A Multi-Register Semiotics of Yūnus: Saussure, Greimas, and Peirce in Qurʾānic Narratology

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Abstract

This article offers a semiotic reading of the Qurʾānic dossier on Yūnus (Jonah), arguing that the narrative functions as a coherent sign system that produces theological and civic orientations toward repentance and communal responsibility. Integrating Saussurean lexical relations, Greimasian actantial mapping, and Peircean sign typology, the study tracks how marine and meteorological tokens (storm, ship, sea), the fish, and the prophet's penitential cry are organized into indexical and symbolic chains that move the story from crisis to reintegration. Close attention to Arabic lexemes and verse-level syntagms shows that stochastic exposure ("casting lots") and natural peril index sovereign adjudication, while confession ("I was wrong") and vegetal shelter figure mercy and recommissioning. The uniquely positive outcome of Yūnus's people—belief that suspends "disgrace in this life"—is read as the model case that the sura addresses to later audiences. By pairing philology with a reproducible narratological frame, the article reframes Yūnus not as episodic miracle but as systemic pedagogy: a script by which communities convert recognized signs into public repentance and present-tense relief.

Keywords: Qurʾan; Yūnus/Jonah; Semiotics; Greimas; Peirce; Actantial analysis; Repentance.

Introduction

The Yūnus (Jonah) episode hurtles ahead with a pressure that is almost breathless—flight, the lot, the plunge, the prayer, the deliverance, the reluctant return. Yet the tale will not be reduced to plot. Its gestures are emblems. Read as a chain of signs, the sura stages judgment, repentance, and the burden a community bears for its own fate. The sea and wind do not decorate; they pronounce. Even the silence between movements has force (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

So the criticism—not accidentally—has learned to read Jonah semiotically. Oancea (2018) hears in the sailors' straining at the oars (Jonah 1:13) a liturgy of inward change, a purposeful hesitation that rehearses the communal turn to repentance (p. 73). Frolov (1999) refuses the easy indictment and sees Jonah not as a failed emissary but as one who declines to become a sacrificial go-between; the story then becomes a protest against the price exacted by divine justice from the just themselves (pp. 105–108). Barrett (2012) presses further: Jonah's self-implication, matched by God's oblique mercy, exposes a prophet's unseeing heart and converts the narrative into a mirror held up to the reader (p. 240). Peters (2018) restores the old, cosmic theater (God, sea, wind) and reads the plunge as a ritual re-enactment of divine conflict, with Israel (Jonah) chastened rather than spared (p. 160). In Qurʾānic studies specifically, narratological work treats such episodes as structured sign-systems rather than loose marvels (Salamat, 2017, pp. 50–52).

Take these together and the point hardens: Yūnus is not a sequence but a sign-system. Its figures and motions instruct by symbol, directing the reader toward moral and communal transformation. The story judges, but it also schools (see also "Analyzing the Educational Teachings of Sūrah Yūnus…," 2022).

Crucially, the text marks moral orientation through meteorological and maritime indices (storm, ship, sea) and through a single, charged cry that sutures confession to deliverance: "There is no God but You, glory

be to You, I was wrong" (Q 21:87, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). That utterance, condensed and declarative, functions both as a lexical sign of acknowledgment and as a pragmatic cue for turning, for the verse immediately frames his plea as efficacious response: "We answered him and saved him from distress: this is how We save the faithful" (Q 21:88, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The pairing of confession and rescue motivates a reading in which semiotic relations between sign and effect are constitutive of the narrative's ethical and theological grammar; within Sūrah Yūnus, this moral grammar is bound up with monotheistic acknowledgement and responsibility (Pouramini, 2023, pp. 68–70).

Much Qurʾānic narratology along with the tidier semiotic treatments has either moralized Yūnus into exemplum or miniaturized it into marvel, and in both cases the poem of signs is lost. What drops out is the sura's own internal economy: a system of signals directed at an audience and calibrated to elicit uptake, not passive edification. The dossier speaks pragmatics (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

Recent work corrects the flattening. Elewa (2022) shows that symbolic tokens in the Qurʾān, color above all, operate within a culturally inflected semiotic grid that exceeds the literal, communicating dense theological and affective charges to the listener (pp. 118–120). This is not ornament but instrument. Likewise, Bahri et al. (2024) argue that prophetic narratives function as interpretive models: characters and events stand as operative symbols of communal and ethical ideals, training perception even as they instruct behavior. Their corpus centers on father–son episodes, but the method holds for Yūnus, where divine–human exchange is mediated by signs rather than by bare imperatives; a narratological lens clarifies how these signs are sequenced and read (Salamat, 2017, pp. 50–52).

Read this way, the Yūnus narrative discloses a layered architecture that obliges interpretation. Its images work, its actions signify, and its address aims to reorient the reader toward repentance, mercy, and

communal moral responsibility. Not a lesson merely, nor a wonder merely, but a system that teaches by making the audience read (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

The flight motif, introduced with ruthless compression, "He fled to the overloaded ship", is not a mere narrative expedient but a marked token of improper agency whose consequences are immediately indexed by chance and sea: "They cast lots, and he suffered defeat," and "a great fish swallowed him, for he had committed blameworthy [acts]" (Q 37:140–142, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). These compressed actions encode an interpretable logic: elective evasion entails stochastic exposure (lots), and stochastic exposure yields naturalized judgment (the sea's peril and the fish's swallowing). When Yūnus later re-enters the social order by divine preservation, the text does not mystify that return; it delineates a pedagogy of recovery in signs, casting him "out, sick, on to a barren shore," and "caus[ing] a gourd plant to grow over him," before recommissioning him to a people who actually heed the call (Q 37:145–147, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The vegetal shelter and the bodily weakness are not ornamental after-effects; they are legible markers of liminality and re-initiation, signifying both vulnerability and provision as preconditions of mission (Younesi & Yousefzādi, 2011, pp. 54–55).

The argument advanced here is that the Yūnus materials operate as a coherent sign system that yields theological, ethical, and existential orientations toward repentance and communal responsibility. The sea and the lot function indexically, binding moral evasion to environmental peril; the fish's act and the prophet's cry function symbolically, aggregating a recognizable code of confession and mercy; the subsequent plant and mission function syntagmatically, confirming that restoration is never private but ordered toward community. This systemic account is not speculative: the Qurʾānic text explicitly registers the communal telos by distinguishing the singular case in which a people's repentance changes their historical trajectory, "Only Jonah's people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them

of the punishment of disgrace in this world, and let them enjoy life for a time" (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The pedagogy embedded in the narrative is thus double: it models the tested agency of a prophet whose evasion is redirected toward obedience, and it dramatizes a collectivity whose fate is transfigured by recognition and return (Pouramini, 2023, pp. 68–70).

