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8 Opposing Voices in Ancient Egyptian Literature

Two types of Egyptian literature are of direct interest in the context of the present volume: Late Egyptian disputes that pit personifications against one another, and Middle Egyptian “discourses,” as these are referred in Egyptology. After briefly presenting the former, which are sparsely documented and may or may not reflect an initial influence by Mesopotamian disputes, I concentrate on the latter. Whether formally dialogues or monologues, these integrate multiple voices or attitudes to a question and are therefore strongly dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense. In two appendices, I briefly refer Middle and Late Egyptian satires of professions and Demotic dialogues concerned with the initiation into restricted sacerdotal knowledge.

1 Late Egyptian Disputes

Dating to the New Kingdom, three disputes pit personifications against one another (Mathieu 2011: 162–64; Jiménez 2017: 128–30; López 2005a). Among all Egyptian texts, these come closest to the Mesopotamian disputes. All three are fragmentarily documented in single witnesses:

- *Trial of Head and Belly* (the original incipit): the beginning of the composition is preserved on T. Turin 58004, a writing board of unknown origin, of which only the upper half (eight lines) is preserved.¹ T. Turin 58004 has been dated to the times of Amenhotep III-Akhenaten (ca. 1350 BCE; López 2000; see Jiménez 2017: 129 and n. 351) or to the late Twentieth Dynasty (ca. 1100 BCE, Burkard & Thissen 2008: 137). In the composition, Head and Belly vie as to whose function is more vital than the other. Parallels in Esop, Titus Livius, and beyond have been noted (Mathieu 2011: 163–64; Burkard and Thissen 2008: 139–40).

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¹ Text: López 1984: 50–51, pl. 184–184a; edition and translation: López 2000; translation and discussion: Burkard and Thissen 2008: 137–40; Kammerzell 1995. See also the contribution by Mathieu in the present volume.

- *Trial of Wine and Beer* (the original incipit): only the incipit and first sentence are preserved on O. DeM 10270, a Twentieth Dynasty (ca. 1190–1070 BCE) ostrakon from the workmen’s village of Deir el-Medineh.² The text appears to begin with a recrimination of Wine against Beer. Based on the grammatical genders in Egyptian, it has been tentatively suggested that Wine could stand for a man working in the hardships outside, and Beer for a woman staying inside (Mathieu 2011: 164).
- A dispute between trees, fragmentarily preserved on P. Turin 1966 ro, an early Twentieth Dynasty papyrus also from Deir el-Medineh.³ As the dispute takes place in an orchard inhabited by lovers, this composition has often been related to Ramesside love poetry.

In relation to these three fragmentary compositions, two Late Egyptian narrative compositions are to be mentioned. Both consist largely of dialogues:

- *Truth and Falsehood* (modern title, based on the two main protagonists), partially preserved on P. Chester Beatty II, a Twentieth Dynasty papyrus from Deir el-Medineh (ca. 1190–1070 BCE).⁴ The narrative and dialogues oppose Truth (*M3’t*) to his younger brother Falsehood (*Grg*), the latter having falsely accused the former of having robbed him of an extraordinary dagger.
- *Trial of Horus and Seth* (original incipit), or (*Contendings of*) *Horus and Seth* (as the composition is more commonly referred to), a lengthy composition fully preserved on P. Chester Beatty I, a Twentieth Dynasty papyrus from Deir el-Medineh.⁵ The narrative and dialogues pit Horus and Seth against one another over a period of some eighty years as to whom of the two will inherit the royal function from Osiris.

All preserved incipits—in two of the three disputes and in one of the two narrative compositions—include the word *wpw* “Trial,” which appears to be a generic marker (Mathieu 2011):

- *wpw ht hn’ tp r wh’ ĩ.ĩr=w sdd kī=w m-b3h m’b3yt (r) ptrĭ p3y=sn tp mtw.tw sh3 p3 ‘d3 (...)* “Trial between Head and Body until the resolution that was made, announcing their nature before the Court of Thirty to see their chief (*scil.* who is chief among the two) so that the one who was wrong was revealed.”

² Text: Grandet 2010: 153, 377.

³ Text: López 1992; edition and translation: López 2005b; see also López 2005a: 137–46; Jiménez 2017: 128–30.

⁴ Text: LES 30–36; among translations, e.g., Wente 2003a.

⁵ Text: LES 37–60; monographic study: Broze 1997; among other translations, e.g., Wente 2003b; further references in Burkard and Thissen 2008: 35–47.

- *p3 wpw irp hn' hnkt* “The trial between Wine and Beer.”
- [*h3ti-'*] *m p3 wpw hr hn' sth (...)* “[Beginning] of the trial between Horus and Seth (...)”

