CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF JOSEPH: ITS LANGUAGE

There are a number of stories that might form the basis of a case study to explore this topic. Our poem telling the story of Joseph, by reason of its length and unitary structure, is an ideal example. It is carried by a mix of report and dialogue.

The story is set out in episodes, in order to give a shape and focus to this approach: The story which is told in our poem and the Qur'an takes the form of dialogue which normally is notoriously difficult to transfer from one language to another. Such a dialogue in our poem, of course, partakes of the Qur'anic style and diction.

The emphasis will be on the syntax of our poem. The classical and colloquial Arabic exemplified in the dialogues that have so important a function in carrying the plan of episodes the poem presents. The poem manifests what the characters say to each other and the language suggests how they say it and how they respond to each other. It should be noted here, that the notions of spoken utterance and 'written Arabic' are complementary and not mutually exclusive.
Alongside the narrator, there are no less than seventeen speaking parts. In order of appearance, these are: Joseph, Jacob, Joseph's brothers, (their elder (Reuben or Judah)), the water-drawer, al-Aziz (the governor of Egypt), his wife (Zulaykha), the witness, the women of the city, the two prisoners (the Butler and the Baker), the King, his ministers and the Crier (who denounces the brothers as thieves). Significantly, only two of these are identified by name of Jacob and of Joseph.

The poem's episodic method is based on the recognition that the presentation of the story is dramatic. By removing the dialogues from the report settings in which they occur, which are given in summary form, they can be considered independently, thus highlighting their status as dialogue.

As far as the English renderings are concerned, it must be stressed that even in cases where they express adequately the prose sense of the Arabic words, the resonantal penumbra, of the Arabic is missing in part, because the poem derives from the Qur'an as a whole.

**Episode I Joseph's Dream LL)24-33) verses (4-5)**

24. As he slept a pleasant smile showed on his countenance; it was as though, as a bringer of good tidings he had attained his aim.

25. Jacob, the Prophet, wondered at his laughing, *and a matter of great import came into his mind.
26. Jacob said to him: "Thy face is laughing, and giving glad tidings of the Divine; what has happened, Joseph?

27. He replied: "It is a vision I have seen; it tells of something which must be proclaimed and spread abroad!"

28. Jacob said: "What hast thou seen? Do thou relate the vision to me truthfully!"

29. He replied: 'I saw glittering stars - I counted them: there were eleven;

30. "I saw them prostrating themselves before me, all of them, and the sun and the moon joined them in this".

31. Jacob said to him: 'This vision of thine contains a prophecy, O Joseph, which has appeared to me'.

32. Conceal it from your brothers; tell them nothing about it; never reveal it to man or woman.

33. *Do not relate the vision to anyone; keep thy secret and cleave to caution.

The same idea appears in the Qur'an, verses (4-5)

Joseph: My father, I saw eleven stars, and the sun and moon. I saw them bow down before me.

Jacob: My dear son, do not tell your dream to your brothers, for they will plot against you. Satan is a self-declared enemy to man! In this way your Lord is choosing you.
He will teach you the interpretation of dreams and make perfect his blessing upon you, as in former times he made it perfect upon your two forefathers Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is indeed All-Knowing, all Wise.

Stylistically Joseph's words are matter of fact and in low-key. There may be discerned in Jacob's response, on the other hand, the tones of a father addressing a child. But there is something more. His speech is longer than that of Joseph. In addition, the syntactic units of which it is composed are significantly longer than those of Joseph's utterance, and the pace is measured. Form as well as content combine to engender a certain calm and remoteness in his speech and give it a solemnity that sets it in what may be called the prophetic mode.

**Episode II: The brothers are jealous and make their plot**
(lines 40-49, verses 8-10).

40. Do you not see Jacob your father showing him devotion and favour, while you do not receive a glance?

41. [Do you not see that] Joseph is conceited and that you are [made] abject.

42. If he were not occupied with him he would give his attention to you, in the evening and at morning light.

43. Is this not so? Therefore kill him, that your father's face may be clear for you, and that you may be in his eyes that most upright of men.

44. Or else cast him away in the midst of a desert place, far from human habitation, in the narrowest of holes.
45. Then Judah said "This would be an enormity. There is no more serious offence than taking a life,

46. Especially that of a prophet of God, and the son of a prophet, and whoever kills a just person unjustly becomes an infidel.

47. They replied: 'We have to strike him down; in spite of any opposition you may offer!

48. *He replied to them: If you have to do [this] then throw him into a well with water in it!

49. His Lord will do with him as He wishes; If it is His will. He will save him; if not he will be drowned in it.

The same course of action is narrated by the Qur'an (verses 8-10)

The brothers
(in chorus): Joseph and his brother are more loved of our father than are we, even though we are many.
Our father is clearly in the wrong.

One voice: Kill Joseph!
Or get rid of him to some other land so that your father's countenance will be for you alone.
After that, live virtuously.

Another voice: Do not kill Joseph!
Throw him deep into the well.
Some caravan or other will pick him up if you do this.

This episode is structured by three reference points. The first part is the brothers’ speaking in chorus, expressing their jealousy of Joseph, and their complaint at their father's folly. This chorus may be heard in two ways: one, the brothers speaking in unison; the other, the brothers encouraging each other
in their hatred as they indulge in their malice by repeating the words to each other. Attention will be drawn to a similar feature of the women speaking in chorus. It appears in poetry (lines 174-177) and in the Qur'an (verse 30).

The second reference point is the solo voice of one brother saying 'Kill Joseph!' and the third solo voice that of another brother saying 'Don't kill Joseph!'.

