

Act of Reading and Aesthetic Response in the Quranic Discourse

-Surah Yusuf as a Model-

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Abstract

This article examines the act of reading and theory of aesthetic response in the Quranic discourse, particularly in chapter of Yusuf. This story aims to consolidate monotheism through an aesthetic and artistic style. It associates artistic characteristics with religious purposes. Furthermore, it invites the reader to engage with the Quranic text in order to participate in meaning construction. This study aims to highlight the act of reading and theory of aesthetic response in chapter of Yusuf as a complex mental process where the cognitive, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions overlap altogether. We adopted in this study some of the mechanisms of the reception method and structural method in order to understand how narration functions within the Quranic discourse, and how the act of reading stimulates the reader's response

Keywords:

Act of reading ;
Gaps ;
Narration;
Reception and Interpretation ;
Surah Yusuf.

I- Introduction:

The reader undertook the study of the Noble Quranic text in order to understand, interpret, and grasp the intended and the precised meaning. As a divine and sacred revelation, any misunderstanding or misinterpretation may lead to blur the distinction between what is lawful and unlawful, thus the Muslim's faith can be questionable. There is no doubt that the reader has a central role in interpreting and arriving to comprehend the text correctly, relying on his intellectual, religious, cultural, and social background. The narrative "Chapter of Yusuf" (Joseph) moreover has been shaped for a religious purpose through the fusion of religious instructions with the story's context. Unlike literary narratives, the Quranic narrative extends beyond being merely an artistic work; rather, it functions as a tool to fulfill diverse religious purposes such as delivering the Prophetic message of Muhammad peace be upon him and embedding its principles in people's minds. Thus, the story in the Quranic text associates both the aesthetic and artistic characteristics with its religious purposes. Chapter of Yusuf in particular is considered as a unique Quranic narrative model, since the text describes it as the best stories, Allah says in this regard " We do relate unto thee The most beautiful

of stories, In that We reveal to thee this (portion of the Quran)¹. The expressive devices used in the Quranic text, lead the reader to engage with it, and participate in the construction of meaning. Thus, the act of reading in the Quranic context is not about receiving information or following the narrative sequences; rather, it becomes both an interpretive and aesthetic act in the meantime. This interaction, however, give the rise to following main questions:

How does the act of reading embodied in Surah Yusuf?

How does the reader respond to the Quranic narrative?

To what extent can the reader engage with such level of discourse?

We proposed a hypothesis from the above-mentioned problematic, that the aesthetic dimension in the Quranic narrative is fully realized through the engagement of an interactive reader. The act of reading in this context is thus a complex process that integrates intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions all together.

We adopted in this study certain methods from Reception theory and Structuralism, with aim of understanding how narration functions within the Quranic discourse, particularly in Surah Yusuf, and how it stimulates the act of reading that, in turn, elicits the reader's response. It should be noted that in this study we relied on the original Holy Quran written in Arabic for our corpus. We also brought the translation of the meanings of the Noble Quran by Yusuf Ali since this article is written in English.

I.1. the Story in the Qur'an:

Narration manifests in the Quranic discourse in many forms. It presents sometimes the stories of prophets as an example of human virtue; at other times, it adopts a dialectical mode by presenting the objections of unbelievers and responding to them through rational argumentation. In other contexts, it utilizes symbolic representations that concretize the notions of good and evil. This narrative diversity serves to captivate the reader's attention and touching both his intellect and emotion. According to Sayyid Qutb, the holy Quran is a masterpiece of artistic expression that evokes intentionally the reader's spiritual feelings through the beauty of its language. In his view, art and religion are inseparable and inherently connected to the human soul and perception. Therefore, the fact of perceiving the artistic beauty reflects the readiness to receive the spiritual influence. The Quranic narratives are not entertainment tales, but a living discourse that convey deep spiritual and educational messages, which place the reader before a real-life situations and experiences that stimulate him to think and to extract moral lessons.

A proper understanding and interpretation of the Quranic text can be done through a contemplative reading, as affirmed by Iser Wolfgang «one thing is clear, reading is a necessary prerequisite for all acts of literary interpretation.»¹ Thus, if a literary text recommends the element of reading for a sound understanding and interpretation, the sacred text demands then even the highest levels of reading to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Hence, the first step we undertake in this research paper is to explore the act of reading and to delve into it.

I. 2. Act of reading: from blanks to the construction of meaning:

Reading is an active, dynamic, and a complex mental process, which involves multiple aspects such as:

Physical abilities: the act of reading requires the proper functioning of the nervous, visual, and articulatory systems. Healthy organs play an essential role for an effective process of reading.

Mental abilities: a successful reading process depends on a stable psychological state of the reader, so any disturbance in him can negatively affect the process. Disorders such as:

Speech or language difficulties and other psychosomatic issues can significantly impede the reading process.

We shift the above-mentioned concept of **act of reading** as an activity to its place within literary criticism. This term is closely associated with Iser in his work a theory of Aesthetic Response,

¹ The Holy Quran, Translation by A. Yusuf Ali, <https://www.alim.org/translation/yusuf-ali/12/>

particularly the Act of Reading, in which he emphasizes that “reading is an activity guided by the text, which the reader must interact with and, in turn be influenced by the process of interaction.”² We conclude from this statement that reading is shaped and resulted from the text itself, and the reader engagement with the text is a new reading, giving rise to a fresh version of the text. Iser eliminates the author’s role and instead gave importance to the new born text during each act of reading. This reflects both “the authority of the text” and “the dominance of the reader”.

