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ISLAM IN MODERN MALAY LITERATURE

Examining the Role and Position of “Story” According to *Persuratan Baru*

Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani¹
Muhd. Zulkifli Ismail²

Abstract

This article discusses the synchronisation of Persuratan Baru’s idea on the role and position of stories in literature to Islam. Persuratan Baru (PB) is a literary notion proposed by Mohd. Affandi Hassan as an alternative to resolve the confusion of knowledge in modern Malay literature. To this end, PB upholds Islam particularly its core doctrine Tawhid as its conceptual framework which recognises the Qur’an and Prophetic Sunnah as legitimate sources of knowledge. Among the major ideas of PB is “Ilmu-Cerita” (Knowledge-Story) which prioritises “Ilmu” (Knowledge) and subordinates “Cerita” (Story) to “Ilmu.” More important is Affandi Hassan’s statement that his idea of “Ilmu-Cerita” is indeed Islamic as it is inspired by the Qur’an. No critical research has examined the synchronisation of PB idea and “Ilmu-Cerita” to Islam. This article is structured to achieve two objectives. Firstly, to discuss PB’s idea on “Ilmu-Cerita” as expounded by Affandi Hassan in his writings. Secondly, to examine the synchronisation of the idea to Islam by referring to authoritative (mu’tabar) Arabic commentaries of the Qur’an. This study applies a textual analysis approach that outlines two levels of reading procedure, i.e., descriptive reading and analytical reading. The study reveals that in PB’s perspective the aim of literary writing is to convey ilmu (knowledge), and therefore cerita (story) functions as a tool in conveying knowledge. Close reading on the mu’tabar Arabic commentaries of the Qur’an reveals that stories in the Qur’an seek to

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convey knowledge, i.e., good lessons that benefit mankind in everyday life. In this context that stories in the Islamic perspective serve as a tool to convey knowledge. With this understanding, PB's idea of "Knowledge-Story" is found in synchronisation with the teaching of Islam.

Keywords: Islamic literature, Malay literature, stories in Qur'an, *Persuratan Baru*, Affandi Hassan.

Introduction

In the 1970s and 1980s, modern Malay literature showed a clear tendency towards Islam thus sparking what is known as the literary phenomenon of "*Sastera Islam*" (*Islamic Literature*). This continued in the following decades, which witnessed a polemic among literary scholars, laureates and critics on the meaning and role of "literature" according to the Islamic worldview.³ It was in such an intellectual climate that *Persuratan Baru* (henceforth PB) emerged as a new literary notion following its proposal by Mohd. Affandi Hassan (henceforth Affandi),⁴ a renowned prolific creative writer and a literary critic in contemporary Malay literature. Affandi, who has been writing since the 1960s, discussed the idea of PB in several of his prominent writings such as *Pendidikan Estetika daripada Pendekatan Tauhid* (1992), followed by *Medan-Medan dalam Sistem*

³ Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, "Sastera Islam: Malaysia's literary phenomenon of The 1970s and 1980s," *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXXIX, no. 3-4 (July-October 1989), 232-248. The inclination towards Islam in modern Malay literature continues until today. Interestingly, in the mid-2000s, the same trend hit the domain of "popular literature", stirring the "phenomenon of popular Islamic novels" in the style of *Ayat-ayat Cinta*, an Indonesian novel by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy. For more information, see Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, "Islam, romance and popular taste in Indonesia: A textual analysis of *Ayat-ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy and *Syahadat Cinta* by Taufiqurrahman Al-Azizy," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 40, no. 116 (March 2012), 59-73; Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, "The conflict of love and Islam: The main ingredients in the popular Islamic novels of Malaysia," *Southeast Asia Research*, vol. 22, no.3 (2014), 1-16.

⁴ Literally, the word means "New Literature" but Affandi translates it as "Genuine Literature."

Persuratan Melayu: Sanggahan Terhadap Syarahan Perdana Prof. Dr. Muhammad Haji Salleh (1994), “Pemikiran dan Pendekatan dalam Kritikan Sastera Melayu Moden” (1994), and a tetralogy novel *Pujangga Melayu* (1997).⁵ Affandi introduced the term *Persuratan Baru* in 1994 after having critically debated several issues in modern Malay literature.⁶

In 2008, the term PB was explicitly indicated as the title of the book *Gagasan Persuratan Baru: Pengenalan dan Penerapan*, which discusses it at a philosophical level. Later, the idea was applied by Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir and Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani in their literary analyses. The publication of this book with such a title was to convey the message that PB was proposed as a systematic literary notion. It thus was open for debate in the academia. Apart from his writings in a blog specifically named “*Gagasan Persuratan Baru*,” Affandi discusses the idea of PB among others in “Mengembalikan Peranan Ilmu yang Benar dalam Persuratan Melayu” (2010), “Keindahan Bahasa Berasaskan Konsep Ihsan” (2012), *Balai Maqamat* (2014), *Pandirisme dalam Komuniti Dunia* (2016), *Hikayat Buyung Lurus: Sebuah Hikayat Politik Melayu* (2016), *Anugerah Sastera Negara dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu Moden* (2019) and *Teori-teori Sastera Barat dalam Tangan Sarjana Malaysia* (2021). It is important to note that PB was proposed as an alternative solution to problems in modern Malay literature. Affandi relates the problems to the “confusion of knowledge” which refers to the secular worldview underpinning the modern Malay literature that contrasts to the Islamic worldview.⁷ The Islamic worldview

⁵ For more information on Affandi’s biography and literary tradition, see Akalily Narmi, Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, Kamariah Kamarudin, and Pabiyah Hajimaming@Toklubok, “Sumbangan Shah Waliyullah al-Dihlawi dalam perkembangan intelektual Islam di Malaysia: Beberapa perkembangan mutakhir,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 17, no. 1 (June 2022), 97-108. For reviews on PB, see Nudra Shafini Halis Azhan, Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, and Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad, “Kesusasteraan Melayu dan Persuratan Baru: Satu pengamatan kritis tentang sambutan keserjanaan,” *Pertanika: Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, vol. 29, no. 2 (June 2021), 1449-1468.

