What is Papyrus Pushkin 127?

An Examination of its Fiction, Genre and Ideology

By

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A thesis submitted to the

University of Birmingham

for the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY(B)

The Institute of Archaeology & Antiquity
College of Arts & Law
University of Birmingham
October 2013

Abstract

P. Pushkin 127 has previously been labelled a literary text but it is not entirely clear why it is literary and what its purpose is, its meaning. The text presents itself as a letter from an exiled man, Wermai, to the Royal Scribe in Residence, Usermaatre-nakht. It details the various injustices Wermai has suffered and asks for help. This thesis first examines the impact of this source if it were taken at face value. Once this premise is established it uses modern theoretical techniques derived from literary criticism to work out the extent of P. Pushkin 127's fictionality and general 'literariness'. Finally it considers the meaning of the text in light of such critical analysis and examines the implications of modern perceptions on explaining Wermai's sufferings. The overall aim is to define the importance and application of P. Pushkin 127 as a source and to investigate its 'literary' character in a more theoretical and holistic approach.

For Emma

Acknowledgements

My most sincerest of thanks are for Dr Antony Leahy for his spectacular patience and inimitable ability to eviscerate a flawed argument with a single well placed question. This thesis is immeasurably better off for his guidance, foresight, and expertise and would be a blithering mess were it not for all of his counsel.

I must also give thanks to Dr Emma Southon whose unsubtle, un-gentle and in some cases, downright evil attempts at getting me writing have resulted in a thesis. Her perseverance and tolerance with my many attempts at diversion have saved me from myself.

I should also at this point thank my parents and sister. They were neither the most understanding nor helpful when it came to both the research and writing of this thesis but, as with good friends, they were always available to call me away from the sufferings of Wermai to enjoy the finer things in life. Their support and distraction has been invaluable in keeping me sane and stable, if not always lucid. May it never change.

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Introduction

"…neither the dead nor the living would care for me in my sorrows: what will my sufferings signify a long time hence anyway…" (P. Pushkin 127, 3:12-13 trans. Caminos 1977:71)

Papyrus Pushkin 127 takes the form of a letter from Wermai to Usermaatre-nakht, a royal scribe, and consists of a narrative of Wermai's sufferings, how his lifestyle has been wrecked by injustice and how he continues to be plagued by misfortune. The text was allegedly uncovered by fellahîn in the vicinity of el-Hibeh in 1890[1] in a pot with texts that are now commonly known as the *Tale of Wenamun* and the *Onomasticon of Amenemope*. The papyri were purchased from an antiquities dealer in Cairo by the Russian Egyptologist Vladimir Golénischeff, and then in 1909 they became part of the collection of the A. S. Pushkin Museum in Moscow. Golénischeff himself only briefly mentioned P. Pushkin 127, he commented on its difficult language, [2] compared it to P. Prisse, and eventually noted it was a copy of a letter from one scribe to another;[3] he was more intrigued with Wenamun.[4] P. Pushkin 127 remained unpublished until 1960 when Mikhail Korostovtsev published the *editio princeps*[5] of the papyrus and worked with Caminos on the first monograph, published in 1977.[6] Since its publication as 'The Tale of Woe' it has still remained relatively obscure in spite of its 'literary' status. It does not feature in anthologies of Ancient Egyptian literature and is rarely referenced in general. Caminos' publication and more recently Joachim Quack's

[1] Caminos 1977:1; Golénischeff 1899:74.
[2] Golénischeff 1893:88; Caminos 1977:6.
[3] Golénischeff 1893:88.
[4] Gardiner 1947:27. Gardiner did make a transcription of P. Pushkin 127 in 1905 (Caminos 1977:8) but was only afforded three days with the text and doubted its accuracy, in 1955 he suggested Ricardo Caminos edit it (Caminos 1977: *Preface*).
[5] See Коростовцев М.А.1960. Египетский иератический папирус № 167 ГМИИ им. А.С. Пушкина в Москве, 119–133, Moscow.
[6] Although this is the first full publication of P. Pushkin 127 in English, it is not the first English translation: Allam (1975: 147-153) published a brief and flawed translation in *JEA*.

re-translation into German[7], have made the text more accessible but its context within Ancient Egyptian history and, more importantly, within the corpus of Ancient Egyptian literature, is still missing. The aims of thesis are to investigate Caminos' assertion that P. Pushkin 127 is a 'tale', to explore its context within or outside of the Ancient Egyptian literature tradition and to explore its significance.

The reception of an Ancient Egyptian text is limited by several issues: its level of fictionality, its relationship with genres and, by extension, its intertextuality, and its ideological systems. Each of these categories alters the effect of the text on the reader: the level of fictionality of a text changes the world within which the narrative takes place, the juxtaposition to a particular genre(s) changes the purpose and defines its originality, its ideological principles change the tone of the text across generations and alters the reception of it by a modern reader. Within Egyptology, the principal theoretical problem for the study of literature has been how to define what, in Ancient Egyptian literature[8], is 'literary'? This debate is pertinent to P. Pushkin 127, which has previously been referred to as a 'Literary Letter of Lament',[9] the '*Moskauer literarischen Brief*',[10] and the 'Tale of Woe'. The principal motivation for the identification of 'literary' and 'non-literary' texts is to minimize historicist readings and consequently, avoid falling into the trap of the intentionalist fallacy.[11] Historicist readings from literature within Egyptology often equate the text being critiqued with propaganda and can lead to the creation of historical narrative from biased sources. Criticism taking into

[7] Quack 2001:167-181.
[8] By Ancient Egyptian literature I refer to writings in hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic which are written in stone, on ostraca or on papyrus (manuscript).
[9] Quirke 2004:19.
[10] Quack 2001:167.
[11] Simpson 2002b:45; Wimsatt & Beardsley 1965:3: "How is he to find out what the poet tried to do? If the poet succeeded in doing it, then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do. And if the poet did not succeed, then the poem is not adequate evidence, and the critic must go outside the poem – for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem."