The Quranic text enhances the dynamic of act of reading in chapter of Yusuf and increases its interactions “through communicative channels shaped by the speaker’s intention “Allah”, in order to stimulate the addressee and to build him a continuous reading awareness.”³ Consequently, the reader of Surah Yusuf develops an interpretive awareness due to his attentive reading and contemplation. The fact that the Quranic text is semantically coherent, it differs from the literary one, which makes it transcends the time and space addressing all humanity.

Furthermore, “ the narrative text is not a communicative text in the traditional sense, but it creates multiple possibilities of communication during reading process, through its internal structure and its semiotic energy. Since it extends across time, embracing the past, present, and the future preserving in the meantime its semiotic energy, it remains then open for multiple interpretations.”⁴

Reading necessarily involves imagination; the reader must bring the subject into existence or imagine it beyond all what is written on the page. This subject is shaped by the engagement with the world evoked “by the outlined aspects of the text. In other words, imagination is an essential component of the creative process that ultimately produces the aesthetic object”⁵. Iser points out that reading is a constructive process, activating the reader’s imagination to fill gaps and blanks between scenes and events, by forming mental patterns which construct meaning.

We come to conclude that reading is a cognitive process created by the reader, in which his interaction of filling blanks move the mind beyond passive reception, and it reconstruct the text internally. The sentence is the basic unit of the aesthetic perspective. Once the sentence’s idea is completed, we expect it to flow into the next sentence, and thus the process of reading a text unfolds in a continuous thoughtful way. However, when the two sentences are not connected the process of thought is then interrupted, creating what is known as “gap”. For Ingarden, it is considered as a deficiency, whereas Iser in the other hand, he focused on this gap, stressing its significant function. This “interruption is an example of the multiple processes of focusing and shifting focus that occur during reading a literary text.”⁶

The interruption between one sentence and the next one justify that the act of reading requires a high level of concentration. Furthermore, this gap is the source of both literary text aesthetic and implicit aesthetics. Scholars noted in most narratives that the storyline shifts suddenly into another perspective or into unexpected turn, which lead into a gap that the reader must fill in to connect between the unrelated parts. However, this is only a simple function of the gap, the connection of the two parts or more forms a field of vision for a wandering viewpoint. This referential field or the minimal organizational unit in the process of comprehension consists components that share equal structural value. Its confrontation creates a tension that the reader must resolve through their mental representation of things. At this point, one component becomes dominant; while the others are temporary recede.

The Quranic text does not recount events in a narrative form; rather it introduces gaps that encourage the reader to participate in meaning construction. The act of reading, therefore, is not a passive reception of information; it is the reader instead who fills in the narrative blanks with their imagination, experience, and knowledge, thereby, developing a grid of meanings and connotations “interpretive interaction”. Thus, the reader shifts from a passive receiver of information to an active agent in reshaping the narrative, linking it to religious and existential values.

We conclude that these interruptions between sentences indicate that the act of reading is the product of mental representation processes. Furthermore, Iser’s theory of aesthetic response is a mental representation theory that uses the reader’s sensory perceptions to reach meaning, similarly to conceptual metaphor.

II– Manifestations of gaps in Surah Yusuf:

We examined the presence of gaps in Surah Yusuf between verses or between what scholars refer to as scenes. These gaps create a space for imagination and “enjoy establishing a link between the prior scene and the next one”.⁷

The following scenes indicate the gaps/blanks in Surah Yusuf as we examined:

The Quranic verse	Scenes & gaps/blanks
4-7	S1- It represents Yusuf childhood and telling his father about his good vision (dream). G1)- The context eliminates the reasons behind the brothers envy of their sibling. How his father treated his son Yusuf which ignite the flames of jealousy in his sons chests. S2- The jealousy and envy of the brothers of their sibling and conspiring together to get rid of him.
11-14	G2)- Eliminating details that demonstrate the mistreatment and hate to their little sibling. S3- The brothers discussed and asked their father to take their sibling with them to play and chill.
15-18	G3)- This gap evokes astonishment and shock into the reader because of the brothers behaviors, although they are the sons of prophet Yaqub (Jacob) peace be upon him. It also highlights their joy on the night of executing their vile plot. As well as, the way they mistreat their sibling Yusuf with cruelty far from his father watchful eye. Thus, the reader imagines the suffering of Yusuf with them. S4-There is no mention to the moment of him being thrown down in the abandoned dry well. They threw him in the well and Told their father the fake story of the wolf bringing suspicious evidence.
19-21	G4)- The reader wonder in this gap about the feeling of Yusuf falling into the well. How long did he suffer in the darkness? The manner in which he clung to the bucket? And the moment of his rescue. S5- The caravan rescued Yusuf and sold him in the slave market for a miserable price.
22-35	G5)- This gap brings to the reader’s mind the reaction of Yusuf when they took him to the slave market and bargaining over him. The narrative does not describe the feelings of Yusuf in the process of sold. This gap leads us to think about when and where he was sold. Furthermore, how Yusuf grow up in the prime minister (Al Aziz) household alongside his wife and the way she treated Yusuf in his childhood? The context does not mention those details, but it shifts directly to his youth and passing the childhood era. There are no details about his life before Fitna and moving directly to seduction. S6- In his manhood, the wife of the great Al Aziz persisted with the ladies of the city to seduce him. He asked his lord to save him from their snare.
36-42	G6)- This gap allows the reader to imagine and dig in details about Yusuf imprisonment. And how he was saved from the wife of the great Al Aziz and ladies of the city. The ladies gathering and their reactions are not described. As well as to the description of the place or another seduction attempt.

