Parkinson, Richard B. *The Story of Sinuhe and other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 B.C.E.* Oxford UP, 1997. (Introduction, "The Tale of Sinuhe," and "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant")

If an uncertain number of verses is lost at the start of a text, the translation is headed with:

. . . . . .]

Angled brackets ⟨ ⟩ indicate an erroneous omission by the ancient copyist. The text inside the brackets is supplied by the modern editor. When restoration is impossible, dots give a visual indication of the amount of text that is missing, as with square brackets.

In the notes, particular words from the passage which are being discussed are set in italics; these lemmata are, however, not always in exactly the same form of the word in the original text. The note is placed at the end of the first verse of the passage that it discusses, and usually at the end of the first verse of a stanza or section of a stanza. Thus, the lemma in the note is usually in the subsequent verses, and only occasionally in the preceding ones.

The notes provide different levels of commentary for various texts. Some of the narratives and much of the didactic writing are clear to follow, as are the 'laments' which have a single theme consistently expounded. Other passages, especially those which are reflective or discursive, need extensive notes to explain the often allusive trains of thought. This requires a certain measure of paraphrase. I do not attempt to indicate the full diversity of possible reactions to the poems, but try to provide pointers towards a unified reading of a remarkably rich and coherent corpus. Since I hope to make the poems accessible to readers of the comparatively modern Western canon such as myself, I have not explored the culturally specific aspects of the ancient corpus in depth. This strategy may underplay the 'otherness' of the poems, but I consider it a necessary step to bring out the distinctive nature of their discourse that is closer to early modern concepts of 'literature' than the reader may at first assume.

Introduction

Or duopo è d'un gran core e d'un bel canto.
A. Striggio, *L'Orfeo* (1607), III

An Ancient Egyptian Reader

Around 1800 BC in the reign of the great king Amenemhat III, a man lived at Thebes whose position in the state bureaucracy was high enough for him to build a tomb on the west bank of the Nile—probably the sort of man who could also dedicate a small but tasteful statue of himself in the local temple. Like others of his position and education, he was proud of his knowledge of literature, and he copied out on a reused roll of papyrus in his own professional hand, the highly regarded *Tale of Sinuhe*, which had been composed at the royal court in the north in his grandfather's time. He also made his own copy, with some enthusiasm and haste, of another fine work, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*; this copy lacked the end of the poem, but he later managed to acquire part of a roll that included the final stanzas. He also possessed a roll with the poetic *Dialogue of a Man and his Soul*, perhaps copied by a friend who had been trained by the same master-scribe as himself; this manuscript had to be patched with a sheet from a discarded roll that contained another old, but less well-liked, Tale. When he died, his collection of four manuscripts seems to have been buried with him, and it survived to be discovered in unrecorded circumstances and subsequently auctioned in London in 1843.

We know almost nothing about this man, not even his name, his rank, or the exact location of his tomb. The preceding speculative account of his existence is based entirely on the surviving papyri.[1] The most certain thing that we know about him, apart from his

[1] Now P. Berlin 3022–5. My imaginative reconstruction draws on various features of the group of papyri; see R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (Oxford, 1991), p. ix–xxx. For the Tale on the reused roll see pp. 287–8.

handwriting, is that he was a person of high literary taste, for his manuscripts contain three masterpieces that are among the supreme achievements of his culture. These manuscripts remained unread, however, for over three-and-a-half millennia, and during this period all knowledge of their poetry vanished as completely as his name.

Approaching Ancient Egyptian Literature

From antiquity, Ancient Egypt exerted a fascination as a land of strange gods, impenetrable symbols, magicians, and tyrants, and it was only in the 1820s that decipherment revealed that hieroglyphs were not allegorical mysteries, but a practical script used for a wide range of writings, including literature. Ancient Egyptian poems, with their frivolity and pessimism, challenged the scholars' preconceptions about that civilization, and still have an allure for us as the voices of the dead speaking their thoughts and feelings with enduring artistry.

The rediscovery of Ancient Egyptian literature can be dated precisely to the 22 July 1828, when Jean-François Champollion, the decipherer of the hieroglyphic script, viewed the collection of François Sallier on his way to Egypt, and saw Papyrus Sallier II (now in the British Museum), which contains a copy of *The Teaching of King Amenemhat*, composed *c.*1900 BC. However, he did not recognize its literary character, since at that date preclassical literature—with the exception of the Bible—was little regarded. Until quite recently, Egyptian poems were read largely for their adventitious historical interest and their supposed documentary information, and they are a strange mixture of the familiar and of elements that now seem very unliterary. Literature is not only older than is often assumed, but more varied.[2]

Egyptian writing is very rich, and the poems translated here are a small section belonging to a larger tradition much of which has literary or poetic qualities. No criticism survives from Ancient Egypt, nor any explicit indications of how the Egyptians assessed 'literature', for which there was no specific Egyptian term. In an attempt to define literature, one is left with deductions from the contexts of the manuscripts and from the works themselves. The extant literary

[2] For example, *The Teaching of King Amenemhat* was still being copied in Egypt when Sappho was composing her more familiar-sounding lyrics.

corpus existed side by side with a much larger and rather better preserved body of religious texts, which it often resembles in style and in density of meaning. From various features, one can suggest that literature is an institution which is defined and created by its culture; whether a text is part of the institution or not is determined by formal criteria—that is, by genres. A linguistic approach is also valuable in identifying features that are characteristic of literature, if not unique to it.

Egyptian literary texts exhibit various distinctive features: they mingle the general and the particular; they are self-conscious and concerned with self-definition and expression; they are not bound to any context or situation; aesthetic considerations are of central value; the speaker–hearer relationship is dramatized with framing devices. Perhaps most importantly, they are fictional. This last feature distinguishes them from commemorative texts, which were intended to be accurate—if idealized—accounts, and from religious texts, which were intended to be authentic reflections of the universe. Fiction, however, allows its audience a vision of a different reality and an experience of alternative possibilities. Egyptian literature was also a predominantly secular mode of discourse, being concerned with the 'here and now', but it was one which spanned various spheres, and crossed the secular–sacred and royal–private divides; it was not limited to a particular single function. This feature is reflected in its physical mobility: it was copied on privately owned rolls of papyrus, not stelae, or tomb or temple walls. Literature was not like the funerary texts, whose numerous copies drew—with local variants—from a fairly restricted set of religious utterances; the literary papyri are the results of individuals choosing to copy individual works. Most ancient settlements are now under cultivation and waterlogged, so that usually only those papyri that were placed in dry tombs or stored in some other desert location have survived. These papyri are often little more than scraps, and very few copies are free from major gaps.

After three millennia, the survival of any manuscripts is remarkable. Thirteen poems are translated here, of the thirty-five or so works that are preserved to any extent and can be dated to the 300-year period of the Middle Kingdom, *c.*1940–1640 BC. This is equivalent in length to the period in English history between the birth of Chaucer and the composition of *Paradise Lost*, or from the birth of Shakespeare to the death of Charlotte Brontë, although Egyptian

society was much smaller, less literate, and less productive of literature than the English society of these periods. It is unknown how many works are lost; whole genres may not have survived, but the relative coherence of what remains makes this unlikely, even though there is not a single complete copy of some types of text. The relative chronology of the compositions also remains uncertain. As excavations continue, and museum collections are studied in greater detail, new texts will appear that are bound to modify current analyses.

Contemporaneous papyri are not the only sources. Some Middle Kingdom works became established classics in the following New Kingdom (*c.*1550–1070 BC), and some survive only in later papyri. In addition, short excerpts were copied onto flakes of limestone, often by apprentice scribes for whom the classic works were set texts. This practice increases the textual problems for the modern scholar, not only because young scribes made errors in copying a poetic language that was by then far distant from everyday language, but also because they sometimes had no access to a coherent or comprehensible textual tradition.[3] *The Teaching of Khety*, for example, was the most copied work on the syllabus as it extolled the profession of the scribe, but all the copies are so corrupt that it must have been virtually unintelligible. It is tempting to think that the texts of which numerous copies are known, such as *The Tale of Sinuhe*, were held in some particular esteem. It would be some consolation to the modern researcher to suppose that the surviving copies represent the major ancient classics, but a New Kingdom Miscellany text listing sages of wisdom literature makes it clear that some of the most famous works have not survived,[4] while the chances of preservation are so random that a poem's survival in a single manuscript does not mean that it was not highly regarded.[5]

Philology still has a central role in providing the critic with the means to shape expectations and assess the probability of competing interpretations, and is crucial in attempting any evaluation. Problems attend the most basic questions of translating and interpreting what survives. Many details of grammar and vocabulary remain obscure and controversial. After surviving so much, the poems remain confined by these academic difficulties, and have not

[3] For textual reasons, the fragmentary *Teaching of a Man for his Son*, which is being reassembled by H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, is excluded; see pp. 292–3.

[4] See n. 24.

[5] Such as *The Dialogue of a Man and his Soul.*

yet become, as early Egyptologists once hoped, 'a part of the stock-in-trade of literary criticism'.[6] Despite these difficulties, the artistry of the poems retains the power to fascinate; we can read them together with people who have been dead for more than 3,000 years.

The Historical and Social Context

Literature creates its own world, but it is still an artefact of a particular culture. Egyptian culture was so different from our own that some historical background is essential for understanding, although it is easy to overestimate the direct relationship between the poems and historical events. The dating of many works is still uncertain, but it is now generally agreed that those translated here belong to the Middle Kingdom.

The Middle Kingdom was preceded by a period of less centralized power, when the country was divided, and its literature remained very aware of the dangers of civil unrest and the chaos of the interregnum. A period of military conflict between the royal dynasty at Heracleopolis (the Tenth Dynasty) and the rulers at Thebes (the Eleventh Dynasty) in the south ended in victory for the Theban Dynasty *c.*1987 BC. The new rulers remained at Thebes for some fifty years, until a new family, the Twelfth Dynasty, took control of the kingdom with the accession of Amenemhat I in *c.*1938 BC. His reign saw the eventual movement of the royal line to a new residence in the north named with the royal epithet 'Seizer of the Two Lands' (Itj-tawi), and the Twelfth Dynasty was later known as the 'kings of the Residence of Itj-tawi'. After a turbulent beginning, a policy of cultural centralization was gradually imposed on the whole country.

The Middle Kingdom is often seen in terms of a struggle between central power and local rulers, a highly developed bureaucracy, and convulsive administrative reforms. Political developments, however, remain obscure; many of the period's most characteristic features appear after more than a century, in the reign of Amenemhat III. After a rule of 180 years, the family trailed off in dynastic worries, and was succeeded by what Egyptian historiographers termed the 'kings who followed the House of Sehotepibre (Amenemhat I)'. This,

[6] S. R. K. Glanville, quoted by G. Posener in J. R. Harris (ed.), *The Legacy of Egypt*[2] (Oxford, 1971), 220.

the Thirteenth Dynasty, was essentially a continuation, but it witnessed a gradual failing of authority and influence under a long sequence of ephemeral kings. While there was no political disintegration, there was a levelling in general prosperity, and state works of art show a decline in quality. Eventually foreigners in the eastern Delta formed a culturally distinct power base, until the country became divided between the 'rulers of foreign countries' in the north (the so-called 'Hyksos' dynasties) and the Theban state in the south, around 1640 BC. Another turbulent period ensued before the unity of Egyptian culture was reasserted from the south, around 1540 BC.

Invasion by foreigners was regarded by the Egyptians as an overwhelming of the established order by representatives of chaos. For most of the Middle Kingdom, it is unknown how extensive foreign influence on Egypt actually was, but the general impression is of a unified state quite self-contained, despite campaigns and trading links abroad, and the conquest of Nubia to the south. Egyptian art and religion were one with the central state in articulating the order of the élite; the life of most of society is now unknown, except where archaeology can provide a corrective to the partial evidence of ideological artefacts. Despite the images of gracious living found in élite tombs, life was brutal for most people, and adults who survived childhood could expect to live only until about 35. Administrative texts, which are less concerned with direct expression of the state ideology and more with practical matters, give an impression of workhouses, corvée labour, and a highly ordered bureaucracy, although the range of different types of burials in the cemeteries suggests that society was more varied and differentiated than the documents imply.

Egyptian fictional literature appears at the start of the troubled but effective Twelfth Dynasty. It was not a direct result of the disturbances of the First Intermediate Period, but its origins can perhaps be sought in social changes, such as the rise of a class of free commoners, with wealth and respect for intellectual 'excellence'. Burials of the period show an increased access to religious writings, which is both a change in cultural decorum and a sign of growing literacy. By the start of the Middle Kingdom, written tomb Autobiographies were no longer the prerogative of the highest élite, and this will have offered one model for the expansion of written forms in general.

