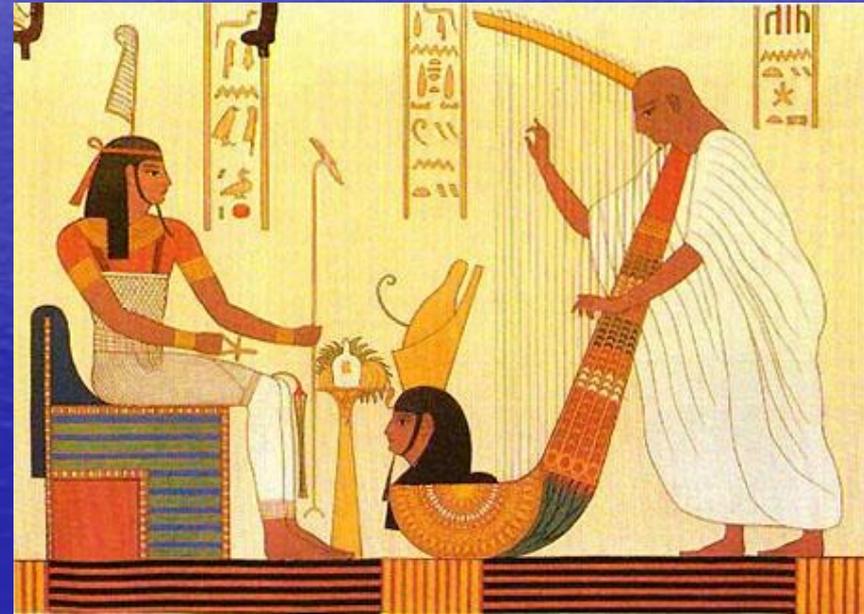


Egyptian Literature and Poetry

Alan J. M. Haffa

Harper's Song from the Tomb of King Intef

- Songs to dead almost always with the Harp
- Carved on tomb walls
- Secular: carved above relief sculpture of workmen and sung by workmen
- Reflections on death, but not as ritual
- Intef's: Questions the reality of afterlife and the effectiveness of tombs!!!
- Hedonistic



King Intef's Harper's Song

He is happy, this good prince!

Death is a kindly fate.

A generation passes,

Another stays,

Since the time of the ancestors.

The gods who were before rest in their tombs,

Blessed nobles too are buried in their tombs.

Yet those who built tombs,

Their places are gone,

What has become of them?

I have heard the words of Imhotep and Hardedef,
Whose sayings are recited whole.

What of their places?

Their walls have crumbled,

Their places are gone,

As though they had never been!

None comes from there,

To tell of their state,

To tell of their needs,

To calm our hearts,

Until we go where they have gone!

Hence rejoice in your heart!
Forgetfulness profits you,
Follow your heart as long as you live!
Put myrrh on your head,
Dress in fine linen,
Anoint yourself with oils fit for a god.
Heap up your joys,
Let your heart not sink!
Follow your heart and your happiness,
Do your things on earth as your heart commands!
When there comes to you that day of mourning,
The Weary-hearted hears not their mourning,
Wailing saves no man from the pit!

Make Holiday,
Do not weary of it!
Lo, none is allowed to take his goods with him,
Lo, none who departs comes back again!

Dispute Between a Man and His Ba; 12th dynasty

- Longing for death
- Ba is angered and threatens to leave him
- He urges it not to leave and to welcome death as natural
- The Ba argues that those in fine tombs are no better than those without them
- The Ba urges him to enjoy life!
- The man tells four poems to convey the sorrow of life and to exalt death and resurrection
- The Ba agrees to remain with him



- For my suffering is too heavy a burden to be borne by me. May it please the gods repel my body's secrets!
- What my ba said to me: "Are you not a man? Are you not alive? What do you gain by complaining about life like a man of wealth?"
- I said: "I will not go long as this is neglected. Surely, if you run away, you will not be cared for. Every criminal says: 'I shall seize you.'" Though you are dead, your name lives. Yonder is the place of rest, the heart's goal. The West is a dwelling place, a voyage...Be patient my ba, my brother, until my heir comes one who will make offerings, who will stand at the tomb on the day of burial, having prepared the bier of the graveyard."""

- Ba: “If you think of burial, it is heartbreak. It is the gift of tears by aggrieving a man. It is taking a man from his house, casting him on high ground. You will not go up to see the sun. Those who built in granite, who erected halls in excellent tombs of excellent construction—when the builders have become gods, their offering-stones are desolate, as if they were the dead who died on the riverbank for lack of a survivor. The flood takes its toll, the sun also...Listen to me! Follow the feast day, forget worry!”

- Songs in Answer to the Ba:
- “To whom shall I speak today?
Hearts are greedy,
Everyone robs his comrade’s goods.

To whom shall I speak today?
Kindness has perished,
Insolence assaults everyone.

To whom shall I speak today?
One is content with evil,
Goodness is cast to the ground everywhere.

- The Dying Singer continues
- “Death is before me today
Like a sick man’s recovery,
Like going outdoors after confinement.

Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of myrrh,
Like sitting under sail on a breezy day.

Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of lotus,
Like sitting on the shore of drunkenness.

Death is before me today
Like a man’s longing to see his home
When he has spent many years in captivity.

Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, Middle Kingdom Era

- Peasant goes to city to sell goods
- Tricked into losing his Donkey
- “you have stolen my goods and beaten me, and will you also take the wail away from my mouth?”
- He appeals 8 times to the Steward of Pharaoh.
- The Chief Steward sends the written appeals of the peasant to Pharaoh
- The Steward awards the peasant goods taken from the other man, Dehuti-necht.

Observations on Eloquent Peasant

- Justice should not mistreat or ignore even the poor
- Democratization: the gods dispense justice and help to deserving men
- Change: The importance of speech has changed from Old Kingdom

Love Poetry

- Many variations on Love theme: romantic, heartbroken, longing, erotic, comic, idyllic
- Although sophisticated and witty, the poetry reveals a genuine appreciation for all aspects of love that is not artificial.
- Female as agents of love, not merely objects
- Sexuality does not seem repressive or moralistic
- Sexual Freedom: A girl who approaches a boy in public and dreams of shamelessly kissing him

Why, just now, must you question
your heart

Why, just now, must you question your heart?

Is it really the time for discussion?

To her, say I,

Take her tight in your arms!

For god's sake, sweet man,

it's me coming at you,

My tunic

loose at the shoulder!

How clever my love with a lasso

How clever my lover with a lasso—
she'll never need a kept bull!

She lets fly the rope at me

(from her dark hair),

Draws me in with her come-hither eyes,
wrestles me down between her bent thighs,

Branding me hers with her burning seal.

(Cowgirl, the fire from those thighs!)

I just chanced to be happening by

His door, as I hoped, was open –

and I spied on my secret love...

Love steals the heart of a poor thing like me
pointing her toes down his street...

If only Mother knew of my longing

(and let it occur to her soon) –

O Golden Lady, descend for me,

plant him square in her heart!

Then I'd run to my love, kiss him hard
right in front of his crew.

I'd drip no tears of shame or shyness
just because people were there..

When Love Goes Awry

Let me look through his wayside gate—
I think it's my love there, coming for me!
Eyes on the ground but my ears listening hard,
I tremble a little, waiting for him.
(I'll make an art out of loving my love,
he'll be my only concern!)
For his heart stops at nothing!

Why, he's sending me only a messenger!
the one with fast slinky feet,
Trust with bedroom secrets
...I never liked him...

A mere servant tells me my love's been a lie!
"He's found another."

Whose turn is it now
making soft eyes up into his face...?

...oh my god, love,

What kind of man breaks the heart of a girl
with such ever so strange goings on?

I think I'll go home and lie very
still

I think I'll go home and lie very still,
feigning deathly illness.

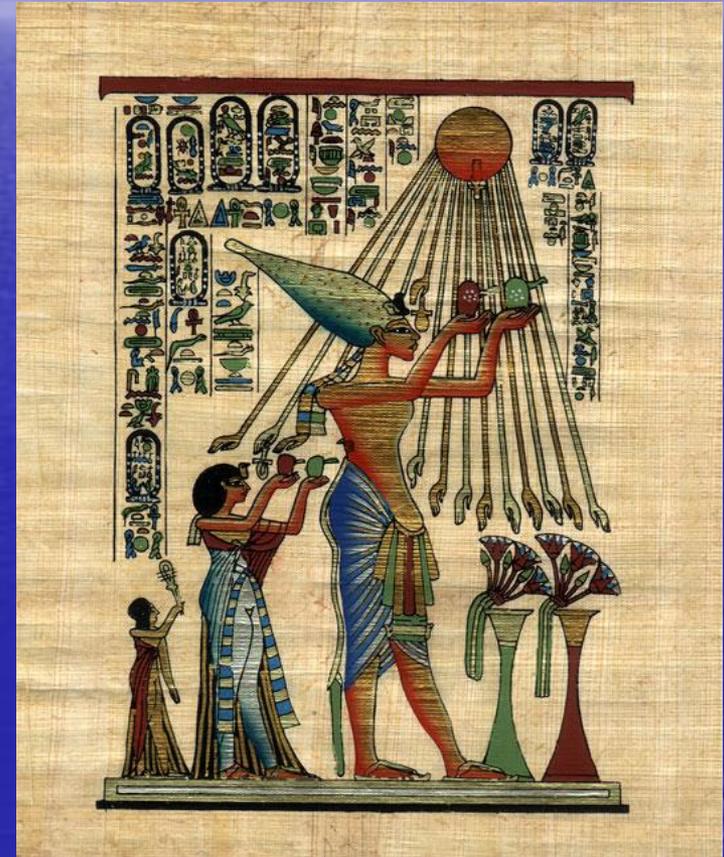
Then the neighbors will all troop over to stare,
my love, perhaps, among them.

How she'll smile while the doctors
snarl in their teeth!—

She perfectly well knows what ails me.

Not all poetry was Erotic: Hymns to Gods such as Akhenaten's *Hymn to the Sun*.

- Aton, the sun, is the creator of all;
- Aton, the father of all:
- Aton is thanked for being the source of Time, the Seasons, Beauty, for making it possible for people to work, and for all living things.



Summary

- Middle and New Kingdom literature develop new and more secular genres
- Middle Kingdom stories question traditional religious ideas
- The theme of justice to the poor and common man becomes important in stories like Eloquent Peasant
- Religious literature continues
- But new Hymns to Aton
- New Kingdom poetry: happy and self-confident ease with human society; it is erotic and romantic, naïve and sophisticated at the same time.