Among these five texts, three pit personifications against each other: among the disputes, *Belly and Head*, *Wine and Beer* (the third features talking trees, *Sycamore and Fig Tree*); and among the narrative compositions, *Truth and Falsehood* (the second features gods, *Horus and Seth*). This raises the question of possible connections with the Mesopotamian genres of disputes. While actual influence remains difficult to demonstrate, a possible context for such is given by intensified cultural contacts between Egypt and the Levant and the Near East beginning in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty (Jiménez 2017: 128–30). As the presence of other Mesopotamian literary works at Amarna, Akhenaten’s new capital, illustrates, tokens of the Mesopotamian genre could have reached Egypt possibly by the times of Amenhotep III-Akhenaten, for example along with foreign wives married to the Egyptian king and their retinues (e.g., Kemp ²2006: 292–96). As the preserved incipits demonstrate, the Egyptian compositions reflect the importance of judicial matters in Ramesside times. If, therefore, there was an initial outside influence, the Mesopotamian model would have been rapidly integrated and re-framed in specifically Egyptian terms in compositions such as *Trial of Head and Belly* and *Trial of Wine and Beer*. As the small number of texts suggests, Egyptian disputes may never have gained broad popularity. Based on what is preserved, they could also have been much shorter and simpler than Mesopotamian ones. Whether they should be seen as relating to any educational context remains entirely unclear given the evidence at hand.

An altogether different development is seen in the narrative compositions, *Truth and Falsehood* and *Trial of Horus and Seth*, with the latter standing out by its sheer length and multi-layered complexity.⁶ The two compositions belong squarely to the group of Late Egyptian tales, integrating the model of the “Trial” with this tradition. The figures are allegorical, and a mythical background underlies both compositions, possibly pointing to models of royal succession. More fundamentally, the compositions are deeply humorous and entertaining, and provide a ferocious parody of judicial procedures in Ramesside times. In *Truth and Falsehood*, Truth wins, not because he is right, but only because he has managed to trick his opponent rhetorically before the tribunal. In *Trial of Horus and Seth*, the issue is solved after endless contradictory debates, argumentation, and exchanges of letters, only when Isis tricks Seth rhetorically into performative

⁶ See the detailed discussion of Broze 1997.

self-contradiction through wordplay—the duration of the whole process, dragging on over some eighty years, being parodic in itself. The two compositions stage rhetoric as a tool by which the protagonists, rather than working toward establishing the truth, trick, trap, and deceive one another. Both are expressive of a bleak view of rhetoric as a tool for manipulation at the hands of the powerful, in utter disconnect from any ethic value (Coulon 1999: 117–27).

2 Middle Egyptian “Discourses” and their Social Settings

In altogether different ways and reflecting different social settings, rhetoric is even more central to Middle Egyptian literature, particularly of the Middle Kingdom (2000–1700 BCE).⁷ Among the various types of Middle Egyptian literature are compositions referred in modern scholarship as “discourses.”⁸ One of these “discourses” is a dialogue (*Debate of a Man and his Ba*; all titles are modern ones); another is a very long monologue followed by a dialogue (*Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*); and the others are monologues addressed to an interlocutor who remains silent (most notably *Eloquent Peasant*, *Discourse of Khakhaberreseneb*; also *Discourse of a Fowler*, and *Discourse of Sasobek*). Whatever their format, these “discourses” stage different voices with high performative effect and virtuosity. Of the three main types of Middle Egyptian literature, “teachings” (*sbꜣyt*) and tales would continue, taking new forms, into Late Egyptian and Demotic literature; “discourses,” by contrast, would not, and are therefore specific to Middle Egyptian literature.⁹

Prior to illustrating Middle Egyptian “discourses,” aspects of the social and cultural settings of Middle Egyptian literature and rhetoric more broadly should be briefly outlined. Middle Kingdom elite society has been variously characterized as a court society, a petitioning society, and/or a society in which face-to-face interaction was paramount in determining an individual’s advancement or fate. In this context, Middle Egyptian literature was not oral (it was transmitted in writing, and its very high degree of internal patterning points to composition in writing), yet fundamentally aural (formal features and high verbal vir-

7 On Middle Egyptian literature, see Parkinson 2002.

8 Parkinson 1996; 2002: 193–234. In the following, the type of Egyptian literary text is set in inverted commas, to distinguish it from other uses of the common English word.

9 On the issues raised by the discontinuation of “discourses,” see Parkinson 2002: 226–234.

tuosity point to performance, which, furthermore, is staged, reflexively, in compositions such as *Neferti*). Primary settings were performative, in the royal court and in other elite contexts.¹⁰

Verbal etiquette and rhetoric are amply thematized in autobiographical self-presentations inscribed on stone, as well as in literature of all types. Middle Egyptian literary teachings abound in metapragmatic statements on the importance of rhetoric, for example, a king advising his son and successor-to-be: “Be skillful with words, and you will be victorious [...] The strong arm of a king is his tongue, words are stronger than any fight” (*Teaching a Merikare* E 32–33).¹¹ The most culturally central teaching of all, *Teaching of Ptahhotep*, concerns notably proper (verbal) etiquette, and defines itself as a teaching into the “norm” or “standard” (*tp-ḥsb*, on which see Coulon 1999: 112–14) of “accomplished/perfect speech” (*mdt nfrt*). The last expression, which is central to Middle Egyptian literature in general,¹² has dimensions that are at once ethic, rhetoric, and aesthetic in *Ptahhotep* (Hagen 2012). In a composition that is not a teaching, *Neferti*, “accomplished/perfect speech” is “choice verses” performed to distract the king and, by extension, the elite. In addition, poetic language in *Neferti* is also a verbal figuration of order, set against the anomic world that *Neferti* presents to the king, and at once contains in and through his “choice verses.”