Razi (рез) on the other hand regards these words as uttered by an individual: either by one of the brothers, or by a stranger to whom the brothers put their problem, and who gave this advice 'Kill Joseph'. The views differ because the text is heard differently. 

Equally important, however, for the concerns of this study is the difference between the brothers' speech style and that of Joseph or Jacob. The sub-units of their utterances are briefer than those of either of the other two. Their selfishness and jealousy are expressed with a brutal directness that finds its cynical apogee in the words 'After that, live virtuously'. Razi brings this out in the first of three possible interpretations of their words that he offers: they were aware that what they had decided on was a grave sin, and so they said: 'when we have done this we will turn back to God, and live as righteous people' (line 43, verse 10).
The brothers make their plot (line 61-81, verses 12-15)

61. They came to their father, setting snares for Joseph, and the Truthful One was not aware of what was happening.

71. So send thou him tomorrow, if thou wilt, to play and disport himself in the wilderness and enjoy its scenes.

78. *It would grieve me for you to take him away and for a wolf to eat him, and I would be the one who suffered [the greatest] loss.

81. His children said to him: 'we are a band of men: would a wolf then be able to devour him? Verily we should [then suffer the greatest] loss.

The Qur'an Verses (12-15)

Father, what is it with you that you don't trust us with Joseph?
We treat him well.
Send him with us tomorrow,
let him amuse himself, let him play games.
We will be good guardians of him.

Jacob: That you should take him with you troubles me. I fear that the wolf may devour him
While you neglect him.

The brothers: If the wolf devours him we - being as many as we are - would be weaklings.

Here, the contrast between the speech style of Jacob and that of his ten sons is again clearly manifested. As in the previous episode, the brothers speak, either in unison, or in turn, each importuning their father with the same words. Their utterances are marked by the same brevity of their constituent syntactic units noted in episode II. Further, it is not difficult to detect a
whining tone implicit in their complaint to their father, 'Father what is it with you that you don't trust us with Joseph?' Indeed, a skilful reader could by intonation and timing suggest their evil intent and the insincerity implicit in their words.

Jacob's words, on the other hand, are consistent with his dignity and prophetic role. He is an elder, a prophet, a man who is to do a grievous wrong, but is powerless to intervene as events take their course and knowing that Joseph is going to succeed him in the lineage of prophecy. It is fitting that his style of utterance should contrast with that of his sons. The solemnity that marked his words to Joseph is present here, too, and is heightened by the inversion in the main clause, 'That you should take him with you grieves me, I fear the wolf may devour him while you neglect him'.

The words *nasihun* (ناصحتون) and *hafizun* (هافذتون) (well keepers) deserve attention. They present two elements of the argument as to why Jacob should allow Joseph to go with them. Their question, 'Why don't you trust us with Joseph?' and their plea, 'Why don't you send him with us?', are in straightforward language and add to the utterances a solemn standard character, which contrasts with the restless and rapid movement of their other words. Now the plot is fulfilled and Joseph has been thrown into the well.

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1 Qur'anic Presentation of Joseph story by A.H. Johns, 1993, p. 43.
(lines 108-110, Verse 16). A revelation is made to him,

108. He said to him: 'Be assured and confident, and be patient; he who is patient, by God, cannot fail.

109. Thou wilt leave it safe and sound, at the hands of people heading for Egypt,

110. And thou shalt possess them as slaves, and rule the land, and thou shalt wear a crown with dignity and respect.

Qur'an, Verse (16) You will tell them of this deed of theirs when they least expect it.

Baydawi offers two meanings for the last phrase, one looking to the future 'at a time when they do not realise who you are', or referring to the present 'they do not realise that you are receiving this revelation'. Both show a delicate irony.

**Episode III: The brothers have returned to their father without Joseph with a false story, (lines 121-128, verses 18-19).**

121. We left our brother looking after our belongings whilst we went to run races, and Fate overrides caution.

122. We forgot him because our shepherding distracted us from him. O what a fateful chance, like sable night!

123. When we bethought ourselves of him we went back in dire alarm, but we found nothing save some scattered flesh.
124. Thou wilt not believe us, even though our sincerity be as obvious and clear as the light of the sun in summer.

128. So Jacob said to them: 'Nay, your souls have induced you to do something; but one must be patient under the blows of Fate.

The Qur'an, Verse (18)

The brothers: Father, we went racing each other. We left Joseph with our belongings so the wolf was able to devour him. Yet you don't believe us! Even when we speak the truth.

Verse (19)

Jacob: Rather your passions have led you to this pass. So gracious patience [is my sole recourse]. It is of God I must ask aid in face of what you tell me.

The brothers' words, as in their previous utterances, are composed of short syntactic units, and move rapidly like the report of a series of events in a simple action chain. This hurried flow of their words reflects their guilty consciences. Their dishonesty is highlighted by the tone of Jacob's reply, again exemplifying his prophetic mode of speech. The thoughts that pass through his mind could not be expressed more succinctly, and it is difficult to exaggerate the controlled dignity of his words.
The use of this rhetorical device is highly effective. By it, their complaint that Jacob does not believe them is made twice: once, explicitly, and a second time implicitly, and in their words may be heard the same whining tone mentioned earlier.

**Episode IV: (lines 154-164, Verses 20-21): Joseph's Rescue**

*Joseph is found in the well by a Caravan; he is taken to Egypt.*

154. The generous God by His grace
     Made use of a caravan of merchants engaged in commerce.

155. They had come from afar, urging their camels,
     riding hard on their bare-backed beasts.

156. They dismounted near Joseph's pit,
     wishing to get water because of their thirst and the heat.

157. They sent Bushra with the bucket to get water for them, and he made ready, tucking the skirts of his cloak behind him.

