

Yusuf Sura: The Working Out of Drama*

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*This research is expected to be followed in the light of the suggested architectural design of the Sura as drama appended at the end of the paper.

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T. S. Eliot compellingly proposes that drama cannot depart from religious liturgy because it has principally arisen out of it.¹ The drama in the Western World was initially “reborn on the high altar of the Cathedral at the most sacred moment of the liturgy.”² By the beginning of the twentieth century, church-leaders began to recognize that the “new intellectual challenges to faith” could not be countered by hymn-singing angels; they, therefore, thought of establishing what was called the Religious Drama Society.³ The establishment of such society coincides with what Eliot regards as the relationship between literature (in its general sense) and religion. Eliot affirms that literature and religion are inseparable. Although literature may be read for pleasure or entertainment (or what he terms as “aesthetic enjoyment”), “it affects our moral and religious existence.”⁴ For Eliot, the whole modern literature is “corrupted by . . . Secularism” because the modern man is unaware of the primacy of the supernatural (i.e., religion) over the natural life.⁵ Accordingly, religion and drama must be inseparable: drama should therefore occupy the primary concern of man for its function in the religious realms.

In agreement with this view, Thomas Adler, quoting George Kernodle, speaks of three approaches to religious drama. They are: the dramatization of biblical events in current idiom and psychology, fusing “modern poetry and modern stage techniques” with the method of miracle plays, and staging a “contemporary religious problem.”⁶ Aside from the interest in the dramatization of biblical and religious events liturgically, the employment of drama to serve religious issues is widely acknowledged. In fact, the dramatic perspective has started to play a decisive part in the context of the Bible. Gustaf Aulen, furthermore, illustrates that

[w]hat the Bible describes is a universal drama. The God to whom it bears witness is a living active God. . . . [This] action of God, his ‘mighty deeds’, we find described as action at war with opposition, at war with all that is anti-God and destructive of his creation. Action versus opposition equals drama.⁷

The dramatic experience is therefore tending the religious experience, a fact that Edwin Block finds yielding a “common heritage of dramatic and religious experience.”⁸

This concern with religious drama proves that religion is still at the centre of inquiry since a great wealth of literary work (and drama) penned by prominent figures are still being produced and are dealing with religious subject matters, conflicts and culture. “The interpretation of religious material and contexts never really [cease],” writes Arthur Marotti, but rather, “they [have] just been pushed somewhat to the side by the most new Historicists and cultural materialists.”⁹

The relationship of English drama with the Bible is cordial despite the idea that Christian ideology in the West associated the theatre with sinful activities. In the early day of Christianity, the theatre “equated with venal pleasure, sensuous enjoyment and the affirmation of life on earth, all of which were at odds with the aesthetic spirit of early Christian thought.”¹⁰ English drama was nurtured by the Medieval Church where plays were essentially required to provide Christian teachings. A non-antagonistic relationship between Islam and drama is a relatively recent development: fundamentally, literature had been believed to be a lying alternative to truth and only recently has been considered as a possible enhancement. Some Muslim pageants that dramatize the martyrdom of Imam Hussein are substantial evidence of how drama can serve religion.¹¹ In the religious perspective, the actual battle (between Imam Hussein and the Umayyads) is not without its results; the suffering the pageants arouse is purposeful suffering. Metaphorically, it is the battle of God against whatever is anti-God or even destructive. Similarly, tendencies to dramatically represent Qur’an-based stories of prophets would with doctrinal interference potentially function as more religious than merely secular plays.

A variety of dramatic elements, however, contribute to enriching such actions and stories with aspects that aesthetically enhance their representations and artistically managing to blend the dramatic impulses with the aesthetic devices employed to identify the themes. The dramatic and aesthetic impulses (resulting from these activities) participate in yielding a variety of responses that range from pleasure and enjoyment, to catharsis and purgation. The full fulfilment of these objectives basically relies on the availability of dramatic elements that encourage the success of the theatrical experience.

Not all stories and religious events are equally apt to yield dramatic effects; indeed, some episodes are, arguably, “inactable.” Some Qur’an-based stories are characterized by a linear structure that renders them more narrative than dramatic. Their paces and rhythms cannot compete with those Yusuf Sura is endowed with. Yusuf Sura belongs to those episodes that can quite early draw the audience’s attention for its dramatic privileges and potentials. There are many elements that effectively introduce the Sura as a perfect drama: the manifold conflicts among the characters, the internal conflicts within the major characters themselves, the interplay of pace and tempo, the effective employment of imagery and prosody, and most importantly, the non-linear structure that keeps the Sura of varying rhythms.

The Sura opens with a highly dramatic situation that arouses a good deal of suspense. Early in the morning, Yusuf relates to Jacob the dream he sees, presumably, when Jacob’s other sons are out:

O my father!
I did see eleven stars
And the sun and the moon
I saw them prostrate themselves
To me!¹² (Q: 12: 4)

The creation of suspense shapes the future dramatic construction. Expectations are aroused; or, indeed, a series of anticipations are prepared to be aroused but not fulfilled.¹³ The audience encounters many basic questions which quickly emerge: Why is the dream? What is the interpretation of the dream? Why does Yusuf seek his father’s aid? What do the stars, the moon and the sun really signify? A sequence of elements of suspense is already set up for this opening scene; more curiosity is created as the action proceeds.

Jacob’s reply does not fulfil the expectations of the audience so much as it arouses further interest and suspense:

Said (the father)
“My (dear) little son!
Relate not thy vision
To thy brothers, lest they
Concoct a plot against thee:
For Satan is to man
An avowed enemy! (Q: 12: 5)

Jacob warns Yusuf against relating his ‘vision’ to his brothers lest they should conduct a plot against him. Though the verse unfolds one aspect of the action, yet more suspense is aroused and information disclosed. Now what Yusuf sees is not a ‘dream’: it is a ‘vision’, and we are prophetically prepared for an evil intrigue.