account authorial intention interprets the text in terms of the historical identity of the author.[12] In the Ancient Egyptian literary tradition, the identity of the author is inaccessible in most cases,[13] Parkinson suggests using an 'implied author' but in a manuscript tradition it is more accurate to think of an implied multiplicity of authors. P. Pushkin 127 is not protected from these traps. Its theoretical provenance with Wenamun, at el-Hibeh, in the 21st Dynasty is enticing for a historicist approach, and chapter one of this thesis will analyse the validity of this reading in detail. Categorising P. Pushkin 127 as either 'literary' or 'non-literary' provides a frame from within which the text can be analysed with comparative literature, it also widens the scope of the text's reception – a 'literary' text would have "no single context" and would have been used for purposes such as "entertainment, edification, instruction, exploring the possible and imaginatively thinking the otherwise unthinkable".[14] The principal emphases of this thesis are the concepts of fictionality, genre and reception, which together form the broader concept of Ancient Egyptian literariness as presented in the following theories. Henceforth a discussion of the parts in relation to P. Pushkin 127 contrives to present a more general discussion about the efficacy of a theory of literature for Ancient Egypt.

Thesis Overview

This thesis will consist of a more detailed re-examination and application of theories of Ancient Egyptian literature which are briefly summarized and assessed below. There will be a specific focus on these theories' implications on our reception of P. Pushkin 127. The concept and implications of a literal reading of P. Pushkin 127 will first be investigated to clarify why we need to consider the implications of a literary reading. The fictionality of the papyrus

[12] Parkinson 2002:24.
[13] This does not include the authors included within the frame of the text such as Neferti in the *Prophecies of Neferti* or Ipuwer in the *Dialogues of Ipuwer*.
[14] Baines 2003:4.

needs to then be gauged in chapter two with the aid of Loprieno's scale of fictionality. The genre of the text, as emphasised by the theories of Assmann, Parkinson and Baines comprise the next stage in chapter three. We need to examine the intertextuality of P. Pushkin 127 within the corpus and consider its relationship with other genres, the extent to which it can be termed a 'lamentation', whether Fischer-Elfert's suggestion that it is a derivative of curse-blessing formulae has any weight or whether the text is an altogether different species. The final step in chapter four is as a result of the focus of all the above approaches on ideology. This requires a combined approach by examining the dominant ideologies, the extent to which a text can be ideological, and the impact of various ideological approaches on reading P. Pushkin 127. The synthesis of all these different aspects will provide wider context for P. Pushkin 127 and hopefully once again, give meaning to Wermai's sufferings.

Literature Review

P. Pushkin 127 has been previously labelled literary on the basis of what Loprieno has called an 'adductive' model,[15] its literary character assigned from 'individual analyses applied to individual texts'. Gardiner is quoted by Caminos as calling the text 'cryptic,'[16] and in his publication of Onomastica, he described it as 'an extensive model letter in flowery language'.[17] Bakir had been referred to the "literary letter formerly in the collection of Golénischeff" by Battiscombe Gunn.[18] Caminos goes further than both in his concluding statements and likens the text to Posener's work[19] on 12th Dynasty propaganda literature.[20] P.

[15] Loprieno 1996:211.
[16] Caminos 1977:*Preface*
[17] Gardiner 1947:27.
[18] Bakir 1970:5;12.
[19] Caminos 1977:80; Posener 1956.
[20] This term appears frequently in relation to Ancient Egyptian literature, the comparison is brought about by a lack of sympathy for the Ancient Egyptian writing style and pharaonic ideology. It is also a loaded term for modern scholars given its prevalence in the 20th century. Quirke (2004:47-48) warns against its usage in Egyptology where most literature has no datable context that can be tied to politics, he goes further, referencing

Pushkin 127 has not been exempt from the 'euhemeristic' model[21] either: Fecht[22] and Niwinski[23] have both taken it as a broadly historical document,[24] noting its literary character as a historical fiction concerning the suppression of HPA Amenhetep.[25] In a similar vein, Lull takes the text to be a literary representation of the aftermath of the invasion of Thebes by Panehsy, the request at the end of the text for help is read by Lull as a reference to Panehsy's eventual expulsion from Thebes.[26] Fischer-Elfert advances on this view-point, albeit with an awareness of the theoretical flaws with such an approach. He considers P. Pushkin 127 to be a literary embellishment of a New Kingdom curse formula[27] and this, coupled with its elaborate narrative, historically locates it in the transitional period between the 20th and 21st Dynasties.[28] Such a conclusion is odd given Fischer-Elfert's acknowledgment and adoption of Loprieno's theories of intertextuality, *topos* and *mimesis.*[29] Whilst the first part of Fischer-Elfert's theory, the comparison with a curse formula, is an interesting idea and will be considered in chapter 3, he suggests the lack of a 'happy-ending' is the author's intention[30] and that Fecht and Niwinski had the right timeframe but wrong approach – pinning his theory on authorial intent

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Bahrani (1998:169), to suggest it reduces Egyptian identity to merely 'articulate ideology' and feeds into 'Oriental despotism'. Academic scholarship uses this orientalism and propitiates these 'prototypes of imperialism'. The 'propaganda' label is also, as emphasised by Parkinson (2002:8), caused by the critic being presented with bare texts, with no comparative discourse on literature to work from and thus the text being criticised is taken as if it were 'strictly referential'. It removes the text's aesthetic value and becomes a message from the state to the audience (Parkinson 2002:15), it even affects our perception of the make-up of the audience of a text. The solution is to use a more nuanced terminology for such messages, if they can be deduced, one which highlights the purpose of the message within an Ancient Egyptian context and removes the negative association which modern scholars have with 'propaganda'.

