Linguistic Research in the Holy Quran.
Vol. 14, No. 2, 2025
pp. 1-14
Research Paper

The Aesthetics of the "Unsaid" and the Production of Meaning in Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas: A Reading Based on Wolfgang Iser's Theory

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Abstract
Classical interpretive traditions often regard meaning as static and predetermined; this study, drawing on Wolfgang Iser's theory of "Aesthetic Response," instead treats Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas as a set of "instructions" for producing meaning in the virtual space between text and reader. The central problem is how the "unsaid" (blanks) within the dramatic structure of the verse directs the reading process. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the commentaries of five prominent commentators are examined as documented responses by actual (historical) readers: their arguments are first presented in their own terms, and their correspondence with Iser's concepts is then assessed separately. Findings indicate that the semantic gaps between contradictory commands—such as "nurse him" (arḍiʿihi) and "cast him into the river" (al-qihi fi al-yamm)—suspend "good continuation" and invite the reader to participate in the production of meaning. Through the "negation of the norm" of maternal protection, the verse points toward revelatory trust (tawakkul) as an alternative authority, while the "wandering viewpoint" moves from the verse's initial turbulence toward the coherence suggested by its final tidings. The study offers a new reading of the verse; it does not claim to revise Iser's theory or to access the commentators' inner experience.

Keywords: Surah Al-Qasas (Verse 7), Wolfgang Iser, Aesthetic Response, The Unsaid (Blanks), Production of Meaning.

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https://doi.org/10.22108/nrgs.2026.149610.2167

1. Introduction

In classical traditions of criticism and interpretation, the text was often viewed as a reservoir of predetermined meanings, which the interpreter was tasked with extracting, much like an archaeologist, from beneath the layers of words. In this view, meaning was regarded as a static and solid object whose discovery signaled the end of the interpreter's mission. However, with the emergence of Wolfgang Iser's theory of "Aesthetic Response", this perception gave way to a dynamic perspective. Iser argues that a literary work resides neither solely in the words on the page (the artistic pole) nor exclusively in the reader's mind (the aesthetic pole), but in a "virtual" position between the two (Iser, 1978, p. 21). Consequently, meaning is no longer a ready-made datum but a "dynamic event" that is only actualized through the interaction between the text's structure and the reader's faculty of perception. The text serves as a set of "instructions" for the production of a mental image, compelling the reader to reconstruct the world of the text in the act of reading, drawing on their prior experiences.

The fundamental stimulus in this process of meaning production is the structure of the "unsaid", or the blanks (*Leerstellen*) within the text. Iser maintains that because a literary work lacks a direct external reference, it always possesses a form of "indeterminacy". These blanks are the invisible joints of the text that suspend the automatic continuation of meaning, forcing the reader to mobilize their imagination to forge links between scattered utterances (Iser, 1978, pp. 182-183). According to the principles of Gestalt psychology, the reader's mind tends toward "good continuation"; however, by creating gaps in this continuity, the text transforms the reader from a passive recipient into an active producer participating in the experience of meaning production.

The Holy Qur'an, as a linguistic masterpiece built upon brevity and narrative economy, serves as the most brilliant manifestation of these "blanks". Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas, which narrates the critical moment of revelation to Moses' mother (PBUH), is a prime example of organizing the process of reading and perception through structural gaps. In this verse, a series of rapid and contradictory commands—such as nursing (*arḍiʿihi*), fearing (*khifti*), and casting into the river (*al-qihi fi al-yamm*)—are articulated with such speed that deep gaps are created between each station of meaning. The central problem of this research emerges here: classical interpretive traditions have often focused on extracting final meanings or explicating lexical, historical, and theological points, attempting to fill these gaps through narratives to reach a cohesive meaning. However, the question remains: how do these "unsaid" elements within the verse's structure direct a reader's process of perception? And what traces of that process can be identified in the written commentaries of historical readers?

The issue is that in Verse 7 of Al-Qasas, the command to "cast into the river" logically contradicts the rational norm of "maternal protection". This "negation of norms" (*Negation*) places the reader in a state of suspense (Iser, 1978, p. 213). From Iser's perspective, this negativity is the unwritten foundation of the text that allows meaning to transcend the literal level. This study faces the challenge of demonstrating how the verse's structure invites a reader to reconstruct the higher meaning of "revelatory trust" (tawakkul) not as historical information, but as a "living experience", and of determining what the commentaries, as documented historical responses, permit us to infer about that process.

To address this problem, prominent exegeses—including *Al-Mizan*, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, *Al-Kashshaf*, and *Mafatih al-Ghayb*—are examined as "evidence of aesthetic response". These commentators are "actual readers" in Iser's sense, that is, historical readers distinct from the "implied reader", which is a structure of the text itself; their written commentaries preserve traces of their encounter with the verse's invisible links, which can be examined in relation to Iser's notions of the act of reading and consistency-building. This article aims to utilize Iser's theory as an "analytical lens" to explicate how the aesthetics of the unsaid in this verse invite readers to actualize the meaning of revelation through the "wandering viewpoint" (*Wandering Viewpoint*) and the dialectic of "immanence and horizon", and to what extent the commentaries allow this process to be traced. Ultimately, this research offers a new reading of Verse 7, tracing how its structure invites a reader to move from the turbulence of its contradictory commands to the trust (tawakkul) affirmed at its close. It tests the usefulness of Iser's theory for a scriptural

narrative and does not claim to revise it.

