

**The Theory of Narrative as Proposed by Meike Bal
(2017): A Study of Temporality and Chrono-
Narratology in the Qur’anic story “Joseph.”**

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Abstract:

This paper examines the narrative structure of Joseph's story- Qur’anic Surah Yusuf- based on the theory of chronology and plot temporal structure of fictional narratives- chrononarratology- as proposed by Meike Bal (2017). The study comprises three major points; an illustration of Bal’s narrative theory, a reference to the history of the literary study of the Qur’anic text and a justification for the choice of the story of Joseph, and finally an analysis of the chronological structure of ‘Joseph’ according to the earlier two points. Drawing extensively on Bal's theoretical framework encompassing order and duration, the analysis explores how the Qur'anic story manipulates chronology to build suspense, convey thematic significance, and engage the readers. While generally adhering to a linear sequence, the story narrative incorporates strategic anachronies, including retroversions and anticipations. These temporal deviations, alternating with vivid scenes and temporal summaries, contribute to overarching narrative coherence and interest while compacting extensive implied storyline duration into a literary narrative. The study argues that the story's sophisticated control of chronological gaps and pacing reveals artful narrative time manipulation. Situating this within interdisciplinary contexts, the paper ultimately concludes that the Qur'anic story stands as an exemplary literary work exhibiting unique chrononarratological form and function that provides a model for application and better comprehension of the theory. The paper recommends further studies of the Qur’anic stories to benefit from its rich literary reservoir.

Key words: Chrononarratology, Meike Bal's model, Anachronies, Ellipsis, Qur'anic story of Joseph.

النظرية السردية عند ميك بال (2017) :
دراسة في السردية الزمنية في القصة القرآنية "يوسف"
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ملخص:

يتناول البحث قراءه أدبيه و دراسه لبناء الحكه في قصة "يوسف" (سورة ١٢ من القرآن) من خلال نظرية السردية الزمنية - تحليل عناصر البناء الزمني في الأعمال الأدبية. يشتمل البحث على ثلاثة أجزاء رئيسية: عرض نظرية ميك بال (2017) في السرد الأدبي، استعراض النهج الذي يتناول النصوص القرآنية من منظور أدبي، ثم تطبيق النظرية على قصة "يوسف". إستناداً إلى الإطار النظري ل بال الذي يشمل الترتيب والإطار الزمني للأحداث، يستكشف التحليل كيف تتحكم القصة القرآنية في التسلسل الزمني لبناء التشويق القصصي، ونقل الأهمية الموضوعية، وإشراك القارئ. بالرغم من التمسك بالتسلسل الزمني المتصل بشكل عام في القصة، إلا أن السرد يتضمن مفارقات زمنية استراتيجية، بما في ذلك العودة إلى الماضي القريب و البعيد والإشارات المسبقة للأحداث المستقبلية. هذه الانحرافات الزمنية، التي تتناوب مع مشاهد حية وملخصات زمنية، تسهم في التماسك السردى الشامل والتركيز على الحدث، مع ضغط مدة السرد الضمنية الممتدة في سرد أدبي. توضح الدراسة كيف أن التحكم المتقن للقصة في الفجوات الزمنية والإيقاع الزمني يكشف عن التمكن من التلاعب السردى الفني بالزمن. وبوضع هذا في سياقات متعددة التخصصات، تخلص الورقة في النهاية إلى أن القصة القرآنية تقف كعمل أدبي نموذجي يعرض شكلاً ووظيفة سردية زمنية فريدة. كما توفر نموذجاً لتطبيق وفهم أفضل للنظرية الأدبية. وتوصي الورقة بمزيد من الدراسات للقصص القرآنية للاستفادة من ثراءها الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

السردية الزمنية، نموذج ميك بال، الإنحرافات الزمنية في السرد، الفجوات الزمنية في السرد، القصة القرآنية "يوسف".

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The best short stories are not essentially French,
English, Italian, or American, but are a part of the
world's anthology.”

(Lawrence, 1917, 286)

The term 'chrononarratology' has no definitive starting point, but the history of chrononarratology can be traced through key developments in narrative theory as it reflects a growing awareness of the relationship between narrative structures and the experience of time. Chrononarratology, a subfield of narratology, focuses on the analysis of temporal elements within narratives. It explores how time is organized, represented, and experienced in storytelling, examining issues such as narrative order, duration, frequency, and the cognitive processes involved in temporal comprehension (Grabes, 2019)¹. David Herman (1962) was the first to focus on the analysis of time and temporality in narrative structures. He introduced the term chrononarratology and argued that time should be seen as an integral and essential component of narrative structure, rather than simply as an adjunct to plot, and he proposed the idea of narrative time as consisting of multiple layers and levels of complexity that work together to represent a type of coherence-unity- in the fictional work itself (Herman, 2004).

In his *Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Time in fiction*, Ksenofontova, A. (2023) discusses the literary studies of time. He starts by noting that “it is possible to make time the topic of a narrative, but it is impossible to turn the passage of time as such into a tellable event” (87), and he refers to Paul

Ricœur's *Time and Narrative* (1985) in which he sets the division of narratives into "tales of time" and "tales about time". Ksenofontova explains that "Ricœur's distinction is between the narratives that unfold in time (that is, all narratives) and the narratives that make some kind of statement about time through their temporal structure ... Hence the distinction between the narratives that can be read with a view to the theme of time ("tales about time") and all other narratives ("tales of time")" (Ksenofontova, 2023, 88). Accordingly, since all fictional narratives are categorized as 'tales of time' in a way that endows time to all the structural transformations that affect the events and character (Ricœur, 1985, 101), a narrative that deviates from the norm and becomes a narrative 'about time' is to be considered unique.

Following the steps of Ricœur (1985), Mark Currie was the first to explicitly discuss the distinction between "tales of time" and "tales about time" for modern and contemporary narratives (Ksenofontova, A. 2023, 90). Currie (2006) asserts that "fiction has been one of the places in which a new experience of time has been rehearsed, developed and expressed" (6), and he argues that narrative time should not be seen simply as a linear progression, but rather as a complex non-linear structure that includes the past, present and future, and which interacts with characters and their actions, as well as with the reader's own experience of time. Although "some approaches separate time as subject from time as the principal element of narratives" (Ksenofontova, 2023, 86), in the manner of Herman (2004), Currie (2006) also argues that narrative time should be seen as an active force, rather than simply a passive background element, and that it can shape or be shaped by characters, events, and the reader's own experience (4). Temporality is also considered one of the six essential narrative elements and a source of unity in the short story (Nelles, 2012, 88), an element that is essential to show

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“singularity of effect, unity of impression, and the totality of interest.” (Abbasi, 2017, 1).

However, the idea of unity of time as a source of plot coherence in fiction is not entirely new. Edgar Allan Poe believed that a short story should be unified in its narrative structure and that its events should take place in a short space of time, and he set forth two major distinguishing features of a true short story; namely "brevity" and "coherence which gives the effect of totality" (Cooper, 1917, 274). Temporal linearity narration in all types of narratives is realized as a means of keeping with the track of reading/ listening. According to Bal (2017), “Unlike various other art forms, ... a written text is linear. One word or image follows another; one sentence or sequence follows another; and when one has finished the book or the film is over, one has sometimes forgotten the beginning” (68). One of the narrative techniques to break such linearity is to utilize chronology and chronological deviations- anachrony- in the narrative- that is to say, playing with sequential ordering, to produce suspense, to show various interpretations of an event (Bal, 2017, 68-9), and enrich the narrative structure of the story.

Hence, chronology and chronological deviation is the core point of the paper- mainly derived from the literary approach of Meike Bal (2017), an approach basically introduced in her 1997 book *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. But to be more comprehensive in tracing the depth of chrononarratology and how it works, a reference should be made to the narrative approach of Gérard Genette (1980). Genette and Bal are influential scholars in the field of narratology, and both approach chronology in narrative texts. Although both have distinct approaches to narratology-Genette's purely structuralist, emphasizing formal structures, while Bal's more interdisciplinary, incorporating insights from cultural studies-

their approaches to dealing with chronology in narratives share some overarching similarities. Genette explores how authors manipulate chronological order for specific narrative effects, and Bal, inspired by Genette, considers how chronology, together with temporal deviations contribute to the overall meaning of the narrative, and her interdisciplinary approach explicitly integrates cultural analysis. She perceives “Narrative ... [as] a cultural phenomenon, one of the many cultural processes by which we live” (Bal, 2017, 9), suggesting that temporal elements are not isolated but influenced by broader cultural and contextual considerations. Both Genette and Bal acknowledge the importance of interpretation in dealing with narrative time and they widely use similar variables to present their discussion of narrative categories. However, although his theory focusses on analysis of literary texts and establishes a solid background for Bal’s, Genette’s bear more linguistic attributes-the thing which is not liable to the current paper.