⁶ Mohd. Affandi Hassan, “Mengapa saya menulis Aligupit,” *Dewan Sastera*, September, 1994, 9-11.

⁷ The term “confusion of knowledge” was coined by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in discussing the dilemma of contemporary Muslims. See al-Attas, *Islam*

according to Affandi is shaped by the principle of Tawhid which recognises the Oneness of God, as well as the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah as the highest sources of knowledge.⁸ Affandi argues that confusion of knowledge is evident when modern Malay literature recognises and put to pride works that contradict Islamic values.⁹ PB argued that due to the confusion, "knowledge" (*ilm*) in its Islamic definition was no longer adopted and modern Malay literature became a fictional writing enthusiasm.¹⁰ Thus, PB concluded Islam had been completely marginalised and its worldview is not adopted when defining the meaning and role of Malay literature. To address the problem, Affandi proposed that PB upholds Islam particularly its Tawhidic teachings.

As a literary notion, PB received an encouraging academic reception from literary scholars and critics. Among the early enthusiasts were Abdullah Tahir (1995) and Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir (1999: 121-133), who both well accepted PB as a substantive literary notion that should thus be given serious

and Secularism (Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), 1978). In order to understand religious polemics in the Western modern intellectual tradition and how it affects modern Malay literature, see Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, "Kesangsian terhadap agama: Memetakan wacana-wacana Barat yang melingkari "kemodenan" Abdullah Munsyi. *Kemanusiaan: The Asian Journal of Humanities*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2022), 145–168.

⁸ Mohd. Affandi Hassan, *Pendidikan Estetika Daripada Pendekatan Tauhid* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), 15-32; Akalily Narmi, Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, Kamariah Kamarudin, and Pabiyah Hajimaming@Toklubok, "Pengaruh pemikiran al-Dihlawi mengenai taklif dalam Kitab *Hujjat Allah Al-Balighah* terhadap pemikiran Sastera Islam Mohd. Affandi Hassan dalam gagasan Persuratan Baru," *Afkar*, vol. 25, no. 1 (June 2023), 199-230; Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, "Sastera berpaksikan Tauhid: Satu penerokaan terhadap gagasan Persuratan Baru oleh Mohd. Affandi Hassan – Bahagian I," *Jurnal YADIM (Journal of Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia)* vol. 7 (October 2005), 10-16.

⁹ Mohd. Affandi Hassan, Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, and Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru: Pengenalan dan Penerapan* (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA), 2008), 82-83; Mohd. Affandi Hassan, Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, and Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, Edisi Kedua (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2014), 162-163.

¹⁰ Mohd. Affandi Hassan, *Medan-Medan dalam Sistem Persuratan Melayu* (Kota Bharu: Penerbit Tiga Puteri, 1994), 37.

attention.¹¹ This was followed by Mohd. Zariat in 2004 through his doctoral thesis (published in 2011) who pioneered an effort in developing a systematic analytical framework based on PB for application in a comprehensive analysis on Malay literary texts. The framework leads the way to the application of PB in several master and doctoral theses.¹² PB was also discussed in scholarly writings relating to theories and critical approaches in Malay literature.¹³ More interestingly, PB has received due attention at a higher scholarly level when professors of literature critically debated it through their inaugural lectures.¹⁴ Affandi's *Pendidikan Estetika daripada Pendekatan Tauhid* that proposed preliminary notion of PB, was also listed in "Key Works Initiative" in *The Annotated Bibliography Project* by Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study

¹¹ Abdullah Tahir, "Novel-novel Mohd. Affandi Hassan: Meneliti kemungkinan penerapan konsep "Persuratan Baru Melayu"" (lecture, Kongres Bahasa Melayu Sedunia, Kuala Lumpur, August 21-25, 1995); Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, "Mohd. Affandi Hassan's notion of Persuratan Baru: A preliminary exploration," in *Texts & Contexts: Interactions Between Literature and Culture in Southeast Asia*, eds. Luisa J. Mallari-Hall & Lily Rose R. Tope (Quezon City: The Department of English and Comparative Literature, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Phillipines, 1999), 121-133.

¹² See Nahari Mastono Arukin, *Analisis Pemikiran dalam Espen-Espen Mohd. Affandi Hassan*, MA Thesis, Universiti Putera Malaysia, 2008; Nur Fatiha Fadila Abu Bakar, *Intelektualisme dalam Lima Novel Anwar Ridhwan Dari Sudut Persuratan Baru*, MA Thesis, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, 2014, Siti Aisyah binti Mohamed Salim, *Sejarah Alternatif dalam Novel Duka Tuan Bertakhta: Satu Analisis Menurut Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, Master of Letters, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2014; Nurul Hilwany Che Shaffine, *Ilmu dalam Novel Karya Aisya Sofea Berdasarkan Persuratan Baru*, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2017; Akalily Narmi, *Wacana Taklif dan Manifestasinya Terhadap Cerita dalam Novel Pujangga Melayu oleh Mohd. Affandi Hassan*, MA Thesis, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 2019; and Muhammad Zarif Hassan@Zulkifli, *Penilaian Kandungan Teks Novel Mata Pelajaran Kesusasteraan Melayu Berdasarkan Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, PhD Thesis, Universiti Putera Malaysia, 2023.

¹³ Zawiah Yahya, *Reading Approaches in Malay Literature: Critical Theory in the Making* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2010); A. Halim Ali, *Inti Sari Teori Sastera: Barat dan Malaysia* (Shah Alam: NHA Excell Resources, 2018).

¹⁴ Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, *Kritikan Sastera Melayu: Antara Cerita dengan Ilmu* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2007); Muhammad Bukhari Lubis, *Kesusasteraan Islami Bandingan: Menyingkap Tabir Mengungkap Fikir* (Tanjong Malim: Penerbit Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 2017).

of Muslim Civilisations, United Kingdom.¹⁵ It is clear that today PB has been recognised and given critical receptions by academics and literary audience.

