991:13–31; 73–98; Matter 1990:52–57), but they would have viewed these as foreign concepts (see below, chapter one, n. 6), whereas Ibn Ezra and his compatriots were at home in the terminology of Arabic poetics.

These shifts in technical terminology tell a story of cultural transitions and changing literary conceptions. To properly assess this moving target and, at the same time, plot the dynamic development of the medieval conception of metaphor, we use modern linguistic terms (metaphor, simile, etc.) as a fixed coordinate system. Yet even the modern terminology requires clarification, not least because of disagreements about it in modern literary and linguistic studies. Accordingly, a special section appears at the conclusion of this introduction, in which we define our terminology in light of recent scholarship and the needs of this study.[23]

Outline

By now it is clear that two academic fields converge in this book: medieval Hebrew philology and biblical interpretation. Recognizing that some readers will be more interested in one or another, I have divided the book into two parts. The first, comprising three chapters, is devoted to language, namely, the medieval conceptions of metaphor and the terminology used to express them. In chapter one we study Abraham Ibn Ezra and his background in Hebrew and Arabic poetics and hermeneutics. This chapter (the longest in the book) also serves as an introduction to the remainder of our study, since it presents the basic Andalusian conceptual framework for discussing metaphor, which Maimonides and Radak both inherited. Chapter two focuses on Maimonides' definitions of metaphor and its subcategories based on his training in Arabic logic, which he combined with his rabbinic learning. In chapter three, we demonstrate how Radak, reflecting his Provençal environment, used a dichotomy devised by Rashi to augment the classification he inherited from the above-mentioned predecessors and offer a new perspective on metaphor. The second part of this work, comprising three chapters and a conclusion, focuses on hermeneutics and traces the interpretation of metaphor within the Andalusian tradition. Here we diverge from chronological order and begin with Maimonides (chapter four), since he revives an older, philosophically-driven system established by

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[23] Two recent studies of the medieval terminology should be noted: Talmage 1986, a study of allegory and symbolism in the Andalusian exegetical tradition; Stern 1991 (compare Boyarin 1995), a study of the rabbinic *mashal* genre.

Sa'adia. We then turn to Abraham Ibn Ezra (chapter five), who shows greater poetic sensitivity than Sa'adia and Maimonides, but limits the imaginative potential of biblical metaphor in his desire to define a *peshat* method in opposition to midrashic exegesis. In chapter six we define the creative literary approach advanced by Radak, its roots in the traditions he inherited and the new possibilities it opens. In the conclusion (chapter seven), we use our findings to illuminate the continuum of biblical interpretation from Midrash to the medieval *peshat* tradition to modern literary scholarship.

Prior Scholarship

Recent advances in the study of Jewish biblical exegesis (*parshanut ha-miqra*) have brought the field to a new level, making the time ripe for fresh avenues of inquiry.[24] To begin with, many previously unavailable texts by important commentators have been identified, critically edited and translated into modern languages.[25] Based, in part, on

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[24] Just two decades ago, M. Greenberg (1983:559) commented that "modern scholars told the history of [Jewish biblical] exegesis and described its accomplishments, but hardly analyzed the exegetes' assumptions and their definitions [of interpretive principles]." The recent explosion of scholarly output in this field since then has done much to rectify this deficiency. To take just one example, the crucial notion of *peshat* in the northern French tradition (the subject of Greenberg's article), has been critically analyzed by S. Kamin (1986) and, more recently by S. Japhet (1994; 2000:56. 63); see also above, n. 10; compare n. 43 below on Radak. Happily, the large number of recent important studies on *parshanut ha-miqra* make it impossible to mention them all in this context. In the text and notes below, we focus on those directly relevant to this work.

[25] For example, the exegetical works of Moses Ibn Chiquitilla and Judah Ibn Bal'am, two eleventh-century authors in al-Andalus who influenced Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, had been lost to subsequent generations and were not published with the advent of printing in the early modern era. In recent years, however, a good number of their commentaries have been edited (in some cases based on long-lost manuscripts) and translated into Hebrew; see Perez 1999:43; Maman 2000:262, 275–81. On newly found commentaries by Ibn Ezra and David Kimhi, see below. Sa'adia's commentaries (many of which were previously available only in Arabic, others found recently) have been translated from Arabic into Hebrew in the last thirty years by Qāfih and Zucker, a project now carried on by Ratzaby and Ben-Shammai. Moses Ibn Ezra's poetics, *Kitāb al-Muhādṛa* (once available only in MS and Halper's loose translation, *Shirat Yisrael* [1924]), was critically edited and re-translated into Hebrew by Halkin (1975). Moses Ibn Ezra's exegetical work, *Maqālat al-Hadīqa*, has until now been available only in MS (which is the basis for the citations in this work); P. Fenton's edition and Hebrew translation of this important treatise is scheduled to appear in the coming year. The French *peshat* exegete

the wider range and better quality of primary sources now available, a number of seminal studies have refocused our understanding of Jewish biblical hermeneutics and suggest new directions for its research. Some of the current studies highlight the literary conceptions of the *peshat* tradition and its debt to the surrounding Muslim and Christian cultures.[26] We take advantage of these developments to evaluate the literary implications of the shift in the tradition that had reached its zenith in al-Andalus and was then transplanted to Christian Provence.[27]

Rashbam is another striking example of a medieval Jewish biblical interpreter whose writings have benefitted from recent scholarly editing. New critical editions of his commentaries on Qohelet (Japhet and Salters 1985) and the Song of Songs (Thompson 1988), both with English translations, have replaced inferior earlier printed editions. The horizon of Rashbam scholarship has been widened yet further by Japhet's critical edition of the previously unpublished commentary of Rashbam on Job (2000), which includes an extensive introduction that offers a comprehensive, up-to-date analysis of this exegete's methods and interpretations (see Cohen 2003). (Lockshin [2001] questions the attribution of the Job commentary to Rashbam, although he admits that it reflects this northern French *peshat* scholar's exegetical style and may have been written by a student of his [2001:103–04].)

[26] Our study of the treatment of biblical metaphor in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries owes much to recent scholarship that focuses on earlier Jewish exegetes in Muslim countries and their use of Arabic learning. The key role played by figurative interpretation (a staple of Qur'anic hermeneutics) in Saʿadia's thinking has been outlined by M. Zucker, whose conclusions were refined by H. Ben-Shammai and R. Steiner. Additional light has been shed on Saʿadia's hermeneutics by M. Polliack, who explores his methods of translating Scripture into Arabic in comparison with the Karaite school. Fenton (1997) offers a comprehensive survey of the subsequent tradition, from Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon through Moses Ibn Ezra, and demonstrates how these authors enriched their interpretive scope by applying to Scripture a broad range of concepts from Qur'anic hermeneutics and Arabic poetics. My own essay devoted to the definition of *istiʿāra*, i.e., metaphor proper (2000a), demonstrates how Moses Ibn Ezra and Maimonides drew upon Arabic poetics and logic respectively to define this literary technique with a level of precision unique in medieval Jewish learning. Elbaum (2000) addresses the tendency of authors in the Judeo-Arabic tradition, from Saʿadia to Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, to interpret rabbinic Midrash figuratively, an issue closely related to our subject. Although our work is devoted to the Jewish exegetical school that had developed in a Muslim milieu, we have also benefitted from the cultural approach to the French *peshat* school and its Christian surroundings in studies by S. Kamin, E. Touitou. S. Japhet and A. Grossman. Of special relevance to our study is the investigation by R. Harris (1997) of the literary conceptions manifested in this *peshat* school.

[27] I have taken two recent works as models for my own study in this volume. (1) W. Heinrichs' 1977 monograph, *The Hand of the Northwind: Opinions on Metaphor and the Early Meaning of* Istiʿāra *in Arabic Poetics*, which reveals a decisive shift in the conception of metaphor among Arab experts on poetry, something we attempt to do within the Jewish exegetical tradition. (2) U. Simon's *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (1991), which analyzes a cross-section of the exegetical tradition with respect to a specific set of issues. Rather

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Current research on Ibn Ezra illuminates the exegetical personality of this itinerant scholar, whose commentarial activity began when he fled al-Andalus at age 50. Wandering from town to town in Christian Europe, Ibn Ezra made his living by writing commentaries in which he promulgated the philological, literary-historical conception of *peshat* exegesis he had inherited from predecessors whose works (written in Arabic) were largely unknown to his new audiences. New critical editions, several based on manuscripts recently identified by U. Simon and A. Mondschein,[28] highlight Ibn Ezra's penchant for re-writing his commentaries throughout his travels. During his stay in Italy in the 1140's, the Andalusian emigré wrote his first round of commentaries;[29] a decade later, he resettled in France and wrote new versions of his commentaries on seven biblical books.[30] (A. Mondschein [1997, 2000b] has identified fragments of a third version of the Genesis commentary, recorded by a student, while Ibn Ezra was in England at the end of his life [ca. 1158–1164].) The wandering Andalusian emigré also wrote monographs (some of which were also written in multiple versions) on the Hebrew language, mathematics, astronomy and astrology, all of which aimed to transmit the Judeo-Arabic cultural heritage to his new audience in Christian Europe.[31] These works have attracted a good deal of scholarly attention in the past decade, yielding a number of important studies of Ibn Ezra's

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than studying individual authors in isolation, Simon traces an intellectual continuum by showing how later exegetes build upon their predecessors' work, a framework that effectively opens the door to this study of biblical metaphor.

[28] See Simon 1989, 1991; Mondschein 1997, 2000b. Recently found commentaries on Jeremiah and Ezekiel have been attributed to Ibn Ezra, but Simon (1998) concludes that this identification is erroneous and that those commentaries were actually written by Menaḥem ben Simon of Posquières.

[29] In Rome (1140–1142), he wrote the commentaries (in the following order) on Qohelet, Job, Lamentations and Daniel (critically edited by Mondschein [1977]). In Lucca (1142–1145), he wrote on the five books of the Torah (including the so-called "short" commentary on Exodus), Isaiah, Song of Songs, Esther, Ruth, Minor Prophets and Psalms (of which we have only the introduction and the commentaries on Psalms 1 and 2, published by U. Simon [1991]). For the dates and provenance of these commentaries, see Levin 1969:24–27; Mondschein 1977:xxix; Simon 1991:145–52; Sela 1999:16.

[30] These include Genesis (of which we have only the introduction and a partial commentary), the "long" commentary on Exodus, Minor Prophets (published by Simon [1989]), Psalms, Daniel, Esther and Song of Songs. These commentaries were written, apparently in the city of Rouen in northern France, between 1153 and 1156; see Levin 1969:31–35; Simon 1991:146–48; Sela 1999:16.

[31] On Ibn Ezra's linguistic works, see Charlap 1999:6–13; for his works on mathematics, astronomy and astrology, see Sela 1999:20–26, 379–82.

linguistics,[32] as well as his philosophical and scientific conceptions and their impact on his exegesis.[33]

The new texts by Ibn Ezra and studies of his thought have shed light on his exegetical outlook as it developed through the different stages of his career. His attitude towards the intellectual heritage of his host communities, for example, has sparked debate over this itinerant scholar's cultural identity. Simon (1988a, 1991, 1998) argues that he ignored the vibrant French exegetical school[34] and maintained his dialogue primarily with ghosts of his Andalusian youth. On this basis, Simon (1985, 1991, 1992, 1993a) concludes that Ibn Ezra—often portrayed as an iconoclastic champion of *peshat*—was actually a conservative thinker who resisted the more radical exegetical notions advanced by great Andalusian predecessors such as Jonah Ibn Janaḥ (early eleventh century) and Moses Ibn Chiquitilla (mid-eleventh century). On the other hand, A. Mondschein (1992, 2000a) highlights Ibn Ezra's emigré experience in Christian Europe by arguing that his commentaries include numerous implicit responses to Rashi's midrashic exegesis, which reigned supreme outside of al-Andalus. This opens the door to the possibility raised by some scholars that Ibn Ezra, especially while in France and England, absorbed the exegetical insights of his French contemporary Rashbam, a kindred *peshat* spirit.[35] As often occurs in scholarly debates, both Simon and

Mondschein see different aspects of the truth,[36] and their views will enable us to better understand Ibn Ezra's motives in his exegesis of biblical metaphor. In chapter one we will see that Ibn Ezra contended with Saʿadia and Ibn Janaḥ with respect to their linguistic conception of metaphor. But in chapter five it will become clear that, on literary matters, the Andalusian emigré returned to the safety of the hermeneutic those authors represent when faced with what he perceived as midrashic anarchy.

A new image of Maimonides has also emerged: once portrayed only as philosopher and jurist,[37] he is now viewed also as an exegete.[38]

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[32] See Charlap 1999, a dedicated study of Ibn Ezra's linguistic system in comparison with his predecessors, especially Saʿadia, Ḥayyuj and Ibn Janaḥ.

[33] This new scholarly focus, represented in the studies of S. Sela, Y. Langermann, J. Cohen and M. Halbertal, has revealed that Ibn Ezra's *peshat* hermeneutic is not based solely on philological-literary methods, but is also the product of a medieval Greco-Arabic philosophical and scientific world-view, which granted a central role to astrology. Ibn Ezra's philosophical outlook and its impact on his exegesis are also brought to light in the recently published annotated critical edition of *Yesod Mora* (Cohen and Simon 2002).

[34] It is indeed surprising that Ibn Ezra ignores Joseph Qara and Rashbam, whose *peshat* insights often resemble his own. Simon 1988a:40-41 maintains that he never saw Qara's writings and does not mention Rashbam (about whom he does seem to have known) because "he did not consider him a *peshat* exegete worthy of consideration .. due to his firm conviction that Hebrew grammar is the exclusive heritage of Spanish scholars, since it was revealed by Judah Ḥayyuj."

