

**'THEY HATED HIM EVEN MORE':  
LITERARY TECHNIQUE IN GENESIS 37.1-11**

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### 1. Introduction

The well-known story of Joseph opens with the scene of his two dreams. The dreams about the sheaves of wheat and about the sun, the moon and eleven stars both recall a tension which persists through some of the later chapters in the Book of Genesis. The reader is waiting for the answer to the question: How and when will those dreams come true? This article is not concerned with the literary structure of the whole of the story of Joseph,<sup>1</sup> but is confined to a few remarks on the composition of the opening scene in Gen 37.1-11. These remarks were provoked by a text-critical problem in Gen. 37.5. First, I will review this problem and the proposed solution. While it is not convincing, I will give my own proposal with reference to the literary structure of Gen. 37.1-11.

### 2. A gloss in Gen. 37.5b ?

The Masoretic text of Gen. 37. 5 reads:

וַיִּחְלֶם יוֹסֵף חֲלֹמִים	Joseph had a dream.
וַיַּגִּד לְאֶחָיו	He told it to his brothers.
וַיִּקְשְׁבוּ עִדָּה שָׂנְאָה אִתּוֹ:	They hated him even more.

In the Old Greek translation of Genesis the last four words are absent. For many scholars,

<sup>1</sup> On that see i.a. D.B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Genesis 37-50) (VT Supplement, 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970), pp. 66-105; H. Donner, *Die literarische Gestalt der alttestamentlichen Josephsgeschichte* (SHAW Ph-H. Kl. 1976, 2; Heidelberg: Winter, 1976); G.W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt*. Structural and theological context for the Joseph story (CBQ.MS, 4; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), pp. 7-52; R. Alter, 'Joseph and his brothers', *Commentary* 70 (1980), pp. 59-69; A. Asakoff, 'The ascent and descent of Joseph: an interpretation', *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1982/83), pp. 22-28; J.P.H. Wessels, 'The Joseph story as a wisdom novelette', *Old Testament Essays* 2 (1984), pp. 61-80, and W. Dietrich, *Die Josephserzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung*. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Pentateuchfrage. (BThS, 14; Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989), pp. 13-18.



there is a good reason to consider these words as not original.<sup>2</sup> This argument seems sound. The same words occur in verse 8. After Joseph told the contents of his first dream to his brothers, and after they reacted with an offensive question, a remark on the disturbed relation between Joseph and his brothers seems more apposite. Thus there is much to be said for the assumption that a later editor of the History of Joseph, or the whole of the Book of Genesis, duplicated — for some unintelligible reason — the words from vs. 8 in vs. 5b. This duplication should then be dated between the time of the Old Greek translation and the date of the Vulgata. The later versiones antiquae agree with the Masoretic Text.

However, this solution is not entirely convincing. First, it adduces no reason for the addition in the Masoretic Text. Second, it overlooks the literary technique underlying the composition of the story of Joseph. The text-critical solution is built on the supposition that the story was written chronologically. The argument that the words are not in the right place in vs.. 5b implies that this part of the story of Joseph is told in these verses without retrospective or anticipating elements. The sequence of the sentences is simply assumed to reflect the sequence of 'events'.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. The composition of Genesis 37.1-11

The episode in Gen. 37.1-11 seems to be constructed out of four textual units:

1. *Introduction* (vs.. 1-2).
2. *Description of the onset of alienation* (vs.. 3-4)
3. *First dream and its reactions* (vs.. 5-8)
4. *Second dream and its reactions* (vs.. 9-11)

The first unit (vs.. 1-2) was written either by a Priestly redactor or should be regarded as a revi-

<sup>2</sup> For instance: H. Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (GHAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1910), p. 405 [Glosse]; J. Skinner, *Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 21930), p. 445 [out of place before the telling of the dream]; G. von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose Genesis* (ATD 2/4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1972), p. 284 [irrtümlich vorgezogen]; A. van Selms, *Genesis deel II* (POT; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1967), p. 183 [5b schrappen]; BHS [prb dl]; H.-C. Schmitt, *Die nichtpriesterliche Josephsgeschichte*. Ein Beitrag zur neuesten Pentateuchkritik (BZAW, 154; Berlin New York: De Gruyter, 1980), p. 24n77 [Glosse, die G noch nicht gelesen hat]; C. Westermann, *Genesis*. 3. Teilband (BK, I,3; Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), p. 24 [fehl am Platz, Zusatz]; L. Schmidt, *Literarische Studien zur Josephsgeschichte* (BZAW, 167; Berlin New York: De Gruyter, 1986), pp. 144.294 [unterbricht den Zusammenhang].