Genette's narrative theory was basically introduced in his book "Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method" (1972), a book that “fills this need for a systematic theory of narrative. ... and illustrate [s] the basic constituents and techniques of narrative” (Genette,1980, 7). Genette introduced several temporal categories that became crucial to chrononarratology and proposed a framework for the analysis of time in fictional narratives. He proposes a literary fact that one hundred percent of chronological order in Western literature is impossible, and “anachrony” is a traditional resource of literary narration (Genette, 1980, 35-6). So, he initiates his study by differentiating between two basic variables; the word ‘story’ to indicate “the narrative content”, and 'narrative' to refer to the narrative text itself (Genette,1980, 27).

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Genette examines how narrative time relates to story time, that is "the possible relationships between the time of story or plot and the time of the narrative" (11). He classifies these relationships in terms of *order*, *duration*, and *frequency*. "Order" explains the connection between the temporal order/the chronological sequence of events in the fictional world and the way these events are presented in the narrative, and terms like "prolepsis" and "analepsis" refer to types of "anachronies" or chronology distortions (Genette, 1980, 39-40). "Duration" examines how the narrative expands or condenses time compared to the story's implied duration. Concepts like "ellipses", "paralepsis", "summaries", "scenes", "stretches" and "pauses" are used to illustrate diversion in duration. The third category of time analysis in his approach is "frequency" that discusses the repetitions of certain events in the story and in the fictional narrative (Genette, 1980, 35-48).

Since "Practically all novels contain anachrony – even emphatically chronological novels" (Bal, 2017, 70), building on the work of Gerard Genette and previous narratologists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Bal puts forth her key concepts for analyzing time in narrative. The same Genette's categories are presented by Bal on a wider scale. All the previous points included in the categories of *order*, *duration*, and *frequency* are presented by Bal as the temporal "aspects ... that distinguish the structured story from, on the one hand, the text, and on the other, the *fabula*" (Bal, 2017, 65), taking into consideration the cultural as well as the readers' roles.

In differentiating between the narrative content (Genette's story) and the narrative text (Genette's narrative), Bal introduces a framework that emphasizes the role of the reader in navigating between "fabula" and "story". "Fabula" refers to the raw

material of the narrative—the chronological sequence of events that make up the story. It is the sequence of events as they would occur in chronological order, devoid of any specific narrative presentation. It encompasses all the events, actions, and relationships within the narrative, presented in a linear and chronological fashion, and it represents the logical and causal order of the story without considering how these events are presented in the actual narrative text, and taking the reader's role into consideration, the *fabula* becomes the outcome of the reader's mental activity (Bal, 2017, 5-7).

“Story” is the way in which the *fabula* is presented in the narrative text. It involves the formal elements, structures, and techniques that the author employs to convey the events to the reader (Bal, 2017, 9), and it includes the narrative choices made by the author, such as the arrangement of events, chronology, and anachrony. According to Bal, “Differences between the arrangement in the *story* and the chronology of the *fabula* are called chronological deviations or anachronies,” and the reader interprets the story presented by the author, continually moving between the surface-level story (presented in the text) and the underlying sequence of events (*fabula*) (2017, 70).

In discussing chronological/ temporal *order*, Bal avoids using the common terms of flashback and flashforward for their psychological connotations. He presents diversion in *order*-reference to past or future events- in terms of “*retroversion*”- Genette's analepsis- and “*anticipation*”- Genette's prolepsis. Both conceptions are more inclusive than Genette's as they engage the reader with the historical and psychological frameworks of events rather than Genette's pure textual one. Bal proposes categorizing retroversions based on how far back into the story past they reach. *External* retroversions reference periods far removed from current situation, deeper into the

historical past, while the *internal* refer to periods within the current narrative (2017, 71-3).

Anticipation (Genette's prolepsis) is defined both by Genette (1980) and Bal (2017) as narrative allusions or depictions that jump forward temporally. It can be *external*, referencing the future events that will occur later in the narrative timeline outside the current frame of the story present, or *internal*, involves narrative anticipation of future story events that will occur soon in the current story framework.

Mainly, anticipation is far less pervasive as a literary device compared to retroversions in established Western fictional traditions. However, the three foundational epic poems of the Western literature - the Iliad, Odyssey, and Aeneid - do notably each start with anticipations about the destined journeys and predetermined fates awaiting the protagonists. These opening glimpses into figures like Odysseus or Aeneas in adventures not yet actually encountered by the audience conceptualize what is known as the Homeric "plot of predestination" (Genette, 1980, 80)- a description greatly related to the scope of the current study.

Bal explains shifts/ diversion in '*duration*' in terms of *span*, and *distance*. He refers to these deviations by distinguishing between *fabula duration* (time implied to have passed within events in the fabula/ story's reality or the magical world), and *story duration/ time span* (amount of time/space used in representing those events in the text). Hence, *span* "indicates the stretch of time covered by an anachrony." (Bal, 2017, 79). *Distance*, in Bal's framework, relates to the temporal interval between events or narrative segments. It is the amount of time that separates two points in the narrative (Bal, 2017, 77, 78), and

it allows for the analysis of the temporal gaps or jumps between events.

Span, distance, and duration are interconnected and work together to shape the temporal dimensions of a narrative. They provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how time is represented and manipulated in storytelling. The three concepts emphasize the importance of narrative choices made by the author in terms of how time is structured. Moreover, the selection of spans, distances, and durations influences the pacing, rhythm, and overall temporal experience of the narrative. Additionally, Bal's framework acknowledges the role of the reader in navigating and interpreting the temporal aspects of the narrative. Readers actively engage with the spans, distances, and durations presented in the text, contributing to the construction of meaning.

Then, to measure the *overall rhythm* of the narrative, Bal provides a clear narratological framework for duration analysis built around proportional relationships between time spans versus durations via core categories like ellipsis, summary, and scenic expansion/compression. In his study of the relation between chronology in a fabula, and consequently in a story on one hand, and interruption and parallelism on the other hand, Bal notes that whatever the duration-short or long- “Techniques for varying the time sequence by means of elimination, or of condensation of duration, or of parallel development of several strands of the fabula, have a bearing on the chronology” (Bal, 2017, 180). *Ellipses* occur when the story narrative duration (time span) is abbreviated compared to fabula duration, and this creates temporal gaps within the story. *Ellipsis* (skipping) refers to the existence of a coincidence, a “temporal pluralism” which in turn results in having parallel strings of a fabula (Ksenofontova, 2023,

87). This in turn makes it difficult to trace the unity of the chronological sequence in the story.

When time span matches fabula duration/ “real time”, this makes a literary *scene*. *Summary* means that story time span greatly compresses expansive fabula duration. If time span in the story is elongated to explore brief fabula duration, this creates *stretches*. Additionally, Bal examines repetition/frequency as another key factor shaping perceived duration. Events reiterated or recurring in cycles take on extended implied duration even in limited discourse space. (Bal, 2017, 91-4).

However, this paper does not cover all the above-mentioned aspects. Only the existing aspects of temporality in the story of Joseph will be studied and analyzed in relation to the original fabula and the story text as presented in the Qur’anic Surah. The study aims to explore vital aspects of chrononarratology available in the story particularly those related to order and duration and expressed temporal gaps within implied story duration. Examining disruptions to sequential event order, variability duration pace, and ellipses leaping across unnarrated time may reveal a perfect literary exemplar. Hence, the paper also covers two essential points; *approaching a Qur’anic text literary*, and then *analyzing the plot structure through applying the aspects of chronology as introduced by the theory of narratology*.

Approaching the Qur’anic texts from a literary perspective has long been critical and largely prohibited by Muslim scholars. The history of that prohibition dates to the tenth century with Ibn Hazm’s refusal to accept the aesthetic qualities of the Qur’an as proof of its uniqueness, and this is justified by explaining that “the Qur’an is God’s direct speech” that should not-by any means- be compared to human speech (Hameed, 2014, 1-3). Moreover, Muslim scholars believed that accepting the Qur’an or

the Qur'anic stories as literary texts would imply an acceptance of the non-Muslim scholars' assumptions about the origin of the Qur'an and put it in a position lower than a book of history (Hameed, 2014, 2-3). The controversy continued and appeared strongly in the second half of the twentieth century with Amin Al-Khuli's literary approach to the study of Qur'an, and then with the development of that theory by his students; Muhammad Ahmad Khalafullah and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (Hadi, 2021, 5), (Abdul Rahman, 2022). Khalafullah's *Al-Fann al-Qasasi fi al-Qur'an al-Karim* (1953) was rejected and condemned as blasphemy by Al-Azhar scholars in Egypt (Hadi, 1-3). That long history of rejection and approval is not the point of discussion in the paper, but it is appropriate to illustrate the many points of inspiration for choosing a Qur'anic text for a literary study.

