

element is both mother and spouse in the royal succession. The woman bears a son, who is really Bata, and Pharaoh, naturally believing the son to be his own, appoints him crown prince. When Pharaoh dies, Bata accedes as king and appoints his elder brother crown prince. After thirty years of rule, Bata dies to be succeeded by his elder brother Anubis. The story has been discussed in detail by Susan Tower Hollis, The Ancient Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers": The Oldest Fairy Tale in the World, (Norman, 1990).

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THE TALE OF THE TWO BROTHERS

Although this story, fully preserved on Papyrus d'Orbiney of the reign of Seti II, may have been written simply for entertainment as a sort of fairy tale, it draws richly upon mythological and folkloristic themes. The first part, treating the filial-like relationship of two peasant brothers, Anubis and Bata, and its disruption by the elder brother's seductive and prevaricating wife, conforms to reality. After the sun god places a barrier between the two protagonists, Bata, the younger brother, emasculates himself; and Anubis, regretting his ill-founded suspicions and grieving for his upright brother, kills his wife for her treachery.

The second part of the tale makes liberal use of the supernatural and miraculous. Now living abroad in the Valley of the Cedar, the still impotent Bata is given a wife by the gods, but she is brought away to Pharaoh, who makes her Chief Lady. No longer attached to Bata, she is responsible for effecting his death; but Anubis journeys to the Valley of the Cedar, where he restores Bata to life and potency. Transforming into a bull, Bata carries Anubis back to Egypt and appears as a marvel at the palace, where Bata confronts his wife. She induces Pharaoh to have the bull sacrificed, but drops of its blood produce two Persea trees as a further transformation of Bata. Again confronted by Bata, she has the trees cut down, but a splinter enters her mouth, impregnating her.

The tersely worded conclusion of the story illustrates the "Bull of His Mother" principle in the theology of pharaonic kingship, whereby the female

1,1 Once upon a time there were two brothers, so the story goes, having the same mother and the same father. Anubis was the name of the elder, and Bata was the name of the younger. Now as for Anubis, he [possessed] a house and had a wife, [and] his younger brother was just like a son to him, so that it was he (Anubis) who made clothes for him while he (Bata) followed after his cattle to the fields, since it was he who had to plow. It was he who reaped for him, and it was [he] who did for him every chore that was in the fields. Indeed, his younger brother [was] a perfect man: there was none like him in the entire land, for a god's virility was in him.

1,5 Now many days after this,¹ his younger brother / [was tending] his cattle according to his daily habit, and he would [quit work] for his house each evening laden [with] all sorts of field vegetables; [with] milk, with wood, and [with] every [good produce of] the fields; he would place them before his [elder brother] while he was sitting with his wife, and he would drink and eat, and [he would leave to spend the night in] his stable among his cattle [daily].

2,1 Now after dawn and the next day had come about, [he would bring foods] which were cooked and would place them before his elder brother, [and he would] give him bread for the fields, and he would drive his cattle to let them graze in the fields while he followed behind his cattle. [And they] [would] tell him, "The herbage of such and such a place is good."

1. This and similar expressions marking the passage of time occur throughout the story as conventionalized formulas that are not always to be taken literally. In fact, this paragraph and the following one are not really part of the narrative proper but serve to provide the necessary background for the action of the story that begins following the statement about the increase in the size of the herd. See E. F. Wente, in *JNES* 21 (1962): 308-10.

good herbage which they were desiring so that the cattle which were in his charge became exceedingly fine, and they multiplied their offspring very much.

At plowing time his [elder] brother told him, "Have a team [of oxen] made ready for us for plowing, for the soil has emerged so that it is just right for plowing. Also, you are to come to the field with seed because we shall start plowing tomorrow,"² so he said to him. Then his / younger brother made all preparations that his elder brother had told him to [make]. And after dawn [and the next] day had come about, they went to the field carrying their [seed] and started [to] plow with [their hearts] very pleased with their project as [they] began working.