	S7- Yusuf staying in the prison revealing the truth and meaning of dreams of two young men, asking one of them to mention him to his lord (the king).
43-52	<p>G7)- The reader here is eager to know the state of Yusuf praying to his lord in the prison and how he turned the misfortune into a blessing through calling to Allah. The way he bore the little harm to avoid the greater one and seizing the opportunity to share monotheism. This leads to reflect in his patience and steadfastness, without mentioning how news of Yusuf reached the king.</p> <p>S8- Yusuf interpreted the king's vision and he persisted in proving his innocence and securing his release.</p> <p>G8)- The reader imagines in this gap the failure of the great dream interpreters of Egypt in interpreting the king's dream. How did they react when hearing Yusuf's interpretation? Also the conversations of the king with the saved young man who has been in prison to release Yusuf. There is no mention of the dialogue between Yusuf and the prisoners during his departure, nor of the investigation with ladies of the city and their confession to their deeds.</p>
53-57	<p>S9- Yusuf possessed a higher position alongside the king and become responsible of the land's affairs.</p> <p>G9)- The reader thinks in this gap of Yusuf as a dedicated official, sincere, and faithful.</p>
58-68	<p>S10- Yusuf knew his brothers and asked them to bring him their little sibling.</p> <p>G10)- This gap allow us to imagine the little brother journey to Egypt with his brothers. Furthermore, his astonishment and joy when meeting his brother Yusuf after so many years of separation.</p>
69-79	<p>S11- Yusuf met with his brother and planned to keep him with him.</p> <p>G11)- The reader wonder about the way Yusuf planned to keep his brother with him without letting his brothers know about it. This gap also indicates the state of the little brother playing ignorant of what is happening around him and controlling himself.</p>
80-87	<p>S12- A consultative council hold by brothers to discuss how they will face their father who complained his distraction and anguish to Allah and never give up hope of his mercy, hoping to reunite with his sons.</p> <p>G12)- The reader imagines their trip from Canaan to the king's palace in Egypt.</p>
88-93	<p>S13- Yusuf exposed himself to his brothers who admitted their fault. He asked Allah to forgive them and told them to cast his shirt over the face of his father and to bring all their family members.</p>
94-98	<p>G13)- The reader imagines the reunion of the brothers in an overwhelming vibes filled of forgiveness and joy throughout their return journey to Canaan. There is no mention to Yaqub suffering and his painful days during the loss of his son.</p> <p>S14- Yaqub scents the presence of Yusuf and regained his clear sight. His sons confessed their sins and asked forgiveness.</p>
99-101	<p>G14)- This gap evokes the receiver to imagine Yaqub joy during his journey to Egypt on pins and needles to meet Yusuf. There is no mention in this context to the details of Yusuf and his father reunion, which lead the reader to connect this scene with the old dream, so the meaning is completed.</p>

	<p>S14- The story ends with the interpretation of Yusuf childhood dream. As he ascended the throne, they all fell down in prostration before him to show respect and tribute.</p> <p>Yusuf recalls here his old dream as his father and brothers bow down, and he asked his lord to let him die submitted and join him with the righteous.</p>
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The gaps provide an opportunity for the reader to engage with the text actively with his experience and imagination. This is among the mechanisms that keep the Quranic text alive across generations, which open the way for renewed interpretation. Rather than providing free details, they involve the reader to construct their images. Moreover, they open the way for renewed and infinite interpretation. Therefore, there is no wonder that Surah Yusuf is one of the sophisticated narrative masterpieces in the Holy Quran.

II .1. The role of the narrative structure in Surah Yusuf:

We try in this section to analyse the structure of Surah Yusuf according to Vladimir PROPP analysis of function, which each character in a story should perform. We identify some functions as follows:

1-Absentation: this function is about “a family member leaves home”. Absentation in the story ⁸ appears in the main character Yusuf peace be upon him leaving home with his brothers under the pretext of playing. This is reflected in the verse: “So they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well: and we put into his heart (this Message): Of a surety thou shalt (one day) tell them the truth of this their affair while they know (thee) not (15)”⁹

2-Interdiction: “The hero is warned about something forbidden” it does not appear in the story of ¹⁰ Yusuf as a threat, rather, we observed a mitigated form of interdiction conveyed through an expression of hope and advice. This is what Yaqub discourse included when his sons asked him to take Yusuf with them to play and enjoy. So Yaqub replied with an answer carries an implicit fear of the wolf might devour Yusuf while they do not attend to him. Thus, this interdiction is indirect which carries meanings of hope and advice, mainly watching over Yusuf attentively. This function appeared in the verse: “(Jacob) said: Really it saddens me that ye should take him away: I fear lest the wolf should devour him while ye attend not to him (13).”¹¹