[35] Based on striking parallels in their respective commentaries, Margaliyot (1953) argued that Ibn Ezra used Rashbam in his long commentary on Exodus, which was written in 1153 in Rouen in northern France. (Since Rashbam himself resided in Rouen at that time, it is conceivable that the two *peshat* exegetes actually met one another there [see Golb 1976:60-66].) Indeed, it would seem that by 1153 our Andalusian emigré had reached a point of readiness to acknowledge his new intellectual milieu in France, since most of his explicit references to Rashi are found in

the long commentary on Exodus (see Steiner 1998:251n). Unlike Rashi, however, Rashbam is never mentioned by name in Ibn Ezra's writings. Simon (1965:130-36; 1991:259) thus challenges Margaliyot's conclusions and deems the similarities between Ibn Ezra and Rashbam nothing more than coincidental confluences that might be expected between two *peshat* exegetes. S. Japhet, on the other hand, goes beyond Margaliyot's modest claim and believes that Ibn Ezra used Rashbam's work even when writing his early commentaries in Italy (personal communication: see also Japhet 2000:52, 67, 71, 196, 228). This view requires consideration in light of the numerous parallels between the two exegetes noted by Gómez Aranda (1994:20, 25, 30, 34, 90, 117, 166, 177) in his critical edition of Ibn Ezra on Qohelet (written in Rome in 1140). In this volume, as well, I have noted a number of parallels between Rashbam and Ibn Ezra (including his Italian writings); see chapter one, n. 17; chapter three, n. 61; chapter five, n. 80; chapter six, n. 12. Just before this book went to press, Dr. A. Mondschein kindly sent me his new study (2001) dedicated to re-evaluating this question. He concludes that Ibn Ezra did not actually see Rashbam's work until he settled in England at the end of his life, at which point the Andalusian emigré strongly criticized some of his French contemporary's anti-*halakhic peshat* interpretations. Mondschein (2001:41) does, however, leave open the possibility that some of the great French *peshat* exegete's interpretations circulated among Jewish intellectual circles in Christian Europe and might have become known to Ibn Ezra in that form earlier in his lifetime.

[36] It stands to reason that Ibn Ezra's later commentaries would reflect his greater awareness of the cultural and intellectual milieu of Jews in Christian Europe, a development that Sela (1999:17-19) observes by comparing the two versions of Ibn Ezra's commentaries on Genesis.

[37] In line with this narrow range of interests, it was generally thought (see, e.g., Twersky 1980:250-51, 482) that Maimonides opposed poetry, following in the tradition of Plato, who denounced poets as liars (see Brann 1991:73; *PEPP*, s.v. "Platonism"). But Yahalom (1997; 1999) has recently raised the intriguing possibility that Maimonides not only appreciated poetry, but even composed fanciful verse himself (cf. Shailat 1988:II:694-95).

[38] In studies on method by A. Hyman, S. Rosenberg and S. Klein-Braslavy, and on specific issues and texts by S. Rawidowicz, Z. Harvey and H. Kasher. For a bibliography of older studies related to Maimonides' biblical interpretation, see Dienstag 1970 and the updated bibliographic list in Dienstag 1989. In her first work on the great philosopher's biblical exegesis (published just twenty-five years ago [1978; reprinted in 1987]), Klein-Braslavy pointed to Bacher's 1896 study as the last comprehensive analysis of this subject (1987:10-11). Symptomatic of the

The old view resulted, in part, from his failure to write a running commentary; moreover, his biblical readings in the *Guide* were dismissed as philosophical *derash* by authors as diverse as Spinoza and M. H. Segal.[39] Recently, however, S. Rosenberg (1981) has shown that Maimonides defined principles of exegesis based on a keen sense of language, poetics and psychology, which, admittedly, he applied to serve his philosophical agenda. S. Klein-Braslavy, in two books (1986; 1987) devoted to Maimonides' interpretation of Genesis 1–5, reveals—in a line-by-line analysis—how he applies those principles. Nevertheless, this literature continues to view Maimonides the exegete within the rabbinic and Greco-Arabic philosophical traditions he cites explicitly.[40] Our study aims to reveal his place in—and silent debt to—the Andalusian *peshat* school that culminated in the work of Abraham Ibn Ezra.[41] We will also show how Maimonides' linguistic and exegetical

insights, originally motivated by a philosophical agenda, entered the mainstream exegetical tradition when used by Radak for literary purposes.

The current state of Kimhi scholarship owes much to the groundbreaking work of F. Talmage, whose studies in the 1960's and 1970's outlined the work of Joseph and Moses Kimhi, as well as Radak's philological, rationalist *peshat* method, all in the context of the culture clash between the family's scientific roots in al-Andalus and its new midrashic Provençal milieu.[42] His perspective is enriched by the important studies of Simon (1968:203–09) and Melammed (1978:734–78), which highlight Radak's adherence to the hermeneutical principles formulated by Abraham Ibn Ezra and other Andalusian predecessors, principles that enabled Radak to distinguish between his *peshat* method and the midrashic mode of reading Scripture popular in Provence.[43] But the new perspectives on Radak's predecessors offered by the most recent scholarship (as outlined above) have yet to bring

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paradigm shift is a recent study by Fradkin (1997; see response in Stern 1997), who raises the question of the genre of the *Guide* and considers classifying it as a work of biblical exegesis.

[39] See Rosenberg 1981:88–89.

[40] A prime example of this trend is Klein-Braslavy 1996, an important study of Maimonides' theory of allegory in light of his rabbinic and Greco-Arabic sources. His medieval Jewish philosophical sources are more difficult to trace because Maimonides seldom cites them by name. After a lengthy discussion of his Arabic sources, Pines (1963:cxxxii–cxxxiv) cites a few parallels with Saʿadia, Moses Ibn Ezra and ha-Levi, but concludes that the author of the *Guide* "had no use for a specific Jewish philosophical tradition." Twersky (1993:21, 40–41), on the other hand, calls for a more balanced approach that credits the Jewish influence, as does Kreisel (1991), who discusses the possible influence of Bahya, ha-Levi and other authors on the great philosopher. (In this spirit, we should note R. Eisen's forthcoming volume, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, which views Maimonides' interpretation of Job [*Guide* III:22–23] in the context of a Jewish philosophical tradition beginning with Saʿadia and culminating in the post-Maimonidean Provençal philosophical school.)

[41] On the members of this tradition who clearly influenced Maimonides, see below, chapter two, n. 1. The question of his possible debt to Abraham Ibn Ezra has long engaged scholars and is relevant to our discussion throughout the current work. A well-known letter attributed to Maimonides addressed to his son, Abraham, includes ardent praise for Ibn Ezra's commentaries (*Qoves Teshuvot ha-Rambam* II:39–40). Citing that letter for support, Perla (1975 [orig. publ 1914–17]:15) argued that Maimonides' distinctive system of enumerating the commandments in *Sefer ha-Miṣwot* can be traced to principles in Ibn Ezra's theological-philosophical work, *Yesod Mora*. Subsequent scholars have relied on Perla's opinion and have adduced further parallels between the two authors (see Jospe 1994:197; Harvey 1988b:209–11; Cohen and Simon 2002:30; see also Bromberg 1963–64). Twersky (1993), however, deems the case for direct influence unproven. As he notes, the letter extolling Ibn Ezra is no longer considered authentic (1993:23); moreover, it is not clear that *Yesod Mora*, completed in London in 1157, was available to Maimonides in Egypt when he composed *Sefer ha-Miṣwot* just over a decade later (1993:39). Yet Twersky himself

compiles his own substantial list of additional parallels between the two thinkers on matters of philosophy and biblical exegesis (1993:25–39), and argues that the question of influence must give way to the equally important matter of the common intellectual environment that produced these two great thinkers. In other words, it was only natural for Maimonides and Ibn Ezra to arrive at similar readings of Scripture because both drew upon the rationalist Andalusian *peshat* tradition. In this spirit, we note additional points of contact between Ibn Ezra and Maimonides on exegetical matters in this work; see, e.g., chapter one, n. 21; chapter four, nn. 6, 19, 126, 134; chapter five, nn. 36, 66, 99. As a talmudist, however, Maimonides more willing than Ibn Ezra to rely on rabbinic readings of Scripture; on this distinction, see chapter four, n. 1.

[42] The following three texts by Radak were edited and published for the first time in the twentieth century: (1) the allegorical commentary on Gen 2:7–5:1, by Finkelstein (the introduction of which was published separately by H. Kasher; (2) the introduction to Radak's standard Pentateuch commentary, by A. Golan; (3) the Proverbs commentary, by F. Talmage, based on a Vatican MS identified as Radak's by U. Cassuto. (On the recent debate over this attribution, see below, chapter three, n. 41). Radak's other commentaries are widely available in the Rabbinic Bible: on the critical and other editions, see Bibliography below and Talmage 1975:188–92. For a new perspective on the MSS of Radak's works, see the introduction to Y. Berger's critical edition of the Chronicles commentary (2003). In separating out the MS groups, Berger has found evidence of substantial revisions by Radak during his lifetime, which reflect different stages of development in the style and content of the Provençal author's exegesis.

[43] In my 1994 essay, however, I show that Radak's *peshat* at times manifests a Midrash-like sensitivity to linguistic nuance. The Provençal exegete's respect for Midrash is also documented by Perez (1983), who shows that Radak often relied on rabbinic literature for historical information. In his more recent study, Perez (2000) addresses Radak's greater reliance on Midrash in his exegesis in general.

about an analogous paradigm shift in our perception of David Kimhi's exegetical thought and practice. The previous studies paint a portrait of Radak as a faithful scion, a master teacher and an elucidator of the Andalusian *peshaṭ* legacy, rather than an independent thinker. Inspired by the new outlook on the medieval exegetical tradition, I would like to challenge this portrait by revealing Radak's innovative qualities and showing how he drew upon a variety of intellectual streams converging in Provence to forge a novel *peshaṭ* method with enhanced literary sensitivity.[44]

Modern Linguistic and Literary Terminology[45]

The terminology and concepts of metaphor that we will use in this work are based on recent scholarship in linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy of language and psychology.[46] Although the medieval writers obviously did not have access to the modern views, they intuitively grasped some of the issues that are now defined explicitly.[47] The discussion below is, of necessity, technical and theoretical. Analytic minded readers will deem it essential for a smooth reading of what follows, but some may wish to proceed to the analysis of the medieval authors in chapter one and refer back to this introduction where necessary for clarification of terminology and theory. With this in mind, I have indicated key technical terms in SMALL CAPS when first

[44] For an overview of the Kimhi legacy from this perspective, see my recent essay, "The Qimhi Family" (Cohen 2000c). New studies by N. Grunhaus (2003a, 2003b) explore Radak's use of midrashic literature and shed further light on his multifaceted interpretive outlook.

[45] Somewhat surprisingly, there is no widely accepted standard terminology readily available for the analysis of metaphor. In fact, variations among academic fields even make terms used by some scholars unacceptable to others, creating a gap that we cannot completely bridge. In the following pages, we aim primarily to define the terminology used *in this volume* and the concepts on which it is based.

[46] The purpose of this section of the introduction is to draw upon contemporary studies of metaphor to develop a vocabulary for analyzing the writings of the medieval authors who are the focus of this study. For an analogous use of modern theories of metaphor to understand its workings in Scripture. see Caird 1980:7–84, 131–97; Watson 1984:251–72; Brettler 1989:17–28; Macky 1990:4–56.

[47] This has been demonstrated amply in Arabic poetics by Abu Deeb (1979) in his extensive study of the theory of metaphor advanced by the eleventh-century literary critic ʿAbd-al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. Abu Deeb (1979:9–15) outlines "modern critical theories on poetic imagery" and goes on to demonstrate how they illuminate al-Jurjānī's innovations (see chapter six, n. 26) in relation to the conceptions of metaphor he inherited from the earlier tradition of Arabic poetics.

introduced, both in the section below and again in the body of this work (where I have also referred in notes back to the relevant material in the following section).

Figurative Language

Metaphor, simile and allegory are *figures of speech* or *figurative language*, which can be defined as (a) non-literal language (b) that compares dissimilar objects or ideas.[48] Variations between the techniques result from different types of "non-literalness" and forms of comparison. Most contemporary analysis of figurative language focuses on metaphor,[49] which we study first, followed by simile and allegory. We then address symbolism, which is closely related, though not, strictly speaking, figurative language.

Metaphor

The "non-literal" quality of figurative language is expressed in the typical definition of METAPHOR as "language that says one thing and means another."[50] More specifically, metaphor—as opposed to other types of figurative language—can be defined as

> any IDENTIFICATION of one thing with another [or] any REPLACEMENT of the more usual word or phrase by another.[51]

We illustrate with three biblical examples, each manifesting a slightly different structure, accompanied by an interpretation that expresses the "other thing" that is meant but not said.

> (1) He shall gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four *wings* of the earth (Isa 11:12).

[48] See *PEPP*, s.v. "Figures of Speech"; Beckson and Ganz 1975, s.v. "Figurative Language"; Fogelin 1988:1–4. Figurative language includes other techniques, such as hyperbole, metonymy and irony, but those are not, by and large, included in the medieval discussions of *mashal, hashʾalah,* etc.

[49] See Black 1962:35; 1993:20. As Shipley (1970, s.v. "Figure" notes, Aristotle "called all figures of speech essentially metaphorical."

[50] As formulated by Owen Barfield; see Black 1962:32; 1993:22; Davidson 1984:260. In speaking about "non-literal language," we assume a basic understanding of the definition and workings of literal language, on which, see Macky 1990:32–39; Stern 1985:678; 2000:40–45, 63–71, 301–18.

[51] Brooke-Rose 1970:17; compare Fogelin 1988:26–27.

CHAPTER TWO

MAIMONIDES: *MASHAL, HASH'ALAH*

Unlike Ibn Ezra, Maimonides never left the Muslim domain and wrote most of his works in Arabic. For the most part, he also could ignore the challenges posed to his older Andalusian contemporary by the midrashic exegesis popular among Jews in Christian lands. Instead, the great philosopher, whose most important works were written in his mature years in Egypt, took up the more traditional issues of concern in the Judeo-Arabic tradition, especially the endeavor to reconcile Scripture with reason. His *Guide of the Perplexed* is largely devoted to the figurative interpretation of biblical passages that are problematic in this respect, an endeavor pioneered by Sa'adia and refined by his successors in al-Andalus, as we saw in the preceding chapter.[1] But to reach Sa'adia's goals, Maimonides utilizes new methodologies based on more precise linguistic concepts culled from Arabic learning, particularly the logic of al-Fārābī. Like Ibn Ezra, he avoids Sa'adia's catch-all *majāz* category; but whereas his older Andalusian contemporary replaced it with another single-category hermeneutical system, Maimonides builds a two-category system using the Arabic notions of *isti'āra* and *mathal*, rendered in Hebrew *HASH'ALAH* and *mashal*, respectively.[2]

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[1] The influence of this tradition on Maimonides is not immediately apparent because the great philosopher generally does not cite his medieval Jewish predecessors (see introduction, n. 40). Nonetheless, Sa'adia's exegetical motives and strategies reverberate throughout the *Guide*; see Rawidowicz 1969:187, 194–230. (See Dienstag 1996a for an extensive bibliography on the relationship between Maimonides and Sa'adia.) Ibn Janaḥ seems to have been Maimonides' usual linguistic reference (below, n. 32), and he held the commentaries of Moses Ibn Chiquitilla and Judah Ibn Bal'am in high esteem; see *Treatise on Resurrection* 329–30 (Ar.); 359–61 (Heb.). The possible influence of Moses Ibn Ezra on Maimonides is discussed below, chapter four, n. 80. On the scholarly supposition that the great philosopher knew and used Abraham Ibn Ezra's writings see introduction, n. 41. For further discussion of Maimonides' reliance on the Andalusian exegetical tradition, see Birnbaum 1944:187–90; Twersky 1980:56–58.