Now many [days] after this, while they were in the field, they needed seed. So he sent his younger brother, saying, "Go quickly and fetch us seed from the village." His younger brother found his elder brother's wife seated plaiting her hair.³ He told her, "Get up and give me seed / so that I may hurry off to the field, because it's for me that my elder brother is waiting. Don't cause a delay." Then she told him, "Go, open the granary and fetch for yourself what you want. Don't make (me) leave my hairdressing unfinished."

Then the youth entered his stable and fetched a large vessel, since it was his wish to take a lot of seed. He loaded himself with barley and emmer and came out carrying it. Then she asked him, "How much is what is on your shoulder?" And he told her, "It is / three sacks of emmer and two sacks of barley, totaling five, that are on my shoulder," so he said to her. Then she [spoke with] him, saying, "There is [great] virility in you, for I have been observing your exertions daily," for it was her wish to know him through sexual intimacy. She got up, seized hold of him, and said to him, "Come, let's spend an hour lying together. Such is to your advantage: I will then make you fine clothes."

Then the youth became like an Upper Egyptian panther in 'furious' rage over the wicked proposition she had made to him, and she became exceedingly fearful. He had words with her, saying, "Now look, you are just like a mother to me, and your husband is just like a father to me, for he who

2. In ancient Egypt the sowing of the seed for cereal crops was performed simultaneously with the plowing of the soil.
3. As the text stands, the translation should be, "His younger brother found the wife of his elder brother while one was sitting plaiting her hair."

4,1 is older than I it is who has brought me up. What means / this great offense (you) have said to me? Don't say it to me again! But I will tell it to no one, nor will I let it escape my mouth to anybody." He picked up his load and went off to the field. Then he reached his elder brother, and they started to work (at) their project. Afterward, at evening time, his elder brother quit work for his house, while his younger brother was (still) tending his cattle and [would] load himself with all produce of the field and
4,5 bring back his cattle / before him to let them spend the night (in) their stable, which was in the village.⁴

Now the wife of his elder brother was fearful (because of) the proposition she had made. So she got some fat and bandages and pretended to be an assaulted woman in order to tell her husband, "It's your young brother who has assaulted (me)." Her husband quit work in the evening according to his daily habit. He reached his house and found his wife lying down, pretending to be sick. She did not pour water upon his hands as usual, nor had she lit up for his arrival, so that his house was in darkness as she lay vomiting.⁵ Her husband said to her, "Who has quarreled with you?" She
5,1 said to him, "No one has quarreled with me except your / young brother. When he returned to take seed to you, he found me sitting alone and said to me, 'Come, let's spend an hour lying together. You shall loosen your plaits,'⁶ so he said to me, but I refused to obey him. 'Isn't it so that I am your mother, and that your elder brother is just like a father to you?' so I said to him. And he became afraid and assaulted (me) to prevent me from making a disclosure to you. Now if you let him live, I shall pass away. See, when he returns, don't [let him live any longer], because I curse this wicked proposition which he would have carried out yesterday."⁷

4. This sentence, which is also not part of the narrative proper, serves to explain how Anubis would customarily return home before Bata, thus setting the stage for the episode at the barn door.

5. E. Rowińska and J. K. Winnicki, in *GM* 134 (1993): 85–89, argue that the verb here means "spitting," expressing contempt of Bata, rather than "vomiting," although in the Israel Stela, line 20, the same verb refers to disgorging after the manner of a crocodile.

6. On this passage and its sexual connotation, see E. Graefe, in *SAK* 7 (1979): 53–61, and P. Derchain, in *SAK* 7: 62–63.

7. Or, "I am suffering from this wicked proposition which he would have carried out yesterday," but the determinative of the verb favors "curse." The term "yesterday" is used because day was over at sunset, even though the Egyptian day began at dawn.