2. Literature Review

Research concerning Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response can be categorized into three general domains:

A) Theoretical and Anthropological Foundations: Some scholars have focused on introducing and explicating the intellectual infrastructure of the Konstanz School. Namvar Motlagh (2008) examined Iser's and Jauss's perspectives, emphasizing the reader's unique position in 20th-century hermeneutics and exploring the link between reception aesthetics and the visual and literary arts. Similarly, Barakat (2014) followed the trajectory of Iser's thought from "The Act of Reading" toward "Literary Anthropology"و demonstrating how shifting the focus from the author to the reader creates new horizons in textual perception.

B) Application in Literary and Mystical Texts: Another group of researchers has tested the efficacy of this theory within classical Persian texts. In their study of the "Sheikh San'an" narrative, Ansari and Azar (2019) utilized the concept of the "implied reader", showing how techniques such as plot complications and transcendent actions create a bilateral communication between the author and the reader to reach the story's deep structure. Furthermore, Vaez and Nasri (2022) analyzed selected commentaries on the *Masnavi Ma'navi*, proving that the meaning of poetic verses is not fixed but is reproduced through the interaction of commentators (as readers) with the text, influenced by their "horizon of expectations".

C) Aesthetic Response Approaches in Quranic and Translation Studies: In recent years, attention to textual gaps within Quranic studies has increased. Internationally, Farghal and Al-Masri (2000) examined "referential gaps" in English translations of the Qur'an, illustrating how these blanks challenge the reading experience of non-Arab audiences. Maatoq and Al-Ali (2019) focused on Surah At-Taqwir to analyze the impact of readers' cultural backgrounds on selecting acceptable translations based on the interaction between the mind and the text. Domestically, Mozaffari and Annabi (2023) identified metaphors as the primary form of "linguistic gaps" in Surahs Al-Baqarah and Al-Imran, analyzing the methods translators use to fill these empty spaces. The closest study to the present research is by Delavar Abarbakouh (2024), who examined Angelika Neuwirth's reading of Surah Al-Rahman in light of Iser's theory, showing how the interpreter completes the "indeterminate spaces" of the Quranic paradise by relying on prior religious texts and pre-Islamic poetry.

2.1. Research Gaps

A review of the aforementioned literature reveals that while valuable research has been conducted on the interaction between "Quranic translations" and the reader's mind, or the views of a specific commentator regarding indeterminate spaces, the issue of the "mechanism of meaning production through the unsaid within the structure of verses", particularly in Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas, has remained neglected. Most existing studies view gaps at the level of "translation" or "general imagery". In contrast, the present study transcends the mere identification of rhetorical omissions to explicate how the dramatic and paradoxical structure of Verse 7 (commands such as *arḍiʿihi* and *al-qihi*) directs the reading process, by way of the "implied reader" role that the text itself constructs, toward the meaning of "revelatory trust" as a living aesthetic experience. This paper aims to demonstrate that the aesthetics of this verse, rather than being confined to the spoken words, reside in the invisible links and "unsaid" elements that transform the reader from a passive observer into an active participant in the revelatory event. This study applies Iser's framework to a sacred text without claiming to revise it. Iser's (1978) formulation of "blanks" and "indeterminacy" was primarily modeled on modern secular prose fiction (see also Iser, 1974); the contribution of this article is a new reading of Verse 7 that shows how blanks, negation, and the wandering viewpoint can describe the structure of a Qur'anic narrative, and what the commentaries can and cannot tell us about its reception. Where the verse raises questions for the theory, they are noted as suggestions for further research (Section 6.1).

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing library research methods. The underlying logic of this reading is grounded in the components of "Aesthetic Response"

theory and the dynamic process of meaning production within the reader's mind.

3.1. Iser's Theory as an Analytical Lens, not a Dogma

In this research, Wolfgang Iser's theory is treated as an operational model rather than an infallible dogma. The author's objective is not to impose a Western theory upon a revelatory text; rather, Iser's perspectives on "blanks" and "indeterminacy" are utilized as an aesthetic lens to re-read the expressive capacities and hidden layers of Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas. This approach allows the literary work (here, the Quranic verse) to be studied not merely as a historical-revelatory document, but as a "dynamic event" taking shape in the space between the text and the reader. By treating classical exegeses as documented historical responses, this study places Iser's theory alongside classical Islamic rhetoric (*ʿilm al-balaghah*). Long before the Konstanz School, Arabic rhetoricians investigated textual reception through concepts like *al-ijaz bi-l-ḥadhf* (brevity through omission) and *al-taqdim wa-al-taʾkhir* (transposition), treating them as cognitive devices designed to mobilize the recipient's intellect (see Al-Zamakhshari, 1987; Ibn Ashur, 1999). Putting Iser's *Leerstellen* (blanks) into conversation with rhetorical omission (*ḥadhf*) allows a useful comparison: Iser (1978) provides a systematic vocabulary for the cognitive mechanics of reading, while the Islamic tradition offers its own account of how textual silence functions under divine eloquence (*iʿjaz*) (Al-Razi, 1999; Al-Zamakhshari, 1987). In this light, the classical tradition serves as a point of comparison for Iser's concepts, not as a framework that revises them.

3.2. The Role of Prominent Exegeses: The Commentators as Actual (Historical) Readers

A distinguishing feature of this research is the nature of its engagement with exegetical sources. In this article, exegeses do not serve as the theoretical framework; instead, they are regarded as "witnesses" and instances of the "act of reading". Following Iser's distinction, the "implied reader" is a structure inscribed in the text—the role the text offers to its recipient (Iser, 1978, pp. 34, 38)—whereas the commentators are "actual readers": historical individuals whose responses are shaped by their own repertoire and are preserved only in their written commentaries. Throughout this article, the term "implied reader" is used exclusively for the former, and the commentators are referred to as actual (historical) readers. The commentators' interpretive moves, such as supplying omitted narrative links or reinterpreting an earlier command in light of the verse's end, are therefore analyzed in relation to Iserian concepts, such as filling blanks or the wandering viewpoint, as responses to the roles the text offers, not as identical with those roles.