[21] Loprieno 1996b:211.

[22] Fecht 1962.

[23] Niwinski 1992.

[24] *C.f.* Goedicke 1975:11 on Wenamun as a 'crucial source for the evaluation of the situation at the end of the Ramesside Period'.

[25] Fecht 1962:12-31.

[26] Lull 2006:42.

[27] Fischer-Elfert 2004:88.

[28] Fischer-Elfert 2004:89.

[29] Fischer-Elfert 2004:80.

[30] Fischer-Elfert 2004:88 – the 'happy-ending' motif is flawed when applied to Ancient Egyptian literature. It is a hangover from modern western Romantic precursors, assuming that the greatest texts are united with no gaps. It is derived from the Aristotelian 'whole' wherein a tragedy must have a beginning, middle and an end (Selden 1988:268).

rather than comparative texts.[31] The common theme among these interpretations is that literary character is a reason for caution but this composition must have been motivated by socio-political pressures;[32] the historical setting is affirmed by orthography, palaeography, shared provenance with Wenamun and an intertextual connection to curse formulae. The problem with this is that the literary character of the text is not important to the interpretation; if P. Pushkin 127 were approached literally, the same conclusions drawn about the historical setting would be identified. There are too many problems with assigning P. Pushkin 127 to such a tumultuous historical setting upon these bases. The historical reading diminishes the idea that literature could exist independently of the socio-political environment[33] and with regards to Ancient Egypt, this attitude is primitivistic by diminishing the sophistication of Ancient Egyptian culture.

The progression from a historicist reading of P. Pushkin 127 depends on its 'literariness' within more modern theoretical models for Ancient Egyptian Literature. The push-back, the rising influence of literary criticism amongst Egyptologists arguably had its roots in Fecht's theories of *Metrik*[34] but sporadic attempts at literary theory can be seen as early as 1938 with Alfred Herman's identification of the *Königsnovelle*. The tipping-point was in 1974 when Assmann questioned the validity of the *Handbuch der Orientalistik Literatur*, an anthology which had little differentiation between the texts according to genre or purpose. Heavily influenced by Russian formalism,[35] Assmann proposed that this was an invalid method of examination and that it was necessary to differentiate between literary and non-literary texts,

[31] Fischer-Elfert 2004:89.
[32] *C.f.* Vernus 2003:121-149 on 'The Crisis of Moral Values' at the end of the New Kingdom.
[33] Loprieno 1996b:212 *c.f.* Haikal 2002:30 who criticizes the separation of literary texts from the political dimension and defends the idea of texts being inspired consciously or unconsciously by events given that 'works were created after the event'.
[34] This line of thinking began with Fecht (1964) but adaptations have been proposed by Foster (1980, 1993), Burkard (1977) and also Mathieu (1988).
[35] Moers 1999a:3.

and the simplest way to do this was through analyzing the function of texts. This method, he claimed, takes into account nuance and difference between texts of apparently the same genre, and the evolution of textual forms and language. A functional text, he said, cannot be completely understood by us because it exists only within in its practical context: the *Cannibal Hymn* cannot be fully understood without the accompanying ritual context,[36] a tomb autobiography cannot be fully understood without the physical context of the tomb. As words alone on a page, these texts cannot be fully interpreted or understood. On the other hand, he argued, literary texts are functionless. They can only be read on the page and the context that is needed to interpret and understand it is contained within the text itself. As he suggested, access to the complete corpus of Ancient Egyptian literature, every text that was produced, would not 'improve our understanding of *Sinuhe*'.[37]

This theory was a significant step forward in criticism of Ancient Egyptian literature, but there are flaws. In particular, declaring a literary text functionless is questionable. Literary texts had a function in their original context but this is beyond our reach for reasons ranging from inaccurate archaeology (P. Pushkin 127) to an incomplete understanding of the socio-political, cultural and ideological climate. Perhaps the best example is *Sinuhe*, its composition date and surrounding circumstances are disputed but there is evidence it later came to be used as a teaching text for scribes;[38] similarly the *Eloquent Peasant* which much later was utilised by Gardiner to illustrate to modern students the various germinations of the *sDm.f*.[39] Thus Assmann's theory is a negative theory: just because we cannot assign a function to a text does not mean that a function did not exist. This then falls into the same logical fallacy as a historicist approach.

[36] Assmann 1999:3.
[37] Assmann 1999:4.
[38] Simpson 2003a:54.
[39] Gardiner 1957:361.

Nonetheless, Assmann's theory was taken up, with some modification by Loprieno. Whilst he found the concepts of formalism to be useful, he used them to develop a scale of literariness which comprises of three parts. First, fictionality: does the text describe events within this universe or an ideal universe? Secondly, intertextuality: to what extent does the text share motifs, idioms, tropes, stereotypes *etc.*? Finally, classicism: how does the text continue to exist within the context of Ancient Egypt and Ancient Egyptian literature?

Loprieno's model is simple, and easy to apply, however in its simplicity it is also problematic. The corpus of surviving Ancient Egyptian literature is too small to truly understand intertextual overlaps, and this issue is exacerbated by the language's extended use and idealisation of formulae and idioms. Furthermore it is difficult to see how the mere continued existence and apparent admiration of a text after the period of its production demonstrates literariness. The theory was rebutted by Assmann in 1999 when he argued that it was highly flawed and came to the sudden and somewhat surprising conclusion that the entire dialogue concerning literariness was anachronistic and invalid with regards to Ancient Egyptian texts[40]. Instead, he argued it was necessary to examine Ancient Egyptian literature through his own framework of cultural texts.