As mentioned earlier, PB upholds the Islamic worldview as its philosophical framework. The choice was put forward on the stand that Islam and its scientific tradition has a significant contribution in the emergence of the tradition of Malay letters (*tradisi persuratan Melayu*).¹⁶ According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (henceforth al-Attas), the arrival of Islam to the Malay World introduced rationalism and individualism which universally became the framework in measuring the progression in civilizations.¹⁷ During the Islamic period, the nature of Malay language has shifted from an aesthetic language that narrates fantasy including superstition, fable and myth, to a scientific language that debates knowledge and ideas.¹⁸ The proposition by al-Attas was supported by V.I. Braginsky (henceforth Braginsky) who recognised the emergence of the “*literary self-awareness*” in Malay literature during the Islamic period. By “*literary self-awareness*”, Braginsky means a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the genuine meaning of “*literature*” (*sastera*) and the substantive roles of authors and authorship.¹⁹ With these achievements, PB emphasises that the tradition of Malay letters of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century was *par-excellence* that was unrivalled in the history of Malay literature.²⁰ Therefore, PB proposed the tradition of Malay letters to

¹⁵ Affandi Hassan, Mohd. Tahir and Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, 150.

¹⁶ Mohd. Affandi Hassan, *Medan-Medan Dalam Sistem Persuratan Melayu*, 18-19; Alparslan Acikgenc, *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM), 2014); Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, *Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu: Satu Analisis Teks Berdasarkan Persuratan Baru* (PhD Thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2004), 128-131.

¹⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1972), 29-32; 44-47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹⁹ V. I. Braginsky, *The System of Classical Malay Literature* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993), 29; Vladimir Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings and Literary Views* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004), 204-206; Abdul Rani, *Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu*, 132-135 & 204-206.

²⁰ Affandi Hassan, *Medan-Medan Dalam Sistem Persuratan Melayu*, 18-19; 35; Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, “Tradisi persuratan Melayu: Tradisi par excellence dalam

be the benchmark in measuring the progression of modern Malay literature. Based on this benchmark, PB argued that modern Malay literature is without a strong epistemological basis, since it has given prominence to fictional writings that prioritise leisure. This retrogress occurred due to the confusion of knowledge whereby values contrary to Islam were highly appreciated and knowledge and intellectualism as the basis of literary activities sidelined.

In responding to the confusion of knowledge problem, PB argues for a redefinition of the meaning and role of Malay literature according to the Islamic worldview. PB also argues that the confusion of knowledge has resulted in several conventions in fictional writings, particularly for novels and short stories, that could adversely affect the growth of genuine literature. Firstly, the preoccupation with “story” (*cerita*) and the primacy of “story” over knowledge (*ilmu*).²¹ This practice may be seen through the National Laureates who confess that writing is just to narrate stories, and leave to readers the questions of knowledge and didacticism. Some writers openly stated that their fictional works should not be didactic or to cultivate values.²² Secondly, and related to the above issue, is the propensity for human evils and weaknesses, which PB argues were dominant themes in Malay novels and short stories. This includes justifying the propensity with ideas such as prostitution for the sake of survival, stealing from others to help the poor, and treachery towards parents to achieve one’s ambition.²³ Thirdly, the preoccupation with story-making to highlight an exploration of new story-telling techniques which are unconventional (commonly known as “experimental” style of writing), which includes the manipulation of sex and erotica to escalate the intensity of a story.²⁴ As a result, modern Malay literature demonstrates values which are contrary to Islam. It became more serious when these fictional works were

sejarah kesusasteraan Melayu” (lecture, Seminar Antarabangsa Kesusasteraan Asia Tenggara (SAKAT) XVI 2022, Balai Seminar Tun Hamdan Syeikh Tahir Wisma Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, October 4-5, 2022).

²¹ Affandi Hassan, Mohd. Tahir and Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, 4-65; 142-144.

²² Abdul Rani, *Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu*, 104-105; 110-114.

²³ Affandi Hassan, Mohd. Tahir and Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, 81-85.

²⁴ Abdul Rani, *Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu*, 556-570; 478-481.

praised by literary critics and through literary recognitions, and thus became a trendsetter in modern Malay literature.

In attempting to solve this problem, PB proposed its main idea, which is “knowledge-story” (*Ilmu-Cerita*). By this idea, PB differentiates between “*ilmu*” (knowledge) and “*cerita*” (story). At the practical level, “knowledge” is further defined as “thought” (*pemikiran*) which is substantively and academically debated to create a “discourse” (*wacana*). Meanwhile, “story” is described as a narrative developed from the manipulation of narrative devices such as characters, plot, events and settings. PB prioritises “discourse” (*wacana*) or “knowledge” (*ilmu*) as opposed to “story” (*cerita*). Thus, the aim of literary writing including fictional works such as novels or short stories is to produce “discourse” (*wacana*) and not “story” (*cerita*). In other words, PB subordinates “story” (*cerita*) to “discourse” (*wacana*). PB concludes that “story” (*cerita*) only serves as a tool in conveying “discourse” (*wacana*). In this context, fictional works such as novels and short stories provide a space to convey “true knowledge” (*ilmu yang benar*) in Islam, as defined in the Qur’an and Sunnah.

Research Problem and Objectives

A preliminary observation reveals that PB’s idea of “Knowledge-Story” (*Ilmu-Cerita*) as described above, is novel and had never been thought of in modern Malay literature, as admitted by Ungku Maimunah (2007).²⁵ As far as it is known, there had been no notion in the modern Malay literature (more often mentioned as “literary theory”) that problematised the inclination towards “story” (*cerita*) as well as the primacy of “story” (*cerita*) over “knowledge” (*ilmu*). On the contrary, “story” and “story-making” are endorsed as a “nature” of literature, thus “story-telling” became the priority in literary writings.²⁶ It is obvious that PB’s idea of “Knowledge-Story”

²⁵ Mohd. Tahir, *Kritikan Sastera Melayu*, 58-60.

²⁶ See Shahnon Ahmad, *Sastera: Pengalaman, Ilmu, Imaginasi dan Kitarannya* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994), 41; 43; Shahnon Ahmad, *Pongang Sastera* (Shah Alam: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1995), 200; A. Samad Said, *Dari Salina ke Langit Petang: Proses Mencipta Novel* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987), 1; Salbiah Ani, “Tikam lidah pada wacana hatiku terluka

(“*Ilmu-Cerita*”) which prioritises “discourse” (*wacana*) as opposed to “story” (*cerita*), contests the preference for “story” and “story-making”.