To maintain methodological rigor, an important epistemological distinction must be clarified: the classical commentators did not, of course, articulate their insights using modern reader-response terminology. Moreover, rather than treating them as neutral empirical observers, this study recognizes these commentators as active interpretive agents situated within distinct theological and hermeneutical traditions (see Al-Razi, 1999; Al-Zamakhshari, 1987; Tabataba'i, 1971). In Iserian terms, these traditions constitute the readers' "repertoire"—the cultural, theological, and literary norms that frame their horizon of expectations and guide their consistency-building (Iser, 1978, pp. 53–85). Consequently, their exegetical outputs are analyzed not as objective readouts, but as "empirical traces of the reading process"—historically documented evidence of how highly trained, situated readers responded, in writing, to the text's structural tensions. Using Iser's concepts as an analytical metalanguage allows us to describe the interpretive moves visible in these written responses (Iser, 1978, p. 21), without claiming access to the commentators' inner experience.

3.3. Scope of Inference

The evidence consists solely of what the commentators state or visibly do. Three levels are therefore distinguished throughout Section 5: (1) what a commentator explicitly says, which is reported in his own terms; (2) what can reasonably be inferred from his interpretive moves (for example, that a commentator who supplies narrative details treated the gap as requiring explanation); and (3) what cannot be inferred, namely unconscious reactions, emotional states, or specific mental experiences, which are not attributed to any commentator. Where Iserian terms such as "mental image" or "passive synthesis" describe cognitive processes, they are applied to the

reading process modeled by the theory, not to the commentators' documented experience.

3.4. Rationale for Selection and Diversity of Exegetical Approaches

To ensure analytical precision and avoid arbitrary selection, the corpus of five prominent exegeses was constructed based on two main methodological criteria: historical-theological representativeness and structural alignment with Iserian reader-response dynamics. First, these works span different interpretive epochs (from the 12th to the 20th centuries) and represent diverse intellectual paradigms within Islamic thought, including Mu'tazilite linguistic rationalism (*Al-Kashshaf*), Ash'arite philosophical theology (*Mafatih al-Ghayb*), modern Shi'ite Quran-by-Quran hermeneutics (*Al-Mizan*), classical-modern rhetorical synthesis (*Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*), and modern socio-literary imagery (*Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*) (see Al-Razi, 1999; Al-Zamakhshari, 1987; Ibn Ashur, 1999; Tabataba'i, 1971). This diversity ensures that the corpus represents a broad, balanced hermeneutical spectrum. Second, each commentary was selected because its primary interpretive focus can be related to a specific cognitive dimension of Iser's model: rhetorical omission (Al-Kashshaf) as "blanks", emotional visualization (Fi Zilal al-Qur'an) as "mental imagery", syntactic relationships (Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir) as "textual linkage", theological possibilities (Mafatih al-Ghayb) as "controlled indeterminacy", and intertextual structuralism (Al-Mizan) as "consistency-building". Consequently, this selection serves as a representative cross-section of how the Islamic interpretive tradition, across different eras and doctrines, has responded in writing to the interpretive demands of the Qur'anic text.

3.5. Analytical Process

In the findings section, the verse is first divided into perspective segments. Subsequently, by tracking the "unsaid" elements between these segments, it is examined how the commentators (as actual readers of the text) articulate the final meaning (revelation and trust) in their written commentaries, and how far these articulations can be related to Iser's "feedback process" and the revision of preconceptions. In this sense, the commentaries are treated not as mere extractions of information but as documented responses in which a "performance of meaning" can, within the limits stated in Section 3.2, be traced. The analytical process is therefore not a passive mapping of Iserian categories onto the verse: each correspondence is argued, and its limits are stated (Section 5). The aim is a new reading of the verse; the study does not claim to modify any component of Iser's theory.

4. Theoretical Framework: Aesthetic Response and the Act of Reading

4.1. From Hidden Meaning to Aesthetic Response: A Paradigmatic Shift in Iser's Theory

Iser's point of departure is a critique of the "archaeological" approach to the text, which perceives meaning as a hidden object buried within words. Iser maintains that a literary work possesses two poles: the artistic pole (the perceptual horizon opened by the author) and the aesthetic pole (the realization of the text by the reader) (Iser, 1978, p. 21). Accordingly, the literary work is situated neither solely in the text nor exclusively in the reader's mind, but in a "virtual" position between the two (Iser, 1978, p. 21). In this view, meaning is not a fixed identity but a "dynamic event" that is actualized through the process of reading (Iser, 1978, p. 22).

4.2. The Concept of the "Implied Reader" as Textual Structure

Iser distinguishes between the actual reader and the "implied reader". The implied reader is not a real entity but a "transcendental model" that allows the reader to perceive the structures of the work (Iser, 1978, p. 38). This concept encompasses all the pre-structuring that the text incorporates to invite the reader's response (Iser, 1978, p. 34). In fact, the implied reader is the role designed by the text for its recipient to actualize the text's semantic potentials (Iser, 1974, p. xii).

4.3. The Structure and Function of the "Unsaid" or Textual Blanks

The "unsaid" or "blanks" (*Leerstellen*) are the invisible joints of the text that suspend semantic continuity. Iser refers to these blanks as the text's "unseen joints" that create gaps between textual schemata and various perspectives (narrator, characters, etc.). A blank is essentially the "non-presence" of a stated link, compelling the reader to discover the governing

code of the text themselves. These spaces serve as the "point of entry" for the reader into the text, allowing their imagination to participate in the production of meaning (Iser, 1978, pp. 182-183). It should be noted that in this study, the "unsaid" does not refer to traditional rhetorical omission (*hadhf*), but rather to an active space of suspense and reader participation in the realization of meaning.