[2] *Mashal* is the Hebrew cognate of *mathal*; *hash'alah* (metaphor; lit. borrowing) is a loan-translation of Arabic *isti'āra* (above 1.2.3). These equivalences were standard already in the medieval translation tradition. We use the Hebrew terms because they facilitate our comparisons with Abraham Ibn Ezra and Radak.

Throughout the *Guide*, Maimonides highlights the *mashal-hash'alah* distinction as a critical hermeneutical tool. In one passage, after discussing a number of examples of figurative readings, he directs his reader to apply his method independently:

> Take . . . what I have not mentioned in the manner that I have mentioned in this chapter[3] and distinguish . . . between . . . what has been said by way of *mashal* [and] what has been said by way of *hash'alah*[4] . . . [as opposed to] what has been said literally (lit. exactly according to the first conventional meaning). (II:47;409)[5]

Since the term *isti'āra* (lit. borrowing) was used in Arabic literature to translate Greek *metaphora*, we render it (along with its Heb. equivalent *hash'alah*) "metaphor," which conforms with Maimonides' usage.[6] The Arabic term *mathal* is used in reference to a broader range of figurative expressions, and its cognate, *mashal*, has a long, complex history in biblical and rabbinic Hebrew.[7] Maimonides uses it primarily to indicate what we call allegory or parable, though he also uses it to label similes and symbolic visions. My preference, therefore, is to leave the term untranslated, and where translation is necessary to do so contextually.[8]

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[3] Since he did not write a comprehensive biblical commentary, Maimonides uses this formula to establish a rule applicable elsewhere based on his selected examples. Compare *Guide* II:46;403–04; see also II:29;342–43.

[4] For other references to the *mashal-hash'alah* distinction in the *Guide*, see I:33;70; II:47;407. Maimonides here speaks of a third category, *al-ighrā'* (lit. going to the limit; referred to by other authors in the Judeo-Arabic tradition as *taghāyī* [see Fenton 1997:334–35]), i.e., exaggeration or hyperbole (Heb. *guzma*), which he discusses at length in this chapter of the *Guide* (II:47) together with the closely related term *mubālagha* (Heb. *haflagah*). Analysis of hyperbole in Maimonides' hermeneutical system is beyond the scope of the current study, as we focus on his primary dichotomy between *mashal* and *hash'alah*, which he applies throughout the *Guide*.

[5] References in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *Guide* and follow S. Pines' translation with some modifications based on the original Arabic text. Where Hebrew appears in citations of the *Guide*, it reflects Maimonides' use of Hebrew (usually biblical or rabbinic quotations) within his Arabic text. (Citations of Hebrew translations of the *Guide* are identified as such specifically.) References in notes below to "Pines," "Qāfiḥ" and "Schwarz" without further bibliographic information are to the notes in their respective translations of the passage from the *Guide* under discussion.

[6] On the term *isti'āra*, see above 1.2.3, 1.2.4. Pines usually renders this term in the *Guide* more broadly as "figurative language" (though he sometimes renders it "derivative term" [introduction; 5]).

[7] See Stern 1991:9–13; Boyarin 1995.

[8] Pines usually renders *mathal* "parable," but he sometimes renders it "allegory" (introduction; 13) or "image" (III:2;419); Friedlander renders *mathal* "simile"; Munk

Although *mashal* and *hash'alah* are both types of figurative language and thus have much in common, Maimonides insists on separating them. Without appreciating the importance of this distinction, some modern scholars have been unable to fully discern Maimonides' views on prophecy, Scripture and their interpretation. L. Strauss, for example, points to a supposed contradiction in Maimonides' opinions:

> The assertion [by Maimonides] that Moses' prophecy was entirely independent of the imagination leads to a great difficulty if one considers the fact that it is the imagination that brings forth similes [*meshalim*] and, we may add, metaphors [*shemot mush'alim*], as well as the fact that the Torah abounds if not with similes, at any rate with metaphors.[9]

As we shall see below (2.3 2), Maimonides, in fact, distinguished between *mashal* and *hash'alah* specifically with respect to the need to activate the imagination. Once we recognize this, the problem Strauss raises can be resolved. The current chapter is devoted to defining Maimonides' *mashal-hash'alah* distinction; in chapter four we show why it is crucial for his biblical exegesis.

2.1   *The Linguistic Concept of* Hash'alah

Maimonides first introduces his notion of *hash'alah* when outlining the primary goal of his *Guide for the Perplexed* in the introduction to that work:

> The first purpose of this Treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in Scripture.[10] Some of these terms are equivocal (Ar. *MUSHTARIKA*; Heb. *MESHUTTAFIM*; lit. shared); hence the ignorant understand them according to [only] some of the meanings in which the term in question is used. And some of them are metaphorical (Ar. *musta'āra*; Heb. *mush'alim*; lit. borrowed); hence they understand them

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renders it "allegory." On the ambiguity of the term in Arabic literature, see *EI*, s.v. *Mathal*.

[9] Strauss 1963:xxxvii. Klein-Braslavy 1987:23 (see below, p. 223) raises a similar dilemma.

[10] Lit. the books of prophecy. A reference to all of Scripture, not only the section referred to as *Nevi'im*, as opposed to *Torah* and *Ketuvim*; see Klein-Braslavy 1996:41; Harvey 1996:54. Compare Ibn Ezra's use of the term נביאים as a reference to all biblical authors (e.g., long comm. on Ex 11:5); see also Simon 1993b:305. There are times, however, that Maimonides seems to speak specifically about a style of the literary prophets; see, e.g., below nn. 63, 111.

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as well according to the first meaning from which they were derived (Ar. *ustu'īrat*; Heb. *hush'alu*; lit. borrowed).[11]

To understand the linguistic terminology in this passage, it is helpful to turn to the *Treatise on Logic*, a work that relies heavily on al-Fārābī and is thought to have been written by Maimonides in his youth.[12]

2.1.1   *Equivocal and Metaphorical Terms: The* Treatise on Logic

Chapter thirteen of the *Treatise* discusses how words acquire their meanings.[13] Arabic tradition refers to nouns and verbs collectively as *ismā* (sing. *ism*), i.e., "names." An *ism* is a linguistic sign that designates a thing or action, the *mussamā* ("that which is named"), in a relation called *tasmiya* ("giving a name").[14] The simple case of *tasmiya* involves a word with one meaning.[15] By contrast, a word with more than one meaning is an *ism al-mushtarik* (Heb. *shem meshuttaf*), an "equivocal" (lit. shared) term, i.e., a name shared by different meanings, of which six sub-types are listed in the *Treatise*. A word shared coincidentally by two independent meanings is *AL-ISM AL-MAHD AL-ISHTIRĀK*; (Heb. *HA-SHEM HA-MESHUTTAF HA-GAMUR*), "the absolutely equivocal term":

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[11] Maimonides here also lists another type, "amphibolous terms" (Ar. *mushakkika*; Heb. *mesuppaqim*), on which, see Wolfson 1938. But this is a minor category in the *Guide*; see below, n. 27.

[12] See Hyman 1991:177. The traditional attribution is challenged by Davidson 2001:118–25. It is beyond the scope of this study to decide this matter, but we should note that the parallels discussed in this chapter between the *Treatise* and *Guide* with respect to linguistic terminology are unmistakable and suggest common authorship. At the very least, our study shows that Maimonides was intimately familiar with the Farabian definitions presented in the *Treatise*.

[13] On the linguistic concepts in this chapter, see Hyman 1991, Rosenberg 1978.

[14] These Arabic terms were used occasionally by Ibn Janah and Moses Ibn Ezra, see chapter one, n. 198. One might render *tasmiya* "denomination" and compare *ism* and *mussamā* with Latin *nomen* and *nominatum*; see Versteegh 1977:154–59. As Versteegh observes, Arabic linguists were not careful in their phraseology to distinguish between the meaning (sense) of a word and its referent, i.e., the extra-mental entity to which it refers (on this distinction, see introduction, p. 29); see, e.g., below, n. 16. Nonetheless, Zwiep (1997:94–97) shows that this linguistic tradition related signification to meaning (sense) rather than reference. We therefore usually speak of the *mussamā* as a meaning rather than "a thing named." On the medieval concept of denotation and its relation to sense and reference, see Eco 1989.

[15] The basic case is that of terms that are "distinct" (*mutabayyina*), i.e., that name a thing with only one name. By contrast, "synonymous" (*murādifa*) terms are different names for the same thing; see Hyman 1991:177–78.

handiwork,[74] has special poetic features that the other expressions lack. But in the *Guide*, Maimonides dismisses that quality and focuses only on its derived, non-physical sense, which leads him to argue that Scripture could just as well have employed the less poetic expressions and conveyed the same meaning.[75]

2.2 *The Literary Concept of* Mashal

After presenting the analysis of equivocal and metaphorical terms as his "first purpose" in the *Guide*, Maimonides goes on to say:

> This treatise also has a second purpose, namely the explanation of very obscure *meshalim* occurring in Scripture[76] . . . an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they are said only according to their obvious meaning (Ar. *ẓāhir*) and there is no deeper meaning (Ar. *bāṭin*) to them. (Introduction; 5)

Unlike the terms *hash'alah* and *shittuf*, which are taken entirely from Arabic sources, the great philosopher's analysis of *mashal* draws heavily upon its usage in Scripture and rabbinic literature,[77] though he borrows Arabic terminology to describe its workings.

2.2.1 *Allegory, Symbolism and Simile*

Whereas Maimonides applies the label *hash'alah* to a single metaphorical term (a *shem mush'al*) in a larger linguistic context, a *mashal* is normally a self-contained literary unit, a fictional allegorical tale or account (sometimes called a parable).[78] Unlike simple fiction, a *mashal*

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[74] Compare Ps 8:4, "the skies, the work of your fingers (מעשי אצבעותיך). . . ." Not surprisingly, Saʿadia in his *Tafsīr* avoids translating the grossly anthropomorphic term אצבעותיך.

[75] For other examples in which Maimonides asserts that equivalence of the metaphorical expression and its literal paraphrase (using the formula "it is as if it said"), see I:6;31 (איש ואשתו—it is as if it said וזכר ונקבה"; Hebrew text and paraphrase); I:17;44 (אלקדימון—it is as if it says 'let me know'"; Hebrew text and Arabic paraphrase).

[76] Lit. the books of prophecy; see above, n. 10.

[77] The rabbinic *mashal* genre is the subject of a dedicated study by Stern (1991). As Boyarin (1987) demonstrates, Maimonides' view that the concept of *mashal* is critical for understanding Scripture can be traced to rabbinic tradition.

[78] The use of the term *mashal* to connote fiction can be traced to rabbinic literature; see, e.g., BT *Baba Bathra* 15a (cited below); Loewe 1964:173-75.

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represents a factual state of affairs. This is expressed using the Arabic terms *ẓāhir* (external, obvious meaning), i.e., the fictional account, and *bāṭin* (inner, hidden meaning), the facts or ideas it symbolizes.[79] The classic example of a *mashal* cited in rabbinic literature (BT *Baba Bathra* 15a) is the "poor man's lamb" parable devised by Nathan the prophet (II Sam 12:1-4) to illustrate to King David the moral repugnance of his actions with Bathsheba. Maimonides follows an opinion cited in the same talmudic text that the book of Job, likewise, is a *mashal*. He thus takes the tale of this righteous man's suffering and subsequent discussions with his friends to be a fiction employed by Scripture to convey various philosophical views about the problem of evil. The "second purpose" of the *Guide* implies that full comprehension of this biblical book requires more than merely understanding the literal tale (*ẓāhir*); one must also explain its inner meaning (*bāṭin*), i.e., the philosophical views that it contains, an exegetical enterprise to which Maimonides devotes *Guide* III:22–23 (see below, 4.1.2).[80]

Maimonides also uses the term *mashal* in reference to similes[81] and

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[79] Compare Moses Ibn Ezra's comment regarding *mashal* and *hiddah*: ולהא האייל באמן כוי מא ישׂהד מן לפטׂהא (*Kitāb* 146a; above 1.2.1). Maimonides' defines *hiddah* similarly: חדה הי אלכלאם אלדי נרצׂה פי באמנה לא פי טׂאהרה (Mishnah Commentary, introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* [= *Sanhedrin* X], Qāfiḥ ed., 202). On the Hebrew equivalents used to translate *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, see above, 1.1.4 and below, 3.2.1.

[80] In the *Guide*, Maimonides interprets biblical and rabbinic *meshalim* and even devises his own (on which, see Stern 1991:224-27). In interpreting rabbinic *meshalim* (see, e.g., I:59;142, II:30;353, III:6;427), Maimonides may be fulfilling an early promise to compose the "Book of Correspondence" on this subject (introduction; 9; see also Klein-Braslavy 1987:17-18; Kasher 1992/3:122-29). Of particular interest is Maimonides' interpretation of a rabbinic *mashal* that he cites to explain the workings of the biblical *mashal* genre (below, p. 122). That example illustrates how Maimonides reads Scripture in light of rabbinic tradition (see chapter four, n. 1. Perhaps the best known of Maimonides' original *meshalim* is the "palace *mashal*," in which the intricate labyrinth of a palace in al-Andalus represents various levels of spiritual proximity to God (see below, n. 130). For other *meshalim* devised by Maimonides, see e.g., I:33;71, I:46;97.