There are some prerequisites for understanding the role of literature in Assmann's broader framework of cultural memory in Ancient Egypt. A cultural text can be anything that expresses the self-image and self-understanding of a society: a ceremony, a monument, an image, and any phenomena which help establish and reinforce the identity of the society.[41] Cultural texts are separate from 'encyclopaedic' texts (funerary, magical, temple recitations). Next, cultural texts have a ritual which creates the context for the repetition and circulation of

[40] Assmann 1999:4.
[41] Assmann 1999:7.

the text.[42] Through involvement in a ritual they can be defined as functional with regards to his earlier theory.[43] Finally, writing as a phenomenon arose out of bureaucracy and complicated rituals, it arose out of a need to store data difficult to memorise. In summary, a written cultural text is a data store which reinforces cultural identity and prolongs it. This seems a contradiction: accepting that cultural texts contain some of the rituals of a society and help to define its identity, if writing is essentially a mnemonic device then why would it be used to record what is common knowledge.[44] Assmann defends against this issue by suggesting written cultural texts have to carry cultural identity across generations.[45] In which case cultural identity in subsequent generations is limited by literacy and the previous generation's interpretation of society. Concerning Ancient Egyptian literature, this theory is his explanation for Middle Kingdom literary texts, he proposes: Middle Kingdom Egypt was a literocracy wherein literacy controlled entry to the ruling classes. Apprentice scribes were supposed to memorise written cultural texts and transcribe them, thus imparting a "literate and cultural competence".[46] In this way scribes were the exemplar of the ideal Ancient Egyptian society and were able to "form the cultural memory of the new ruling elite" in the 12th Dynasty.[47] Assmann considers Posener's identification of a political intention behind Middle Kingdom written texts to be correct not in terms of propaganda but that these texts were given the function of shaping future officials' cultural memory through the educational institution.[48] Therefore the texts' function is the root of our anachronism with defining 'literary texts', the

[42] Assmann 1999:7.
[43] Assmann 1999:3
[44] The *Onomasticon of Amenemope* is an exception to this issue, its stated aims are to list everything in the universe (Gardiner 1947:*2) and in doing so it acts a store of common knowledge which Ancient Egyptians would presumably appreciate as arbitrary. A better title given the use of the term sbAy.t in the rubric (Gardiner 1947:*1) would be the *Teaching of Amenemope*, thus falling into Assmann's 'cultural texts' definition, but the use of 'Teaching' is more commonly associated with didactic texts in our reception rather than a list.
[45] Assmann 1999:7.
[46] Assmann 1999:8.
[47] Assmann 1999:9.
[48] In this case it seems 'cultural memory' has taken on a definition of 'ideology' given that within this theoretical framework, cultural texts prolong the attitudes and traditions of an ideal society.

function means that they must be written in a general way and represent a general and representative character which then makes them comparable to our modern perception of literature.[49]

Assmann's only applied his theory to the Middle Kingdom. It does not apply easily to P. Pushkin 127 and due to the conflation of cultural identity, cultural texts and new rising elite, the results would give an ideological reading with emphasis on the top-down imposition. For the New Kingdom he has proposed a model reminiscent of his initial theory, he suggests that with the Ramesside period came the development of entertainment literature. Before this, entertainment was an oral product and the innovation of the Ramesside period was to create a body of written texts with the same function.[50] A separation grew between the classical literature of the Middle Kingdom and the more modern literature. Rather than explore the differences between the classical Middle Kingdom texts and the more modern New Kingdom texts, Assmann suggests that the cultural identity function remained with the classical texts allowing modern literature to develop as a "de-functionalized sphere of literary production and reception"[51]; thus he completes the circle back to his original non-functional/functional division and it applies to a more relevant historical timeframe for P. Pushkin 127. The issues with declaring literary texts non-functional have already been explored and this generic view of the New Kingdom literary landscape removes all interaction between literary texts and their cultural context whereas those of the Middle Kingdom cannot be separated from it. Moreover a significant portion of this theoretical journey through Ancient Egyptian literature is poorly argued, there is not much evidence offered to support his assertions on the Middle

[49] Assmann 1999:9
[50] Assmann 1999:12
[51] Assmann 1999:13

Kingdom[52] and concerning the New Kingdom side of the theory there is only one mention of an ancient Egyptian text, *The Myth of the Solar Eye*. Whilst the concept of literary texts acting as a store of cultural memory to perpetuate the core tenets and customs of a society is relevant to this study, the remainder relies upon an empirical perception of Ancient Egyptian society wherein education defines everything and the methods behind education were left unchanged from the 12th dynasty onwards. Literacy is a far more complex phenomenon than this theory allows for: differences in location, occupation, political and economic climate, teachers, students *etc.* all impact on literacy levels and the motivations for achieving varying degrees of literacy. Furthermore, conflating class divisions with literacy rates is a modern bias which, by extension, falsely correlates literacy rates with economic growth and individual wealth. This interpretation is in itself a remnant of 19th and 20th century presumptions.[53] Assmann's theory is too simplistic and in terms of general views of the Ancient Egyptian landscape of literature from composition to reception, it is flawed.

Another Egyptological theory which takes a different approach from the formalist criteria of Loprieno's definition of Ancient Egyptian literary texts is Richard Parkinson with his study of Middle Kingdom poetry. Rather than attempting to establish a normative theory, Parkinson's 2002 publication offers a 'pick 'n' mix' of hermeneutic approaches from the various schools of modern western criticism, the locus of which is the reader. Whilst not completely rejecting Loprieno's parochial approach,[54], the key difference is that Parkinson includes a study of the social context so as to restore a sense of pathos in the criticism – he acknowledges the intentionalist fallacy and its previous effects on critiquing Ancient Egyptian texts but urges caution against assuming an artistic autonomy. The text is still a product of a society and can

[52]Assmann argues that these observations should be evident for Egyptologists and not need detailed clarification (1999:9).
[53] Quirke 2004:37.
[54] Parkinson 2002:20.

never be autonomous from that context.[55] He does not create intentions on the behalf of the author(s) but suggests a general context to help shape the response of the reader and bring it closer to an ancient perspective. The problem with applying Parkinson's approach to P. Pushkin 127 is that his focus on the Middle Kingdom makes correlations with our later text questionable. By emphasising the social context of the Ancient Egyptian author and reader in the Middle Kingdom we cannot simply adapt it to the later New Kingdom. Thankfully the broadness of his theory means that we can derive a similar approach from some of his more abstract conclusions and apply aspects of it to P. Pushkin 127.