Against this background, this article aims to highlight Affandi’s statement about his idea on “Knowledge-Story” (“*Ilmu-Cerita*”). In his writing, Affandi revealed that the idea was inspired by the Qur’an.²⁷ This is unsurprising since PB acknowledges Islam as its epistemological framework. In the Islamic tradition, the Qur’an is acknowledged as a revelation from Allah ﷻ, the Creator and Guide of humankind. Other than accounts about creation, human phenomena, man’s duties and responsibilities, and divine rewards and punishment, the Qur’an contains stories about prophets and messengers and their peoples, as well individuals such as Maryam, Khidir, Iskandar Dzulkarnain, Queen Balqis and others. Within this context, Affandi argues that the stories in the Qur’an are not mere stories; instead, they convey “true knowledge” in Islam (*ilmu yang benar di sisi Islam*) in the forms of notions, reminders and warnings from Allah ﷻ to mankind. What is important in this context is Affandi’s statement that his idea of “Knowledge-Story” (“*Ilmu-Cerita*”) is Islamic, as it is inspired by the Qur’an.

Preliminary observation shows that Affandi’s PB idea finds acceptance among scholars and researchers.²⁸ In line with this acceptance, some researchers discuss the idea of “Knowledge-Story” including its relation to Islam. However, most researchers refer to earlier studies on stories in the Qur’an or to the Malay or English commentaries of the Qur’an. A research by Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani for instance, refers to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation & Commentary* (1938) and Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an* (1980).²⁹ This study shows that there has

di Bukhara,” *Berita Harian*, April 9, 2002, 16.

²⁶ Affandi Hassan, “Mengapa saya”, 10-11.

²⁷ Afandi Hassan, “Mengapa saya”, 10-11.

²⁸ Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, “Lorong Midaq oleh Naguib Mahfouz: Satu penilaian menurut gagasan “Persuratan Baru” janaan Mohd. Affandi Hassan,” in *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, Mohd. Affandi Hassan, Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, and Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA), 2008), 222-223; Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, *Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu*, 208.

²⁹ Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, *Seksualiti dalam Novel Melayu*, 208.

been no serious effort to critically examine PB's idea of "Knowledge-Story" in relation to the Qur'an, by referring to Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an especially those considered as "authoritative" or *mu'tabar*. In the tradition of *'ilm al-tafsīr* (or the science of Qur'anic interpretations), the term "*mu'tabar*" commonly refers to commentaries that are recognised by *jumhūr al-'ulamā'* (the majority of scholars) as authoritative because these are written by renowned scholars in the discipline and thus enjoy considerable influence in society. The issue in question clearly demonstrates the *lacuna* which can be filled with a scientific study on PB's idea of "Knowledge-Story" by referring to *mu'tabar* Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an.

Following the abovementioned issue, this article is structured to achieve two objectives. Firstly, to discuss PB's idea of "Knowledge-Story" explicated by Affandi in his writings. Secondly, to examine the synchronisation of the PB idea to Islam by referring to *mu'tabar* Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an.

Research Approach

This research applies a textual analysis approach because the materials consist of written texts. Analysis of the texts under study was carried out based on a reading procedure comprising two levels: i) descriptive reading which enables the researcher to discuss PB's idea of "Knowledge-Story", and ii) analytical reading which enables the study to summarise on the synchronisation of the idea to Islam by referring to *mu'tabar* Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an.

In order to materialise the first objective, this research analysed PB's idea of "Knowledge-Story" using Affandi's writing as the research material.³⁰ In order to realise the second objective, this research selected six *mu'tabar* Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an as

³⁰ Following are the studied texts of Affandi Hassan's writings; (i) Mohd. Affandi Hassan, "Mengapa saya menulis *Aligupit*". *Dewan Sastera*, September 1994, 9-11, (ii) Mohd. Affandi Hassan, *Pujangga Melayu* (Shah Alam: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1997), and (iii) Mohd. Affandi Hassan, Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir & Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru: Pengenalan dan Penerapan* (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu (ATMA), 2008).

references.³¹ These selected commentaries were written by six renowned scholars in the history of Islamic scientific tradition who lived between the ninth and the twentieth century. The latitude of about 1,000 years is hoped to give a comprehensive understanding relating the subject under study that can be influenced by the factor of different eras. These six selected commentaries are considered *mu'tabar* in the discipline of *tafsir* because they have been used as major references until now. All the commentaries have been republished several times in various editions within the past six decades until recent times.

Analysis and Discussion

1) PB's Idea on "Knowledge-Story" (*Ilmu-Cerita*)

a) The Role of "Story" as a Tool to Convey "Knowledge"

By and large, PB relates the role of "story" to writing creative genres such as novels and short stories. As mentioned above, PB emphasises that the purpose of writing is to convey true knowledge as understood in Islam. This is based on PB's understanding of the worldview of Islam as comprising *tawhid* as its core teaching with the Qur'an and Sunnah as the sources of reference.

With this writing purpose in view, PB conceptually differentiates between "story" and "knowledge", given the precise

³¹ The following are titles of the Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an selected for the study:- (i) Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (838 CE-923 CE), *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Aya al-Qur'an* also widely known as *Tafsir al-Tabari*, ed., Abdullah bin Abd al-Muhsin Al-Turki (Al-Gizah: Dar Hijr, 2001), (ii) Muhammad bin Umar al-Razi (1149/1150 CE-1209 CE), *Mafatih al-Ghayb* also known as *Tafsir al-Kabir* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1999), 3rd edition, (iii) Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Qurtubi (1214 CE-1273 CE), *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam al-Qur'an* also known as *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, ed., Ahmad Al-Bardouni & Ibrahim Atfayash (Kaherah: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1964), 2nd edition, (iv) Ismail bin Umar Ibnu Kathir (1301 CE -1373 CE), *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* also known as *Tafsir Ibnu Kathir*, ed., Sami bin Muhammad Al-Salamah (Riyadh: Dar Taibah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1999), 2nd edition, (v) Muhammad bin Ali al-Shauqani (1759 CE-1834 CE), *Fath al-Qadir* (Damsyik: Dar Ibnu Kathir, 1993), and (vi) Muhammad al-Tahir Ibnu 'Asyur (1879 CE-1973 CE), *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir min al-Tafsir* (Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah, 1984).