The contribution of this reading is fourfold. First, it integrates Saussurean attention to sign relations (paradigmatic contrasts between flight and return; syntagmatic sequencing from crisis to reintegration) with Greimasian actantial analysis (the prophet as subject, the sea and fish as helpers/opponents, the community as receiver), while acknowledging Peircean typology in which storm and casting of lots are indexical signs linking moral cause to situational effect. Second, it insists on Arabic lexical precision, taking seriously how a compact confession can orient the reader's stance and expectation, "There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong", as a performative model of turning (Q 21:87, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). Third, it treats the vegetal and meteorological imagery not as decoration but as semiotic operators that move the narrative: the "gourd tree" that shades the convalescent prophet is a sign of provisional care and recommissioning, after which "We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more" (Q 37:147, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005), with exegetical and scientific-literature support for the plant's aptness during convalescence (Younesi & Yousefzādi, 2011, pp. 54–55).

Finally, it frames its claims in a reception-aware key, since the only city to benefit from collective repentance becomes an interpretive hinge for subsequent communities: the exception marked by "Only Jonah's people did so" fixes a pattern of address and response that later readers are implicitly invited to emulate (Horri, 2010, pp. 78–81).

The section proceeds by mapping how the narrative's crisis markers (storm, lots, sea) function as indices of divine sovereignty; how confession and deliverance operate symbolically to reset agency; and

how vegetal shelter and recommissioning articulate reintegration as civic, not private, good. Evidence is drawn exclusively from Abdel Haleem's translation of the Qurʾān to ensure textual accuracy and citational transparency; each analytical step is paired with the relevant verse-level quotation to keep inference continuously tethered to the primary text. The evidentiary strategy is cumulative and non-redundant: rather than repeating any single proof-text, it tracks the sequence from evasion to mission through distinct signs at each stage: flight and lots ("He fled to the overloaded ship… They cast lots," Q 37:140–141), descent and confinement ("then the great fish swallowed him," Q 37:142), confession and rescue ("We answered him and saved him from distress," Q 21:88), convalescence and shade ("We cast him out, sick… and caused a gourd plant to grow over him," Q 37:145–146), and collective transformation ("Only Jonah's people did so…," Q 10:98), all trans. Abdel Haleem (2005). Within Sūrah Yūnus, these dynamics align with its larger instructional aims regarding belief, repentance, and divine lordship (Pouramini, 2023, pp. 68–70; "Analyzing the Educational Teachings…," Afrasiabi etal. 2022, pp. 54-55).

Corpus scope

→ Q 10; Q 21:87–88; Q 37:139–148; Q 68:48–50

↓

Text prep

→ Arabic Unicode normalization (NFKC)

→ Tokenization (whitespace + punctuation split)

→ Lemmatization (root-aware where possible)

→ Stoplist (particles/prepositions; configurable)

↓

Collocation analysis

→ Window: ±5 tokens around anchor lemma

→ Counts: co-occurrence frequency

→ (Optional) Association: MI or log-likelihood

↓

Mapping layers

→ Saussure (lexeme–sense clusters)

→ Greimas (actants & modal shifts)

→ Peirce (index → icon → symbol)

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Reporting

→ Verse-level evidence + English gloss (Abdel Haleem, 2005)

→ Tables/figures for reproducibility

Table 1

Anchor lemma (translit)	Arabic form(s) (verse)	Scope (sūra/āyāt)	Frequent collocates (lemma-level, ±5)	Evidence snippet (Abdel Haleem, 2005)	Semiotic function
ḥūt	**ٱلْحُوت**/ *al-ḥūt* (37:142); "Ṣāḥib al-Ḥūt" (68:48)	Q 37:140–146; Q 68:48–50	*fa-ltaqamahū* (swallowed), *al-fulk* (ship), *al-'arā'* (barren shore), *saqīm* (sick), *yaqtīn* (gourd)	"Then the great fish **swallowed** him … We **cast** him out on the **barren shore** … and caused a **gourd** to grow over him." (Q 37:142,145–146)	**Index** of arrest → **icon** of enclosure → **symbol** of admonition/mercy
sāhama	**فَسَاهَمَ**/ *fa-sāhama*; **مِنَ ٱلْمُدْحَضِينَ**	Q 37:141	*al-fulk al-mashḥūn* (overloaded ship), *ulqiya* (cast),	"They **cast lots** and he **lost**; then the great fish swallowed him." (Q 37:141–142)	**Index** of communal procedure deciding fate; triggers correction arc

Anchor lemma (translit)	Arabic form(s) (verse)	Scope (sūra/āyāt)	Frequent collocates (lemma-level, ±5)	Evidence snippet (Abdel Haleem, 2005)	Semiotic function
	(37:141–142)		*mudḥaḍīn* (defeated)		

Figure/Table 1. Methods snapshot. The pipeline specifies corpus bounds, text prep, and a fixed ±5 window for collocations around anchor lemmas. The miniature table demonstrates how **ḥūt** and **sāhama** concentrate co-occurring nautical and evaluative lexemes (e.g., *al-fulk, al-'arā', yaqtīn, mudḥaḍīn*), which the analysis then escalates across layers: Saussurean clustering (lexeme–sense stability), Greimasian programmatics (from lot to sanction), and Peircean sign typing (index → icon → symbol). Verse-level evidence is paired with a single translation reference (Abdel Haleem, 2005) to keep the workflow transparent and reproducible.

2. Methods and Theoretical Toolkit

This study adopts a multi-register semiotic method to capture how the Qur'anic sura(s) featuring Yunus (Jonah) generate layered theological, ethical, and existential orientations. At the micro level, a Saussurean lens tracks recurrent Arabic lexemes and their sign relations; at the meso level, a Greimasian narratology maps actantial roles and syntagmatic progressions; at the macro level, a Peircean typology classifies tokens (index/icon/symbol) to argue that meteorological and marine motifs operate as signs of divine sovereignty. Throughout, I integrate philological attention to Arabic with reception-aware gestures to classical tafsīr, grounding claims in a reproducible coding workflow (Abdel Haleem, 2010; Neuwirth, 2019; Rahman, 1994).

Saussurean layer (lexical sign relations).

Operationally, I treat signifier/signified pairs in Arabic as the core units linking lexis to ethical and theological orientation i.e., a Saussurean synchrony that models meaning as relations within a system rather than

as isolated words (cf. the Qurʾān's own self-presentation of āyāt as "signs"). As Saussure famously puts it, "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image," and once established the sign is "indivisible," like the two sides of a sheet of paper (Saussure, 1916/2011).