158. Bushra let down his bucket, marveling at the light which could be seen, and the pleasant odour which suffused the desert air.

159. When the bucket had settled in the water and was full, the handsome Joseph clung on to it and held on.
160. Bashshar felt him and found him making [the bucket] heavy, *and he braced himself with vigour, and pulled.

161. When the handsome Joseph appeared, coming up [from the pit], Bashshar caught sight of him and delightedly called out:

162. 'O Bushra, this is a youth who has appeared, with a face like the full moon!

163. They took him with them, as he was the most valuable kind of merchandise, more valuable than a treasure filled with pearls.

The Qur'an, Verse 20: The water drawer
What a luck! Here is a young man and was concealed as a treasure

Joseph was sold to Potiphar in Egypt and Potiphar spoke to his wife Zulaykhah. He said, (Qur'an, verse 21).

Make his position with us one of honour
Perhaps he may be of use to us
Or let us adopt him as a son.

This act is brief, although it contains a critical part of the story, the transference of Joseph from Canaan to Egypt. It is carried by report interrupted by only two utterances. The expression 'What luck' (Ya bushra) in line 162 is striking for what appears to be its spontaneous character. It could well be a common expression of surprise and pleasure.
Episode V: Attempted seduction by Zulaykhah and later the other women, (lines 168-173, verses 24-30).

This episode tells how Zulaykhah locked the doors of the room to prevent Joseph's escape; (Some lines of the poem are missing here, therefore Qur'an is quoted in full) (verse 24-30). But Joseph, strengthened against her attempt of seduction by a vision, flees from her, and runs to the door. She pursues him, catching hold of him and tearing his garment from behind. As he reaches the door, he finds himself face to face with her husband. One of her kin said (lines 168-173).

168. If his shirt is torn behind thou hast told a lie and the wickedness (of the deed) will have been made plain by this.

169. When he saw that it had been torn from behind, the truth shone plain and clear like the morning.

170. He said to her: Women are wicked, and reject the doing of good, and love, and friendship.

171. Wouldst thou impugn an innocent person through what thou hast done? Thy condemnation for slander and sin has been established.

172. It is surely a piece of your intrigue; it is a monstrous intrigue! Thus God has stated.

173. 'O Joseph, shun the deeds of this [woman], and ask thou forgiveness for thy sin; perhaps it will be forgiven'.
Verse (28)

Joseph: She tried to seduce me.

The Witness: If his garment is torn in front, she has spoken the truth and he is lying. If his garment is torn from the back, he has spoken the truth and she is lying.

Verse (29-30)

Potiphar: This comes of your guile! Your guile is enormous! You, Joseph, disregard this [matter]. You, [Woman] ask God's forgiveness for your sins. You are a grievous sinner.

Zulaykha's words reflect the confusion with which she speaks. As Razi points out, they are logically inconsistent, in a way that reveals her guilt. In other words, the way in which she expresses herself reflects her moral disposition. In contrast with her tangled utterance, Joseph's response is simple and concise.

From a dramatic point of view, the words of the Witness are elegantly structured and have an exquisite internal balance appropriate to the function of his words as a fulcrum between the accusation of Zulaykha and the situation that confronts her husband. Potiphar's response is brief. But this brevity is distinct from that of the utterances of Joseph's brothers. His words have the tone of a man used to the exercise of authority and at the same time are expressive of his indignation.
Verse (24):

And she in whose house he was sold, tried to seduce him against his will and she locked the door and said "Now Come". He said, "I seek refuge in Allah. He is my lord, he has made my stay with you honourable, verily wrong doers never prosper".

Verse (25):

And she made up her mind to have him and he made up his mind to resist her, as he had seen the manifest sign of his lord, so to turn away from him all evil and indecency.

Verse (26):

And they both raced to the door and she tore his shirt from behind, and they found her lord at the door. She said,

Verse (27)

Zulaykha: What should the requital be for one who intends harm to a member of your household, [what] other than he be imprisoned, or [subjected to] a painful punishment?
Episode VI: (lines 174-177, verse 31). The women of the city gossiping,

174. Women in the city blamed her
for her deed, for talk about her had spread.

175. These were women from among the notables of her people: *[people] of lineage, not people to be disdained.

176. They said: 'Zulaykha is wise;
can what they say of her be true? What extraordinary news!

177. She has been smitten with love for her young man;
She is attempting to seduce him for himself, but he holds back'.

This appears in the Qur'an in verse (31)

The Women (in chorus):
The wife of the governor longs to lie
with her slave.
He has pierced her heart with love
We see her in evident error.

Formally, the women appear to be speaking in unison, yet the significance suggested by the context is that they are repeating to each other the scandal of Zulaykha's infatuation with her servant. The words can be expanded to communicate something like the following: they mention the fact that she longs to lie with him; they embroider it by adding, 'He has pierced her heart with love'; they pass judgement on her, 'We see her in evident error'. While the phrase fi dalal'ain mubin is appropriate to the context, it is also used by the
brothers of their father Jacob in (line 40, verse 8). This is a neat, ironical touch, for as applied to Jacob the words are false, but applied to her they are true. A little reflection shows the acuity of the words and the realistic manner in which the women's response to the situation is suggested as they discuss the shocking fact, and indulge their judgmental attitudes. When Zulaykha heard of their sly whispering she sent for the women and prepared for them a repast and gave every one of them a knife and said to Joseph to come forth for them

Zulaykha Plans to shows Joseph to the women to justify herself

194. She said to him: 'Go out to them, Joseph, and ask them to give you citron and dates to eat'.

195. So he came, like a full moon appearing over the horizon of the heavens; he had a presence which captivated hearts when he proudly walked.

