

Generell darf man vielleicht sagen, daß sich in neuerer Zeit, nachdem sich die ernsthafte Diskussion ägyptischer Literaturwerke zuvor mehr auf philologischem Terrain bewegte und sich eher der historischen Bezüge annahm, das Bedürfnis bemerkbar macht, Texte als Texte zu interpretieren und unter dem Blickwinkel einer allgemeinen Literaturwissenschaft zu betrachten.<sup>112</sup> Ohne jeden Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit seien nach der bereits angesprochenen, eher informellen, werkimmanenten Interpretation als beobachtbare Arbeitsrichtungen genannt: die Anwendung diverser strukturalistischer Verfahren für die Bestimmung des Textaufbaus, wie dies namentlich Jan Assmann exemplifiziert hat,<sup>113</sup> und die Bestimmung von Betrachtungsweisen, wie dies namentlich in Peter Seiberts "Charakteristik"<sup>114</sup> und in Antonio Loprieno's "Topos und Mimesis"<sup>115</sup> angegangen wurde.

Was die vermehrten Aktivitäten auf dem Gebiet der demotischen Literatur angeht, sei, nachdem demotische Literatur im vorliegenden Beitrag nur sporadisch zur Sprache kam, auf Taits Beitrag in diesem Band verwiesen, wo die neueren Impulse im weiteren Zusammenhang gesehen werden können.<sup>116</sup>

Das alles kann und darf hier, in einer wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Einleitung, nicht ausdetailliert werden. Der Wissenschaftshistoriker braucht zeitlichen Abstand, kann nur über Abgestandenes sich ein Urteil anmaßen. Auch muß er den Empfindlichkeiten der Zeitgenossen Rechnung tragen; denn wer unter den Lebenden möchte sich schon für abgestanden halten lassen wollen?

<sup>112</sup> Vgl. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 4f.; id., "Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Theory," in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century. The William Foxwell Albright Memorial Volume*, 1–24.

<sup>113</sup> Assmann, *GM* 6 (1973), 9–31; id., *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 1–25.

<sup>114</sup> Seibert, *Die Charakteristik*.

<sup>115</sup> Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*.

<sup>116</sup> Daß die demotische Literatur im Vorstehenden selten genannt wurde, liegt am time-lag, mit dem die Demotistik der weiteren Ägyptologie bis in neuere Zeit hinterhinkte.

## DEFINING EGYPTIAN LITERATURE: ANCIENT TEXTS AND MODERN THEORIES

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1 While most "orientalistic" disciplines have maintained a certain methodological homogeneity, modern Egyptology no longer shares a frame of reference with the other fields of the Ancient Near East. Linguistically, the ties between Egyptian and the Semitic family can be detected only by the eye of an historical linguist; archaeologically, a few cultural landscapes—such as the Eastern delta—document extensive Egypto-Asiatic contacts, but they acquire crucial importance only in comparatively few periods in the history of the ancient world; in the area of religion, the nature and structure of Egyptian theology seem to show little in common with Mesopotamian or Canaanite concepts; historically, Egyptologists prefer to operate with Manetho's dynasties rather than with the stratigraphic periodizations of the Bronze Age. Contemporary Egyptology does not altogether feel the urge to promote a dialogue with other disciplines of the Ancient Near East: there is a detectable trend in the field to depart from the orientalist approach and to devote more attention to the methodological debate in theoretically oriented disciplines (general linguistics,<sup>1</sup> models in archaeology,<sup>2</sup> *Religionswissenschaft*,<sup>3</sup> social and intellectual history<sup>4</sup>) and, especially in the United States, to issues of cultural identity.<sup>5</sup> While in the past Egyptologists would often be equally interested in Assyriology, Biblical studies, or Semitic linguistics, they now abandon orientalist learned societies and become increasingly attentive to other cultural domains, such as classical antiquity or medieval and modern Europe,<sup>6</sup> and also, although perhaps not yet within the same scholarly paradigm, subsaharan Africa.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schenkel, *Einführung in die altägyptische Sprachwissenschaft*; Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian: a Linguistic Introduction*.

<sup>2</sup> Seidlmayer, *Gräberfelder*, 5–39.

<sup>3</sup> Assmann, *Ma'at*; id., *Stein und Zeit*.

<sup>4</sup> Kemp, *Anatomy of a Civilization*; Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the nature of the discussion provoked by Bernal, *Black Athena*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for example Assmann, "Literatur und Karneval im Alten Ägypten," in *Karneval*.

2 The general trend to pay more attention to theoretical discourse has a correlate in literary studies. Until two decades ago, the study of Egyptian literature adhered to a euhemeristic<sup>8</sup> and adductive<sup>9</sup> model. By *euhemeristic* I mean that a more or less direct connection was posited between historical events and literary creations: the "Admonitions" are a mirror of the socio-political crisis generally known as the First Intermediate Period;<sup>10</sup> the "Instructions of Amenemhat I" and "Sinuhe" should be understood against the background of the coregency of Amenemhat I and Senwosret I;<sup>11</sup> the "Doomed Prince" harks back to a period of intensive contacts between Egypt and Asiatic powers during Dyn. XVIII;<sup>12</sup> "Wenamun" is a direct testimony of the decadence of Egyptian imperialism in the Levant.<sup>13</sup> By *adductive* I imply that no theory of the literary medium was derived from textual observations or applied to categories of Egyptian fictionality. Rather, the literary character of a text was inferred *ad hoc* on the basis of individual analyses and applied to specific texts, with little interest in typological considerations.<sup>14</sup> Ancient Egyptian chrestomathies, therefore, included all conceivable textual forms and genres: wisdom and narrative texts, funerary corpora and love poetry, belletristic and scholarly literature, epigraphically and paleographically transmitted material.<sup>15</sup>

In the euhemeristic-adductive perspective, the theoretical *argumentum e silentio* concerning the difference between referential and autoreferential genres was that Egypt's textual categories were similar to ours, but literature had not yet fully developed as independent discourse. While the aesthetic qualities of Egyptian literary creations were emphasized, the appearance of a literature independent of sociopolitical pressures was considered a much later achievement in cultural history.<sup>16</sup>

leske Phänomene in antiken und nachantiken Kulturen und Literaturen.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bilolo, *Les cosmo-théologies philosophiques de l'Égypte antique*.

<sup>8</sup> This term is normally used to refer to a political interpretation of the origin of myths or religious beliefs: see Baines, *JNES* 50 (1991), 98. I use it here, somewhat loosely, to indicate the same "historiocentric" approach when applied to literature as well.

<sup>9</sup> For the semantic status of this term see Mitchell, "Introduction: Pragmatic Theory," in id., *Against Theory. Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Brunner, *Grundzüge einer Geschichte der altägyptischen Literatur*, 20ff.

<sup>11</sup> Posener, *Littérature et politique*, 70ff., 101ff.

<sup>12</sup> Helck, "Die Erzählung vom Verwunschenen Prinzen," in *Festschrift Fecht*, 218–25.

<sup>13</sup> Goedicke, *The Report of Wenamun*.

<sup>14</sup> An example of this strategy is offered by Kaplony, "Die Definition der 'Schönen Literatur' im alten Ägypten," in *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur*, 289–314.

<sup>15</sup> The best collection can be found in Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the introduction by Simpson (ed.), *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 1ff.