The importance of rhetoric is also manifest in dialogues in narratives (on which see also Worthington 2004). In *Tale of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (ca. 1950–1850 BCE), for example, a low-level official attempts to dispel a higher official’s terror of reporting to the king what seems to have been an unsuccessful expedition. The former tells the latter: “Wash yourself, put water on your fingers, so that you can answer when addressed. You shall speak to the king with your mind with you, you shall answer without stammering. A man’s mouth (*r3*) saves him, his speech (*mdt*) gives veiling of the face to him (i.e. makes that one be lenient for him)” (*Shipwrecked Sailor* 13–19). The low-level official goes on telling the frightened official a lengthy story of his own experience to illustrate, by analogy, that all will be well. The composition ends abruptly with the higher official’s response: “Don’t act brilliant, friend! What is the point of giving water to a fowl at the dawn of its slaughter in the morning?” (*Shipwrecked Sailor* 183–86). Besides the explicit thematization of rhetoric in face-to-face interaction, note the shattering brevity of the frightened high official’s dismissal, consisting of just

¹⁰ In much later Ramesside times (1300–1070 BCE), one of several contexts for the reception and cultivation of Middle Egyptian literature would be educational, but no similar educational contexts can be made out for the Middle Kingdom itself.

¹¹ See, e.g., Coulon 1999: 103.

¹² E.g., Moers 2001: 167–91, with references to previous literature; Coulon 2004: 128–29.

two clauses. Note, furthermore, how the high official takes up the mid-level official's very opening words about pouring water, and reverses these to signify the exact opposite of their original meaning. Such a maximization of the intratextual gap will also be one central rhetorical strategy in the "discourses" to be discussed now.

3 *Eloquent Peasant*

The ambivalent relationship of "perfect speech" to "Order" (Maat), is at the core of one of the most rhetorically complex "discourses" of Middle Egyptian literature, *Eloquent Peasant*.¹³ The composition, which dates to around 1850 BCE, is documented in a series of four Middle Kingdom manuscripts, the two earliest of which derive from the so-called Berlin Library, a collection of literary texts deposited in a Theban tomb around 1800 BCE (Parkinson 2009: 77–112).

The opening narrative section stages a peasant from Wadi Natrun—an outsider, therefore—who is robbed of the goods he had come to trade in the Valley. The Peasant then addresses nine successive petitions to the king's deputy, the high steward Rensi son of Meru, who remains silent. It finally turns out that the authorities have remained intentionally unresponsive so that the Peasant may keep deploying his out-of-the-ordinary eloquence, which is subsequently written down on a roll under the king's own order. During his nine petitions, the Peasant, in increasing despair, moves from the specific situation of his being denied justice to broader social, political, and ultimately cosmic, levels in questioning Maat, thus raising the theodic question. The composition thereby stages a metapragmatic commentary on the social role and effects of rhetoric, addressing the problematic link between discourse and reality, and the question whether rhetoric can be reconciled with the model of Maat (Parkinson 1990; Coulon 1999).

Among the various rhetorical strategies deployed by the Peasant, the direct iteration of words is revelatory of a possibly unstable relation between the word and what it should stand for. The Peasant thus urges the king's deputy Rensi: "Do Maat for the Lord of Maat of whose Maat there is (real) Maat" (*ir m3't n nb m3't nty wn m3't nt m3't=f*, B1 334–35).¹⁴ Playing on the different associations of the repeated word, the king's deputy is here to judge ("do Maat") for Thoth

¹³ Photographs and text: Parkinson 2012b and 1991, respectively; translation and commentary: Parkinson 2012a; see, further, the analyses in notably Parkinson 1990; 2002: 168–82; and Coulon 1999: 104–109, 114–17.

¹⁴ All translations after Parkinson 2012a, some slightly adapted.

(“the Lord of Maat”), who functions as a divine model of justice and has “(real) Maat,” implying, by contrast, that others, such as possibly Rensi himself, have Maat only in name or form (Coulon 1999: 108–109, 115; Parkinson 2012a: 271–72). Inasmuch as the various significations of words are themselves intertextually determined, wordplay becomes a maximally condensed mode for exploring the fissures in normative discourse.

Such fissures are also expressed through directly antithetical statements. For example: “The measure of heaps now defrauds for himself; the filler for another now despoils his surroundings; he who leads lawfully now commands theft—who then will beat off wretchedness? when the dispeller of infirmity is going wrong; (...)” (B1 135–38). A nominal pole, the subjects consisting of participial constructions, refers to the situation as it should be, and therefore to what, normatively, should be Rensi’s behavior. This clashes with a verbal pole, referring to the here and now of the speech situation, the petitions the Peasant addresses to the same Rensi, and thereby to the situation as it is empirically found to be.¹⁵ The following is even more subtly insinuating: “Does the scale wander (*in iw iwsw nnm=f*)? Is the balance *being* partial (*in iw mhzt hr rdt hr gs*)? And is Thoth lenient (*in iw rf dhwti sfn=f*)? Then you may do evil!” (B1 179–81). The three rhetorical questions in sequence call for “of course not” denials to each. In the first and third questions, the constructions SUBJECT *sdm=f* express general or habitual unaccomplished aspect, referring to the normative state-of-affairs, how things should be. In the second question, by contrast, the construction SUBJECT *hr sdm* expresses progressive aspect, pointing to the speech situation, to how things actually are. Through contrasts in verbal aspect, the Peasant here insinuates that the normative values that Rensi as a deputy to the king should embody (first and third questions, habitual or general aspect) stand in direct conflict to his actual observed behavior (second question, progressive aspect).