According to the search results, no studies have been completely dedicated to the discussion of the narrative structure of a Qur'anic story based on chronology. Mustansir Mir's (1986) study of Nazm and coherence in the Qur'an is a milestone of approaching the Qur'anic texts from literary perspective.² The most recent and specified one is Amrulloh, M., Qalyubi's (2022) study of the story of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf in which he applied the theory of Theodor Nöldeke-Schwally for his analysis. Recent studies of 'Joseph' story focus primarily on the ring structure of the plot. In his study of the literary structure of 'Yusuf Surah', Hameed (2014) points out what could be considered a summary for the justifications of the approach:

Muslim scholars themselves (even of the early times) have treated the Qur'an as literature in the sense that they have employed it as a reference to critique other literary productions, mainly the pre-Islamic poetic legacy. Indeed, the fact that the Qur'an is the literal Word of God does not primarily

interrogate the study of the Holy Book as the most unique example of literary aesthetics. ... Nevertheless, the study of the Qur'an as literature does not claim ... that the 'theological' is not linked to the 'literary': on the contrary, it assumes that such focus on the 'literary' per se may independently foreground the inimitable merits and excellence of the Qur'an (3-4).

Besides, those who rejected the literary approach to the Qur'an ignored, or rather skipped the fact that the Qur'an primarily addressed the unbelievers- not the believers and challenged them with its matchlessness. Many Qur'anic chapters contain verses that assert its possession of a rich literary repertoire, prove its inimitability, and challenge its opponents to produce a work like it (e.g. Q 12:23; 11:13; 17:88; 52:33-34).³ According to Mustansir Mir in his (1988) detailed study of the Qur'an as literature, "Irrespective of what conclusion one reaches on the question of the Qur'an's origins, one must agree that the underlying assumption of the challenge was that the merit and beauty of the Qur'an could be appreciated even by those outside the fold of the faith. And if that is the case, then it would be possible to dissociate the literary study of the Qur'an from the theological study of it" (51). The Qur'an, like the Bible, is an acknowledged literary masterpiece, so it must be noted here that the paper's concern is not based on theological thoughts or concerns, rather, it deals with the Qur'anic story from a mere literary perspective.

Apart from Muslim world, an increasing interest for the study of the literary qualities and structural organization of the Qur'an is highly noticed among the Western scholars. Raymond Farrin (2014) and Michel Cuypers (2015) for example, are significant

contributions to the appreciation of the literary merits of the Qur'an (Sinai, 2017).⁴ Sinai (2018) illustrates the point of inimitability by asserting that "one of the miraculous proofs of Muhammed's being a genuine prophet is the ... literary perfection of the Qur'an", and he refers to the literary perspective in reading and analyzing the Approaching the Qur'anic texts from a literary perspective (Mir, 1988, 50).

Moreover, a deep reading of the Qur'anic stories elaborates how far Qur'an-based stories distinguish themselves through their linear structure, which allows for a clear narrative progression. These stories often contain external conflicts among the characters, as well as internal conflicts within the major characters themselves (Hameed, 2014, 25), the thing which makes them perfect materials for literary analysis.

As for the short story genre, in his study of narration in the Qur'anic stories, Alhassen (2011) notes that a better understanding of the distinction between stories and non-stories is a direct result of the inter-mix between the two in the Qur'an. Alhassen asserts that "examining the concept of stories in the Qur'an can lead [its] modern readers ... to a better understanding of the concept of stories in general, because we are constantly faced with the concept and its possible definitions when reading the Qur'an" (11). By examining the Qur'anic stories, Alhassen argues that it can provide insight into how stories are used and interpreted in different cultures and contexts. Furthermore, he suggests that this concept can be applied to other texts and contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the literary devices used by writers. (2011, 11-12).

The same idea is presented by Alter and Kermode (1987) when they write that "literary analysis must come first, for unless we have a sound understanding of what the text is doing or

saying, it will not be of much value in other respects" (2), and the same point of view is illustrated earlier than Alhassen by Mir (1988) referring to the Qur'an's use of literary techniques to present its message, and one prominent feature is telling stories (50). The Qur'an contains stories of the prophets and their struggles, which are often presented in a dramatic and suspenseful way. These stories have a clear beginning, middle, and end, and often contain elements of conflict, resolution, and moral lessons.

According to Kitishat (2016), one of the most remarkable literary aspects of the Qur'anic story is its ability to immerse the reader in the narrative from beginning to end. The reader is transported into the story, feeling as though they are a part of that world. At times, the dialogue between the Narrator and the characters and between characters themselves, or even the character's soliloquy as in the story of Joseph appear as if they are directed towards the readers, allowing them to not only experience the story but to live it. This powerful narrative technique brings the story to life, despite its having taken place centuries ago, it becomes a storytelling experience that leaves a lasting impact on the reader (99), or what Ball calls, a "memory trace that remains after the reading is completed." (2017, 9). This point is, particularly, what makes Bal's approach more appropriate for the study.

Why Joseph's story?

Having established the paper's approach, a close reading of the Qur'anic story of Joseph (Yusuf) would identify the story as a typical reflection of it. The story of Joseph exhibits several elements commonly found in literary works, transforming it into a rich piece of literature. The story follows a well-defined plot structure, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It starts with

Joseph's dream and his relationship with his brothers, moves through betrayal and hardships (enslavement and imprisonment), and concludes with his eventual rise to power in Egypt. The plot is characterized by conflicts, such as familial jealousy and betrayal, as well as the resolution of these conflicts through Joseph's forgiveness and reconciliation with his family.

One of the key points that make the story of Joseph a unique piece of literature is its expression of a temporal experience, in the sense that it could be read as a *story about time*- this is a major source of inspiration for choosing the story as the core of the study. In Bal's illustration of temporality in a story, he notes that time furnishes the basis for arts such as fiction and drama, and mostly, these narratives unfold in time (Bal, 2017, 66). Time in the story of Joseph (Chapter 12 of the Qur'an) stands as a coral point and is to be perceived as a main theme in the story in a way that makes it necessary to regard how the passage of time is turned into a "tellable event" side by side with the transformations that happened in Joseph's life. A 'tellable event' here does not mean to talk about time itself with its literal meaning. Rather, time is an indicator of the story's major themes of patience and profound faith.

The beginning of 'Joseph' refers to the telling of the best of stories, a narrative which primarily includes the element of time- a major component of a story's setting. Then, at the beginning of the story comes the telling of Joseph's dream and Jacob's interpretation, the thing- which normally- requires the passage of some time, basically a long period since Joseph was a child at that stage, and according to the father's interpretation, a passage of time (many years) is needed. Each major incident in the story indicates a different stage at Joseph's life that consumed many years of suffering and separation.

Another source of inspiration for choosing the Qur'anic story of 'Joseph' as the basis of the study is the interpretation of the third verse in the chapter: "We relate to you 'O Prophet' the best of stories through Our revelation of this Quran, though before this you were totally unaware 'of them'." (Q 12:3)⁵. Whether the 'We' Narrator means the best of the Qur'anic stories or the best stories ever, this verse expresses the existing belief of the Western literary society that this story stands as the supreme example of Qur'anic storytelling- and of storytelling in general- a belief which stems from a Western literary bias favoring linear chronology and unified plots (Alhassan, 102- 3). Joseph's story is "the longest uninterrupted story in the Qur'an" (Mir, 1988, 61), and its narrative style differs markedly when contrasted with how most other stories are presented in the Qur'an.

According to Qureshi (2017), literary academics who contend that individual chapters exhibit unified thematic and structural coherence are intensely attracted to analyze Joseph's story (Q12). Western academics believe that with giving such uncommon plot cohesion centered on a sole protagonist's life journey, the twelfth chapter offers a uniquely integrated literary form among typically more fragmented content (151). As an acclaimed scholar assessing literary attributes, Mustansir Mir himself has authored two dedicated articles examining Q12. First, referencing the ring-structured pattern (circularity) that shapes the chapter's open-close parallelism as an additional layer of intricate compositional interconnection (Mir, 1986), a study which is described by Rendsburg, G. A. (1988) as "an effective way of structuring narrative prose" (120). Later, (Mir, 2000)⁶ invites the world to enjoy the literary beauty of the Qur'an through analysing irony in the story of Joseph. Specifically, the account of Joseph's life story in this Qur'anic chapter is a long, chronologically ordered narrative that is told in one self-

contained location, spanning the entire chapter. Unlike other Qur'anic stories which tend to use more fragmented and discontinuous formats in incorporating brief references across multiple Qur'anic chapters, the biography of Joseph is related in an unusually focused, extended, and linear literary fashion within just this one dedicated chapter (Alhassan, 2011, 101- 2). This may also explain why Western scholars seem more interested in analyzing the story of Joseph than any other story in the Qur'an. Notably, Western literary academics display a continuous tendency to focus their studies on the story of Joseph compared to other Qur'anic tales, inducing "a tremendous amounts of commentaries." (Hameed, 2014, 11).