The written literature, which was clearly composed for dissemination in written form, must have existed against a background of oral poetry, but we cannot know what the relationship between the two was. The extent of literacy has been tentatively estimated at less than 1 per cent of the population, and all the evidence implies that the surviving compositions were to some extent court poetry, although they were also circulated far away from the royal residence. Some manuscripts owned by individuals were placed in tombs, but we should not imagine a private person reading alone; rather—and perhaps primarily—the compositions were probably recited at a formal gathering, like a soirée. The poems had an audience rather than a reader, to judge by the way they describe their own settings: in *The Words of Neferti*, a sage is commissioned to improvise a composition before the court of King Sneferu, and it is written down as he speaks. The names of the actual poets were not recorded, although the wisdom texts, which rely on personal authority, were usually attributed to historical or pseudo-historical characters from the past. In a semi-oral context, and without any personal prominence for the actual 'author', there was little concern with 'authorized' texts, and different contemporaneous copies of a poem can show some variants.

Literary Genres

Many of the literary motifs will seem familiar to the modern reader, but the significance of these motifs is very different from what modern expectations would suggest. *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* is, for example, remarkably similar in many ways to Coleridge's *The Ryme of the Ancient Mariner*; in both a sailor tells of strange adventures in which he met representatives of another world, but their aesthetic and intellectual concerns are different, as are the genres.

The literary canon comprises a group of fictional texts, belonging to three main genres: the narrative, which shows great formal variety, and two types of wisdom text. The Tales are the easiest to appreciate, and display a taste for narrative skill and fantastic events that is relatively timeless. Wisdom texts are, however, an unfamiliar form to the modern reader. Of the two types of wisdom literature, the Teaching (*sebayet*) is the most formally unified; in it a wise father speaks to his son, presenting the fruits of his

experience in didactic and reflective utterances. There are two subgenres: the private teaching, where the teacher is a high official, and the royal teaching, where the teacher is a king at the end of his reign, so that the teaching becomes a *speculum regnis* in which the king's experience embraces a universal range. The other type of wisdom text is more reflective and takes various forms, including the Discourse (*medet*) and the Dialogue; they are all, however, to some extent pessimistic and form 'complaints' or 'elegies' lamenting the vicissitudes of life.

The canon displays great interweaving and combination of different genres drawn from the whole of Egyptian writing, and a flexibility which allows the creation of hybrid genres. The titles used to refer to many poems are modern inventions. Only the Teachings were invariably given titles, starting 'Beginning of the Teaching . . .'; some Discourses have titles, but they often open with narrative prologues. Tales characteristically start without a title.

Egyptian literature lacks dramatic and epic genres, although performative ritual texts and commemorative texts occupy these roles to some extent outside the narrowly literary corpus. Comedy is muted, although satire runs rather fitfully throughout the poetry. In the Middle Kingdom, lyric songs seem not to have been part of the written canon in their own right, but they could be included in other written poems; they were performative oral poetry, and bound to particular contexts. They are preserved only as captions on tomb walls, or, if sacred, in copies derived from temple libraries, such as a papyrus from the settlement of el-Lahun, which contains ritual hymns to King Senwosret III:

> How your [descendants] rejoice!
> You have fixed their borders.
> How your ancestors of old rejoice!
> You have made great their portion.
> How the Egyptians rejoice at your strength!
> You have protected the ancient heritage.[7]

Texts that match many modern readers' expectations of lyric poetry entered the written literary canon only in the New Kingdom. Their immediate charm, can be exemplified in a snatch of a love-song that was scribbled on the back of an apprentice's papyrus (*c.*1220 BC):

[7] Text: K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke*[2] (Leipzig, 1928), 66, ll. 14–17.

> If the wind comes, he's for the sycomore;
> if you come ⟨you're for me⟩.[8]

The prominence given here to landscape and to the description of emotions, especially love, is lacking in the Middle Kingdom; its literature is, in modern terms, not pastoral or lyrical, but rather didactic. The poems are generally unromantic in all senses of the word, but they are not impersonal or abstract; they have an intimate mode of address and deal with personal themes, being concerned with the human heart. Man's ethical life is their central concern, and not the cultivation of subjectivity, or personal emotions such as romantic love.

The Style and Range of Literature

Although the narratives are now the most familiar-seeming type of literature, even they reveal very alien conventions of style. They are direct and uncluttered by any description of superfluous detail. They are objectively narrated, even when related in the first person, and, while extreme changes in emotion are noted, the shifting moods of a conversation are left to speak for themselves. The audience's response is guided by literary form rather than by explicit authorial comment. The discursive wisdom poetry in particular moves by syntax rather than by metaphor, despite elaborate sequences of occasionally extreme images and the presence of continuous strands of imagery. There is a tendency towards simile rather than metaphor. The style is repetitive and formulaic, and calls to mind biblical rather than classical parallels. The use of formulae may look dull on the page, but is very helpful and stimulating when a work is performed.

The language of literature was archaic, and fairly remote from everyday speech, with a very formal diction and grammar which only occasionally displays colloquial features. This does not mean that poetry was necessarily inaccessible to common people, only that it was distinct from normal speech. The diction is recherché, sometimes convoluted, but it is not sensuous, exotic, or 'purple'. It has a spare elegance, with an occasional density of wordplay that recalls the Shakespearian. Wordplay is often with different forms of

[8] P. Anastasi II, verso 5; the second verse is only half-written, as if the apprentice were distracted or interrupted. Text: M. V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, Wis., 1985), 404.

the same word, but allusions to homonymous and homophonous words can add another layer of meaning. Although pronunciation cannot be reconstructed with any assurance, it is clear that assonance will have given the poems an incantatory quality, as a verse from *The Teaching of King Amenemhat* shows:

> *jw-ms-msyt-ʿšzwt m-mrrwt*
> (i.e. *iu-mes-mesyt-ashaut em-mererut*)
> Yet now the children of the masses are in the street.

A tendency towards epigrammatic or proverbial utterance is particularly strong in the didactic and reflective poems, which present generalizing formulations of wisdom that are sparing and witty. These wisdom texts are prescriptive, explicitly moralistic, and rhetorical. Ambiguity and amphiboly also produce resonance within individual verses and in the structure of works as a whole: stanzas draw compressed parallels and contrasts, but differing attitudes are balanced, sometimes ironically, throughout whole compositions, producing a sense of semantic multifariousness.

Many aspects of the works' original appeal, including rhetorical virtuosity, metrical skill, and the sheer *cantabile* quality of their music, can no longer be appreciated by a modern audience. The nature of Egyptian verse in particular has been much debated; the prevalent analysis of Gerhard Fecht proposes that it was based on the counting of stress units, rather than on the alternation of long and short syllables; the difference between it and 'prose' is one of degree rather than of kind. The principles of scansion have been reconstructed by him,[9] but the parallel of Coptic (the descendant of Egyptian) suggests that there were many exceptions to these grammatically derived prosodic rules, due to the influence of the spoken language. This may explain the occasional divergence between the verses of poetry as reconstructed and the red dots ('verse-points') that mark off short sections of text in many New Kingdom copies. These points occur first in the late Twelfth Dynasty, in ritual texts whose recitation had to be exact,[10] and were introduced into copies of literary texts in the early New Kingdom when stress counting in recitation had probably become an acquired rather than an instinctive skill, as the spoken form of words became progressively

[9] See Select Bibliography.

[10] An unpublished papyrus from el-Lahun in University College London (to be published by M. Collier and S. Quirke).

reduced. As they mark pauses, they may sometimes indicate a sort of caesura rather than the end of a verse.

One important stylistic feature of metrical form is the use of balanced phrases—the 'parallelism of members' familiar from biblical verse. This seems to be a stylistic feature which heightens the poetry, and it does not occur consistently throughout a composition. Verse often favours strongly antithetical statements, rising to paradoxes. Such statements are characteristic of a form of pessimistic wisdom poetry known as laments, which was derived from descriptions of reversal, as in death or in changes of season; their role is analogous to the elegy of Western literature.

The poems' complexity involves a display, a variety, and a hierarchy of style, ranging from simple narratives to complex lyrical passages. Refrains, which were characteristic of ritual lyrics, probably indicate a formal and elevated tone. Many poems are supremely unified compositions, although their unity is different from what a modern reader might expect; the more diffuse examples of high style, such as the lengthy laments of *The Dialogue of Ipuur and the Lord of All*, have consequently proved less accessible to modern audiences. Verbal profusion, to an extent that we would consider superfluous, was a virtue in Egypt, as in many other semi-oral societies. Nevertheless, a mastery of form can still be appreciated in the internal symmetry of tightly structured poems such as *The Tale of Sinuhe*. That structure and (on a more minor scale) the use of repetition give the work a great resonance and profundity; passages and incidents echo one another, illuminating the narrative and its significance. The repetition of phrases can give an effect of integrity and authority, presenting the same subject in a variety of complementary ways, but it can also produce a polyphonic interweaving of imagery and motifs that embody the richness and complexity of the poem's subject matter. In wisdom Discourses, this interweaving creates the impression of a rapid train of thought, exploring and developing understanding with proliferating images and formulations.

The poems often present themselves as monologues, and many compositions would have gained tension from being recited in performance. They show elements of 'dramatic' presentation and characterization,[11] although this is on a different level from modern

[11] For example, the end of *The Teaching of Amenemhat*, or *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*. The performative potential of the latter is effectively realized in *Der*

expectations: characterization is more concerned with public personae than with shifting individual emotions. *The Tale of Sinuhe*, for example, is unusually detailed in its descriptions of emotions, but these are presented in moral rather then purely personal terms. The poems are, nevertheless, more concerned with individuality and subjectivity than other types of Egyptian writing.

The form, the moral tone, and the classical language of most of the surviving examples of Middle Kingdom literature suggest that they embody a culturally central, or high, tradition. As the process of preservation was restricted by the élite's dominance over literacy, this is not surprising. Despite the unity of the whole literary corpus, a few fragmentary texts, such as a collection of maxims,[12] show that literature was not rigidly restricted to these courtly genres. Some works, particulary tales, reveal looser structures, more colloquial language, and are less serious; these suggest the existence of more culturally peripheral or low traditions, where decorum was looser. *The Tale of King Cheops' Court* is the best evidence for this. It is a typical member of the genre, but is more diffuse and picaresque, less rigid and concentrically structured, and in a much less formal language; its themes are similarly less elevated, although often a parody of more serious treatments. Its anecdotes of wonders are more frivolous and 'sexy' than anything from the high tradition; merry King Sneferu, for example, is presented in them in a less admirable light (in terms of serious cultural values) than he is in *The Words of Neferti*. *Neferti* is a much earlier work, but it seems likely that these differences are not just a matter of date and that this variety was always part of literature. This less elevated tradition may have been a little closer to oral poetry, but it seems likely that the written and oral forms were remote and separate from each other: the 'little' tradition of the peasants, as opposed to the 'great' tradition of the literate élite, is completely lost.

Less elevated features were more widely adopted in the written compositions of the late New Kingdom, when the more colloquial Late Egyptian was used as a written language for documents. The characteristic composition of that period was no longer the wisdom text, but the more episodic narrative, as well as the Miscellany—a collection of varied types of composition forming a didactic anthology. Literature's boundaries seem to have moved to embrace a wider decorum, and the Middle Kingdom texts were hallowed, by their age and their language, into classics that formed a canon for apprentice scribes and continued to be transmitted alongside the new and more varied genres.

redekundige Bauer, a melodrama for speaker and small orchestra by H.-P. Müller-Kieling (first performed 2 Sept. 1993, Freiburg im Breisgau).

[12] See p. 293.

The Role of Literature

The poems of the high tradition of the Middle Kingdom were conceived as 'monuments to unageing intellect',[13] and many show the direct influence of funerary inscriptions and official texts. They teach, meditate on, and relate the 'nature of mankind' and the 'nature of eternity'.[14] Literature was already *aere perennius*, and aimed at eternal renown beyond the endurance of physical monuments.[15] The wisdom texts, in particular, demonstrated what the Egyptians termed *Maat*, 'Truth'. This was the order of society and, by extension, of the cosmos, ethical and moral righteousness, and Truth as an abstract ideal. According to one late Middle Kingdom inscription:

> The reward of the man who does is what is done to him:
> in the heart of God, this is *Maat*.[16]

Maat is a loyalistic virtue, and an expression of society's solidarity that reflects the solidarity of the cosmos in time and space, a principle that operates through laws of reciprocity and retribution. In the Teachings there are frequent injunctions to 'do' and 'say' Truth in public and private contexts. This enacting of Truth is also described in a general manner, on a cosmic level, and with examples from specific situations.

Like representational art and cultural artefacts, literature was dominated by inherent rules of decorum. Egyptian ideology, as formulated in official documents and inscriptions, presents an ordered coherent view of life, a paradigmatic construction of reality that ignored the untoward events of life and concealed contradictions. The poetry that was produced by and for office-holders naturally

[13] W. B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium', l. 8.

[14] *The Teaching for Kagemni*, 2.3–4 (see pp. 291–2); *The 'Loyalist' Teaching*, 1. 6.