The disconnect between the normative and the actual is expressed, furthermore, through the subversion of imagery that recurs as long-distance echoes.¹⁶ For example, Rensi is addressed as a cosmic “rudder” (B1 122–23) and as a Nile flood (B1 173), both pointing to the most normative sphere of all, the king’s. But the image of the rudder then also becomes one of a helmsman whose boat had gone adrift (B1 157–58), a ferry that has sunk (B1 229), and a boat that runs out of control (B1 252), while the image of Rensi as the Nile flood gives way to one as a destroyer of fish in the river (B1 257–62) (Parkinson 2012a: 211). Such strategies of rhetorical subversion extend to official discourse

15 Coulon 1999: 107–108, with a discussion of the similarly patterned B1 165–69.

16 See the detailed commentary by Parkinson 2012a.

that the Peasant keeps alluding to in his petitions. In the first petition, the Peasant eulogizes Rensi. He does so first through a series of epithets directly reminiscent of formulations in contemporary autobiographies, a highly topical inscriptional genre: “For you are a father to the orphan, a husband to the widow, a brother for the repudiated woman, a kilt to who has no mother” (B1 93–95). He pursues the eulogy with a series of five epithets that is modelled on nothing less than the five-fold royal titulary: “Let me make your name in this land according to good rule: Guide free of greed, Great one free of lowliness, who terminates falsehood, who brings about *Maat*, who comes to the one whose voice babbles in fear” (B1 95–99). Rensi’s five-fold titulary is subsequently echoed by a similarly five-fold mock titulary in the fourth petition (B1 252–55), which, in the immediately following fifth petition, is itself “debased into a series of derogatory statements” to do with fishing (B1 257–61; Parkinson 2012a: 211). The normative formulations inspired by the autobiographies, for their part, are made to stand in an increasingly stark contrast with actuality as the Peasant goes on with his petitions. Through what amounts to an *Entfremdung* avant la lettre, the Peasant presents the elite with its normative discourse about itself, destabilizing the same discourse (Coulon 1999: 107). Like direct juxtaposition, antithetical formulations, and long-distance modulations of imagery, the maximization of intertextual gaps reveals the fissure between the normative and the actual. In and through “accomplished/perfect speech” (*mdt nfrt*), in principle an index of *Maat*, the Peasant questions the relation between the two—reflexively, because “accomplished/perfect speech” is made to bear on itself.

4 *Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*

A core concern of Middle Egyptian literature is the theodic question (Parkinson 2002: 130–38; Enmarch 2008: 55–58): suffering and imperfection is experienced in the world and actuality is divorced from ideality, raising the question how this can accord with the creator’s justice. The theodic argument, which is central to the Peasant’s questioning of *Maat* (see above), receives its most extensive, and at once darkest, expression in the *Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All*.¹⁷ The composition is preserved in a single manuscript, P. Leiden I 344 ro, from the late Nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1200 BCE; Enmarch 2005) but is much earlier, arguably dating to the late Middle Kingdom (ca. 1800–1700 BCE).¹⁸

¹⁷ Edition and study: Enmarch 2008, on which the following is based.

¹⁸ Enmarch 2008: 20–22; secondarily, Stauder 2013: 463–68.

After the lost beginning, which may or may not have included an opening narrative frame, much of the composition consists of a series of anaphoric strophes spoken by Ipuwer, otherwise known as an Overseer of Singers (Laments I-III, 1.1–10.3; Injunctions I-III, 10.3–ca.11.9). In the following section, Ipuwer and the Lord of All—the king, and as such a figure solidary with the creator god himself—take turns (Enmarch 2008: 28–33). This discursive section consists of a direct Reproach by Ipuwer to the Lord of All, a Meditation by Ipuwer, a Reply of the Lord of All, a second Reproach, and a second Reply (ca.11.10–ca.17.3). Like the beginning, the end of the composition is lost.¹⁹ In the Laments and Injunctions, Ipuwer develops images of general misery and the disruption of order, and topics of social inversion, including the collapse of royal authority, of correct ritual procedure, and of elite written culture. In the following Reproaches, Ipuwer denounces the negligence of the creator god and the inaction of the Lord of All, his deputy. The Lord of All replies by pointing to the imperfect nature and evil behavior of humanity as responsible for its own suffering.