3 A turn toward theoretical concerns took place during the Seventies, especially under the influence of Assmann's review of the volume of the *Handbuch der Orientalistik* devoted to literature.<sup>17</sup> Questions began to be raised as to which Egyptian texts could be classified as genuinely literary;<sup>18</sup> individual texts came to be used as a case study for a reconstitution of the formal features of literary discourse. From an Egyptological viewpoint, this paradigmatic shift was certainly favored by the fact that after the phase in which the *richesses inconnues*<sup>19</sup> and the *trésors encore cachés*<sup>20</sup> of Egyptian literature demanded incessant attention, the quantity of unpublished literary texts had apparently reduced its growth: a "detailed" perspective,<sup>21</sup> with its focus on the interpretation<sup>22</sup> of the classics of Egyptian literature, on the investigation of their social context, and tentatively also on their "deconstruction"<sup>23</sup> could now prevail over the "fragmentary" approach to the text. Although the theoretical model with which each interpreter operates remains different, and possibly spurious, it is fair to state that a hermeneutic approach to Egyptian literature is increasingly being adopted, in the sense that each Egyptian text *as a whole* becomes the "paradigmatic object of interpretation"<sup>24</sup> both in its cotextual structures and in its contextual ties. This is, roughly speaking, the historical background against which my present observations must be read.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Assmann, *OLZ* 69 (1974), 117–26, with his programmatic Baconian motto: *citius emergit veritas ex errore quam ex confusione*. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 4ff. had also recognized the need for a theoretical foundation of the study of Egyptian literary genres.

<sup>18</sup> See Purdy, *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 112–27. A complete assessment of the literary corpus of the Middle Kingdom is offered by Parkinson, "Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom," in *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 91–122.

<sup>19</sup> Posener, *RdE* 6 (1951), 27–48. Posener always stressed that the publication of unknown texts should be the highest priority for scholars of Egyptian literature: see id., "Tâche prioritaire," in *Acts of the First International Congress of Egyptology*, 519–22.

<sup>20</sup> van de Walle, "(Literarische) Überlieferung," in *LÄ* VI, 826–30.

<sup>21</sup> Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Baines, *JEA* 68 (1982), 31–44; id., *JEA* 76 (1990): 55–72.

<sup>23</sup> Derchain, *Le dernier obélisque*.

<sup>24</sup> Much in Schleiermacher's sense: cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 1–23, esp. 3.

<sup>25</sup> R. Rorty, "Philosophy without Principles," in Mitchell (ed.), *Against Theory*, 132–38 speaks of "(neo-) pragmatists" and "Derrideans" as "natural allies." The common ground is represented by the perception of the repressive function of the Enlightenment in the codification of Western thought: cf. Gumbrecht, "Posthistorie Now," in *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, 34–50, esp. 44–46. The "rescue" of the Enlightenment represents the programmatic goal of critical theory (à la Frankfurt School) and related hermeneutic models (à la Gadamer), a bridge between poststructuralism and hermeneutics being represented by the fact that all modern approaches tend to view "language" as the dominant factor in interpretation: Poster, *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism*, 1–33.

4 All textual genres may be sources of fundamental importance for the reconstruction of the historical or religious attitudes within which the dialogue between an author and a text on the one hand and a text and its readership on the other took place. In this respect, "cultural texts"<sup>26</sup> are historically more informative for what they reveal *implicitly* than for what they assert *explicitly*. Many Egyptian texts will strive for aesthetic elegance and employ certain prosodic devices regardless of the discourse to which they belong, and to a certain extent also regardless of the nature of the information they convey. What makes literary texts deserving of a discrete treatment is their *primary* function,<sup>27</sup> which can be described as "poetic," i.e., self-referentially oriented towards the message itself, as shown e.g. by the colophon formula *jw=f pw h3.t=f r ph.wj=fj* "So it goes from its beginning to its end,"<sup>28</sup> in which the literary text itself is referred to by the third person pronouns, as opposed, just to give examples at random, to referential mathematical or medical treatises (*jr q3=f st mwt=f pw jr ['m=f] st 'nh=f pw* "If he vomits it, it means that he will die; if he swallows it, it means that he will live"),<sup>29</sup> metalinguistic mythological glosses and aetiologies (*jr sf wsjr pw* "As for 'yesterday,' it means 'Osiris'"),<sup>30</sup> conative royal decrees (*wḏ-nzw*), emotive workers' utterances in Old Kingdom tombs (*mk wj hr=s mry=j* "I am right on it, my beloved"),<sup>31</sup> or phatic greetings (*j.nd-hr=k* "Hail to you").

How can we, therefore, define and understand an Egyptian literary composition? What makes it different from a non-literary text? While avoiding the fallacy that Egyptian literary texts can be treated as direct historical sources,<sup>32</sup> we should nonetheless be careful not to fall into the trap of a "prehistoricism"<sup>33</sup> shared by premodern literary analysis<sup>34</sup> and postmodern deconstructionism,<sup>35</sup> i.e., the illusion that there can be an unfiltered hermeneutic continuity between Egyptian literary text and Egyptological interpretation.<sup>36</sup> For the historian of Egyptian literature, no text can really "speak for itself": we always need the interpretive support of

<sup>26</sup> To use the expression suggested by Assmann, "Kulturelle und literarische Texte" in this volume.

<sup>27</sup> Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, 350–77.

<sup>28</sup> This example is from Sin. B 311.

<sup>29</sup> pRamesseum IV C 18–19.

<sup>30</sup> CT IV 193b.

<sup>31</sup> Badawy, *The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of 'Ankhm'ahor at Saqqara*, fig. 36.

<sup>32</sup> See Purdy, *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 113; Derchain, *RdE* 40 (1989), 37f.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 85f.

<sup>34</sup> Weimann, *New Criticism und die Entstehung bürgerlicher Literaturwissenschaft*.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Ulysse gramophone. Deux mots pour Joyce*.

<sup>36</sup> In favor of this hermeneutic contiguity see Brunner-Traut, *Gelebte Mythen*, 6.

a *theory* of literature derived from internal evidence provided by the Egyptian documents. In the following, I shall suggest that an Egyptian text can be assigned to the domain of literature on the basis of the combination of three heterogeneous criteria: (a) *fictionality*,<sup>37</sup> with the problem of the distinction between referential and self-referential discourse; (b) *intertextuality*,<sup>38</sup> connected with the question of literary types; (c) *reception*,<sup>39</sup> which touches on the concepts of authorship and the classic.

5 I define "fictionality" as the textual category whereby an implicit mutual understanding is created between author and reader to the effect that the world presented in the text need not coincide with the real world, and that no sanctions apply in case of discrepancy. This tacit agreement between author and reader is generated by formal and stylistic criteria, by a "structure" and a "texture."<sup>40</sup>

It is well-known that specific stylistic devices<sup>41</sup> appear only in certain categories of texts. One can think here of keywords such as oratorical style, prosodic structure, or *parallelismus membrorum*.<sup>42</sup> While the presence of rhythm<sup>43</sup> or rhetorical figures<sup>44</sup> is not by itself a sufficient criterion to assess the literary nature of a text, these formal categories are widespread in the Ancient Near East as well as in later literary history. On the basis of these criteria alone, however, funerary corpora would score higher than *belles lettres*; the same would hold true for cultic texts in *égyptien de tradition*<sup>45</sup> as opposed to demotic tales in Ptolemaic Egypt. It is clear that a fundamental issue must be addressed here, namely the degree of referentiality of the texts belonging to the religious sphere. I shall return to this question in Section 6 below.

<sup>37</sup> A dimension particularly emphasized by the literary theory of the Chicago school: see Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*.

<sup>38</sup> This concept has been mainly explored within the poststructuralist and deconstructionist experience: Broich-Pfister, *Intertextualität*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Jauß' *Rezeptionsästhetik* and the work of the Konstanz school: Iser, *New Literary History* 3 (1971–72), 279–99; id., *Der Akt des Lesens*.

<sup>40</sup> Hasan, "Text in the systemic-functional model," in *Current Trends in Textlinguistics*, 228–46.

<sup>41</sup> See Guglielmi, "Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur" in this volume.

<sup>42</sup> Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1, 11f.; Fecht, "Prosodie," in *LÄ* IV, 1127–54; Assmann, "Parallelismus membrorum," in *LÄ* IV, 900–910.

<sup>43</sup> See Shirun-Grumach, "Bemerkungen zu Rhythmus, Form und Inhalt in der Weisheit," in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, 317–52.