3-Violation: Yusuf’s brothers violated their father commandment to watch over their sibling when they throw him down in the well. Vladimir Propp confirmed that « any interdiction is followed by violation »¹² which reflected in the verse: “Then they came to their father in the early part of the night weeping (16) they said: Oh our father! We went racing with one another and left Joseph with our things: and the wolf devoured him. But thou wilt never believe us even though we tell the truth (17)”¹³

then a passing caravan arrived and rescued Yusuf from the depth of the well. At this point, a new character has appeared in the story which is described by Vladimir Propp as the evil character, who opposes the hero. “It aims is to disturb the happy family peace, to cause damage, and to inflict harm” . After the travelers rescued prophet Yusuf from the well, they concealed him, treated him as their ¹⁴ own property, and they sold him for a miserable price. Allah says in this regard: “Then there came a caravan of travelers: they sent their water-carrier (for water) and he let down his bucket (into the well)... He said: Ah there! Good news! Here is a (fine) young man! So they concealed him as a treasure! But Allah knoweth well all that they do! (19) The (Brethren) sold him for a miserable price for a new dirhams counted out: in such low estimation did they hold him! (20)”¹⁵

4-Reconnaissance: the caravan travellers try to find out information from the young Yusuf by questioning him, fulfilling the function in which the villain interrogates the victim.

5-Delivery: the villain successfully receives the information from the victim. The travelers have received information about Yusuf peace be upon him.

6-Trickery: trickery is reflected when the caravan travellers concealed Yusuf after when they pulled him out of the well and they treated him as a stuff.

7-Complicity: this function is about “the victim is surrendered to trickery, so he helps unwillingly the enemy”. It is reflected in the surrender of Yusuf to the travelers and going with them.¹⁶

8-Villainy: in this function “the villain harms a family member and inflicts damage”. In this story, prophet Yusuf is harmed the moment they sold him for a miserable price. Vladimir Propp considers this function as a crucial one because it motivates the story. Thus, departure, violation, delivery, and successful trickery all of them prepare for this function and facilitate to make it possible. Therefore, the early seven functions can be viewed as the preparatory part of the narrative, whereas the plot complexes in the moment of harm.

9-Lack: it is about a family member needs or miss something. Like the need of Yusuf to his family and his familiar home environment.

10-Mediation: the turning point of this story appeared at the moment when he was purchased in Egypt and given to the buyer’s wife so she might raise and care for him as their own son. From that point on, Yusuf moved to a comfortable house to live in stability and material ease. Moreover, he has been taught everything about economics, politics, and social affairs of the country due to his presence in the place of decision making authority in Egypt. “This function enables the hero to appear on the scene.

11-Counteraction: it is reflected when the young man agreed to be sold and his submission to their decision, also taking him to the market to sell him for a miserable price.

12-Departure: this element is embodied in Yusuf movement to the household of his purchaser. This function differs from the earlier function previously mentioned which is a temporary absention. At this stage, the hero who is a victim taking his first steps on a path and confronting all kinds of adventures. Here, the woman character who is the purchaser wife appears as the donor or provider, taking care of Yusuf and giving him support from the moment he was separated from his father. Allah says: “The man in Egypt who bought him said to his wife: Make his stay (among us) honorable: maybe he will bring us much good or we shall adopt him as a son. Thus did we establish Joseph in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of stories (and events). And Allah hath full power and control over His affairs; but most among mankind know it not (21)”.¹⁷

Lack, mediation, and counteraction are considered as the main elements which represented the plot twist.

13-First functions of the donor: the man’s wife tested prophet Yusuf during his staying. So, when he attained his full manhood, the wife of Al Aziz sought to seduce him in the palace. Allah says: “but she in whose house he was sought to seduce him from his (true) self: she fastened the doors and said: Now come thou (dear one)! He said: Allah forbid! Truly (thy husband) is my lord! He made my sojourn agreeable! Truly to no good come those who do wrong (23)”.¹⁸

14-The hero’s reaction: Yusuf overcame the ordeal with his faith and purity. So, he was safe from the assault that came against him. Allah says: but she in whose house he was sought to seduce him from his (true) self: she fastened the doors and said: Now come thou (dear one)! He said: Allah forbid! Truly (thy husband) is my lord! He made my sojourn agreeable! Truly to no good come those who do wrong (23)”. Yusuf resisted and chose the prison rather than falling into sin.¹⁹

15-Receipt of a magical agent: the hero figure relies on a magical object to overcome his test, which manifests in his faith and holds to the rope of Allah that granted him wisdom and dreams interpretation. This magical agent is not tangible; rather, spiritual qualities in monotheism. Propp points out that when the hero’s reaction is passive, the transformation will not occur and a severe punishment befalls him. Likewise, Yusuf’s reaction to the attempted seduction was passive as it is illustrated in the verse: “So they both raced each other to the door and she tore his shirt from the back: they both found her lord near the door. She said: What is the (fitting) punishment for one who formed an evil design against thy wife but prison or a grievous chastisement (25)”²⁰.

In this verse the woman in whose house Yusuf was, “she initiated immediately the conversation with false accusations and without stuttering. She was acting like she is truthful and framing her speech in a legal form as if it is a rule, leaving the listener no choice but to accept her claim. Perhaps, she had

the fear of her husband's affection toward Yusuf will prevent him from punishment, so she framed her speech in general form to sound legal intending to make her husband feels that she adores no one else but him and to frighten Yusuf peace be upon him so he would not resist her again". Thus, she²¹ falsely accused Yusuf and she sought to have him imprisoned and punished severely.