Through poetic imagery, the Laments and Injunctions move from one thematic complex to the next and meander back to ones previously evoked. The divorce between the world as it should be and as it is observed is often couched in the *Sonst-Jetzt* scheme (Schenkel 1984; Parkinson 2002: 58–60), a one-sentence format common in Middle Egyptian “discourses” and laments, which sets a(n ideal) past situation in an antithetical contrast with the (problematic) present. Like in *Eloquent Peasant*, wordplay is directly expressive, for instance: “O, but now Maat is through this land in this its name (only), but it is wrongdoing that they do, building (*grg*) on it (*scil.* Maat)” (5.3–4): “building” (*grg*) on Maat is homophonous with *grg* “lie, falsehood,” and thereby inherently vitiated (Coulon 1999: 109–10; Enmarch 2008: 105–106). Like in *Eloquent Peasant*, too, normative discourse is intertextually evoked and made to clash with vivid images of disorder and counter-normative situations: the disconnect between ideality and actuality is brought to the fore through a maximization of intertextual gaps.²⁰ In the Reproaches and Replies, Ipuwer and the Lord of All do not oppose one another through direct counter-arguments but voice their adverse positions by taking up motifs and imagery from the preceding Laments and Injunctions or their opponents’ preceding speeches, re-contextualizing these so that they express diverging significations. The speakers’ opposed positions are thus articulated through a maximization of intratextual gaps as much as intertextual ones. The poem does not drive toward a discursive solution of the contradiction. Rather,

19 For the overall structure, see Enmarch 2008: 56.

20 Compare Enmarch 2008: 36–42, 49–52, and the commentary.

“th(e) modulation of tone and accretive treatment of themes has a baroque, contrapuntal, quality” (Enmarch 2008: 55). This semantic intensification is dramatized through the long-delayed response of the Lord of All, then through the dialogue structure of the second part, and leads to an increasingly resonant and multiply-voiced vision of Egypt engulfed in chaos.²¹

5 *Debate of a Man and His Ba*

Different attitudes toward death are staged in the Middle Egyptian *Debate of a Man and His Ba*.²² The *Debate* is known from a single manuscript, P. Berlin 3204, dating to ca. 1800 BCE, and may have been composed a few decades or generations earlier during the Twelfth Dynasty. P. Berlin 3204 derives from the “Berlin Library,” a group of literary texts deposited in a Theban tomb, and including notably the two earliest known copies of *Eloquent Peasant* (see above). Fragments of the lost beginning of P. Berlin 3204 have recently resurfaced in altogether unexpected places (P. Mallorca II and P. Amherst III).²³

Uniquely in Middle Egyptian literature, a man addresses his Ba, an aspect of the person and a mode of existence also associated with mobility in the after-life.²⁴ P. Mallorca II and P. Amherst III, the recently recovered initial fragments of P. Berlin 3024, demonstrate that, as had long been hypothesized, the dialogue between the Man and the Ba was preceded by a narrative frame of uncertain length. Tantalizing as they are, these fragments show that this staged a Man, referred as “The sick one” (*mr*), who reports his conversation with his Ba to an audience that includes a woman called “The living one” (*ḥt*). In this liminal situation, the Man can either go to death or back to life, this alternative being the topic of the Debate (Escolano-Poveda 2017: 36–37). The overall structure of the composition can be schematized as follows (with “Ba 1” for the first speech of the Ba, “Man 1” for first speech of the Man, and so forth):

- narrative frame (uncertain length, fragmentary);
- Ba 1 (fragm.) – Man 1 (fragm.) – Ba 2 – Man 2;

²¹ See Enmarch 2008: 45–55, 60–64, with an analysis of style and performative aspects.

²² Text and study: Allen 2011; see also Parkinson 2002: 216–26; other modern titles include *Gespräch eines Lebensmüden mit seiner Seele* or *The Man who was tired of Life*.

²³ See Escolano-Poveda 2017 and Parkinson 2003, respectively.

²⁴ In *Discourse of Khakheperreseneb* (text: Parkinson 1997; interpretation: Parkinson 2002: 200–204), a monologue is addressed to the “heart” or “mind” (*ib*), the seat of mental ability and agency.

- Ba 3, the Ba's longest speech, culminating in parables 1 and 2 – Man 3, the longest speech of all, consisting of litanies 1–4;
- Ba 4, a short final reconciliation.

Throughout their speeches, the Man and the Ba display consistent, yet opposed, perspectives on death. The Ba emphasizes the horror of death, as an end to a transient life. The Man stresses the blessings of death, associated with the after-life and funerary provisions, and as a release of life. The poem thus stages two voices: the Man's, tending to espouse a more normative cultural discourse, and the Ba's, tending to a more counter-cultural one (Parkinson 2002: 218) also found in some Harpists' songs.

While the Man's and the Ba's perspectives on death remain constant throughout the *Debate*, their positions as to whether death should be wished for immediately or waited for to come in its proper time are reversed in the course of the poem.²⁵ In his first two speeches, the Ba advocates for immediate death, considering the Man's sorry state. The Man, to the contrary, underscores that an untimely death will deprive him (and thereby the Ba as well) of the opportunity to provide for the afterlife. In a dramatic reversal, the Ba in his third speech makes a tableau of the ephemeral nature of life, and urges the Man to enjoy life. The Man responds through a picture of the wretchedness of his situation and his social isolation, advocating immediate death. The short final speech of the Ba is reconciliatory, proposing to accept death as the ultimate end, so that the Man and the Ba can reach the West in harmony.