His principal problem with previous criticisms of Ancient Egyptian literature is the assumed audience. Specifically for the Middle Kingdom he proposes a more lenient model of ideology and literacy for the formation of literary texts,[56] from this he proceeds to argue how literary texts can be identified by the way they manipulate and translate the dominant ideology thus a literary text can be identified primarily by its "divergence from the cultural norms of official discourse".[57] To summarise: literature in Ancient Egypt is a product of the male elite, and whilst the literary representation of Ancient Egyptian society has the trappings of a meritocracy,[58] the extent of social mobility seems small.[59] The next step is to isolate the specific group within the hierarchy in which literary texts appear to be both composed and consumed. Rather than leave literary texts in the domain of the general 'elite' he argues that they come from a 'sub-elite' *i.e.* not members of the royal court. This undermines the top-down propagandist view of Posener and to a certain extent, that of Assmann. Parkinson's

[55] Parkinson 2002:20.
[56] Parkinson 2002:86.
[57] Parkinson 2002:91 – Taken out of context this can seem subversive in its proposal but by "divergence from cultural norms" Parkinson means that literary texts in Ancient Egypt tend to provide a playground for experimenting with ideological precepts and social values.
[58] *e.g. The Eloquent Peasant* wherein the protagonist rises on the back of his expertise with words.
[59] Parkinson 2002:67.

evidence for such a proposal is the provenance of the extant papyri we have in the corpus and that they come from the non-royal and non-elevated: the Berlin library is from an unknown tomb owner not in the royal court, the Ramesseum library is from the tomb of a lector priest, P. Leningrad 1115 (*Shipwrecked Sailor*) is most likely from the tomb of the scribe at Dra Abu el-Naga, the scribe which was named in the *Shipwrecked Sailor's* colophon.[60] Given that this is reader-response based theory it is completely understandable that it begins with the consumers of literary texts and works back from them to the form of the text to complete its definition of literariness. Parkinson's approach to identifying literary devices is not too dissimilar to Assmann's theory but whereas Assmann chooses to look for 'cultural memory', Parkinson examines how the texts interact with ideology rather than propagate it. Ideology is not 'static' in the Middle Kingdom but there is a 'uniformity' in its presentation in Middle Kingdom literature, there is also a disconnect between official discourse – tomb autobiographies, monumental inscriptions *etc.* – and the texts we are concerned with. For instance: the lower orders are accorded more respect and idealised as being efficient servants in tomb scenes but are treated less favourably in literature;[61] in tomb autobiographies there is little mention of evil and evil-doers beyond forms such as negative confessions, but the concept of evil and its manifestations is a key theme in teaching texts.[62] Such examples are a product of reader-response criticism and serve to help Parkinson separate the literary texts from the non-literary.[63] Parkinson suggests that literary texts are identified by their treatment of cultural fault lines and muted groups. [64] He does not see the Middle Kingdom literary tradition as subversive though, he proposed an entrapment model wherein conflicts with ideological values can be released within a literary frame for exploration and eventual

[60] Parkinson 2002:70-72.
[61] Parkinson 2001:95.
[62] Parkinson 2001:95.
[63] Parkinson 2001:20.
[64] Parkinson 2001: 92.

neutralization – literary texts always appear to have a harmonious conclusion.[65] There was an unwritten agreement between the dominant ideology and the not completely oppositional literary one. Literary subversion in the Middle Kingdom was a means of containment not dissimilar to execration rituals.[66]

The foremost difficulty in applying such a theory requires recreating a socio-political context. In Parkinson's application of his theory this is only evidenced and argued as being applicable to the Middle Kingdom and thus to extend it into the New Kingdom without a re-examination of the social and cultural setting undermines the theory. Assmann has indicated that potentially there was a divergence in seeing some forms of literature as entertainment in the New Kingdom, Parkinson counters that this was a much earlier development and was an essential part of the literary tradition in the Middle Kingdom: a metaphorical space where the sub-elite can play. But these contradicting theories must be resolved to progress with such a reader-response orientated approach. There is also a potential problem in perception and identification of contrary voices, Parkinson focusses on the difference between official discourse and literary discourse to pull out these voices but the representation of official discourse comes primarily from tomb autobiographies where the funerary context can skew a presentation of the self. Aside from these issues, the approach effectively argues in opposition to Loprieno that comparative culture can and should be used in the identification and criticism of literary texts to derive meaning. However, for P. Pushkin 127, there is not a significant body of equivalent evidence to compare it to. There is a wider range of Middle Kingdom texts than there are those which are from the same period as P. Pushkin 127. Furthermore, there is an ideological shift in the later New Kingdom, reading P. Pushkin 127 in light of potential ideological change is considerably more difficult.

[65] Parkinson 2001:104-105.
[66] Parkinson 2001:110.