The initiating event, which Meir Sternberg terms as the “suspense discourse organization”¹⁴ leads to more dramatically interesting consequences for the main character, Yusuf. It is highly significant that this occurs very early in the ‘play’, for it not only manipulates Yusuf’s future fortune, but it also prefigures additional materials and situations: this, however, enriches the build-up of the suspense in such a way as to fully win the audience’s interest. Dramatically speaking, the situation entails Yusuf under duress: his prospects appear perilous and uncertain. The scene predicts that Yusuf is weak, not only because of age (he must be a teenager or even younger) but also because of the hard times awaiting him. Jacob’s sympathetic tone of voice discloses his fear for his, moreover: what he utters is almost certainly much less than he feels; an unfair contest awaits Yusuf and he must fight an inequitable battle. The tension is now formulated in the audience’s mind: the audience by now must have become absorbed in the experience, a situation that determines their responses to the whole action.¹⁵

Economically, the pace and rhythm of action dramatically change. It must be at night (darkness is always a blanket for evil) when the brothers meet to lay plans for their conspiracy:

They said: “Truly Joseph
And his brother are loved
More by our father than we!”
“Slay ye Joseph or cast him out:
To some (unknown) land,
That so the favour
Of your father may be
Given to you alone; (Q:12: 8-9)

Out of jealousy and hatred, they have come up with a lethal act: murder haunts their minds in response to their predicament. The Qur’anic verse takes the audience into the inside of Jacob’s sons, where evil and jealousy insinuate them to reiterate the First Murder of the Universe. As they have failed to comprehend Jacob’s actual reasons for his love to Yusuf, they have, therefore, made up their *casus belli*; Jacob favours Yusuf more than he does his other sons out of his senseless prejudice: “Really our father is obviously/ Wandering (in his mind)!” (Q: 12: 8). Death looms ominously although one of the brothers proposes a no- bloodshed answer, the shadow of mischief still lingers:

Said one of them: “Slay not
Joseph, but if ye must
Do something, throw him down

To the bottom of the well:
He will be picked up
By some caravan of travellers.” (Q:12: 10)

Yusuf Sura is characterized by a very effective employment of prompt and economically brisk change of pace, rhythm and tone. This change is attributed to the varying tempo generated by the acceleration of events and the concentration on specific episodes that are related only to the main layout of the plot. In this Qur’anic discourse, the setting varies so dramatically that a lot of information is dispensed with and the audience are invited to feel the elapse of time and the shift of pace. This enriches the dramatic flow in such a way as to secure the audience’s interest and suspense. The very sharp shift, for instance, from Verse 10 above to Verse 11 well illustrates the point:

They said: “O our father!
Why dost thou not
Trust us with Joseph-
Seeing we are indeed
His sincere well wishers.” (Q: 12: 11)

The intrigue is well-laid and the action speedily develops. Jacob resentfully yields to their pleadings, and, ironically, services them with a pretext for their malicious plot:”I fear lest the wolf/ Should devour him.” (Q: 12: 13) Religiously, Jacob’s acquiescence to permit Yusuf join them to “enjoy himself and play” (Q: 12: 12) as they propose is doomed by the power of God since he cannot refuse despite the fact that he suspects a vile and villainous act on his sons’ part; but, dramatically, Jacob’s consent is a crucial momentum without which there is no plot, i.e., no drama.

The conflict between the brothers and Yusuf is at work when they have made up their minds to put the plan into effect. The Qura’nic discourse is briskly and geographically carried to where Yusuf is taken: the bottom of the well:

So they did take him away,
And they all agreed
To throw him down
To the bottom of the well
And we put into his heart
(This message): ‘Of a surety
Thou shalt (one day)
Tell them of the truth
Of their affair
While they know (thee) not.’ (Q:12: 15)

The verse underlies a foreshadowing instance of rich irony (Yusuf will inform his brothers of their deed when they do not recognize him). The audience here shares in the dramatic experience when their sense of hearing and ‘imagined’ sight are evoked.

They can take from the play, as Styran says, “the impressions and images” from which they can construct its concepts;¹⁶ they certainly enjoy the excitement of discovery that the episode foretells. Hence there is an interaction between stage (action) and audience without which the drama hardly exists.¹⁷

The tension is, however, intensified, augmenting the dramatic thrust and flow of the Sura. The deed is done and the brothers are back home with the same pretext Jacob himself has furnished: the Qur’anic text does not introduce detailed accounts about what has happened, for it is for the audience to perceive. The audience is indeed dually placed in the position of identifying himself with Yusuf, not only because Yusuf’s fate is at stake in the unfolding of the drama, but because the audience, too, is in the position of visionaries. The audience really shares in the expectation of what the experience entails. Besides, the audience is likewise endowed with the power of interpretation, the power of seeing into things profoundly; the audience is absorbed and his participation in both the literary and religious experiences is not the outcome of mere ‘aesthetic enjoyment’, but of his consciousness which effectively inspires him to endure an identical experience. Heinz Fischer confirms that “[w]hether facing an elaborate stage or an empty space, an audience is amazingly open, versatile, and swift to understand and participate.”¹⁸ Participation is therefore enhanced by understanding.

The fact that the Sura economically represents action serves the dramatic texture of the text. Had the Sura provided full details of the episode, the event would have been narrative, and the ‘drama’ declining. Instead, the verse tells very little about the brothers except that:

Then they came
To their father
 Weeping. (Q: 12: 16)

And they tell the same tale of the wolf that has devoured Yusuf with more fabricated evidence of a shirt stained with false blood, but not torn apart! Jacob resorts to patience (Q: 12: 18) as a response to his sons’ malice, yielding more opportunities for the drama to unfold its meaning: the audience may not scrutinize Jacob’s reaction. The audience may not accuse Jacob of passivity; one will not ponder the meaning of Jacob’s response as one is now occupied with Yusuf’s fortune. The scene is reformulated as such to inevitably draw attention to a message currently in the process of formation, and drama is the best vehicle to achieve this aim. As an act of communication, a dramatic performance helps attaining the meaning of the ‘message’, hence understanding is fulfilled:

For, if we look at a dramatic performance as an act of communication involving something that is being displayed to be looked at and hence a “message” in the widest possible sense, something that someone wants us to see and know, conveyed by its originators to its recipient in a medium that is likely to transit it to them, in a “code” that they are deemed able to decode, then the recipients of what they must regard as being conveyed to them as something they are intended to “take in” will inevitably look for the “meaning” of that “message.”¹⁹

There is certainly something to demonstrate, some code to be decoded, and some message to be received. The Sura does not intend to address Jacob’s sons only; all the spectators undergo an identical experience of gaining knowledge, too. Jacob’s sons must have ironically understood that this malevolent act will eventually rid them of their feelings of being ‘next’ or ‘second’, for they have taken it for granted that Yusuf has disappeared from the scene. Only the audience knows the irony that encapsulates the situation. The Qur’anic discourse dramatically entangles the knot, for, to the misfortune of the brothers, Yusuf is saved by a caravan of travellers who send their water-carrier for water from the well:

And he let down his bucket
(Into the well)... He said:
Here is a (fine) young man!
So they concealed him
As a treasure! (Q: 12: 19)

The sharp contrast between what the brothers think they have gained and what fortune has befallen Yusuf is highly interesting. The audience must have been aware of the message: Yusuf himself is a ‘treasure’; metaphorically, the term is not restricted to the price paid for him, but to his invaluable spiritual worth to Egypt and human kind. It is evident that the audience starts to attain some knowledge, reformulated by the construction of the ‘drama’; this, however, is part of the aesthetic experience which is currently in the process of formation, and is interrelatedly harmonized with the seriousness of purpose.