definition of the two terminologies. PB defines “story” as a narration developed from manipulating narrative devices such as characters, plots, events and settings. Meanwhile, “knowledge” is defined as “thoughts” or “scholarly ideas” which are debated substantively until what is termed by Affandi as “discourse” is created.³² It is clear from the PB definition that “story” is not the same as “knowledge,” as conceptualised by Affandi; “The two main elements contrasted [in PB] are aspects of discourse and story in evaluating a novel” [*Dua unsur utama yang dipertentangkan [dalam PB] ialah aspek wacana dan cerita dalam menilai sesebuah novel*].³³ In PB, “story” and “knowledge” need to be differentiated and contrasted because the tendency to only deliver the “story” alone may distort the purpose to convey “knowledge”.³⁴

In differentiating between “story” and “knowledge”, PB explains that the delivering of a story is not the “end result” of creative writing, instead, “story” is only a “tool” or a “means” to convey “knowledge” as maintained by Affandi; “story [in the concept by PB] is to express a notion or thought, in order to give reminders or warnings” [*Cerita [dalam PB] digunakan untuk menyatakan sesuatu gagasan atau pemikiran, untuk memberikan peringatan atau amaran*].³⁵ As a tool, a “story” which develops through the manipulation of narrative devices, provides space for the author to convey his thoughts (*pemikiran*). In manipulating characters for instance, the author’s thoughts are woven into the mind with opinions of the characters which are reflected in dialogues, arguments (*hujjah*) and sermons (*khutbah*). In other words, “character”, as a narrative device, convey the author’s thoughts. Thus, “thoughts” in creative works such as novels and short stories are understood in PB through academic discussion (by the author) which substantively debates and finally develops a discourse. In this context, the aspect being put to concern is the academic arguments that shape the discourse, and it is this aspect that dominantly manoeuvres creative writing.³⁶

³² Affandi Hassan, Mohd. Tahir and Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, 106.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Affandi Hassan, “Mengapa saya”, 10.

³⁶ Affandi Hassan, Mohd. Tahir and Abdul Rani, *Gagasan Persuratan Baru*, 64;

In order to establish such a story, the manipulation of narrative devices such as character development is defined and determined by its relevance to the author's arguments (*hujjah*) and discourse (*wacana*). Similar understanding and practice also applies to manipulating other narrative devices such as the plot construction or the selection of events and settings. Based on this conception, PB introduces "stylization of ideas" (translated into Malay as "*siratan makna*"), a concept which generally puts forward a style in creative writing that prioritises thoughts (*pemikiran*) and discourse (*wacana*).³⁷

The discussion at this juncture aims to explain how PB conceptualises the role of "story" as a tool in conveying "knowledge". It is clear that narrating a "story" is not the purpose of writing creative works such as novels or short stories. Instead, according to PB, the end of creative writing is to convey "knowledge".

b) The Position of "Story"

PB conceptualises the position between "story" and "knowledge" in the principle of "*Dominance-Priority*". This principle underlines what is dominant in literary works, either "story" or "knowledge". The dominant prescribes the priority of a creative work. In order to identify the "*Dominance-Priority*", PB proposes "narrative space" (*ruang naratif*), a concept that regards a literary work as "space" developed from the beginning to the end of the story. It is important to note that as a creative work, PB does not totally neglect the "story" part. However, "story"'s role and position are defined and determined by "knowledge" as explained above. The concept of "narrative space" enables the author to limit the role of story as a tool to convey "knowledge". A "narrative space" may be conceptually

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³⁷ Affandi Hassan, *Pujangga Melayu*, 215. For more details on *Pujangga Melayu* as a novel that provides space to convey "discourse" (*wacana*), see Nudra Shafini Halis Azhan, Mohd. Zariat Abdul Rani, and Salmah Jan Noor Muhammad, "Moderate propositional theory of literary truth" oleh Jukka Mikkonen: Satu pengenalan terhadap kesusasteraan Melayu moden", *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. 41, no. 1 (April 2023), 213–234.

filled up by two types of content, namely “story content” and “discourse content”. “Story content” is provided by manipulating narrative devices such as characters, plot, events and settings. In contrast, “discourse content” consists of arguments that are presented in detail, analysed and synthesised practically in an academic manner to develop a substantive discourse. By conceptualising creative works such as novels or short stories as “space”, the writing is propelled by the author’s strategy, either to fill the “narrative space” (of his creative work) with only “story content” or with both “story and discourse content”.

A “narrative space” (of a creative work) with just a “story content” or minor portion of “discourse content” would be viewed essentially as a “story”. On the other hand, a “narrative space” with largely “discourse content” would make “knowledge” a dominant aspect in a creative work. The dominance of one type of content in a “narrative space” determines the “priority” of either knowledge or story in a creative work.³⁸ By and large, PB upholds “knowledge” as the fundamental and dominant aspect in a creative writing, thus subordinating “story” to it. In this respect, PB offers understanding and practices contrary to conventional creative writing.

2) Synchronising PB’s Idea of “Knowledge-Story” with Islam according to the *Mu’tabar* Arabic Commentaries of the Qur’an

As discussed earlier, PB entrusts the idea of “*Knowledge-Story*” based of the Qur’an.³⁹ This explanation raises questions on the synchronisation of PB’s particular idea with Islam, and invites discussions on the role and position of stories in the Qur’an based on the *mu’tabar* Arabic commentaries of the Qur’an. Preliminary readings show that among the *dalil* (evidences) from the Qur’an in support of the role and position of story is the following verse (12:111):⁴⁰

³⁸ Affandi Hassan, *Pujangga Melayu*, 215-216.