<sup>44</sup> For example wordplay: Guglielmi, "Zu einigen literarischen Funktionen des Wortspiels," in *Festschrift Westendorf*, 1, 491–506.

<sup>45</sup> Adopting the terminology suggested by Vernus, for example *RdE* 41 (1990), 153ff.

An important role in fictionality is played by features of metalinguistic character, for example the use (or omission) of the hero's name in Egyptian narrative and the coexistence of a multiplicity of interpretive layers in the linguistic structure of the Egyptian sentence. While it is relatively easy to see how a name such as *Z3-nh.t* ("Son-of-the-sycamore") evidently alludes to the Hathoric dimensions of the tale and to the privileged relationship between the hero and the queen,<sup>46</sup> or how the name *Wn-Jmnw* ("May-Amun-live") programmatically refers to the hero's destiny, the Theban god being his only helper in the hands of the Canaanite rulers, the fact of *not* naming the "Shipwrecked Sailor" or the "Doomed Prince" projects these heroes and their tales into the realm of the "imaginary";<sup>47</sup> in this case, the text is not only "fictional" in the sense that it creates between author and reader a solidarity that neutralizes referentiality, but it also posits a world in which basic conventions of our concrete reality may be broken; a world in which, e.g., a snake can prophesy or a crocodile can speak. By "multiplicity of interpretive layers" I refer to the fact that sentences in Egyptian fictional texts may allow not only denotative, but also connotative readings, and textual allusions often address more than one contextual (i.e., religious, sociopolitical, historical) sphere. The combination of these two features can be seen as a formal signal of fictionality.

To exemplify my point, I will once more refer the reader to Sh. S. 168–69: this passage allows two readings,<sup>48</sup> which are different on the denotative level and which probably also did not correspond to an identical segment of spoken language. The various levels addressed by the many connotative possibilities of the sentence (the political relevance of the "Residence" as ultimate symbol of Egyptian values, the interface between the social and the religious aspect of "rejuvenation," etc.) are themselves an inherent part of this work as a piece of literature. In a referential text such as an historical inscription, on the contrary,<sup>49</sup> it is the *event* that plays the

<sup>46</sup> See Purdy, *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 124–25; Derchain, *RdE* 22 (1970), 79–83.

<sup>47</sup> This is not, however, the only functional yield of a nameless mention. Derchain, *RdE* 40 (1989), 38 rightly suggests that this device is also used to allow the identification of a covert referent by one specific addressee: "L'anonymat est ici discrétion de connivence, non souci de généralité."

<sup>48</sup> *Rnpy=k m hnw qrs.t(w)=k* "You shall rejuvenate in the Residence and be buried," vs. *rnpy=k m-hnw qrs.t=k* "You shall rejuvenate inside your tomb": Loprieno, "The Sign of Literature in the Shipwrecked Sailor," in *Festschrift Derchain*, 209–17.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Urk. IV 324, 10 the writing of *hrj.t* admits both a reading as substantive "heaven" or as adjective "upper": *jn-jw h3j.n=tn hr w3.wt hrj.t* "Have you come down through the roads of heaven?" or "Have you come down through the upper roads?" The speakers, namely the Puntite princes, inquire about the roads followed by the Egyptian soldiers in order to reach Punt, as is obvious from the following question: Urk. IV 324, 11: *jn-jw sqd.n=tn hr mw hr t3* "Have you traveled by sea or by land?" In this case, only one of the two interpretations cotextually emerges as the correct one; neither can be interpreted as an intensional expansion of the other text's horizon of understanding.

primary functional role vis-à-vis the *narrative*,<sup>50</sup> independent of the text's aesthetic qualities, which may very well match those of a literary work. From a theoretical point of view, historical texts share with literature in the narrower sense a "re-cognitive" character which gives them a higher rank in the hierarchy of self-referentiality than "presentational" (e.g. dramatic or ritual) and "normative" (e.g. scientific or legal) texts.<sup>51</sup> In fact, the decline of the traditional Egyptian approach to history,<sup>52</sup> which we could ascribe to the performative "presentational" type, in favor of the descriptive "recognitive" historiography<sup>53</sup> of the *Urkunden* of Dyn. XVIII, which addresses the issue of Egypt's place in the community of nations, is precisely one of the signals of the "advent of history" in the early New Kingdom.<sup>54</sup>

To define Egyptian literature implies identifying genres and forms with a certain diatopic and diachronic cohesion.<sup>55</sup> From this perspective, in Egypt the highest hierarchical level belongs to the genre of the "Instructions," which displays an unbroken history from the Middle Kingdom onward and in which I have tried to recognize the most representative literary shape of *topos*, of the ideological expectations of Egyptian society as transmitted to its officials. "Narrative" literature, which I see as the privileged vehicle of *mimesis*, of individual response to these expectations, would also score high on this scale.<sup>56</sup> Lower on the scale of literariness would be genres and forms that develop at a later stage or are productive only in one period in Egypt's cultural history, such as e.g. love poetry or harpers' songs. I shall return to this problem in Section 11 below.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Koselleck–Stempel, *Geschichte. Ereignis und Erzählung*, esp. 519–89.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 26ff.

<sup>52</sup> See Hornung, "Vom Geschichtsbild der alten Ägypter," in *Geschichte als Fest*, 9–29; Baines, "Ancient Egyptian Concepts and Uses of the Past," in *Who Needs the Past?*, 132f. The Hyksos domination seems to have represented the turning point in the Egyptian perception of its role within the community of nations.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. A. J. Greimas, "Sur l'histoire événementielle et l'histoire fondamentale," in Koselleck–Stempel, *Geschichte. Ereignis und Erzählung*, 139–53.

<sup>54</sup> Assmann, "Die Entdeckung der Vergangenheit. Innovation und Restauration in der ägyptischen Literaturgeschichte," in *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, 484–99. For the general problem cf. Chr. Meier, "Die Entstehung der Historie," in Koselleck–Stempel, *Geschichte. Ereignis und Erzählung*, 251–305, who considers the development of an "historical consciousness" in the Ancient World the consequence of the individual perception of "mastering one's own destiny" in 5th century Greece. A similar evolution, although socially much less widespread, had taken place in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom with the development of a new, literate aristocracy whose *Weltanschauung* is conveyed through the contemporary works of literature: Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 84 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Assmann, *OLZ* 69 (1974), 23–26.

<sup>56</sup> Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 1–21.

Whether we take funerary discourse to be the cradle of Egyptian literature or not,<sup>57</sup> "autobiography" from the late Old Kingdom onward plays a significant role in our discussion. It exhibits both topical and mimetic features, often conveyed through different styles (poetry vs. prose, ethical vs. narrative sections); it expresses most clearly the tension between social expectations and individual concerns.<sup>58</sup> The presence of this tension is a characteristic of fictional discourse, especially in traditional societies, in which even the élite is likely to remain at a relatively low level of individual emancipation. The two highest genres on our hierarchy of literariness based on the respect for established textual models, namely instructions and tales, represent two opposite answers to the challenge inherent in the dialectic between the social and the individual spheres: wisdom literature represents the compliance with ideology, narrative literature the rise of the individual hero. Most of the literary texts oscillate between the two poles and combine *topos* and *mimesis*: for the Middle Kingdom, one can think of a composition like the "Eloquent Peasant,"<sup>59</sup> with the triumph of an individual who successfully tests the validity of ideological schemes, or of the "complaints,"<sup>60</sup> in which received ideas are philosophically<sup>61</sup> debated; for the New Kingdom, one can refer to the prayers of "personal piety," in which a private divine interlocutor is singled out from the pantheon of official religion. To judge from the internal history of reception (Sections 10–11), topical literature enjoyed in Egypt a higher recognition than any other textual genre.<sup>62</sup> However, the fact that I prefer to characterize the narrative genre by the technical term, *mimesis*, which in the history of Western thought specifically defines the connection between the work of art and its non-artistic referent,<sup>63</sup> implies that I take the latter to be the preferred vehicle of individually *authorial*, rather than socially *authoritative* literature. In Egypt, punctual "innovation" rarely became generalized "inauguration,"<sup>64</sup> and the rules of decorum<sup>65</sup> allowed for individual leeway

<sup>57</sup> For the former opinion see Assmann, "Schrift, Tod und Identität. Das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur im alten Ägypten," in *Schrift und Gedächtnis*, 64–93; for the latter see Quirke, Review of Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, DE 16 (1990), 93.