This dynamic and creative function of the unsaid aligns with modern findings in the phenomenology of Quranic language. Based on this perspective, every "said" necessarily carries an "unsaid" within it; it is precisely this realm of the unsaid that, upon emerging from concealment, acquires disclosing power, guiding the interpreter through a linguistic event toward a deeper understanding of the inner layers of the verses (Entezari et al., 2025, p. 23).

4.3.1. Suspension of "Good Continuation"

Unlike informative or scientific texts, literary works utilize blanks to prevent "automatic perception". Drawing on Gestalt psychology, Iser explains that the human mind consistently seeks "good continuation" (*Gesetz der guten Fortsetzung*) or continuity between data (Iser, 1978, p. 185). When the text ruptures this continuity, the reader experiences "aesthetic stimulation", forcing them to bridge the missing links through their imagination. This intentional suspense transforms the reader from a passive recipient into a "producer" who constantly creates new mental images to fill textual gaps (Iser, 1978, pp. 186-187).

4.3.2. Self-Regulation Mechanism and the Feedback Process

Blanks function as a self-regulating structure; that is, what remains unsaid in the text becomes a stimulus for the imagination, compelling the reader to produce meaning (Iser, 1978, p. 194). Iser argues that the interaction between text and reader operates like a "cybernetic system" involving a feedback process (Iser, 1978, pp. 66-68). As the reader moves through the text, they combine new data with prior knowledge, constantly revising their "potential meanings" (Iser, 1978, p. 67). These gaps are the primary space for interaction because, by withholding certain information, the text encourages the reader to seek what is hidden. Through this process, the meaning of the text is realized in the reader's mind not as ready-to-consume information, but as a "living experience" (Iser, 1978, pp. 31-33).

4.4. The "Wandering Viewpoint" and the Dialectic of Theme and Horizon

Since a literary text can never be grasped all at once, the process of perceiving it is only possible through successive phases of reading (Iser, 1978, p. 108). Unlike physical objects, which we stand outside of and observe, in a literary text, the reader is placed within the world of the text; thus, their perception is achieved through a "wandering viewpoint" that travels through the text. This mobile perspective transforms the tension between the "read text" and the "text ahead" into a continuous synthesis, during which the artistic work takes shape as a "virtual entity" in the reader's mind (Iser, 1978, p. 109).

4.4.1. Segmentation of Perspectives and Temporal Synthesis

The act of reading is not merely a linear flow but involves a constant shifting between the various perspectives of the text, such as the narrator, characters, and plot. Iser refers to this process as "reciprocal spotlighting", meaning that each new perspective casts light on the previous ones and modifies them (Iser, 1978, p. 114). At every moment of reading, we are at the intersection of "retention" (memory of the past) and "protension" (expectation of the future) (Iser, 1978, p. 112). This segmentation and shifting compel the reader to constantly revise and refine the potential meanings they have constructed, so that meaning is realized not as a fixed datum but as a "temporal event" (Iser, 1978, p. 116).

4.4.2. Theme and Horizon Structure and the Production of Transcendent Meaning

To further explicate this dialectic, Iser utilizes the concepts of "Theme" (immanence) and "Horizon". At any given stage of reading, the specific segment or perspective of the text that occupies the reader's focus becomes the "theme" (Iser, 1978, p. 197). However, this theme is never perceived in a vacuum; it always gains meaning against the "horizon" of previous segments that have now receded into the background. This structure causes every part of the text to function like a two-way mirror: the current theme reconstructs the past horizon, and the past horizon directs our understanding of the current theme (Iser, 1978, p. 198). Through this

constant interaction, a "polysemantic density" is achieved, ultimately leading to the formation of the "aesthetic object"—the final meaning of the text—within the reader's consciousness. This meaning always transcends the individual components of the text, as it is the product of synthesizing all these perspective shifts (Iser, 1978, p. 199).

4.5. "Indeterminacy" and the Production of Mental Imagery

Due to its fictional nature, a literary text—unlike informative texts—lacks a direct external reference, which results in "indeterminacy" (Iser, 1978, p. 182). Iser maintains that a literary text is not an "object" but a set of instructions for the production of an "imaginary object". Therefore, the text's indeterminacy is the factor that enables communication between text and reader. This feature compels the reader to utilize their imagination to bridge the gap between linguistic signs and the absent reality, thereby creating the text's object within their mind (Iser, 1978, pp. 182-183).

4.5.1. Production of Mental Imagery and the Dialectic of Presence and Absence

Since meaning is not "given" in the words of the text, the reader must create it through the production of "mental images" (Iser, 1978, p. 135). Iser distinguishes between "perception" and "conception" (or mental imagery); perception requires the physical presence of the object, whereas conception is formed precisely upon the "absence" of the object (Iser, 1978, p. 137). Mental images fill the void left by the absence of real objects. Unlike a photograph or film, which makes the object visible in all its details, the mental image resulting from reading possesses a "visual poverty" but a "semantic richness". This imagery allows the reader to be exposed to the presence of something that is not in the text, thus turning the imaginary object of the text into an "experienced reality" for them (Iser, 1978, p. 140).