5,5 Then his elder brother became / like an Upper Egyptian panther, and he sharpened his spear and put it in his hand. His elder (brother) then stood behind the door (of) his stable in order to kill his younger brother as he was returning in the evening to let his cattle enter the stable. Now when the sun set, he loaded himself (with) all sorts of field vegetables according to his daily habit, and returned. The lead cow entered the stable and said to her herdsman, "Look, your elder brother is standing in wait for you holding his spear to kill you. You must get away from him." He heard what his lead
6,1 cow said, and / the next one entered and said the same. He looked under the door of his stable and saw his elder brother's feet as he was standing behind the door with his spear in his hand. He set his load onto the ground and hastened to run off in flight, and his elder brother went in pursuit of him, carrying his spear.

6,5 Then his younger brother prayed to Pre-Harakhti, / saying, "My good lord, it is you who distinguishes wrong from right." Thereupon Pre heard all his petitions, and Pre caused a great (gulf of) water to come between him and his elder (brother), infested with crocodiles, so that one of them came to be on one side and the other on the other (side). His elder brother struck twice upon (the back of) his hand because he had failed to kill him. Then his younger brother called to him on the (other) side, saying, "Wait there until
7,1 dawn. As soon as the sun disk rises, I shall / contend with you in his presence, and he will deliver the culprit to the just, for I shall nevermore be with you, nor shall I be in a place where you are. I shall go to the Valley of the Cedar."

Now after dawn and the next day had come about, Pre-Harakhti arose, and they looked at each other. Then the youth had words with his elder brother, saying, "What's the meaning of your coming in pursuit of me in order to kill (me) unjustly without having heard what I have to say? For I'm
7,5 still your young brother; and / you are just like a father to me, and your wife is just like a mother to me, isn't it so? When you sent (me) to fetch us seed, your wife said to me, 'Come, let's spend an hour lying together.' But see, it has been distorted for you into something otherwise." Then he informed him about all that had transpired between him and his wife. He swore by Pre-Harakhti, saying, "As for your (coming) to kill me unjustly, carrying your spear, (it was) because of a sexually aroused slut!" He got a reed knife, cut off his phallus, and threw it into the water. The catfish swallowed (it),
8,1 and he / grew weak and became feeble. His elder brother became very grieved and stood weeping for him aloud. He could not cross over to where his younger brother was because of the crocodiles.

8,5 Then his younger brother called to him, saying, "If you have recalled a grievance, can't you recall a kindness or something that I have done for you? Now go to your home and take care of your cattle, for I shall not stay in a place where you are. I shall go off to the Valley of the Cedar. Now what you shall do on my behalf is to come and take care of me if (you) find out that something has happened to me (after) I extract my heart and put it on top of the blossom of the cedar tree. And if the cedar tree is cut down and falls to the ground, / you are to come to search for it. Even if you spend seven years searching for it, don't let your heart become discouraged, for if you do find it and put it into a bowl of cool water, then I will become alive in order that (I) may avenge the wrong done to me. Now you shall ascertain whether something (has happened) to me if a jar of beer is delivered to you in your hand and produces froth. Don't delay upon seeing that this comes to pass with you."

Then he went off to the Valley of the Cedar, and his elder brother went off to his home, his hands placed upon his head and his (body) smeared with dirt. Presently he reached his home, and he killed his wife, cast her (to) the dogs, and sat down in mourning over his younger brother.

9,1 Now many days after this, his younger brother was in the Valley of the Cedar with no one with him as he spent all day hunting desert game. He returned in the evening to sleep under the cedar tree on top of whose blossom his heart was. And / many days after this, he built for himself a country villa with his (own) hands (in) the Valley of the Cedar, filled with all sorts of good things, with the intention of establishing a household for himself.

Presently he went out from his country villa and encountered the Ennead⁸ as they were walking (along) governing the entire land. The Ennead spoke in unison, saying to him, "Oh, Bata, Bull of the Ennead, are you alone here having abandoned your town before the face of the wife of Anubis, your elder brother? / See, (he) has killed his wife, and thus you will be
9,5 avenged upon him (for) all wrong done against you." And they felt very sorry for him. Pre-Harakhti told Khnum,⁹ "Please fashion a (marriageable) woman for Bata so that he does not (have to) live alone." Thereupon Khnum made for him a house companion who was more beautiful in her body than any woman in the entire land, for (the seed of) every god was in

8. The company of the major gods.

9. A creator god represented as shaping man on a potter's wheel.

her. Then the seven Hathors¹⁰ came (to) see her and said with one voice, "It is [by] an (executioner's) blade that she shall die."