[15] This is most explicit in a passage of the Late New Kingdom P. Chester Beatty IV, quoted below, see n. 24.

[16] Stela of King Neferhotep, l. 40; text: W. Helck, *Historisch-Biographische Texte der 2. Zwischenzeit und neue Texte der 18. Dynastie*[2] (Wiesbaden, 1983), 29, ll. 14–15.

voiced a similar self-definition of the culture. Its themes are, for the most part, state themes, just as the diction is usually formal and courtly. The Teachings, for example, are almost always addressed by a member of the élite, to the élite, and concern their ethical behaviour. One exception is the comparatively peripheral *Teaching of Khety*, where satirical vignettes of low life make the didactic point that scribedom is best; eternal virtue is reduced to the enduring quality of writing. The modern lack of any comparable 'state' literature makes a response to this element of cultural self-presentation rather difficult: at least for his own time, the modern poet has become a rebel rather than a laureate. This aspect led some scholars, most notably Georges Posener, to consider the poems 'propaganda', but recent studies have recognized that this is too reductive a term for these complex works. While they have a strong tendency to affirm loyalistic values, and many of them are didactic 'cultural texts', they do not affirm cultural values in a simple or propagandistic manner. They formulate and examine basic principles of the Egyptian world-view, and central political concerns, such as the relationship between power and culture, rather than particular political events. In addition, literature was concerned with, and was composed by, individuals; it was about individual wisdom and experience, not that of undifferentiated 'aristocratic' representatives of the state. It belonged to the relative privacy of official life, not to the unremittingly universal world of religious and monumental achievements. The founding of the Twelfth Dynasty, amid considerable opposition and an increase in cultural individualism, seems to have provided the impetus to compose and circulate written literature, as a vehicle for transmitting and examining intellectual culture, and for exploring man's interpretation of an ever-problematic reality.

Literature's fictionality and its use of historical settings gave it a freedom to discuss aspects of life, such as unashamed frivolity, that were excluded from more ideologically constrained modes of discourse. Since literature was a culturally central artefact in the Middle Kingdom, it is not surprising that it has a generally serious tendency, diverging from the official normative order usually towards the darker, rather than the lighter, side. Even the generally positive Teachings warn of the dangers and difficulties facing the wise in a complex world. The most extreme example of this high pessimism is in the wisdom discourses. In *The Words of Neferti*, for

example, when the king demands literary entertainment, he is presented with a grim vision of chaos that eventually resolves in a prophecy. The discourses are not prescriptive but reflective, and they are addressed to specific members of the élite or to an indefinite audience, often by lowly people. They express a complaint about the imperfection of individuals, society, and the very cosmos; against *Maat* they set falsehood, wrong, disorder, and chaos. They raise questions about the existence of imperfection and of suffering—themes seen most fully in a later religious text that expounds the Egyptians' belief in a negative cosmology, by which the universe has a tendency towards chaos and decay.[17] These poems explore that problem and question the justice of the gods. They express this theodic question more forcefully than any religious texts, which voice the problem only by presenting the answer of the creator-god, that imperfection was allowed into the created world by mankind's own heart, against his will, and that mankind's flawed nature cannot be held against its creator.[18] The reflective poems are characteristic of the Middle Kingdom and have no direct successors in the subsequent period. Their descriptions of agony were intended to be a source of aesthetic pleasure, presumably in a manner similar to the sufferings enacted in western tragedy.

The Tales of the great tradition reflect these questioning concerns in both form and motif. The concerns underlie, for example, *The Tale of Sinuhe* and *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, and are explicit even in the apparently simple *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*. Narratives are more specific in their treatment of these issues, and they allow grand themes to be mingled with more everyday aspects of life, such as humour: mankind's imperfection can be a source of laughter, as well as despair.

This untoward tone permeates literature, and is one of its most distinctive features. Royal inscriptions never mention the fallibility of a king, but the fictional Teachings present it in a most intimate manner; tomb Autobiographies present unqualified, absolute self-declarations of the culture's virtues and the tomb-owners conformity to them, whereas the 'Autobiography' of *Sinuhe* is in part a

[17] E. Hornung, *Der ägyptische Mythos von der Himmelskuh: Eine Ätiologie des Unvollkommenen* (Orbus Biblicus et Orientalis, 46; Fribourg, 1982).

[18] Coffin Text spell 1130; text: A. de Buck, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, vii (Chicago, 1961), 461–71; recent translation: R. B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt* (London, 1991), 32–4.

catalogue of fallibility. Homosexual desire had no place in the Egyptian ideal society, and all signs of it are lacking in the mortuary, religious, and commemorative texts, but it features prominently in several literary works. The contradictions between the ideal extolled by the ideology and the imperfect actuality of the present life are not articulated in official texts, whereas literature addresses these contradictions, mediating between the ideal and the actual.[19]

The questioning poems, however, always reach a reconciliation—at least wherever the ending is extant—and they do not end by undermining cultural values. Nowhere is there any trace of intellectual rebellion or dissent; any socially peripheral characters are judged by élite standards and values, and there is a lack of any alternative voice speaking independently, despite the undercurrents of potential dissent.[20] Potential dissent seems to be articulated almost in order to be accommodated, contained, and constrained by the poetry. A combination of factors at the start of the Middle Kingdom may have allowed the creation of the distinctive questioning voice of literature; factors such as expanding literacy may have created a potential for dissent to be formulated, and literature may be seen as a response, which allowed this to be articulated and contained within the status quo of the court and its officials. Such a presentation of the untoward could programmatically validate the harsh measures imposed by the state to enforce its ideal, but literature's presentation is not made in a programmatic fashion, or in order to entrap the untoward. Instead, the poetry revels in and creates sympathy for the untoward, the individual, and the unideal. Although there is always a positive resolution to the most pessimistic texts, questions such as the justice of the gods are posed forcefully, and never answered glibly. The poems' eventual resolutions are achieved in a complex and subtle manner. In *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, the audience's attitude is suspended between sympathy and ironic detachment for over 600 lines; the energies of the discourse of ideas are not exhausted by the resolution, and the issues remain problematic. In their ambiguity, these compositions embody a profound awareness of the 'dark side to perfection'.[21]

[19] Cf. the remarks of B. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago, 1991), 22.

[20] A more familiar parallel is Vergil's *Aeneid*, where the alternative values of Dido and Turnus are accommodated within the affirmation of state values presented by the whole.

[21] M. Piper, libretto for Benjamin Britten's *Death in Venice* (1973), I. v.

Through its acknowledgement of life's anomalies, randomness, and complexities, Middle Kingdom literature allowed its privileged audience to explore or enact various possible complementary realities, as the poets taught, meditated on, or narrated their interpretations of the nature both of humanity and of the divine. As the audience listened to the poetry of imagined princes and peasants, they playfully expanded their own experiences and lived out the experiences of different individuals from different worlds. The 'travesties' of these fictional individuals—both peasants and princes were very different from the actual audience's rank—will have distanced the audience from the experiences that were narrated to it. The audience will thus have both experienced and stepped away from difficulties of life, and have gained 'relief', a sense of transcending them in something that was 'perfect to their hearts', as several poems phrase it. Monumental commemorative inscriptions address a discourse of permanent perfection to eternity; literature seeks eternity through humanity, and creates a space for entertainment as well as wisdom. In the hands of the poets, the knotty difficulties and choices of life become a sort of enchantment, and the nightmares of troubled experience become for the audience an entertaining reverie or revelation of grace, without losing their untoward, disturbing qualities. Poetry transforms an imperfect world into 'perfect speech'.

Reading Egyptian Literature

Literature's playful and untoward nature provides a unique record from Ancient Egypt of man's (self)-consciousness and his exploration of the problematic reality that faced him. This is not its only aspect, but it is the one to which the modern reader can most easily relate. Cultures change, but many of life's problems remain universal experiences that defy comprehension. In their treatment of these themes, the poems reveal a complex sensibility which we recognize as a sign of artistic value.

The first duty of the critic is to publish and analyse these texts. They are sources for a cultural poetics of Ancient Egypt, rather than for the more empirical history of the 'old historicist' scholars. Such interpretation requires great objectivity, involving a suspension of modern attitudes; attempts at absolute objectivity, however, run the danger of leaving the poetry lifeless. Literature was a powerful

medium of cultural self-definition, which was designed to be an eternal memorial: 'every poem an epitaph'.[22] Literature was, in the words of *The Teaching of the Vizier Ptahhotep*, composed in order to 'speak to the future', and it was also a very personal medium. The poems were written for individual enjoyment and self-exploration, and not to be scholarly exercises—although they had partially become this by the New Kingdom—or historical curiosities.

In view of this, we should remember to read the poems for pleasure, while appreciating the conventions of their different world. We should aim not only at a critical reading—a distancing process—but also at a creative act of reconstructing, and appreciating the 'perfect speech' of these poems. This beauty demands not only scholarship but also responsive love. The reader needs the same quality that Marguerite Yourcenar required for her fictional recreation of the emperor Hadrian, whose love transfigured Antinous into an Egyptian god, and who is thus a particularly appropriate figure to invoke here. For Yourcenar, such work needs 'un pied dans l'érudition, l'autre dans la magie, ou plus exactement, et sans métaphore, dans cette *magie sympathique* qui consiste à se transporter en pensée à l'intérieur de quelqu'un'.[23] Her concern with summoning up the voices of the beloved dead captures the spirit of the Egyptians' own attitude to their authors, as expressed in a eulogy to dead writers from *c.*1190 BC. In this, the Middle Kingdom writers are described as dispensing with funeral preparations in favour of the more potent magic of their art:

> These sage scribes . . .
> their names endure for eternity,
> although they are gone, although they have completed their
> lifetimes, and all their people are forgotten.
> They did not make for themselves pyramids of bronze
> with stelae of iron . . .
> they made heirs for themselves
> as the writings and Teachings that they begat . . .
> Departing life has made their names forgotten;
> writings alone make them remembered.[24]

[22] T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, l. 225.

[23] *Carnets de notes de "Mémoires d'Hadrien"* in *Oeuvres romanesques* (Paris, 1982), 526.

[24] P. Chester Beatty IV, verso 3.7–11; text: A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*: 3rd ser., *Chester Beatty Gift*, ii, pls. 18–19; recent translation: Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt*, 148–50.

TALES

[1]

The Tale of Sinuhe

Introdution

The Tale of Sinuhe is a tale of adventure in foreign lands, but one which encourages reflection on the nature of Egyptian life, particularly on an individual's relationship to the king. The king was quasi-divine, the political and ideological centre of Egyptian culture, and the representative of all its values. The king was the direct heir of the creator-god, who, according to one (possibly contemporaneous) religious text, had appointed him to rule

> for judging men, for appeasing the Gods,
> for creating Truth, for destroying Evil.[1]

Sinuhe was composed in the first half of the Twelfth Dynasty, probably shortly after the end of the reign of Senwosret I (*c.*1875 BC). The earliest surviving manuscripts date from the reign of Amenemhat III, and later copies show that it was read for at least 750 years.

The Tale is presented as a funerary Autobiography from the start of the Twelfth Dynasty. In these commemorative tomb inscriptions the dead man addressed the passer-by with an idealized description of his virtues, as manifested in his life and career, in order to preserve his reputation and his funerary cult. Sinuhe is, as his inscription immediately makes clear, a royal courtier, but for him the usual pattern of an official's ideal life was destroyed by a moment of panic in which he fled from Egypt, and most of the Tale describes experiences away from the court that are often extremely untoward. From the moment of his panic, the style moves away from that of an Autobiography, and encompasses a wide range of genres and

[1] Text: J. Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: Ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik in thebanischen Tempeln und Gräbern* (Abhandlungen der Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, 7; Glückstadt, 1970); also M. C. Betrò, *I testi solari del portale de Pascherientaisu (BN2)* (Saqqara, 3; Pisa 1990), 27–50. Recent translation: R. B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt* (London, 1991), 38–40.

techniques: narratives of conquest and combat, eulogies of the king, a royal decree, meditative prayers, and ceremonial lyrics, culminating in the description of the tomb in which Sinuhe's Autobiography is supposedly inscribed. The narrative of Sinuhe's flight from Egypt and his return matches the form of the Tale, in which the Autobiographical style is shattered by his flight, and is only firmly re-established as his life returns to order in the final stanzas. Instead of commemorating an ideal life 'in truth', the literary Tale deals with 'dreams', 'half-truths', and things that are 'unrepeatable'. The Tale displays a perfection of form, as well as spare and concise composition; the manuscripts divide the text into forty stanzas, and these form five concentric groups. The Tale's virtuosity is manifest in allusions and self-echoes rather than in florid diction, although this is elegant and rather recherché in idiom. Throughout, there is a constant tension between the ideal and the actual, and a questioning of Sinuhe's motivation that is unparalleled in actual Autobiographies.