196. When they beheld him they quite lost their senses: they could understand neither an odd nor an even number.

197. They admired him so much it was as though they thought of him as a young angel, not as a human being.

198. 'They were astonished, gazing at him, and they cut their hands through extreme perplexity.

199. Zulaykha laughed at their action: they were drunk, and had not recovered from their inebriety.
200. She said to them: 'Gently with yourselves!
   Do not cut your hands, but cast down your eyes!

201. For this man is the one for whose sake you blamed me previously; the matter was indeed as he described.

202. But he resisted temptation: but if he will not obey me I shall have him thrown into prison, where he shall taste adversity.

203. She said to them: 'If you intercede for me with him he may relent if he does but glance at me'.

204. So they came to him; every one inviting his attention for herself, not for any other.

205. He said: 'I swear by God: They were one; now they have become many. How can I escape from them?

206. He prayed, and God answered his prayer,
   Verily he answers the prayer of the oppressed man when harm comes to him.

The Qur'an, This appears in (Verse 32-34)

Verse (32): When Zulaykha heard of their sly whispering she sent for the women and prepared for them a repast and gave every one of them a knife and said to Joseph to come forth for them.
The Women (in chorus reacting to the sight of Joseph):
Verse (32) By God above!
This is no human being,
He can only be a gracious angel.

Zulaykha: So there you are!
The one for whom you found fault with me!
I tried to make him lie with me
yet he remained steadfast.
If now he does not do what I command him,
let him be a thing of contempt.

Verse (34)
Joseph: My Lord, prison is dearer to me
than that to which they tempt me.
If you do not turn aside from me their guile,
I will incline to their blandishments,
and I will be as one ignorant [of right and wrong].

The women's chorus in reaction to the sight of Joseph is antithetic to their
gossiping before they had seen him. Now they are singing in unison the praises
of his beauty. Zulaykha regards herself as justified in her passion for him by
their response. She has no shame. She speaks with malice. If she does not get
what she wants, she will harm him. She shows herself implacable.
Episode VII: Joseph in Prison: He speaks with his two fellow prisoners (lines 268-287, verses 36-42-43).

268. Two young men entered the prison where Joseph was: they were the baker and the butler, as [the story] relates.

269. They shared his company for a time, and in their company he showed them wonders by which he delighted them.

270. He interpreted the visions of those who saw them in their sleep, and they came true, translated into reality.

271. The young butler slept and saw a vision from which he quickly awoke in fear.

272. He told him that he had seen three bunches of grapes which he had pressed.

273. "Their colour was white and red and black; he trod them into wine, which immediately fermented.

274. He said to him: 'Thou shalt remain in thy prison three days, and wilt then go forth happy.

275. Thou shalt rise in favour by being at the side of thy lord as a wine butler, wherever he is.

276. The young baker also said: I have seen a vision which [calls forth] tears when one ponders it.
277. I saw three ovens filled with
loaves of bread, and the yeast had risen,

278. And I was carrying them on my head,
while people were gazing at me.

279. The birds of the air descended upon it and ate of it as much as they
wished, and flew away.

280. He said to him" 'Thou shalt remain in thy prison
*three days, and shalt [then] go forth reviled,

281. And shalt be crucified on the trunk of a palm-tree, high up, and the birds
of the air shall eat of thee when they peck.

282. He replied: 'I have not committed any offence and I am indeed afflicted
by its injustice; Fate has so decreed'.

283. To the one who was to be saved he said: 'Be thou mindful, and do not
forget the Lord'. But the friend by then had become lukewarm.

286. The butler had forgotten Joseph's charge to him, through Fate and
Predestination.

287. He remained a prisoner, and stayed in prison for some [time] - and
'some' means between seven and ten.
And with him here entered the prison two young men. One of them said, “I see myself in the dream pressing wine” and the other said, “I see myself in the dream carrying upon head bread of which the birds are eating. Inform us of the interpretation there of for we see thee to be of the righteous”.

Verse (42):

“O my two companion of the prison! As for one of you he will pour out wine for his lord to drink and as for the other he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head. The matter about which you inquired has been decreed”.

Verse (43):

And of the two he said to him, whom he thought to be the one who would be released, “mention me to thy lord”. But Satan caused him to forget mentioning it to his lord, so he remained in prison for some years.

In this scene, each prisoner speaks individually, relating the content of his dream, then they address Joseph in unison, asking him the meaning of their dreams. The presentation of the scene is thus carried by the same alternating use of solo and chorus utterances as has been noted earlier.
It is in answer to their questions that Joseph makes his first prophetic statement. It is a solemn speech, moving with weight and dignity, as Joseph sets himself in the prophetic line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, making clear that his ability to interpret dreams derives directly from the recognition that God is One (verses 38-40).

But there is another point. Joseph's speech is not directed exclusively at the two fellow prisoners within the story. He addresses them in the dual (verse 42) but as he makes his points, he addresses a wider audience, and the verbs are in the plural form. The plurality includes not simply the prisoners and their associates, but the unbelieving, ungrateful ones in any society to whom and for whose benefit, the story is being recited. Joseph's interpretation of their dreams, concludes, "The outcome of what you asked me is decreed".

Episode VIII: Pharaoh's Dream, (lines 298-399, verses 44-45).

298. It seemed to me as though I were sitting on a bank of the Nile in a meadow which was brilliantly green.

299. I looked towards the blessed Nile; its waves lapped against each other, and its current brought something up,

300. Its waves stood still and parted and cast on to the land, seven fat kine.
301. They were fine and well-formed and their colour was of an extreme red.