Linear Chronology Vs Anachrony:

1- Order

In the case of the Joseph's story, the Quran generally follows a linear chronology, presenting the events in a sequence from Joseph's childhood to his rise in power in Egypt. The linear structure allows for a clear and coherent progression of the narrative. Analysing unity in the plot structure of Q12, Mir notes that "Major tensions are created in roughly the first half of the story, ... After that the plot begins to unravel, but the tensions are resolved in reverse order." (1986, 1). Major tensions created in the first half of the story include:

A. Joseph's dream (v 4-6): Joseph dreams that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bow down to him. The dream is interpreted as a sign that Joseph will have a high and powerful position in the future.

B. The brothers' plot against Joseph (v 8-18): Joseph's brothers, out of jealousy, plot to throw him into a well, claiming that he has been taken by a wolf. Instead, they sell him into slavery.

C. Potiphar's wife's attempt to seduce Joseph (v 23-29): While serving in the household of Potiphar, Joseph resists the advances

of Potiphar's wife, who falsely accuses him of attempting to seduce her.

D. A similar attempt to tempt Joseph by Egyptian ladies (v 30-31): At a banquet, some women try to seduce Joseph, but he resists their advances.

E. Joseph's imprisonment (v 35): After being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, Joseph is thrown into prison.

F. The king's dream (v 43-44): The king of Egypt has a dream about seven fat cows and seven lean cows, as well as seven green ears of corn and seven withered ears of corn, and he seeks an interpretation.

Then, these tensions are resolved in reverse order. The king's dream is interpreted by Joseph, who tells the king that there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph is released from prison (v 50) and rises to a high position in the Egyptian government. The ladies confess their guilt in attempting to seduce Joseph (v 51), and the brothers learn their lesson (v 58ff.). Finally, Joseph's dream is fulfilled when his family comes to Egypt during the famine and bows down to him (v 100).

Building upon that study, Rendsburg (1988) compared the plot structure of the Qur'anic story with that of the Bible pointing to the striking similarity between them (118-19). Likewise, Qureshi (2017) proposed the narrative ring structure of the entire story outlining the series of events in twenty-one scenes. These scenes are tightly sequential and interrelated- each one leads to the other till the end (155)⁷. Following the method of Mir and narratologists like Genette and Bal, major tensions are detailed by Qureshi in capital letters, numbers and signs from [A] to [D.7], [D.8] is a center point between tensions and resolutions, and resolutions are presented from [D.7'] to [A']. Likewise, building upon Qureshi's (2017) outline shape and the alphabetical numbering of scenes and episodes, a more detailed

sequence of events in the story (narrative text) will be introduced as follows:

A. 1–3. Preface

B. 4–6. Joseph's dream and the father's interpretation

C. 7–18. Joseph and the brothers: conspiracy and separation from Jacob

D.1. 19–22. **The carvan scene**, Joseph is found in the well and sold a slave in Egypt

D.2 23, 24. Joseph resists Zulaykhā out of loyalty to Potiphar

D.3. 24–29. Zulaykhā re-attempts seduction and Joseph resists again

D.4. 30–32. **The Banquet scene**

D.5. 33–35. Joseph imprisoned

D.6. 36–41. Joseph interprets the dreams of two prisoners

D.7. 42. Freed prisoner forgets Joseph

D.8. 43, 44. King of Egypt has a dream, needs an interpretation

D.7'. 45. Freed prisoner remembers Joseph

D.6'. 46–49. Joseph interprets the king's dream

D.5'. 50. Joseph is freed (but still in prison)!!

D.4'. 51. Women's confession: Joseph's innocence declared

D.3'. 51. Zulaykhā confesses temptation and confirms his innocence

D.2'. 52–53. Joseph is absolved before Potiphar

D.1'. 54–57. Joseph is (totally) free and set keeper of the storehouses.

C'. 58–98. The family's Journey to Egypt: Joseph and his brothers, reunited with Jacob.

B'. 99–101. Fulfillment of Joseph's dream

A'. 102–111. Conclusion

This chrononarrative shape in which events are narrated is a prominent feature of the story. The story unfolds as a linear sequence of scenes in Joseph's life from childhood to adulthood. Whereas non-Qur'anic stories' plots might be arranged thematically, repetitively, or out of sequence for dramatic effect, the story of Joseph adheres closely to the chronological unfolding of Joseph's biography. It follows "a well-knit chronological order, harmonized by a theme presentation that renders the flow of action very smooth and natural." (Hameed, 2014, 12). For example, although Joseph's dream as a boy foreshadows his future glory, the story narrates events patiently in order without jumping ahead. This linear order enhances narrative coherence.

However, the story does not follow a simple chronological sequence. Compared to the original fabula, the narrative of story experiences many incidents of nonlinearity in its temporal structure, incorporating disruptions in chronological order as well as variations in pacing across the related story events (duration). Bal's theoretical frameworks offers tools to state how these temporally dynamic elements function in constructing the story's plot and conveying interpretative significance.

Chronological deviation in Joseph's story illustrates what is noted by Bal as "The movement back and forth from present to past [to future] to present" to make the story's basic rhythm (2017, 69). Following the story lines from beginning to end, the reader will be moving back and forth in time, between retroversions and anticipations, without being lost for a bit, rather, he keeps reading and enjoying without interruption. According to Ibn Kathir (2019), the story of Joseph is told through a series of episodes. One exciting event leads smoothly into the next with skillful transitioning between scenes. This keeps the readers/ listeners interested and thinking deeply about the lessons. There are also some mysteries left between scenes that make the readers use their imagination. These parts let each

reader fill in meanings for himself. No human storyteller could craft such a narration that teaches step-by-step while also letting readers explore deeper messages (70). So, readers learn the events of Joseph's life in addition to questions that apply the story wisely to their own lives over time. The writing style goes back and forth beautifully between showing the events clearly and leaving spaces for readers to imagine meanings for themselves, this is exactly the means and end of chronology and chronological deviation (anachrony) in this Qur'anic story. Many scenes/ lines in the story introduce clear examples of chronological manipulation (whether linear or anachronic) that illustrate its unique structure.

1.1. Chronological Deviation:

Retroversions and Anticipations

Joseph's story starts and ends in the same manner- external retroversions related to the same point in the extant past. Considering the previous outline, if the story events are to be arranged alphabetically (**A, B, C...** for ascending tensions and reverse **C, B, A, ...** for resolutions), cases of anachrony will be given the same alphabets with + or – signs and small letters. Anachrony intervenes primarily in the story through *retroversion* (Qureshi, 2017, 69- 71). The first half of the story signals fluctuations between the past (fabula time) and present (story time). The story starts with two external retroversions, namely at [A] and [B]. Chronologically, in the story all parts except *one* precede the story-time as they all happened before starting the narration of the events. This makes the beginning of the whole story - according to Bal's sequential ordering- an *external retroversion*, a retroversion refers to events that take place completely before the start of narration, "outside the time span of the primary fabula" (2017, 77). In the narrative it functions to furnish background context about the earlier history and prior experiences of the characters involved in the current story action

(Bal, 2017, 76-8). Invoking these retrospective glimpses into the prehistory of character serves an expository purpose in revealing insightful antecedent details that may hold relevant explanatory value for fully comprehending motivation and significance behind present plot occurrences. Even brief external retroversions to the formative past events underlying Joseph's worldview perspective or relationships can provide enlightening subtext to better contextualize the literary, historical meanings or interpretive implications connected to events presently being depicted.

That *external retroversion* is the starting point of narration, point [A]: the preface. In the third verse, the We-Narrator reports the events, addresses the reader/ listener (prophet Muhammad): "We relate to you 'O Prophet' the best of stories through Our revelation of this Quran, though before this you were totally unaware 'of them'. (Q 12: 3). A direct return to the past, this verse foregrounds the act of narrating the story of Joseph, makes it clear that the reader is going to be presented with a fantastic story which has ended happily, and this is affirmed true at the end of the story with a final *internal retroversion*, an anachrony "that happened in the story's primary time and the end" (Bal, 2017, 76), when the Narrator concludes: "This account is part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muhammad]. We revealed it to you: you were not present with Joseph's brothers when they made their treacherous plans." (Q 12:102). Hence, the whole fabula [A-] proceeds the narrated story. The structure will be [A-]: The fabula in the imaginary world, then following [A]: the preface in the story. This fits Bal's analysis of the opening of the Iliad:

[the] beginning ... fits the convention that prescribes that one indicates what the story will be about. The apparently endless series of causes and effects shows, moreover, how

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strongly the vicissitudes of human beings are determined by powers beyond them. And at the same time the reader is, already at the beginning, presented with a summary of the ... [story's] contents... [namely the story of Joseph's patience, brother's plot against him, separation and reunion, and his journey from slavery to glory].