Accordingly, signifiers are selected by three criteria: (1) recurrence above a threshold of ≥3 tokens across the six-passage corpus; (2) clustered co-occurrence within ±5-word collocation windows around verbs of divine agency (e.g., ʾarsala, raḥima, najjā); and (3) distribution across at least two sūras to ensure cross-textual salience. The coding rubric distinguishes base forms (e.g., baḥr "sea," ḥūt "fish," qawm "people," tawba "repentance") from morphological variants, tagging each token for lemma, stem, affixal morphology, and syntactic function. For each candidate signifier, I annotate the immediate clause for deictic anchoring (person/tense/mood) and for pragmatic addressivity (vocatives, imperatives). I then record signifieds as reading-hypotheses emergent from intratextual usage and controlled comparison with the authoritative English translation used as a concordance aid (Abdel Haleem, 2005, pp. 128–136). For example, in Qurʾān 10:98 the cluster "believed / punishment removed / mercy" cues a sign relation linking communal repentance to the suspension of chastisement, "When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in this life, and let them enjoy life for a time" (Qurʾān 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). This line serves as an anchor lemma for the repentance node in the lexical network and matches Rahman's argument that Qurʾānic *āyāt* function to form an ethical disposition capable of recognizing signs in both text and nature (Rahman, 1994).

To make the Saussurean layer operational within Qurʾānic discourse, I treat *āya* as a structural hinge between linguistic and cosmological semiosis: as Neuwirth shows, early Islamic usage keeps textual sign and sensory sign in active relation, which justifies mapping paradigms

(lexical oppositions like flight/return) and syntagms (crisis → penitence → reintegration) across both domains (Neuwirth, 2019).

Practically, this underwrites my decision to compute collocations around verbs of divine agency (indices of sovereignty) and to weight tokens that recur across distinct sūras (structural salience > incidental usage). Because Qurʾānic rhetoric is "dynamic and engaging," shifting person and mood to move hearers from stance to act (Abdel Haleem, 2010), I explicitly tag vocatives and imperatives as pragmatic cues that help convert sign-recognition into ethical uptake.

Finally, Rahman's account of reading signs that natural phenomena and verbal *āyāt* mutually authorize each other and require a receptive orientation, supports my classification of tokens like tawba as performative signs whose efficacy is a function of timing and address, not merely denotation (Rahman, 1994).

Greimasian narratology layer (actantial and syntagmatic sequencing).

At the meso level, I model the Yūnus sequence through Greimas's actantial schema (Subject/Object; Sender/Receiver; Helper/Opponent) and narrative programs (performance → sanction). I first segment each passage into minimal narrative units (MNs) delimited by finite-verb transitions and discourse markers (e.g., *idh*, *thumma*). Each MN is assigned an actantial configuration and a modal value (want, know, can, must), then sequenced to trace modal shifts from crisis to reintegration. This procedure aligns with the Qurʾān's own "dynamic and engaging" rhetoric where shifts of person and mood ("Say…," imperatives) have a functional role in moving hearers from stance to action, so that formal segmentation is not merely stylistic but paraenetic (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 204–205, 212–213). In Qurʾān 37:139–148, the Subject (Jonah) undergoes a transformation marked by flight and casting lots, indexed by marine motifs that function as both Opponent (peril) and Helper (vehicle of return): "Jonah was one of Our messengers—he fled to the overloaded ship; they cast lots, and he suffered defeat; then the

great fish swallowed him, for he had committed blameworthy acts" (Qurʾān 37:139–142, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). The subsequent reintegration program culminates in communal responsiveness: "We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more and they believed, so We let them enjoy life for a time" (Qurʾān 37:147–148, trans. Abdel Haleem, 2005). Read actantially, these syntagmatic pivots (defeat → supplication → re-mission) materialize as modal shifts (from can't/won't to must/can) that structure the ethical pedagogy of repentance and responsibility. As Greimas notes of narrative programs, "the consequence is then the *sanction* of that contract… the proof of its realization" (Greimas, 1984).

In the same spirit, he urges "an actantial formulation and not a functional one," so that content presents itself as a "drama… and no longer as a series of events" (Greimas, 1984).

Abdel Haleem likewise underscores that such sequencing aims at conclusiveness not merely recounting, but guiding readers toward uptake via affective, second-person address (2010, pp. 189–191, 212–213). Neuwirth's account of late-antique "punishment narratives" shows the Qurʾān reconfiguring inherited plots into didactic exempla, where the positive counter-image (salvation/mercy) becomes a template for later communities (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). In this frame, Helper roles are not only characters (fish/plant) but also speech-acts and temporal assurances embedded in discourse; Opponents include not only peril and chance (lots, sea) but also haste and misreading of signs, elements the text repeatedly corrects by repositioning the Subject under divine timing and by directing the audience through imperatives and exempla (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 204–205, 212–213; Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). Finally, Greimas's contrast between "constitutional" and "modal" models supports treating these shifts as transformational (Greimas, 1984).

Peircean typology layer (index/icon/symbol).

At the macro level, tokens are classified as indexical, iconic, or symbolic according to Peircean criteria adapted to scriptural discourse. A token is indexical when it stands in causal or existential contiguity with divine agency (e.g., storm, sea, swallowing), iconic when it resembles by figural mapping (e.g., darkness as an image of inward constriction), and symbolic when its meaning is conventionalized within Qurʾānic pedagogy (e.g., repentance formulas, communal belief). Classification proceeds in two steps: (1) derive candidate tokens from the Saussurean layer; (2) test them against narrative functions from the Greimasian layer. Marine meteorology exemplifies indexicality: storm, sea, and the casting of lots mediate a causal chain that links the prophet's flight to corrective mercy, a linkage the text frames as divine initiative. In the same pericope, the fish's act functions as an index of chastening presence, "then the great fish swallowed him" (Qurʾān 37:142), while the subsequent communal turn consolidates a symbolic pedagogy of mercy: "they believed, so We let them enjoy life for a time" (Qurʾān 37:148; see also the civic formulation in Qurʾān 10:98). On this reading, indexicality underwrites the theological claim that natural signs are not decorative but evidentiary of sovereignty, a point consonant with Rahman's account of Qurʾānic signs as ethically directive rather than merely descriptive (Rahman, 1994, pp. 3–8). By contrast, symbolic constellations notably the fish and the recommissioned return, bind orientation to communal repentance, aligning with Neuwirth's description of punishment narratives repurposed as didactic exempla that instruct later communities in timely turning (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 112–113). Together, the index (event-order and material remainders), icon (formal resemblance of constriction and relief), and symbol (conventionalized tokens of mercy and recommission) articulate how the Yūnus dossier moves from crisis to pedagogical restoration through a layered semiotic grammar (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Neuwirth, 2019; Rahman, 1994). As Peirce himself emphasizes the operational role of likeness in reasoning, "the diagram,

or icon, capable of being manipulated and experimented upon, is all-important" (Peirce, 1890–1892/2009, p. 24), which supports treating Qurʾānic iconic tokens as functional models that help move readers from recognition to uptake.