10,1 So he coveted her intensely while she was dwelling in his house and he spent all day / hunting desert game, bringing (it) back and putting (it) down before her. He told her, "Don't go outside lest the sea carry you away, for I will be unable to rescue you from it, because I am a female like you and my heart lies on top of the blossom of the cedar tree. But if another finds it, I shall fight with him." Then he revealed to her all his inmost thoughts.

10,5 Now many days after this, while Bata went to hunt according to his daily habit, / the maiden¹¹ went out to stroll under the cedar tree which was next to her house. Then she beheld the sea surging up behind her, and she hastened to flee from it and entered her house. So the sea called to the cedar tree, saying, "Seize hold of her for me," and the cedar tree removed a tress from her hair. Then the sea brought it to Egypt and deposited it in the place of the launderers of Pharaoh, l.p.h. So the scent of the tress of hair turned up in the clothes of Pharaoh, l.p.h., and the king wrangled with the launderers of Pharaoh, l.p.h., saying, "Scent of ointment is in the clothes of Pharaoh, l.p.h.!" The king got to wrangling with them daily, but / they didn't know what to do. The chief launderer of Pharaoh, l.p.h., went to the bank, very worried as a consequence of the daily wranglings with him. Then (he) stopped short and stood on the seashore opposite the tress of hair that was in the water. He had someone go down, and it was brought to him. (Its) scent was found exceedingly fragrant, and he took it away to Pharaoh, l.p.h.

11,1 Then the learned scribes of Pharaoh, l.p.h., were brought. They told Pharaoh, l.p.h., "As for this tress of hair, / it belongs to a daughter of Pre-Harakhti in whom is the seed of every god. Now it is tribute to you (from) another country. Send envoys forth to every foreign country to search for her. As for the envoy who will go to the Valley of the Cedar, have many men go along with (him) to fetch her." Then His Majesty, l.p.h., said, "What you have said is very, very good." And (they) were sent off.

12,1 Now many days after this, the men who had gone abroad returned to render report to His Majesty, l.p.h., whereas those who had gone to the Valley of the Cedar failed to return, for Bata had killed them, leaving (only) one of them to render report to His Majesty, l.p.h. So His Majesty, l.p.h., sent forth many soldiers as well as chariotry in order to bring her back, / a

12,5 woman being among them through whom all sorts of beautiful feminine adornments were presented to her (Bata's wife). The woman returned to Egypt with her, and there was jubilation for her in the entire land. His Majesty, l.p.h., loved her very much and appointed her to (the rank of) Chief Lady. Then he spoke with her in order to have her divulge the nature of her husband, but she said to His Majesty, l.p.h., "Have the cedar tree cut down and chopped up." The king sent / soldiers carrying their tools to cut down the cedar tree, and they reached the cedar tree. They cut off the blossom upon which Bata's heart was, and he fell dead that very instant.

13,1 Now after dawn and the next day had come about and the cedar tree had been cut down, Anubis, Bata's elder brother, entered his house, and he sat down and washed his hands. He was handed a jar of beer, and it produced froth. Another of wine was handed him, and it turned bad. Then he took his / staff and his sandals as well as his clothes and his weapons, and he hastened to journey to the Valley of the Cedar. He entered the country villa of his younger brother and found his younger brother lying dead upon his bed. He wept when (he) saw (his) younger brother lying in death, and he went to search for his younger brother's heart beneath the cedar tree under which his younger brother slept in the evening. / He spent three years searching for it without finding it. Now when he had commenced the fourth year, his heart desired to return to Egypt, and he said, "I shall depart tomorrow," so he said in his heart.