³⁹ Affandi Hassan, “Mengapa saya”, 10.

⁴⁰ The verse is translated into English by Pickthall as in the following, “In their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding. It is no invented story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةً لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۗ مَا كَانَ حَدِيثًا يُفْتَرَىٰ
وَلَكِن تَصَدِّقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ
يُؤْمِنُونَ

Within academia, Sūrah Yūsuf has been used many times as an important reference in the effort to understand the concept and form of story according to Islam.⁴¹ In the Qur'an itself the story of Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام has been stated as *ذٰهُ الْيٰسْرِ اَوْ حَيْثَا بِمَآ الْقَصَصِ اَحْسَنُ* ' (12: 3) or translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr as "...the most beautiful of stories by Our having revealed unto thee this Qur'an" (589).⁴² Nasr also explains that the special characteristic of Sūrah Yūsuf also lies in the narration about the Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام himself in one chapter of its own (*sūrah*) and in a chronology.⁴³ Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains the exquisiteness of the story about Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام in the Qur'an which is described as "*the most beautiful stories*", among which rely on the complete structure of the story, rendering chronologically in one particular chapter, narrating the rise and fall of nations in their era thus making it an easy reference to be exemplified

a guidance and a mercy for folk who believe." Muhammad William Pickthall, *The Roman Transliteration of The Holy Qur'-aan With Full Arabic Text: English Translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall* (Lahore: Quدرات Ullah Co, 2011), 275. While Seyyed Hossein Nasr translated the similar verse as follows, "Certainly in their stories is a lesson for those possessed of intellect. It is not a fabricated account; rather, it is a confirmation of that which came before it, and an elaboration of all things, and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe." Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015), 614.

⁴¹ Among Muslim scholars, the Qur'an is recognized as a source of revelation knowledge, and therefore the study of it is included in the context of Sūrah Yūsuf, carried out to understand the revelation of Allah سبحانه وتعالى Sūrah Yūsuf in the Qur'an also invites studies by Western researchers who tend to deal with the Qur'an not as a source of revealed knowledge. See John MacDonald, "Joseph in the Quran and Muslim commentary: A comparative study: Part 1", *The Muslim World*, vol. XLVI, No. 2 (July 1956), 133-131; John MacDonald, "Joseph in the Quran Part II", *The Muslim World*, vol. XLVI, No. 3 (July 1956), 207-224.

⁴² Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 589.

⁴³ Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 589.

from it, other than the complexity of levels of human spiritual elements, as a result of events that befall them.⁴⁴ Mustansir Mir believes that Sūrah Yūsuf can offer an understanding of Islamic concept and structure of a story as manifested in the Qur'an.⁴⁵ All these scholarly views invite this study to examine the interpretation of Sūrah Yūsuf particularly verse 111, in the effort to understand the role and position of stories in the Qur'an.

a) Lessons to Man Who Thinks

With reference to Sūrah Yūsuf, Verse 111, several sentences, phrases, and words became the focus of the *mu'tabar* Arabic commentaries of the Qur'an. Among them is the sentence *فِي كَانَ لَفَذٌ أَلْبَابٌ لِأُولَى عِبْرَةٌ قَصِيصُهُمْ* which was translated by Pickthall as follows; "In their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding".⁴⁶ In this sentence, among the important words given emphasis by *tafsir* scholars is the word "ibrah"/عِبْرَةٌ. Imam Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Qurtubi (henceforth al-Qurtubi) in his *الجامع لأحد كام القرآن (al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān)* interprets "ibrah"/عِبْرَةٌ as "thoughts" (فكرة), "reminders" (تذكرة) or "warnings" (عظة).⁴⁷

Similar interpretation can also be found in *جامع البيان عن تأويل آي القرآن (Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āya al-Qur'ān)* by Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari (henceforth al-Tabari), who interprets the word as "to learn lessons from it" (يعتبرون بها) or "advice" or "reminder" (موعظة).⁴⁸ From these explanations, it can be understood that the word "ibrah"/عِبْرَةٌ in Sūrah Yūsuf, Ayat 111 carries the meaning of "lesson" which include advice, thought, reminder or warning which benefit man who thinks.

Imam Muhammad bin Ali al-Shauqani (henceforth al-Shauqani) in his *فتح القدير (Fath al-Qadir)*, interprets the word "ibrah"/عِبْرَةٌ as "baṣīrah" (بصيرة) or *insight* that provides knowledge,

⁴⁴ 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text With An English Translation and Commentary*, (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1937), vol. II, 548.

⁴⁵ Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'anic story Of Joseph: Plot, themes and characters," *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXVI, no. 1 (January 1986), 15.

⁴⁶ Pickthall, *The Roman Transliteration*, 275.

⁴⁷ Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*.

⁴⁸ Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āya al-Qur'ān*.

and thus, is able to release mankind from ignorance and confusion. In the context of the verse *أَلَّا لَيْبِ لَأُولَىٰ عِبْرَةً قَصَصِهِمْ فِي كَانَ لَقَدْ*, al-Shauqani explains that the word *qasasihim* (قَصَصِهِمْ) can refer to either narrations about previous prophets, or specifically the story about Prophet Yūsuf (يُوسُفَ) from which man learns “*basīrah*” (بصيرة) or *insight* that can be understood by “common sense” (*al-'uqūl al-salīmah/ العقول السليمة*), therefore enables man to benefit for his self-worth. From al-Shauqani’s interpretation, it can be understood that “*ibrah*”/عبرة in the verse is ever relevant to the life of mankind.⁴⁹

In his *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm), Imam Ismail bin Umar Ibnu Kathir (henceforth Ibnu Kathir) explains the meaning of the expression “*ibrah li ūli al-bab*” (عِبْرَةٌ لِّأُولَىٰ الْأَبَابِ) as a lesson to men who are sensible.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Imam Muhammad al-Tahir Ibnu ‘Asyur (henceforth Ibnu ‘Asyur) in his *al-tahriir wa al-tanwīr min al-tafsīr* (al-Tahriir wa al-Tanwīr min al-Tafsīr), interpretes the verse *أَلَّا لَيْبِ لَأُولَىٰ عِبْرَةً قَصَصِهِمْ فِي كَانَ لَقَدْ* to mean that “*ibrah*”/عبرة which can be attained through a process that connects between matters that can be witnessed by five basic human senses, with matters that are beyond those senses. This process can be performed by rational men (*ashhābul uqūl/ أصحاب العقول*). In other words, stories in the Qur’an provide to man the opportunity to understand matters beyond transcendental dimension in order to attain “*ibrah*”/عبرة, as expressed in the verse in the Qur’an.