W. Resenhöfft, *Die Quellenberichte im Josef - Sinai -Komplex* (Gen 37 bis Ex 24 mit 32-34) (EH XXIII, 199; Bern Frankfurt am Main New York: Peter Lang, 1983), pp. 29.59, considers some words of vss. 5b and 8b ("Und sie hassten ihn wegen seiner Rede") as part of the P-version and takes עוֹד "noch mehr" as a late gloss.

<sup>3</sup> The question of the historicity of the events of the Joseph-story is left aside.



sion by a Priestly writer of the opening lines of the Story of Joseph.<sup>4</sup> In both cases, the P-character of these verses indicates a redactional process in which the hitherto separate *Josephs-novelle* was incorporated in the greater literary work: the Book of Genesis or the Pentateuch.

The second unit (vs.. 3-4) functions as the description of the scenery, in which the story will be 'played'. The exclusive love of Jacob/Israel for Joseph is expressed in the gift of the *קִטְנָה פְּסִים* 'a multipartite woollen robe'.<sup>5</sup> The love of Jacob/Israel is then contrasted with what it subsequently provoked: the hate of the other sons of Jacob. At the end of the description of the two dreams of Joseph, hatred towards the brothers developed into jealousy (vs.. 11, וַיִּקְנְאוּ-בּוֹ).

The dreams are described in a parallel scheme in the form of a dyptich:

Dream A	Dream B
A	
- וְיִדְלֹם Joseph (5a)	- וְיִדְלֹם Joseph (9a)
- וַיִּגִּיד Joseph (5b)	- וַיִּסְפֹּר Joseph (9b)
- reaction of the brothers (5c)	
- וַיֹּאמֶר Joseph (6a)	- וַיֹּאמֶר Joseph (9c)
B	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Imp דָּלַם שָׁמַע (as object)</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="text-align: center;">הִנֵּה + part</p> <p style="text-align: center;">הִנֵּה +part + part</p> <p style="text-align: center;">הִנֵּה + ipf + ipf</p> </div> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Imp הִנֵּה דָּלַם (as object)</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="text-align: center;">הִנֵּה + part</p> </div> </div>
C	
- וַיֹּאמְרוּ brothers (8a)	- וַיִּסְפֹּר Joseph/"man" (10a)
	- וַיַּגִּיד father (10b)
	- וַיֹּאמֶר father (10c)

<sup>4</sup> See Gunkel, pp. 401.404.492; Skinner, pp. 443-444; Von Rad, p. 285; R. Rendtorff, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW, 147; Berlin New York: De Gruyter, 1977), pp. 130-142; H. Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (CBC; Cambridge: University Press, 1979), p. 217; Schmitt, p.23n74; Westermann, pp.24.25; Resenhöfft, pp. 29.59; L. Ruppert, "Die Aporie der gegenwärtigen Pentateuchdiskussion und die Josephserzählung der Genesis", *BiZs NF* 29 (1985), p. 48n72; Schmidt, pp. 142.287; Dietrich, p. 53+n147. For another view, see Coats, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Interpreting *passîm* as an assimilation of *\*parsîm*. See the commentaries on Genesis for the different interpretations of this word.



D	- Two interrogative sentences	- Two interrogative sentences
	- מֶלֶךְ + הֵן	- חֵלֶם + מָה
	- מִשָּׁל + אֵם	- בֹּאָה + הֵן
E	- שָׂנְאוּ + וְיָסְרָה brothers (8b)	
F		- וַיִּקְבְּאוּ brothers (11a)
		- שָׂמַר father (11b) <sup>6</sup>

In both descriptions, the direct speeches of Joseph and of his brothers/his father are related to each other. The speeches of the brothers/father (= elements D) function as a kind of *Traumdeutung* of the elements B. In both descriptions, the elements B and D have a syntactically parallel structure. The initial reaction to the dreams is not only divergent — the brothers *hated* (שָׂנְאוּ) Joseph; Jacob/Israel *scorned* (וַיִּסְרָה) him — but is also placed at another position in the narrative.

- In Dream A the reaction is told both in elements A and E, with the suggestion that it is a duplication in A. In this part of the story the angry reaction of the brothers should be interpreted as the recapitulation of the attitude of the brothers towards Joseph after his first dream.

- In Dream B the reaction of the father is told in element C; i.e. between the telling of the second dream and the direct speech of the father. In this part of the story, the reaction of Jacob/Israel functions as a kind of *adverbialis* to the next *wayyiqtol*-form (he told). The verb-form וַיִּסְרָה (he scorned) informs us about the way in which Jacob/Israel talked to his son Joseph.