16-Struggle: it is manifested in the confrontation between Yusuf and the ladies of the city along with the wife of Al Aziz. This function is about the hero and the villain meet in direct combat. When the wife of Al Aziz heard the malicious talk of the ladies of the city, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them and called Yusuf to come out before them. They were so overwhelmed by amazement because of his extraordinary beauty that they cut their hands without feeling it. In that moment the wife of Al Aziz felt victorious and she admitted to them that she sought to seduce him but he refused. She insisted on her demand and threatened Yusuf to imprison and belittle him in case he refused her demand. Allah says: "Ladies said in the City: The wife of the (great) Aziz is seeking to seduce her slave from his (true) self: truly hath he inspired her with violent love: we see she is evidently going astray (30). When she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them: she gave each of them a knife: And she said (to Joseph), "come out before them." When they saw him, They did extol him, and in their (amazement) cut their hands: they said, God preserve us! No mortal is this! This is none other than a noble angel! (31). She said: "There before you is the man about whom Ye did blame me! I did seek to seduce him from his (true) self but he did firmly save himself guiltless!...And now, if he doth not my bidding, he shall certainly be cast into prison and (what is more) be in the company of the vilest! (32)".²²

The wife of Al-Aziz did not stop at such false accusation; but she persisted in her vile intention, threatening Yusuf with dire consequences if he refused her as declared by the ladies. "Her threats demonstrate her confidence in her influence over her husband, despite his awareness and fear of her snare, incapable of stopping her. Indeed, in the high societies of cities corrupted by civilization, women possess snare and deceit".²³

17-Branding: The story's hero is always marked by a special sign. For Yusuf, it was his ability to interpret dreams; a talent taught to him by Allah. This is confirmed by the Almighty in the following verse: "The man in Egypt who bought him said to his wife: Make his stay (among us) honourable: maybe he will bring us much good or shall we adopt him as a son. Thus did we establish Joseph in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of stories (and events). And Allah hath full power and control over His affairs; but most among mankind know it not (21)".²⁴

18-Victory: it is a function where the hero defeats the villain. Victory in this story is embodied when Yusuf turns to Allah; seeking refuge from the women's plotting, preferring the suffering of imprisonment to the torment of sin. Remaining in prison as an oppressed was easier than living unjustly outside its walls. Yusuf identified two evils: suffering and pleasure; and he chose pain over pleasure. Thus, this function embodied his victory over lewdness, his escape from the ladies snare, and his commitment to obeying God, as expressed in the holy verses: "He said: O my lord! The prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me: unless thou turn away their snare from me I should (in my youthful folly) feel inclined towards them and join the ranks of the ignorant (33). So his lord heard him (in his prayer) and turned away from him their snare: verily he heareth and knoweth (all things) (34). Then it occurred to the men after they had seen the signs (that it was best) to imprison him for a time (35)".²⁵

19-Liquidation: After the king heard Yusuf's interpretation in which the great interpreters failed in interpreting his vision; he wished to reward Yusuf personally. Yet Yusuf refused to leave prison except if his case was re-examined, asking the king about the women who cut their hands. The narrative's context highlights a gap in the transition from one scene to the next, which contribute to the aesthetic quality of the Quranic text. At the moment of dream interpretation, the narration breaks off, closing the scene. When the scene is raised, it shifts to the king's court "the context omits the interpretation of the dream conveyed by the cupbearer and what he reported about Yusuf, his imprisonment, and the conditions in which he lived. All of this is omitted from the scene, and we are presented only with its outcome: the king's desire to meet Yusuf commanding to bring him before him as Allah says: "So the king said "Bring ye unto me". But when the messenger came to him

(Joseph said): Go thou back to thy lord and ask him What is the state of mind of the ladies who cut their hands? For my Lord is certainly well aware of their snare (50). (The king) said to (the ladies): What was your affair when ye did seek to seduce Joseph from his (true) self? The ladies said: Allah preserve us! No evil know we against him! Said the Aziz's wife: Now is the truth manifest (to all): it was I who sought to seduce him from his (true) self: he is indeed of those who are (ever) true (and virtuous) (51)".²⁶

20-Return: This function is embodied in the hero's return. When the king heard the testimony of the women, he commanded his messenger to bring Yusuf so that he might become his adviser, worthy to be by his side and among his closest confidants. The king acknowledged Yusuf's greatness and entrusted him with guarding the land, as Allah says: "So the king said: Bring him unto me; I will take him specially to serve about my own person. Therefore when he had spoken to him he said: be assured this day thou art before our own Presence with rank firmly established and fidelity fully proved! (54)"²⁷.

Return according to Propp means prior control of the place, and here Yusuf gained mastery through his morals, integrity, patience, wisdom, and skill.

21-Pursuit: We notice that pursuit is represented in the king's pursuit of Yusuf every time, calling him and expressing a strong desire to keep him close to him.

22-Rescue: This function manifests in Yusuf's request from the king to take charge of Egypt's granaries, as Allah says: "(Joseph) said: Set me over the storehouses of the land: I will indeed guard them as one that knows (their importance) (55)".²⁸

He was made responsible for Egypt's stores, delivering his Lord's message, and due to his knowledge and wise planning; he saved the world from imminent devastation.