Una Ellis-Fermor rightly believes that such strong passions as jealousy, hatred and love are commonly the nature of materials suitable for drama. These areas of human experiences go into the very depth of human mind and heart, and they can influence man’s fate if ever man fails to control the extremes of these passions. Indeed, such passions are essential to drama since they bring about conflicts when man attempts to fulfil his/her purposes. “Without the tension and balance that result from the conflict of these passions with the world,” writes Ellis-Fermor,” we cannot imagine such

drama.”²⁰ Such is the tension that envelops Yusuf’s life in Egypt, where a more appalling conflict emerges: the Potiphar’s wife entices him with carnal pleasures, and threatens him with prison and severe chastisement if he does not abide by her desire.

The Qur’anic Sura shortly reveals Yusuf in Egypt at the Potiphar’s palace; he is already endowed with wisdom and manly beauty. The Potiphar’s wife is so frantically infatuated with his physical beauty that her mind becomes entirely occupied with bodily sensuality. Overlooking all palace conventions and sexual etiquettes, she more than declares her love to him; she seduces him too frankly:

But she in whose house
He was, sought to seduce him
From his (true) self and fastened
The doors, and said;
“No come thou (dear one)”!
He said: “Allah forbid!
Truly (thy husband) is
My lord. (Q: 12: 23)

Conventionally, the lady of the house should not seduce her male servant though a master can a female servant; but she does. The conflict here is more powerful than that of the early phase (with Yusuf’s brothers), because Yusuf is now for the first time, aware of the consequences of the dramatic tension. The Potiphar’s wife gains power, prestige as well as authority, and, with them, she has lavish beauty and desire freely offered. The Qur’anic discourse, however, deals with Yusuf’s instincts on human and realistic grounds when the verse reveals that Yusuf would have “equally desired her, but that/ He saw the evidence.” (Q: 12: 24)

Yusuf is now enthralled to two conflicts that both need to be disentangled: the likely internal conflict of a man who is offered temptations so wildly. Given what Yusuf is, such conflict must have taken place as a transient internal engagement which lasts briefly; it must have even not occurred to his mind at all, for the Qur’anic verse illustrates that he “would have desired” her except that the evidence shown to him by God had prevented it. Yusuf is described as “one of Our servants,/ Sincere and purified.”(Q: 12: 24) It is God’s Providence that helps him suppress his ‘desire’ for her.

The vital conflict, however, is that between Yusuf and the Potiphar’s wife: his Faith against her might, and his steadfastness against her obsession. She is portrayed as practically bold enough to fasten the doors and frankly force him to do her will: “Now come, thou” (Q: 12: 23) (I am ready). The action runs so rapidly that Yusuf should

decide in a moment; and he chose the way of Faith. He makes up his mind to race out of the room and the palace, and to escape her havoc and temptation. He must have thought this decision passive, but it is most likely the wisest, taking into consideration who and what she is. The Potiphar's wife seems unprepared to surrender to the 'defeat' of losing Yusuf; it must have dismayed her to feel that indeed; therefore, she races him to the door to keep him under her control. A highly dramatic incident then occurs: she unexpectedly confronts her husband at the door. The drama rises to a much higher pitch of tension and complication: a prompt pretext to explain what is happening is required. The Qur'anic text is never short of furnishing elements to reinforce the dramatic situation:

So they both raced each other
To the door, and she
Tore his shirt from the back:
They both found their lord
Near the door. She said:
"What is (the fitting) punishment
For one who formed
An evil design against
Thy wife, but prison
Or a grievous chastisement?" (Q: 12: 25)

The Potiphar's wife's instinct is at work. She quickly exercises the prerogative of her status as well as her wit and might. She does not await the hearing and immediately passes the judgment: for Yusuf's 'evil design' he must be sent to prison and grievously punished with chastisement. Yusuf must naturally speak next for he is the 'accused' and, above all, the 'servant'; but he has only one brief statement to utter: "It was she/ That sought to seduce me." (Q: 12: 26) The conflict reaches its utmost peak here; the suspense is breath-taking for the audience is aware of Yusuf's critical situation in comparison with that of the Potiphar's wife whose grounds essentially rest on her status and authority. She must have taken it for granted that her husband will support her testimony: he cannot suspect her report. But the Qur'anic verses equally prophesy an interesting irony:

And one
Of her household saw (this)
And bore witness, (thus)
"If it be that his shirt
Is rent from the front, then
Is her tale true,
And he is a liar!"
"But if it be that his shirt
Is torn from the back

Then is she the liar,
And he is telling the truth!" (Q: 12: 26-27)

The audience temporarily exercises a brief instant of tension- release here, for the episode permits for a turning point in the course of action. The Potiphar is aware of his wife's wicked scheme, but, amazingly, he seems to have decided to let the event pass unnoticed. It is true that he apologizes to Yusuf and asks him to give no further thought to the grievance caused by his wife's false charge, but it is equally true that he fails to force his wife to humbly beg Yusuf's pardon for the painful injury she has done his spotless character. Again, the dramatic necessity requires such a reaction, and God's Providence to save Yusuf inevitably thrives:

"O, Joseph, pass this over!
(O wife), ask forgiveness
For thy sin, for truly
Thou hast been at fault!" (Q: 12: 29)

In the drama, it is essential that the action undergoes such phases of varying tensions and suspense. Martin Esslin illustrates that such technique is needed for each scene or section of action. He considers the variability of elements of suspense both tactical and strategic since they are "superimposed on the main objective or suspense momentum of the whole play," and that they indeed "coexist and mutually support each other."²¹ Indeed, the Potiphar's unpredictable response intensifies the drama. Esslin again emphasizes that "[p]redictability is the death of suspense and therefore of drama."²² Unpredictability gives drama a sense of continuity because, in the Potiphar's situation, it encourages her to pursue her quest of Yusuf's love.

When the scandal of her enticement and passion spreads among the ladies of the city, they seem to have exaggerated her story and mentioned it with ridicule. At this instance, the dramatic conflict is transposed to the tension between the Potiphar's wife and the ladies of the city who must have sneered about her failure to win the heart of a servant. To her dismay, this is an injury to her pride and feminine ego; that is why she has planned to prove them ignorant of what Yusuf in truth is. Her plan is a challenge to their malicious gossip as well as a practical endeavour to dupe them and fool their shortsightedness, and lack of knowledge.

When she heard
Of their Malicious talk,
She sent for them
And prepared a banquet
For them: She gave
Each of them a knife;
And she said (to Joseph):

“Come out before them,”
When they saw him,
They did extol him,
And (in their amazement)
Cut their hands (Q: 12: 31)

What is shown now is certainly significant; she triumphs over them, for, in their amazement, they interrogate his being mortal: “Allah preserve us! No mortal/ Is this!” (Q: 12: 31) and, furthermore, in utter absentmindedness and bewilderment, they unawares and unmindfully cut their hands. Her triumph has augmented her defiance; yet she admits the truth encouraged by their reaction: “There before you/ Is the man about whom/ Ye did blame me!” (Q: 12: 32); she even frankly tells me that she “did seek to seduce him from/ His (true) self.” (Ibid.), but, arrogantly, she reaffirms her threat of chastisement: “If he doth not/ My abiding, he shall certainly/ Be cast into prison.” (Ibid.)