4.5.2. Passive Syntheses

Through "passive syntheses" (*Passive Synthesen*), the reader transforms the scattered data of the text into a coherent whole. This process is termed "passive" (or pre-logical) because it occurs automatically during the act of reading, at a level below conscious judgment (Iser, 1978, p. 135). Through these syntheses, the words of the text shift from rigid signs into a living experience within the reader's consciousness (Iser, 1978, p. 150). In fact, by utilizing a "cumulative effect", the reader combines each new image with previous ones, organizing the text's meaning as a "temporal event" within their mind (Iser, 1978, p. 149). This continuous synthesis ensures that the text dwells in the reader's mind not as a mere collection of words, but as a "living world" (Iser, 1978, p. 151).

4.6. Negativity and the Revision of Preconceptions

While "negation" (*Negation*) affects the linguistic and semantic layers of the text, "negativity" (*Negativität*) is the unwritten infrastructure that allows words to transcend their literal meaning and attain multiple significations. Iser regards negativity as the "link" between text and reader, through which what is unsaid overshadows what is said (Iser, 1978, p. 226-227). In effect, by creating "void forms", negativity compels the reader to imagine the hidden causes behind the negation of norms, constructing meaning as the "hidden side" of the represented world (Iser, 1978, p. 226).

4.6.1. Negation of Norms and Creating a State of Suspense

By negating norms and prior knowledge, the text suspends the reader in a state between "no longer" and "not yet" (Iser, 1978, p. 213). Iser argues that negation does not mean the elimination of a norm, but rather a "shift in its position"; the familiar norm is pushed into the background so the reader can observe it from a critical perspective. This negation of norms obstructs the reader's expectations and ruptures their mental "good continuation", forcing them to seek alternatives for the invalidated norms (Iser, 1978, pp. 212-213).

4.6.2. Changing the Reader's Status and Producing a New Reality

When the text negates the reader's familiar norms, they are compelled to view their own beliefs from an external vantage point (Iser, 1978, p. 212). Iser identifies this process as the beginning of "discovery", where the reader uncovers a meaning that did not previously exist in their real world (Iser, 1974, p. xiii). To operationalize this transition from theory to

exegetical analysis, this study adopts a strict two-step interpretive protocol in Section 5. Rather than retrospectively conflating classical rhetoric with modern phenomenology, each subsection first reconstructs the commentators' arguments on their own theological and linguistic terms (focusing on traditional concepts of ellipsis, rhetorical structure, or emotional imagery). Only after establishing this classical foundation does the analysis examine the extent to which these traditional observations correspond to Iser's technical concepts—such as the wandering viewpoint, feedback, or consistency-building. This rigorous separation preserves the historical and methodological integrity of classical Islamic hermeneutics while testing the explanatory boundaries of reception aesthetics.

5. Research Findings

The verse under discussion refers to the revelation bestowed upon the mother of Moses (PBUH) regarding her infant. The narrative background involves the priests informing Pharaoh that a child would be born among the Israelites this year who would bring about his downfall. Consequently, Pharaoh appointed Egyptian midwives to monitor Israelite women, commanding them to kill every male newborn. However, God, through His grace, continuously devised plans for Moses (PBUH) until the revelation was finally sent to his mother. Her name was Jochebed (*Yukabad*), a descendant of Levi, son of Jacob; she had nursed the infant for three months before this event (Muqatil ibn Sulayman, 2002, vol. 3, p. 336; Abu al-Futuh Razi, 1988, vol. 15, p. 95), establishing a narrative baseline that we first analyze on its own classical hermeneutical terms before retrospectively applying Iserian concepts as a modern analytical metalanguage.

The aesthetic realization of the verse: *"And We inspired the mother of Moses: 'Nurse him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him [one] of the messengers'"* (Al-Qasas/7), transcends the mere extraction of a moral message or a historical report. This revelatory text serves as a set of instructions for the production of a virtual reality in the process of reading. From Wolfgang Iser's perspective, the meaning of the text is not a hidden object but a dynamic event taking shape in the interactive space between the verse's structure and the reader's mind (Iser, 1978, p. 22). The mechanisms of this meaning production are explicated below according to Iser's theoretical components. As set out in Section 4.6.2, each subsection first presents the commentators' arguments in their own terms and then assesses separately their correspondence with Iser's concepts and its limits; the Iserian vocabulary of the second step is the author's analytical language.

5.1. The Dynamics of the "Wandering Viewpoint" in Segmenting the Verse's Perspectives

The process of reading Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas is not a simple linear flow; rather, the reader's mind travels through the utterances via a wandering viewpoint (Iser, 1978, p. 108). This verse can be divided into distinct perspective segments: first, the station of revelation (*wa-awḥayna*); second, the station of maternal emotion (*an arḍiʿihi*); third, the station of dread (*fa-idha khifti ʿalayhi*); fourth, the station of peril (*fa-alqihi fi al-yamm*); fifth, the station of serenity (*wa-la takhafi wa-la taḥzani*); sixth, the station of promise (*inna radduhu ilayki*); and seventh, the station of divine purpose (*wa-jaʿiluhu min al-mursalin*).

The commentators' own terms. Tabataba'i approaches the opening of the verse as a matter of rhetorical economy: the text employs ellipsis (*ijaz bi-l-ḥadhf*), so that events such as the mother's pregnancy and the child's birth are omitted from the wording and are to be supplied from the surrounding narrative (Tabataba'i, 1971, vol. 16, p. 10). Ibn Ashur observes that the revelation was accompanied by an expansion of the chest (*inshiraḥ al-ṣadr*), which he links to the certainty the mother needed to move from dread to the commanded act (Ibn Ashur, 1999, vol. 20, p. 15). Neither commentator speaks of segments of perspective or of a progressive movement through the verse; both explain the wording of the verse and the mother's situation within their own rhetorical and theological categories.