[81] We already noted this application by Abraham Ibn Ezra (above 1.2.2). The structure of a simile is different from that of an allegory. In an allegory, the topic or "thing represented" is hidden and therefore merits the label *bāṭin*. But in a simile, the topic is mentioned explicitly alongside the image; Maimonides therefore does not use the *ẓāhir-bāṭin* dichotomy in analyzing similes. He does explain, however, how the image resembles—and thus illuminates—the topic (see I:1;23). He comments, e.g., on Ezek 1:14, "the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning":

> . . . their motion consisted in running and retracting their way. And he made it clear in a *mashal*, saying, "as the appearance of a flash of lightening" . . .

symbolic visions. The latter category is especially important for his theory of prophecy, since he maintains that most prophets receive communications from God in *mashal* form, i.e., a symbolic vision, which amounts to an imaginary tale or scene that "occurs" in someone's mind. He discusses many such cases in the *Guide*, but it is interesting to look at his discussion of this phenomenon in *Mishneh Torah*, where he must use Hebrew terminology to express the Arabic *ẓāhir-bāṭin* dichotomy:

> The matters communicated to the prophet in a prophetic vision are communicated to him in symbolic form (*derekh mashal*). And immediately the interpretation (*פתרון*) of the *mashal* is impressed upon his mind in a vision so that he grasps what it symbolizes (lit. is). Such, for example, was the case with the vision the Patriarch Jacob saw (Gen 28:12–15) of a ladder with angels ascending and descending it—and that was a symbol (*mashal*) for the monarchies and their oppression of Israel,[82] the animals in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 1), the steaming pot (Jer 1:13) and the rod of an almond tree (Jer 1:11) seen by Jeremiah, the scroll seen by Ezekiel (Ezek 2:9).... (*MT, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:3)[83]

In these examples, the *ẓāhir* is the content of the prophetic vision and the *bāṭin* its "interpretation," i.e., the facts it symbolizes. Writing in Hebrew, Maimonides uses BH *pitron* (interpretation)[84] as an equivalent for the Arabic term *bāṭin* and he refers to the *ẓāhir* as the *mashal*, i.e., the symbol itself.[85] Maimonides reveals the *pitron* of only one example, Jacob's ladder; for the others he refers the reader to Scripture since "these prophets recited the *mashal* together with its interpretation" (ibid.). For example, Jeremiah records:

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whose motion appears to be the swiftest of motions and which stretches out rapidly and at a rush from a certain place and then with the same rapidity contracts and returns time after time to the place whence it moved. (III:2;419) For other examples of simile labeled as *mashal*, see below (on Prov 25:11); see also 1:49:110 (כאשר יראה הנשר); III:7:429 (כמראה הקשת); compare II:36;370, where he comments that the rabbinic maxim, "a dream is [like] an unripe fruit of prophecy" is "an extraordinary simile [*tashbīh*]." Although Maimonides occasionally uses the Arabic term *tashbīh*, which does connote *simile* (above, 1.2.2), he also uses that term more generally in the sense of *figurative comparison* (see, e.g., II:47;408, where he associates *tashbīh* and *isti'āra*); it thus does not represent a distinct category in his exegetical system (cf. Ibn Ezra's use of the term *dimyon*; chapter one, n. 88).

[82] See Klein-Braslavy 1988:330–33 for the rabbinic source of this reading.

[83] Compare *Guide* II:43.

[84] On the Hebrew root פתר as an exegetical term equivalent to *ta'wīl*, see Wansbrough 1977:246.

[85] A similar convention was employed by Ibn Ezra; see chapter one, n. 76.

> And the word of the Lord came to me...: What do you see? I replied:
>   I see a steaming pot
>   Tipped away from the north.
> And the Lord said to me:
>   From the north shall disaster break loose
>   Upon all the inhabitants of the land (Jer 1:13–14)

Immediately upon seeing the scene of the steaming pot, Jeremiah is told its inner meaning (*bāṭin/pitron*): the impending disaster from the north, a Babylonian invasion.[86]

2.2.2 The Two Steps of Mashal Analysis

Although both *mashal* and *hash'alah* are types of figurative language and, as such, "say one thing and mean another,"[87] they differ fundamentally because a *mashal* does not involve any revision of semantic meaning. In other words, the language of a *mashal* retains its literal sense and generates the *ẓāhir*, i.e., the literal tale or scene,[88] which, in turn, symbolizes or calls to mind the *bāṭin*.[89] When we speak about the figurative *meaning* of a *shem mushʾal*, we are making

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[86] Maimonides (II:43;392) mentions two methods by which the graphic image shown to the prophet yields its *bāṭin*. In the usual case, the inner meaning is derived through an analogy with the image itself, what Maimonides calls an "imitation of ideas" (*muḥākāt ma'ānin*), e.g., Jeremiah's menacing seething pot image, which represents a military menace from the north. But in some cases, an equivocal term that would come to mind (in one meaning) when the prophet sought to describe the scene hints at the deeper message through one of its other meanings. Maimonides illustrates with another one of Jeremiah's visions:
> The word of the Lord came to me: What do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree (*shaqed*). The Lord said to me: You have seen right, for I am hurrying (*shoqed*) to bring my word to pass (Jer 1:11–12).
Here the *pitron* is derived by a play on words: the Hebrew root שקד (*almond*) hints at its other meaning *to hurry*. As Maimonides explains, "The intention of the *mashal* did not concern the idea of a rod nor that of an almond," but only the association with the other meaning of the equivocal root שקד. On this symbolic mechanism, see Rosenberg 1981:184–85; Klein-Braslavy 1986:184–87.

[87] See introduction, n. 50.

[88] This applies even in the type of *mashal* that relies on an equivocal term to hint at the *bāṭin* (above, n. 86), e.g., Jeremiah's vision of an almond branch. The language describing the vision retains its literal sense; i.e., the word *shaqed* in Jer 1:11 means only an *almond rod*. The symbolic meaning does not interdict the normal path of denomination; it is derived, instead, through an additional step in the standard *mashal* model: the visual image evokes its own linguistic sign, which, in turn, brings to mind a different sense of that sign.

[89] In a simile, this model must be modified slightly: the image calls to mind certain features of the topic.

a claim about its semantic meaning, i.e., *the sense of a language expression*.
But when speaking about the "deeper meaning" of a *mashal*, we make
a claim about *something it communicates indirectly*, much as we might
speak about the "meaning" of a painting or as Maimonides would
speak about the meaning of God's commandments (*ta'amei ha-miṣwot*).[90]

The above distinction applies to *hash'alah* both as defined in the
Treatise and in the *Guide*. When we contrast *mashal* and *hash'alah* as
defined in the *Guide*, their divergence is even greater. One can the-
oretically speak of "two levels of meaning"—a literal and figurative
meaning—in both *mashal* and *hash'alah*, but only *mashal* has a genuine
ẓāhir, since the literal sense of a *shem mush'al* is incorrect where it is
used metaphorically, since it directly conveys the derived sense.[91] But
interpreting a *mashal* is always a two-step process; one must first
understand the language literally to understand the *ẓāhir*, before
thinking about how it symbolizes the *bāṭin*. This special feature of
mashal can be inferred from Maimonides' initial presentation of his
"two purposes" in the *Guide* (above, pp. 100, 118). People err when
they take *shemot mush'alim* "according to the first meaning"; but *meshalim*
pose a different challenge, the ignorant err if they understand them
only "according to their external sense (*ẓāhir*), and [believe] that they
possess no internal sense (*bāṭin*)." It is correct to interpret a *mashal*
literally; the error is to stop there without seeking the deeper meaning.

Since Maimonides recognizes the literary integrity of the *ẓāhir*, the
literal sense of the *mashal* genre, he must address its nature and pur-
pose. In his introduction to the *Guide* he offers two possible approaches
to this matter, the first based on a rabbinic source, the second derived
from Scripture itself:

> Our Rabbis say:[92] A man who loses a *sela'* (a coin) or a pearl in his
> house, can find the pearl by lighting a taper worth an *issar* (a coin of
> little value). In the same way, this *mashal* in itself is worth nothing,
> but by means of it you can understand the words of the Torah.
> (Introduction; 11)

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[90] On the distinction between semantic and non-semantic meaning, see intro-
duction. pp. 21–22. In allegory and symbolism, the *bāṭin* is communicated indi-
rectly; a simile calls to mind the shared aspects of the topic and image, though,
semantically speaking, it expresses only the existence of a similitude, not its content
(see introduction, p. 26).

[91] This applies only to the *Guide*; in the *Treatise* the metaphorical sense must be
derived anew from the literal sense in each instance (above, 2.1.3).

[92] Maimonides' source is *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1:1; see Boyarin 1987:480–84.

As this passage shows, the Rabbis relied on an analogy, i.e., *mashal*,
to illustrate the workings of biblical *meshalim*. Maimonides goes on
to explain the point of this analogy in his view:

> The hidden matters (*bawāṭin*, pl. of *bāṭin*) of the words of the Torah
> is the "pearl" whereas the *ẓāhir* of all *meshalim* is worth nothing, and
> they likened the matter . . . to a man who let drop a pearl in his house,
> which was dark and full of furniture . . . until . . . he lights a lamp—
> an act to which an understanding of the meaning of the *mashal* cor-
> responds. (Introduction; 11)

According to the Rabbis, the great philosopher explains, the *ẓāhir*
of a biblical *mashal* is valuable only insofar as it aids in understanding
the *bāṭin*. This would perhaps apply to Nathan's tale of the poor
man's lamb, Jacob's ladder vision, Jeremiah's steaming pot and even
Ezekiel's chariot vision, all of which seem to serve merely to illus-
trate deeper moral or philosophical truths. In that case, the tale or
vision itself is "worth nothing," i.e., it has no educational, moral,
historical or practical significance.

Maimonides presents the alternative model based on his analysis
of Prov 25:11, "A word fitly spoken is [like] apples of gold in set-
tings (משכיות) of silver," an approach he thus attributes to King
Solomon.[93] This biblical simile compares well formulated language
to a valuable, beautiful artifact, but Maimonides gives a more specific
meaning to both the image and topic. He maintains that King
Solomon refers specifically to the *mashal* genre and that the silver-
covered golden apples reflects its workings:

> משכיות means *filigree traceries* . . . in which there are apertures with very
> small eyelets, like the handiwork of silversmiths . . . The Sage (Solomon)
> accordingly said that a saying uttered with a view to two meanings is
> like apples of gold overlaid with silver filigree work having very small
> holes. Now see how marvelously this dictum describes a well con-
> structed *mashal*. For he says that in a saying that has two meanings—
> a *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*—the *ẓāhir* ought to be as beautiful as silver, while
> its *bāṭin* ought to be more beautiful than its *ẓāhir*, the former being in
> comparison to the latter as gold is to silver. Its *ẓāhir* also ought to

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[93] Maimonides accepted the traditional view that Proverbs was penned by King
Solomon, a figure that Maimonides otherwise regarded as a master of the *mashal*
genre; see Klein-Braslavy 1996:112. Maimonides' analysis of Prov 25:11 may be
original, since he does not attribute it to the Rabbis, nor is it found in Sa'adia's
commentary, although it is possible that he saw it in a commentary that we no
longer possess.

contain in it something that indicates to someone considering it what is to be found in its internal meaning, as happens in the case of an apple of gold overlaid with silver filigree-work having very small holes. The *meshalim* of the prophets are similar. Their *zawāhir* (pl. of *zāhir*) contains wisdom that is useful in many respects, among which is the welfare of human societies, as is shown by the *zawāhir* of Proverbs. . . . Their *bāṭin*, on the other hand, contains wisdom that is useful for beliefs concerned with the truth as it is. (Introduction; 11)

In King Solomon's *mashal* model, the *zāhir* has educational value (albeit on a lower level than the *bāṭin*), unlike the rabbinic model, in which "*mashal* in itself," i.e., the *zāhir*, "is worth nothing." Maimonides does not deem it necessary to reconcile these two models and may have considered both to be applicable to different *meshalim*. It would seem, for example, that he regarded King Solomon's own *meshalim*, i.e., those in Proverbs, to have value even on the level of the *zāhir*.[94]

Even where the *zāhir* is "worth nothing" from an educational perspective, Maimonides makes it clear that its literary integrity must be respected. Although the *bāṭin* is normally his primary target, he at times invests much effort to establish a correct understanding of the *zāhir*. He thus devotes a lengthy section of the *Guide* (III:1–7) to Ezekiel's chariot vision, which he takes as a *mashal* symbolizing metaphysical secrets known as *Maʿaseh Merkavah* (the Account of the Chariot) in rabbinic tradition.[95] Given the rabbinic injunction against revealing these secrets, he carefully limits his analysis:

> I shall interpret to you that which was said by Ezekiel the prophet, peace be on him, in such a way that anyone who heard the interpretation would think that I do not say anything . . . that is not indicated by the text, . . . as if I translated words from one language to another or summarized the meaning of the external sense (*zāhir*) of the speech. (III: introduction; 416)

To understand the *bāṭin*, the reader must look elsewhere:

> On the other hand, if that interpretation is examined with a perfect care by him for whom this Treatise is composed and who has under-

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[94] See Qāfiḥ here and Klein-Braslavy 1987:40–42. This conforms with Maimonides' analysis of Prov 25:16 (below, p. 128) and Prov 7:6–21 (below, p. 182). We can argue similarly that Maimonides regarded the literal tale of Job to be meaningful for the masses, even though they are to remain ignorant of its deeper philosophical content; see chapter four, n. 44.

[95] See Klein-Braslavy 1996:39–48.

stood all its chapters—every chapter in its turn—the whole matter that has become clear and manifest to me will become clear to him . . . (Ibid.)

Scholars have pondered the esoteric content Maimonides hints at here, but for our purposes it is significant that he devotes seven chapters to analyzing the language of this biblical passage and revealing the details of Ezekiel's vision, but not their deeper significance. It is as if he is not analyzing a *mashal*, but simply engaging in philological exegesis, following the example of great exegetical predecessors he mentions elsewhere, Ibn Janaḥ, Ibn Chiquitilla and Ibn Balʿam.[96]

Maimonides' theory of translation also reflects the integrity of the *zāhir*. Although a *shem mushʾal* must be rendered according to its metaphorical sense (unless the target language equivalent is also a *shem mushʾal*), he allows for literal translation of a *mashal*.[97] This is implicit in his *peshaṭ* exegesis of Ezekiel's chariot vision, but emerges more clearly when he addresses the Targum on Ex 33:23, "You shall see אֲחֹרָי (lit. my back), but פָּנַי (lit. my face) will not be seen," said by God to Moses. Onkelos avoids the blatant anthropomorphism here by rendering פָּנַי and אֲחֹרָי each according to a metaphorical sense attested elsewhere in Scripture, yielding: יְתֶחֱזֵי יָת דְּבַתְרָאַי וְדִקֳדָמַי לָא יִתְחֲזוּן ("You shall perceive those which are *behind me*, but those which are *in front of me* shall not be perceived"; I:37;86).[98] This leaves the more subtle philosophical difficulty that nothing can be "in front of" or "behind" an incorporeal God. Maimonides thus

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[96] See above, n. 1. Within Maimonides' treatment of Ezekiel's chariot vision, we do find semantic analysis of some equivocal terms. Faced with a description of the chariot's wheels as "full of עֵינַיִם (lit. eyes)" (Ezek 1:18), for example, he explains that BH עַיִן has another meaning in this context:

> It is possible that he meant that they had many *colors*, as in the passage, "and the color thereof (וְעֵינוֹ) as the color of (כְּעֵין) bdellium" (Num 11:7). (III:2;420)

(Interestingly, neither this sense of עַיִן nor another two that he considers here are cited in *Guide* I:44, the lexicographic chapter devoted to this equivocal term.) But this has nothing to do with the *bāṭin* of Ezekiel's vision; Maimonides merely interprets the *zāhir* to determine what the prophet saw, i.e., many colors, not many eyes. In other words, he does not mean to say that one sense of the *shem meshuttaf* is operative in the *zāhir* and the other in the *bāṭin*. He identifies the single correct meaning of the language, which signifies only the *zāhir*. For other examples of his philological analysis of Ezekiel 1, see his discussion of רוּחַ (III:2;419); נִלְבָּל (III:4;424).