The final theory of literariness for consideration in the course of this thesis comes from Baines, delivered and defended in the Millennium Debate at the International Congress in 2000. Baines' approach is not far removed from Loprieno in its scope. He attempts a more generalized and unitary theory rather than focus on a single period like Assmann or Parkinson. He chooses three criteria to draw the boundaries of literature: compositions which employ a 'connected discourse' (*a*), compositions which were 'culturally salient and maintained in the 'scholarly process' (*b*), and compositions which were composed for no single context (*c*).[67] The model is an attempt to define a corpus of Ancient Egyptian literature and at its broadest (*a*) it includes inscriptions as well as papyri. The next segment of the literary pyramid (*b*) narrows to those texts which enter the "stream of high-cultural tradition".[68] This refers to the text's influence and continuation through time and is similar to Loprieno's views on intertextuality and tradition[69] but, unlike Loprieno's theory, they are not explicitly associated with fictionality. There is also a crossover with Assmann's 'cultural texts', Baines rejects the idea that Middle Kingdom 'cultural texts' were composed for that specific purpose but concedes that certain compositions may have become 'cultural texts' at a later stage.[70] He goes further to criticise Assmann's simplicity because the incomplete nature of the corpus means we have an imperfect "sense of the continuity" of core cultural values.[71] The cap of the pyramid comprises the *belles-lettres* (*c*), the important definition for our purposes. He combines two approaches which have been identified above, that of early-Assmann wherein texts are defined by their context, and the fictionality portion of Loprieno's theory.[72] Using the genre distinctions proposed by Parkinson (Teachings, Discourses, Tales),

[67] Baines 2002:4.
[68] Baines 2002:8.
[69] Baines 2002:9.
[70] Baines 2002:10.
[71] Baines 2002:10.
[72] Baines 2002:6.

Baines argues that fictionality is the delineation for these texts from those of (*a*) and (*b*). They differ by their "range of attitudes and worldviews" and their fictionality is explicit from the 'fictions' in tomb biographies thus imparting the sense that they are manipulating model and ideal worlds for "thematic and ideological purposes".[73] He extends this restriction based upon genre to include the *Hymn to the Inundation* and its successors because of the unusual features for its form, making them both fictional and part of the 'stream of tradition'. This particular group of texts within the capstone are not a reaction to the First Intermediate Period but an attempt to formulate a stream of tradition, the "highest realisations of performance…could be given a lasting existence".[74] He also borrows from Parkinson's entrapment theory and goes further by offering an official reason for their existence in pointing out that their critical tone and distance from other genres is a "positive problematization" which "reinforces central values".[75] A propos, these texts within (*c*) are non-utilitarian aesthetic objects which celebrate high-culture, give pleasure and in some cases respond to "the fragility of order".[76]

Baines's theory is more encompassing in its boundaries of literature, distinguishing between Ancient Egyptian Literature in general and Ancient Egyptian literary texts (*belles-lettres*). However his distinction of the *belles-lettres* requires a mapping of genre derived from Parkinson's genre map, this is focussed on Middle Kingdom literature so when it comes to P. Pushkin 127 it will not be unusual to find it crossing such boundaries. It also returns to Assmann's old theory of literary texts being without purpose, being purely aesthetic objects, which require either an understanding of the original context or a complete abandonment of the social context. Although this use of Assmann's purpose theory by Baines is mitigated by the concept of literary texts being received and created as an exemplar of high-culture. As his

[73] Baines 2002:6.
[74] Baines 2002:7.
[75] Baines 2002:7.
[76] Baines 2002:8.

theory is more of a hybrid of Loprieno, Assmann and Parkinson, its implications will be considered in reference to their original ideas in the course of this thesis.

These theories will now be applied more specifically to P. Pushkin 127 but first we need to examine the alternate hypothesis that the text is not literary and non-fiction.

1. Literal Reading

An investigation of what P.Pushkin 127 is first requires an assessment of whether the assessment of it as a "tale" is indeed defensible. If P. Pushkin 127 can instead be read as a genuine letter between two people rather than two characters then it has clear implications for our current historical narrative of the period. Furthermore, using the literal reading of P. Pushkin 127 to compare against the fictional reading we shall develop a more holistic view of the text. This chapter shall examine the evidence for the temporal and archaeological context for P. Pushkin 127 and explore whether the events described by Wermai in his letter describe what is currently known about the historical era and milieu in which it was produced. This analysis will allow us to assess whether Wermai's sufferings can be read – at least a surface level – as a genuine description of events in the period of its production and what this could mean for P. Pushkin 127.

1.1 Archaeological Provenance

With a literal reading of P Pushkin 127, the archaeological provenance plays an important role in creating the context. The provenance of the papyrus is not verifiable, the evidence from the actual papyrus connecting it to the area of el-Hibeh is imprecise: outside of the content of the text, we have only the word of the Cairene antiquities dealer that the cache of P. Pushkin 127, P. Pushkin 120 (*Wenamun*) and the Golénischeff Onomasticon were uncovered by fellahîn near el-Hibeh sometime around 1891.[77] The palaeography, whilst sharing similarities with other texts from el-Hibeh, is not conclusive and there is no other internal evidence connecting the text to el-Hibeh. Wermai requests that Usermaatre-nakht make a copy of the letter to send on to the god, presumably this is our copy but it is unclear as to where this copy should be

[77] Golénischeff 1899:74, the details of the purchase accompany the first translation of *Wenamun*.

sent. Although there is little reason to doubt both Golénischeff's and his antiquities dealer's assertion of the provenance, an examination of the archaeological context based upon the site will need to be wary of conclusions which are drawn exclusively from the historical narrative at el-Hibeh.