Imam Muhammad bin Umar al-Razi (henceforth al-Razi) in his *Mafātīh al-Ghayb* (Mafātīh al-Ghayb) explains that there are three forms of “*ibrah*”/عبرة which can be read in the story of Prophet Yūsuf (يُوسُفَ) in the Qur’an. Firstly, Allah (اللَّهُ) has the might to elevate the position of His servants. In the story Allah (اللَّهُ) raised the Prophet’s status as a servant (after his separation from his father Prophet Yaakob (يَاكُوبَ) by his brothers) to the head of state. And thus too, according to al-Razi, Allah (اللَّهُ) lifted the status of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), in accordance with His will. Secondly, the story becomes a miracle (*mu’jizat/ معجزة*) of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) since it is about events not known to him until Allah (اللَّهُ) reveals it. Thirdly, the form that underlines the

⁴⁹ Muhammad bin Ali al-Shauqani, *Fath al-Qadīr*.

⁵⁰ Ismail bin Umar Ibnu Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*.

important characteristics of a constructive narration according to the teachings of the Qur'an. The characteristics are clear when Allah ﷻ refers to the story as “الْقَصَصِ أَحْسَنَ” *the most beautiful stories*.⁵¹

It is clear from all the above commentaries that there are lessons or “*ibrah*”/عِبْرَةٌ to be learned from the story, including advice, thoughts, reminders or warnings to mankind. The fact that “*ibrah*”/عِبْرَةٌ is a fundamental content in the story about Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ, and the story is prescribed by Allah ﷻ as “الْقَصَصِ أَحْسَنَ” (*the most beautiful stories*), clearly shows that the role of “story” according to the Qur'an is to convey lessons or “*ibrah*”/عِبْرَةٌ.

b) Not Fictional or Deception

This study also found that the *mu'tabar* commentaries provide detailed explanations of this part of the verse 12:111, which is كَانَ لَقَدْ يَدِيدُ بَيْنَ الَّذِي تَصْدِيقَ وَلَكِنْ يُفْتَرَى حَدِيثًا كَانَ مَا ۖ الْأَلْبَابِ لِأُولَىٰ عِبْرَةٍ قَصَصِهِمْ فِي translated by Pickthall as “*It is no invented story*”.⁵² Al-Qurtubi interprets this sentence to mean that the story of Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ in the Qur'an is not a fake narration. Instead it tells the truth about the content of sacred books before the Qur'an, that is, the Psalms (*Zabur*), the Torah (*Taurah*), and the Bible (*Injil*). According to al-Qurtubi, this is because Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ has also been described in these sacred books.⁵³ Al-Tabari interprets the same sentence as meaning that the story is not fictional or a deceptive narration (*yufalq*/يُخْتَلَقُ), rather it confirms the content of previous sacred books as Allah's revelations.⁵⁴ Ibn Kathir shows a similar understanding when he explains that it is impossible for the Qur'an to convey untrue or fictional content. Rather, the Qur'an affirms all previous sacred books, and denies all untruths and fictional matters.⁵⁵

According to al-Razi, stories about Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ in the Qur'an are “non-fictional” (مَا كَانَتْ هَذِهِ الْقِصَّةُ حَدِيثًا يَفْتَرَى) because similar stories had been narrated in previous sacred books, especially the

⁵¹ Muhammad bin Umar al-Razi, *Maḥāṭih al-Ghayb*.

⁵² Pickthall, *The Roman Transliteration*, 275.

⁵³ al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'an*.

⁵⁴ al-Tabari, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āya al-Qur'an*.

⁵⁵ Ibnu Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm*.

Torah, which Allah ﷻ revealed to Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام.⁵⁶ Similarly, al-Shauqani argues that stories in the Qur'an are neither fictional nor fabricated, but true stories as they were already narrated earlier in the Torah, Psalms, and the Bible.⁵⁷ With similar implications, Ibn 'Asyur asserts that the stories of previous people (before the Qur'an) are true stories (*al-khabar sidiq/ خبر صدق*) in conformity with reality (*mutabiq lilwaqi/ مطابق للواقع*). In relation to the meaning of the first sentence as previously described, Ibnu 'Asyur argues that “*ibrah*”/عبرة could not be attained by man through fictional stories or deceptions. This is because the soul of mankind does not easily perceive lessons (*لا تحتفظ به النفوس*) from fictional or deceptive stories. Such stories are considered as lacking in “*ibrah*”/عبرة to mankind. Referring to fictional stories, Ibn 'Asyur provides their examples such as superstitious supposition (*الخرافات*), stories about spirits and ghosts (*أحاديث الجن والغول*) and epics containing elements of mythology such as “Rustam and Esfandiyar” (*رستم وأسفنديار*), a Persian epic that tells stories of two legends named Rustam and Esfandiyar. Ibn 'Asyur thinks that such story is fictional and is merely for seductive fantasy (*الخيالات اللذيذة*), among which are rendered through humour (*الفكاهات*).⁵⁸

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that all the *mu'tabar* commentaries of the Qur'an referred in this study understand that the story of the Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام is true and real, and not fictional, neither fabricated nor containing deceptions. This understanding is based on the fact that similar narrations are found in the sacred books of the Psalm, the Torah, and the Bible, the authenticity of which the Qur'an confirms. These commentaries concur that fictional and fabricated stories or stories containing deceptions do not render real lessons or “*ibrah*”/عبرة beneficial to mankind. In other words, such stories are considered as incapable of offering what the verse 12:111 refers to as “moral lessons for thinking human beings” as “*ibrah li uli al-bab*” (*عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولَى الْأَبْوَابِ*).