These observations show the literary character of the narrative in Gen. 37.1-11. The author made use of the technique of repetition; since he would weave two threads together throughout his story: one on the relation between Joseph and his brothers, and another on the relation of Joseph to his father. That means that it is not possible to regard the two dreams of Joseph as the result of a twofold oral or written tradition.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it implies that the opening scene of the Joseph story is a piece of narrative art to such a degree that it is not a category mistake to bring in arguments from the theory of narrative art in order to explain elements of the story.

<sup>6</sup> The *qāṭal*-form brings the sequence of narrative *wayyiqtol*-forms to a rest.

<sup>7</sup> Contra H. Seebass, *Geschichtliche Zeit und theonome Tradition in der Joseph-Erzählung*, (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), pp. 76-79; Resenhöfft, pp. 43.59 [\*5-7 = J; \*9-11 = E]. See — among others — J.M. Lotman, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte* (UTB, 103; München: Fink, 1972), pp. 158-242; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 88-113, and S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOT Supplement Series, 70 = Bible and Literature Series, 17; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), pp. 42-45, for the implications of the literary technique of repetition.



#### 4. Gen. 37.6-8a a retrospective achrony ?

It is a characteristic of literature that there is not always synchrony in a narrative.<sup>8</sup> The sequence of the episodes or the sentences is not always in agreement with the actual sequence of the events described. Elements of a story can be told in achrony. A flash-back, for instance, is a much used form of achrony. In many novels the reader is moved backwards in time, for instance to events in the youth of the principal character. Achrony is a literary technique which can be used by an author to raise the narrative tension in a story or to emphasize some of its elements. Two types of achrony should be distinguished: retrospective and anticipating achrony. Both types seem to be present in the opening scene of the story of Joseph.

His dreams have an anticipatory character as such: they are waiting to become true. But they are not told in the form of an anticipating achrony. 1) We only know that the dreams have an anticipatory character in the explanation of the brothers and the father. 2) In fact, they are told retrospectively. Within the direct speech of Joseph, the author has him tell events which happened earlier than the uttering of the words "Hear this dream, which I have dreamed!" Joseph dreamed about the sheaves of wheat during the night. He tells them, however, the next morning.<sup>9</sup>

Anticipating achrony can be found in the other direct speeches of the story. Both his brothers and his father react to the dreams of Joseph with interrogative sentences:

דמלך המלך אלינו

Will you be a king for us?

משול המשל בנו

Will you rule over us?

מה תדלם הזה אשר חלמתי

What dream is that, which you dreamed?

דבוא נבוא אני ואמך ואחייך

Shall we come — me, your mother

להשתחוות לך ארצה

and your brothers — to bow down  
before you on the earth?

Within their interrogative sentences they refer to situations — the rule of Joseph and the bowing down of the family to him — which are at the moment of their utterance still in the future. They must still be fulfilled. The literary tension created by this anticipating achrony is that the reader of the story is left with two questions. Will the situations referred to actually occur and will the brothers and/or the father try to prevent them?

<sup>8</sup> See for instance V. Šklovskij, 'Der parodistische Roman' in: J. Striedter (Her.), *Russischer Formalismus*. Texte zur allgemeinen Literaturtheorie und zur Theorie der Prosa (UTB, 40; München: Fink 21971), pp. 249.263.267; G. Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), pp. 78-122, and Bar-Efrat, pp. 175-183.

<sup>9</sup> The author, however, leaves away the indications of the times when Joseph dreamed and when he told his dream; which in it self is a literary technique.



Now I will return to the text-critical problem in vs.. 5b. Since it has become clear that Gen. 37.1-11 is not narrated in a chronological way, it is now possible to look at the question of the addition in the MT from another point of view: i.e. the assumption lying behind the excision of the words "they hated them even more" in the MT is no longer tenable.

In other narratives of the Old Testament, scholars have indicated an immediate form of flash back, the literary technique of a type of retrospective achrony called in German *Nachholende Erzählung*.<sup>10</sup> In this technique, the final result of a group of events and/or acts is told first and the way in which this climax was achieved is narrated afterwards. A good example is produced by Jonah 4. The events described in Jonah 4.5-9 can be interpreted as events which happened *in time* before the question of YHWH in vs.. 4. In the narrative order they are placed in achrony, which means that they should now be translated in a plusperfect:

4. YHWH answered: "Are you justly angry?"
5. Jonah had gone out east of the city.  
He had settled himself down.  
He had made for himself a shelter.  
...
8. So he had wished he were dead.  
"I am better of dead than alive", he had said.
9. But YHWH answered him  
"Are you justly angry?"  
...