302. They were filled with fat and meat and milk, and their udders were replete [and distended as] the full moon.

303. "[Then] seven thin, emaciated, empty [ones appeared] and their eyes were blue, tending to yellowness.

304. Their snouts were like a dog's, ugly; their colour was dusty, and lack of food had exhausted them,

305. They ate up all of those fat [kine] and they spared nothing of their backs and bellies.

306. And afterwards appeared even cars filled with grain, which were green and fresh,

307. And [I also saw] seven dry ears twisted around them, strangling them, having no greenness in them.

308. They had all become dry and withered, and resembled the colour of pitch, being utterly black.

309. So expound to me, O counsellors, this vision of mine, if any of you are able to interpret it.
Qur'an

The King: I saw seven fat cattle with seven thin ones devouring them, and seven green ears of corn, with another seven dry ones (devouring them). Ministers, tell me the meaning [of my dream] if you are able to give the meaning of dreams. The king's minister being unable to interpret the dream they said (line 314) and in order to justify their failure in (line 319).

(lines 314, 319 and 322). The counsellors, are perplexed and want to justify their failure. They said.

314. We have been thrown into a sea of which we can discern no shore.

319. This is no true vision, but merely a confused dream, which has no interpretation.

Verse (45)

The Ministers: They are confused dreams. We are not of those who understand the meaning of dreams.

322. The one who had been in prison, but who had been released, said when he remembered: “I will inform you of the interpretation of this”.

Verse (46)

The Butler imprisoned with Joseph: I'm the one who can tell you the meaning of it, so send me (to Joseph).
The scene is brief and moves briskly. The King's account of his dreams is succinct: not a word is wasted, or could be omitted. Having told his dream, the King puts his questions. His ministers respond with directness and simplicity. The Butler, without standing on ceremony, claims to be able to establish the meaning of the dreams. In itself the scene depends for its effectiveness on the way in which the King's question and his ministers' answers are heard. Superficially, the King's question appears to lack any weight or dignity, the ministers' reply lacks any formal sign of respect for the ruler. But this very simplicity contributes to the relation of this scene to those following and which culminate in Joseph appearing before the King and accepting viceregency of the realm.

Episode IX: The King order the Butler to go and bring Joseph to him. Butler with Joseph, (lines 326-331, verse 47).

326. The King said: 'Fetch' him without delay, for in an interrogation shall the man be tried and tested!

327. Thus spoke the butler when he remembered, being filled with shame at forgetting that with which (Joseph) had previously charged him.

328. When he knocked upon his door he came with haste, and a smile (appeared) on his lips when he saw him.

329. He said to him: A hearty welcome to one who has come to ask me about the seven.
330. Fat kine and the seven thin ones with them, which ate those fat ones, leaving none behind.

331. And about the seven full ears of corn, and then another seven withered ears.

The Qur'an, Verse (47)

The Butler: Joseph, man of truth, explain to us the meaning of the seven fat cattle and the seven thin ones devouring them, and the seven green ears, and another seven dry ones [devouring them], so that I can return to the people, and they understand what the dreams mean.

Episode X: The King's Vision Interpretation by Joseph (lines 332-346, Verses 48-50).

332. Their interpretation is: fruitful years shall come, their number being seven: God has thus spoken.

333. [These years shall be] full of prosperity, provisions and mercy, and the grass of the land shall be illuminated by flowers.

334. The Nile shall be in full flood from bank to bank, and the eyes of the clouds shall pour forth an abundance of rain.

335. The tillers of the land shall be assured of water in their plough-land; there shall be no part of it which the blessed Nile does not cover and inundate.
336. They shall strive to sow it all, and they shall not leave a span of earth fallow.

337. They shall build a spacious building for storage in every region, with sturdy walls.

338. After that shall come very barren years of drought, having no good in them.

339. They will be seven in number, and harsh, and will eat up the provisions you have planted.

340. The springs of water will overflow from every source, *and during that time the land will be overwhelmed, so that the sower shall lose [his crops].

341. The palm-trees will be overwhelmed during that time, so that even the females will be changed to males, and the fruit will be spoiled.

342. The prices of food will soar, and when prices soar rapacity will come.

343. Winds with no good in them will blow, and most of the evil people will perish in the destruction.

344. So in these seven fruitful [years] there should be stored up enough for the seven others that will follow them.
345. It should be stored in the husk and the ear, and in this way it will be preserved for the beasts in the [time of] want.

346. So the butler came to him and told him what Joseph had said to him: and he was amazed and astounded.

The Qur'an, Verse (48-50)

Joseph:

You are to sow for seven years as usual, but what you harvest, leave in the ear, except for the little that you are to eat [during those years]. After that will come seven hard years that will devour what you have prepared for them, except for the little that you have stored. But then will come a year when people will have plenty, and in which they will press [again wine and oil].

The butler later returns to the King to tell him the interpretation of the dreams. The King orders Joseph to be brought to him. The butler goes back to Joseph with the king's summons, but Joseph is not yet ready to obey.

line 347. He said to him: 'Arise quickly and bring him to me: I shall give him the choice between being a prince and a minister.

Verse (51)

The King
(to the Butler): Bring him to me
Joseph (having heard the King's order from the Butler) He said: Return to your master, and ask him, 'How about the women who cut their fingers?' My Lord knows all their cunning.
line 352-359. The butler has returned to the King with Joseph's request that this question be put to the women.

**Episode X: Women's investigation and their confession (lines 352-359, Verses 51-52)**

352. 'Return to thy lord and ask him about the women who cut their hands in awed astonishment.