It is quite obvious that the stage in this instance is the space where significant events are presented; this space encourages the audience to “concentrate [his] attention and compel [him] to try to arrange everything that happens there into a significant pattern,” suggests Martin Esslin, “Hence,” he continues, “anything that is unnecessary or does not contribute to that pattern will appear as an intrusion, an irritant.”²³ Whatever events happen in Yusuf Sura functionally fulfil this ‘pattern’ because there is no single episode that is either irritant or an intrusion. The episode above, for instance, underscores how Yusuf’s graces are unique; he must be ‘divine’, and it is this divinity in him that firmly resists or defies the wicked planning of the Poriphar’s wife, and emboldens him to readily resort to imprisonment. Once more, the conflict is restored to the Yusuf-Potiphar’s wife conflict. Yusuf prays to God for protection: he seems to have come into a position when he is unable to get away himself though he firmly defies temptation:

He said: “O my Lord!
The prison is more
To my liking than that
To which they invite me:
Unless Thou turn away
Their snare from me,
I should (in my youthful folly)
Feel inclined towards them
And join the ranks of the ignorant.” (Q: 12: 33)

The total meaning of the dramatic situation depends on the harmony of the elements that contribute to the pattern already suggested. Yusuf is always prepared to sacrifice

his worldly freedom, the anticipation of wealth, and the ecstasy of pleasure and desire for his Faith. The audience has already witnessed that Yusuf's life is a net of integrated subsidiary works that eventually reshape his future fate. Accordingly, Yusuf, having resorted to putting up with going to jail, indeed starts to lead a new life that will establish his reputation as a great vision interpreter: the Qur'anic discourse has foreshadowed this blessedness earlier when it pronounces that he is bestowed with wisdom and knowledge; and now is the best time to work out what he has been graced with. Ironically enough, both Yusuf's brothers and the Potiphar's wife have come to the realization that they have triumphed over Yusuf, and that, by and large, they are victors, but the dramatic undercurrents illustrate that the course of action trickles quite differently.

The pace of Yusuf's rise to power and fame rapidly manifests itself in the jail. The Qur'anic text informs us that Yusuf's two prison-mates have dreams for which they seek interpretations: one sees himself "pressing wine" and the other "carrying bread on [his] head/ And the birds are eating, thereof." (Q: 12: 36) Effortlessly, Yusuf interprets the two dreams: the first will "pour out/ The wine for his lord to drink", and the other will "hang from the cross, and the birds/ Will eat from off his head." (Q: 12: 41) Here the verse exploits subsidiary episodes as interrelated portions to thread the dramatic texture of the Sura, the total pattern of the whole drama. The one who is saved is supposed to mention Yusuf to his lord, but he has forgotten that and Yusuf is held in jail to suffer years of chastisement.

The fact that Yusuf's renowned repute as dream interpreter starts in the jail is indeed dramatic. On the contrary, it is interrelated with the general pattern of the whole Sura. Yusuf's interpretation of the prison-mates' dreams is only a prelude to the re-modulation of his forthcoming fortune. The Sura subtly carries the action from prison to the palace with the King's dream that obstinately resists interpretation despite the solemn struggle of his chiefs who frankly admit that his is a "confused medley/ Of dreams: and we are not/ Skilled in the interpretation of dreams." (Q: 12: 44) The King's failure in finding someone *au fait* is a reminder to the King's cupbearer to recall what Yusuf has requested. To the king's and the courtiers' surprise, the cupbearer declares: "I will tell you/ The truth of its interpretation;/ Send ye me (therefore)." (Q: 12: 45) The delicate balance works out; all parts are threaded with refinement, and the economy of action, irrespective of superfluous details, supplements the elegance of the dramatic situation. The Qur'anic discourse

embeddedly alludes to the King's decree to seek Yusuf's interpretation and the cupbearer, dispatched to the prison to meet him. This elapse of time is quite serviceable because it focuses primarily on the single action of the play, concentrating only on the anticipation of Yusuf's rise to power.

Yusuf's success in logically interpreting the King's dream is the threshold of his life as an acknowledged devout and pious man. His interpretation is indeed a working plan for overcoming the years of famine the dream predicts; this is why the King, evaluating the worth of the interpretation both politically and administratively, decrees to have Yusuf sent out of prison: "Bring him unto me." (Q: 12: 50) This is practically the key turning point of the whole action of Yusuf's life. In reply, Yusuf sends the message back:

"Go thou back to thy lord,
And ask him: 'What is
The state of mind
Of the ladies
Who cut their hands?'" (Q: 12: 50)

The ladies' reply is the final testimony of Yusuf's innocence and integrity, this time crowned with the Potiphar's wife's confession that it was she who sought to seduce him from his true self. (Q: 12: 51) The rhythm of action is now no longer rapid and brisk: the truth is attained and the Potiphar's wife episode has come into a resolution. The second major conflict is settled, and the drama has the brothers' portion to be treated as well.

The King's decree to take Yusuf to serve about his person (Q: 12: 54) is a prologue to the imperial theme of Yusuf's eminence. The Qur'anic verse emphatically foreshadows that graciousness. The King addresses Yusuf:

"Be assured this day,
Thou art before our own Presence,
With rank firmly established,
And fidelity fully proved!" (Q: 12: 54)

Furthermore, the King nominates Yusuf to be in charge of the store-house. It is this particular pronouncement that will predicate the dramatic treatment and resolution of Yusuf's tension with his brothers as a treatment closely interrelated with the interpretation of the King's dreams: famine will urge Yusuf's brothers to come to Egypt seeking help, and it is then that the encounter takes place.

It is true that the creation of suspense and tension inspires all dramatic construction, but it is equally true that "[e]xpectations must be aroused, but never, until the last curtain, wholly fulfilled; the action must seem nearer to the objective yet never reach

it entirely before the end; and, above all, there must be constant variation of pace and rhythm, monotony of any kind being certain to lull the attention and induce boredom and somnolence.”²⁴ The pace with which the Potiphar’s wife episode terminates varies again: the sense of ending seems a little elusive! The Qur’anic text turns us directly to the encounter between Yusuf and his brothers: the text furnishes no details and it exercises economy to the utmost: “They entered his presence, / And he knew them, / But they knew him not.” (Q: 12: 58) This is categorically what is required of the drama to work out, and the tension to develop. The audience is required to imagine how Yusuf feels, what psychological vexations disturb him, and what strains huddle inwardly. But Yusuf is both wise and subtle.