In the opening lines of the Tale Sinuhe speaks from his tomb in Egypt: the ending of his life is thus implicit in the beginning of his tale. The calm elevated style appropriate to an Autobiographical narrative is gradually broken down in the first part of the Tale (R 1–B 34) as Sinuhe leaves Egypt. He overhears that the old king has unexpectedly died, is struck by a blind panic, and flees his homeland with what is, in effect, an unwitting renunciation of all its values. The horror of this moment is described in detail, and images of night-time suggest its broader significance: the Egyptian world-view was fundamentally pessimistic; chaos was thought to be ever present and waiting to overwhelm the ordered cosmos, and Sinuhe's terror is an experience of this.[2]

Sinuhe abandons the fixed security of Egypt for the impermanence of life amidst the nomadic 'sandfarers'. This fatal transition is symbolized by his near death from thirst, from which he is rescued by a passing sheikh, and he ends up being carried off by a Palestinian prince, Amunenshi.

In the second part of the Tale (B 34–92), narrative gives way to discourse as Sinuhe converses with his foreign rescuer, and

[2] This episode has been the subject of much fruitless discussion among Egyptologists, who have often tried to interpret the Tale as if it were a historical document (referring to a palace conspiracy) or a novel with modern characterization (providing a single unspoken rational motivation for Sinuhe's flight): see Select Bibliography.

Amunenshi asks why he has come to Retjenu. The dialogue is dominated by Sinuhe's lengthy answer, which is a eulogy of the new king Senwosret; this establishes Sinuhe's continued loyalty to the Egyptian king, despite his flight. He extols the king's fearsomeness against foreign lands, dramatically enacting his terror of the king's ferocity towards deserters such as himself. In this exchange, Amunenshi is presented as pseudo-Egyptian, and he rewards Sinuhe's praise song with generosity, as if he were the Egyptian king. His land is described as a place where Sinuhe tries to find a substitute Egypt, and to replace the life he has lost. The settings of the Tale form a symmetrical pattern of Egypt–Retjenu–Egypt, and this is reinforced with many ironic verbal echoes and contrasts, which combine to heighten the difference between the real with the substitute life, his true and substitute identity. As R. A. Brooks has remarked of the *Aeneid*, the Tale is a 'web of antithetic symbols, of tensions and oppositions never finally resolved'.[3]

Abroad, Sinuhe attempts to rationalize and overcome the consequences of his fatal panic, and the third part (B 92–177) relates his struggles to establish a social identity in the midst of an alien herd. This includes a duel with a local challenger, which is structurally the central incident of the Tale, and the turning-point of the plot. It embodies the conflict between the real and the substitute, between Egypt and the desert. His victory in this armed combat brings him greater wealth but also, ironically, an awareness of his alienation, and it leads to an inner conflict. He recounts his triumph in a lyrical manner, and in doing so he attempts finally to distance himself from the consequences of his flight, to deny that he is a fugitive in exile. His speech initially echoes the Autobiographical style with measured parallel cadences and motifs, but, at the very moment of apparent self-justification, he collapses into a desperate prayer. It is a dramatic interior monologue, leading to a realization of his true state: life outside Egypt is meaningless. The third part of the Tale ends with the almost miraculous statement that the king has heard of Sinuhe's state and has sent an answer to his private prayer.

Just as the second part was the conversation between Sinuhe and Prince Amunenshi about the king, the fourth part contains his correspondence with the true king (B 178–243). It opens directly with

[3] '*Discolor Aura*: Reflections on the Golden Bough' in Steele Commager (ed.), *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966), 158.

a copy of the royal decree summoning him home. In the letter the king restates the problem of Sinuhe's motivation more forcefully, and asks directly for the reason for his flight. Sinuhe has already proved himself unable to explain his actions, and his unaccountable, unintentioned fault raises broader questions about whether the gods can be just: for how could the powers above allow an innocent man to transgress and still be just? The king is a representative of the gods and in some sense a god himself, and in his letter he distances himself from any responsibility for Sinuhe's suffering and assigns all responsibility to the man's own fallible heart.

The climax of the reassuring letter comes as the king enjoins Sinuhe to return for burial in Egypt. This is a joyous description of a transition to eternal verity—an ultimate homecoming. The juxtaposition of death and joy would have been to the original audience a happy paradox. A contemporaneous harpist's song describes the tomb as a home

> built for festival,
> planned for happiness.[4]

A later harpist's song extols the 'land of eternity' as 'righteous and just', elevated from all 'strife'.[5] The otherworld is a refuge from the struggles of life, and the home of the absolute and ideal.

The inclusion of a royal letter is a motif of Autobiographical inscriptions and marks the start of a gradual reassertion of order on a formal level. Sinuhe's receipt of the letter is briefly narrated, and then a copy of his reply follows. In this he denies conscious responsibility for his flight, and abandons himself to the king's grace. The letter's profusion of stately wishes for the king's well-being recalls his earlier eulogy spoken to Amunenshi.

The fourth part of the Tale ends as Sinuhe travels to the border of Egypt, and the fifth part (B 244–311) returns him to the court and the enduring security of the state, in a vivid and climactic scene. Sinuhe at last finds himself face to face with the king who has been the centre of all his preceding narration. The meeting is marked by a panic 'like that which created the fated flight', and his re-entry into Egyptian life is marked by a death-like collapse,

[4] Stela Leiden V.68; text: K. Sethe, *Ägyptische Lesestücke*[2] (Leipzig, 1928), 87, ll. 1–2.

[5] Text: R. Hari, *La Tombe thébaine du père divin Neferhotep (TT 50)* (Geneva, 1985), pl. 4, ll. 4–5.

similar to that which marked his leaving Egypt. This time, however, his unconsciousness is banished not by nomads, but by the royal children, who are reintroduced to their long-lost attendant. Despite moments of humour, as they fail to recognize him, there is a break with the tone of the preceding stanzas as Sinuhe enters the realms of royalty and divinity. The princesses enact a ritual of renewal with a song to the king that is intensely religious, lyrical, and erotic. In the song the princesses beg grace for Sinuhe, whom they describe as 'a barbarian born in the Homeland'; they articulate the Tale's central paradox of how an Egyptian can be a foreigner, and how a virtuous man can find himself a traitor and deserter. This is a final summation of the Tale's theme of the problematic justice of the gods. Sinuhe's irrational panic was the incursion of chaos which underlies the whole plot, and the antithesis of the order of the court, but here it is accommodated within that order. His panic is rearticulated as a 'fear', which is a natural, orderly response to the king's 'fearsomeness'. The king dismisses the chaos and the preceding events with the words 'he shall not fear', and Sinuhe is recreated as a courtier.

He is then cleansed and rejuvenated, and the final stanzas lead the audience swiftly from this moment of revelation through a series of courtly dwellings, into a description of the tomb which the king bestows as a sign of his favour. The Tale ends as it began, with Sinuhe in his tomb, addressing the tomb-visitor.

The profusion of genres in the Tale gives an encyclopaedic feel, suggesting a full range of human experience, but all run parallel to the basic plot in terms of form. In tone, however, the whole is more complex, because of the richness with which Sinuhe's experiences abroad are described. The modulations of the patterns of the Egyptian official text *par excellence*, the Autobiography, articulate a questioning of Egyptian culture. In one sense, nothing has happened—the trip to Retjenu is a 'dream', and Sinuhe is purged of his experiences abroad—and yet everything in the Tale has happened in this dream. The horror of the nightmare that is Sinuhe's life is vividly expressed with a poetry that makes it for the audience an entertaining reverie as well as a disturbing narrative. The Tale reassuringly presents the value of the Egyptian way of life, but the possibility of a world elsewhere lingers in the audience's mind, as does the question of his motivation: how can the gods allow the heart of

man to be so unstable that it can lead him astray so unintentionally? This ambivalence is reflected in the setting of the Tale in a tomb, which is a link between the imperfect world of men and the perfection of the otherworld.

Four papyrus copies are known from Middle Kingdom, and, along with *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, *Sinuhe* is one of the best-attested works in manuscripts from that period. There are some twenty-eight later copies. It is now widely regarded as the masterpiece of Egyptian literature. The numbers in the text give line numbers of the principle manuscript available at that point: R (P. Ramesseum A = P. Berlin 10499), then B (P. Berlin 3022).

The Tale of Sinuhe
and other Ancient Egyptian
Poems 1940–1640 BC
trans. R.B. Parkinson
Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1997

The Tale of Sinuhe

The Patrician and Count,[1] R 1
Governor of the Sovereign's Domains in the Syrian lands,
the True Acquaintance of the King, whom he loves,
the Follower, Sinuhe says,
'I was a Follower who followed his lord,
a servant of the Royal Chambers
and of the Patrician Lady, the greatly praised,
the Queen of Senwosret in Khnemsut,
the Princess of Amenemhat in Qanefru, R 5
Nefru, the blessed lady.

Regnal year 30, month 3 of the Inundation Season, day 7:[2]
The God ascended to his horizon;
the Dual King Sehotepibre
mounted to heaven,
and was united with the sun,
the divine flesh mingling with its creator.
The Residence was in silence,[3]
hearts were in mourning,
the Great Portal was shut,
the entourage was bowed down, R 10
and the patricians were in grief.

Now his Majesty had sent out an expedition to the Libyan land,[4]
with his eldest son at its head,
the Perfected God Senwosret;
but now he was returning, having carried off Libyan captives R 15
and all sorts of cattle without number.
The Friends of the Court[5]
sent to the western border
to inform the prince
of the affair which had happened in the Audience Hall.

On the road the messengers found him.[6]
They reached him at nightfall. R 20
Not a moment did he wait;
the falcon flew off with his followers,

without informing his expedition.
Now, when the royal children
accompanying him on this expedition were sent to,
B 1 one of them was summoned.
Now, when I was standing on duty,[7]
I heard his voice as he spoke,
as I was a little way off.
My heart staggered, my arms spread out;
trembling fell on every limb.
I removed myself, leaping,
to look for a hiding place.
B 5 I put myself between two bushes,
until the traveller had parted from the road.

I travelled southwards.[8]
I did not plan to reach this Residence,
expecting strife would happen;
I did not think to live after him.
I went across Lake Maaty in the region of the Sycomore.[9]
I came to the Isle of Sneferu.
B 10 I passed a day on the edge of a field.
When it was daylight again, I made an early start.
I met a man standing in my way.
He saluted me, though I was afraid of him.
When it was supper-time,
I had arrived at Cattle-Quay.

I crossed in a rudderless barge[10]
blown by the west wind.
B 15 I passed east of Iaku,
above Lady of the Red Mountain.
I gave my feet a northwards path,[11]
and I reached The Walls of the Ruler,
made to beat back the Syrians.
I crouched down in a bush
for fear of being seen by the watcher
on duty upon the wall.

B 20 I travelled in the night-time.[12]
When it was dawn I had reached Peten.
I alighted on an island of Kemur.

Thirst's attack overtook me,
and I was scorched, my throat parched.
I said, "This is the taste of death."
But I lifted up my heart, and gathered my limbs together,[13]
as I heard the noise of cattle lowing, caught sight of Syrians, B 25
and a leader of theirs, who had once been
in Egypt, recognized me.

Then he gave me water,[14]
while he boiled milk for me.
I went with him to his tribe,
and what they did was good.
Country gave me to country.[15]
I set out for Byblos; I got to Qedem.
I had spent half a year there,
when Amunenshi carried me off. B 30
He was the ruler of upper Retjenu,
and he told me, "You'll be happy with me,
for you'll hear the speech of Egypt."
He said this, knowing my character
and having heard of my understanding,
and the Egyptians who were with him there
had vouched for me.

*

Then he said to me, "Why did you come here?[16] B 35
Has anything happened in the Residence?"
Then I said to him, "It's that the Dual King Sehotepibre[17]
has gone to the horizon,
and how this all happened is unknown."
But I spoke in half-truths.
"I have come from the expedition to the Libyan land:
it was reported to me, and my heart failed
and carried me off on the ways of flight. B 40
I had not been talked of, and my face had not been spat
upon;
I had heard no reproaches; my name had not been heard
in the herald's mouth.
I do not know what brought me to this country—it is like a
plan of God."

Then he said unto me, "So how is that land[18]
without him—that worthy God,
B 45 fear of whom is throughout the countries
like Sekhmet's in a plague year?"
I spoke thus to him, answering him,
"Indeed, his son has already entered the palace,[19]
and has taken up his father's inheritance.
Now, he is a God who is peerless,
before whom no other exists.
He is a lord of understanding, excellent of plans, effective of orders;
B 50 coming and going are by his command.
He subjugates the countries.
His father stayed within his palace,
and he reported to him that what he had ordained was done.

Now, he is a hero, active with his strong arm,[20]
a champion without compare,
seen descending on barbarians, approaching the combat.
He curbs horns, weakens hands;
B 55 his foes cannot marshall troops.
He is vengeful, a smasher of foreheads;
close to him no one can stand.
He is far-striding, destroying the fugitive;
there is no end for the man who shows him his back.
He is firm-hearted at the moment of forcing retreat.
He turns back again and again; he shows not his own back.
B 60 He is stout-hearted, seeing the masses;
he allows no rest around his heart.