The settlement of el-Hibeh is situated upon a limestone scarp bordering the east bank of the Nile. The distance between the desert and the river's edge narrows at this point leaving a small strip of cultivated land[78] which is roughly 300m wide at its narrowest and stretching to 900m.[79] The minimal agricultural ability of the settlement is supplemented with suitable areas for quarrying.[80] The scarp itself rises up to 250m above the flood plain in the eastern part of the site[81] providing a natural promontory over the river and mostly avoiding the impact of the inundation. Wenke argues that the level of the inundation has been shown to be particularly variable at this site and suggests, citing Butzer, that there was "a sustained decline in flood levels after 1200BC on a scale sufficient to promote flood plain desiccation". The key feature of the settlement is its location at the "natural juncture" between Upper and Lower Egypt, near Heracleopolis. Both the topography and the location suggest that the settlement was strategically located to monitor traffic along the Nile or provide a defensive setting near the border.

The extent of systematic archaeological excavations at the site is limited and it has also been substantially looted. Wenke describes the site as being pockmarked by looter's pits, some to a considerable depth, although most Egyptian sites have been subjected to centuries of looting

[78] Grenfell & Hunt 1906:1.
[79] Wenke 1982:6.
[80] Grenfell & Hunt 1906:1.
[81] Wenke 1982:5.

"el-Hibeh has suffered more than most".[82] In spite of this there have been substantial text finds from the site[83] since the 19th century, albeit sometimes with questionable provenance (such as is the case with our cache).[84]

The most significant excavations at el-Hibeh were carried out initially by Daressy who partially excavated and recorded the inscriptions from the Temple of Amun-of-Great-Roarings (built by Shoshenq I) in 1892.[85] Other teams led by Grenfell and Hunt,[86] Kamal, [87] Junke, [88] Ranke[89] and Paribeni[90] have also carried out excavations to varying degrees, mostly concentrated on the necropolis outside the walls or aforementioned temple of Amun-of-Great-Roarings. In more recent times, Wenke led an American expedition from the University of Washington in 1980 to map the topography of the site and carry out preliminary investigations. Since 2001, the University of California (UC Berkeley) has taken over the excavations of the site, returning annually under the guidance of Redmount.[91] These most recent excavations have focussed mostly on the Coptic remains in the Northern end of the site.

1.2 Dating P. Pushkin 127

A chronology for el-Hibeh has been hampered by the limited but complicated archaeology. The site was occupied for a substantial period of time and each successive occupancy

[82] Wenke 1982:11 see also more recent accounts of looting after the Arab Spring, http://www.pasthorizonspr.com/index.php/archives/03/2012/massive-looting-at-el-hibeh-egypt, accessed May 2012.
[83] For a full catalogue of the textual finds from el-Hibeh see the website of the UC Berkeley excavations, http://neareastern.berkeley.edu/hibeh/, accessed May 2012.
[84] Particularly relevant to this study is the collection of 21st Dynasty letters uncovered by Spiegelberg in the late 19th century Spiegelberg 1917:1.
[85] Daressy 1901:154.
[86] Grenfell & Hunt 1906.
[87] Kamal 1901:84.
[88] Junker 1912:98.
[89] Nauerth 1996:1.
[90] Bresciani 1959:.1.
[91] Redmount 2007:303.

damaged the evidence left by the previous tenants. Generally however, a significant portion of the archaeology dates to the 21st dynasty: the enclosing wall of the city contains bricks stamped with the names Menkheperre and Pinudjem[92] - a high priest of Amun and Pharaoh[93] respectively during the 21st Dynasty. This is matched by the palaeography of *Wenamun*, P. Pushkin 127 and the Golénischeff *Onomasticon*, as well as the references in the letters of the scribe Horpenese to contemporary figures of the 21st Dynasty.[94] *Wenamun* has received the most philological attention: Möller suggested that the handwriting was not contemporary with the contents of the text, specifically the year 5 mentioned in the opening line, and dates the handwriting to the 22nd Dynasty because of the odd ligature Xt at the end, which is similar to an instance found on greater Dakhleh stela.[95] Goedicke argues strongly in favour of this hypothesis because of a jotting on the verso concerning the transfer of an unnamed commodity from an individual with a 'semitic-sounding name', Nikrija, and because the content fits with the political situation at the start of the 22nd dynasty, that is a renewed interest in Syria-Palestine and the archaeology at el-Hibeh indicates the settlement receives increased political attention.[96] On the other hand, Gardiner suggests the Golénischeff *Onomasticon* and *Wenamun* were written by the same scribe and dates them both to the closing years of Ramesses XI, based on the date stated in *Wenamun*.[97] Similarly Lichtheim argues the report was written directly after the events it details,[98] and Ritner also supports a date at the start of the 21st Dynasty.[99]

[92] Wenke 1982:7.
[93] Dodson 2012:207.
[94] Wente 1990:206.
[95] Goedicke 1975:6; Gardiner 1933:26; Möller 1927:29
[96] Goedicke 1975:9.
[97] Gardiner 1947:28.
[98] Lichtheim 1976:224.
[99] Ritner 2009:87.

The palaeography of P. Pushkin 127 is meticulously examined by Caminos, who prefers the idea that all three papyri are written in different but related hands, probably sourced from the same institution, and are all palaeographically from the same time during the 21st Dynasty.[100] For a palaeographic context he draws similarities in all three papyri to the *Decree of Amonrasonther for Neskhons* (P. Cairo 58032), an oracular decree in favour of Pinedjem and a papyrus of King's Mother Nezemet. [101]

A general date of the 21st Dynasty is the closest period in which we can assume P. Pushkin 127 was written, this does not necessarily mean it was composed at this time though. As it cannot be narrowed down further we cannot entirely rule out the possibility of the text dating from the early 22nd Dynasty nor can we ignore a date of the late 20th Dynasty either but the most secure form of dating available for the text, the palaeography, is more indicative of early to mid-21st Dynasty. The political and social situation of this period at el-Hibeh is equally as unclear. Kitchen suggests that the settlement was strategically located, an assumption based upon its proximity to the Nile and siting near the juncture of Upper and Lower Egypt.[102] Evidence from the letters of Horpenese refers to el-Hibeh as the 'Promonotory' and Horpenese himself holds the position of temple scribe of 'He-of-the-Camp'.[103] P. Strasbourg 33 calls upon 'the captain of the shield-bearers' to see to the 'warriors of the Neshyet who are living at the Promontory' and to 'send a watch onto the ramparts'.[104] Later on in the same letter there is a command to seal off the settlement and prevent everyone from either entering or leaving. P. Berlin 8523 is a letter from the 'troop captain and scribe Shedsukhons' to the

[100] Caminos 1977:3.
[101] *c.f.* Gunn 1955:83-105; Ritner 2009:145-158.
[102] Kitchen 1973:248.
[103] Wente 1990:206.
[104] Wente 1990:207; Spiegelberg 1917:8.