Yusuf devises a plan to keep his brother Benjamin with him first. To fulfil that scheme, he takes advantage of their need for more provision to tempt them to bring him with them next time they turn up. He, therefore, addresses them with both threat and temptation:

“Bring unto me a brother
Ye have, of the same father,
As yourselves, (but a different mother);
See ye not that I pay out
Full measure, and that I
Do provide the best hospitality?”
“Now if ye bring him not
To me, ye shall have
No measure (of corn) from me,
Nor shall ye (even) come
Near me.” (Q: 12: 59-60)

The brothers must have been amazed by Yusuf’s request, but their destitution seems to have suppressed any voice of inquiry in them. Yusuf is, however, aware of that, and he is also aware of the difficulty they are expected to meet once they approach Jacob and inform him of their intent. Therefore, Yusuf arranges to have their ‘stock-in-trade’ restored to their saddle-bags, to give them more excuses to come back again. (Q: 12: 62)

The scene’s brisk movements start to speed up as the action approaches its final stage. From this episode on to the end of the Sura, the scenes shift rapidly in place and time: it is a to-and-fro rhythmic drive between Egypt and Canaan in which the brothers are active agents, but, ironically, they fail to comprehend its import. Yusuf’s brothers, however, keep their word and disclose what Yusuf demands; this time they tell the truth but it is hardly for Jacob to entrust Benjamin to them:

“Shall I trust you
With him with any result
Other than when I trusted you
With his brother aforetime?” (Q: 12: 64)

To assist his brothers to persuade Jacob, Yusuf has arranged to have their stock-in-trade returned to them, a case because of which Jacob resorts to abide by what they have requested. Once more, Jacob’s assent to give Benjamin a leave to accompany his brothers on their next trip to Egypt is inspired by the act of the ‘divine’ first, and the necessity of the drama as well: the story would not have come to its anticipated end without Jacob’s consent.

Yusuf’s plan to keep Benjamin soon works when they meet away from the brothers: he confidentially informs him that he is his own full brother and he should “grieve not at aught of their doings.” (Q: 12: 69) The plan starts again when Yusuf devises to put the King’s drinking cup in Benjamin’s saddle-bag and send his guards to address them as thieves. As search for the great beaker commences, the brothers are still blind to what is happening. The search starts with their saddle-bags, and eventually it is found in Benjamin’s. To Yusuf’s resentment, they lie to him again and injure his character:

“If he steals,
Here is a bother of his
Who did steal before (him).” (Q: 12; 77)

Yusuf, embittered by this reproach, keeps it “locked in his heart” (ibid.). The false accusation entitles him to an act of retaliation but Yusuf is too pious to seek revenge. The audience certainly despises and detests the brothers’ cruelty when they accuse Yusuf of thievery; on the other hand, the audience’s sympathy goes with Yusuf. The audience’s provocation against the brothers is one of the messages of the Sura, and the variability of the audience’s dispositions is to increase the liveliness of the action.

This episode of the Sura soon shifts to the brothers’ dilemma: the oath they have given Jacob and the critical situation they already face. Yusuf has left them indeed with one choice: telling Jacob of Benjamin. It seems to be a shadow of gloom overwhelming the whole dramatic atmosphere, but it also looks quite transient, foreshadowing the ultimate end of the catastrophe. Dramatically enough, the scene is again in Canaan; Jacob reflects upon his sons’ tale, shows deep resentment, and keeps aloof from them; but still an optimistic nuance presages reunion with both Yusuf and Benjamin. (Q: 12: 83) Interestingly, Jacob recalls Yusuf’s story three times within four verses (Q: 12: 84-7), and this recollection cannot be arbitrary; it is part of the

dramatic architecture of the Sura: "O my sons! Go and enquire/ About Joseph and his brother,/ And never give up hope of God's Soothing Mercy." (Q: 12: 87)

The highly dramatic incident of the confrontation between Yusuf and his brothers occurs while they are back to Egypt to seek more provision and to enquire about their two brothers. To disclose the whole story, it seems quite suitable that Yusuf reminds them of their villainous act; hence, he enquires: "Know ye how ye dealt/ With Joseph and his brother,/ Not knowing (what ye were doing)?" (Q: 12: 89) It is a rhetorical question that soon entails their recognition of who he is: "Art thou indeed Joseph?" (Q: 12: 90) Yusuf's reply to the enquiry is a message; indeed, it is the major theme of the whole Sura (drama): "I am Joseph, and this my brother:/ God has indeed been gracious to us all" (Q: 12: 90) Yusuf resorts to moralization; it is not the brothers who are addressed; rather the audience is typically called to reflect upon the moral lessons the drama has yielded.

The drama here keeps to a unified pace and rhythm. Nothing is left to settle but informing Jacob of the truth, and Yusuf, naturally, resorts to Providence for help: "Go with this my shirt,/ And cast it on the face of my Father/ He will come to see (clearly)." (Q: 12: 93)

Yusuf's moralizing speech underlies the theme of the Sura once more: Yusuf's steadfastness to his faith against the villainies of his brothers and the intrigues of the Potiphar's wife. Dramatically, this is not difficult to foreground, for the Sura is quite straightforward: it is totally devoted to Yusuf's rise to power despite all his hardships. The whole Sura (drama) is Yusuf's; what happens to him and how he is saved. This single action of the discourse enriches the Sura with a highly dramatic flow; whatever subsidiary events take place are connected to the major action of the Sura, providing it with a compact set of episodes that permit no looseness or monotony.

It is indeed evident that what the dramatic experience achieves is powerfully analogous with that of religious experience. In fact, it is irrational to separate the literary (dramatic) from the religious judgements; even if there could be a sort of separation, that would not certainly be complete. This understanding of what the drama can do makes us appreciate it more. As the religious experience can fulfil such goals and objectives as unity with the divine, enrapturement, the sense of the infinite and transcending the self, the dramatic experience is not an exception. Through full identification with the dramatic situation, the audience is absorbed in the experience, and consequently, find himself in the position of understanding, and gaining cognitive

insight into the subject under investigation. Edwin Block, briefly epitomizes this idea in his remark that the “play makes a claim on not only our attention but on our moral awareness,” too.²⁵ This is exactly what Yusuf Sura powerfully fulfils.

A SUGGESTED LAYOUT OF YUSUF SURA AS DRAMA

ACT I

Scene i

(Morning. Canaan, Jacob's residence.)

4. Behold, Joseph said
To his father: “O my father!
I did see eleven stars
And the sun and the moon:
I saw them prostrate themselves
To me!”
5. Said (the father):
“My (dear) little son!
Relate not thy vision
To thy brothers, lest they
Concoct a plot against thee;
For Satan is to man
An avowed enemy!
6. “Thus will thy Lord
Choose thee and teach thee
The interpretation of stories (and events)
And perfect His favour
To thee and to the posterity
Of Jacob – even as He
Perfected it to thy fathers
Abraham and Isaac aforetime!
For thy Lord is full of knowledge
And wisdom.”