Jonah's anger and YHWH's reaction receive the emphasis. The fact that Jonah's complaint (vs.. 3) and YHWH's question (vs.. 4) are repeated in vs.s. 9-10, indicates that, at this point, the achronical loop comes to an end.<sup>11</sup>

It can now be argued, in Gen. 37.1-11, the literary technique of the *Nachholende Erzählung* can also be found. In my opinion, vs.s. 6-8b are narrated in this form of immediate flash-back. This means that the hatred of the brothers is the final result of Joseph's telling of the dream, and of the interpretation of his dream by the brothers. This result is then reached by the events

<sup>10</sup> See for instance: W.J. Martin, "Dischronologized' Narrative', in: *Congress Volume Rome 1968* (VT Supplement, 17; Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 179-186 [Josh. 2.16; II Sam. 12.26ff; I Kgs. 2.7; 9.15f; II Kgs. 24.7]; N. Lohfink, 'Jona ging zum Stadt hinaus (Jona 4,5)', *BiZs NF* 5 (1961), pp. 159-170; A.S. van der Woude, 'Nachholende Erzählung im Buche Jona', in: A. Rofé and Y. Zakovitch (eds.), *Isac Leo Seeligmann Volume. Essays in the Bible and the Ancient World*, Vol. III, (Jerusalem 1983 [= 1985]), pp. 263-272; B. Becking, 'Elia op de Horeb', *NedTT* 41 (1987), pp. 177-186 [I Kgs. 19.9-14].

<sup>11</sup> The critical remarks against this interpretation by J. Day, 'Problems in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah', in: A.S. van der Woude (ed.), *In Quest of the Past. Studies on Israelite Religion, Literature and Prophetism* (OTS, 26; Leiden New York København Köln: E.J. Brill, 1990) p. 42 + n.49, are not convincing.



narrated in 6-8b. The relation between the narrative time and the narrated time is clarified in Fig. 1.

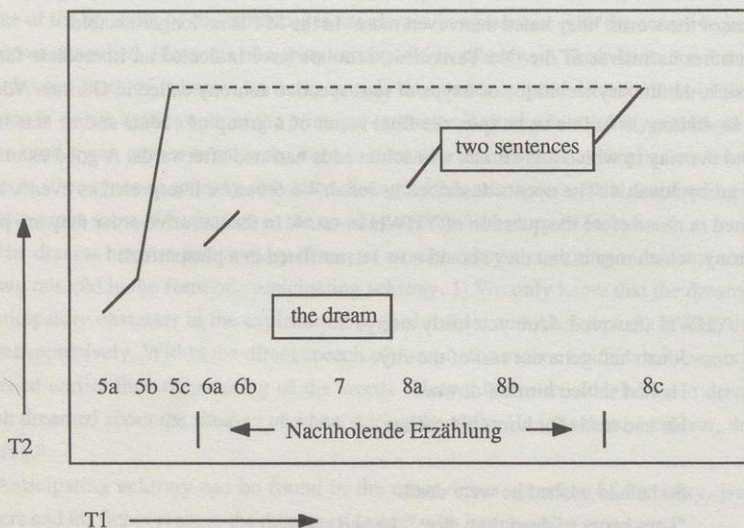


Fig. 1. Narrative time (T1) and narrated time (T2) in Gen. 37.5-8

## 5. Conclusions

Accepting the presence of different types of literary technique in Gen. 37.1-11 makes a text-critical intervention in Gen. 37.5b unnecessary. The repetition of the words "they hated him even more" in vs. 8 can be interpreted as the indication of the end of the achronical loop in the text. The lacuna in the Old Greek version can be explained by assuming that the translators were not aware of the literary technique which was used in the story.

It would be a confusion of methods to conclude from the occurrence of different types of literary technique in Gen. 37.1-11 that this text has not gone through a process of redaction. The analysis of the literary structure does not permit conclusions of a literary-critical nature. This is a problem on its own, which is narrowly connected with one's 'pentateuchal paradigm'. Was there really "J" and "E" material about Joseph? Or was the story developed in other circles, implying that it was handed down through the history of Israel separately? Such questions can not be answered here; though we can refer to recent scholarly research on this

problem.<sup>12</sup>

The consequences of this understanding of the meaning of the text, however, are as follows. The primary emphasis in the story is not on the dreams as such; but on the growing alienation between Joseph and his brothers. Their hatred, provoked by the love of Jacob/Israel, and the gift of the *תורה פסים* is increased by their interpretation of Joseph's first dream and turned, thus, into jealousy after the second dream. Their jealousy forms the basis for their actions, by which they try to prevent Joseph's dreams for coming true (Gen. 37.12-36).

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<sup>12</sup> See — among others — R.N. Whybray, 'The Joseph Story and Pentateuch Criticism', *VT* 18 (1968), pp. 522-528; Redford, pp. 106-186; Donner; Schmitt, pp. 23-32; Ruppert, pp. 31-48; Schmidt, pp. 142-151; Dietrich, pp. 53.66.