<sup>58</sup> Assmann, "Sepulkrare Selbstthematisierung im Alten Ägypten," in *Selbstthematisierung und Selbstzeugnis*, 213–21.

<sup>59</sup> See Parkinson, *Eloquent Peasant*; id., *JEA* 78 (1992), 163–78.

<sup>60</sup> Junge, "Die Welt der Klagen," in *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur*, 275–84.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. the expression *hhj nj jb* "intellectual investigation" in the "Complaints of Kha'kheperre'seneb" (I, 2), one of the foremost representatives of this literary genre: Ockinga, *JEA* 69 (1983), 88–95.

<sup>62</sup> Brunner, *Altägyptische Weisheit*, 11–98.

<sup>63</sup> Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 77f. Cf. E. A. Schmidt, "Historische Typologie der Orientierungsfunktionen von Kanon in der griechischen und römischen Literatur," in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 252f.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Assmann, "Gibt es eine 'Klassik' in der ägyptischen Literaturgeschichte?," in

only within the frame of a formal adherence to the sociopolitical context. Therefore, being potentially more subversive, narrative literature was on the one hand less likely to become "classical," on the other hand closer to the aesthetic standards of *mimesis* in the classical and modern sense.<sup>66</sup>

6 A basic issue for a proper assessment of Egyptian fictionality is the status of theological discourse, the interface between theology and literature being one of the main problems of Egyptological literary analysis altogether.<sup>67</sup> In this case too, it is hardly surprising that a hermeneutic key is offered by the autobiographical genre, which by its very nature tends to explore the interface between the social and the individual sphere, between referentiality and self-referentiality. Here I am thinking of two texts, paradigmatic of a more general cultural trend: the autobiographies of Sa-Mut, surnamed Kiki (TT 409), and Djehutiemhab (TT 194). Generally speaking, both texts belong to the intellectual movement of Ramesside "personal piety,"<sup>68</sup> itself a cultural phenomenon in which the individual and the official dimension are intertwined more than in any other form of Egyptian<sup>69</sup> religiosity. Individual is its focus on the tie between the human and the divine sphere, the emphasis on the god as addressee of one's personal concerns; official is its constellative framework, the fact that this partnership involves a specific entity within state religion, rather than the undetermined *ntr* of earlier wisdom literature.<sup>70</sup>

In the former inscription,<sup>71</sup> the narrator describes in the first person not his own achievements, as was the case in earlier traditional biographies, but his metonymically founded loyalty to the goddess Mut (*Z<sup>3</sup>-Mw.t* = "son-of-Mut").<sup>72</sup> The role of the king, the dimension of the family, even the quest for social promotion fade out.<sup>73</sup> The text is accompanied by a series of formal devices of the type described above, such as the retrograde direction of the writing, which in spite of the orientation of the hieroglyphs goes from the individual to the goddess, or the large number of intertextual

ZDMG Supplement VI, 51.

<sup>65</sup> For the relevance of this concept in exploring and explaining Egyptian cultural phenomena see Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 277–305.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Martinez-Bonati, *Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature*; Schmidt, in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 252–55.

<sup>67</sup> Assmann, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit*; Derchain, *CdE* 63 (1988), 77–85.

<sup>68</sup> Assmann, *Re und Amun*, 264–86.

<sup>69</sup> And not only Egyptian: for Mesopotamian and Biblical personal piety see Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion*.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, 44ff.; Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 93f.

<sup>71</sup> See Vernus, *RdE* 30 (1978), 115–46.

<sup>72</sup> A 5 "He found that Mut was ahead of the other gods."

<sup>73</sup> A 9–10 "I was a weak citizen of her city, a poor vagabond of her town."

reminiscences.<sup>74</sup> In the latter inscription,<sup>75</sup> somehow symmetrically, it is the goddess Hathor herself who appears to the individual in a dream. First of all, the oneiric dimension specifically evokes fictionality;<sup>76</sup> secondly, the dialogue with the divine sphere had previously been the king's prerogative.<sup>77</sup> The text uses metalinguistic signals,<sup>78</sup> the intervention of intertextual memories,<sup>79</sup> and ties with constellative state religion. In a time when true biographical inscriptions have disappeared from funerary discourse, the "autobiographies" acquire a higher literary status by incorporating the theological dimension. By the same token, theology itself trades referentiality for fictionality: from the sacral it moves to the individual sphere, from the canonic to the literary level. One could argue, therefore, that the concept of "individual" influenced the fluid boundaries between referential theology and autoreferential piety: while traditional theological corpora and books are not to be considered literary, the emergence of texts in the Ramesside period in which the enquiry about god's nature is tied to one's personal experience marks the generalized use of explicit theological discourse,<sup>80</sup> characterized by genres such as *s3h* ("transfiguration"), *rdj.t j3w* ("prayer") or *dw3w* ("hymn")<sup>81</sup>.

This evolution was not abrupt: it had been elicited by the references to the unnamed *ntr* and the experiments of theodicy in the literature of the Middle Kingdom,<sup>82</sup> and had been prepared during Dyn. XVIII by the humanism of the "theology of Amun,"<sup>83</sup> by the anthropocentricity of the

<sup>74</sup> Such as beginning the narration with the Middle Egyptian construction A 1 *zj pw wnn(.w)* "Once upon a time there was a man," as in the Eloquent Peasant, or borrowing the Late Egyptian expression A 17 *bw jr=j n=j nhw m rmt.w* "I made no human protection for myself" from scholastic prayers (see pAnastasi II 9, 3–4): Vernus, *RdE* 30 (1978), 130ff.

<sup>75</sup> Assmann, *RdE* 30 (1978), 22–50.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. the famous passage in Sin. B 223–26 "Look, this flight which your servant made, I did not plan it, it was not my decision; I did not devise it, I do not know who brought me away from my place: it was like a dream, as if a man from the Delta saw himself in Elephantine, a marsh-man in Nubia." See Vernus, "Traum," in *LÄ* VI, 745–49.

<sup>77</sup> I 11 "You are the one who spoke to me with your very mouth (...) while I was asleep, and the earth was in silence," and Hathor responds by listing all the gods with whom she will intercede for the deceased.

<sup>78</sup> Such as the wordplay between the juxtaposed *m s3c* "at the beginning" and *m s3w* "as was decided" in col. 10.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., 12–13 *iw=j m qd iw t3 m sgr* "While I was asleep and the earth was silent," a common locution in hymnic literature since Amarna: cf. Assmann, *RdE* 30 (1978), 32.

<sup>80</sup> Assmann, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit*, 258–82.

<sup>81</sup> Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, 78–94; Barucq–Daumas, *Hymnes et prières de l'Égypte ancienne*, 19–47.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Assmann, "Weisheit, Loyalismus und Frömmigkeit," in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, 36–53; id., *Theologie und Frömmigkeit*, 198ff.

<sup>83</sup> Assmann, *Re und Amun*, 145–88.