354. Al-Rayyan sent to fetch the women, and spoke to them words of rebuke.

355. He said to them: 'What is your concern with Joseph? You desired him for himself when he was in captivity!

356. They replied: 'God forbid! By God, he is innocent of disgrace and abomination and impurity.

357. [He is] chaste and clean as mother-of-pearl. By God, we have not been aware of any sin that could be imputed to him.

358. Zulaykha said (she was the wife of their prince): 'The clear truth has become evident and has been noised abroad.

359. Indeed I tried to seduce him, but he was sincere in what he said; and the matter was as stated.
The Qur'an, Verse (52)

**The King (addressing the women):** How about the occasion when you attempted to seduce Joseph?

**The women:** By God above! We know no evil of him.

**Zulaykha:** Now the truth has been established. I did attempt to seduce him. He is a truthful person.

The butler has returned again to Joseph, still in prison, and informed him of the women's confession.

**Verse (53)**

**Joseph:** Let him know that I have not betrayed him in his absence; God does not guide the one who betrays or is faithless.

**Joseph:** This is that her husband may know that I was not unfaithful to him in his absence, and that God does not guide the guile of those who try to deceive. I make no excuses for myself: the passionate self bids to evil all except those to whom my Lord is merciful. My Lord is forgiving, merciful.

This scene although set here in different locations needs to be taken together. They exemplify a remarkably effective technique of story-telling. The butler makes no less than three visits to Joseph in prison and Joseph sends him back three times before he deigns to come out of prison himself. When he does come, it is on his own terms. The economy of presentation is striking. The communication between Joseph and the King is as much by what is not said as by what is said. The butler indeed related the King's dream to Joseph in the same words as the King told it, but his repetition of Joseph's answer to the King
is not stated. When he comes back to Joseph with the King's order 'Bring him to me', his communication of this order is understood; his relaying of Joseph's request to the King is not stated, but the King's putting of Joseph's question to the women is! This kind of compression will be noted elsewhere in the story also. The women's words in response to this question are not repeated, but from Joseph's response, it is understood that they have been repeated to him.

The narrative is carried not simply by a dialogue between two individuals, but by an intermediary who goes to and fro from one to the other carrying their words which are not repeated. By the use of this device, the story is carried forward in a number of important respects: Pharaoh's dreams are interpreted; the women confess their wrong-doing and, in admitting their guilt, utter the same formula as they did when he was first displayed to them, and they were spell-bound by his beauty: 'By God above! (hasha li'llah) (God's Forbid) - and as they do so the device of solo and unison voices is used again: Joseph, on hearing this, justifies his action in putting his question to the women and is magnanimous in being thus vindicated. At the same time, it has the dramatic function of delaying Joseph's appearance in the King's presence, and thus serves to create dramatic tension and to ensure that this is a major climax in the story.
Due to missing lines from the poem in the coming episode Qur'an will be mainly quoted, verses (59-68). When famine befell Egypt the brothers of Joseph came from canaan to Egypt to buy corn (verses 59-68).

59. They presented themselves to him, he knew them, but they recognise him not. When he provided them with their provision, he said to them.

60. “Bring to me your brother on your father side and added”.

61. “If you don’t bring him to me, there shall be no measure of corn for you from me nor you shall come near me”.

62. They replied, “we will try to induce his father to part with him we will certainly do”.

63. When they return to their father, they said, “no further measure of corn will be given to us until we bring our brother, so we can obtain our measure and we will surely be able to take care of him”.

65. Jacob said, “can I trust you with him except to the same result as when I trusted you with his brother Joseph before”? When they unpacked their goods they found their money return to them. They said, “O our father what more can we desire? Here is our money return to us, we shall bring provision for our family, and guard our brother and we shall have an extra measure of a camel-load. That is a measure which is easy to obtain”.

67. He said, “I will not send him with you until you give a solemn promise in the name of Allah”. When they had given him their solemn promise he said;
"Allah Watches over what we say", so before they return to Egypt their father asked them "O my sons, enter not by one gate, but enter by different gates". That there was a desire in Jacob's mind which he thus satisfied. Surely, he was possessed of great knowledge God taught him, but most men know not.

The brothers came back again to Egypt accompanied by Joseph's young brother Benjamin and visited Joseph who lodged his brothers with himself and he said to him, "I am your brother, now no grieve at what they have been doing".

**Episode XI: Brothers on their way back to Canaan; they were accused of Robbery, (lines 395-402, verses 71-78). They were followed by Joseph's men and one of them stop the Caravan.**

395. He shouted, calling to them, and hailed them, saying: 'O caravan, with your howdahs'!

396. By God, your falsehood has become plain to your messengers. You are robbers and thieves, and some of you are perfidious!

397. He alarmed the camel-driver as they were setting off. and it brought them to a standstill when he cried out.

398. He said to them: 'What is it that you have lost? They replied' 'A goblet, which we cannot find',

399. And the one who shall produce it shall have a camel-load of pure wheat.
400. They replied: 'From a family such as ours no cheats and robbers have come, nor anyone who deceives and misleads.

401. We did not come into the world to cause public depravity, *nor to tear aside the veils of sacred things which God has veiled!*

402. [God] says to the speaker: Verily his punishment shall be thus; we shall requite the wrongdoers, as He has mentioned.

The Qur'an, Verse (71-72)

When Joseph had given them their provision he put the drinking cup in his younger brother's saddle bag. Then a crier cried, "O you men of the Caravan you are surely thieves". They replied "what is it that you are missing"? The crier said, "we miss the king's measure-vessel and who so brings it shall have a camel load of corn". The crier and his men started searching.