Throughout their speeches, the Ba and the Man develop common imagery.²⁶ The speakers take up imagery from their opponent's or their own previous speeches, subverting, reversing, or assimilating it. A case of direct reversal is at the crucial juncture between Man 2 and Ba 3. Arguing against untimely death, the Man had concluded with a normative vision of burial associated with the proper funerary rites: "Set your heart, my soul, my brother, until the heir has grown up *who will present offerings*, who will attend to the tomb *on burial (qrs) day*, and will transport *a bed for the necropolis*" (Man 2, 60–62).²⁷ In his rebuttal, the Ba takes up the very word *qrs* to paint a bleak vision in which the "offerings" (to be presented) have become "tears" (to be brought), while the "bed in the necropolis" is echoed with a corpse "on the hill": "As for your bringing to

²⁵ I follow Allen's (2011: 137–60) interpretation; see, however, Parkinson 2002: 218 and 219–226, reading differently.

²⁶ The following is based on the very rich commentaries by Allen (2011) and Parkinson (2002: 219–27), to which the reader is referred for much further elaboration.

²⁷ All translations after Allen (2011), some slightly adapted; emphasis mine.

mind *burial*, this is heartache; it is *bringing tears*; it is taking a man from his house so that he is *left on the hill (...)*" (Ba 3, 56–59). He who was supposed to be "in a pyramid" and have heirs to attend for his funerary service (Man 2, 42–43) has, in the Ba's speech, become one who "has died on the riverbank for lack of a survivor," one "to whom the fish and the lip of the water speak" (Ba 3, 64–66).

In the Ba's and the Man's speeches, imagery goes through successive modulation, thus the image of a journey through the whole second part of the composition. In the Ba's third speech, it is first a metaphor of life, its transience and unpredictability (Ba 3, 1st parable, 68–80). In the Man's response, it is recast positively as a coming home from an expedition, an image of death as a release from a painful life (Man 3, 3d litany, 130–42, in particular tercets 1, 4, 6), then as one of a man standing in the bark, in a vision of the afterlife (Man 3, 4th litany, 143–45). It is finally taken up by the Ba in his closing reconciliatory speech: "(...) Reject the West, but desire that you reach the West when your body touches the earth, and I will alight after your weariness, thus we will make harbor together" (Ba 4, 151–54). The image of the riverbank has an even longer history of successive modulations. The riverbank is first a part of the Man's vision of funerary bliss: "I will *drink water at the flood* and shall lift away dryness, and you will make jealous another *ba* who is hungry" (Man 2, 47–49). The Ba reverses the image into one of being abandoned and lacking proper funerary rites: "like *the inert who have died on the riverbank* for lack of a survivor, the waters having taken his end, or Sunlight similarly—to whom the fish and the lip of the water speak" (Ba 3, 63–67). The Ba then modulates the image into one of life often interrupted before time, and therefore to be lived and enjoyed now: "(...) disembarked with his wife and his children, and *they perished atop a depression ringed by night with riverbankers*. (...) But I care about her children, broken in the egg, who saw the face of Khenti before they lived." (Ba 3, 1st parable, 73–80). The Man responds by the same image, asking why stay alive given his dire condition: "Look, my name reeks: look, more than crocodile's smell, *at a site of slaughter with riverbankers*" (Man 3, 1st litany, 95–97). Moving to increasingly loftier levels (compare also stench becoming myrrh), the Man then transforms the image into one of death as coming home: "Death is in my sight today, like myrrh's smell, like sitting under sails on a windy day. Death is in my sight today, like the lotuses' smell, *like sitting on the Bank of Inebriation*" (Man 3, 3d litany, 132–36). Joining the previously evoked thematic thread of the journey, the riverbank, finally, becomes a harbor, a normative image of harmonious death, in the closing verse of the composition: "(...) Then we will *make harbor* at the same time" (Ba 4, reconciliation, 154).

At the level of the overall poetic form, while the initial exchanges (Ba 1, Man 1, Ba 2, Man 2) are terse and interrupting, the much longer speeches that follow (Ba 3, Man 3) are based on more densely patterned modes of discourse, parables (Ba 3, second part) and litanies (the whole of Man 3). The four litanies in Man 3 move from descriptions of the Man's wretchedness on a personal level ("Look, my name reeks ...") and social isolation ("To whom can I speak today ...") to visions of death as a coming home ("Death in my sight today ...") and eternal bliss ("Surely, he who is there will be a living god ..."). The metric structure of the four litanies is highly patterned (8 < 16, with increasingly repetitive imagery, then 6 > 3 tercets, see Allen 2011: 124) and contributes to the ultimate sense of release in the third and fourth. Throughout the composition, common imagery is subverted, and also increasingly assimilated and integrated, by the two parties; the resolution is brought about in and through poetic language itself (Parkinson 2002: 226).