He is bold, descending on Easterners;[21]
his joy is to plunder barbarians.
As soon as he takes up his shield, he tramples;
he needs no second blow to slay.
None can escape his arrow, none draw his bow.
As before the power of the Great One,
barbarians flee before him.
B 65 Having foreseen the end, he fights heedless of all else.

He is a lord of kindness, great of sweetness.[22]
Through love he has conquered.

His city loves him more than its own members;
it rejoices at him more than at its God.
Men and women pass by, exulting at him.
He is a king, who conquered in the egg,
his eyes on it from birth.
He makes those born with him plentiful.
He is unique, God-given. B 70
How joyful this land, since he has ruled!
He extends its borders.

He will conquer southern lands, without yet considering northern countries.[23]
He was begotten to strike Syrians, to trample Sand-farers.
Send to him, let him know your name,
as a man far from his Majesty who enquires!
He will not fail to do good B 75
for a country that will be loyal to him."

And he said unto me, "Well, Egypt is certainly happy,[24]
knowing of his success.
But look, you are here,
and you will stay with me; I shall do you good."
He placed me at the head of his children.
He joined me to his eldest daughter.
He had me make my choice of his country,
from the choicest of what was his, B 80
on his border with another country.
It was a good land,[25]
called Iaa.
Figs were in it, and grapes;
its wine was more copious than its water;
great its honey, plentiful its moringa-oil,
with all kinds of fruit on its trees.
Barley was there, and emmer, and numberless were its cattle of all kinds. B 85
Now, what came to me as a favourite was great.
He appointed me the ruler of a tribe
of the choicest of his country.

Provisions and strong drinks were made for me,[26]
with wine as a daily supply, and cooked flesh,

and roast fowl, as well as wild game.
They would snare and lay it all out for me,
as well as the catch of my own hounds.
Many sweets were made for me,
with milk in every cooked dish.

*

I spent many years there,[27]
and my children became heroes,
each man subjugating his tribe.
The messenger who went north and south to the Residence
would tarry for me. I would make all men tarry.
I would give water to the thirsty,
and I returned the wanderer to his path and rescued the robbed.
The Syrians who became so bold
as to resist the countries' rulers—I countered their movements.
This ruler of Retjenu[28]
would have me do many missions
as the commander of his army.
Every country for which I set out,
I made my attack on it,
and it was driven from its grasslands and wells;
I plundered its cattle and carried off its inhabitants,
and their food was taken away.
I killed the people in it with my strong arm, my bow,
my movements, and my excellent plans.

In his heart I attained high regard;[29]
he loved me, knowing my valour.
He placed me at the head of his children, having seen the strength of my arms.
A hero of Retjenu came
to provoke me in my tent;
he was a peerless champion, who had subjugated all the land.
He said he would fight with me, he planned to rob me,
and thought to plunder my cattle, on the advice of his tribe.
That ruler conferred with me;[30]

I spoke thus, "I do not know him.
So am I some ally of his, to walk around in his camp?
Or does this mean that I've opened his private quarters, overturned his stockade?
It is resentment at seeing me do your missions.

How like am I to a bull of the roaming cattle in the midst of another herd,[31]
whom the bull of that little herd attacks,
whom that long-horned bull is charging!
Can an inferior ever be loved as a superior?[32]
No barbarian can ever ally with a Delta man;
what can establish the papyrus on the mountain?
Does that bull want to fight,[33]
or does that champion bull want to sound a retreat
in terror of being equalled?

If he has the will to fight, let him speak his wish![34]
Does God not know what He has fated,
or does He know how it stands?"
When it was night I strung my bow and tried my arrows,[35]
sharpened my sword and polished my weapons.
When it was dawn, all Retjenu had come,
having incited its tribes and gathered its neighbouring countries,
for it had planned this fight; and yet every breast burned for me,
the wives jabbered, and every heart was sore for me,
saying, "Is there another man mighty enough to fight him?"

Then his shield, his axe,[36]
his armful of javelins fell to me:
after I had escaped his weapons and made them pass by me,
with his arrows spent in vain,
one after the other,
he approached me, and I shot him;
my arrow stuck in his neck,
he cried out, and fell on his face.
I felled him with his own axe,
and gave my war cry on his back,
while every Asiatic was bellowing.

To Montu I gave praises,
while his supporters mourned for him.
This ruler Amunenshi
took me into his arms.
Then I carried off his property and plundered his cattle.[37]
B 145 What he planned to do to me, I did to him;
I seized what was in his tent, and stripped his camp.
With this I became great, and grew copious of wealth,
and grew plentiful of cattle.

For now God has acted so as to be gracious to one with whom He was offended,[38]
whom He led astray to another country.
Today, He is satisfied.
B 150 A fugitive takes flight because of his surroundings;[39]
but my reputation is in the Residence.
A creeping man creeps off because of hunger;
but I give bread to my neighbour.
A man leaves his land because of nakedness;
but I have bright linen, white linen.
A man runs off because of the lack of someone to send;
B 155 but I am plentiful of serfs.
Good is my house, spacious my dwelling place,
and memory of me is in the palace.
Whatever God fated this flight[40]
—be gracious, and bring me home!
Surely You will let me see the place where my heart still stays!
What matters more than my being buried
B 160 in the land where I was born?
This is my prayer for help, that the good event befall,
that God give me grace!
May He act in this way, to make well the end of someone whom He made helpless,
His heart sore for someone He compelled
to live in a foreign country!
Does this mean that He is so gracious today as to hear the prayer of someone far off
who shall then turn from where he has roamed the earth
to the place from which he was carried away?

May the king of Egypt be gracious to me,[41] B 165
that I may live on his grace!
May I greet the Mistress of the Land who is in his palace,
and hear her children's messages!
So shall my limbs grow young again, for now old age has fallen:[42]
weakness has overtaken me,
my eyes are heavy, and my arms weak;
my legs have ceased to follow, and my heart is weary; B 170
I am near to dying.
May they lead me to the cities of eternity![43]
May I follow the Lady of All,
and then she shall tell me that all is well with her children!
May she pass eternity above me!

Now the Majesty of the Dual King Kheperkare was told[44]
about the state of affairs in which I was.
And his Majesty sent to me, B 175
with bounty of royal giving,
to gladden the heart of this humble servant
like any ruler of a country,
and the royal children who were in his palace let me hear their messages.

*

Copy of the Decree Brought to this Humble Servant[45]
about his Being Brought Back to Egypt:
"Horus Living-of-Incarnations;
Two Ladies Living-of-Incarnations;
Golden Horus Living-of-Incarnations;
Dual King Kheperkare;
Son of Re Senwosret B 180
—may he live for all time and eternity!
Royal Decree to the Follower Sinuhe:[46]
Look, this decree of the king is brought to you
to inform you that your roving through countries,
going from Qedem to Retjenu,
country giving you to country,
was at the counsel of your own heart.

What had you done, that you should be acted against?
You had not cursed, that your speech should be punished.
You had not spoken in the officials' council, that your utterances should be opposed.
B 185 This idea carried off your heart—
it was not in my heart against you.
This your Heaven, who is in my palace, endures[47]
and flourishes in the kingship of the land
today as she did before,
and her children are in the Audience Hall.

You will store up the wealth given by them,[48]
and live on their bounty.
Return to Egypt!
And you will see the Residence where you grew up,
kiss the earth at the Great Portal,
and join the Friends.
For today you have already begun to be old, have lost your
B 190 virility,
and have in mind the day of burial,
the passing to blessedness.

A night vigil will be assigned to you, with holy oils[49]
and wrappings from the hands of Tayet.
A funeral procession will be made for you on the day of joining the earth,
with a mummy case of gold,
a mask of lapis lazuli,
a heaven over you, and you placed in a hearse,
with oxen dragging you,
and singers going before you.
The dance of the Oblivious ones will be done at the mouth
B 195 of your tomb-chamber,[50]
and the offering-invocation recited for you;
sacrifices will be made at the mouth of your offering-chapel,
and your pillars will be built of white stone
in the midst of the royal children's.
Your death will not happen in a foreign country;[51]
Asiatics will not lay you to rest;
you will not be put in a ram's skin when your coffin is made.

This is too long to be roaming the earth!
Think of your corpse—and return!"

As I stood in the middle of my tribe, this decree reached me.[52]
B 200
It was read to me and I prostrated myself,
I touched the earth
and scattered it on my chest;
I roved round my camp, shouting and saying,
"How can this be done for a servant
whose heart led him astray to strange countries?
So good is the kindness which saves me from death!
Your spirit will let me make my end
with my limbs at home!"

Copy of the Reply to this Decree:[53]
"The servant of the palace, Sinuhe says,
B 205
'Most happy welcome!
Concerning this flight which your humble servant made in his ignorance:
It is your spirit, Perfected God, Lord of the Two Lands,[54]
which is loved by the Sungod, and favoured by Montu Lord of Thebes;
Amun Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands,[55]
Sobek-Re, Horus, Hathor,
Atum and his company of Gods,
Sopdu-Neferbau-Semseru the eastern Horus,
the Lady of Imet—may she enfold your head!—
the divine Council upon the Flood,
Min-Horus in the midst of the countries,
Wereret Lady of Punt,
B 210
Nut, Haroeris-Re,
and all the Gods of the Homeland and the islands of the Sea—
may they give life and dominion to your nostrils,
endow you with their bounty,
and give you eternity without limit,
all time without end!
May fear of you resound in lands and countries,
with the circuit of the sun curbed by you!
This is the prayer of a humble servant for his lord,[56]
who saves from the West.

The lord of perception, perceiver of the people,[57]
B 215 perceives as the Majesty of the Court
what your humble servant was afraid to say—
it is like an unrepeatably great matter.
O great God, equal of the Sungod in understanding
someone who willingly serves him!
Your humble servant is in the hand of him who enquires after him:[58]
these things are placed at your disposal.
Your Majesty is Horus the conqueror;
your arms are mighty against all lands.
Now, may your Majesty command that he be made to bring the Meki man from Qedem,[59]
B 220 the settler from out of Keshu,
and the Menus man from the lands of the Fenkhu.
They are rulers who are well known,
who live by love of you.
Without calling Retjenu to mind—it is yours, even like your hounds!

This flight which your humble servant made—[60]
I had not planned it. It was not in my heart.
I had not thought of it. I know not what parted me from my place.
B 225 It was like the nature of a dream,
like a Delta man seeing himself in Elephantine,
a man of the marshy lagoons in Southern Egypt.
I had no cause to be afraid; no one had run after me.
I had heard no reproaches; my name had not been heard in the herald's mouth.
Only—that shuddering of my limbs,[61]
my feet hastening,
my heart overmastering me,
B 230 the God who fated this flight dragging me away!
I was not presumptuous before,[62]
for a man respects him who is acknowledged by his land,
and the Sungod has put respect for you throughout the land,
and terror of you in every country.
Whether I am at home,

whether I am in this place—
it is you who veils this horizon of mine.
The sun shines for love of you;
the water of the river
is drunk when you wish;
the air of heaven
is breathed when you say.

Your humble servant will hand over to the chicks[63] B 235
which your humble servant has begotten in this place.
A journey has been made for your humble servant!
May your Majesty do as you desire!
Men live on the breath of your giving:[64]
may the Sungod, Horus, and Hathor love
these your noble nostrils,
which Montu Lord of Thebes desires
to live for all time!' "
I was allowed to spend a day in Iaa,[65]
handing over my property to my children;
my eldest son was in charge of my tribe, B 240
and all my property was his—
my servants, all my cattle,
my fruit, and all my orchard trees.
This humble servant then came southwards,[66]
and I halted at the Ways of Horus.
The commander there who was in charge of the garrison
sent a message to the Residence to inform them.

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And his Majesty caused a worthy Overseer of the Peasants of the Royal Household to come,[67]
accompanied by laden boats,
and bearing bounty of royal giving B 245
for the Syrians who had come with me,
leading me to the Ways of Horus;
and I announced each one by his name.
Every serving man was at his duty.[68]
I set sail,
with kneading and brewing beside me,
until I reached the harbour of Itj-tawi.

When it was dawn, very early,
they came and summoned me;
ten men coming,
ten men going,
ushering me to the palace.

I touched the ground between the sphinxes,[69]
as the royal children stood in the portal, receiving me;
and the Friends who usher to the Pillared Hall
were showing me the way to the Audience Hall.
I found his Majesty on the great throne
in the portal of electrum.
Then I was stretched out prostrate,
unconscious of myself in front of him,
while this God was addressing me amicably.
I was like a man seized in the dusk,
my soul had perished, my limbs failed,
my heart was not in my body.
I did not know life from death.