**The Crier:**
Verse (73) Whoever returns it will have a camel load of grain, I guarantee this!

**The Brothers (in chorus):**
Verse (74) By God, you know that we did not come to this land to do wrong, and that we are not thieves.

**The Crier (in chorus):**
Verse (75) What should be the punishment of the thief if you lie?

**The Brothers (in chorus):**
Verse (76) The punishment of the one in whose pack it is found is himself.
This is the way we punish wrong-doers!

When they found the cup in Benjamin’s saddle-bag. Joseph was able to detain him.

Verse (78)

And the brother said, “if he has stolen, a brother of his had committed a theft before” but Joseph kept it secret to himself. He simply said, “you are in a worst condition and Allah knows best of what you allege”.

Verse (81)

When the brothers were dispaired of Joseph to give them back Benjamin, they retired conferring together in private, and knowing that their father has taken from them a solemn pledge in the name of Allah put them in a very critical situation. Their senior brother said, “I will stay here in Egypt and I will not go back with you as I feel that I have failed in my duty, unless my father permits me or Allah decides”. He said to his brothers, “go back to your father and tell him that your son committed a theft and we have stated only what we know and we could not be guardians over the unseen”. The brothers came back to their father and told him the story and said to him that you can ask we are speaking the truth. Jacob replied, “your minds have established to you an evil thing. So now there is nothing left for me but goodly patience, May Allah bring them all to me. For he is the all knowing, the wise”. Jacob turned away from them and said "O my grief to Joseph" and his eyes were filled with tears but he was
suppressing his sorrow. The brothers said by God you are still in your old preoccupation.

This scene provides another example of the alternation of solo and chorus voices. The Crier, leading the pursuers, calls out alone; the brothers reply to him in chorus; the pursuers then shout in chorus, 'We miss the King's cup!' followed by the solo voice of the crier, 'Whoever returns it will have a camel-load of grain, I guarantee this'. This dramatic change from chorus to a solo voice within one verse, clearly signalled by the shift from a third person plural verb, to a first person singular pronoun, suggest the swift sequence of events and the confusion and tension that attend the scene, a tension arising from the suddenness with which the crier appears, and the directness of his language. The brothers' words have a significant element of irony. They are neither aware that the man beside them is the one they say has stolen, nor that he knows who they are and what they have done. There is also a grim irony in Joseph's 'soliloquy': You are in a worse situation ...'.

The device of Joseph soliloquizing at this point in the story in response to the brothers' explanation as to why Benjamin might have stolen something deserves reflection. The previous 'soliloquy' was of emotional intensity as Joseph yearns to be reunited with his brothers. This occasion too, as he reflects on the wrong they have done him, is one of aching longing.
The brothers in the face of Joseph's silence are more pregnant because, all of them know what he is thinking, they do not - make a direct appeal to him. They ask him to take one of them in Benjamin's place, because 'He has a father advanced in years'. The offer is simply expressed and moving. It is a key utterance in the unfolding of the story because it demonstrates that they have learnt their lesson. Joseph, however, responds by again assuming his persona of severity, refusing to accept any substitute for Benjamin and insisting that he judges them according to what they said was their law.

**Jacob:**

My unbearable grief and pain I share with God

Verse (87) alone for I know from him what you do not know.

Verse (88) My sons, go and search out Joseph and his brother and do not despair of the kindness of God, only unbelievers despair of the kindness of God.

We note the use of another linguistic technique - sympathetic. He tells his younger siblings to return to Canaan, and instructs them, 'Return to your father and say ... '. Without any explicit signal to indicate change of location, the siblings are back in Canaan telling their father what has happened. This syncopation of real time into narrative time is an oral technique and its effectiveness depends upon the projection of the oral delivery: again we have to do with the way in which the quranic words are heard. From a dramatic point of view, the device is strikingly effective.
The brothers' violent outburst against their father, 'By God, you will not cease speaking of Joseph until you have wasted away and died', in reaction to his expression of grief, has a psychological explanation. Before they left Egypt, their senior had reminded them of the wrong they had done to Joseph. It is prompted by their sense of guilt.

Jacob's final speech, which has reverted to the prophetic mode after his outburst of grief, is deeply moving. It gives a vivid expression of his trust in God and his struggle to control his grief. It's impact is enhanced by another psychological touch. When he sends his sons back to Egypt, although his grief has been occasioned by the loss of Benjamin, his mind is filled with Joseph, and he tells them not, as one might expect, to seek out Benjamin, but to seek out Joseph and his brother. His final words, 'For I know from Him what you do not know', are redolent of dramatic irony. What Jacob knows, they are soon to find out.

The brothers returned to Egypt and came before Joseph again they said, "O noble chief, poverty has smitten us and our family, and we have brought partly some of money, so give us full measure and be charitable, surely, Allah does reward the charitable".

87
Joseph said, "do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother in your ignorance". They replied, "are you not Joseph"? He said, "yes and this is my brother". "Allah has been generous to us, verily who fears Allah and be patient, Allah will never suffer the reward of good to be lost". They replied, "swearing on God, Allah has preferred you above us and we have been indeed sinners". He said, "no blame on you go with this shirt of mine and lay it on the face of my father's face to regain his sight", when they arrived at Canann Jacob said, "I perceive the scent of Joseph".

Now we have the scene of reconciliation. For the first time the brothers make a plea based on religion: 'God rewards those who are generous'. The contrast with their violent abuse of their father in the previous scene, 'By God, you will not cease speaking of Joseph until you have wasted away and died', could hardly be more striking.

Episode XII, (lines 410-412, Verse 95). In Canaan. The caravan has just set out from Egypt.)