6 Conclusion

While composed and transmitted in writing, Middle Egyptian literature is fundamentally geared at performance (education, in particular, is only one secondary, much later, setting). *Debate of a Man and his Ba* stages different attitudes toward death, while *Eloquent Peasant* and *Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* center around the theodic question and, particularly the former, the problematic relation between words and what these stand for. Being the products of a society in which face-to-face verbal interaction were of central importance, the compositions are highly rhetorical; they often concern, and stage, rhetoric itself, reflexively. The compositions do not consist of directly discursive expositions of arguments and counter-arguments leading to a resolution that would have one position win over another. Rather, they portray different aspects of, or attitudes to, a question through what has been described as accretive thematic modulation.

Within one sentence, one turn, in turn-taking, and over longer distance, iteration cum variation is central to the rhetoric of the compositions presented above. The repetition of a word, with or without wordplay, makes the different significations of that word clash. Similar imagery is taken up, with different and often opposed significations. Segments of normative discourse are extracted from their original places, notably in inscriptions, and inserted into the literary contexts in which their original significations become problematic. Through such indirect citationality at all levels, both intratextual and intertextual gaps are maximized, revealing the fissures of discourse itself. Complexly voiced iteration

accumulates over the course of a performance, building up a resonant and increasingly polyphonic space.

Formally, *Debate of a Man and his Ba* is a dialogue with an introductory narrative frame; *Eloquent Peasant* is a monologue with a narrative frame; and *Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* is a very long monologue followed by a dialogue (the beginning and end, where a narrative frame may have been located, are lost). Despite such formal differences, the compositions are much closer than they may seem at first, not only thematically and rhetorically, but also in terms of their voicing. While *Debate* stages a dialogue, both speakers ultimately stand for the same individual, a man experiencing near-death. The Man speaks of the Ba mostly in the third person, addressing him directly only at the crucial turn of Man 2 to Ba 3. Throughout the composition, the Man and the Ba do hardly respond to one another directly but develop common imagery in ways that counter their opponent's speeches with high effect. Conversely, the monologues are themselves strongly addressive. Ipuwer's anaphoric Laments and Injunctions are addressed to the Lord of All. When they finally come, the long-delayed Replies of the Lord of All draw on imagery previously developed by Ipuwer and therefore respond to Ipuwer's earlier Laments and Injunctions as much as to his immediate Reproaches. In *Eloquent Peasant*, the petitions are even more strongly interlocutive in their address to, and even apostrophe of, Rensi son of Meru. The dramatic progression of the Peasant's petitions is entirely in response to Rensi's continued, and increasingly louder, silence, which becomes itself a major topic of the petitions.

The compositions discussed above are strongly dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense: they include other voices. In *Eloquent Peasant*, high-cultural discourses are intertextually evoked, and questioned, by the speaker in his petitions to an unresponsive deputy of the king, himself a figuration of these same high-cultural discourses. A similar comment applies to Ipuwer's densely intertextual addresses to the long silent Lord of All. In *Debate of a Man and his Ba*, various voices receive what would seem to be a direct figuration in the two speakers, yet each speaker also individually stands for multiple voices. Whether formally dialogues, monologues, or combining both, the compositions bring these various voices together, with the effect of foregrounding intratextual and intertextual gaps. Through the rhetoric of iteration and indirect citation, they integrate, rather than discursively resolve, the multiple voices they stage.

Appendix 1: Satires of Professions

Some Sumerian disputes make satires of professions. The very small group of Egyptian disputes does not include any, but satires of professions are prominent in another type of literature of the same period (Dynasties 19–20, ca. 1300–1075 BCE) and are therefore mentioned here for the sake of reference. These compositions (Jäger 2004: 193–304) espouse the ethos of the scribal milieu from which they arguably derive, and deride notably the military profession. Formally, they adopt the general format of the “teaching” (*sb3yt*), which consists of a direct address to a son, or a younger man, who is instructed but does not respond.²⁸ The Ramesside satires of professions have a major antecedent in the Middle Egyptian *Teaching of Dua’s son Khety* (also referred to as the *Satire of Trades*).²⁹ In this, the father presents the son with a series of tableaux of the hardships or unworthiness of various trades, leaving him to contemplate the uniquely blessed status of the scribe. Satire is also central in the Ramesside literary *Satirical Letter*, or *Satirische Streitschrift* (main manuscript ca. 1200 BCE; Fischer-Elfert 1992; 1986). In this, a military scribe, Hori, accuses his addressee, a fellow scribe, of gross incompetence at extensive lengths. Like in the satires of professions (couched in the teaching format), the addressee does not respond in the *Satirical Letter*.

²⁸ The format of the “teaching” (*sb3yt*), which is highly productive in Middle Egyptian, Late Egyptian, and Demotic literature alike, has the addressee, the son, remain silent. In one case only, the son responds: in the early Ramesside *Teaching of Ani* (ca. 1250 BCE (?); text: Quack 1994), the teaching on ethical and religious values and behavior is followed by a dialogue between Ani and his son Khonshotep, who questions the value of the instructions he has just received (see Burkard and Thissen 2008: 104–108; for the tentative possibility of a Near Eastern influence, Quack 1994: 218–19). A dialogue between a father and his son is probably also featured in a short Ramesside ostrakon from Deir el-Medineh (Posener 1951: 30, pl. 50–50a. Fischer-Elfert 1997: 10–16; Burkard and Thissen 2008: 136–137), where the son, quite to the contrary, praises the instructions.