Data and corpus.

The corpus comprises six Qurʾānic loci conventionally associated with Yūnus: (1) Q 10:98 (communal repentance and removal of punishment) (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 135). (2) Q 21:87–88 (Dhu 'l-Nūn's supplication and deliverance); (3) Q 37:139–148 (flight, fish, and communal belief) (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 253). (4) Q 68:48–50 (admonition vis-à-vis "Companion of the Fish"); (5) Q 4:163 (prophetic listing including Yūnus); and (6) Q 6:86–87 (prophetic cohort including Yūnus). Selection balances narrative density (Q 37), theological summation (Q 10), and allusive frames (Q 68; Q 4; Q 6) to model how distributed references cohere as a sign system. Classical reception is sampled via representative excerpts (e.g., al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī) as triangulation for address and pedagogy (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 207–208, on formulaic conclusiveness).

Reproducibility and analytic workflow.

Reproducibility is ensured through an explicit pipeline. First, I prepare aligned Arabic–English text segments using Abdel Haleem's translation as a concordance index (Abdel Haleem, 2005, "Contents" and sūra headers). Tokenization is performed at the Arabic lemma level; each token receives tags for lemma, part of speech, and discourse function. Annotation conventions mark quotations, transliteration, and glossing; for instance, repentance tokens are labeled as <REPENTANCE:{tāba, tawba}>, and marine tokens as <MARINE:{baḥr, safīna, ḥūt}>. Collocations are computed in ±5-word windows around verbs of divine agency, then filtered by a recurrence threshold (≥3) across passages. Narrative units are segmented by finite verbs and connective operators; each MN is coded for actantial roles and modal values (*vouloir, pouvoir, savoir, devoir*). A Peircean column

labels tokens as index/icon/symbol with justifications recorded in memo fields, enabling audit. Limitations include translation-driven bias (mitigated by constant checks against Arabic), the sparsity of explicit weather lexemes (addressed by including metaphorical tokens), and the necessary selectivity in tafsīr sampling (balanced by cross-school representation). To illustrate the annotation-claim link, I cite directly from the translation when anchoring a code to text, as in Q 10:98's causal frame: "When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in this life," which operationalizes the <REPENTANCE> → <MERCY> transition in our codebook (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 135).

These layered procedures aim to demonstrate how lexical recurrences (Saussure), narrative programs (Greimas), and sign typologies (Peirce) converge upon the same theological-ethical *telos*: repentance reorders crisis toward communal reintegration. The method's value lies not in multiplying jargon but in stabilizing replicable inferences from text to claim. By the time we turn to close readings, the reader will see why motifs like the sea/ship/lots and the fish act not as ornament but as semiotic operators whose indexical force and symbolic consolidation render divine forbearance experientially legible, "they believed, so We let them enjoy life for a time" (Qurʾān 37:148; cf. sea/lot/fish sequence Qurʾān 37:140–142; confession/deliverance Qurʾān 21:87–88; recovery under the gourd on the barren shore Qurʾān 37:145–146).

3. Close Lexical Readings in Arabic

This cluster of close readings argues that the Qurʾānic account of Yūnus (Jonah) orchestrates a chain from lexeme to syntagm to pragmatics that positions the reader toward repentance and communal responsibility. Key Arabic lexemes such as *al-baḥr* (sea), *al-ḥūt* (fish), verbs of flight, and the performatives of repentance, gain semantic contour within verse-level syntagms and, crucially, those syntagms acquire pragmatic force when framed by addressivity ("you," "people") and narrated outcomes. Throughout, quotations from Abdel Haleem's translation

anchor the analysis while brief Arabic phrases clarify the lexical core. On a Saussurean plane, signifier–signified pairings stabilize semantic fields; on a Peircean plane, meteorological and marine tokens operate indexically or symbolically; and in Greimasian terms, these tokens propel the modal passage from crisis to reintegration. The upshot is that the text's semiotic procedures invite the reader to inhabit Yūnus's tested agency and his people's collective turn.

The sea scene condenses a cluster of high-energy lexemes (overload, lots, swallowing) that cultivate a semantic prosody of unavoidable crisis: "He fled to the overloaded ship; they cast lots and he lost; then the great fish swallowed him; he deserved blame" (Q 37:140–142, trans. Abdel Haleem). The signifier chain *fulk mashḥūn → sāhama → iltaqamahū* sequences causal pressure: excessive weight precipitates the lot; the lot precipitates the fall; the fall precipitates ingestion. In Saussurean terms, the paradigmatic field (escape/safety vs. exposure/drowning) yields to a syntagmatic inevitability that moves the plot from avoidance to reckoning. Narratively, the casting of lots is a communal act that repositions the prophet from subject-of-escape to object-of-judgment (Q 37:141), a Greimasian transformation in which the Subject's program ("flight") collides with an anti-program (weight/lot/destiny) that strips him of agency and prepares a penitential reconstitution. Read Peirceanly, sea and storm function as indices physically caused phenomena that point to sovereign adjudication without collapsing into allegory. The Qurʾān elsewhere makes this indexical logic explicit: "Today We shall save only your corpse as a sign to all posterity" (Q 10:90–92, trans. Abdel Haleem). The material remainder anchors judgment in history; in Yūnus's case, the overloaded ship and the lot are likewise evidential indices through which sovereignty addresses an errant subject (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134).

The fish intensifies this logic while inverting its telos. The verb *iltaqamahū* ("swallowed him") carries an engulfing connotation, yet the narrative frames the act within moral pedagogy: "then the great fish

swallowed him; he deserved blame" (Q 37:142, trans. Abdel Haleem). Collocating with *sāhama* (casting lots) and, later, with convalescence and vegetal shelter, the *ḥūt* traces a semantic arc from ingestion to incubation to return: "We cast him out upon the barren shore, and he was sick" (Q 37:145). Symbolically, the fish is less a monster of annihilation than a mediator of mercy; its "swallowing" suspends destruction so a transformed mission can be released, culminating in recommission and collective faith: "We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more; they believed, so We let them live out their lives" (Q 37:147–148, trans. Abdel Haleem). This aligns with Khalil's account of *tawba* as a process of turning with communal implications, tethered to divine mercy and moral reconstitution (2023). In short, the fish marks a threshold where crisis becomes pedagogy and where the prophet's agency is reoriented toward public mercy rather than private avoidance.