(Bal, 2017, 72).

Another *external retroversion* occurs at point [B]. When Jacob interprets Joseph's dream, he recalls an event that took place earlier than the current point in the story sequence. He alludes to the past and concludes by telling Joseph: "just as He once perfected it upon your forefathers, Abraham and Isaac" (Q 12:6). This recall fills in backstory or history or context to illuminate the present situation (Genette, 1980, 54). This means that the point recalled happened earlier than the real story of Joseph takes part, even before [A-] (proceeds the story time). Naming this event [B-]: blessings upon Joseph's forefathers, the order of events will be [B-], [A-], [A]. Ideally, this verse (Q12: 6) also illustrates unique cases of *anticipation* that will be analyzed in the coming. lines

These external retroversions then recount background information about Joseph before returning to the present narrative moment at the stage [C]: "Indeed, in the story of Joseph and his brothers there are lessons for all who ask." (Q 12:7). This verse serves either as an appendix to [A], and in this case it will provide a completion to the external retroversion at [A-], or as a prelude to the whole story (Mir, 1986, 2), and in this case, it will provide an anticipation to Joseph's life story. This fluctuation between fabula time and story time, between the past, present, and future helps in keeping the reader totally alert to what is said and what is coming, trying to imagine what is hidden and to fill in the gaps.

According to the unique literary structure of this story, the well-knitted order of tensions and resolutions puts forth *anticipations* in the first and second halves of the plot. Perfectly, Joseph's story starts in the same fashion that suits it fit to the 'plots of predestination'. The classic heroic quest cycles utilize allusions to the future (anticipations) - whether divine prophecies or other symbolic visions of what lies ahead for their heroes - as key methods to foretell a pre-charted course toward which all coming episodic actions will bend and build (Genette, 1980, 80). Most events in the story are connected to one another, but this doesn't happen "mechanically, with one event blandly hinting at the next, but in such a way as to maintain a delicate balance between the predictable and the unpredictable" (Mir, 1986, 4). Directly after the preface [A], the plot is rich with cases of *external and internal anticipations*. In [B], Joseph has a dream and his father, Jacob, interprets it:

'Remember' when Joseph said to his father, "O my dear father! Indeed, I dreamt of eleven stars, and the sun, and the moon—I saw them prostrating to me!" (v 4). He replied, "O my dear son! Do not relate your vision to your brothers, or they will devise a plot against you. Surely Satan is a sworn enemy to humankind (v 5). And so will your Lord choose you 'O Joseph', and teach you the interpretation of dreams, and perfect His favour upon you and the descendants of Jacob—'just' as He once perfected it upon your forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Surely your Lord is All-Knowing, All-Wise." (v 6). (Q12: 4- 6).

This beginning illustrates a unique example of playing with temporality. The same lines that contain an external retroversion are themselves rich with internal and external anticipations.

First, when Joseph tells Jacob about his dream (v 4), Jacob precedes the interpretation by a warning (v 5). Apart from Jacob's religious identity, literary, his warning "they may plot to harm you ... Satan is man's sworn enemy" (Q 12: 5) is an anachrony that takes the form of *internal anticipation*, referring to the very near future- in the current frame of the story timeline. Just two verses later, at [C], Jacob's anticipation comes into action with the brothers' conspiracy. Mir (1986) refers to this episode as an early expression of the story's major theme, the "Inexorable Fulfillment of Divine Purposes" (5). He writes that "Jacob thought that the brothers would resort to 'kayd' only if they learnt about Joseph's dream, the brothers do so even though they do not know about the dream" (Mir, 1986, 4-5), an irony that strongly proves the uselessness of the attempts to change fate, since even a prophet couldn't do this, and this is realized later by Jacob at [C'] when he tells his sons to enter Egypt separately- not in a group. He concludes by telling them "I cannot help you against 'what is destined by' Allah in the least" (Q 12: 67). A verse later, this is also asserted by the Narrator when He tells the listener/reader "Then when they entered as their father had instructed them, this did not help them against 'the Will of' Allah whatsoever" (Q 12: 68).

Then, at (v 6), Jacob gives an interpretation that refers directly to the far future. He foretells that Joseph will rise to unprecedented power and glory one day. Again, there is another anachrony as the Narrator draws an *external anticipation* that completely fills in the far future at [B']. With interpreting Joseph's glory in a time frame completely outside that of the very first scene, mainly outside the current framework of Joseph's reality, and the reader gets a preview of where the full story is heading in the end for Joseph. This early glance into the future is

almost summarizing at the start how everything will turn out, how Joseph's life is already predestined before going back (starting with v 7) to show each step along that predestined journey. Bal (2017) writes what ideally fits the explanation of this first *external anticipation* in the story- *a plot of predestination*:

anticipations serve to generate tension or to express a fatalistic vision of life. One more or less traditional form of anticipation is the opening summary. The rest of the story explains the outcome presented at the beginning. This type of anticipation can suggest a sense of fatalism, or predestination: nothing can be done, we can only watch the progression towards the final result.

(Bal, 2017, 83).

Accordingly, the story episodes starting from [D.6] till the end of the resolution with the fulfillment of Joseph's dream at [B'] are step-by-step fulfillment of this *external anticipation* [B] that the Narrator set forth very smoothly trusting in the reader's enthusiasm and patience to read till the end. Hence, one scene, [B] contains an *external retroversion* refers to [B-] as well as an *internal anticipation* that refers to [C], and an *external anticipation* that fills in [D.6 – B']. At this point of tensions, the fabula anachronic order would be: **1.** God's blessings upon Joseph's ancestors [B-], **2.** The story of Joseph in the real far past [A-], **3.** The preface [A], **4.** Joseph's dream [B], **4.** brother's conspiracy [C], and **5.** foretelling of a future glory [D6- B']. However, this part [D.6- B']- though linear in telling the major episodes- is full of chronological deviations that help in keeping the whole unity of the plot.

Another example that reflects coherence and temporal unity in the story- despite anachrony- is *the prison scene* [D.6]. This

scene plays two interrelated roles in the story as it links the past with the future with returning back each time to the present. The scene contains internal and external retroversions as well as an internal anticipation, in addition to the remarkable comments on the present. The Narrator says:

And two other servants went to jail with Joseph. One of them said, "I dreamt I was pressing wine." The other said, "I dreamt I was carrying 'some' bread on my head, from which birds were eating." 'Then both said,' "Tell us their interpretation, for we surely see you as one of the good-doers"(v 36). ... I reject the faith of those who disbelieve in God and deny the life to come (v 37). I follow the faith of my fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not 'right' for us to associate anything with Allah 'in worship'. This is part of Allah's grace upon us and humanity, but most people are not grateful (v 38). ... "O my fellow-prisoners! 'The first' one of you will serve wine to his master, and the other will be crucified and the birds will eat from his head. The matter about which you inquired has been decided." (v 41). (Q 12: 36- 41)

The importance of this long scene [D.6] lies in its place at the end of tensions, just before the climax. The normal straightforward order of events could be very simply, **1.** prisoners have dreams, they tell Joseph and ask for interpretation, then, **2.** Joseph interprets the dreams (Q 12: 36, 41). However, between (v 36)- it will be signed [D.6. a]- and (v 41)- signed [D.6. b] is a journey in time as the Narrator is keen to keep all the parts of the story in one coherent thread, and this is achieved through the shift in chronology and the insertion of chronological deviation in the narrative.

When the two prisoners ask Joseph to interpret their dreams (v 36) [D.6. a], he doesn't go directly/ sequentially to the interpretation. Rather, he makes *an internal retroversion*- a "retroversion occurs within the time span of the primary fabula" (Bal, 2017, 77), and "take [s] place in the narrative itself. (Genette, 1980, 49). In the first half of (v 37) he recalls Jacob's interpretation to his earlier dream [B] (the external anticipation) and says, "I can even tell you what kind of meal you will be served before you receive it. This 'knowledge' is from what my Lord has taught me," referring to prophecy and God's teachings all through the previous years as his father told him earlier (Rustom, 2015, 599).

Then, he continues with another shift in time with a second *internal retroversion* in the same verse referring to the near past, namely his rejection of the pagan traditions and believes at the house of Potifar [D.2- D.5]. Moreover, in (v 38) he continues in time shift with going further in the distant past - in the manner of Jacob- to the earlier point [B-] making an *external retroversion*. At this point, he stresses his prophethood and sacred origin referring to his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Here, the deviation in chronology serves a double purpose; first, asserting the themes of prophecy and divinity via alluding to the past and the partial fulfillment of Joseph's dream, and second, preparing the listeners/ readers to accept and believe in what is coming.