23-Unrecognized arrival: Yusuf recognized his brothers after several years, yet they did not recognize him, and he did not reveal his identity. Thus, this function is realized when Yusuf was unrecognized by his brothers: "Then came Joseph's brethren: they entered his presence and he knew them but they knew him not (58)".²⁹

24-Unfounded claims: These claims appeared when he had furnished with them provisions and sensing their trust, Yusuf placed the drinking cup in his brother's bag. When they set out, a voice called out, "O caravan, you are thieves!" This surprised and puzzled the brothers. Who dares steal the king's great beaker which they had not even touched? To avoid suspicion of a plot, the search began with the other brothers' baggage before examining the intended one. When finished, he brought it out from his brother's baggage. "The text comments that this was a plan by Allah for Yusuf, whether through general knowledge or granting him intelligence and wisdom for such planning, or direct revelation; all are possible". So Yusuf's adopted plan and his unfounded claims succeeded³⁰ effectively to retain the brother he wanted to keep. Allah says: "At length when he had furnished them forth with provisions (suitable) for them he put the drinking cup into his brother's saddlebag. Then shouted out a Crier: O ye (in) the caravan! Behold! Ye are thieves without doubt (70). They said turning towards them: What is it that ye miss? (71). They said: We miss the great beaker of the king; for him who produces it is (the reward of) a camel load; I will be bound by it (72)"³¹.

25-Difficult task: This was Yusuf's test by detaining his brother Benjamin, embodied in the verse: "So he began (the search) with their baggage before (he came to) the baggage of his brother: at length He brought it out of his brother's baggage. Thus, did We plan for Joseph. He could not take his brother by the law of the king except that Allah willed it (so). We raise to degrees (of wisdom) whom We please: but over all endued with knowledge is One the

All-knowing(76)"³²

26-Solution: This function is shown in Yusuf's success in keeping his brother with him without the other brothers noticing the plan, and as his brothers' truthfulness and repentance became clear.

27-Recognition: Yusuf reveals himself to his brothers "They said: Art thou indeed Joseph? He said: I am Joseph and this is my brother: Allah has indeed been gracious to us (all): behold he that is righteous and patient never will Allah suffer the reward to be lost of those who do right (90)". They³³ finally recognize him.

28-Exposure: In this function, the brothers' deed against Yusuf is exposed, and they confess their sin, Allah says: "They said: By Allah! indeed has Allah preferred thee above us and we certainly have been guilty of sin! (91)".³⁴

They confessed their sin and their plot was revealed.

29-Transfiguration: Yusuf stands in a position of power as Egypt's ruler, while his brothers are in a weak spot. Yusuf has transformed from a prisoner into a king.

30-Punishment: Here, in this function the villains are punished at the hands of the hero, for the harm they inflicted on Yusuf as a child. Yet this punishment in this story carries forgiveness and mercy; Yusuf never reproaches them or causes them pain, but instead prays for their forgiveness. This is conveyed in the verse: "He said: This day let no reproach be (cast) on you: Allah will forgive you and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy? (92)".³⁵

Their remorse is itself the harshest punishment in this life, as they confess their dishonorable deed.

31-The Hero's Elevation to the Throne: Yusuf did not raise himself above his parents in the royal court, but elevated his parents to a seat of honor and authority. Out of humility and filial piety, he did not consider himself Egypt's noble Aziz in their presence. Here, the brothers bow in homage to their sibling, fulfilling Yusuf's old vision. As Allah says: "And he raised his parents high on the throne (of dignity) and they fell down in prostration (all) before him. He said: O my father! This is the fulfillment of my vision of old! Allah hath made it come true! He was indeed good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers. Verily, my Lord understandeth best the mysteries of all that He planneth to do: for verily He is full of knowledge and wisdom (100)".³⁶

In this function, Yusuf's political ascension and moral guidance are realized, as he is empowered in Egypt, and this empowerment extends to reunite with his family.

If we follow these functions, we discover the aesthetic core returning each function to the preceding one. The functions are the elements of the story shaping the event, much like fabric measured by the meter to determine its size. The 'function' is one of the story's main components forming the event.

We conclude that all Vladimir Propp's functions are exemplified in Surah Yusuf, each represented in the story's thirty-one functions, confirming that the Quranic narrative structure is universal and directed toward spiritual and intellectual meanings: patience, wisdom, and forgiveness not simply a journey from a dream to fulfillment, from weakness to strength.

II .2. Horizon of Expectation and Meaning Generation:

Jauss affirms that the meaning of a literary work is shaped by its reception through the horizon of expectation, oscillating between confirmation and disruption. The aesthetic and intellectual value grows as the text defies intended expectations, reflecting the reader's cultural and historical position which contributes to the reconstruction of meaning. This is illustrated in Surah Yusuf in the following examples:

- The first vision symbolized Yusuf's future higher status, but following the events, the narrative descends from the well to prison creating a unique deviation, resulting in aesthetic value.
- When his brothers plotted and threw him in the well, the reader expects Yusuf's death, but divine intervention sets him on a new path which brought him to life again and aesthetic value is reflected by breaking expectation.
- Yusuf's imprisonment despite his innocence; the reader expects a reward for his chastity and virtue, but instead, Yusuf is imprisoned and punished which disrupt the expectation, demonstrating the aesthetic value of the text.