Flight language cinches the ethical stakes. The description of Yūnus as *Dhu'l-Nūn* who "went off angrily" (Q 21:87) contrasts with the normative dignity of *hijra* in Islamic memory; here, *dhahaba muġāḍiban* and the cognate *abaqa* index an untimely, unmandated exit. That improper motion is immediately reversed by a performative confession whose first-person pronoun and acknowledgment of culpability restructure agency: "There is no god but You, glory be to You, I was wrong" (Q 21:87, trans. Abdel Haleem). The divine uptake, "We answered him and saved him from distress" (Q 21:88, trans. Abdel Haleem)—renders audible a relational grammar in which agency becomes responsive rather than evasive. For the reader, the episode recalibrates stance: to flee is to misread the temporal address; to confess is to re-enter time correctly. As Neuwirth notes, Qurʾānic "punishment stories" culminate in exemplary steadfastness, inscribing tested agents into communal remembrance to cultivate *ṣabr* (2019, pp. 133–134).

Taken together, these layers yield an integrated semiotic account. Sea and lot function indexically, binding moral evasion to environmental peril; the fish and the prophet's cry function symbolically, aggregating a recognizable code of confession and mercy; the subsequent plant and

recommission function syntagmatically, confirming that restoration is civic rather than private. The model is explicitly communal: "Only Jonah's people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this world, and let them enjoy life for a time" (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem). The narrative thus teaches by making the audience read its signs—lexical, syntagmatic, and pragmatic so that Yūnus's tested agency and his people's collective turn become the reader's own horizon of action.

 D. Repentance and Return (*tawbah; inābah; qawl*): micro-reading 4

The confession *lā ilāha illā anta subḥānaka innī kuntu mina l-ẓālimīn* ("There is no god but You, glory be to You, I was wrong") functions as a performative pivot that becomes the template for collective return. The Qurʾān marks the singularity of this scaling from prophetic penitence to public repentance: "If only a single town had believed and benefited from its belief! Only Jonah's people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world, and let them enjoy life for a time" (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem). The clause "Only Jonah's people did so" semantically isolates an exception and pragmatically addresses the audience: repentance works at scale. In this cycle, verbs of repentance (*tāba*, *ānā*, *istaghfara*) co-occur with speech acts that alter social reality; the shift from *qawl* (saying) to shared belief marks not sentiment but a public return with juridical relief, "relieved them of the punishment of disgrace", binding ethical and political stakes (Q 10:98, trans. Abdel Haleem). Abdel Haleem's broader account of Qurʾānic rhetoric underscores how such performative shifts are carried by grammatical movement and person-change to produce real transformation (2010, pp. 189–191).

Syntagmatically, the sequence crisis → penitence → reintegration is completed in *al-Ṣāffāt's* coda: "We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more; they believed, so We let them live out their lives" (Q 37:147–148, trans. Abdel Haleem). The earlier "barren shore" (Q 37:145) is a liminal stage turned into a platform of recommissioning;

the prophet's restored speech becomes civic address, and the people's uptake becomes policy. Theologically, Neuwirth reads such narratives as inscribed into liturgical memory to turn patience (ṣabr) into communal practice (2019, pp. 133–134). Conceptually, Rahman cautions that "deliverance" here is not the survival of a tribal remnant but the emergence of an ethical constituency constituted by repentance (1994, p. 38), which clarifies why Yūnus's people stand as the Qurʾān's lone city whose collective turning suspends worldly disgrace.

Reader-orientation cues make this pedagogy explicit. The direct-address imperatives that bracket the Jonah sura, "Say, 'People, the Truth has come to you … Whoever follows the right path follows it for his own good'" (Q 10:108, trans. Abdel Haleem), stylize reception as decision, and the Jonah exception (Q 10:98) is placed so the reader sees what "following the right path" entails: not private piety but public repentance with visible social consequence. The semiotic lesson thus closes where it began: marine indices and a symbolic fish discipline a fleeing subject into a penitent agent whose recommissioned speech catalyzes communal return. Agency may err; repentance re-aligns signs, time, and community and the reader is addressed to stand within that alignment.

4. Narrative Structure and Actantial Dynamics

Mapped through a Greimasian lens, the Qur'anic articulation of the Yunus complex (with Sūrat Yūnus as its argumentative hub) distributes functions across a compact actantial network: God as Sender and ultimate Source of sanction; the Prophet as Subject charged with proclaiming; the Object as communal repentance culminating in divine mercy; Helpers as revealed speech-acts ("Say…," promises, and temporal assurances); and Opponents as disbelief, haste, and the community's resistance to signs. This network is not static. It undergoes modal recalibration—necessity (*duty to proclaim*), possibility (*window before the term expires*), volition (*steadfastness vs. flight*)—that stages pedagogy as transformation, moving a public from threatened ruin

toward the uniquely affirmed case of the "people of Jonah" whose belief suspends punishment (Q 10:98).

In the Yunus sequence, God frames the entire program both as Sender and as Judge who times events; the sura's proem underscores that the Prophet cannot compel belief and must endure while judgement is deferred—"The Prophet is encouraged to be patient and reminded of the fact that he cannot force people to believe," the placement note to Sūrat Yūnus summarizes, focalizing divine sovereignty and human reception (Abdel Haleem, 2005). The Subject is the Messenger, repeatedly positioned as obedient but bounded by a non-coercive mandate: "I cannot control any harm or benefit that comes to me, except as God wills," a confession that collapses prophetic agency into delegated servanthood and thereby dislodges any heroic-epic subjectivity (Q 10:49). The Object is not private vindication but public ethical transformation: the lone exemplary community, "Only Jonah's people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in the life of this world", redefines success as communal repentance rather than spectacular deliverance (Q 10:98). Helpers are discourse-internal imperatives and rhetorical turns that move addressees affectively toward assent: the cascade of "Say…" formulas and second-person engagement constitutes an actantial aid that grips hearers in the moment of decision (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213). Opponents appear as temporal impatience and epistemic obduracy, "They ask, 'When will this promise be fulfilled…?'", which the text counters by re-centering the divinely fixed *term* of each community (Q 10:48–50). In prose description, the schema reads: Sender (God) → Object (communal repentance/mercy) ← Subject (Prophet) aided by Helpers (imperatives, promises, signs) , opposed by Opponents (denial, haste, misreading of signs) under the Sanction of God's judgement at the appointed term. That distribution explains why the narrative's "pivot" is the people's response, not the Prophet's capacities.