"new solar theology,"<sup>84</sup> and by the extreme anti-constellativism of the Amarna age. But while in the theological text of pCairo 58038<sup>85</sup> and, a fortiori, in the Great Hymn to the Aton<sup>86</sup> the interaction between god and *rhy.t* "man(kind)" is indicated by general predicates rather than by personal appeals,<sup>87</sup> and even the new solar theology emphasizes god's role as mankind's "good shepherd" rather than as the author's personal savior, in the Ramesside period the focus of attention shifts away from the assessment of god's qualities towards the expression of the existential needs of his human interlocutors. Bringing god down to the level of human, of private history<sup>88</sup> enhances the likelihood that he will leave the realm of referential speculation and enter the author's world, the domain of *mimesis*. But as I pointed out above, the border between theology and literature remains fluid throughout pharaonic history,<sup>89</sup> a significant gray area being, e.g., the presence of the (literary) "creator's apology" within the (non-literary) corpus of the "Coffin Texts"<sup>90</sup> or of literary solar hymns within the "Book of the Dead."<sup>91</sup>

7 The movement whereby during Dyn. XIX theological texts tend to address individual tensions, and hence to become increasingly self-referential, can also be observed in the growth of mythological discourse.<sup>92</sup> While myths surely existed from the very beginning of Egyptian history,<sup>93</sup> mythology in the narrower sense of a narrative sequence concerning the gods and taking place *in illo tempore*, does not completely emerge before the New Kingdom.<sup>94</sup> The inaugural text of this genre is likely to be the

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 96–143.

<sup>85</sup> Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, 199–207, 549–53; id., *Re und Amun*, 170ff.

<sup>86</sup> Assmann, *Ägyptische Hymnen und Gebete*, 215–21; 557–58; Allen, "The Natural Philosophy of Akhenaten," in *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, 89–101.

<sup>87</sup> IV 3–5 "Who listens (*sdm.w*) to the plea of him who is in distress, and is well disposed (*jm3-jb*) towards the one who cries out to him; who saves (*nhm.w*) the fearful from the hand of the violent, and who judges rightly (*wpj.w*) between the poor and the rich."

<sup>88</sup> As was pointed out above, a similar phenomenon of "privatization of history" had accompanied the rise of literary discourse during the Middle Kingdom: Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 84–97.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. the late pJumilhac, where individual theological solutions are tied up in a traditional mythological frame: Derchain, *RdE* 41 (1990), 9–30.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Assmann, *Theologie und Frömmigkeit*, 204–8.

<sup>91</sup> Barucq–Daumas, *Hymnes et prières*, 168–79.

<sup>92</sup> See the insightful analysis by Baines, *JNES* 50 (1991), 81–105, who offers a discussion of the related Egyptological debate and new methodological solutions to address the thorny issue of the presence of myths in Egypt before the New Kingdom.

<sup>93</sup> Baines, *JNES* 50 (1991), 94–99.

<sup>94</sup> The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus and the texts of the Osirian mysteries at

"Destruction of Mankind," probably composed towards the end of Dyn. XVIII and still tied to the funerary context of New Kingdom royal tombs.<sup>95</sup> It is during Dyn. XIX that mythology as a textual genre, with clearly defined references to interacting divine constellations, enters the literary sphere, mainly through the "Contentings of Horus and Seth" of pChester Beatty I.<sup>96</sup> The parodic or sarcastic character of this text, usually attributed to its function as political satire,<sup>97</sup> is nothing other than the result of the projection of material otherwise known from referential contexts into the truly literary, i.e., human dimension, in which ideology is continuously challenged by individual mimesis. It is therefore understandable why, in Egypt, "mythical icons" occur before fully developed myths, and "myths" before "mythology." In the same way in which the emergence of theological discourse predates by several centuries the literary exploration of explicit theology in "personal piety," or the topical and mimetic concerns in the biographies of the Old Kingdom only later develop into a full-fledged literary genre, narratives in which divine entities are dialogic partners within a story rather than static roles within a constellation rest upon a prehistory of textual antecedents.<sup>98</sup> We should observe that one of the few literary texts possibly composed during the Middle Kingdom which make use of religious material, i.e., the "Hymn to the Nile,"<sup>99</sup> presents itself as a *dwšw*, the very technical term which in Ramesside times has come to characterize a whole literary genre.<sup>100</sup> Several other features contribute to an isolation of this text from the cultic context, projecting it into the domain of literature: its narrative structure, its universalist message, its relative lack of constellative references, and the loyalistic connections it establishes between the Nile and the King.<sup>101</sup> In many respects, a similar analysis applies to royal hymnic<sup>102</sup> and to loyalistic wisdom:<sup>103</sup> instead of the god, it

Abydos do contain mythical allusions, but the roles of the participants of the divine constellations are too unclear to allow the reconstruction of a narrative sequence: Sethe, *Dramatische Texte*, 83–264; Schäfer, *Die Mysterien des Osiris*, 47–86.

<sup>95</sup> Hornung, *Himmelskuh*, 74–81.

<sup>96</sup> See also the tale of "Truth and Falsehood" of pChester Beatty II: Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2, 211–14.

<sup>97</sup> Spiegel, *Die Erzählung vom Streite des Horus und Seth*, esp. 68ff. See however Verhoeven, "Ein 'Sitz im Leben' für die Erzählung von Horus und Seth," in *Abstracts of Papers*, Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists, 193–94 for the suggestion that the text was designated for the occasion of a festival to celebrate the rule of Ramesses V.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. the famous homosexual episode of the Horus-Seth myth in a papyrus from Kahun: Griffith, *Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob*, Pl. 3, VI.12.

<sup>99</sup> See however van der Plas, *L'Hymne à la crue du Nil*, 187–90 for a dating in the early New Kingdom.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 57ff.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 186f.

<sup>102</sup> Such as the cycle of Hymns to Senwosret III from Illahun: Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1, 198–201; Derchain, *CdE* 62 (1987), 21–29.

is the king who functions here as the addressee of the literary composition, and this can only occur through a kind of "appropriation" of the divine or the royal sphere by the actors of the literary dialogue.<sup>104</sup>

8 The concept of "intertextuality" is borrowed from poststructuralist literary theory and implies that a text is never a truly original creation of its author<sup>105</sup>, but is part of a dynamic "universe of texts" with which it dialectically interrelates. All texts which transcend their pragmatic setting and tend to develop a specific meta-language, such as literature, theology, science, or law, will score high on the scale of intertextuality. For the purposes of Egyptological analysis, we should use the concept of intertextuality in an historical sense:

(a) The text must appear outside its purported contextual frame, which thus becomes a signal of fictional creation. The form of an autobiographical text appearing outside the funerary sphere of its alleged author, as in the case of Sinuhe,<sup>106</sup> the structure of a travel report deprived of any administrative reference ("Wenamun" was discovered in el-Hibeh in conjunction with two other literary papyri),<sup>107</sup> the device of presenting a text as a copy of a letter supposedly written several centuries earlier (as in the Moscow "Tale of Woe"),<sup>108</sup> are all indications of the fictional character of the contextual frame; these compositions will display a higher level of intertextuality than the corresponding contextually bound, non-literary texts. The intertextual allusions can also be conveyed by linguistic devices, such as beginning a text with a verbal form that would normally require a cotext to become semantically transparent<sup>109</sup> or borrowing the introductory formula from the oral medium<sup>110</sup> in order to assign the text to the "proletarian" (cf. Section 11) narrative genre.

<sup>103</sup> Posener, *Littérature et politique*, 117–40; id., *L'enseignement loyaliste*.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. the presence of the textual instruction *jny.t* "refrain" in Senwosret III's hymns or the substitution of the loyalistic *nzw* "king" with a more personal *nfr* "god" (whom I do not take to be the king) in the "Teaching of a man to his son": Kitchen, *OrAnt* 8 (1969), 193; cf. Posener, "L'enseignement d'un homme à son fils," in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, 307–16.

<sup>105</sup> A felicitous Egyptological restitution of an Egyptian author's dialog with his context has been pursued for a text which, hardly to our surprise, lies at the crossroads between theological and literary discourse: Derchain, *RdE* 41 (1990), 9–30.