And his Majesty said to one of these Friends,[70]
"Raise him up, let him speak to me!"
And his Majesty said, "Look, you have returned after
roaming foreign countries,
after flight has made its attack on you;
you are now elderly, and have reached old age.
Your burial is no small matter;
you will not be laid to rest by barbarians.
Act against yourself, act against yourself no more!
You did not speak when your name was announced—
are you afraid of punishment?"
I answered this with the answer of a frightened man:[71]
"What does my lord say to me, that I can answer?
For this is no disrespect towards God, but is a terror
which is in my body like that which created the fated flight.
Look, I am in front of you, and life is yours;
may your Majesty do as he desires!"

And the royal children were ushered in,[72]
and his Majesty said to the Queen,
"Look, Sinuhe has returned as an Asiatic,

an offspring of the Syrians!"
She gave a very great cry,
and the royal children shrieked as one.
And they said unto his Majesty,
"Is it really he,
sovereign, my lord?"
And his Majesty said, "It is really he."
Now they had brought with them their necklaces,[73]
their rattles and their sistra.
And they presented them to his Majesty:
"Your hands upon this beauty, enduring king,[74]
these insignia of the Lady of Heaven!
May the Golden One give life to your nostrils,
the Lady of Stars enfold you!
South-crown fares north, North-crown south,[75]
joined and made one
in the words of your Majesty,
on whose brow the uraeus is placed!

You have delivered the poor from evil.[76]
So may the Sungod, Lord of the Two Lands, be gracious
to you!
Hail to you, as to the Lady of All!
Slacken your bow, withdraw your shaft!
Give breath to him who suffocates!
Give back the good we give on this good day—[77]
present us with North Wind's Son,
the barbarian born in the Homeland!
Through fear of you he took flight,[78]
through terror of you he left the land.
A face that has seen your face shall not pale!
An eye that has gazed at you shall not fear!"

And his Majesty said, "He shall not fear,[79]
he shall not gibber in terror!
He will be a Friend among the officials,
and he will be appointed amongst the entourage.
Proceed to the Robing Chamber to attend on him!"
I went forth from the Audience Hall,
with the royal children giving me their hands.
And afterwards, we went through the Great Portal.

I was appointed to the house of a prince,[80]
with costly things in it, with a bathroom in it
and divine images of the horizon,
with treasures from the Treasury in it,
clothes of royal linen,
myrrh and kingly fine oil,
B 290 with officials whom the king loved in every room,
and every serving man at his duty.

The years were made to pass from my limbs;[81]
I became clean-shaven, and my hair was combed.
A load was given back to the foreign country,
and clothes back to the Sand-farers.
I was clad in fine linen;
I was anointed with fine oil.
I slept in a bed.
I returned the sand to those who are upon it
B 295 and the tree oil to those smeared with it.

I was given the house of a Governor,[82]
such as belongs to a Friend.
Many craftsmen were building it,
all its trees were freshly planted.
Meals were brought to me from the palace,
three and four times a day,
as well as what the royal children gave,
without making a moment's ceasing.
B 300 A pyramid of stone was built for me,[83]
in the midst of the pyramids.
The masons who construct the pyramid measured out its foundations;
the draughtsman drew in it;
the overseer of sculptors carved in it;
the overseer of the works which are in the burial grounds busied himself with it.
B 305 All the equipment to be put in a tomb shaft—
its share of these things was made.
I was given funerary priests;
a funerary demesne was made for me,
with fields in it and a garden in its proper place,
as is done for a Chief Friend.

My image was overlaid with gold,
and its kilt with electrum.
It is his Majesty who has caused this to be done.[84]
There is no other lowly man for whom the like was done.
I was in the favours of the king's giving, B 310
until the day of landing came.'

So it ends, from start to finish,[85]
as found in writing.

Notes

1. The Tale begins as a funerary Autobiography with the titles held by Sinuhe at the end of his life. The first two mark him as a person of high rank, though not of hereditary nobility; that of *Governor* . . . anticipates his activities abroad. *True Acquaintance* refers to Sinuhe as a member of the court, and articulates the importance of a person's relationship with their king in the Tale. The title of *Follower* (i.e. retainer) is repeated in Sinuhe's opening statement as he starts to recount his life; it indicates his original (lower) status, and, like that of *Governor*, is ironic when viewed with hindsight. The name *Sinuhe* means 'Son of the Sycomore', referring to the most characteristic tree of Egypt, and one associated with Hathor, the goddess of fertility and rebirth, who features throughout the Tale. He describes himself as a palace servant of the late Queen *Nefru*, who was a daughter of Amenemhat I (*c.*1938–1908 BC) and the wife of Senwosret I (*c.*1918–1875 BC). *Khnemsut* and *Qanefru* are the cultic enclosures attached to the pyramids of Senwosret and Amenemhat respectively, near modern el-Lisht, some 30 km south of Memphis. The whole stanza has a formal, elevated, and funerary tone, as befits an Autobiography.
2. *Regnal year 30* . . . is the date of Sehotepibre Amenemhat I's sudden death, which the following stately verses record as a withdrawal of the divine king from humanity into the world of the gods. *His horizon* is the royal pyramid, already alluded to in the preceding stanza (see n. 1).
3. The second half of the stanza moves to the human sphere, while maintaining a calm and monumental style; grief is described in terms of the élite. The *Residence* is the dwelling place of the king, the capital of the Twelfth Dynasty, called Itj-tawi, near modern el-Lisht (see n. 1). Here the *Great Portal* of the palace is shut to the audience, and is reopened only towards the end of the Tale.
4. The *Libyan land* is the desert country west of Egypt. The narrative now begins its move to more specific events. The title *Perfected God* is a royal epithet referring to the king's being made divine at his accession; the succession of the new king is presented smoothly, as if already achieved. The account of his victorious *return* is in the language of commemorative inscriptions: all as it should be, despite the king's death.
5. The *Friends* are the inner members of the royal court: the title is derived from closeness to the king. The narrative alludes circumspectly to the shock of the king's death, and moves very gently from the ideal state of affairs to a harsher reality.
6. The mention of *night-fall* evokes the potentially chaotic nature of the events surrounding a king's death. The *falcon* is the new king, an embodiment of the falcon-god Horus. He secretly leaves for the Residence to ensure his succession; a message is then *sent* by him to his siblings (on whom Sinuhe is waiting) to

inform them of their father's death, and one of them is *summoned*, to assist him in his accession.

7. In the second part of the stanza, Sinuhe describes for the first time his own actions: chaos and panic irrupt on a personal level, as he unofficially overhears the news of the king's death while in attendance on the royal children. The original audience would have known what the Tale leaves unspoken: that this news told how the king had been assassinated (see *The Teaching of King Amenemhat*, pp. 203–11). Sinuhe hides himself like a common thief until the coast is clear (the *traveller* is the royal child on his way to the Residence).
8. A stanza of rapid flight, providing a detailed description of constant movement over two days (see Map, p. 297). Sinuhe explains that he fled away from the court, in terror of the interregnum (*him* is the old king).
9. The *Sycomore* is probably a tree sanctuary to Hathor at Giza, and *Maaty* a lake or canal nearby. As the name Sinuhe means 'Son of the Sycomore', and Maaty is 'Right-place', these place names evoke the home and the values which Sinuhe is leaving behind. The *Isle of Sneferu* is a funerary estate that was established by a famous and benevolent Fourth Dynasty king. The confused meeting with a man gives the flight an aspect of social chaos and reversal (recalling the themes of contemporaneous literary Discourses). *Cattle-Quay* was probably a small village opposite modern Gebel Ahmar—a sharp contrast to the royal Residence.
10. The wind-blown *rudderless barge*, an intervention of chance, forces Sinuhe to flee eastward instead of continuing his planned flight to the south; a rudderless ship is a common image of the state in chaos. *Iaku* is a settlement to the west of the quarries of the *Red Mountain* (modern Gebel Ahmar), where there was a shrine, referred to here, of the goddess Hathor (the *Lady*), the patroness of foreign places and quarrying (see n. 1).
11. Sinuhe now moves north-east towards what was the edge of the civilized world. *The Walls of the Ruler* was a fortress built by Amenemhat I to guard the eastern border, in the region of the Wadi Tumilat. He behaves like a barbarian, terrified of being spotted; the echo of his earlier hiding in a *bush* (B 4–5) gives the impression of continuing flight. The mention of *Syrians*, Egypt's barbarous enemies, anticipates later developments.
12. The *travelling in the night-time* of this third stanza of flight reverses his previous pattern of travel, and evokes the chaos which caused Senwosret to return to Egypt by night (R 20–2). *Peten* is an otherwise unknown location, on the way to *Kemur*, the bitter lakes (including Lake Timsah); it was presumably the area at the end of the Wadi Tumilat. As Sinuhe crosses the boundary out of Egypt, this symbolically charged moment is marked by his near *death* (described in the central verse of the stanza).
13. Another sudden change in fortune occurs, reversing the effects of his earlier panic (B 2–3). The stanza's concluding allusion to *Egypt* and Sinuhe's being once again *recognized* suggests how inescapable his identity and responsibility are. The fact that this is by a *Syrian* who had been in Egypt anticipates the mixture of cultures that is to come.
14. *Water* is given as an immediate help, while more substantial *milk* is being prepared (this latter is a touch of local colour). In Autobiographies 'giving water to the thirsty' is a virtuous act done by the narrator; here the conventions and roles of an ideal Egyptian life are reversed.
15. The rapid uncontrolled movement away from Egypt continues, through foreign *countries* (as if too numerous to be named). *Byblos* was a Syrian port with traditional Egyptian connections, while *Qedem* is probably the wooded area east of the Lebanon mountain range. Sinuhe is then captured by a local ruler; *upper Retjenu* is probably the land along the upper reaches of the river Litani, and is mentioned in contemporaneous inscriptions as an enemy state. Although Amunenshi, whose name may also be read Amunesh, has not been to Egypt (unlike the sheikh of B 25–6), he can speak Egyptian and has *Egyptians* with him, who may be other exiles, or messengers passing through. His land is presented as an Egyptianized foreign chiefdom. At this point, the first part of the Tale ends with verses whose frequent mentions of Egypt suggest that Sinuhe's own cultural and personal identity cannot be renounced by voluntary exile.

16. The second part of the Tale opens with a return to the events with which the Tale began (Amenemhat's death). Amunenshi naturally questions Sinuhe's motivation, which is a major concern of the plot. As an Egyptianizing chief, he is also curious, out of self-interest, to know if Egypt is still stable.
17. Sinuhe's account repeats the stately description of R 6–8 (see n. 2), but adds the significant detail that the circumstances are unknown: the audience knows that Sinuhe overheard more about these circumstances than he admits to Amunenshi (this is his *half-truth*). The following verses also are duplicitous, as the death was not *reported* to Sinuhe, but overheard (B 1–2). He defensively stresses that his exile was not imposed on him, but was the result of his own *heart* or of an unknown power, and he proclaims his lack of guilt, perhaps implying a lack of involvement in the king's death. (In most manuscripts, the simile at the end of the stanza continues as it does in B 225–6.)
18. Amunenshi now develops his question, taking up Sinuhe's mention of *God* and turning it to the divine king Amenemhat. His Egyptian-style phraseology shows that he is a loyal ally: the baleful goddess *Sekhmet*, the Lady of *plague*, is a protectress of Egypt; in a eulogy of the period, the king is a 'Sekhmet against those who touch his borders'.
19. Sinuhe echoes the words of Amunenshi's question exactly, to stress that the new king is at least the equal of the old. His reply is an extensive praise song to the new king. Eulogy was an important poetic genre, characterized by sequences of descriptive epithets. The eulogy is an integral part of the Tale, since the king represents the culture that Sinuhe has abandoned, and is also very relevant to the addressee, who is ruler of a foreign country such as the new king *subjugates*. The stanza ends, as it began, with a description of the close relationship between the old and the new order.
20. Two stanzas now acclaim the king's military prowess against foreigners. The dichotomy between victorious Egypt and the craven *barbarians* is strongly drawn, as in official discourse. The king's power against defectors is grimly appropriate to the fugitive Sinuhe: his description dramatically expresses his own fear of royal punishment.
21. The opening verse of the third stanza of the eulogy is implicitly pertinent to Amunenshi, who is an *Easterner*. The choice of the king's weapon is appropriate as *barbarians* are literally 'Bowmen'. The *Great One* is the uraeus serpent on the Sungod's forehead; as an avenging goddess, she recalls the earlier mention of Sekhmet, an archer-goddess (B 45 and n. 18).
22. The eulogy now shifts to the king's grace; the two contrasting aspects of the king's power are paradoxically united in the second verse of this stanza. The stanza is full of mentions of *birth* and increase, as opposed to the death of the preceding stanzas (*in the egg* is an idiom for extreme youth). The king's grace is presented in terms of Egypt's social prosperity: the people who benefit live in *cities*, not in tribes. Sinuhe, however, seems completely transported by his own eulogy, and speaks as if he were still in Egypt, referring to it as *this land*. The stanza concludes with the expansion of Egypt (a phrase used in many royal inscriptions), which is ironical here, since Sinuhe has gone beyond its *borders*.