[97] Though he does not *require* its literal translation; he thus does not criticize the Targum for rendering *meshaim* according to the *bāṭin* (see below).

[98] On this Targumic reading, see Klein 1982:45–46.

posits that Onkelos took this verse as a *mashal*,[99] the real subject of which relates to two types of entities, "incorporeal intellects" and lower beings "possessing form and matter":

> There are great created beings whom man cannot apprehend as they really are. These are the incorporeal intellects, and [Scripture] speaks of them as being "in front of" God . . . because of the power of His providence constantly watching over them. But the things that, in his opinion—I mean that of Onkelos—can be grasped in their true reality are such as are beneath the separate intellects with respect to their rank in that which exists, I mean things endowed with matter and form. Of them [Onkelos] has said: "You shall see that which is behind me", he means the beings from which it is as if I have "turned away" and "turned my back," speaking by way of *mashal*, because of their remoteness from His existence. (Ibid.)

Taking this verse as a *mashal*, Maimonides identifies its two levels of meaning, the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. The Targum reflects only the *ẓāhir*, an imaginary scene of beings surrounding God, some "in front of" Him, others "behind" Him. Onkelos' metaphorical translation of אחור and פנים thus conveys only the *ẓāhir*, much like Maimonides' explicit analysis of Ezekiel's vision. The imaginary scene,[100] in turn, symbolizes the *bāṭin*, the relative ontic status of "things possessing form and matter," which can be revealed to Moses, as opposed to the "incorporeal intellects," which cannot.

2.2.3   *The* Mashal-Hash'alah *Border*

Maimonides's *mashal-hash'alah* distinction comes into sharp relief in borderline examples that allow him to choose between the two interpretive modes. This occurs, for example, in connection with BH terms from the semantic field of eating אכל (lit. to eat), which, as Maimonides explains, are often used metaphorically (= by way of *hash'alah*) in connection with the acquisition of knowledge (*Guide* I:30). For support, he cites a rabbinic exegetical rule about Qohelet: "all

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[99] Maimonides devises this *mashal* reading only to justify Onkelos: he himself (I:37–38) prefers other readings that apply the *hash'alah* mode. On Maimonides' analysis of Onkelos and its relationship to his own interpretation of this verse, see Kasher 1995:44–48; see also Kreisel 1991:111–112.

[100] Unlike Ezekiel's vision, which the prophet actually saw in his mind, this *mashal* is a literary fabrication, much like Nathan's parable or the *meshalim* that the Rabbis and Maimonides compose to illustrate abstract concepts.

אכילה (lit. eating) and שתיה (lit. drinking) in this book are nothing but *wisdom* (אינה אלא חכמה)" (I:30;64).[101] Maimonides takes this to mean that *acquiring wisdom* is actually the sense of these terms. This rule results in rather forced exegesis, as we see in his reading of the following verse in Isaiah:

> [Scriptures] frequently call (כהר הסמיתהם; lit. their frequently calling)[102] knowledge מים (water): "All that is צמא (lit. thirsteth) come ye for מים (lit. water)" (Isa 55:1). (Ibid.)

Maimonides could have taken this verse as a *meshal*, which would allow it to retain its literal sense, and argued that study is the *bāṭin* of Isaiah's picturesque language. But instead he invokes the notion of denomination (using the technical Arabic term *tasmiya* [above, p. 101]) and argues that the word מים here actually means *knowledge*, not *water*.

Maimonides was evidently willing to use this rule to reinterpret an entire verse, a strategy that he found in the Targum:

> Jonathan ben Uziel, peace be upon him, translates the verse, "You shall joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation," (ושאבתם מים בששון ממעיני הישועה; Isa 12:3), saying: "With joy shall you receive new teaching from the chosen of the righteous" (ותקבלון אולפן חדת בחדוא מבחירי צדיקיא). Consider his interpretation (*ta'wīl*)[103] of מים (lit. water) that it is the *knowledge* that will be received in those days. And he makes [the word] מעיני to be like "מעיני the community" (Num 15:24), meaning the *notables* [of the community], who are the wise men.[104] And he says "from the chosen of the righteous," as righteousness is true salvation (ישועה). See accordingly how he reinterprets (*ta'awwala*) every word in this verse with a view to the notion of knowledge and learning. (Ibid.)

In rendering מים *knowledge*, Jonathan applies Maimonides' dictionary definition. But the term מעיני requires more radical treatment that the great philosopher—surprisingly—supports and even seems to accept. After citing yet another tenuous reconstrual (ישועה [lit. salvation]

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[101] As Schwarz notes, that this seems to be a paraphrase of *Qohelet Rabbah* 2:26, 3:16 (כל אכילה ושתיה שנאמר במגילה הזאת בתורה ובמצות טובים הכתוב מדבר).

[102] Compare the language in the *Treatise*, "[people]'s calling (הסמיתהם) a generous man 'the sea'" (above, p. 102).

[103] On this technical term, see chapter one, n. 32.

[104] For attempts to rationalize this tenuous "philological" analysis, see Pines and Schwarz here.

= righteousness), he commends Jonathan's reading of "every word in this verse with a view to the notion of knowledge and learning."[105]

But elsewhere Maimonides recognizes that this metaphorical usage is meant to conjure up an image of eating, in which case he uses the term *mashal* rather than *hash'alah*:

> ... it is said, "Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith and vomit it" (Prov 25:16) ... How marvelous is this *mashal* inasmuch as it likens knowledge to eating, as we have said.[106] It also mentions the most delicious of foods, namely, honey. Now, according to its nature, honey, if eaten to excess, upsets the stomach and causes vomiting. Accordingly, Scripture says, as it were, that in spite of its sublimity, greatness and what it has of perfection, the nature of the apprehension in question [i.e., intellectual apprehension]—if not made to stop at its proper limit and not conducted with circumspection may be perverted into a defect, just as the eating of honey may. For whereas the individual eating in moderation is nourished and takes pleasure in it, it all goes if there is too much of it. Accordingly Scripture ... says "[...] and vomit it." (I:32;69)

Here Maimonides does not engage in semantic analysis to re-construe the components of this verse (finding honey, eating sufficiently, being filled and vomiting) to relate to study. Instead, he takes the literal sense of the verse as a literary unit, i.e., the *ẓāhir*.[107] Taken literally, this verse offers sound gastronomic advice;[108] but the verse also has a deeper meaning based on the model of something wonderful becomes harmful when used improperly. Solomon portrays

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[105] For a similar example, see Maimonides' analysis of Num 12:8 (I:3;27).

[106] The reference is actually to *Guide* I:30, where Maimonides cites this usage as *hash'alah*. See the following note.

[107] His reference to *Guide* I:30, then, raises a possible contradiction: is his interpretation of "eating" as "study" *hash'alah* or *mashal*? In fact, immediately following his analysis of Prov 25:16, he cites Prov 25:27, "it is not good to eat much honey" as expressing a similar idea, implying that it is also a *mashal*; but that verse appears in I:30;63 in a list of examples of *hash'alah*. (See Klein-Braslavy 1996:141.) Perhaps we can resolve this apparent contradiction by positing a *hash'alah-mashal* continuum: a biblical author might re-animate a dead metaphor (see introduction, n. 80) and construct a *mashal* out of a *shem mush'al*. (Compare Radak's analysis of Deut 32:42 [*Shorashim*, s.v. אכל], discussed below, 3.1.1.) In Maimonides' view, then, "eating honey" (Prov 25:27) is a case of *hash'alah* (as stated in I:30;63), i.e., a dead metaphor denoting *study*. But in citing this same verse in I:32, he means to say that the fossilized, worn-out literal sense of the *hash'alah* in Prov 25:27 is brought back to life in Prov 25:16, which is a *mashal*.

[108] This seems to be an example of a *mashal* in which even the *ẓāhir* entails "wisdom that is useful in many respects" (above, p. 124).

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the spiritual dangers of improper speculation[109] about esoteric matters by making us think of the physical pleasure of eating honey and the ordeal of vomiting—images that would be obliterated by a *hash'alah* analysis.[110]

2.2.4 *The Role of Philological Analysis*

The preceding examples give the impression that a *mashal* is always analyzed as a unit, whereas *hash'alah* entails breaking down a text to its lexical components. While this is a general pattern in the *Guide*, it is not fundamental to Maimonides' *mashal-hash'alah* distinction, nor is it even always true. Although *hash'alah* analysis lends itself most naturally to an individual word (the *shem mush'al*), Maimonides is willing to apply it to entire phrases. For example, noting a pattern in prophetic literature whereby human prosperity is described as if nature rejoices, he comments:

> [Scripture's] saying, "The mountains and hills shall break forth before you singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa 55:12). This is clearly *hash'alah*. And similarly its saying "Yea, the cypresses (ברושים) rejoice at thee ..." (Isa 14:8). ... [All of] these metaphors (Ar. *isti'ārāt*; Heb. *hash'alot*) are extremely common in the books of prophecy.[111] (II:47;408)[112]

By contrast, Maimonides cites the Targum on his last example:

> But Jonathan ben Uziel translated: "Also the rulers rejoiced in thee, those rich in property," making this a *mashal*. (Ibid.)

Maimonides here contrasts two interpretive modes: Jonathan reads this verse as a *mashal*, not as *hash'alah*.[113] The latter requires prooftexts to demonstrate that phrases depicting personified nature rejoicing do not convey their normal literal sense, but have become idioms in BH that convey the sense of *human prosperity*.[114] But one cannot

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[109] See Klein-Braslavy 1996:139–42.

[110] In a similar way, Maimonides (I:34;73) applies the term *mashal* to the metaphorical use of the term "water" in reference to Torah study when he wishes to highlight the implications of this image.

[111] See above, n. 63.

[112] For other examples of entire phrases analyzed as *hash'alah*, see II:29;336–345 (a text analyzed below, 4.2.4).

[113] This point is made by Qāfiḥ here.

[114] Throughout *Guide* II:29 Maimonides thus uses formulas such as "the phrases

similarly support the Targum philologically; Maimonides thus posits
that Jonathan took Isa 14:8 as a *mashal*, which requires no linguis-
tic basis since it does not make any semantic claim about the lan-
guage of this verse.

Mashal analysis may seem best suited for a self-contained tale that
can be taken as a literary unit; but Maimonides seems to advocate—
at least in some cases—breaking up the *ẓāhir* and deriving the *bāṭin*
from it word by word. This arises in connection with his funda-
mental rule of *mashal* analysis:

> Know that the prophetic *meshalim* are of two kinds. In some of these
> *meshalim* (1) each utterance[115] corresponds to [lit. necessitates] a[nother]
> idea,[116] while in others (2) the *mashal* as a whole indicates the whole
> of the symbolized idea (Ar. *al-maʿna al-mamthūl*; lit. the idea represented
> by the *mathal*). In such a *nashal* very many utterances (Ar. *kalimāt*) are
> to be found, not every one of which adds something to the symbol-
> ized idea. They serve rather to embellish the *mashal* and to render it
> more coherent, or to conceal further the symbolized idea, hence the
> speech proceeds in such a way as to accord with everything required
> by the *mashal*'s external meaning. (Introduction; 12)

The second type of *mashal* which, as Maimonides goes on to state
explicitly, is prevalent in Scripture (ibid.; 14), reflects the general pat-
tern noted above. In this type, the *ẓāhir* is an irreducible literary
unit with its own internal logic that includes elements for its own
poetic embellishment and coherence. The *bāṭin* is derived by con-
sidering the whole picture painted by the *ẓāhir*, not minute analysis
of its details.[117]

But the first type of *mashal* requires the interpreter to split the text
into smaller components and derive the *bāṭin* from the *ẓāhir* piece-

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x.y.z all really mean nothing but *a*" for similar expressions; see chapter four,
n. 149. Compare the rabbinic philological formula Maimonides cites on the words
אכילה and שתה in Qohelet (above, p. 127).

[115] Ar. *kalima*. The Hebrew translation מילה, offered by Samuel Ibn Tibbon and
adopted by Qāfiḥ, Schwarz, Munk ("*mot*") and Pines ("word"), is misleading; see
below. דיבור might be a better Hebrew equivalent.

[116] Ar. *iqtaḍā maʿna*. I have deviated from Pines' translation ("has a meaning") for
two reasons. (1) The Arabic verb *qḍy* (form VIII, to demand, require, necessitate)
is more forceful than implied by Pines' phraseology (compare Schwarz's translation:
קובעה משמעות). (2) Since Maimonides is not speaking here about semantic mean-
ing, I prefer to render *maʿna* an idea. (Later in this passage, Pines seems to recog-
nize the difficulty of rendering *maʿna* "a meaning" and instead renders it "a subject";
see below, n. 120.)

[117] Maimonides' analysis of this type of *mashal* is discussed at length below, 4.1.

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meal. This threatens the sharp *mashal-hashʾalah* distinction stressed
elsewhere in the *Guide*, and has brought the great Maimonidean
scholar S. Klein-Braslavy to the conclusion that

> this type of *mashal* is nothing but a mosaic of equivocal terms (אינו
> אלא פסיפס של שמות רבי משמעות). To understand its hidden level of
> meaning it is necessary to interpret every one of the equivocal terms
> of which it is composed.[118]

On this basis, she argues that Maimonides' objective in his *mashal*
analysis is to "allow the perplexed reader to *negate or erase* (לשלול או
למחוק) the meaning of the literal level of the text" (1987:55).