⁵⁶ al-Razi, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*.

⁵⁷ al-Shauqai, *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr*.

⁵⁸ Muhammad al-Tahir Ibnu 'Asyur, *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr min al-Tafsīr*.

c) Guidance and Blessing to the Believers of Allah ﷻ

Other than the two sentences discussed above, most of the commentaries also discuss the final portion of verse 12:111, which is *يُؤْمِنُونَ لِقَوْمٍ وَرَحْمَةً وَهُدًى شَيْءٍ كُلِّ وَتَفْصِيلٍ*, translated by Pickthall as “...and a detailed explanation of everything, and a guidance and a mercy for folk who believe”.⁵⁹ With reference to this sentence, al-Qurtubi interprets the phrase *شَيْءٍ كُلِّ وَتَفْصِيلٍ* (*explanation of everything*) as an explanation needed by mankind about the Shari’ah (laws/regulations/code of conduct), including what is made permissible (*halal*) and forbidden (*haram*) by Allah ﷻ.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Ibn Kathir explains that the expression *شَيْءٍ كُلِّ وَتَفْصِيلٍ* bears meanings related to religion such as *halal* and *haram*, *makruh* (offensive) and *sunnah* (meritorious), deeds of devotion and obligation, prophetic messages on matters which are absolute, unseen of the future, knowledge about Allah ﷻ and how He is totally dissimilar to all beings.⁶¹ According to al-Razi, the sentence explains about two things; about Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام within the circle of his father and siblings, as well as about matters relating to Islam.⁶²

The next sentence is *يُؤْمِنُونَ لِقَوْمٍ وَرَحْمَةً وَهُدًى* which Ibn Kathir understands as referring to the soul of man who is endowed with guidance and thus free from astray, and who in fact is awarded with grace from Allah ﷻ in this world and hereafter.⁶³ With reference to the same sentence, al-Razi interprets the word *هُدًى* (*huda*) as “receiving guidance in this world”, while the phrase *يُؤْمِنُونَ لِقَوْمٍ وَرَحْمَةً* refers to the *hidayah* or guidance that begets man in his life, which gives him the reason to receive blessings from Allah ﷻ on reckoning day.⁶⁴

Ibn ‘Asyur explains that the sentence *شَيْءٍ كُلِّ صَبِيلٍ* refers to matters relating to *i’tibar* or teachings or lessons in the stories of the Qur’an. He understands the word *هُدًى* (*huda*) to mean “*‘ibrah*” or

⁵⁹ Pickthall, *The Roman Transliteration*, 275.

⁶⁰ al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*.

⁶¹ Ibnu Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*.

⁶² al-Razi, *Maḥāṭih al-Ghayb*.

⁶³ Ibnu Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*.

⁶⁴ al-Razi, *Maḥāṭih al-Ghayb*.

lessons that bring faith (*iman*) and piety (*taqwa*). To him *taqwa* is the fundamental aspect for man in obtaining success in life in this world and in the hereafter. Lastly, the expression **يُؤْمِنُونَ لِقَوْمٍ وَّرَحْمَةً** is explained by him as blessings from Allah ﷻ to those who learn lessons from the stories in the Qur'an, that keep man from astray, thus bringing them close to peace in the present life and the hereafter.

Based on the above discussion, most of the *mu'tabar* commentaries obviously describe the sentence **يُؤْمِنُونَ لِقَوْمٍ وَّرَحْمَةً** as a detailed explanation about Islam as a religion. This includes “*ibrah*”/عبرة or lessons that can be learned by Muslims from the narration about Prophet Yūsuf **الْعَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ** in the Qur'an. These lessons become a guidance or **يُؤْمِنُونَ** to those who have the faith (*iman*) and piety (*taqwa*) in performing orders from Allah ﷻ as well as abstaining from what is forbidden with the view of receiving blessings from Him.

Conclusion

This study stems from Affandi's statement that his idea of “*Knowledge-Story*” is inspired by the Qur'an. PB conceptualises this idea by contrasting “knowledge” to “story”, and maintains “story” as a tool in conveying “knowledge”. Therefore, PB puts forward the primacy of “knowledge” with “story” subordinated to it. This idea invites further examinations, especially to understand the role and position of “story” from the Islamic perspective. This study focuses on the Qur'anic verse 12:111, which among others describes the role and position of stories narrated in the Qur'an. A close reading of the six selected *mu'tabar* commentaries of the Qur'an reveals that the verse offers a fundamental understanding of the role and position of stories from the Islamic perspective. The majority of the commentaries concur that stories in the Qur'an comprise “*ibrah*”/عبرة or lessons which also contain advice, thoughts, reminders or warnings to mankind. Most commentaries also regard the story of Prophet Yūsuf **الْعَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ** in the Qur'an as not fictional, neither fabricated nor containing deceptions; rather, it is a true story based on real events. “*ibrah*”/عبرة thus understood may serve as a source of guidance (**يُؤْمِنُونَ**) to mankind and blessings (*rahmah*) from Allah ﷻ to guarantee success (*al-falah*) in the present life and the hereafter.

Also discussed was how PB emerged as a literary notion that conceptualises the role of “story” in conveying “true knowledge” as understood in Islam. This “true knowledge” would enable man to understand and differentiate clearly between good and evil. With this understanding, man would be able to make the right choice (*ikhtiyar*) in his every action and finally to perform good deeds and avoid evil deeds (*amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar*). In other words, “true knowledge” is man’s starting point in becoming a good servant of Allah. It is in this context that stories in the Islamic perspectives are viewed as a tool to convey “true knowledge”; in other words, as an “*ibrah*”/عبرة or lessons mentioned in the Qur’an that are explained in the *mu'tabar* commentaries referred in this study. In this sense that the PB idea of “*Knowledge-Story*” is said to be synchronised with the teachings of Islam.

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ب	پ	پ	ز	ز	ز	ز	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	ب	ب	ب	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	پ	پ	پ	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	ت	ت	ت	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ž	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh	—	—	—	—	—
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

¹ – when not final

² – at in construct state

³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)
	و	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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