<sup>106</sup> See Purdy, *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 114; Baines, *JEA* 68 (1982), 33ff.

<sup>107</sup> Gardiner, *Late Egyptian Stories*, XI.

<sup>108</sup> Caminos, *A Tale of Woe*.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Sh. S. 1 *ḏd.jn šmsw jqr* "Then the worthy attendant said." When?

<sup>110</sup> *jr nfr hr.tw, hr-jr m-ht*, etc.: Hintze, *Untersuchungen zu Stil und Sprache neu-ägyptischer Erzählungen*, 1ff., 7ff.

(b) The text must be made public, in the sense that it must become accessible beyond the time and space of its composition. An important role is played by the form of transmission: epigraphic texts are less likely to be reproduced, and are thus less likely to become involved in intertextual relations than texts in book form.<sup>111</sup> Rather than polar oppositions, however, my criteria aim to establish a *degree* of intertextuality and a *scale* of literariness. When the same (or a similar) text is transmitted both in monumental and in cursive form, the change of channel often indicates a change in the scope of the text, including a reduction of the official character to the advantage of the literary (i.e., individual and personal) dimension. Let us take the example of the "Enseignement loyaliste."<sup>112</sup> On the stela of Sehetepibre' from the Middle Kingdom it appears within a funerary context and is combined with references to the Osirian mysteries at Abydos; roughly speaking, it is primarily *jenseitsorientiert*. In the New Kingdom pLouvre E 4864 and in the other cursive copies it exhibits a longer version and precedes an even longer section devoted to the author's attitude to his offspring and to different categories of human groups; it is most definitely *diessseitsorientiert*. Similar tendencies can be detected in the development of an historical literature, or better of a narrative literature with historical motifs: the "Dispute between Apopi and Seqenenre"<sup>113</sup> and the "Taking of Yoppa"<sup>114</sup> transpose to the literary level military actions otherwise related by non-literary (biographical or historical) monuments. The example offered by the accounts of the battle of Qadesh is particularly instructive.<sup>115</sup> Although the "Poem" and the "Bulletin" were repeated on several copies on stone, the former, which is also transmitted by fragments of hieratic papyri, proves intertextually more powerful than the latter: it is much longer, more complex in its formal structure, integrating different textual forms, and closer to the literary genre of the "King's novel,"<sup>116</sup> narrating Ramses II as a (super-)human hero rather than describing him as a divine actor.

9 The *dramatis personae* of a literary text often stand for a specific socio-political *Zeitgeist*: what makes Sinuhe particularly paradigmatic is the fact that, more than in any contemporary biography, one finds there the experience of the Middle Kingdom aristocrat at the crossroads of loyalty to the

<sup>111</sup> On books and libraries in Ancient Egypt see Burkard, "Bibliotheken im alten Ägypten," *Bibliothek* 4.2 (1980), 79–115; Schott, *Bücher und Bibliotheken im Alten Ägypten*; cf. Assmann, *OLZ* 69 (1974), 117.

<sup>112</sup> Posener, *L'enseignement loyaliste*; cf. Assmann, in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, 36–53.

<sup>113</sup> Goedicke, *The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre*'.

<sup>114</sup> Goedicke, *CdE* 43 (1968), 219–33; Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 81–84.

<sup>115</sup> von der Way, *Die Textüberlieferung Ramses' II. zur Qadeš-Schlacht*, 1–20.

<sup>116</sup> See my article "The Königsnovelle" in this volume.

state and intellectual emancipation. An essential intertextual characteristic, which Egyptian wisdom literature shares with similar genres in other cultures of the Ancient Near East, is *pseudepigraphy*,<sup>117</sup> i.e., the tendency for authors not to "assert" their composition,<sup>118</sup> but rather to attribute it to a prestigious antecedent. The author's dialogue with the past yields a twofold result: on the one side it creates a set of canonic models of fictionality; on the other it conveys the expectations of contemporary ideology. A literary name<sup>119</sup> like "Khety," which stands very high in the hierarchy of intertextuality, fulfils a double function: it points back to the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period as the mythical period to which Egyptian culture dated the emergence of autonomous personalities;<sup>120</sup> and by the same token it conveys the canonic encyclopaedia of the Middle Kingdom, an encyclopaedia that by the time of the Ramesside literati<sup>121</sup> had acquired classical (and even educational: one thinks of the diffusion of the "Kemyt") character. Hence, three periods of Egyptian history display intertextual dialogue, thus emerging as the most germane to a hermeneutic definition of literature: (1) the *mythical* time of Snofru's reign,<sup>122</sup> of other segments of the Old Kingdom,<sup>123</sup> and especially of the First Intermediate Period,<sup>124</sup> which represent the fictional *Sitz im Leben* and the cultural identity<sup>125</sup> of the pseudepigraphic literary authors; (2) the *canonical* Middle Kingdom, during which the most paradigmatic works of Egyptian literature were actually composed; and (3) the Ramesside era with its peculiar dialectic between *scriptores classici* and *scriptores proletarii*<sup>126</sup>, which itself is one of the most typical features of developed literary consciousness.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>117</sup> van de Walle, *La transmission des textes littéraires égyptiens*, 35ff.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Assmann, in *Schrift und Gedächtnis*, 89.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Bergman, in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, 93–102.

<sup>120</sup> Assmann, in *Selbstthematisierung und Selbstzeugnis*, 219; idem, *Ma'at*, 54–57.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. pChester Beatty IV 3,5ff. and the so-called "Fragment Daressy": Wildung, *Imhotep und Amenhotep*, 25–29.

<sup>122</sup> Kagemni, Neferti, pWestcar: see Baines, in *Who Needs the Past?*, 136. For Snofru ("the one who causes good") as the metonymically motivated paradigm of an Egyptian king enjoying good reputation see Graefe, "Die gute Reputation des Königs 'Snofru'," in *Festschrift Lichtheim*, 257–63.

<sup>123</sup> Ptahhotep, Neferkare': cf. Brunner, *Altägyptische Weisheit*, 62–71.

<sup>124</sup> Khety, Merikare', the Eloquent Peasant and the tradition of the "complaints": Junge, in *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur*, 275–84; Seibert, *Charakteristik*, 49–54.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Assmann, *Ma'at*, 57.

<sup>126</sup> Fronton, *apud* Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 19.8.15: cf. Schmidt, in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 246–58.

<sup>127</sup> The typically Egyptian dialogue between a "perishable" and an "imperishable" pole is evident not only in the linguistic and literary aspects, but in other spheres of Egyptian culture as well, such as the opposition between "monumental" (*mnw*) and "functional" architecture, i.e. between stone and mud brick: Assmann, "Stein und Zeit," in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, 91–96.



10 The last hermeneutic criterion I suggested in Section 4 as a way to ascertain the nature of literary discourse in Ancient Egypt can be subsumed under the heading "reception." In order for an Egyptian text to qualify as literary, we need proofs of the existence of a readership within Egypt's cultural history itself. The clearer these signals, the higher the text in the hierarchy of reception: a text documented in hundreds of copies or echoed in later compositions is certainly more likely to have belonged to the realm of literature than a work unknown to succeeding generations.

However, there are substantial difficulties in an uncritical application of this criterion to Egyptian material. Apart from the haphazard nature of the evidence from Ancient Egypt, which often makes the presence of documented reception the result of historical or archaeological accidents,<sup>128</sup> the main problem lies on the one hand in the *Gebrauchstexte*, such as the Ramesside "Miscellanies,"<sup>129</sup> which certainly enjoyed ample reception but cannot be ascribed to literary discourse, and on the other in those "school texts" which may have indeed originally been literary, but have subsequently been reduced to the role of sheer educational tools. The intertextually related texts<sup>130</sup> of the "Kemyt"<sup>131</sup> and of the so-called "Satire of the Trades"<sup>132</sup> exemplify this point: while they certainly had literary value at the time of their composition, by virtue of their intensive scholastic use they progressively acquired "encyclopaedic,"<sup>133</sup> rather than literary function.