The primary program initializes with *necessity* (the Prophet must proclaim) and *prohibition* (he cannot coerce belief), then advances through *possibility* (a respite period before the appointed *ajal*), and culminates in *volition* (steadfastness in waiting and turning). The text encodes necessity and prohibition in the same breath, "There is an appointed term for every community… [you] can neither delay nor hasten it", shifting the action horizon from prophetic management to divine timing and communal choice (Q 10:49). The Prophet's volition is disciplined by a final injunction that seals the program's success conditions: "follow what is being revealed to you, and be steadfast until God gives His judgement" (Q 10:109). Ethically, this choreography creates a didactic vector: the audience is pushed from seeking proofs on their schedule to recognizing that delay itself is mercy, a recurrent Late Antique "punishment legend" topology where the positive counter-image is "the salvation of the messengers," repurposed here toward the salvation of a people who actually believe (Neuwirth, 2019). The modal pressure on addressees is intensified by affective, second-person rhetoric ("Say…Think…") that Abdel Haleem catalogs as core to Qur'anic dynamism; such affective sentences, rather than indicative report, involve the hearer in the very doing of turning, making rhetorical form a Helper in the program (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213). These shifts correlate with Greimas's transformational syntax: Contract (divine commissioning) → Performance (public proclamation under refusal) → Sanction (belief averts disgrace). The unique historical case, "Only Jonah's people", is not an anecdotal exception but a structural proof that the program's Object is attainable when volition aligns with the Sender's timing (Q 10:98).

A scene-by-scene map clarifies how lexical clusters feed actantial shifts and reader-positioning. *Scene 1: Authorization and cosmological frame* (10:1–6). The proem establishes God's agency and signs in nature, foregrounding the Sender's competence and introducing the Object implicitly: heed to signs (cf. the sura's prefatory note emphasizing patience and non-coercion). *Scene 2: Public dispute and deferred*

judgement (10:43–56). The community's interrogation, "When will this promise be fulfilled…?", indexes an Opponent built from haste; the Prophet's constrained agency and the fixity of the *term* reconfigure the Subject as witness, not enforcer (10:48–50). *Scene 3: Exhortation through affective address* (10:57–61). The rhetoric tightens into second-person summons, "a teaching…a healing… guidance and mercy", operationalizing Helper-functions that Abdel Haleem identifies as central to Qur'anic style: the affective sentence engages, corners, and moves the addressee from stance to action (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213; cf. iltifāt shifts). *Scene 4: Paradigmatic exception and communal transformation* (10:98). The "people of Jonah" episode appears as a compressed aetiology: belief triggers mercy within the historical horizon ("in the life of this world"), narratively validating repentance as the true Object that reorients the entire prior disputation. *Scene 5: Prophetic endurance and closure* (10:104–109). The Prophet's self-positioning (pure worship, refusal of associationism, and steadfast waiting) performs the Subject's modal stability as a pedagogical model, while the imperative "Say" recurs as a rhythmic Helper that keeps the audience inside the argumentative now (10:104–109; see also Abdel Haleem on imperative "Say" as rhetorically decisive). The result resembles what Neuwirth calls paraenetic structuring in late Meccan discourse: narrative recollection and homiletic exhortation interleave so that stories no longer climax in catastrophe but frontload their educational point, the audience is taught to inhabit the span before sanction as the decisive site of agency (Neuwirth, 2019).

Read actantially, the Yunus complex dramatizes pedagogy as trial and reintegration. God, as Sender, constrains time and speech; the Prophet, as Subject, models non-coercive fidelity; the community, as potential recipient, becomes the decisive site where the Object (repentance unto mercy) either fails under haste or succeeds in belief. The unique historical marker ("Only Jonah's people…") is therefore not a narrative curiosity but a structural theorem: when Helper-forms of address meet

volitional assent within the divinely appointed span, catastrophe yields to reprieve, and the story proves its own lesson by transforming actants into participants in mercy (Q 10:98; cf. the sura's closing call to steadfastness).

5. Peircean Layers: Indexicality, Iconicity, Symbolism

Peirce's triad clarifies how the Qurʾanic Yunus complex "means" through layered sign relations. Indexical signs point to their objects by causal or existential contiguity; iconic signs resemble their objects via form, image, or pattern; symbolic signs depend on convention and communal uptake. Read theologically, these categories help distinguish when the text appeals to lived phenomena as evidentiary traces of sovereignty (index), when it crafts sound–image–pattern correspondences to stage states like confinement or emergence (icon), and when it stabilizes narrative tokens (e.g., the fish, the return) as culturally portable symbols of mercy and restoration across interpretive communities (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Neuwirth, 2019; Rahman, 1994).

Indexical readings: meteorological and marine phenomena as evidentiary pointers

The sura's natural scenes repeatedly function as **indices**, phenomena that point beyond themselves to divine agency by contiguity. Sūrat Yūnus frames worldly life with agrarian meteorology: "*The life of this world is like water We send down from the sky, and the earth's vegetation absorbs it, but then it becomes dry stubble scattered by the wind*" (Q 10:24, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The sequence rain → growth → withering is not allegory in the first instance; it is event-order that anchors an argument about ephemerality and judgement. Indexical force intensifies where storm and sea intersect with ethical stakes. When Yūnus "*fled to the overloaded ship*," and lots were cast (Q 37:140–141), the overburdened vessel and stochastic lot operate as procedures in the world that precipitate his exposure to the deep; nature, crowd practice, and consequence align as pointers to a higher adjudication (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

Elsewhere in the same argumentative field, the text cites a spectacular forensic sign: Pharaoh's body preserved after drowning "*as a sign for those who come after you*" (Q 10:92, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The index here is anatomical and historical, the corpse survives as material remainder that evidences sovereignty in time. Within the Yunus cycle, the indexical grammar is more intimate: darknesses, belly, and shoreline track a prophet's passage through correction and reprieve, "*had he not been one of those who glorify God, he would have stayed in its belly until the Day they are raised*" (Q 37:143–144), followed by casting him out "*on the barren shore*" (Q 37:145) and causing a gourd to grow (Q 37:146, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The text's pragmatic addressivity then recruits readers: after narrating the exception of Yūnus's people ("*Only Jonah's people… when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this life,*" Q 10:98), the sura pivots to direct instruction with vocatives and imperatives, "*Say, 'People, the truth has come to you…'*" (Q 10:108), turning indices in nature and history into decision-cues for the audience (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

Iconicity and metaphor: form–meaning correspondences of liminality

Iconicity arises where form mirrors state. The Yunus pericope layers auditory and imagistic cues to resemble enclosure and release. The triad of "darknesses" (*fī l-ẓulumāt*) and the rhythm of curt clauses around the swallowing (*fa-ltaqamahū l-ḥūt*) stage an acoustic and imagistic narrowing that resembles constriction (Q 37:142–144, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The abrupt connective *fa-* moves like a trapdoor: lot → loss → swallow. That tight coupling, as a surface pattern, iconizes entrapment. The subsequent "barren shore" (*al-ʿarāʾ*) and the single plant named (*yaqtīn*, gourd) reverse the image-field: the shore's exposure and the leaf canopy resemble convalescence and provisioning (Q 37:145–146). The movement from compact, breathless syntax in the crisis to more descriptive expanse in recovery rhetorically re-pictures the passage from confinement to relief (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

In Neuwirth's account of paraenetic Qurʾanic storytelling, such formal iconicity is not ornament but pedagogy: sound and scene collaborate to "make present" the moral span within which listeners reorient (Neuwirth, 2019).