13,5 Now after dawn and the next day had come about, he began walking under the cedar tree and spent all day searching for it. He quit in the evening. He spent time to search for it again, and he found a (cedar) cone.¹² He left for home with it: it was indeed his younger brother's heart. And he fetched a bowl of cool water, dropped it into it, and sat down according to his daily (habit).

14,1 After night had fallen, / his heart absorbed the water, and Bata shuddered over all his body and began looking at his elder brother while his heart was (still) in the bowl. Anubis, his elder brother, took the bowl of cool water in which his younger brother's heart was and (had) him drink it. His heart assumed its (proper) position, and he became as he used to be. So they embraced each other and conversed with one another. Then Bata said to his / elder brother, "Look, I shall transform (myself) into a large bull that

10. The goddesses who determine an individual's fate; see *The Doomed Prince*, n. 1.

11. Bata's wife is still a virgin.

12. Because of a cedar cone's similarity to a bunch of grapes, the Egyptian uses the word "grapes."

has every beautiful color and whose sort is unparalleled, and you shall sit upon (my) back. By the time the sun rises, we shall be where my wife is that (I) may avenge myself. And you shall take me to where the king¹³ is, for every sort of good thing shall be done for you and you shall be rewarded with silver and gold for taking me to Pharaoh, l.p.h., because I shall become a great marvel, and there shall be jubilation for me in the entire land. And (then) you shall depart to your village.”

15,1 Now after dawn / and the next day had come about, Bata transformed (himself) into the form which he had mentioned to his elder brother. Then Anubis, his elder brother, sat down upon his back. At dawn he arrived at the place where the king was, and His Majesty, l.p.h., was informed about him. He saw him and became very joyful over him. He made a grand oblation for him, saying, “It is a great marvel that has come to pass.” And there was jubilation for him in the entire land. Then / his weight was made up in silver and gold for his elder brother,¹⁴ who (again) settled down in his village. The king gave him much personnel and many goods, for Pharaoh, l.p.h., loved him very much, more than anybody else in the entire land.

Now many days after this, he (the bull) entered the kitchen and stood in the place where the Lady was, and he began speaking with her, saying, “See, I’m still alive!” She asked him, “Who indeed are you?” And he told her, “I am Bata. I realize that when you caused the cedar tree to be chopped up for Pharaoh, l.p.h., it was on account of me, to keep me from staying alive. 16,1 See, / I’m still alive, but as a bull.” The Lady became very fearful because of the declaration her husband had made to her. Then he left the kitchen.

His Majesty, l.p.h., sat down and made holiday with her. She poured (drinks) for His Majesty, l.p.h., so that the king was very happy with her. Then she said to His Majesty, l.p.h., “Swear to me by God as follows, ‘As for what (she) will say, I shall grant it to her.’” And he heard all that she said, 16,5 “Let me eat of the liver of this bull, / for he will never amount to anything,” so she said speaking to him. The king became very vexed over what she had said, and Pharaoh, l.p.h., felt very sorry for him.

Now after dawn and the next day had come about, the king proclaimed a grand oblation as an offering up of the bull, and he sent a chief royal butler of His Majesty, l.p.h., to sacrifice the bull. Thereupon he was sacri-

13. Here and following, the Egyptian uses the term “One” in reference to the king.

14. That is, the elder brother was rewarded with an amount of silver and gold equivalent to the weight of the bull.

17,1 ficed. While he was upon the men’s shoulders, he twitched in his neck and shed two drops of blood beside the two doorposts of His Majesty, l.p.h., one chancing on one side of the great portal of Pharaoh, l.p.h., and the other on the other side. They grew into / two large Persea trees, each of which was exquisite. Then someone went to tell His Majesty, l.p.h., “Two large Persea trees have grown this night as a great marvel for His Majesty, l.p.h., beside the great portal of His Majesty, l.p.h.” And there was jubilation for them in the entire land, and the king presented an offering to them.