23. The concluding stanza of the eulogy resumes the military and hostile ethos of the opening stanzas. Sinuhe makes its relevance to Amunenshi explicit, treating him as a vassal of the Egyptian king, whose grace will be extended to foreign lands in return for loyalty.
24. Amunenshi ignores the recommendation in a laconic reply, which reassures Sinuhe, but also brings him back to earth, pointing out the dichotomy between his position and Egypt. There is ironic use of the word for *happy/good*: while Egypt's *good* relies on the king, Sinuhe's *good* must come from Amunenshi. This promise is fulfilled in the rest of the stanza, as Amunenshi adopts him.
25. At the centre of the stanza is *Iaa*, whose description as a *good/happy land* ironically echoes the happiness of Egypt. It is a paradise (cf. the island in *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, p. 93) whose name may mean 'Rushy place'; it is possibly fictional, although the name occurs in much later lists of foreign lands.
26. The second part of the Tale ends with a stanza of plentiful sustenance, continuing the description of Sinuhe's well-being. The prominence of *wild game* in the list keeps his foreign (desert) position in mind, as does the culinary reference to *milk*—a touch of authentic local colour (recalling his rescue by nomads in B 26–7; see also n. 14).
27. The stanza that opens the new part of the Tale—the repetition of *many* provides a link with the preceding one—recounts Sinuhe's rise to power over a long time period, during which he retains indirect contact with the Egyptian court. His encouraging all to *tarry* is an indication of his desperate isolation, as well as of his virtue in providing hospitality. In the following verses he returns to the formulaic declarations of virtuous acts as found in Autobiographies: he asserts that he is established in his own pseudo-Egyptian world.
28. His achievements abroad are recounted as in Autobiographies. This expresses Sinuhe's ambivalent position, since the phrases are normally used of Egyptians attacking foreigners; the description of his military deeds also shows how he is loyally conforming to the model provided by the Egyptian king: his triumph recalls that of Senwosret over Libya (R 15–16), and his *excellent plans* recall Senwosret's (B 48–9). Since his eulogy of Senwosret, the style of his narrative has resumed much of its stateliness.
29. This stanza opens with more Autobiographical-sounding phrases, but Sinuhe's influence is soon shown to be unstable. This episode is the central one of the Tale—a face-to-face combat between Egyptian and foreign values. It is introduced as in a commemorative inscription, and the *hero* is presented as a scheming enemy.
30. The fact that the challenge to Sinuhe makes Amunenshi feel the need to *confer* with him is a sign of Sinuhe's importance. Sinuhe denies any knowledge of the disruptive mighty man, either as an ally or as someone who has given offence (the *private quarters* imply interference with the man's women).
31. Sinuhe's speech becomes more reflective in a stanza that begins and ends with imagery of bullfights. Cattle are not only plunder (as in B 112), but are often an image for humanity, and this metaphor expands the individual incident beyond one man's experience. The *roaming* cattle are relevant to the wandering Sinuhe, who is living among nomads.
32. To Retjenu Sinuhe is an *inferior* outsider, but he has become a resented *superior*. As Sinuhe meditates, the imagery moves from the specific to the general and the geographical, to express the fundamental incompatibility of Egypt (the *papyrus*) with barbarians (the desert *mountain*). This proverbial-sounding verse is structured by wordplay: *papyrus* and *mountain* are homophones.
33. Sinuhe's questions turn on the enemy to imply that the enemy's motives are as chaotic and unsure as they are veiled; the man's indirect challenge suggests that he may wish to back out.

34. Sinuhe states unequivocally that he is willing to fight and places his faith in the certainty of divine justice. A final pair of rhetorical questions affirms that god must know the preordained result of the combat, contrasting with the previous pair's expression of uncertainty.
35. His preparations in the *night* contrast with his earlier irresolute night-time activities (the flight: see nn. 6, 12), suggesting the extent to which he has regained strength of character. In the second half of the stanza he narrates the anticipation of the duel. Even the natives pity Sinuhe, and the *wives* come to watch (presumably only the tribe's married women would be allowed to do this). Their sympathy encourages the audience's, and the sequence of questions heightens the suspense as the turning-point of the Tale approaches. (In the final question *him* is the foreign champion).
36. The stanza narrating the duel begins suddenly and continues swiftly. The champion's moves are described in complicated and extended syntax, but then Sinuhe's easy victory is narrated in laconic simple statements. The word *stuck* is (ironically) the same root as 'establish' in Sinuhe's earlier question 'what can establish the papyrus on the mountain?' (B 122–3, see n. 32). The irony of felling the enemy with his own *axe* is developed later, and prepares for a wider and unexpected change in Sinuhe's fortunes. The mention of *every Asiatic* brings out the foreignness of the surroundings, but Sinuhe the Egyptian reappears in the incident: his accuracy recalls the king's (B 62–3), and he thanks *Montu*, a falcon and bull-god of battle associated with Thebes (pertinent to the cattle imagery here, as is the word *bellowing*).
37. The stanza progresses from the rapidly described fight to Autobiography-like statements of Sinuhe's triumph, as order returns to his life; after the interruption of the duel the description of his achievements resumes.
38. The narrative moves from a past narrative into the present (*today*), as Sinuhe reflects in a dramatic monologue on his god-given good fortune. He places responsibility for both his flight and his present success on god, giving a (short-lived) sense of reconciliation.
39. Sinuhe hymns his triumph with a formal lyric. He contrasts his present state with the actions of various types of *fugitive*, and thus distances himself from his flight. His claim to have given *bread* echoes the ethical ideals claimed in funerary Autobiographies; *white linen* is the characteristic dress of successful Egyptians. The lyric ends as it began with a reference to the royal *Residence*, and the couplets are patterned by contrasts which point the contrast between two locations—Sinuhe's foreign *dwelling place* and Egypt. He can only formulate his foreign prosperity in terms of Egypt, and this suggests the self-contradictory nature of his happiness, which he gradually realizes even as he proclaims it.
40. The dichotomy produces a breakdown, as Sinuhe realizes how desperate his position is. The second half of the stanza is full of convoluted syntax, desperate cries and rhetorical questions, and the language has grown more passionate. Like the first half, it starts with mention of *God*'s responsibility and his *grace*, but here grace is not yet attained. The *good event* is his return to Egypt for burial (the phrase can be a euphemism for 'death'). Earlier, he was pitied even by foreigners (B 131–3; see n. 35): surely god must pity him now. Before, he distanced himself from his flight, but here he moves to a deeper level, acknowledging his exile's reality but distancing himself from the motivation.
41. This stanza continues his concern with *grace*, moving from god to his deputy, the *king* and his family. After the moment of self-realization, Sinuhe expresses his wishes to be in Egypt more directly and more calmly.
42. At the centre of the stanza is a description of his decrepitude, which echoes his near-death as he left Egypt (B 21–3); here a more lasting rescue is wished for.

His *legs ceasing to follow* is very ironically appropriate, given his flight. *Weariness of heart* is a euphemism for the lethargy of death: his life is a living death.

43. The *cities of eternity* are the Egyptian necropoleis, which are an otherworldly court in layout (*they* are either his legs and heart, or the royal children). Burial is often an image of the permanence of Egyptian values. The queen, Sinuhe's patroness, is here not just the Mistress of the Land, but the *Lady of All*—which is an epithet of Hathor and Sekhmet as a universal goddess in religious texts. The imagery of the final verse merges her with the sky-goddess, by alluding to the symbolism of the coffin lid—*above* the dead man—as representing this goddess who provides rebirth. Her *children* are a sign of Egypt's continuance: Sinuhe hopes to follow his queen after death, when she will tell him how they prosper on earth. (The wishes are linked together by repetition of the word *follow*, and by the fact that *lead* and *pass* are homonyms.)
44. As soon as this prayer is uttered, heard only by the Tale's audience, the king answers it: the *children* send the desired *messages*, and Sinuhe's *heart*, weary before (B 170), is revived. *The humble servant* is an epistolary formula for 'I', which prepares for the actual royal letter in the next part of the Tale.
45. Royal letters (*decrees*) are occasionally included in actual Autobiographies; here a title presents the decree as an exact transcript. The title makes the main purpose immediately apparent; the letter is *brought* to reverse Sinuhe's being 'brought'/'carried away' into foreign lands (B 164) and bring him home. The letter itself opens with the full titulary of king, comprising five titles (see Glossary).
46. The use of the title *Follower* in the address is ironic (cf. n. 1). The king immediately assigns responsibility for Sinuhe's exile to his own heart; whereas Sinuhe had earlier placed his responsibility with god (B 147–9), the king, himself a god, denies this, and draws a contrast between Sinuhe's fallible heart and his own. The king reaffirms Sinuhe's earlier denial of being consciously blameworthy. For *Qedem*, see n. 15.
47. The king assures Sinuhe that his patroness is still in favour; since the plot leading to the old king's death seems to have originated in the Women's Chambers in the palace, this would probably have seemed a necessary reassurance to the original audience. The image of the queen as Sinuhe's *Heaven* continues the imagery of B 172–3 (see n. 43)—the tale is moving to a cosmic level.
48. Another stanza of assurances, developing the topic. The king repeats Sinuhe's description of old age, as if he had heard Sinuhe's own thoughts (note the echo of *today* from the previous stanza). This description is a tacit promise, which is developed in the following stanza. To *have in mind the day of burial* is not just a sign of old age, but also of piety (*memento mori*).
49. The king assures Sinuhe a full courtly burial, the privilege of the élite. The preparations, including the funeral procession, occupy much of the first half of the stanza. The *night* is here a period of funerary ceremonies, and as such is a transformation of the usually negative associations of night-time in the narrative. The funeral is a union with the gods: the mummy-wrappings come directly from *Tayet*, the goddess of weaving. The *lapis lazuli* is inlaid in the mummy *mask* to represent hair. The *singers* are a band who perform mourning songs. The *heaven* is the lid of the mummy case, imagined as the sky-goddess (a symbol of rebirth, evoking the queen's role as Sinuhe's patroness (see n. 47)); this fulfils Sinuhe's earlier wish (see B 172–3 and n. 43).
50. The assurance now moves on to the rites performed at the entrance of the tomb, and the subsequent funerary cult performed in the *pillared* chapel next to the pyramid. The *dance of the Oblivious ones* is a ritual performance portraying spirits welcoming the dead man into the other world. The *offering-invocation* is a

recitation summoning up offerings for the dead to live on, which accompanied the *sacrifice* of animals. Sinuhe will be buried in the same enclosure as the royal family, a privilege of the highest courtiers. This central position in eternity contrasts with his peripheral and transient state among Asiatics, as is described in the following verses.

51. *Ram's skin* is impermanent and unclean, in contrast to the security and magnificence of an Egyptian burial, amid *white stone* (limestone), which will ensure his resurrection and save him from death. After assuring Sinuhe of an eternal homecoming, the letter ends with a summarizing couplet which reiterates the climactic command to *return*.
52. In contrast with the promised bliss, the letter is received *in the midst of* a foreign *tribe* (not royal children). Sinuhe abases himself before the royal might. In his cry of joy, he now admits the responsibility of his own *heart* for his flight, in accordance with the king's view.
53. In Autobiographies royal letters need no reply, but here one is necessary. Sinuhe presents himself using a title that expresses his continuing loyalty, as does the epistolary formula *your humble servant* (cf. n. 44). In the opening heading, Sinuhe characterizes his flight as not a conscious decision; this explanation of his motivation is developed in the letter, and his *ignorance* is contrasted with the king's all-knowing wisdom.
54. The letter begins with standard epistolary wishes on the grandest scale, with a great list of deities forming a rhetorical declaration of loyalty. The mention of the king's *spirit* recalls the previous stanza (B 203). *Montu* is a god of war (see n. 36) and a state god of *Thebes*, the original religious centre of the Twelfth Dynasty.
55. *Amun Lord of the Throne of the Two Lands* is the king of the gods and the god of kings, and a state god of Thebes, the lord of the temple of Karnak. He heads a wide-ranging list of gods: *Sobek-Re* is a fusion of the potent crocodile-god and the Sungod, and a patron of the Twelfth Dynasty; *Horus* is the kingly god, appropriate to the addressee; *Hathor* is a cosmic goddess, but also the goddess of foreign lands (see n. 10); *Atum* is the creator-god who, together with his children, the *company* of nine gods, forms the divine dynasty. All these deities are a group that is sometimes associated with Thebes, and which occurs in the formulae of actual Middle Kingdom letters. The following gods are associated with foreign lands and with the routes towards them: *Sopdu-Neferbau-Semseru the eastern Horus* is a compound god associated with the eastern desert (into which Sinuhe fled); the *Lady of Imet* is the goddess Buto, who appears on the king's *head* as the royal uraeus (*Imet* is modern Tell Farun, north-east of Cairo, and on the route to the eastern countries); the *divine Council upon the Flood* is a cosmic group with powers over the Nile and other bodies of water (part of Sinuhe's flight was by water); *Min-Horus* is another compound deity, again a patron of foreign countries; *Wereret* is the uraeus-goddess of the Crown, and *Punt* is a land of exotic marvels in Africa. The list concludes with two cosmic gods: *Nut* the sky-goddess and *Haroeris-Re* the elder Sungod. The group of deities shows the king's universal significance—including foreign lands, relevant to Sinuhe; this is summarized by the final generalized and all-inclusive verse; the *Sea* is that to the north of Egypt (a final foreign reference). The gods are invoked in wishes which affirm Sinuhe's loyalty to the king, and which acclaim his power as unbounded in both space and time.
56. Sinuhe's prayers for the god's gifts are a reciprocal response to the king's gift of mercy (the theme of reciprocity is fundamental to Egyptian concepts of truth and justice (cf. n. 76)). The couplet echoes Sinuhe's earlier acclamation of the king's mercy (B 202–3). The *West* is the death from which the promised funeral and

tomb will save him, by ensuring his eternal rebirth. (It is also paradoxically a rescue from his living death in the east.)