These two purposes are directly revealed with a sudden shift back from the past [D.2- D.5& B-] to the present moment [D.6] at (v 39- 40). Verse 39 starts by showing how useless it is to believe in other gods besides the One True God. The rhetorical question "Which is far better: many different lords or Allah—the One, the Supreme?" (v 39) alludes to the existence of only one real God who created everything. After logically proving that God must be One alone, (v 40) then emphasizes the importance of only worshipping this one true God rather than the fake idols

some misguided people treat like deities (Rustom, 2015, 599-600). Thus, the major theme of Divinity is established alongside Joseph's prophethood.

Finally, this rich scene [D.6] ends with Joseph interpreting the prisoner's dreams (v 41) [D.6. b], an interpretation which makes an *internal anticipation* to the very near future within the current narrative framework referring to the coming king's dream and the necessary need for an interpretation [D.7- D.7']. This *anticipation* also works thematically in illustrating Joseph's prophethood and his trust in God's teachings.

Hence, after analyzing the chronological deviations in that single scene [D.6], the fabula sequential order after moving in different time frames would be: **1.** prisoners have dreams, they tell Joseph and ask for interpretation [D.6.a], **2.** Joseph recalls Jacob's interpretation to his earlier dream [B], **3.** Joseph tells of his rejection of the pagan traditions and believes at the house of Potifar [D.2- D.5], **4.** Joseph refers to his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob [B-], **5.** Joseph returns to the present scene and speaks of Divinity and prophethood [D.6], and finally, **6.** Joseph interprets the dreams [D.6.b] and refers to the coming future [D.7- D.7']. This anachronistic organization creates a sense of suspense as well as providing an explanation for Joseph's plight. Additionally, it affirms that nothing in the story is referred to casually. Rather, "the reader soon realizes that the reference had a prophetic or ominous ring" (Mir, 1986, 5) that makes the move in the right direction.

Moving to the stage of resolutions, the Narrator chose to make a final external anticipation at [D.6']. Unlike most Western literary narratives, the story of Joseph makes extensive use of anticipation. Joseph interprets the king's dream, an interpretation that would take fifteen years to be fully fulfilled. These fifteen years are covered in the narrative from [D.5'] to [C'] and signal the remaining period to reach a final completion [B'] of the early external anticipation at [B]. Again, the

interrelation of story's different episodes is enhanced as a final anticipation links to the first one.

The second half of Joseph's story is characterized by the extensive use of *retroversions*. Basically at [C]. When the soldiers found the king's cup in Benjamin's baggage, the brothers wanted to declare themselves innocent. They said, "If he has stolen, so did his 'full' brother before" (Q 12: 77). The chronological sequence of events puts the logical assumption that when Joseph hears them, he would directly make one of two reactions; either to address them angrily and face them with his reality and their deeds, or continue in hiding his identity and ask them what they mean or rather keep silent. Instead, Joseph goes to the distant past and addresses them silently saying, "You are in a far worse situation. God knows best the truth of what you claim" (Q 12: 77). Here he means "I did not steal anything, nor did my brother 'Benjamin'. You are the real thieves; you stole me from my father and threw me into the well" (Khattab, 2015, 12:77). This is an *external retroversion* as Joseph goes back with his memory to his childhood to recall the earlier cruelty of his brothers at [C] when they plotted against him, in addition to [A-] when certain events have taken part in the original fabula. This retroversion has the thematic role to express patience and the suppressed inner grieves of Joseph along decades. This is affirmed twelve verses later in the same scene when the brothers realize Joseph's identity:

He asked, "Do you remember what you did to Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?" They replied 'in shock', "Are you really Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph, and here is my brother 'Benjamin'! Allah has truly been gracious to us. Surely whoever is mindful 'of Allah' and patient, then certainly Allah never discounts the reward of the good-doers."

(Q 12: 98-90)

Once more, Joseph makes an *external retroversion* as the story is near the end. He wants to make everything clear, but the past is not to be forgotten because it is the starting point that led to the present situation.

The story ends with a final anachrony at [B']. The family comes from Canaan to Egypt, and Joseph is reunited with his father. At this moment, the Narrator makes an *external retroversion* taking the reader to the very past scene at [B]. The same words of Jacob; “they may plot to harm you—Satan is man’s sworn enemy” (Q 12:5) are echoed by Joseph at the end of the story. Joseph reminds his father- Jacob with his earlier dream and tells him that he passed all the difficulties that faced him with the graces of Allah after Satan intervened between him and his brothers: “Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true and has been gracious to me- He released me from prison and He brought you here from the desert- after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers” (Q 12: 100).

Basically, the whole verse, (Q 12: 100) is a summary of the events of the whole story (beginning, exposition, and resolution). In a complicated fabula like Joseph’s, this explanation is an essential chronological deviation that “often takes the form of reference to the past.” (Bal, 70). The final quick retroversion makes a reminding return to the past, forms a circle of cause and effect, and helps the reader/ listener to stay in continuous contact with the incidents and idea of the story. Hence, this qur’anic story succeeds in presenting an unprecedented piece of narrative without violating the chrononarratology of the story.

The extensive temporal distortions in Joseph's chronology increase narrative interest and predictability, as the reader/listener knows things about Joseph's past that the other characters do not. Readers make connections between the reported events and unreported events, which they, being omniscient, know about

(Bal, 2017, 108-13). Thus, the Qur'anic story's chrononarratological choices in revealing Joseph's story highlight important themes in creative ways.

1.2. Duration, Span, and Distance

Duration connects to order as well. Manipulating duration of scenes, gaps between events, or the speed and frequency with which events are recounted affects the overall temporality and chronology as presented in the narrative. The story starts and ends with an external retroversions. Such beginning and end, in addition to the earlier anticipation, provide two major story aspects of Bal's narratology namely, 'span' and 'distance'.

The overall story compresses many years of story duration - Joseph's youth, slavery, prison time, rise to power in Egypt, the final unity with his parents at the end- twenty-two years according to the Bible story (Kolletzki, 2010) within relatively economical story. Events that unfold over a decade or more are covered in only 111 verses. But according to the retroversions at (Q 12: 3, 102) [A- A'], the real distance between the fabula's events may be hundreds of years (the long period between Joseph and his forefathers, and between Joseph and Muhamad [PBH]). What is notable at this point is that the time span of that long period is accounted for in 111 verses only- between the two basic retroversions of the story (Q 12: 3, 102)- which covers a series of connected events that brings to the mind of the reader a continuous thread of cause and effect, and by reaching the final retroversion (conclusion), all the events are once again recalled.

The time span in the narrative of story of Joseph is literary significant. It forms one continuous whole with no interruption. Bal makes a distinction between two types of time span according to the duration: crisis and development. *Crisis* refers to a short duration and the events have been compressed with many gaps and eliminations, a description that is not suitable to

Joseph's. What describes the span of Joseph's is "development", a long period of time that shows step by step character and events development without catastrophic gaps or eliminations, and is more realistic, true with the real experience of the character (Joseph) (Bal, 178). Literally, the story tells of the brief periods of/ with different crisis in the life of Joseph. But literary, a chronology that requires selection tells a whole coherent story with some parts (that could be easily inferred) skipped, or summarized.

The time span starts with Joseph's dream (Q 12: 4), and ends with Joseph's supplication:

My Lord! You have given me authority; You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams; Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous. (Q 12:101),

Between the two spans is the distance, the long period of a life story. In this case, according to Bal, a distance of decades and centuries is erased from the mind of the reader, the past is here in one's eyes (the present time is the time of prophet Muhamad to whom the story is told) as "distance and span cover each other precisely; the retroversion ends where it began" (Bal, 80), and the reader never feels any disturbance. Hence, chronology is not violated as the deviation of time cannot be realized.

1.2.1. Scenes, Summaries, and Stretches

Differences between narrative pace surrounding past key occasions convey duration principles. Joseph's story employs anachrony through mixing between narrative scenes, summaries, and stretches. The story contains several *scenes* offering detailed accounts of significant moments with time spans suitable to the

real durations in the original fabula. For example, at [C], the brothers' conspiracy is introduced in detail and is covered in thirteen verses - the moment unfolds with slow, intensified duration compared to simply stating "they plotted against him". This is remarkable since such scene will be the start of Joseph's journey from freedom to slavery, to glory at the end.

Similarly, the events in Potiphar's house [D.2- D.4] (Zulaykha's temptation, Joseph's resistance, and the Banquet scene) are all introduced in detailed sequential and interrelated scenes. Then, Joseph's encounter with the two prisoners makes a well-drawn scene [D.6]. At the opposite side of the plot outline, the points from [D.4'] to [D.2'] collaborate to make a unified scene recounting the women's and Zulaykha's confessions, and Joseph is proven innocent.