To evaluate this understanding, which I consider inaccurate, or
at least overstated, we must consider Maimonides' own analysis of
the first type of *mashal*. He illustrates his rule with Jacob's ladder
vision (Gen 28:12–15):

> Scripture's saying (Ar. *qawluhu*)[119] "ladder" indicates one idea;[120] its say-
> ing "set up on earth" indicates a second idea; its saying "and the top
> of it reached to heaven" indicates a third idea. . . . and its saying "and
> behold the Lord stood above it" indicates a seventh idea. Thus every
> expression (Ar. *lafẓa*)[121] occurring in this *mashal* refers to an additional
> subject in the complex of subjects represented by the *mashal* as a whole.
> (Introduction; 12–13)

Without revealing its *bāṭin* here, Maimonides establishes that this
vision is a *mashal* simply by claiming that it represents *something* beyond
what Jacob saw. Later in the *Guide* (I:15), he explains what each
detail represents: the "angels of God" are the prophets; their "ascent"
is their perception of a prophetic message, their "descent" bringing
that message to the people. The ladder is thus a symbol for prophetic
inspiration, by which the prophet "ascends" to spiritual heights, and
"descends" back into the mundane world.[122]

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[118] Klein-Braslavy 1987:42 (translation my own). Klein-Braslavy reiterates and
applies this methodological point throughout her book.

[119] Pines renders *qawluhu* "the word" (Munk, "*le mot*"). Our literal translation ("its
saying," which matches Hebrew אמרו, as rendered by Ibn Tibbon and Qāfiḥ, fol-
lowed by Schwarz [דברו]), though more awkward, avoids the impression that
Maimonides is thinking about philological analysis.

[120] Ar. *maʿna*, which Pines renders "a subject"; see above, n. 116.

[121] Pines' translation, "word" (compare Munk's *mot*), like Hebrew מילה (Samuel
Ibn Tibbon and Qāfiḥ), is misleading. Schwarz's translation, ביטוי, is preferable; see
below.

[122] For further analysis of Maimonides' reading of Jacob's ladder vision, see

Klein-Braslavy (1988) supports her view cited above by demonstrating that most of the words appearing in the biblical depiction of Jacob's ladder vision are analyzed as equivocal terms elsewhere in the *Guide*.[123] On this basis she argues, for example, that according to Maimonides מלאכים in the description of Jacob's vision means *prophets* and that עלה (lit. ascent) and ירד (lit. descent) mean *spiritual ascent* and *spiritual descent*, respectively.[124] Using Maimonides' dictionary, one derives the *bāṭin* by plugging in the non-physical senses of the terms making up the *ẓāhir*.

But Maimonides had neither philological analysis nor semantic meaning in mind when speaking about the first type of *mashal*, in which "each utterance (Ar. *kalima*) corresponds to a[nother] idea."[125] In paraphrasing this type of *mashal* as "a mosaic of equivocal terms (*shemot meshuttafim*)," Klein-Braslavy (1987:42) relied on Samuel Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation of the Arabic term *kalima* as *word* (מילה),[126] which she may have taken as being interchangeable with Hebrew

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Klein-Braslavy 1988; Diamond 2002:85–130. Both of these scholars note that Maimonides offers other readings of the ladder vision elsewhere in his writings, but they maintain that *Guide* I:15 reflects the one he had in mind in the introduction to the *Guide*.

[123] For the methodological assumption underlying this type of analysis, namely that Maimonides intends that his philological analysis be applied throughout the *Guide*, see Klein-Braslavy 1987:52–59.

[124] Klein-Braslavy 1988:343–44, citing II:6;252; II:7:266 (where Maimonides seems to use midrashic sources); I:10;36.

[125] This is not to say that philological analysis never has any place in the interpretation of *meshalim*. In the type of *mashal* that relies on an equivocal term evoked by the vision scene (above, n. 86), one can speak of philological analysis that helps to uncover the *bāṭin*. But not *every word* of that type of *mashal* is to be analyzed philologically. Even in Klein-Braslavy's article devoted to Jacob's ladder vision, there is one symbolism, ladder = material existence (סולם' אינו אלא המציאות החמרית 1988:341), for which she cannot find a philological basis in the *Guide*. (She cites instead the midrashic derivation סיני = סולם [1988:338], which is based on *gimaṭria*, a method Maimonides hardly endorsed [see chapter five, n. 36].) When all is said and done, then, even Klein-Braslavy must admit that not every word of Jacob's vision is a *shem meshuttaf*.

[126] His translation reads:
מהם משלים שכל מילה במשל ההוא יש בה ענין. . . . כל מילה שבאה בזה המשל היא לענין מוסיף.

Pines' English translation reads similarly:
In some of these parables each *word* has a meaning. . . . Every *word* occurring in this parable refers to an additional subject. (Pines trans., 12–13; emphasis added [MC]).

He also translates קולה סולב ידל עלי מעני מא as "the *word* (Ar. *qawluhu*) ladder indicates one subject." Admittedly, Maimonides uses the root *dll* (ראד; to indicate) in the *Treatise* when speaking about semantic meaning (above, p. 102); the Arabic term יסמי would have been more precise there.

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shem (Ar. *ism*). But in describing the first type of *mashal*, Maimonides avoids the term *ism* (deliberately, it would seem) and uses only the Arabic terms *kalima* and *lafẓa*. Although Hebrew translators of the *Guide* have traditionally rendered both of those terms *word* (מילה),[127] a more precise translation would be "utterance" or "language expression," i.e., a group of words.[128] And, indeed, the format Maimonides sets up for interpreting Jacob's vision actually involves seven *phrases*: (1) "ladder"; (2) "set up on earth"; (3) "and the top of it reached to heaven". . . . (7) "and behold the Lord stood above it." Instead of a *lexical* division, he divides the vision itself into distinct scenes, each of which represents another element in the *bāṭin*.[129] This does not imply semantic reconstrual; the language retains its normal literal sense and conveys what Jacob actually saw in his dream, which Maimonides neither negates nor erases. We can thus conclude that in the first type of *mashal*, every *detail* of the *ẓāhir*—not every word— has a deeper meaning. And indeed, this understanding, rather than the notion of a "mosaic of equivocal terms," best describes the other *meshalim* in the *Guide* that belong to the first category.[130]

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[127] See above, nn. 115, 121; compare n. 119.

[128] This more precise translation is reflected in Schwarz's choice of Hebrew ביטוי; see above n. 121.

[129] In her 1988 article devoted to Jacob's ladder vision, Klein-Braslavy modifies her language to reflect the possibility that Maimonides is really not thinking about word for word analysis:
משל הסולם מוצג כדוגמא למשל הבני כפסיפס של שמות רבי-משמעות, ולפיכך לכל
מילה אנ קבוצת מילים שבו יש משמעות בדיבוד הנסתר של המשל. כדי להבין משל מן
הטיפוס הזה, יש לערוך תחילה אנליזה ליחידות משמעות בסיסיות . . . (1988:338)
Instead of speaking only of individual words (which can be subject to philological analysis), here she introduces the notion of "a group of words," and "basic units of meaning." This understanding is also adopted by Diamond 2002:85, who speaks of the "seven *units* of Maimonides' interpretation of Jacob's ladder."

[130] E.g., Maimonides' "palace *mashal*" (III:51;618–19), which illustrates different levels of "proximity" to God (on this *mashal*, see Kasher 1989). In this vivid description of a palace, its network of walls, gates, courtyards and antechambers, every detail is carefully deployed to represent another spiritual level. As Stern (1991:226) notes, this *mashal* (which is typical of other Maimonidean *meshalim*) is of the first type, not the second, and thus contains no meaningless details added purely for literary embellishment. (It stands to reason that Maimonides' own *meshalim* would not reflect such poetic playfulness; as a philosopher rather than a poet, his goal—certainly in the *Guide*—was clarity of content. On the great philosopher's attitude towards poetry in general, see introduction, n. 37.) Yet the palace *mashal* is hardly a "mosaic of equivocal terms" since Maimonides does not use words like "city," "palace" and "antechamber" in a new sense. What makes this a *mashal* of the first type is the fact that every one of its *details* has a deeper meaning; i.e., every phrase in the *ẓāhir*, taken literally as depicting another feature of the palace precincts,

2.3 *Metaphorical Language vs. Metaphorical Thought*

By insisting that a *mashal* is never "a mosaic of equivocal terms," we arrive at the critical distinction between Maimonides' two modes of non-literal interpretation. The characteristic feature of his literary *mashal* analysis, in fact, is its preservation of the integrity of the *zāhir*, which becomes evident by contrast with his philological analysis. Since a *shem mush'al* is an equivocal term, *hash'alah* analysis does yield "a mosaic of equivocal terms." Maimonides cites just such a reading from the Targum on Isa 12:3, "You shall joyfully draw water . . ." (above, p. 127), which "reinterprets (*ta'awwala*) every *word*[131] in this verse with a view to the notion of knowledge" (I:30;64).[132] In his *hash'alah* analysis Maimonides intends to "negate or erase . . . the literal level of the text" (above, p. 131). But whereas *hash'alah* is dead metaphorical language, *mashal* entails dynamic metaphorical thought, perceiving one thing in terms of another. Maimonides would hardly advocate erasing the *zāhir* because it is essential for producing the vivid effect of the *mashal*, an allegory, simile or prophetic vision.[133]

2.3.1 *Picture vs. Idea: The BH Term* Temunah

As noted in modern scholarship, Maimonides' writing is often self-referential.[134] In other words, a point he makes in one context might

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illustrates another aspect of man's closeness to or remoteness from God. Compare Maimonides' analysis of Prov 25:11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (above, p. 123). Although he analyzes every detail in that *mashal*, the gold, silver, their relative value, their settings, etc., he does not imply that the words of this verse have a new dictionary sense.

[131] Ar. *kul kalima*. Here *kalima* is used in the sense of "a word."

[132] As Maimonides explains, Isaiah "calls knowledge מים"; hence, מים in Isa 12:3 does not mean *water* any more than לפנים means *face* in Ruth 4:7.

[133] We can illustrate with an example that Klein-Braslavy herself uses (1988:343–44), the equivocality of the term מלאך (lit. angel) in Jacob's ladder vision. As Maimonides observes, this term is used in BH in the sense of *a prophet* in Num 20:16, "He sent a מלאך (= Moses) and brought us forth from Egypt" (II:6;262). According to Klein-Braslavy, this meaning is activated in Jacob's vision of א-להים מלאכי (lit. angels of God) ascending and descending . . ." (Gen 28:12). But in Num 20:16, the sense *angel* is incorrect and מלאך means only *a prophet*, whereas Jacob's dream did feature *angels* ascending and descending the ladder. Even if one claims that those angels *represent* prophets, Maimonides' analysis does not erase the literal sense of the language.

[134] See Klein-Braslavy 1987:52–59; Diamond 2002:30. As Diamond (2002:13–28) demonstrates, Maimonides attributes this self-referential method to the Rabbis and identifies its occurrence in midrashic literature.

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illuminate another seemingly unrelated issue elsewhere, which he expects a careful reader to notice. Keeping this writing technique in mind, we should note that a discussion in one of the lexicographic chapters illuminates the theoretical hermeneutical distinction between the great philosopher's philological (*hash'alah*) and literary (*mashal*) modes of analysis:

> The term תמונה (lit. figure) is used amphibolously[135] in three different senses. (1) . . . to denote *the thing outside the mind that is apprehended by the senses*, I mean *the shape and configuration of the thing*. Thus it says, ". . . and make a graven image, the תמונה (= figure) of any thing" (Deut 4:25). . . . (2) . . . to denote *the imaginary form of an individual object* existing in the imagination after the object of which it is the form is no longer manifest to the senses. Thus it says, "in thoughts from the visions of the night . . . a תמונה was before mine eyes" (Job 4:13) meaning *a phantasm of the imagination*. (3) . . . to denote *the true notion grasped by the intellect*. It is with a view to this third meaning that the word תמונה is used with reference to God, may He be exalted. Thus it says: And the תמונה of the Lord יביט (lit. he shall look upon)" (Num 12:8) the meaning and interpretation being: he *grasps* the *truth of* the Lord. (I:3;27)

In a *mashal*, the language evokes a תמונה in the second sense: a picture or pictures in the listener's mind that make up a scene or tale. To compose—and to understand—a *mashal* thus requires activating one's imagination. But a *shem mush'al*, as defined in the *Guide*, can directly convey a תמונה in the third sense, i.e., an idea, a "notion grasped by the intellect," which has no physical manifestation. By employing his *hash'alah* mode, then, Maimonides can bypass the imagination, even where the language of Scripture—taken literally—would conjure up vivid imagery.[136]

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[135] On this type of equivocal term in Maimonides, see Hyman 1991:178–82; on its background in Arabic and Greek tradition, see Wolfson 1938.

[136] Interestingly, we find a parallel to the equivocality of the BH term תמונה in medieval Hebrew, as Samuel Ibn Tibbon comments (*Perush ha-Millim ha-Zarot*, p. 2): מילות שחדשתי שהופם, כמלות ציור ומצייר הנמצא על מעשה הצורות המלאכותיות ואני שאלתיו להבנת הדבר כפי אמיתתו בצורתו האמיתית . . . אחר לשון הערבי. In his vocabulary (which became popular in medieval Hebrew), *ṣiyyur* is used both in the sense of *a man-made image* and *an idea*. This dual usage is actually a loan-translation from Arabic; see below, chapter four, n. 96.

2.3.2   *The Role of the Imagination*

Having seen how *mashal* and *hash'alah* differ with respect to their need to activate the imagination, we can return to Strauss' critique that we raised at the beginning of this chapter. Maimonides maintains that Moses received his prophecy through the intellect alone, unlike all other prophets who prophesied through the imaginative faculty.[137] If so, Strauss reasons:

> The assertion that Moses' prophecy was entirely independent of the imagination leads to a great difficulty if one considers the fact that it is the imagination that brings forth similes [*meshalim*] and, we may add, metaphors [*shemot mush'alim*], as well as the fact that the Torah abounds if not with similes, at any rate with metaphors.[138]

This problem is largely resolved when we recognize that the great philosopher's conception of metaphor in the *Guide* is not dependent on the imagination. The aim of his biblical dictionary, in fact, is to demonstrate that the *shemot mush'alim* appearing in Scripture with relation to God signify only "true notion[s] grasped by the intellect" (המונה in sense #3, not sense #2). As we shall see in chapter four, this is the benefit of the *hash'alah* category that motivated him to employ it widely, even where the *mashal* mode would seem more appropriate. This preference reveals Maimonides' philosophical agenda to translate Scripture's imagery-producing, graphic language into a conceptual one. Radak, on the other hand, as we will see in the next chapter, used the great philosopher's *mashal-hash'alah* distinction to highlight the former category, yielding an exegetical system that captures the imaginative aspects of biblical metaphor.

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[137] See Mishnah Commentary, introduction to *Pereq Heleq* (= *Sanhedrin* X), principle #7; *MT, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:6; *Guide* II:45;403.

[138] Strauss 1963:xxxvii. His language suggests that he was unsure about metaphors: "we may add . . ." indicates that only *mashal* (which he translates as "simile") is really the product of the imagination.