Now many days after this, His Majesty, l.p.h., appeared at the audience window of lapis lazuli with a wreath of all sorts of flowers on (his) neck, 17,5 and he (mounted) a chariot of electrum / and came out from the palace, l.p.h., to inspect the Persea trees. Then the Lady came out in a chariot following Pharaoh, l.p.h. His Majesty, l.p.h., sat down under one Persea tree, (and the Lady under the other. And Bata) spoke with his wife, “Ha, you liar! I am Bata. I’m alive in spite of you. I realize that when you had (the cedar tree) cut down for Pharaoh, l.p.h., it was on account of me. I transformed (myself) into a bull, and you had me killed.”

Now many days after this, the Lady stood pouring (drinks) for His Majesty, l.p.h., so that the king was happy with her. She told His Majesty, l.p.h., “Swear to me by God as follows, ‘As for what the Lady will say to me, 18,1 I shall grant it to her,’ so you shall say.” And he heard / all that she said. She said, “Have these two Persea trees cut down and made into fine furniture.” So the king heard all that she said. After [a] little while His Majesty, l.p.h., sent skilled craftsmen, and the Persea trees of Pharaoh, l.p.h., were cut down. The queen, the Lady, watched this, and then a splinter 18,5 flew up and entered the Lady’s mouth. / She swallowed (it) and became pregnant in the completion of a brief moment, and the king made out of them (the Persea trees) whatever was her desire.

Now many days after this, she bore a son, and someone went to tell His Majesty, l.p.h., “A son has been born to you.” Then he was brought, and nurse and maids were assigned to him. And there was jubilation (for him) in the entire land. The king sat down and made holiday, and they began to nurture him.¹⁵ His Majesty, l.p.h., loved him very much from that moment, 19,1 and he appointed him / Viceroy of Kush. And many days after this, His Majesty, l.p.h., made him crown prince of the entire land.

15. The verb translated “nurture” refers basically to the physical act of nursing a child but its semantic range also included child-rearing in an extended sense.

Now many days after this, when he had completed many [years] as crown prince in (the) entire land, His Majesty, l.p.h., flew up to the sky.¹⁶ Then the king¹⁷ said, "Have my high officials of His Majesty, l.p.h., brought to me that I may inform them regarding everything / that has happened to me." His wife [was] then brought to him, and he contended with her in their presence.¹⁸ An affirmative (decision) was reached among them.¹⁹ His elder brother was brought to him, and he made him crown prince in the entire land. He (spent) thirty years as king of Egypt. He departed from life, and his elder brother succeeded him on the day of death.

Thus it concludes happily and successfully.

19,5

16. A common expression used to refer to the death of the king, see above, The Story of Sinuhe, R 6.

17. I.e., Bata, the new king.

18. That is, Bata litigated with his wife. The expression cannot mean that Bata judged his wife, as is evident from the use of the same locution in Two Brothers 6,9–7,1.

19. The implication is the condemnation of Bata's unfaithful wife, whose death by execution had been fated by the seven Hathors.

THE CONTENDINGS OF HORUS AND SETH

This, the longest of the New Kingdom stories, is perhaps the one with the least literary merit, for there is very little in the way of suspense to maintain the reader's interest throughout the narrative. It is the theme of Horus's superiority over his rival Seth in contending for the throne, previously occupied by Horus's father Osiris, that serves to bind together an episodically constructed tale, whose narrative style is especially monotonous. The section in which Isis harpoons the two rivals who had transformed themselves into hippopotamuses appears independently in two Ramesside papyri that are calendars of lucky and unlucky days. Some of the episodes, such as the homosexual encounter between the two protagonists, are alluded to in earlier religious literature of the Old and Middle Kingdoms.

The *Contendings* is best appreciated in terms of the function of the mythically oriented short story during the New Kingdom. This particular story, preserved to us on a papyrus of the reign of Ramesses V, contains some other compositions of literary worth, so that it would seem that the papyrus may have been used by its owner for the purpose of entertaining himself and others. The behavior of some of the great gods is at points so shocking that it is hard to imagine that no humor was intended. Yet at the same time the story provides the reader with basic mythical concepts. Such a dichotomy between coarse humor, even about the gods, and seriousness in religion characterized the Ramesside age.