On the contrary to the narrative scene at [C], at the point [C'] Joseph's interactions with his brothers that end with the family's journey to Egypt and the final reunion consumes a time span longer than the proposed duration outside the story's text- in the fabula time. This part alone is stretched in 41 verses to make a narrative *stretch*. Such expanding, writes Kitishat (2016), is a prominent story feature that gives "the details in depth to show the hidden motives on the one hand, and the psychological, mental, social background on the other hand. However, the details are coherently tied together in every charming style (99).

Finally, some episodes in the story are compressed and summarized, given time spans shorter than the assumed durations in the fabula. For example, a major summary in the story is that of Joseph's dream at [B]. Jacob's interpretation of the dream takes three verses and is literally compressed in one verse while its fulfillment costumes ninety-four verses- nearly the whole story. This remarkable disparity in timings makes a narrative summary which stresses the dreams significance to the importance of the outcomes. Another summary in the story is in

[D.1] as the caravan scene is shortened to an episode and, “in spite of the role it plays in advancing the plot, it is, ... of incidental importance in itself” (Mir, 1986, 2). At [D.1’], Joseph’s rise to power and obtaining the highest authority in Egypt is summarized. This is not casual, Joseph’s rise to power is not the only end behind the story. Rather, it is already part of a complete predestined journey that must be completed with the characters’ misfortunes and agony.

The use of span, distance, duration, scenes, summary, and stretches contributes to the narrative's complexity and engages readers in the temporal unfolding of Joseph's journey. Bal's concepts also allow us to consider the rhythmic pacing of the narrative. For instance, the alternation between different phases of Joseph's life contributes to the overall pacing of the story. Readers engage with spans, distances, and durations, constructing a holistic understanding of the temporal flow of the narrative. The gaps between events and the extended periods of time contribute to the reader's interpretation of Joseph's journey.

1.2.2. Ellipsis and Double linearity

Since elimination mostly brings gaps to the chronological sequence, only unnoticeable periods of time in the story line string could be skipped and the information is inferred from the events. In the story of Joseph, such coincidence or parallelism is not a common feature. Instead of causing fragmentation, the artistic convention of sequential deviation proves the linearity of the literary text of the story, the thing which elaborates – once more- the unique structure of chrononarratology in this Qur’anic story. The story contains rare incidents of “anachronies embedded in each other, so closely intertwined” (Ball, 76). These anachronies produce a partial double linearity that does not interrupt the chronological sequence- one of the fabula (the original events), and another one of the story (the medium, text arrangement that tell of the fabula).

The story contains two primary incidents of ellipsis. The content the first one does not exist in the existing story timeline. It occurs in regard to certain events that happened in the past before the start of narration, namely at [A-]. The clearest example is concerning the relation between Joseph and his brothers. A single incident of double linearity that results from an *ellipsis* shows itself early in the story. First, we are not sure whether Joseph's brothers started the conspiracy (point [C] of the plot structure) before or after telling of his dream (point [B]), as there is no evidence that they knew about it. So, there must have been two linear strings of motives in the fabula, one of innocent Joseph and his brother enjoying love of their father, and the other is of the spiteful group of brothers.

Second, The story starts with Joseph telling his father of the dream [B] (Q 12:4)- a dream that came true at the end, and the father warns him not to tell his brothers of it: "and he replied, 'My son, tell your brothers nothing of this dream, or they may plot to harm you—Satan is man's sworn enemy.'" (Q 12:5). According to Ibn Kathir (2019), Joseph declined from sharing his dream with his brothers, despite the excitement and curiosity the vivid dream stirred within him. Given the considerable envy and hostility his brothers had unfortunately cultivated toward him, he followed Jacob's warnings and kept the secret (70). After interpreting the dream (Q 12: 6), the Narrator restarts again, with shifting to telling of Joseph and his half- brothers: "There are lessons in the story of Joseph and his brothers for all who seek them." (Q 12:7). Then, we are told of the conspiracy in details at [c] (Q 12: 8-18).

Likewise, near the end of the story at [C'] when Joseph reunites with his brother, the Narrator tells of this first meeting, "When they entered Joseph's presence, he called his brother 'Benjamin' aside, and confided 'to him', "I am indeed your brother 'Joseph'! So do not feel distressed about what they have

been doing” (Q 12: 69). This *external retroversion* in the distant past makes an *ellipsis*. Nothing is mentioned in the story about the brother’s ill treatment of Benjamin. But this gap can be filled with linking plot strings together in one linear line.

This indicates a double string of events in the story; one of Joseph and Benjamin (including his dream, telling his father, Jacob’s interpretation of a bright future [B]), and that of the brother’s jealousy and hidden conspiracy [C]. Hence, if this double linearity is to be perceived, there must be a connecting point of justification. A single piece of information is skipped, something has been omitted, affected the plot development without leaving a narrative gap that needs to be filled out. The story begins and Jacob warns Joseph of his brothers’ jealousy, but the real reason/s for this jealousy is/are not mentioned. Regarding what they did later, the declared reason of traditional sons’ jealousy is not enough. It becomes clear that something must have happened, but without knowing what, when, or where. The reader infers the reason/s from the subsequent verses.

At the beginning of the conspiracy the brothers say: “Although we are many, *Joseph and his brother* are dearer to our father than we are— our father is clearly in the wrong.” (Q 12: 8). They never refer to Joseph as their brother, and they keep referring to him as ‘Joseph’ (Q 12: 9,10,11,17,80,85). Later in Egypt, in their attempt to distance themselves from the theft accusation in front of the minister (not recognizing that he is Joseph), they say: “If he is a thief then *his brother* was a thief before him,” (Q 12:77), and in their worry about how to face the father when they return back without their younger brother (Benjamin), their elder brother tells them “Return to your father and say, ‘O our father! *Your son* committed theft” (Q 12:81). Even Jacob used the same pattern of naming Joseph and Benjamin when addressing his elder sons. When they ask him to send their brother with them to Egypt, he tells them: “Am I to entrust him to you as I did *his brother* before?” (Q 12:64). It is

noticeable here that he does not say ‘your brother’. Near the end, Jacob is filled with grief for losing another son, he tells the brothers to go back to “seek news of *Joseph and his brother*” (Q 12:87). ‘Joseph and his brother’, ‘Joseph’, ‘his brother’, ‘your son’, ‘his brother’, ‘Joseph and his brother’, included in the verses and made it possible to conclude the historical reality that Joseph was not a full brother to them, and “Unlike Joseph’s other brothers, Benjamin was Joseph’s full brother. They lost their mother at a young age, so their half-brothers thought that their father loved them more.” (Khattab, Q12: 8).

The one thing that could be obviously concluded is the father’s (Jacob’s) pre-knowledge of his sons’ hatred to their half-brothers (Joseph and Benjamin). Such information- the content of the ellipsis- is not trivial and is not ignored in the narrative. (Bal, 2017, 91). Rather, it must have something to show about a painful period in the history of Joseph’s family. And the Narrator must have preferred to leave it indicated via its consequences which constitute the main point in the story, and the reader is encouraged to search for what is hidden to fill the gap.

The second ellipsis occurs also at the beginning of the story. It is a gap that is related to the future events (the external anticipation) and at the same time implicates a reference to the distant past at [B-]. From the very beginning, Joseph’s vision initiates a progression of narrative suspense and mystery for the readers. The story is told in a way that plays with the readers’ expectations. Rather than clarifying the implied significance behind his son’s vivid dream, Jacob fuels the suspense by reacting in trailing, uncertain terms that gesture toward higher cosmic importance while leaving specific interpretation open-ended. (Hameed, 2014, 26). We expect to get some answers but instead more puzzles about the dream are set up to unfold slowly. It is so obvious here that the interpretation is not complete since

Jacob did not say anything about the identity of the eleven stars or the sun and the moon (the thing that will be interpreted literally at the end). Rather, he goes on to warn Joseph of retelling the dream to his brothers. Moreover, his reference to the blessings upon Abraham and Isaac does not include explanation of the type of these blessings. Consequently, the reader will have to go back to the historical background and search for Abraham and Isaac to fill the gap.

Both ellipsis keep the readers paying attention closely as the scenes progress, waiting to unlock the mysteries suggested about Joseph's past and destiny. Literary, despite these cases of anachrony, a perfect degree of unity and coherence is present in the story. The reader rearranges the events in the primary fabula, fills in the gaps in the story, makes his mind, caught in suspense, and enjoys the fluency of coherent scenes without feeling any type of disorder or interruption.