CHAPTER THREE

RADAK: *MASHAL, MELIṢAH, HASH'ALAH*

The cultural tension Ibn Ezra encountered as an adult in Christian lands (but that spared Maimonides) shaped Radak's thinking as a youth. His father, Joseph Kimhi, had fled from al-Andalus and settled in Provence before his birth, placing Radak at a crossroads between the Andalusian *peshaṭ* tradition and the northern French talmudic-midrashic one that dominated the Provençal horizon. As a scion of the Andalusian tradition, his first allegiance was to its great sons, Ibn Ezra and Maimonides. But whereas Ibn Ezra had little use for Rashi's *peshaṭ* and less for his *derash*, Radak, a Provençal Talmud teacher, respected both. Within this convergence of intellectual streams, he synthesized a new approach to metaphor that included a refined system of terminology. Using Ibn Ezra's concept of *mashal* as his base, Radak created a more versatile categorization using two other technical terms: *hash'alah*, taken from Ibn Janaḥ and Maimonides; and *meliṣah*, from Rashi.[1]

3.1   Mashal *as Literary Comparison*

Radak follows the pattern established by his Judeo-Arabic predecessors by assuming the centrality of metaphor in Scripture. He thus

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[1] Neither Ibn Janaḥ nor Maimonides actually used the term *hash'alah*, a medieval Hebrew loan-translation of *isti'āra* (above 1.2.3). The Hebrew term was popularized in the translations of their works that Radak read. (His ability to read Arabic is debated, but he clearly used Hebrew versions where available [see Cohen 1929:xix, Abramson 1976]). On rare occasions, Radak uses other terms in connection with metaphor, e.g., *harhavah* (a loan-translation of Ar. *ittisā'*; see chapter one, n. 134) and *ha'avarah* (a loan-translation of Ar. *majāz*; see chapter one, n. 33); see below, section 3.3.1 and chapter four, n. 89. Radak classifies hyperbole as a technique distinct from *mashal* and calls it *haflagah* and *guzma* (see Melammed 1978:859–61 and below, pp. 278–79). In this respect he follows Maimonides (see chapter two, n. 4), but Ibn Ezra uses neither of those specific terms and refers to hyperbole as *mashal* (see, e.g., his comm. on Deut 1:10). Analysis of hyperbole is beyond the scope of our study.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAIMONIDES: IMAGINATIVE VS. DEAD METAPHOR

Sa'adia's exegetical project of reconciling Scripture with reason, though serving as inspiration for three centuries of exegetes, underwent modification in the subsequent tradition. As we saw in chapter one, exegetes such as Moses Ibn Chiquitilla and Abraham Ibn Ezra deviated from Sa'adia's mode of non-literal interpretation. A modest exegetical evolution, as we shall see below, occurred even among philosophers such as Baḥya Ibn Paquda (eleventh century) and Judah ha-Levi, who otherwise relied more heavily upon Sa'adia. Maimonides incorporated these traditions into his thinking[1] and also drew upon an array of linguistic, literary, psychological and political concepts from Arabic and Greek learning.[2] Yet unlike his immediate predecessors, he deployed his exegetical innovations to bolster Sa'adia's original model.

Though all of Maimonides' works contain biblical exegesis, his *Guide of the Perplexed* is devoted specifically to this subject—that is, philosophically driven exegesis in the rationalist Andalusian mold. In the Mishnah Commentary, written much earlier in his career, the young Maimonides humbly refers to his predecessors when commenting

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[1] All of the above-mentioned authors, with the possible exception of Abraham Ibn Ezra, seem to have influenced him; see introduction, nn. 40–41 and chapter two, n. 1. Despite his frequent reliance on the Andalusian *peshaṭ* tradition, the author of the *Guide* often drew upon rabbinic sources to interpret Scripture; see Boyarin 1937:480–84 (see above, chapter two, n. 77); Klein-Braslavy 1996:153–61, 201; Diamond 2002:13–28. For examples of this tendency, see below, p. 189 and nn. 125, 130–131; see also chapter two, n. 82 and p. 122. While it was natural for a talmudist like Maimonides to rely on rabbinic interpretations of Scripture, this would have conflicted at times with the Andalusian notions of *peshaṭ* exegesis that he inherited (see, e.g., below, p. 183; compare chapter five, nn. 59–60). Indeed, Maimonides was well aware of the *peshaṭ-derash* opposition; see *Sefer ha-Miṣwot*, principle #2 (Qāfiḥ ed., pp. 12–15); Rosenberg 1981:103n; Wolfson 1989:126–27; Weiss-Halivni 1991:83–88. (See also Twersky 1980:145–50, who compares Maimonides' original *peshaṭ* exegesis with his use of talmudic readings of Scripture.) The interplay between these two aspects of Maimonides' exegesis is addressed in my forthcoming essay, "*Peshaṭ* Exegesis of a Philosopher" [Hebrew], and I hope to dedicate a subsequent separate study to this subject.

[2] See Pines 1963:lvii–cxxxii; Macy 1986; Klein-Braslavy 1996:15–30.

on the anthropomorphic depictions of God that abound in Scripture: "All of these are *majāz*, as they have said: 'Scripture spoke in the language of men,' and people have already discussed this matter at length."[3] In using the term *majāz*, he echoes the tradition running from Sa'adia to Moses Ibn Ezra that we saw in chapter one;[4] but in the *Guide*, the great philosopher devises a more sophisticated hermeneutical system for reinterpreting philosophically or otherwise problematic biblical verses. As we saw in chapter two, Maimonides distinguishes in the *Guide* between two types of figurative language: *hash'alah* (i.e., metaphor), which assigns a different semantic meaning to the problematic language, as opposed to *mashal* (i.e., allegory, symbolism and simile), which conveys a deeper, symbolic meaning (*bāṭin*) in addition to its literal sense (*ẓāhir*). In this chapter we aim to demonstrate why this distinction was a crucial element within the great philosopher's biblical hermeneutics.

4.1 Mashal: *Literary and Psychological Analysis*

As its title suggests, the *Guide of the Perplexed* aims to rectify the "perplexity" of an educated reader faced with biblical passages that contradict reason and science. The simplest solution involves Maimonides' *mashal* category:

> if we ... draw his attention to their being meshalim, he will take the right road and be delivered from this perplexity. (Introduction; 6)[5]

Accordingly, he devotes a chapter of the *Guide* (II:46) to religiously problematic activities performed by the prophets, for example, Isaiah's "walk[ing] naked and barefoot" (Isa 20:3) and Hosea's marriage to

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[3] Introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* (= *Sanhedrin* X), principle #3 (Qāfiḥ ed., 211); see also principle #8 (Qāfiḥ ed., 214).

[4] In this comment, he is probably referring to Sa'adia (above, p. 93) and perhaps Moses Ibn Ezra's *Maqālat al-Ḥadīqa*, in which biblical anthropomorphism is classified as *majāz* (above, p. 63). Maimonides' specific formulation here, especially his citation of the rule "Scripture spoke in the language of men" resembles Baḥya's language (below, p. 208). See Kreisel 1991:101n, who argues that "Maimonides made extensive use of Sa'adia ... as well as Baḥya ... in this area," i.e. the interpretation of anthropomorphism.

[5] Unless otherwise indicated, references in this chapter are to Maimonides' *Guide*. On the conventions related to citations of the *Guide* in this volume, see chapter two, n. 5.

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a harlot (Hos 1:2ff.). Maimonides argues that all such episodes were simply *meshalim*, i.e., prophetic visions meant only to convey a deeper message.[6] In these cases, he does not have to do much to resolve the perplexity; he simply asserts that these bizarre activities occurred "only in a vision of prophecy, but they are not real actions, actions that exist for the external senses" (II:46;404), though they may seem to be presented in Scripture as such.[7]

In the above-cited examples, the great philosopher aims primarily to neutralize the implications of a literal (i.e., non-*mashal*) reading.[8] Elsewhere, Maimonides expends more effort to get at the deeper meaning of Scripture's *meshalim*, which prompts him to formulate the fundamental rules of *mashal* exegesis that we discussed in chapter two (p. 130). He differentiates between two types of *mashal*: in the first type, "each utterance corresponds to a[nother] idea"; but in the second type

> the *mashal* as a whole indicates the whole of the symbolized idea. In such a *mashal* very many utterances are to be found, not every one of which adds something to the symbolized idea. They serve rather to embellish the *mashal* and to render it more coherent, or to conceal further the symbolized idea, hence the speech proceeds in such a way as to accord with everything required by the *mashal*'s external meaning. (Introduction; 12)

The first type of *mashal* actually serves as little more than a foil for defining the second type, which Maimonides views as the dominant one in Scripture. Practically relegating the former to obscurity,[9] he

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[6] Ibn Ezra, who makes the same claim (comm. on Hos 1:2), may have been Maimonides' source; see introduction, n. 41.

[7] Nuriel (1990) argues that in certain instances Maimonides preserves the outward appearance projected by Scripture and only hints at his view that a given biblical episode is merely a *mashal* rather than a historical account.

[8] After making his claim about those prophetic episodes, Maimonides thus reiterates the exegetical goal he formulated in his introduction: "After it has been stated expressly that these were *meshalim* there remains no room for obscurity as to any of these things having a real existence" (II:46;407). In those *meshalim*, the *bāṭin*—i.e., the deeper message dramatized through the bizarre actions—is stated explicitly in Scripture and does not require elucidation.

[9] For the rare examples of this type of *mashal* cited in the *Guide*, see above, 2.2.4. Klein-Braslavy (1987:44, n. 37N) questions the validity of this programmatic statement, since, by her reckoning, Maimonides most often engages in word-by-word analysis of biblical *meshalim*. But she incorrectly includes passages that Maimonides actually interprets using his linguistic model (i.e., as a composite of *shemot meshuttafim* and *mush'alim*) and would not regard as *meshalim*; see below, n. 127.

directs his reader to assume that any given *mashal* analyzed in the *Guide* is of the second type:

> When you find that in ... this Treatise I have explained the meaning of a *mashal* and have drawn your attention to the general idea it symbolizes, you should not seek [meaning in] all of the details occurring in the *mashal* and wish to find something corresponding to them in the symbolized matter...[10] Your purpose, rather, should always be to know, regarding most *meshalim*, the whole that was intended to be known. (Introduction; 14)

Accordingly, Maimonides is highly selective in interpreting the details of any given *mashal* and often specifically points out his selectivity.

4.1.1 *Literary Criticism: The Great and Important Principle*

To illustrate his exegetical rule, Maimonides cites Prov 7:6–21, a passage about a young man seduced by a harlot, which he takes to be a *mashal*.[11] The youth represents mankind and the harlot represents "[corporeal] matter, the cause of all ... bodily pleasures" in an allegorical portrayal of man's struggle to achieve spiritual perfection. According to the author of the *Guide*, "the proposition that can be understood from this *mashal* as a whole [is] that man should not follow his bestial nature" (introduction; 12). He dismisses the need to further analyze the vivid details of the harlot's activities, since

> all of them figure only in the consistent development of the *mashal*'s external meaning (*zāhir*), the circumstances described in it being of a kind typical for adulterers. Understand this well, for what I have said is a great and important principle with regard to matters that I wish to explain. (Ibid.; 14)

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[10] Nonetheless, Maimonides sometimes stresses that a particular detail in a biblical *mashal* is meaningful. He comments, e.g., that the date and place of Ezekiel's vision must have a deep meaning, which he does not reveal (III:7;428; see Rosenberg 1981:92). More strikingly, he invites his reader to seek meaning in the details of Ezekiel's vision that he was unable to interpret: after having elucidated the "entirety of the subject in question ... except for a few slight details and repetitious speech, whose meaning remains hidden," he adds: "Perhaps upon consideration, this too will be revealed and nothing of this will remain hidden" (ibid., 430). One would have expected Maimonides to dismiss the unexplained remainder, as he does, e.g., in his analysis of Job (III:23;497; cited below, p. 189).

[11] On this approach and its detractors, see Talmage 1986:327.

The *mashal* is composed according to literary principles dictated by the literal tale rather than its inner meaning.

Maimonides' enthusiasm for his "great and important principle" is hardly gratuitous, for it powers his *mashal* exegesis and constitutes a contribution to biblical interpretation that grants him entry into the pantheon of great Andalusian *peshat* exegetes. This principle represents a departure from over-zealous midrashic exegesis, which manifests what J. Kugel calls the doctrine of "omnisignificance."[12] Guided by a belief that Scripture is a special type of text by virtue of its divine source, the Rabbis extracted meaning from every biblical word and letter, without regard for the rules of language and literary analysis that apply to human texts.[13] By contrast, the Andalusian *peshat* tradition that Maimonides inherited analyzed Scripture according to the conventions of human literary composition.[14] Details of the text from which the Rabbis derived meaning were often explained in this tradition as manifestations of stylistic conventions.[15] In this spirit, Maimonides argues that otherwise meaningless details of a *mashal* serve "to embellish the *mashal* and to render it more coherent,"[16] poetic values that his Muslim literary environment led him to appreciate.[17] The great philosopher was well aware that his approach departs from the older midrashic one, which he deems untenable:

> Inquir[ing] into all of the details occurring in the mashal ... would lead you ... into assuming an obligation to interpret[18] things not

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[12] See introduction, n. 11. Kugel 1981:287–92 notes that Malbim, the nineteenth-century Eastern European rabbinic exegete, articulated this rule:
> In the poetry of the prophets, there is no rind lacking a core, body without soul, clothing without a wearer, language devoid of a lofty idea, a saying within which does not dwell wisdom, for the spirit of the living God is in all the words of the living God. (Comm. on Isaiah, introduction, p. 1).

This comment is directed against the fundamental axioms of the Spanish *peshat* tradition; see Cohen 1995/6:25–35. Compare Maimonides' depiction of Midrash as "a few grains belonging to the core, which are overlaid by many layers of rind" (I:71;176); see Klein-Braslavy 1987:47; 1996:101.

[13] See introduction, n. 12.

[14] See introduction, n. 14.

[15] A prime example of this strategy is the Andalusian approach to the repetitive phrases that result from the biblical convention now known as parallelism; see Kugel 1981:172–81 and below, p. 239.

[16] Above, p. 181 (the other function, hiding the *bāṭin*, is discussed below).

[17] The notion that biblical literature must conform to poetic standards was not taken for granted in the medieval tradition; see Cohen 1995/6:23–25; 38–39. Even Maimonides did not deem this embellishment to be absolutely necessary; his own *meshalim*, e.g., lack extraneous details; see chapter two, n. 130.