Scene ii

(Winter night. Canaan, Jacob's residence.)

8. They said: “Truly Joseph
And his brother are loved
More by our father than we:
But we are a goodly body!
Really our father is obviously
Wandering (in his mind)!
9. “Slay ye Joseph or cast him out
To some (unknown) land,
That so the favour
Of your father may be
Given to you alone:
(There will be time enough)

For you to be righteous after that!”

10. Said one of them: “Slay not
Joseph, but if ye must
Do something, throw him down
To the bottom of the well:
He will be picked up
By some caravan of travellers.”
11. They said: “O our father!
Why dost thou not
Trust us with Joseph –
Seeing we are indeed
His sincere well-wishers?”
12. “Send him with us tomorrow
To enjoy himself and play,
And we shall take
Every care of him.”
13. (Jacob) said: “Really
It saddens me that ye
Should take him away:
I fear lest the wolf
Should devour him
While ye attend not
To him.”
14. They said: “If the wolf
Were to devour him
While we are (so large) a party,
Then should we indeed
(First) have perished ourselves!”

Scene iii

*(Next day, morning or afternoon.
Canaan, the well then Jacob's residence.)*

15. So they did take him away,
And they all agreed
To throw him down
To the bottom of the well:
And We put into his heart
(This Message): ‘Of a surety
Thou shalt (one day)
Tell them the truth
Of this their affair
While they know (thee) not.’
16. Then they came
To their father

In the early part

Of the night, weeping.

17. They said: "O our father!
We went racing with one another,
And left Joseph with our things;
And the wolf devoured him
But thou wilt never believe us
Even though we tell the truth."

18. They stained his shirt
With false blood. He said:
"Nay, but your minds
Have made up a tale
(That may pass) with you.
(For me) patience is most fitting:
Against that which ye assert,
It is Allah (alone)
Whose help can be sought"

Scene iv

*(Next day. Canaan, the well. Then after
a long time, Egypt.)*

19. Then there came a caravan
Of travellers: they sent
Their water-carrier (for water),
And he let down his bucket
(Into the well). He said:
"Ah there! Good news!
Here is a (fine) young man!"
So they concealed him
As a treasure! But Allah
knoweth well all that they do!
20. They sold him
For a miserable price,
For a few Derhams counted out:
In much low estimation
Did they hold him!
21. The man in Egypt
Who bought him, said
To his wife: "Make his stay
(Among us) honourable:
Maybe he will bring us
Much good, or we shall
Adopt him as a son."
Thus did We establish
Joseph in the land,
That We might teach him
The interpretation of stories
(and events). And Allah
Hath full power and control
Over his affairs; but most
Among mankind know it not.

ACT II

Scene i

*(About eleven years later. Egypt, the
Potiphar's residence.)*

22. When Joseph attained
His full manhood, We gave him
Power and knowledge: thus do We
Reward those who do right.
23. But she in whose house
He was, sought to seduce him
From his (true) self: she fastened
The doors, and said:
"Now come, thou (dear one)!"
He said: "Allah forbid!
Truly (thy husband) is
My Lord! he made
My sojourn agreeable
Truly to no good
Come those who do wrong
24. And (with passion) did she
Desire him, and he would
Have desired her, but that
He saw the evidence
Of his Lord: thus
(Did We order) that We
Might turn away from him
(All) evil and shameful deeds:
For he was one of our servants,
Sincere and purified.
25. So they both raced each other
To the door, and she
Tore his shirt from the back:
They both found her lord
Near the door. She said:
"What is the (fitting) punishment
For one who formed
An evil design against
Thy wife but prison
Or a grievous chastisement?"
26. He said: "It was she
That sought to seduce me –
From my (true) self." And one
Of her household saw (this)
And bore witness, (thus) –
"If it be that his shirt
Is rent from the front, then
Is her tale true,
And he is a liar!
27. "But if it be that his shirt
Is torn from the back,

Then is she the liar,
And he is telling the truth!"

28. So when he saw his shirt –
That it was torn at the back –
(Her husband) said: "Behold!
It is a snare of you women!
Truly, mighty is your snare!

29. "O Joseph, pass this over
(O wife), ask forgiveness
For thy sin, for truly
Thou hast been at fault!"

Scene ii

*(Weeks or months later. Egypt, the
Potiphar's residence.)*

30. Ladies said in the city:
"The wife of the (great) Aziz
Is seeking to seduce her slave
From his (true) self:
Truly hath he inspired her
With violent love: we see
She is evidently going astray.

31. When she heard
Of their malicious talk,
She sent for them
And prepared a banquet
For them: she gave
Each of them a knife:
And she said (to Joseph),
"Come out before them."
When they saw him,
They did extol him,
And (in their amazement)
Cut their hands: they said,
"Allah preserve! us no mortal
Is this! Is none other
Than a noble angel!"

32. She said: "There before you
Is the man about whom
ye did blame me!
I did seek to seduce him from
His (true) self but he did
Firmly save himself guiltless
And now, if he doth not
My bidding, he shall certainly
Be cast into prison,

And (what is more)
Be of the company of the vilest!"

33. He said: "O my Lord!
The prison is more
To me liking than that
To which they invite me:
Unless thou turn away
Their snare from me,
I should (in my youthful folly)
Feel inclined towards them
And join the ranks of the ignorant."

34. So his Lord hearkened to him
(In his prayer), and turned
Away from him their snare:
Verily he heareth and knoweth
(All things).

35. Then it occurred to the men,
After they had seen the Signs,
(That it was best)
To imprison him
For a time.

Scene iii

(Morning. Egypt, prison.)

36. Now with him there came
Into the prison two young men.
Said one of them: "I see
Myself (in a dream)
Pressing wine." Said the other:
"I see myself (in a dream)
Carrying bread on my head,
And birds are eating thereof."
"Tell us" (they said) "the truth
And meaning thereof: for we
See thou art one
That doth good (to all).

41. "O my two companions
Of the prison! As to one
Of you, he will pour out
The wine for his lord to drink:
As for the other, he will
Hang from the cross, and the birds
Will eat from off his head.
(So) hath been decreed
That matter whereof
Ye twain do enquire."

42. And of the two,
To that one whom he considered

About to be saved, he said:
 "Mention me to thy lord."
 But Satan made him forget
 To mention him to his lord:
 And (Joseph) lingered in prison
 A few (more) years.

Scene iv

(Years later. Egypt, the court.)

43. The king (of Egypt) said:
 "I do see (in a vision)
 Seven fat kine, whom seven
 Lean ones devour – and seven
 Green ears of corn, and seven (others)
 Withered. O ye chiefs!
 Expound to me my vision,
 If it be that ye can
 Interpret visions.
44. They said: "A confused medley
 Of dreams: and we are not
 Skilled in the interpretation
 Of dreams."
45. But the man who had been
 Released, one of the two
 (Who had been in prison)
 And who now bethought him
 After (so long) a space of time,
 Said: "I will tell you
 The truth of its interpretation:
 send ye me (therefore)."