Correspondence with Iser and its limits. Read through Iser's categories, Tabataba'i's observation corresponds only partially to a "blank" (*Leerstelle*): for him the omitted material is narrative information recoverable from the context, whereas for Iser a blank marks

a point at which segments of perspective are left unconnected and the relation between them must be established in reading (Iser, 1978, pp. 182–183). The division of the verse into seven stations is therefore the author's analytical device and not an observation made by the commentators. In these terms, the transition from *an arḍiʿihi* to *fa-idha khifti ʿalayhi* is a moment of "reciprocal spotlighting": the theme shifts to maternal dread, against a horizon already shaped by *wa-awḥayna* and *an arḍiʿihi*, and the new segment modifies the earlier one (Iser, 1978, p. 114). Ibn Ashur's remark supports this reading only indirectly, since it shows that the passage from dread to action was regarded as requiring explanation; it does not in itself demonstrate a wandering viewpoint. Read within these limits, the successive shifts of perspective can be understood as the temporal event through which the verse is actualized in reading (Iser, 1978, p. 116).

5.2. The Aesthetics of the "Unsaid" and the Suspension of "Good Continuation"

The most fundamental stimulus for meaning production in this verse is the structural gaps, or the "unsaid", between linguistic stations (Iser, 1978, p. 183). By omitting conventional logical links, the text suspends the reader's "good continuation", compelling them to fill these gaps themselves. The most significant blank in the verse is the unwritten space between *"when you fear for him"* and *"cast him into the river"* (Al-Qasas/7). According to conventional logic, fear for a child should lead to "hiding" him, not "abandoning" him in the river.

The commentators' own terms. Sayyid Qutb draws attention to this paradox and portrays it with marked astonishment: "If you fear for him, while he is in your arms and your breast is in his mouth, cast him into the river!!" (Qutb, 2004, vol. 5, p. 2680). Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, for his part, addresses the same difficulty by recounting transmitted narratives of the "midwife", the "heated oven", and the "carpenter making the ark" (Al-Razi, 1999, vol. 24, pp. 580–581), which function in his commentary as historical explanation of the circumstances in which the mother acted.

Correspondence with Iser and its limits. Both responses can be read as reactions to the same tension that this study identifies as a blank between "when you fear for him" and "cast him into the river". The correspondence with Iser is, however, one of function rather than identity. Qutb's response is rhetorical and expressive: it registers the paradox without resolving it. Al-Razi's response supplies missing narrative links from transmitted material, which comes closer to Iser's account of gaps being bridged through the imagination (Iser, 1978, pp. 186–187); yet his declared aim is historical explanation, not aesthetic production. That this bridging amounts to the "production of meaning" in Iser's sense is therefore an interpretive claim of this study, supported by the commentaries only to the extent that they show the gap to have been treated as requiring explanation. By not stating "how" the mother consented to this act, the verse leaves open a space in which a reader is invited to reconstruct "faith" and "submission" not as abstract terms but within the context of a real crisis. This is a claim about the verse's structure and the role it offers its reader, not a report of what any commentator experienced.

5.3. The Mechanism of "Negation of Norms" and the Production of "Revelatory Trust"

One of the most complex strategies the verse employs to influence its reader is the negation of familiar norms. Iser maintains that by negating prior knowledge, the text places the audience in a state of suspense between "no longer" and "not yet" (Iser, 1978, p. 213). In Verse 7 of Al-Qasas, the instinctive and rational norm of "maternal protection" is completely negated. The command *"cast him into the river" poses the sharpest challenge to a reader's system of expectations*, as a river is logically a referent for destruction, not safety.

The commentators' own terms. Sayyid Qutb describes the river in this verse as being under the care of a Hand that provides "no security except in His presence... a Hand that turns the river into a sanctuary and a cradle" (Qutb, 2004, vol. 5, p. 2680). His statement is a theological and imagistic description of divine care; it is not formulated in terms of negation or negativity.

Correspondence with Iser and its limits. Read through Iser's categories, the movement from the norm of maternal protection to an

alternative authority corresponds to the work of negation, which, in Iser's account, does not eliminate a norm but shifts its position (Iser, 1978, pp. 212–213). On this reading, the negativity that forms the unwritten infrastructure of the text directs the interpreter to seek an alternative authority, and the text replaces the "mother's embrace" as a material refuge with "Divine Power" as the only true sanctuary. This is the author's analytical extension of Qutb's statement, not a claim that Qutb himself makes.

Furthermore, with the commands *"do not fear"* and *"do not grieve"* (Al-Qasas/7), the verse negates the most natural human reactions. Ibn Ashur, with a precise distinction, relates *khawf* (fear) to the future and *ḥuzn* (grief) to the past (separation) (Ibn Ashur, 1999, vol. 20, p. 17). Read through Iser's categories, the prohibition of these two states can be interpreted as a further negation of the most natural human reactions, preparing the ground for the discovery of a meaning that, in Iser's account, did not previously exist in the reader's real world (Iser, 1974, p. xiii). This reading is the author's; Ibn Ashur's own distinction is lexical and psychological. This process of "deconstructing the primary meaning" to "construct the secondary meaning" can be regarded as a central mechanism of aesthetic production in this verse.

5.4. Consistency-Building and the Feedback Process

The interaction between the reader and Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas operates like a "cybernetic system", which constantly revises prior data through a feedback process (Iser, 1978, p. 67). When a reader reaches the final tidings at the end of the verse—*"Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him [one] of the messengers"* (Al-Qasas/7)—all previous utterances gain new meaning in light of this grand teleology.