[18] *Ta'wīl* here denotes interpretation in general; see chapter one, n. 32.

susceptible to interpretation and that have not been inserted with a
view to interpretation ... [and] result in extravagant fantasies such as
are entertained and written about in our time by most of the sects of
the world, since each of these sects desires to find meanings for expres-
sions whose author in no wise had in mind the significations wished
by them. (Introduction; 14)

Maimonides here criticizes contemporary writers who adopt midrashic
methods[19] and substitute "extravagant fantasies" for legitimate inter-
pretation. Discovering the intent of the biblical authors requires
understanding the literary principles that guided them.[20]

What brought Maimonides to adopt this non-rabbinic exegetical
approach? One can point, first of all, to the Spanish *peshaṭ* tradition
and its cultural context in Arabic poetic theory, which sharply dis-
tinguished between content and literary style. Moses Ibn Ezra, for
example, viewed metaphor as a graceful literary garb in his poetics;
but in his exegetical work, he sought to divest Scripture's metaphor-
ical garb to reveal its essential idea (above 1.2.5).[21] A century ear-
lier, Jonah Ibn Janaḥ had identified biblical words added for the
sake of literary elegance (*faṣāḥa wa-balāgha*) that are otherwise mean-
ingless (below, p. 240). This thinking may have brought Maimonides
to argue similarly that many details of a *mashal* serve to beautify the
embroidery of the *ẓāhir*, but "have not been inserted with a view to
interpretation."

But the great philosopher otherwise seems to have been inclined
towards Gestalt rather than piecemeal analysis, as evident in his atti-

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[19] This does not impugn the Rabbis themselves, because, as Maimonides explains,
they never meant for their readings to be taken as genuine interpretation; see fol-
lowing note. This strategy was typical in the exegetical tradition that had devel-
oped in al-Andalus and was adopted, e.g., by Abraham Ibn Ezra (see chapter one,
n. 21). This is another example of a parallel between the two authors that can be
added to the list of such parallels compiled by Twersky 1993 (see introduction,
n. 41). But whereas diverging from rabbinic exegesis was only natural for Ibn Ezra,
Maimonides' decision to do so is noteworthy since he often relies heavily on rab-
binic sources in his biblical exegesis (above, n. 1).

[20] See Cohen 1995/6:25–37. Kugel (1981:105) observes that reducing biblical
expression to a poetic style was exactly what the Rabbis intended to avoid in their
midrashic exegesis. Maimonides defuses this potential conflict by applying a simi-
lar analysis to midrashic literature, arguing that many fanciful Midrashim "have the
character of poetical conceits," a claim he supports by arguing that "at that time
this method was generally known and used by everybody, just as the poets use
poetical expressions" (III:43;573; see also Elbaum 2000:140–41)

[21] A similar observation can also be made about other literary ornaments that
he identifies in Scripture; see Cohen 2000b:293–300; Fenton 1997:332–41.

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tude towards the rationale for Torah commandments (*ṭaʿamei ha-
miṣwot*).[22] Though Maimonides insists that all divine commands must
serve a clear purpose, he argues that the details of many com-
mandments need not be explained. For example, "the offering of
sacrifices has in itself a great and manifest utility. . . . but no cause
will ever be found for the fact that one particular sacrifice consists
in a lamb and another in a ram" (III:26;509). Hence, when he offers
a rationale, the author of the *Guide* views the totality of the com-
mandment, not its particulars. In language reminiscent of his criti-
cism of the midrashic model of *mashal* analysis, he counters the
alternative view here as well:

> In my opinion, all those who occupy themselves with finding causes
> for something of these particulars are stricken with a prolonged mad-
> ness in the course of which they do not put an end to an incongruity,
> but rather increase the number of incongruities. Those who imagine
> that a cause may be found for things like this are as far from the
> truth as those who imagine that the generalities of a commandment
> are not designed with a view to some utility. (Ibid.)

Elsewhere in the *Guide* (III:43;572–73), Maimonides implies that these
"interpreters" follow the example of midrashic comments that attribute
meaning to particulars of specific commandments. But the great
philosopher argues that the Rabbis uttered such comments merely
as "poetic conceits" (above, n. 20), not meant to be taken at face
value and certainly not as an exegetical model.

From the parallel to *ṭaʿamei ha-miṣwot*, one might argue that Maimo-
nides arrived at his Gestalt approach to *mashal* without the literary
conceptions of the Andalusian *peshaṭ* tradition, in other words, that
he was inclined to seek meaning—whether of a text or ritual prac-
tice—in a totality, not the sum of individual parts. Yet he still needed
to harness the literary outlook in order to successfully implement
that approach with respect to *mashal*. In *ṭaʿamei ha-miṣwot*, the great
philosopher invokes modal logic to support his view, arguing that
the commandments, by their very nature, must include arbitrary
elements:

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[22] My thanks to Prof. U. Simon for suggesting this alternative to Maimonides'
literary motivation. Recent scholars have noted this correlation between the great
philosopher's principle of *mashal* analysis and his approach to *ṭaʿamei ha-miṣwot*; see
Twersky 1980:397–400; Nehorai 1984:29–42. Cf. Stern 1998:67–86, who explores
this parallel from a different perspective.

Necessity occasioned that there should be particulars for which no cause can be found. . . . It was, as it were, impossible in regard to the Law that there be nothing of this class in it. . . . [since] when you ask why a lamb should be prescribed and not a ram, the same question would have been asked if a lamb had been prescribed instead of a ram. But one particular species had necessarily to be chosen.[23] (Ibid.; 573)

But no logical necessity compels an author to add details to a *mashal* without deeper meaning. To account for these without blurring the clarity of the "big picture" in the *mashal*, Maimonides had to draw upon the poetics of his day to formulate an analogous aesthetic necessity.

Maimonides' approach to the Song of Songs demonstrates how his "great and important principle" opens avenues unavailable to exegetes committed to finding meaning in every detail of a *mashal*. In the Song, two young lovers converse amorously, graphically, even erotically, drawing comparisons from fragrant spices, beautiful plants and graceful animals. In scenes that go from city to countryside to a dream-world, a fragmented story-line emerges that traces the budding love in springtime as it matures along with nature into summertime and beyond. Rabbinic tradition takes the Song as a historical allegory, in which God is the lover pursuing Israel, his beloved, a framework within which every detail of the text is explained as another historical episode.[24] In midrashic literature, these readings defy chronological order, a feature that troubled exegetes as diverse as Rashi and Abraham Ibn Ezra, and prompted them to interpret the Song according to a stricter chronological framework, anchored in the unfolding literal love story.[25] Yet even they were committed to interpreting every scene of the Song as another historical episode.[26]

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[23] Prof. Mark Steiner intends to analyze this logical argument in a forthcoming article.

[24] For an overview of the rabbinic interpretation of the Song, see Pope 1977:93–102.

[25] On Rashi, see Kamin 1991:31 62. On Ibn Ezra, see below, 5.3.1. For a survey of the medieval Jewish approaches to the Song, see Pope 1977:102 12. The allegorical reading was shared by the medieval Church (see Matter 1990), though some modern Christian readings "humanize the love" in the Song (Pope 1977:112 32; 195–205). Modern scholarship, of course, typically rejects the allegorical reading and views the Song exclusively from the perspective of human love; see Pope 1977:34–85.

[26] With minor exceptions, Rashi at times (e.g., on Song 2:13; 5:6, 16) tacitly accepts a version of the rule Maimonides would formulate by interpreting some details only on the literal level without attributing an allegorical meaning to them.

Maimonides advances a new approach, even while taking the Song as a *mashal*. His readings of isolated verses in the *Guide*[27] are based on a view of the Song articulated in *Mishneh Torah*:

What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love the Eternal with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one's soul shall be knit up with the love of God, and one should be continually enraptured by it, like a lovesick individual, whose mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, the thought of her filling his heart at all times, when sitting down or rising up, when he is eating or drinking. Even more intense should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him . . . This Solomon expressed allegorically *(derekh mashal)* [saying,] "For I am sick with love" (Song 2:5). The entire Song of Songs is a *mashal* for this idea. *(MT, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 10:3)

The closing phrase here echoes Maimonides' model in the *Guide*, in which "the *mashal* as a whole indicates the whole of the symbolized idea." He first reads the Song as a literary whole depicting "lovesick individual[s], whose mind[s are] at no time free from" their passions for one another; this image, in turn, symbolizes an individual's love for God. This reading fully harnesses the passions expressed in the literal tale, which are diluted when "nationalized" by the midrashic approach.[28] Maimonides did not need to account for every detail of the Song according to this *bāṭin*, which in any event does not readily offer the interpretive template of the historical approach.[29] His reading is made possible by the "great and important principle," which exempts him from the midrashic challenge: "when . . . I have explained the meaning of a *mashal* . . . you should not seek [meaning in] all of the details occurring in the *mashal* and wish to find something corresponding to them in the symbolized matter."[30]

Apart from freeing him from interpreting the Song's many details,

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[27] III:51, 54. On these passages and Maimonides' approach to the Song, see Rosenberg 1990:133–41.

[28] Interestingly, in his *Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides reads some verses according to the historical allegory; see Twersky 1980:114,357. It is possible that he attributes more than one *bāṭin* to this biblical *mashal*; compare Klein-Braslavy 1988. But it is more likely that the *Guide* and *Hilkhot Teshuvah* represent his definitive analysis, as opposed to his homiletic usage in the *Epistle*; compare Soloveitchik 1980:305–19.

[29] Although subsequent exegetes in the post-Maimonidean school took up this challenge; see the following note.

[30] See above, p. 182. As Maimonides states in his introduction to the *Guide*, this rule applies to most biblical *meshalim*, and his generalized treatment of the Song implies that he viewed this biblical book in that light. Indeed, this was the understanding of the great philosopher's rationalist-minded Provençal followers Moses Ibn

the "great and important principle" affords Maimonides an appreciation for its literary charm rare in medieval tradition.[31] The Midrash interprets the Song piecemeal, making every verse another "window" into an episode of Jewish history. Even Ibn Ezra, a distinguished poet, diverged little from this model and attributed significance to each verse in the book inasmuch as it illuminates the historical relationship between God and Israel (below, 5.3.1). But Maimonides' analysis invites the reader to appreciate how the picturesque details in the Song "embellish the *mashal* and . . . render it more coherent." Ironically, by dismissing its details as devoid of deeper meaning, he grants the *ẓāhir* independence as a Gestalt, a self-contained composition that can be appreciated for its literary merit. A more beautiful and complete *ẓāhir* more powerfully evokes the emotionally charged image of youthful love that is ardent and tempestuous, playful yet painful. Not all of the animated sensations in the *ẓāhir* need be projected into the realm of divine love since it is the overall emotional impact of the image, not its details, that conveys the *bāṭin*.

4.1.2 *Job: Concealment as a Political Function of* Mashal

Maimonides' "great and important principle" is also crucial in his analysis of Job, the only biblical book he endeavors to interpret in its entirety.[32] As Scripture recounts, Job was a righteous man whose family and possessions were destroyed by Satan to test his faith. To

Tibbon and Joseph Ibn Kaspi, who explicitly classified the Song as a *mashal* of the second type as defined in the *Guide*; see Halkin 1950:412; Berlin 1991:92–93, 105. Gersonides, on the other hand, was inspired by Maimonides' philosophical reading to offer a rather detailed interpretation of the Song and insisted that only "in a small number of places . . . [do] those attributes [of the two lovers] relate to the allegory only . . . [being deployed merely for the sake of] the perfection of the text and its betterment" (Kellner 1998:14). Whereas Gersonides still recognized the literary-aesthetic function (albeit in a minimized way), a fundamentally different approach emerged in the commentaries of the mystical post-Maimonidean school in Egypt, which interpreted the language of the Song exhaustively by drawing upon Sufi concepts to demonstrate how this esoteric biblical text symbolizes the yearning of man's soul for God; see Fenton 2000a:443n; 2000b. The authors in this pietist tradition, which included Maimonides' son, Abraham, and other direct descendants of the great philosopher, thus treated the Song as a *mashal* of the first type, in which "each utterance corresponds to a[nother] idea" (above, p. 181).

[31] For other medieval approaches that highlighted the literal sense and the negative reaction they incurred, see Halkin 1950:389–99.

[32] On the philosophical-theological content that Maimonides extracts from Job, see Kravitz 1967; Kasher 1985; Levinger 1988; Eisen (forthcoming), chapter two.

rationalize his suffering, three friends engage Job in tortuous dialogues that comprise most of the book, until God settles the discussion. Maimonides argues that "Job . . . is a *mashal* intended to set forth the opinions of people concerning providence" based on the talmudic statement, "Job did not exist and was not created but was a *mashal*" (BT *Baba Bathra* 15a), which he favors over the alternate rabbinic opinion that "he existed and was created" (III:22;486). Job and his friends represent four erroneous opinions attested in Greek and Arabic thought; God's view, of course, is the correct one. After summarizing these opinions in two chapters, Maimonides comments: "When you see all that I have said . . . and study all of the book of Job . . . you will find that I have included and encompassed its entire content" (III:23;497). Recognizing that his synopsis falls short of the forty-two chapter biblical epic, he invokes his "great and important principle": "Nothing has escaped us, except that which comes for the structure of the elements and the coherence of the *mashal* as I have explained often in this work" (ibid.).[33] In other words, he captures the meaningful content of the book, the remainder of which is employed merely for literary purposes.

In embracing the rabbinic opinion that Job is a *mashal*,[34] Maimonides implicitly continues a dialogue in BT *Baba Bathra* 15a, in which Samuel bar Naḥmani responds negatively to his student who raised this possibility: "For you Scripture said, 'There *was* a man in the land of Uz, Job was his name' (Job 1:1)." The student persisted, since, after all, Nathan, in his classic *mashal*, also speaks of fictional characters as if they "existed":

> What about, "The poor man had nothing but one small lamb . . ." (II Sam 12:3); did he exist? Rather he was merely a *mashal*; this too then is a *mashal*. (Ibid.)

On the classification of Job as a *mashal* in the *Guide*, see Rosenberg 1996 (cited also in notes below). My forthcoming article, "*Peshaṭ* Exegesis of a Philosopher: Maimonides' Literary Interpretation of Job and Its Place in Jewish Biblical Interpretation" [Hebrew] highlights Maimonides' innovative literary method by comparison with *peshaṭ* exegetes such as Ibn Ezra, Rashbam and Naḥmanides (see below, n. 36).

[33] Compare the similar comment at the end of III:22 (cited below).

[34] On this rabbinic view (attested also in JT *Soṭah* 5:6 and *Bereshit Rabbah* 57 [p. 617]) and its reception in the medieval tradition, see Greenberg 1992 and below, n. 36.