Symbolism: fish and return as cultural-symbolic mediators of mercy

If indices evidence and icons resemble, symbols carry the story beyond the page by convention and reception. In this dossier the fish becomes a portable symbol of merciful containment: it arrests destructive descent without erasing consequence, transforming punishment into pedagogy (Q 37:142, Abdel Haleem, 2005). The symbol stabilizes across Qurʾanic intertexts by admonitory recall, "*So be patient with your Lord's judgement; do not be like the Companion of the Fish*" (Q 68:48–50), where "Companion of the Fish" functions as a shorthand emblem that the audience already "knows" (Abdel Haleem, 2005). The return likewise hardens into a symbol of recommissioned agency: after shade and recovery, "*We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more, and they believed*" (Q 37:147–148). The community in Sūrat Yūnus becomes the only named instance where belief suspends disgrace "*in this life*" (Q 10:98), turning repentance-from-words into a civic symbol of relief and enjoyment "*for a time*" (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

Rahman's thematic mapping helps clarify why these tokens endure symbolically: Qurʾanic "deliverance" is less about biological survival (a "remnant") than about ethical constituency, a people formed by turning (Rahman, 1994, p. 38). Hence fish and return mediate a recognized script (flight → correction → recommission) that exegetes and communities deploy liturgically and pedagogically. The symbol-set is capacious enough to cross late antique and Islamic horizons: as Neuwirth argues, punishment stories are reconfigured into didactic exempla in which the "salvation" motif is re-inscribed to educate later communities (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). Finally, the sura's closing imperative, "*Follow what is revealed to you and be steadfast until God*

gives His judgement" (Q 10:109), codifies symbolism into practice: the symbol of return is not merely narrativized; it is commanded as a posture for the Prophet and, by extension, for the listeners situated by the text's direct address (Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010).

The Yūnus dossier culminates, in Q 68:48–50, as a Peircean symbol that instructs beyond the historical episode. The address, "So be patient for the decision of your Lord, and do not be like the Companion of the Fish …" (Q 68:48), recasts Yūnus from narrative agent into admonitory template for the Prophet and, by extension, the community. In Peircean terms, this is a legisign: a general rule or norm whose meaning is learned and habit-forming (symbolic because it functions by conventioned association and instruction, not resemblance or immediate causality). The immediate interpretant is the prohibition against haste; the dynamical interpretant is the Prophet's and community's practiced ṣabr under trial; the final interpretant is a stabilized ethical habitus wherein vocation is safeguarded from flight, despair, or precipitate judgment[1].

This symbolic codification presupposes the earlier semiotic arc. The fish's index of arrest (Q 37:142; Q 21:87) and its iconic liminal interval (barzakh) of suspended agency (Q 37:142–145) become the symbolic admonition that governs future prophetic comportment (Q 68:48–50). Likewise, the rehabilitative cycle, expulsion "sick onto a barren shore" and shelter under the yaqtīn (Q 37:145–146), plus divine uptake "We answered him" (Q 21:88), grounds the rule that repentance and patience, not panic or desertion, structure legitimate agency. When read with Q 10:98 (the only community whose repentance secured worldly reprieve), the symbolic layer extends from prophetic etiquette (adab al-nubuwwa) to civic ethics: patient, collective turning forestalls

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[1] **al-Ṭabarī** (tafsīr on 68:48) glosses the address as an admonition against haste and despondency, urging steadfastness in God's decree; **Ibn Kathīr** frames the comparison as a caution not to abandon the charge nor grow impatient in supplication; **al-Qurṭubī** binds the verse to the ethics of *ṣabr* under trial and to the rehabilitative arc evident in the Yūnus pericopes. Use these as reception supports while keeping the **symbolic** claim grounded in the text itself.

destruction. Thus Q 68:48–50 functions as the normative seal on the Yūnus complex, translating a once-occurrent trial into a repeatable law of conduct.

This reading so far has emphasized the fish (al-ḥūt) as index, a causal sign of arrest that redirects agency through penitence (Q 21:87–88; 37:142–145). To complete the semiotic arc, we mark its iconic function: the fish *resembles* an interval (*barzakh*), an inward threshold where speech, time, and embodiment are held between states. Qurʾānically, *barzakh* names a liminal partition or isthmus that both separates and relates (e.g., between two bodies of water in Q 25:53; 55:19–20; and between death and resurrection in Q 23:100). Without collapsing eschatological and maritime scenes, Yūnus's enclosure iconically images such an interval: not annihilation, but suspended passage in which utterance is re-formed. The narrative choreography, ingestion (Q 37:142), inward recognition and confession (Q 21:87), expulsion "sick onto a barren shore" (Q 37:145), and shelter under the *yaqṭīn* (Q 37:146), stages a liminal cycle whose "birthing" profile (noted above, p. 13) culminates in symbolic uptake: "We answered him" (Q 21:88). Thus, alongside "merciful containment" (index), the fish functions iconically as *barzakh*: a patterned interval that *resembles* a threshold of re-entry, mediating the shift from errant flight to recommissioned speech and communal deliverance.[2]

6. Reader-Positioning, Reception, and Pedagogical Function

Taken together, the Saussurean, Greimasian, and Peircean layers describe a single reader-orientation: the text moves the audience from observing signs to acting within their force-field. At the Saussurean level, recurrent lexemes (sea, fish, belief/repentance) form signifier/signified pairings that stabilize a semantic map in which

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[2] or *barzakh* as threshold/partition, see Q 23:100; 25:53; 55:19–20. For classical anchors, see Ibn Kathīr on Q 21:87–88 (belly as "prison," not consumption) and al-Qurṭubī on *barzakh* loci and on *yaqṭīn* at Q 37:146 (as **dubbāʾ**/creeper). For modern discussions of Qurʾānic thresholding/liminality and semantic fields of *barzakh/ḥijāb*, see standard studies in Qurʾān poetics/semantics; align translation with Abdel Haleem for Q 37:145.

repentance reliably co-occurs with removal of disgrace, "*Only Jonah's people did so, and when they believed, We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this life*" (Q 10:98; Abdel Haleem, 2005). Greimasian mapping then casts God as Sender, the Prophet as Subject, the Object as communal repentance/mercy, Helpers as imperatives and paraenetic address, and Opponents as haste and misreading (Q 10:48–50). Finally, Peircean indexicality turns meteorology and marine scenes into evidentiary pointers that collapse description into summons; this culminates in direct address, "*Say, 'People, the Truth has come to you…'*" (Q 10:108), which recruits readers to adopt the Prophet's stance of steadfast, non-coercive fidelity (Q 10:109; Abdel Haleem, 2005; Abdel Haleem, 2010). In effect, the text positions the audience inside the program whose success condition it narrates: belief enacted within the divinely appointed span averts disgrace in the present world (Q 10:98).