Scene v

(Same day. Egypt, prison then the court.)

46. "O Joseph!" (he said):
 "O man of truth! Expound
 To us (the dream)
 Of seven fat kine
 Whom seven lean ones
 Devour, and of seven
 Green ears of corn
 And (seven) others withered:
 That I may return
 To the people, and that
 They may understand."
47. (Joseph) said: "For seven years
 Shall ye diligently sow
 As is your wont:
 And the harvests that ye reap,
 Ye shall leave them in the ear –
 Except a little, of which
 Ye shall eat.
48. "Then will come

After that (period)
 Seven dreadful (years),
 Which will devour
 What ye shall have laid by
 In a advance for them –
 (All) except a little
 Which ye shall have
 (Specially) guarded.

49. "Then will come
 After that (period) a year
 In which the people will have
 Abundant water, and in which
 They will press (wine and oil)."

50. So the king said:
 "Bring ye him unto me."
 But when the messenger
 Came to him, (Joseph) said:
 "Go thou back to thy lord,
 And ask him, 'What is
 The state of mind
 Of the ladies
 Who cut their hands'?
 For my Lord is
 Certainly well aware
 Of their snare."
51. (The king) said (to the ladies):
 "What was your affair
 When ye did seek to seduce
 Joseph from his (true) self?
 The ladies said: "Allah
 Preserve us! No evil
 Know we against him!
 Said the Aziz's wife:
 "Now is the truth manifest
 (To all): it was I
 Who sought to seduce him
 From his (true) self:
 He is indeed of those
 Who are (ever) true (and virtuous).
52. "This (say I), in order that
 He may know that I
 Have never been false
 To him in his absence,
 And that Allah will never
 Guide the snare of the false ones.
53. "Nor do I absolve my own self
 (Of blame): the (human) soul
 Is certainly prone to evil,

Unless my Lord do bestow
His mercy: but surely
My Lord is Oft-Forgiving,
Most Merciful.”

54. So the king said:
“Bring him unto me;
I will take him specially
To serve about my own person.”
Therefore when he had spoken
To him, he said:
“Be assured this day,
Thou art, before our own Presence,
With rank firmly established,
and fidelity fully proved!”

55. (Joseph) said: “Set me
Over the storehouses”
Of the land: I will
Indeed guard them,
As one that knows
(Their importance).”

56. Thus did we give
Established power to Joseph
In the land, to take possession
Therein as, when, or where
He pleased. We bestow
Of Our mercy on whom
We please, and We suffer not,
To be lost, the reward
Of those who do good.

ACT III

Scene i

(About seven years later. Egypt.)

58. Then came Joseph's brethren:
They entered his presence,
And he knew them
But they knew him not.

59. And when he had furnished
Them forth with provisions
(Suitable) for them, he said:
“Bring unto me a brother
Ye have, of the same father
As yourself, (but a different mother):
See ye not that I pay out
Full measure, and that I
Do provide the best hospitality?

60. “Now if ye bring him not
To me, ye shall have
No measure (of corn) from me,
Nor shall ye (even) come
Near me.”

61. They said: “We shall
Certainly seek to get
Our wish about him
From his father:
Indeed we shall do it.”

62. And (Joseph) told his servants
To put their stock in trade
(With which they had bartered)
Into their saddlebags,
So they should know it only
When they returned to their people,
In order that they might come back.

Scene ii

(Weeks later. Canaan, Jacob's residence.)

63. Now when they returned
To their father, they said:
“O our father! No more
Measure of grain shall we get
(Unless we take our brother):
So send our brother with us,
That we may get our measure;
And we will indeed
Take every care of him.”

64. He said: “Shall I trust you
With him with any result
Other than when I trusted you
With his brother aforetime?
But Allah is the best
To take care (of him),
And He is the Most Merciful
of those who show mercy!

65. Then when they opened
Their baggage, they found
Their stock in trade had been
Returned to them. They said:
“O our father! What (more)
Can we desire? This our
Stock in trade has been returned
To us; so we shall get
(More) food for our family;
We shall take care of our brother;
And add (at the same time)
A full camel's load (of grain
To our provisions).
This is but a small quantity.”

66. (Jacob) said: “Never will I
send him with you until
Ye swear a solemn oath to me,
In Allah's name, that ye

Will be sure to bring him back
To me unless ye are yourself
Hemmed in (and made powerless).
And when they had sworn
Their solemn oath,
He said: "Over all
That we say, be Allah
The Witness and Guardian!"

67. Further he said:

"O my sons enter not
All by one gate: enter ye
By different gates. Not that
I can profit you aught
Against Allah (with my advice):
None can command except Allah:
On Him did I put my trust:
And let all that trust
Put their trust on Him."

68. And when they entered

In the manner their father
Had enjoined, it did not
Profit them in the least
Against (the Plan of) Allah:
It was but a necessity
Of Jacob's soul, which he
Discharged. For he was,
By Our instruction, full
Of knowledge (and experience):
But most men know not.

Scene iii

(Weeks later. Egypt.)

69. Now when they came

Into Joseph's presence,
He received his (full) brother
To stay with him. He said
(To him): "Behold! I am thy (own)
Brother; so grieve not
At aught of their doings."

70. At length when he had furnished

Them forth with provisions
(Suitable) for them, he put
The drinking cup into
His brother's saddlebag.
Then shouted out a Crier:
"O ye (in) the Caravan!
Behold ye are thieves,
Without doubt!"

71. They said, turning towards them:

"What is it that ye miss?"

72. They said: "We miss
The great beaker of the king;
For him who produces it,
Is (the reward of)
A camel load; I
Will be bound by it."

73. (The brothers) said: "By Allah
Well ye know that we
Came not to make mischief
In the land, and we are
No thieves!"

74. (The Egyptians) said: "What then
Shall be the penalty of this,
If ye are (proved) to have lied?"

75. They said: "The penalty
Should be that he
In whose saddlebag
It is found, should be held
(As bondman) to atone
For the (crime). Thus it is
We punish the wrongdoers!"

76. So he began (the search)
With their baggage,
Before (he came to) the baggage
Of his brother: at length
He brought it out of his
Brother's baggage. Thus did We
Plan for Joseph. He could not
Take his brother by the law
Of the king except that Allah
Willed it (so). We raise
To degrees (of wisdom) whom
We please: but over all
Endued with knowledge is One,
The All Knowing.

77. They said: "If he steals,
There was a brother of his
Who did steal before (him).
But these things did Joseph
Keep locked in his heart,
Revealing not the secrets to them.
He (simply) said (to himself):
"Ye are the worse situated;
And Allah knoweth best
The truth of what ye assert!"