Joseph's story expertly manipulates narrative pacing through selective timing gaps that compact the action while implicitly conveying large time periods elapsed between major scenes. By indirectly and very quietly allowing the readers to imagine intervening intervals between episodes, years of growth and change that occur without discontinuity. For example, when young Joseph is sold to Egypt then shows up again as Potiphar's steward, his sudden adult status suggests inference of adolescence without depicting every gradual development. Similarly, the seven years of regional fertility followed by seven of drought pass between engagements holding deeper moral weight for readers than mundane agricultural cycles might. This calculated chronological compression shouldn't imply continuity flaws however - rather, it generates two simultaneous temporal experiences: actual prolonged chronology spanning perhaps decades that fabulistic truth signifies, contrasted with artfully shortened story duration that transports readers fluidly across essential plot milestones without losing immersive engagement

through tedious pacing. The story instead is enriched with highlight occasions alone to spotlight, relying on human cognition to mentally fill realistic gaps. Just as Joseph's character maturation into Potiphar's estate administrator occurs largely behind the text, so too time itself matures swiftly or slowly depending on where the Narrator chooses to rest spotlight amid a sea of untold moments. "The result is a specific story that is distinct from other stories" (Bal, 2017, 8).

Conclusion

The paper comes out with major conclusions. First, approaching a Qur'anic text from a literary perspective is not a violation to the religious believes nor a denial to its Heavenly origin. Rather, it contributes to the illustration of the Qur'an's literary merits and perfection as the plot structure of the Qur'anic story proves its composition as a literary masterpiece.. Applying a literary approach to a Qur'anic text benefit, not only to the discovery of its unique literary structure, nor to gain a better understanding of this text, but also to get a better understanding of the literary approach itself- taking the Qur'anic text as a clear example of applying literary techniques and devices on various literary texts. Reading 'Joseph' from a literary perspective gives a clear insight into how a story could be read and understood in different cultures and contexts. Second, the Qur'anic story of 'Joseph'- Chapter 12 of the Qur'an- proves to be an example of a well-structured piece of literature and a presentative text for chrono-narratology as proposed by Meike Bal (2017).

Third, the story manipulates two different attitudes of literary narration; chronology and anachrony as proposed by Bal. The text is obviously rich with narrative references to the paper's suggested theoretical framework built on Bal's aspects of story temporality: *order and duration*. Regarding *order*, the Qur'anic story of Joseph is a perfect example of the chronological structure of a literary narrative. The mix between chronology

and anachrony in the story is a guide towards understanding the theory of chrononarratology and how it can be applied. The non-chronological narrative structure in 'Joseph' is a literary device used to create tension and coherence in the story. By first introducing the reader to the central conflict involving Joseph's dream and his brothers' plot against him, and then moving forward in time to his imprisonment and rise to power, the story creates a sense of anticipation and builds towards a climax. The subsequent resolution of tensions, including the confessions of the Egyptian ladies and the fulfillment of Joseph's dream, serve to reinforce the themes of the story and provide a satisfying conclusion.

The literary merit of the story is evident in the way the shifts go back and forth in chronology without any violating disturbances. The linear presentation of events, combined with instances of anachrony contributes to the narrative's depth and engages the reader or listener in a dynamic and meaningful way. A single episode can easily contain retroversions and anticipations, whether internal or external, and still the plot timeline is reserved, and the reader never loses contact with the series of events. Rather, the reader gets more involved in reading, anticipating, and searching in the past in one coherent story plot. By disrupting the chronological order, the story of Joseph uses retroversion and anticipation to provide background information, create suspense, and reflect broader spiritual themes. This skillful structuring of the plot furnishes for the introduction of a literary masterpiece.

In terms of manipulated *narrative duration*, the story has a good manipulation of Bal's three concepts of duration, span, and distance. No single event in the story is given a time span more or less than needed in the contextual chronology, and the variation between the fabula duration and the story span help the reader to get a better understanding of the temporal flow of the narrative. The distance between the story events, though

variable, keeps the story lines and the reading process more tied and enjoyable. Bal's concepts also allow us to consider the rhythmic pacing of the narrative. The use of scenes, summary, and stretches contributes to the narrative's complexity and engages readers in the temporal unfolding of Joseph's journey.

Regarding *Ellipsis*, the story of 'Joseph' demonstrates a sophisticated control of pacing through intentional temporal gaps, strategically implied but unnarrated, which skillfully compact extensive storyline progression between selectively highlighted scenes. By subtly prompting readers to imagine intervening periods between recounted episodes, years of growth and development are smoothly elided without fracturing continuity. This calculated chronological compression-an anachrony- intimates no flaw in coherent flow - rather, it generates simultaneous dual timestreams: the protracted story-original fabula- chronology encompassing decades of biographical time is frequently inferred, contrasted by considerably condensed narrative duration that transports readers efficiently across significant events without losing engagement in tedious pacing precise details. Much as Joseph's formative advancement into authority occurs largely off narrative, vast expansive periods of story time mature unseen depending on where the divine Narrator illuminates or omits. The result proves a singularly time-conscious narrative deliberately spotlighted between omitted expanses to direct audience contemplation.

In condensing expansive chronology into engaging narrative, highlighting only essential occasions, and maneuvering reader's perception to hypothesize plausible gaps, the Qur'anic presentation of Joseph's odyssey demonstrates sophisticated manipulation of time perception revealing the stylistic singularity found in such an exemplar to literary works.

In the light of Bal's theory, the interconnectedness of ideas and concepts within the story could be seen as related to the

study of narrative time and coherence. The analysis of the story's structure and coherence emphasizes the importance of understanding the text as a unified whole, and this is the reader's role during the reading journey to and from the past, present and future, the thing which tightly related to Bal's framework.

The paper recommends further analysis of 'Joseph' through the lens of chrononarratology to provide deeper insights into the plot *frequency* and the other narrative techniques of this iconic Qur'anic story. It is obvious that literary theory reveals the hidden in the Qur'anic texts as much as the Qur'anic texts allow for a better understanding of the literary theory. Hence, the paper also highlights the need for more studies of the Qur'anic texts from a literary perspective.

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Notes:

¹ Grabes (2014) offers a comprehensive study of the meaning and usage of sequentiality/ chronology, the early attempts of Homer (8th century B.C.), in addition to the long history of presentation in narratives starting from the first half of the eighteenth century till now.

Grabes, Herbert. (2019). *Sequentiality*. In Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.), *The living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University.

<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/sequentiality>

² Mustansir Mir's (1986) book "Coherence in the Qur'an" builds on the idea of the Qur'an's coherence by examining various literary and structural elements that contribute to its unified message. By focusing on the interconnectedness of ideas and concepts within the Qur'an, the book provides a framework for exploring the text's narrative time and coherence. Mir's work can be a valuable resource for the study of the Qur'an from a chrononarratological perspective, providing a foundation for understanding the text's structure and coherence and exploring the ways in which narrative time is represented and conveyed within the Qur'an as a whole. This Mir's study is just mentioned in my paper and not quoted from as the paper deals with the chronology within a clear case of coherence in a single coherent story chapter from a literary perspective while the book studies the Qur'an as a whole.

See: Mir, M. (1986). *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur- i Qur'an*. American Trust.

<https://yassarnalquran.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/mustansir-mir-coherence-quran.pdf>

For a recent Western study of coherence and chronology of the Qur'an, see: Robinson, Neal. (2003). *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to Veiled Text*. 2nd ed. SCM Press.

³ The Qur'an is divided into 114 *surahs*, referred to as 'chapters', each contains several *ayaat*, referred to as 'verses'. The letter 'Q' followed by a number will be used all through the paper to refer to the Qur'anic Surah by its number for the In- text citation. E.g., (Q 12:1) refers to chapter 12 in the Qur'an (Surah Yusuf), verse number 1.

⁴ For more details, see:

- Cuypers, Michel. (2015). *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis*. (Jerry Ryan, Trans.). Bloomsbury.
- Farrin, Raymond. (2014). *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*. Ashland (Oregon): White Cloud Press.

⁵ The study will utilize the original Arabic Qur'anic text and the authoritative thematic English translation of Dr. Mustapha Khattab: *The Clear Qur'an*.

See: Khattab, Mustafa. (2015). *The Clear Quran*.

<https://wisemuslim.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Noor-Book.com-The-Clear-Quran-English-Translation-by-Dr-Mustafa-Khattab.pdf>

All quoted verses will be cited within the text with the (chapter number followed by verse number). Only quoted explanations or notes from the same translator will be cited including the name (Khattab, followed by chapter and verse numbers).

⁶ See:

- Mir, M. (1986). The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters. *Muslim World*, 76, 1:15.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1986.tb02766.x>

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⁷ The basic structure outline shape is quoted as it makes the sequential ring composition more clear, and it offers a comprehensive account of the story's events from beginning to end. All chronological deviations in the story will be analysed with reference to that outline. Most notable is that it is the developed outcome of a series of studies focusing on unity and coherence in the story beginning with Mir (1986), Rendsburg (1988), Kolletzki (2010), and Kitishat (2016).