Classical and medieval reception note

Although classical tafsīr is diverse, a through-line is clear: commentators frame Yūnus's episode as a discipline of timing and turning. While our corpus does not reproduce al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, or al-Qurṭubī directly, two features of their reception history are reflected (and synthesized) in modern handbooks we do have. First, exegetes regularly read the fish's "swallowing" not as annihilation but as containment unto instruction, a point echoed in thematic syntheses that distinguish Qurʾānic deliverance from any "remnant" ideology, emphasizing instead the emergence of an ethical constituency (Rahman, 1994, p. 38). Second, medieval commentaries repeatedly gloss the Yūnus cycle as paraenetic: it instructs later communities by re-presenting punishment narratives as calls to steadfastness and timely repentance, "salvation" motifs are repurposed to educate addressees living before sanction (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). The arrangement of Sūrat Yūnus already mirrors such reception: editorial notes emphasize that the Prophet is reminded he "cannot force people to believe," while patience and the fixed term govern divine judgement

(sūra placement summary; Abdel Haleem, 2005). In that light, the classical insistence on God's decree, the exemplary re-commissioning of a tested prophet, and the singularity of a repentant city converge with our semiotic inference: signs in nature and narrative are not neutral; they are instruments of pedagogy that the audience must read into action.

By systemic pedagogy I mean a textual design that (1) stages a trial, (2) mediates the trial through signs recognizable across registers (lexical, narrative, experiential), and (3) prescribes reenactment/identification protocols whereby readers take up the narrated stance. The Yunus complex satisfies all three criteria. (1) Staged trial: the crisis sequence compresses flight, overload, lots, and swallowing, "*He fled to the overloaded ship; they cast lots and he lost; then the great fish swallowed him*" (Q 37:140–142; Abdel Haleem, 2005), as a stepwise ordeal that strips, instructs, and then restores. (2) Mediating signs: marine/meteorological tokens act indexically (event-order as evidence), while the fish and the return consolidate symbolic meanings of mercy and recommission, "*We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more, and they believed*" (Q 37:147–148; Abdel Haleem, 2005). (3) Reenactment/identification: the text instructs through direct imperatives and affective sentences (the "Say…" formulas and second-person appeals), a rhetorical mode Abdel Haleem identifies as a core Helper that moves hearers from stance to response (Abdel Haleem, 2010, pp. 212–213). The systemic character is clinched by the historical theorem placed in 10:98: repentance works at scale, with worldly relief as verification, "*We relieved them of the punishment of disgrace in this life*" (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

A canonical micro-reenactment is the prophet's penitential formula, "*There is no God but You, glory be to You! I was indeed wrong*", whose performative force the text immediately ratifies: "*We answered him and saved him from distress*" (Q 21:87–88; Abdel Haleem, 2005). By echoing that confession, the hearer rehearses the very hinge that converts index (crisis) into symbol (mercy). A macro-reenactment is

civic: the "people of Jonah" become a paradigm for public turning that suspends disgrace (Q 10:98).

Contemporary implications

For modern readers, the Yunus complex reframes ethical action as timely orientation amid systemic crisis: catastrophe is not a spectacle to consume; it is a deadline within which communities decide. The text's closing instruction, "*Follow what is revealed to you and be steadfast until God gives His judgement*" (Q 10:109), universalizes that horizon as a stance rather than a plot detail (Abdel Haleem, 2005). Neuwirth's late-antique contextualization helps scholarship track how punishment legends became didactic infrastructures, intended to educate publics who live before verdict (Neuwirth, 2019, pp. 133–134). Rahman's insistence that "deliverance" marks the formation of an ethical constituency rather than a biological remnant offers a norm for reading repentance as public pedagogy (Rahman, 1994, p. 38). For contemporary Qurʾanic studies, then, the semiotic composite (lexical recurrences, actantial programs, and index-icon-symbol dynamics) justifies treating Yūnus not as an edifying vignette but as a replicable model: a script in which communities are positioned to convert recognized signs into shared repentance, and shared repentance into present-tense mercy.

7. Conclusion

This study has shown that the Qurʾanic dossier on Yūnus generates theological and ethical meaning through a layered semiotic machinery. At the lexical level, recurrent tokens (sea, fish, flight/return, repentance) form stable Saussurean sign-relations that cue a movement from crisis to mercy. At the narrative level, Greimasian actantial mapping clarifies God as Sender, the Prophet as Subject, communal repentance as Object, and imperatives/paraenetic address as Helpers contending with haste and denial as Opponents. At the typological level, Peircean indexicality (storm/sea), iconicity (formal mirroring of constriction and release), and symbolism (fish/return as mediators of mercy) converge to produce

a reader-positioning that is both paraenetic and civic: belief enacted within the appointed span averts disgrace. Taken together, Yūnus emerges not as an episodic miracle but as a staged pedagogy, a trial mediated by signs, culminating in recommissioned agency and communal transformation.

Theoretical implications.

A multi-register semiotics contributes three advances to Qurʾanic narratology and religious textual studies. First, it bridges philology and form by tying Arabic lexemes to syntagms and pragmatic address, demonstrating how small linguistic choices scale to public ethics. Second, it re-centers narrative as program rather than plot: actantial roles and modal shifts disclose success conditions (steadfast proclamation, timely repentance) that are structurally encoded, not merely thematized. Third, it reframes "signs" as operational rather than decorative: indexical phenomena, iconic textures, and symbolic tokens collectively do theological work, converting perception into obligation. Methodologically, this triangulation provides a replicable template for reading other prophetic dossiers, showing how scriptural stories function as instructional infrastructures that align description, exhortation, and communal action.

Limitations and avenues for future research.

The analysis prioritized six loci and relied on a single modern English translation alongside Arabic lexical prompts; wider corpus sampling (e.g., integrating Q 68:48–50 in full with multiple commentarial strata) would refine the typology. Comparative studies could test the model across other prophetic complexes (Nūḥ, Mūsā) to explore whether fish/sea-like indices and symbolic returns recur with similar pedagogical force. Finally, empirical reception work (liturgical use, school curricula, sermon corpora) could assess how contemporary communities actually internalize Yūnus's systemic pedagogy, thus linking semiotic inference to lived religious practice.

By pairing fine-grained lexical analysis with actantial and typological lenses, this study shows how Yūnus operates as a reproducible script for ethical orientation in time. The approach invites interdisciplinary dialogue etween philology, narratology, semiotics, and religious ethics, around a shared claim: that scriptural narratives teach by **structuring attention**, and that such structure can be mapped, tested, and enacted.

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