78. They said: "O exalted one!
Behold he has a father,
Aged and venerable, (who will
Grieve for him); so take

One of us in his place;
For we see that thou art
(Gracious) in doing good.”
79. He said: “Allah forbid
That we take other than him
With whom we found
Our property: indeed
(If we did so), we should
Be acting wrongfully.”
80. Now when they saw
No hope of his (yielding),
They held a conference in private.
The leader among them said:
“Know ye not that your father
Did take an oath from you
In Allah's name, and how
Before this, ye did fail
In your duty with Joseph?
Therefore will I not leave
This land until my father
Permits me, or Allah
Commands me; and He
Is the best to command.
81. “Turn ye back to your father,
And say, ‘O our father!
Behold! thy son committed theft!
We bear witness only to what
We know, and we could not
Well guard against the unseen!
82. “Ask at the town where
We have been and the caravan
In which we returned,
And (you will find) we are
Indeed telling the truth’.”

Scene iv

(Weeks later. Canaan, Jacob's
residence.)

83. Jacob said: “Nay, but ye
Have yourself contrived
A story (good enough) for you.
So patience is most fitting
(For me). Maybe Allah will
Bring them (back) all
To me (in the end).
For He is indeed full
Of knowledge and wisdom.”
84. And he turned away from them,
And said: “How great
Is my grief for Joseph!”
And his eyes became white

With sorrow, and he fell
Into silent melancholy.
85. They said: “By Allah!
(Never) wilt thou cease
To remember Joseph
Until thou reach the last
Extremity of illness,
Or until thou die!”?
86. He said: “I only complain
Of my distraction and anguish
To Allah, and I know from Allah
That which ye know not.
87. “O my sons! go ye
And enquire about Joseph
And his brother, and never
Give up hope of Allah's
Soothing mercy: truly
No one despairs of Allah's
Soothing mercy, except
Those who have no faith.”

Scene v

(Weeks later. Egypt.)

88. Then, when they came
(Back) into (Joseph's) presence
They said: “O exalted one!
Distress has seized us
And our family: we have
(Now) brought but scanty capital:
So pay us full measure,
(We pray thee), and treat it
As charity to us: for Allah
Doth reward the charitable.”
89. He said: “Know ye
How ye dealt with Joseph
And his brother, not knowing
(What ye were doing)?”
90. They said: “Art thou indeed
Joseph?” He said: “I am
Joseph, and this is my brother:
Allah has indeed been gracious
To us (all): behold, he that is
Righteous and patient – never
Will Allah suffer the reward
To be lost, of those
Who do right.”
91. They said: “By Allah! Indeed
Has Allah preferred thee
Above us, and we certainly

have been guilty of sin!"
92. He said: "This day
let no reproach be (cast)
On you; Allah will forgive you,
And He is the. Most Merciful
Of those who show mercy!"

93. "Go with this my shirt,
And cast it over the face
Of my father: he will
Come to see (clearly). Then come
Ye (here) to me together
With all your family."

Scene vi

(Weeks later. Canaan, Jacob's
residence.)

94. When the caravan left (Egypt),
Their father said: "I do indeed
Scent the presence of Joseph:
Nay, think me not a dotard."

95. They said: "By Allah!
Truly thou art in
Thine old wandering mind."

96. Then when the bearer
Of the good news came,
He cast (the shirt)
Over his face, and he
Forthwith regained clear sight.
He said: "Did I not say
To you, 'I know from Allah
That which ye know not?'"

97. They said: "O our father!
Ask for us forgiveness
For our sins, for we
Were truly at fault."

NOTES

¹ T. S. Eliot is one of the great figures who has specifically related literature and drama to religion both in his criticism and creative arts. The peak of his interest in the subject is well witnessed in his *Murder in the Cathedral*, a play that has been envisaged as the one that marks the age of the revival of poetic (and religious) drama.

² Murray Roston. *Biblical Drama in England: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1868), 289.

³ Ibid.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1980), 396

⁵ Ibid., 398.

98. He said: "Soon will I
Ask my Lord for forgiveness
For you: for He is indeed
Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

Scene vii

(Weeks later. Egypt.)

99. Then when they entered
The presence of Joseph,
He provided a home
For his parents with himself,
And said: "Enter ye
Egypt (all) in safety
If it please Allah."

100. And he raised his parents
High on the throne (of dignity),
And they fell down in prostration,
(All) before him. He said:
"O my father! this is
The fulfillment of my vision
Of old! Allah hath made it
Come true! He was indeed
Good to me when He
Took me out of prison
And brought you (all here)
Out of the desert,
(Even) after Satan had sown
Enmity between me and my brothers.
Verily my Lord understandeth
Best the mysteries of all
That he planneth to do.
For verily He is full
Of knowledge and wisdom.

⁶ Thomas Adler, "The Mystery of Things: The Variety of Religious Experiences in Modern American Drama," in James Remond (ed.) *Drama and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 139.

⁷ Gustaf Aulen. *The Drama and the Symbol: A Book on Images of God and the Problems They Raise*. (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 144.

⁸ Edwin Block, "Drama and Religious Experience, Or Why Theater Still Matters," *LOGOS*, 8:1, (Winter 2005), 67.

⁹ Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism*, 46.1 (2004), 168.

¹⁰ Heinz Fischer, "Audience: Osiris, Catharsis and the Feast of Fools," *New Directions in Theatre*, ed. Jukian Hilton (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), 67.

¹¹ These are plays that are commonly played publically during the 'Ashoura activities (the first ten days of the first Hijra calendar year). They are acted by common people, and their plots are based on the stories of the battle between Imam Hussein (Son of Imam Ali, cousin of Prophet Muhammad) and the Umayyad army. The story is tragic due to the consequences of what occurred during and after the battle as well as the brutalities of the Umayyad officers.

¹² Abdullah Yusuf Ali. *The Meanings of the Holy Qur'an* (London: The Islamic Computing Centre), 12: 4. All references to the Qur'an interpretation and translated texts are from this edition. Sura number as well as the verse number will be parenthetically cited within the text.

¹³ Martin Esslin elaborately investigates the role and function of suspense in the dramatic construction. For more details, see: Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama*, (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd, 1976) 43-49.

¹⁴ Meir Sternberg, "Universals and Narrative and Their Cognovits Fortunes (II)," *Poetics Today* 24:3 (2003), 518.

¹⁵ Such responses must be of equal significance to the 'action text' which Wolfgang Iser calls to approach it in equal measures. For more details, see: Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomendogical Approach," *Modern Critics and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longmans, 1988), 212.

¹⁶ J. L. Styan, *Drama, Stage and Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 224.

¹⁸ Fischer, 80.

¹⁹ Styan, 224.

²⁰ Una Ellis-Fermor. *The Frontiers of Drama*. (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.), 2.

²¹ Esslin, 46.

²² Ibid., 47.

²³ Ibid., 52

²⁴ Ibid., 43

²⁵ Block, 67.

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