The commentators' own terms. Al-Zamakhshari regards the verse as a miracle of eloquence that, in its brevity, brings together two commands, two prohibitions, two reports, and two glad tidings (Al-Zamakhshari, 1987, vol. 3, p. 393). Tabataba'i explains that the promise of *"inna radduhu"* (We will return him) is the ground for the prohibition of grief (*ḥuzn*) (Tabataba'i, 1971, vol. 16, p. 10). Ibn Ashur notes that the command to nurse the infant (*arḍiʿihi*) was not merely a physiological act but, according to divine providence, a means of strengthening the child for his future mission (Ibn Ashur, 1999, vol. 20, p. 16). The wider narrative flow (*siyaq*) is also invoked. Al-Razi and Al-Zamakhshari document the preceding trial of the "heated oven" (*al-tannur al-masjur*), in which the infant Moses was preserved from fire (Al-Razi, 1999, vol. 24, p. 580; Al-Zamakhshari, 1987, vol. 3, p. 393). Tabataba'i reads the subsequent verses (the mother's anxiety in Al-Qasas/10, the sister's tracking of his path in Al-Qasas/11, and the rejection of Egyptian wet nurses in Al-Qasas/12) as the gradual fulfilment of the twin promises of Verse 7, culminating in the child's return to his mother in Al-Qasas/13 (Tabataba'i, 1971, vol. 16, pp. 13–14).

Correspondence with Iser and its limits. In Iserian terms, these observations can be related to feedback and consistency-building, but the degree of correspondence differs from case to case. Tabataba'i's argument that the promise of return grounds the prohibition of grief is a causal-logical reading of the verse. It resembles Iser's feedback process, in which later data lead to the revision of earlier meanings (Iser, 1978, p. 67), insofar as the end of the verse recasts the hardship of "casting into the river" as part of a coherent plan; however, it does not describe a reader's revision of provisional expectations, so the correspondence is analogical. Al-Zamakhshari's remark concerns the rhetorical concision of the verse, that is, the density of its content. It does not in itself amount to consistency-building (*Konsistenzbildung*), which for Iser is the reader's active construction of a coherent whole out of the textual perspectives. Equating the two would conflate a property of the text (rhetorical coherence) with a process of reading. The remark supplies evidence of the verse's compactness, which this study then interprets, as its own analysis, as a condition for linking the initial turbulence of the verse to its final serenity. Ibn Ashur's reading of the nursing command as preparation for the mission offers the closest commentatorial parallel to "reciprocal spotlighting" (Iser, 1978,

p. 114), in that an early command is reinterpreted in light of the verse's end, although he frames this in terms of providence rather than reading. On this analysis, the interplay between human weakness and revelatory power allows the "aesthetic object"—the final meaning—to be described as taking shape in reading: the verse is not merely a report of a historical incident but a "living and dynamic experience of God's will" in the heart of the impossible.

As for the wider narrative flow, the preceding trial of the "heated oven" can be said, within reception aesthetics, to pre-structure the horizon of expectation, signaling that divine intervention suspends physical laws to protect the sacred child (cf. Iser, 1978, pp. 197–199). The subsequent verses, read as the closure of the blanks left open in Verse 7, represent the author's Iserian interpretation of Tabataba'i's observation that the promises are fulfilled; Tabataba'i himself does not use this vocabulary. Through this sequence, the wandering viewpoint can be said to follow the conversion of structural indeterminacy into certainty (*tawakkul*) (cf. Iser, 1978, p. 197), a claim about the design of the text that the commentators support but do not themselves formulate.

5.5. Commentators as "Actual Readers": Documented Responses to the Verse's Potentials

An analysis of the exegetical evidence suggests that each commentator's written response actualizes a portion of the verse's aesthetic potentials, in relation to the role of the "implied reader" that the text itself offers:

- ***Al-Mizan:*** By focusing on internal consistency, it presents the verse as a coherent system of Divine Will, which can be related to the "temporal synthesis" of the wandering viewpoint.
- ***Fi Zilal al-Qur'an***: By relying on emotional imagery, it presents the river as a sanctuary (Qutb, 2004, vol. 5, p. 2680); the author reads this as an instance of "semantic richness" compensating for the "visual poverty" of words.
- ***Al-Kashshaf and Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir:*** By tracking rhetorical omissions, they draw attention to the places that the author, in Iserian terms, identifies as "structural blanks" (Al-Zamakhshari, 1987, vol. 3, p. 393; Ibn Ashur, 1999, vol. 20, p. 15).
- ***Mafatih al-Ghayb:*** By setting out the possible modes of revelation (dream, inspiration, angel), it maps what the author, in Iserian terms, treats as the "indeterminacy" of the revelatory text (Al-Razi, 1999, vol. 24, p. 580).

From an aesthetic perspective, this diversity of responses suggests that Verse 7 of Al-Qasas is not a single-faceted text, but a "virtual entity" situated between the text and the audience. The commentaries show interpreters supplying narrative links and reinterpreting material norms in light of the verse's end; these written responses can be read as partial actualizations of the verse's instructions. They do not allow us to determine what any commentator experienced inwardly, nor to claim that any one of them realized the verse's potentials "in the most complete manner possible".

Summary of Research Findings

The aesthetic analysis of Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas based on Iser's theory suggests that the expressive power of this verse lies not only in what it "says", but in the "unsaid" that separates its contradictory commands (nursing and abandoning). By creating a blank (maternal suspense), negating norms (the river instead of a cradle), and shifting perspectives, the verse invites its reader to move from dread toward the trust (tawakkul) it affirms at its close. On this reading, meaning is not a pre-packaged theological formula but something the text invites the reader to produce: the river is presented not as an agent of drowning but as a place of divine security. This is a reading of the verse's structure; the commentaries support it only in part, as Section 5 shows.