The horizon of expectation plays a profound role in the Quranic narrative, strengthening faith and trust in Allah Almighty, testing the believer's patience, and deepening their confidence through delayed fulfillment of vision. This underscores Allah's power over his creation as He saved him from getting destructed in the well and raised him to the position of sovereignty and governance.

This affirms God's power in shifting a servant's condition and managing their life. Thus, the narrative cannot be wholly studied without considering its structure, as the reader's response creates the expectation horizon. The response is shaped from the narrative structure.

III- Objectives of the Story in the Qur'an:

- The narrative aims to provide ways to understand the Qur'an within a shared system between sender and receiver in a specific context. It seeks to achieve religious purposes such as affirming the Prophetic message of Muhammad peace be upon him, consolidating faith and monotheism, the consequences of good and evil, patience and impatience, and the manifestations of divine power.
- Allah makes it clear in Surah Yusuf to the Prophet peace be upon him that Yusuf was raised above his brothers, protected from their harm, and endowed with sovereignty and victory.
- Allah revealed to His Messenger the stories of earlier prophets for the benefit and admonition of humankind, to be saved in both this life and the hereafter. The surah underscores the heedlessness of most people regarding Allah's signs, urging the establishment of monotheism and the rejection of polytheism.

IV- Conclusion:

At the end of this article, some findings are noted as follows:

- Surah Yusuf presents events that connect to memory, imagination, and emotion, leaving gaps for the reader to fill, providing cognitive models suited to daily life. Thus, we confirm that Surah Yusuf is not a purpose in itself but a tool for shaping human awareness, memory, and values. Furthermore, it is a complete intellectual and cognitive structure.
- It helps the reader grasp matters of faith, patience, planning, emotion, and authority and not just a story for entertainment.
- The hero's actions in Yusuf story fully correspond to Vladimir Propp's character functions, attesting to the structural strength of the narrative, as illustrated by the Qur'an.
- Quranic storytelling aims to educate through narrative, which is considered as a tool for shaping human awareness and values.