410. And when the caravan had departed from Egypt winds were sent which had been commanded by God the Disposer.

411. The scent of Joseph was easily carried by them, blowing like musk diffused in the breeze of dawn'.

412. Those around him said: 'Thou remainest in thy [old error], unmoved.

**Jacob:**

Verse (95)

I sense the fragrance of Joseph.

Did you not think I was senile [you would believe me.]
Jacob's attendants: By God you are still in your old
Verse (96) delusion.

The caravan has arrived; the garment is cast on Jacob's face, his sight is
restored.) (line 426-430).

426. Jacob the prophet threw it over his face and his sight returned as though
he has suffered no harm.

428. They said to him: 'Forgive us for our transgressions, O our father, for
this was inscribed on the Tablet.

430. Promising, he asked them a respite until the time when prayers and
curses are fulfilled at the hour of dawn.

Verse (96): When the bearer of good news came he cast the shirt over his face
and Jacob regained clear sight. He said, “did I not say to you I know from
Allah that which you know not”?

The Brothers: Father, pray for us pardon for our sins.
Verse (98) Indeed, we are sinners.

Jacob: I will ask pardon for you from my Lord,
Verse (99) for he is the Pardoner, the Merciful.

In this scene, the grand design of reconciliation is completed. As Jacob's
physical blindness is removed, so is the brothers' moral blindness. They ask
Jacob to forgive them, and to ask of God too that he forgive them.
Episode XIII, (lines 443-448, verse 101). Jacob and the family have reached Egypt.

443. He said to Jacob, the Prophet of God: 'Verily it is the interpretation of my vision which appeared when I was young.

444. It has been made truly manifest, and the one who has spoken regarding its interpretation spoke the truth when he uttered its explanation.

445. The glittering stars were my brothers, and similarly the sun and the moon were my parents.

446. And to God, Lord of the Throne, be praised for *the unrestricted sovereignty which he has given us.

447. He was kind to me in the desert, helping me and saving me, and He mended [my] heart after it had been broken, by granting me the kingdom.

448. My Lord brought you from the desert after the Devil had deceitfully caused dissension between us.

(He places them on the dais, and said)
Verse (101)  
My father, this is what my earlier dream foretold. My Lord has made it come true. He has treated me with loving kindness since he freed me from prison, and brought you out of the desert after Satan had put enmity between me and my brothers.
The grandiloquent speech, profoundly felt, marks the conclusion of the story. There has been no indication of the delivery of Joseph's invitation to his father and kin to come to Egypt, let alone of their journey. The scene suddenly shifts to Jacob and his entourage on the threshold of Egypt, and Joseph is welcoming them.

In his speech, Joseph takes care that nothing should damage the reconciliation that has now been realized. He thanks God for bringing him out of prison, not for his rescue from the well, for this would be an affront to the feelings of his brothers who have acknowledged and begged forgiveness for the wrong they have done. In its reference to Satan having put enmity between himself and his brothers, there is an echo of Jacob's words earlier (line 19, verse 5), that Satan is a self-declared enemy of man.

This analysis is frankly experimental and cannot claim to be exhaustive. It is to be hoped that it brings to light some fresh aspects of the poem and of the quranic presentation of the Joseph story. Indeed the balance between speech and report in the carriage of the plot and the shifting proportions of each from episode to episode, is one of the striking features of its structure. The dialogues are worthy of further study in their own right. Style and tone vary from speaker to speaker, from situation to situation.
We have drawn attention, for example, to the speech of Joseph as a child, asking for information; as a man, speaking in the prophetic mode; as a brother identifying himself to his siblings. There are the utterances of Zulaykha in tempting Joseph, in attempting to exculpate herself before her husband, in justifying herself before the women of the city, and in acknowledging her sin. There are the words of the brothers, as motivated by jealousy they make their plot against Joseph; as they whinge to their father, to persuade him to let them take Joseph with them so that they can have the opportunity they need to dispose of him; as breathless and confused, they complain to their father that there is no more corn for them, unless they take Benjamin with them back to Egypt; and as, in humility and contrition, they confess the wrong they have done.

There is, moreover, a richness and diversity in the way speech is presented. Notably, there is the juxtaposition of solo and unison voices but the unison voices are not simply block choruses. The contexts in which they occur can suggest a variety of modalities of utterance: there may be reciprocity, as members of the group pass information or comment to each other; there may be simple repetition, by way of emphasis; or members of the group may say the words in turn to impress them on another party, whether to persuade to or deter from a particular course of action. A number of the group utterances of the brothers can be heard in each of these ways. Further, there is a clear distinction
between dialogue and soliloquy, between the persona and the reality of the speaking individual.

Attention has already been drawn to the device of dialogue at a distance by means of an intermediary, in particular in episode (9-10) in which the butler carries a lengthy dialogue between Joseph and the King. Communication across distance, whether near or far - between the prison and the palace or between Egypt and Canaan - is executed with economy. And not only distance. Reference has already been made in episode (9 & 12) to the syncopation of real time into narrative time.

It should likewise be noted that throughout this poem and the Qur'an, attention has been drawn to psychological subtleties in the delineation of character and motivation, and in particular the care that Joseph takes in order not to hurt the sensibilities of Zulaykha or of his brothers and how these are captured in language.

Perhaps one might generalize by observing that in some poetic situations, spoken speech can be recognized within classical utterances; in others, spoken speech may appear to be blended into classical utterance with the repetition of key words and phrases. Yet spoken language is a relative word, and is used designedly to avoid the connotations of the word spoken. It is reasonable however to perceive the style of the poem and the Qur'anic language and their relationships as suggesting tendencies towards such a polarity.