57. After the introduction, Sinuhe acclaims the king's *perception*—an intellectual power used in the creation of the cosmos—of his exile and of his desire to return. The king displays the perception that Sinuhe lacked when he fled (cf. B 205), and the unspeakable flight is introduced with circumlocution. Sinuhe draws attention to the inexpressible (*unrepeatable*) nature of his predicament, which underlies the whole Tale.
58. He affirms his dependence on the king (*enquires* echoes B 74), and pertinently acclaims him as a divine *conqueror* of foreign lands. Now that the true king has entered the Tale, Amunenshi disappears from view, as more important matters occupy the audience's attention.
59. Before turning to his personal concerns, Sinuhe diplomatically lists peoples who show that he has served the king by spreading his influence. The foreign dignitaries who can be *brought* by him to pay their respects are referred to by their places of origin or rule, rather than their names. *Meki* is perhaps the southern Beqa, and is part of *Qedem* (for which see n. 15); *Keshu* is perhaps the biblical Geshur, a north-western part of the region of Bashan. Meki and Keshu are included in contemporaneous lists of potential enemy states. *Menus* is perhaps the Amanus mountain range, now in south-eastern Turkey, although the Cretan Minos has also been suggested. The *Fenkhu* are the people of the Lebanese coastal plain, later known as the Phoenicians. The diction of the final verse mentioning the more general region of *Retjenu* is rather florid.
60. Sinuhe admits his responsibility for the flight (and significantly starts to use the first person), but asserts that it was neither intentional nor caused by past blame. The stanza recapitulates the various earlier attempts to explain his flight: it was an inexplicable, unconscious, confused event, like a *dream* of geographical confusion; the *Delta* marshes and the southern *Elephantine* are at the opposite ends of Egypt.
61. The syntax moves from simple sentences to a longer and more complex sequence of clauses as Sinuhe truthfully relates his experience. In speaking to the king, he can formulate the truth of what happened more than hitherto, and he now reconciles the two distinct motives which he has mentioned earlier at various points—the external force of *God* and the internal one of his *heart*—by placing them in parallel juxtaposition. The heart was sometimes described as the 'God within a man', and here the two motives complement each other to convey a sense that the flight was by him and yet not by him.
62. Sinuhe claims he could not have been *presumptuous*, so as to deserve reproaches, because the king is too awe-inspiring. This description of the king presents a vision of *the land* of Egypt, where respect is paid where it is due, very different from the confused jostling for power in Retjenu (B 120–1), or from Sinuhe's ambiguous position during his flight (B 10–11). The *Sungod* is the king's divine father, who authorizes the power of his son. Sinuhe implicitly acknowledges that Egypt is his *home*, and states the king's sole power over his world (the reference to his *horizon* extends the reference to the other world (see n. 2)). The lyrical stanza concludes by extolling the king's control of all the basic necessities of life: light, water, and air; his power implicitly has a caring aspect.
63. At the very end of his reply, Sinuhe assures the king that he will not hesitate to relinquish his possessions; his intention to return is unstated but is implicit in his obedience. Although his foreign home is dismissed simply as *this place*, the description of his mature children as *chicks* is tender; such language keeps the audience vividly aware of the importance of the preceding events.
64. The concluding epistolary wishes include the most important gods from the opening of the letter (B 205–12 and n. 54): the cosmic *Sungod*, the royal *Horus*, *Hathor* the goddess of foreign places, and the warrior *Montu*. Sinuhe returns to the themes of breath and reciprocity, praying that the king will be given life by the gods in return for his gift of life to Sinuhe.

65. *Iaa* is dismissed from the Tale with a description of what is being relinquished, and a cycle is completed: the land has not been mentioned since Sinuhe's arrival in it (B 81). Sinuhe's swift departure reveals that only Egypt is of importance now. The motif of a father handing over to his son when he retired or died was the Egyptian ideal: all is as it should be.
66. At the end of the fourth part of the Tale, Sinuhe arrives at the *Ways of Horus*, the royal road leading from Egypt's border at Sile (modern Tell Abu Sefa) to the north-east; the toponym implies that he is back on 'the way of true living', and not 'the ways of flight' (B 39–40; *Horus* also recalls the eulogy of the king in B 217–18). His journey reverses his earlier one, which was, in contrast, solitary, uncontrolled, and towards death. The narrative moves forward rapidly through the gradual stages of his reassimilation. The *commander* is the first of a series of intermediaries who accompany Sinuhe back to the king; the mention of a military *garrison* may ironically recall the fortresses past which he fled earlier (B 16–19).
67. The final part of the Tale is occupied with Sinuhe's reintegration. The title of the official who meets him is appropriate, as *peasants* were marginal members of society, as he is now. The *Syrians* are presumably the men mentioned in Sinuhe's letter (B 219–22), but their *names* are not given to the audience here: as he re-enters Egypt, they recede into the background.
68. The voyage to the royal capital (*Itj-tawi* (see n. 3)) is a picture of idyllic social order. The mention of a *harbour* recalls Sinuhe's previous voyage (B 12–14). The stanza ends with his gradual progress into the palace itself, the repetitive description heightening the sense of expectation as the confrontation between Sinuhe and the king approaches. (Sinuhe's *ushering* reverses his having been 'dragged away' by god, B 230: the same word is used for both movements.)
69. At the great *portal* flanked by statues of *sphinxes*, Sinuhe is introduced to the palace, amid the full panoply of the court as a foreign ambassador: the *royal children* greet him without recognizing him (as is later apparent). The repetition of *portal* gives a sense of his progress; the second *portal* may refer to the canopy of the king's throne or to the portal between the Pillared Hall and the Audience Hall, where the king is enthroned. His terrified bow before the king re-enacts his original panic-stricken collapse when he was literally *seized in the dusk* by panic (B 2–4), and is also a second near-death, echoing his experience of death as he left Egypt (B 23).
70. Courtiers lift him up now, unlike his first near-death, when nomads helped him. The king's address summarizes his letter, and blames Sinuhe for his own suffering (echoing Sinuhe's prayer at B 159, and his own decree at B 197).
71. Sinuhe's respectful reply describes both his irrational flight and his hesitation in replying now as the result of blind—but not disrespectful—panic. Once again he abandons himself to the king's grace.
72. The formal atmosphere is lightened by a moment of charm and humour. The queen's failure to recognize Sinuhe dramatically shows how much he has changed; the court itself, however, seems unchanging—the princesses still seem young, whereas Sinuhe has aged. Their cry poses the plot's central question of Sinuhe's true identity—is he really (literally 'in truth') barbarian or Egyptian?—which the king immediately resolves.
73. The *rattles and sistra* are musical instruments shaken by women in cultic rituals. Like the *necklaces* (also shakeable) they are particularly associated with

Hathor (see n. 74). By presenting them, the princesses enact a lyrical ceremony of renewal before the king (similar to those shown on tomb walls (see R. B. Parkinson, *Voices from Ancient Egypt* (London, 1991), 78–81)).

74. The *Lady of Heaven* recalls the epithets used of Sinuhe's patroness (B 172, 185–6, and nn.43, 47), but refers to Hathor, the goddess of love and rebirth, and the lady of the sycomore (see n. 1) and of foreign lands (see n. 10). *Golden One* and *Lady of Stars* are epithets of the radiant and celestial Hathor. The song is one of rebirth, and has an erotic charge, evoking the king's union with Hathor, who is merged with the queen, to ensure his own rebirth and continued vitality; the worlds of the court and of the gods are fused. Here the song ensures Sinuhe's rebirth.
75. The king unites the two parts of Egypt—the *North* and *South*—and upholds the unity of the state, expressed with images of royal insignia (appropriate to the ritual context). The phrasing echoes the opening of the tale where the old king's death united him with the gods (R 6–8); here the union is achieved within the court of his successor.
76. The princesses urge the king to be gracious, so that the *Sungod*, his divine father, shall be gracious to him, evoking the principle of reciprocity. The *Lord of the Two Lands* is a title held by both king and god. They then hail him in a deliberately ambiguous verse: the *Lady of All* is either the queen or the goddess (see nn. 74, 43), so it is both: 'Hail to you, as to Hathor', and 'Hail to you and also to your queen'. The goddess's role as protectress of Egypt is taken up in the following verses, as the princesses make their request. The imagery of archery echoes Sinuhe's duel (B 137–9), as well as his eulogy of the king (B 62–3).
77. The princesses use the principle of reciprocity (expressed in the repetition of *give*, and of *good*) to request a reward in return for the special offering of their performance: this reward is their beloved Sinuhe. These verses echo the king's last speech (B 260) and are a summation of the paradox of Sinuhe's plight. They rename him at this rebirth *North Wind's Son*—an allusion to his exile in the north—instead of his old name 'Son of the Sycomore' (see n. 1). An additional paradox is that Hathor is the Lady of both the Sycomore and the North Wind.
78. The princesses now provide a final explanation of Sinuhe's flight, in which his irrational panic becomes a sign of the king's power and fearsomeness, and the abnormality of his actions is made into an expression of the natural order of the state. A final couplet expresses their faith in the king's protective care.
79. The king's response is both a natural remark in the situation, and a grand dismissal of the chaos and terror of the preceding plot. The rest of the Tale is a rapid progression from this climactic moment to the practical preparations for his ultimate homecoming, his death.
80. Sinuhe's reintegration takes place in a royal dwelling. The following verses allude to Sinuhe's possessions abroad: the wealth of this dwelling replaces that of the land of Iaa, and the building itself contrasts with the nomads' stockades and tents (B 115–16, 145–6). The *bathroom* is a mark of prestige, and appropriate when Sinuhe is about to be cleansed of his experience. *Images of the horizon* are probably images of gods, either statues or wall-paintings; the idiom moves the audience towards Sinuhe's own *horizon* (tomb) and eternity.
81. This stanza describes what Sinuhe had attempted in his central monologue (B 149–56)—the negation of his flight. He now literally casts off the *load* of his debilitating foreign experiences; beards were worn by foreigners, not Egyptians. The stanza is structured by a stately series of direct antitheses: foreign *clothes* and Egyptian *fine linen*; crude *tree oil* and *fine oil*.
82. After his transitional dwelling, Sinuhe is given a permanent residence. The rank of *Governor* is now bestowed on him, echoing the very start of the tale (R 1 and n. 1). These stanzas present a panoramic series of dwellings, moving towards an eternal residence. The *meals* ironically recall Sinuhe's plenty when abroad (B 87–92), which is now surpassed and nullified through royal bounty.
83. The *pyramid* is Sinuhe's eternal home; it is in the royal enclosure around the pyramid of Senwosret I at el-Lisht, which contained subsidiary pyramids for family members and the highest members of the élite. The repetitive description gives a sense that all is as it should be, forming a progression through the building and equipping of the tomb to the establishment of the funerary cult, with priests and a *demesne* as its endowment. Sinuhe has now attained the rank of a *Chief Friend*, at the very centre of the court (see n. 5). The *image* of Sinuhe is his statue in the tomb, the object of the funerary cult and the subject of the Autobiography; it is an image of permanent personality, transcending the mutability of his earlier life.
84. As Sinuhe regains his true identity, the narrative resumes the form of an Autobiography, a development that is completed in the final verses. The description of tomb-building and the statement that these favours come from the king are standard elements in Autobiographies. The movement of the final stanzas ends here, and the audience is back where it started at the beginning of the Tale, listening to Sinuhe speak from his tomb. The Tale ends, as an Autobiography, by relating Sinuhe's death—his *landing*. This widespread metaphor is particularly appropriate for his journeying life.
85. The colophon states that the literary text was copied accurately in its entirety.