Yet, especially for literary cultures which process their past,<sup>134</sup> reception is a primary hermeneutic category. Attention has been paid to the problem of the transmission of literary texts from Dyn. XII to Dyn. XIX,<sup>135</sup> the conclusion being that it is probably not appropriate to apply the concepts of the "classic" or "classicism" to the Ramesside attitude toward the works of

<sup>128</sup> A few undoubtedly literary texts, such as the "Shipwrecked Sailor" or the "Tales of pWestcar" are indeed transmitted only by one witness: van de Walle, *La transmission des textes littéraires égyptiens*, 8ff.

<sup>129</sup> Donadoni, *La Parola del Passato* 41 (1955), 81–96.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. oBruxelles E 7627 recto: Posener, "Deux ostraca littéraires d'un type particulier et le livre *KMJ.T.*," in van de Walle, *La transmission des textes littéraires*, 48.

<sup>131</sup> See Barta, *ZÄS* 105 (1978), 6–14.

<sup>132</sup> Seibert, *Die Charakteristik*, 99–192. The "satirical" tenor of this composition is in fact nothing else than the result of the formulaic nature of the maxims and of the focus on the formal structure of the text rather than on its intellectual message. This is also shown by the repetition of the *same* exhortations in the Ramesside miscellanies, such as pLansing (see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2, 167–75), in spite of the dramatic change of sociopolitical and cultural context that had meanwhile taken place.

<sup>133</sup> Eco, *Lector in fabula*, § 4.6.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Baines, in *Who Needs the Past?*, 131–40.

<sup>135</sup> Assmann, in *Epochenschwelle und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, 486–94; id., in *ZDMG Supplement VI*, 35–52.

the past, since this period, as opposed to Dyn. XVIII, experienced a break in the continuity of the literary tradition, a break particularly evident in the diglossia by which it was characterized. Consequently, Dyn. XIX appears closer to "modernist" than to "classicizing" aesthetics.

11 We should distinguish between a "classical" and a "canonical" approach to the work of the past.<sup>136</sup> The perception of the present as a moment of decadence and the peculiar feeling that, in spite of its exemplary value, the past has not proven able to survive, whereas the present, paradoxically, acts as a catalyst of individual innovations, is precisely what makes the Rameside era "classicizing." What I mean is that there is a link between regarding the past as "classical" and perceiving a break in cultural transmission. The very concept of *classicus* acquires semantic status only if can be viewed as the opposite pole to *proletarius*, diglossia<sup>137</sup> being the linguistic symptom of this dichotomy. A "proletarian" by-product of the tension between the recognition of the absolute validity of classical standards and the perception of its relative inadequacy in tackling the challenges of contemporary culture is "parody." I already discussed the example offered by the mythological "Contendings of Horus and Seth":<sup>138</sup> the application of canonical forms to counter-canonical contents (or vice versa) allows the author to explore the borders of ideology, re-visiting the classics while neutralizing their paradigmaticity.<sup>139</sup> Since parody affects codified textual frames, such as genres or forms, it can only develop within a *classical*, and not within a *canonic* concept of literary history, as was the case in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom: what can appear in the latter situation is "irony"<sup>140</sup> as an individual critical response to the expectations of contemporary ideology, but always within the strict decorum of accepted textual paradigms.

Otherwise, in the presence of unbroken cultural continuity between past authors and present readers, one should not speak of "classicism," but rather of "canonicity": the literati of the Middle Kingdom perceived a cultural continuity with the fictional authors of the "mythical" age of Egyptian literature (cf. Section 9), much in the same way in which the author of

<sup>136</sup> Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 124–57.

<sup>137</sup> See Loprieno, "Linguistic variety and Egyptian literature" and Vernus, "Diglossie et langue littéraire" in this volume.

<sup>138</sup> One could also mention the contemporary non-literary Turin Satirical-Erotic Papyrus: Omlin, *Der Papyrus 55001 und seine satirisch-erotischen Zeichnungen und Inschriften*.

<sup>139</sup> For a similar outcome in medieval European culture see W. Haug, "Klassiker-kataloge und Kanonisierungseffekte am Beispiel des mittelalterlich-hochhöfischen Literaturkanons," in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 259–70, esp. 268f.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 51ff.

Qohelet viewed Solomon. This is the cultural background of the rise of literary discourse as a “metaphor of understanding”<sup>141</sup> during Dyn. XII: compositions tend to follow “canonical” patterns and themes, and to convey in literary form the dialectic between social decorum and individual aspirations. There are no single authors, but strong common authorities.<sup>142</sup> At this time two options are theoretically disclosed, both in fact amply documented in the literary history of Egypt: on the one hand, to concentrate on the “canon” and develop a tenacious tradition of canonization<sup>143</sup> or of exegesis;<sup>144</sup> on the other hand, to innovate the conventions of literacy, transforming the static “canon” into dialectical “classics.” The first option marked Dyn. XVIII,<sup>145</sup> and remained productive for funerary corpora until later times. It is the option chosen by the Jewish tradition, which drew the ultimate conclusion from the dichotomy between canonical past and catastrophic present and eventually “closed the canon,”<sup>146</sup> depriving literature, in this way, of any autonomy vis-à-vis theological discourse (cf. Section 6). The second option is the Ramesside one: through the development of a new, literary vehicle, i.e., Late Egyptian, the same literary texts which had previously enjoyed canonical status were in a sense downgraded to the level of classical models. The new linguistic vehicle opened the path of literature to new textual genres (harpers’ songs, love poetry, “proletarian”

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 64–86. The very nature of (Egyptian) literature is “metaphoric” in the sense that it displays the author’s speculative, i.e., symbolic interpretation of reality as a *whole*, as opposed to what one could call “metonymic,” i.e. indexical discourses, which concentrate on the exploration of a *segment* of reality, such as theology, scholarship, or law. Cf. the discussion on the multiplicity of interpretive layers in Section 5 above.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory*, 129–35. The same applies to the function of the Egyptian monument as catalyst of “social continuity”: see Assmann, in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, 96–100; idem, *Ma’at*, 96f.

<sup>143</sup> Assmann, *Re und Amun*, 10f.

<sup>144</sup> The paradigmatic example is offered by the “oral” character of Jewish rabbinic literature, which has to be interpreted as a fictional contextual device rather than as the real pragmatic setting of these texts, the different layers of oral commentary to the Law soon evolving into *verschriftete Sprechakte*, which eventually became themselves genuinely *written* corpora: A. Goldberg, “Der verschriftete Sprechakt als rabbinische Literatur,” in Assmann, A. *et alii* (Hgg.), *Schrift und Gedächtnis*, 124ff.

<sup>145</sup> An explicit example is offered by the repetition of all the cultural patterns of the Middle Kingdom (as concerns name, literary structure, ethical values, etc.) in the “ideal” monumental autobiography: cf. Bergman, in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, 92f.; Assmann, in *Selbstthematisierung und Selbstzeugnis*, 221–28; idem, *Ma’at*, 97 ff.