The interaction between the verse's structure and the commentators' observations, together with the degree of correspondence between these observations and Iser's concepts, is summarized in Table (1). This table illustrates how textual gaps serve as the engine of meaning production and a step toward overcoming indeterminacy (Iser, 1978, p. 182). The correspondences listed in the table are those proposed by the author; as shown in Sections 5.1–5.4, they are partial and analogical rather than identical to the commentators' own

concepts.

Table 1- Synthesis of Research Findings: Aesthetic Analysis of Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas Based on Iser's Theoretical Components

Iser's Theoretical Component	Structural Instance in the Verse (Al-Qasas/7)	Aesthetic Mechanism (Analysis of Findings)	Evidence of Commentators' Responses (As Actual Readers)
Blanks (The Unsaid)	The gaps between *arḍiʿihi*, *khifti ʿalayhi*, and *al-qihi*.	Suspending "good continuation"; compelling the reader to bridge the missing logical links between maternal emotion and the peril of the river.	**Al-Zamakhshari and Al-Razi:** Injecting narrative details (the sound of crying, spies, the ark) which the author reads as a de-indeterminization of the text
Negation of Norms	The command to cast the infant into the river (*fa-alqihi fi al-yamm*).	Invalidating the rational norm of "maternal protection"; creating "negativity" to produce a new reality (safety amidst danger).	**Sayyid Qutb:** Redefining the river from a place of drowning to the "embrace of Divine Power" and a secure sanctuary.
Wandering Viewpoint	Shifting between contradictory commands and glad tidings.	The dialectic of "Theme and Horizon"; each new utterance revises and modifies the meaning of the previous segment in the reading process	**Ibn Ashur:** Distinguishing between *khawf* (future) and *ḥuzn* (past) and synthesizing them in light of revelatory certainty.
Consistency-Building	Linking the final tidings (*inna radduhu*) to the initial commands.	The feedback process: closing the open Gestalts from the beginning of the verse to achieve revelatory coherence.	**Tabataba'i:** Explicating the causal relationship between the promise of return and the prohibition of grief to produce certainty.
Realization of the Aesthetic Object	The entire structure of the verse (two commands, two prohibitions, two tidings).	Transferring the "event-like" nature of revelation to the reading process; transforming the text from a historical report into a "living experience of trust" (*tawakkul*).	**Al-Zamakhshari:** Noting that the verse brings together two commands, two prohibitions, two reports, and two glad tidings; the link to the "aesthetic object" is the author's interpretation (see 5.4).

6. Conclusion

The present study has argued that the aesthetics of Verse 7 of Surah Al-Qasas is not a static entity confined to the text's words, but a dynamic process realized within the virtual space between the revelatory structure and the audience's faculty of perception. According to Wolfgang Iser's theory, this verse should not be regarded merely as a historical report of Moses' (PBUH) rescue; rather, the text serves as a set of instructions for the production of a transcendent experience in the process of reading. The primary findings of this aesthetic synthesis are explicated as follows:

First, the expressive power of the verse resides more in the unsaid than in the said. The dramatic gaps between contradictory utterances such as arḍiʿihi (the maternal embrace) and al-qihi (the turbulence of the river) suspend the automatic continuation of meaning. This suspense invites the reader to act as a producer, bridging the logical gaps between "dread" and "the river" through imagination. In the five commentaries, narrative details and explanations appear at exactly these points; the author reads them as responses to the blank, although the commentators themselves present them as historical or rhetorical explanation.

Second, through the negation of norms, the verse opens a perceptual horizon that departs from the reader's familiar world. The command to cast the infant into the river negates the rational norm of "maternal protection". This negativity places the reader in a state of aesthetic suspense, pushing the material refuge (the mother's embrace) into the background in favor of the unseen sanctuary (the Divine Will). On this reading, the "river" is redefined from a perilous object into a manifestation of revelatory security, and the verse's meaning is

not only a description of trust (tawakkul) but an invitation to enact it. This is the author's analytical reading; Qutb's description of the river as a place of divine care is the closest commentatorial support.

Third, the perception of the verse can be described as the movement of the wandering viewpoint within the dialectic of theme and horizon. With every step through the text—from revelation to nursing, from dread to casting, and from prohibition to tidings—a reader constantly revises potential meanings. The final glad tidings of "inna radduhu" can be read as a feedback process that links the initial turbulence of the verse to its final serenity, a correspondence that Tabataba'i's causal reading supports only analogically. Ultimately, the aesthetic object of this verse can be described as a comprehensive image of the "presence of power in the heart of weakness", which gains consistency through the reader's active participation in filling blanks and synthesizing contradictions.

Consequently, classical exegeses can be read not only as dogmatic-theological texts but also as documented responses of actual (historical) readers to the verse's structure. These responses offer partial, analogical support for the Iserian reading proposed here; they do not reveal the commentators' inner experience, and this study offers a new reading of Verse 7 without claiming to revise Iser's theory.

6.1. Research Suggestions

Based on the results of this research, it is suggested that future studies explore the pattern of segmenting perspectives and gap management in other verses characterized by dramatic brevity, such as the narratives of Mary (PBUH) or Joseph (PBUH). Furthermore, a comparative study of the horizon of expectations of contemporary audiences when encountering the unsaid elements of the Qur'an, in contrast with classical commentators, could help explicate the historicity of the aesthetic response to these verses. A comparison of Verse 7 with other Qur'anic and secular narratives could also test whether its explicit closing resolution of the blanks is a distinctive feature of scriptural narrative; only such a comparison could show whether any component of Iser's account needs revision. Finally, applying Iser's concept of mental mapping in analyzing Quranic translations would open new horizons in translation criticism from the perspective of audience reception.

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