²⁹ Jäger 2004: 1–192, I-XCIV; see also Widmaier 2013. The dating of the composition has traditionally been to the Middle Kingdom, ca. 2000–1750 BCE but remains uncertain, with a low dating to the early New Kingdom, ca. 1550–1450 BCE, not to be excluded (provisionally, Stauder 2013: 468–76).

Appendix 2: Demotic Dialogues and Initiation into Restricted Sacerdotal Knowledge

Two of the most massive preserved Demotic compositions consist of dialogues, embedded into a narrative frame for the second: the *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness* or *Book of Thoth*, and the *Myth of the Sun's Eye* or *Return of the Goddess* (all titles are modern ones). Both compositions are about restricted sacerdotal knowledge. They are presently documented in a relatively high number of manuscripts, suggesting that they may have been more widely circulated than Demotic literary compositions in the narrower sense.³⁰ As these sacerdotal dialogues are entirely different from Mesopotamian disputes, the following is kept maximally succinct, the interested reader being referred to the studies cited below.

The *Book of Thoth* (thus named by the editors of the text, Jasnow and Zauzich 2005) or *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness* (thus Quack forthc.) is documented in a still growing number of manuscripts dating from the first century BCE to the second century CE and is one of the most complex and difficult surviving ancient Egyptian texts.³¹ The composition consists of a dialogue between one, or possibly several, masters, and a disciple.³² The scene is the “Chamber of Darkness” (‘.t-kky), probably referring to the House of Life, with strong underworldly connotations. The dialogue centers around esoteric sacerdotal knowledge, the sacred names of entities and beings (Jasnow and Zauzich 2005: 38–65), and very much writing itself (Quack 2007) with rich figurative imagery (Jasnow 2011). The indications of speakers could be interpreted as pointing to a performance, the setting of which has been sought in connection with rituals of initiation into the House of Life (Quack 2007).

The *Myth of the Sun's Eye* is documented in manuscripts from the second century CE (as well as in a Greek translation dating to the third century CE) and represents another highly complex composition.³³ The composition consists mostly of dialogues, embedded in a narrative frame. The narrative frame is based on the myth of the Return of the Goddess, documented in a variety of sources

30 For an overview of Demotic literature in general, see Quack 2009.

31 Edition and study: Jasnow and Zauzich 2005; translation with introductory commentary: Jasnow and Zauzich 2014; additions notably by Quack 2006; 2007; and forthc.; a revised edition is in preparation by Jasnow and Zauzich.

32 Different interpretations in Jasnow and Zauzich 2005: 3–17; 2014: 30–37; and Quack forthc.

33 Edition: de Cenival 1988; recent translation: Quack and Hoffmann 2007: 195–229, with further references on pp. 356–58; for an introduction, Quack 2009: 128–40.

from earlier times on: a goddess, often Re's daughter or "Eye," had retreated to the South in anger, and is propitiated to return to Egypt, appeased and bringing welfare to the land. In the Demotic composition, the angry goddess is the "Nubian Cat," standing for the goddess Tefnut, and speaks with the "Little Dog-Monkey," a son of Thoth, who tries to appease the goddess and persuade her to return to Egypt. The narrative ends with the protagonists' successful return to Egypt culminating in the celebration of a festival. As part of the argument, the dialogues include animal parables, some with parallels in other literary traditions such as the Mesopotamian Etana and the Indian Pancatantra, as well as the elucidations of signs of writing in reference to esoteric sacerdotal knowledge (Von Lieven 2010). The sacerdotal dimension of the text is also manifest in the multiple layers of commentary with which the manuscripts are interspersed, bearing testimony to a highly complex textual tradition. Possible indications for performance have been noted and it has been proposed that settings for this could have been at the end of festivals, in relation to sacerdotal practices of a collective elucidation of complex texts (Quack and Hoffmann 2007: 198).

In both the *Book of Thoth* or *Ritual for Entering the Chamber of Darkness*, and the *Myth of the Sun's Eye*, the dialogue format relates to the initiation into, or elucidation of, restricted sacerdotal knowledge, including writing itself. An outwardly similar association between the dialogue format and the initiation into esoteric knowledge recurs in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, even if there does not seem to be any strong direct link between this and the Demotic composition.³⁴ The association also has much earlier antecedents in the Egyptian tradition itself: in the Coffin Texts already (ca. 2000 BCE), the speaker (the deceased) finds himself in dialogue with various assemblies or guardians and must demonstrate his mastery of esoteric knowledge during his funerary journey.³⁵ It has been suggested that this dialogue format in the Coffin Texts may itself have a background in entry examinations into professional guilds, during which one would have had to demonstrate a mastery of a restricted professional knowledge (Fischer-Elfert 2002: 30–35).

³⁴ Jasnow and Zauzich 2014: 49–50; Quack 2007: 261; Jasnow and Zauzich 2005: 65–71.

³⁵ E.g., Coulon 2004: 134–36, with further discussion of debates in assemblies and councils.

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