<sup>146</sup> See F. Crüsemann, “Das ‘portative Vaterland.’ Struktur und Genese des alttestamentlichen Kanons,” in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 63–79, esp. 75f.; A. Goldberg, “Die Zerstörung von Kontext als Voraussetzung für die Kanonisierung religiöser Texte im rabbinischen Judentum,” in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 201–11.

narrative)<sup>147</sup> that so far had remained outside literary decorum and probably confined to oral transmission.<sup>148</sup> Because this was a literature of “proletarian” nature, its very appearance emphasized the self-referential, intertextual, and classical nature of the literature of the Middle Kingdom; it represented the challenge of the individual to the collective literary tradition, which the history of reception conveyed to him in unitary form.<sup>149</sup> A significant signal of this cultural evolution between the “aristocratic” Middle Kingdom and the “democratic” Ramesside era can be seen in the semantic evolution of the word *nds* from “bourgeois” to “poor.” Egypt’s social structure has become more stratified: economic autonomy is no longer by itself a sign of individual distinction<sup>150</sup>, but needs to be combined with the integration into a professional class, or else it leads to poverty.<sup>151</sup>

It is difficult not to recognize in this radical change of paradigm the consequence of the rise of a new “historical consciousness” during Dyn. XVIII (cf. Section 5). From the expulsion of the Hyksos to the development of a military presence in Asia, Egypt was finally forced to accept the challenge of the Asiatic world and to deal with it in a tension between armed conflict and cultural exchange.<sup>152</sup> Egypt now had a true diachrony, a clearer, less mythical perception of her limits in space and time. But the advent of a classicistic *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*<sup>153</sup> always elicits a dialectical response: while it rhetorically asks “Where have all the classics gone?,”<sup>154</sup> it recognizes the past as *dead* in spite of its achievements.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>147</sup> For the harpers’ songs see Assmann, “Der schöne Tag,” in *Das Fest*, 18–20 and bibliography; for love poetry Fox, *Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*; the features of “proletarian” narrative are delineated by Assmann, in *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen*, 492 and id., in *ZDMG Supplement VI*, 48f.

<sup>148</sup> For a critical discussion of the cogency of J. Goody’s approach (see esp. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*) when applied to the case of classical and oriental civilizations cf. *Literacy and Society*, ed. K. Schousboe and M. T. Larsen; Egypt’s case is discussed by Eyre—Baines, “Interactions between Orality and Literacy in Ancient Egypt,” *ibid.*, 91–119. For the status and the nature of “written folklore” at the interface between orality and literature see A. Assmann, “Schriftliche Folklore. Zur Entstehung und Funktion eines Überlieferungstyps,” in *Schrift und Gedächtnis*, 175–93; for the case of the “Tale of the Two Brothers” as representative of this textual category see Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian ‘Tale of the Two Brothers.’*

<sup>149</sup> Middle Kingdom literature did of course display *mimesis*, but it is questionable whether in Dyn. XIX the revolutionary character of Sinuhe was still perceived, or if, more probably, classical compositions, whether instructional or narrative, were considered ideologically homogeneous: cf. Baines, in *Who Needs the Past?*, 140ff.

<sup>150</sup> As in the case of the rich *nds* Djedi in pWestcar 7,1ff.

<sup>151</sup> See my discussion in “Lo schiavo,” in *L’uomo egiziano*, 197–233.

<sup>152</sup> Helck, “Ägypten im frühen Neuen Reich. Grundzüge einer Entwicklung,” in *Ägyptens Aufstieg zur Weltmacht*, 11–28.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. H. U. Gumbrecht, “‘Phoenix aus der Asche’ oder: vom Kanon zur Klassik,” in A. und J. Assmann (Hgg.), *Kanon und Zensur*, 284–99.

<sup>154</sup> pChester Beatty IV 3, 5–7: “Is there anyone here like Hardjedef? Is there another

The diglossia between the "classical" and the "proletarian" components of Egyptian culture remained a major feature of the first millennium BCE, marking this period as Egypt's archaizing era *par excellence*.<sup>156</sup> While it characterizes the artistic, the political, and the religious sphere, the archaizing movement more rarely concerned literature in the narrower sense, only now causing the break in the history of reception that had not taken place in Ramesside times:<sup>157</sup> with the adoption of the demotic script beyond the administrative frame and with the loss of contact with the profane literature of earlier times,<sup>158</sup> dialectical "classicism" ceased to exist as a productive cultural phenomenon in Egypt. But it is important to observe that this new "proletarian" literature in Demotic chose to express itself through the very same two textual genres, i.e., wisdom and tale, that had marked the beginning of literary discourse in Egypt nearly two millennia earlier.<sup>159</sup>

like Imhotep? No one in our generation is like Neferty, or like Khety, the best of them all. I want you to know the name of Ptahemdjehuty and Kha'kheperre'seneb. Is there another like Ptahhotep, or anyone who equals Kaires?"

<sup>155</sup> I am referring here to the so-called "Fragment Daressy," a relief from a wall of a Saqqara tomb showing names and figures of past personalities, including fictive literary authors: cf. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, fig. 6.

<sup>156</sup> Brunner, *Saeculum* 21 (1970), 151–61.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Brunner, *Altägyptische Erziehung*, 27–32.

<sup>158</sup> During the sixth, fifth and fourth century one still wrote works of literature in Hieratic script, as shown by pVandier (Posener, *Papyrus Vandier*) and pBrooklyn 47.218.135 (Jasnow, *A Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text*); cf. Kaplony-Heckel, *SAK* 1 (1974), 227–46.

<sup>159</sup> Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3, 3–10; Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*, 14ff.

## KULTURELLE UND LITERARISCHE TEXTE

JAN ASSMANN

### 1 "AUßERLITERARISCHE" UND "LITERARISCHE FAKTEN" DER ÄGYPTISCHEN SCHRIFTKULTUR

G. Posener konnte sich vorstellen, daß eines Tages in Lischt die autobiographische Grabinschrift des Sinuhe gefunden würde, die als Vorbild des bekannten literarischen Textes gedient haben könnte<sup>1</sup> und die sich zur Papyrusfassung so verhalten würde wie die Stele des Anchsetepibre zur Papyrusfassung des *Enseignement Loyaliste*,<sup>2</sup> die Berliner Lederhandschrift zu einer (verlorenen) Bauinschrift Sesostri I.,<sup>3</sup> die Kamose-Stelen zum Carnarvon Tablet,<sup>4</sup> die Qadesch-Inschriften zum Gedicht des Pentawere<sup>5</sup> und das Harfnerlied im Grab des Paitenemheb zum Anteflied des pHarris 500.<sup>6</sup> Černý war überzeugt davon, daß der Wenamun ein authentischer Reisebericht, also ein Aktenstück ist.<sup>7</sup> Manche hielten den Papyrus Moskau 127<sup>8</sup> für einen echten Brief. Andere wiederum gingen und gehen davon aus, daß es sich bei Sinuhe, Wenamun und der "Tale of Woe" um rein literarische Texte handelt, die nie für ein Grab, ein Archiv oder einen bestimmten Empfänger bestimmt waren.<sup>9</sup> Aber wofür sonst? Das ist die Frage, mit der sich dieser Beitrag beschäftigt. Niemand bezweifelt, daß es eine unsichtbare

<sup>1</sup> Posener, *Littérature et politique*, 90f.

<sup>2</sup> Posener, *Enseignement Loyaliste*.

<sup>3</sup> Eyre, "The Semna Stelae: Quotation, Genre and Functions of Literature", in *Studies Lichtheim*, 1, 134–65, bes. 143f. Zum Text der Berliner Lederhs. und ihrer poetischen Formung vgl. jetzt Osing, "Zu zwei literarischen Texten des Mittleren Reichs", in *The Heritage of Ancient Egypt. Studies Iversen*, 101–20.

<sup>4</sup> Helck, *Historisch-biographische Texte*, no.119; Habachi, *The Second Stela of Kamose*; Smith-Smith, *ZÄS* 103 (1976), 48–76; Eyre, in *Studies Lichtheim*, 1, 144f.

<sup>5</sup> von der Way, *Die Textüberlieferung Ramses' II. zur Qadeš-Schlacht*.

<sup>6</sup> Assmann, "Harfnerlieder", in *LÄ* II, 972–82.

<sup>7</sup> Posener, *RdE* 6 (1950), 41 n.8.

<sup>8</sup> Caminos, *A Tale of Woe*.

<sup>9</sup> Zum Sinuhe als Literaturwerk vgl. Baines, *JEA* 68 (1982), 31–44; Purdy, *ZÄS* 104 (1977), 112–27; Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*.