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[18]. Ibid, Quran 12 : 23

[19]. Ibid, Quran 12 : 25

Appendix: The Arabic Text of Surah Yusuf

سورة يوسف

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الصلدين (51) ذلك ليعلم أي لـ أخنه بالغريب وإن الله لا يهدى كيد الخاتبين (52) وما أبىء نفسي إن الناس لامارة بالسوء إلا ما رحمة ربى إن ربى غفور رحيم (53) و قال الملك الشوني به استخلصته نفسى قلنا كلمة قال إنك اليوم لدينا مكين أموي (54) قال أجيلى على خزان الأرض إنى حفيظ عليه (55) وكذلك مكى ليوسف في الأرض يتبرأ منها حيث يشاء تصيب بزمتنا من شقاء ولا تحيى أجر المحسين (56) ولأجر الآخرة خير للذين ظمروا كانوا يتعون (57) وجاء الحورة بوسف فخلوا عليه فعزفهم وهو له مذكورون (58) ولما جهزهم بجهارهم قال الشوني باخ لكم من أبكم لا ترون أي أوفي الكيل وأنا خير المذلين (59) فإن تأونى به فلا كيل لكم عندي ولا تغرون (60) قالوا سرود عنه آباء وإنما فعلون (61) وقال لفتيه أجعلوا بضمهم في رحالهم لعلمهم أجعلوا بضمهم في رحالهم لعلمهم أعلموا أهلهم لعلمهم يرجعون (62) فلما رجعوا إلى أبيهم قالوا يابانا نفع ما الكيل فارسل معنا أهانا نتكل وأنا له لخطون (63) قال هل ءامنتم عليه إلا كما امنتم على أخيه من قبل قال خير حفظ وهو أرحم الرجحين (64) ولما فتحوا متعهم وحدوا بضمهم رددتهم فلوا يابانا ما تبعه هدة بضمها رددت إلينا وتبيره أهنا وتحفظ أهنا وترداد كيل تبير ذلك كيل تبير (65) قال لن أرسلاه معمك حتى تؤتون موقعا من الله الشنتي به إلا أن يخطبكم فلما انتوه مؤتقهم قال الله على ما نقول وكيل (66) وقال تبتي لا تخلوا من ياب وج وانخلوا من أبوب مقرفة وما أعني عكمن من الله من شيء إن الحكم لا الله عليه تولك وعليه فليتوكل الناس لا يتعلمون (67) ولما تخلوا من حيث أمرهم أبومهم ما كان يعني عليهم من الله من شيء إلا حاجة في نفس يعقوب قضنها وإن الله ذو علم لما علمته ولكن أكثر الناس لا يتعلمون (68) ولما تخلوا على بوسف عاوى إليه أخاه قال أي أنا أخوك فلا تنتشس بما كانوا يتعلمون (69) فلما جهزهم بجهارهم جعل السفينة في رحل أخيه ثم أدى مودن ايتها العبر إنكم لسفرون (70) قالوا وأقلوا عليهم مادا نقدون (71) قالوا نقدر صواع الملك ولمن جاء به حمل تبير وأنا به رعيم (72) قالوا تالله لقد علمنا ما جتنا لتفيد في الأرض وما كنا سرقين (73) قالوا فما جزوة إن كنتم كثيبين (74) قالوا جزوة من وجد في رحلة فهو جزوة كذلك تجاري الظليمين (75) فدأ باوعيهم قبل وعاء أخيه ثم استحررها من وعاء أخيه كذلك كننا ليوسف ما كان ليأخذ أخاه في وبين الملك إلا أن يشاء الله ترمع درجت من شقاء وفوق كل ذي علم عليه (76) فلما سرق أخه من قبل فأسرها يوسف في نفسه ولم يهدأ لهم قال الله شر مكانا والله أعلم بما تصيرون (77) قالوا أيها العزيز إن له أبا شيخاً كبيراً فخذ أهنا مكاهنا إن نرك من المحسين (78) قال معاذ الله أن تأخذ إلا من وجنتها متعنا عنده إن إذا أهلاطلمون (79) فلما است sisوا منه خاصوا أخينا قال كيبر هم الله تعالىوا أن أيكم قد أخذ عليهم موتا من الله ومن قبل ما فرطتم في يوسف فلن أبرح الأرض حتى يذلن لي أبي أو يحكم الله لي وهو خير الحكمين (80) أرجعوا إلى أبيكم فلوا يابانا إن ابنك سرق وما شهدنا إلا بما علمنا وما كنا للهيب لقطين (81) وسفل القرية التي كنا فيها والعبر التي أقبلنا فيها وإنما لصيقون (82) قال بل سولت لكم أفسكم أمراً فصبر جبيل عسى الله أن يلتنبي بهم جميعاً الله هو العليم الحكيم (83) فلولى عليهم وقال يائنى على بوسف وأبيضت شفاه من الخزن فهؤ كظيم (84) فلما تالله تفوا تذمر بوسف حتى تكون حضرضا أو تكون من الظالمين (85) قال إنما أشكوا بي وحزنى إلى الله وأعلم من الله ما لا تعلمن (86) يبني آدهروا من بوسف وأخيه ولا تائسوا من روح الله الله لا يائس من روح الله إلا القوم الظالمون (87) فلما تخلوا عليه قالوا يابانا العزيز مسنا وأهلاه مرضه فأولى لنا الكيل وتصدق علينا إن الله بجزي المتصدقين (88) قال هل علمنا ما فلتم بيوسف وأخيه إذ أتني جهولون (89) قالوا أعنك لأنك لأنك يوسف قال أنا يوسف وهذا أخي قد من الله علينا إن الله من يشق ويصبر فإن الله لا يصيغ أجر الحسينين (90) قال لا تزب عليهم اليوم يغفر الله لكم وهو أرحم الراحمين (92) آدهروا بقىبيسي هذا فالغور على وجه أبي يأت بصيرا وأثونى بأهلكم أجمعين (93) ولما فصلت العبر قال أبوهم إني لأجد ريح يوسف لو لا أن تقدون (94) قالوا تالله إنك لفي ضلال القديم (95) فلما أخلوا على يوسف على يوسف عاوى إليه أبوه وقال أخذوا مصرا إن شاء الله أمانين (99) ورفع أبوه على العرش وخرأله سجناً وقال يابت هذا تأوي رعيي من قبل قد جعلها ربى حفأً وقد أحسن بي إذ أخرجنى من السجن وجاء يكم من النبو من بعد أن نزع الشيطان بيبي وبيني لخوتى إن ربى لطيف لما يشاء الله هو العليم الحكيم (100) برب قد انتتبى من الملك وعلقنى من تأوبل الأحاديث فاطر السموات والأرض أنت ولـ في الدنيا والأخرة توافقى مسلماً والحقى بالصلحين (101) ذلك من أبناء العبيب بوجهه إليه وما كنت لذتهم إذ أجمعوا أمرهم وهم يمذرون (102) وما أكثر الناس ولو حرصت بمومين (103) وما شئتم عليهم عليه من أجر إن هو إلا ذكر الظليمين (104) وكأين من إيمان في السموات والأرض يمرون عليها وهم عنها معرضون (105) وما يؤمن أكثرهم بالله إلا وهم مشركون (106) وأفعلنوا أن ثائتهم غشية من عذاب الله أو ثائتهم الساعه يغتله وهم لا يشعرون (107) فلـ دهـ سبلي أدعوا إلى الله على بصيرة أنا ومن أتباعى وسبـ الله وما أنا من المشركين (108) وما أرسـنا من ذلك إلا رجالاً ثوحي إليهم من أهل القرى ألم يسيروا في الشقاء وفـي الآخرة خـير للذين آتـوا أـفلا تـقـلـون (109) حتى إذا استـيـنـ الرـسـلـ وـطـلـواـ لـأـنـهـمـ فـدـ كـذـبـواـ جـاءـهـمـ تـصـرـنـاـ فـجـيـ منـ شـقـاءـ وـلـأـ يـرـدـ بـأـسـنـاـ عـنـ الـقـوـمـ الـمـجـرـمـينـ (110) لـقـدـ كـانـ فـيـ قـصـصـهـ عـبـرـةـ لـأـولـيـ الـأـلـبـيـ مـاـ كـانـ حـدـيـاـ يـعـتـرـىـ وـلـكـ تـصـيـقـ الـدـيـ بـيـهـ بـيـهـ وـلـقـصـيـلـ كـلـ شـيـ وـهـدـىـ وـرـحـمـةـ لـقـوـمـ يـوـمـنـ (111)