'Kushite cadet Painebenadjed' about land and tillage rights[105], all of which reinforce the idea of el-Hibeh as a garrison and connected to Upper Egypt. Variously the names of Menkheperre (P. Moscow 5660, stamped mud brick), Masahert (P. Strasbourg 21) and Pinedjem (stamped mud brick) all appear at el-Hibeh from the 21st Dynasty and all strengthen the argument that el-Hibeh was an Upper Egyptian station. It is presumed from the existence of this garrison that there was a border nearby which was worth defending. Of the textual evidence of this period from el-Hibeh it is only *Wenamun* and P. Pushkin 127 which refer to northwards travel into the delta, there are far more references to Upper Egyptian figures and places.

1.3 Contents of P. Pushkin 127

Turning to P. Pushkin 127 with this date and context in mind we can proceed to assess the text. Firstly there is the issue of this being a copy of a letter (mjtt tA Sat). From a literal perspective the most likely situation is that this letter is passing from Upper Egypt, where Wermai is at the end of his story, to Lower Egypt, addressed to the royal scribe at the Residence, which is presumably, given the time period, at Pi-Ramesse. At el-Hibeh the letter is intercepted and a copy is made for a reason that is unclear. Subsequently we have a preamble (17 lines) which is in keeping with epistolary practice, a common courtesy appropriate to the differences in the social hierarchy. Wermai wishes the recipient excellent health and freedom from illness before switching to offer advice on navigating the netherworld, perhaps as a consequence of Wermai's brushes with death as described later in the letter.

Once the necessary preamble is completed we get to the main body of the letter. Wermai was removed from his position, he was gbj: defrauded, cheated, afflicted, and exiled from his

[105] Wente 1990:209.

city, losing all his property. Enemies robbed him and either killed or imprisoned women and children, his servants 'took the lead of them'. He was thrown out of office, and forced to wander whilst the country dissolved into chaos: 'enveloped in the flames of war'. This summary is typical of Wermai's approach to explaining his sufferings, they are oblique with no details or clarity and he makes a habit of skipping over any events which should be more important considering the request embodied by this letter is for justice.

Wermai then joins the crew of a ship and first travels to Chemmis (near Buto), from there he proceeds outside of the borders to Pedjetshu, jumps to the opposite side of the delta to Tjemeh (Libyan territory) and Tjehnu before returning from the foreign lands to Troia (Tura) and travelling upstream into Upper Egypt, arriving at Kenmet (the Kharga Oasis). In corroboration, the Banishment Stela details Menkheperre's return of exiled servants from the Kharga Oasis[106] and this has been taken by Kaper as an indication that the oases were where adversaries of the administration were banished to.[107] For Wermai this implies that his exile is not self-imposed but forced by the administration.

Continuing with the letter, this is an erratic, long and complicated journey in which we have to assume Wermai abandoned the boat along the way. Wermai clearly does not consider this wandering around the perimeters of Lower Egypt to be important to his story, it is delivered rapidly with scant information. In Kenmet, Wermai's suffering continues as his previously unmentioned horses and chariot are 'wrested' from him,[108] he is beaten and is forced to carry on wandering between villages on foot. He is treated as a stranger with no friends, when he does make friends they do not remain so for long. Wermai launches into a soliloquy about his victimisation and loneliness and worries about what would happen if he were to die on the

[106] Ritner 2009:127.
[107] Kaper 2009:158.
[108] It is not clear from where he obtained a horse and chariot but it contradicts the image of Wermai as a pauper.

desert-edge. However this can all be solved by informing the god of his problems. It is at this stage of the letter that Wermai states his first request: 'do send a messenger to him with a copy of my letter from your place'.[109]

After the first request, Wermai continues to list his current grievances: 'I know of no grain, nor do they know of it.'[110] He and his neighbours are starving, the Nile has stopped so they cannot provide for themselves and the local official turns away any pleas as well as restricting wages, overtaxing people and using false corn-measures. The one time this particular official was questioned by 'an inquirer', presumably a superior, he declared that he would produce 'heaps of grain' but instead in an unusual turn of events, took Wermai to court. Wermai begs the recipient for help with these matters; he begs that justice is done against the one who is victimizing him: 'O that he may attack my suppressors'.[111]

Wermai's letter ends here. He has outlined at length his troubles, from his fall from presumed high status, to his temporary exile from Egypt to specific incidents of violence and judicial malpractice. Wermai has made two requests of Usermaatre-nakht: that he makes a copy of the letter for the god, and that he send someone to attack his current enemies who are pursuing unjust legal and physical action against him and his neighbours. He thus wishes to resolve both his past troubles with the gods which have led to his loss of prosperity, and his current pressing concerns of starvation and lawsuits. As Usermaatre-nakht is a Royal Scribe it is perhaps not unwarranted to read this letter as a plea to the Pharaoh himself to take action. Thus, the unfair persecutions of Wermai in Egypt, which have been dated to sometime in the 21st Dynasty, depict an image of Egypt in a state of war, famine and anarchy. In order to read this text as a literal letter, written by a real man named Wermai to Usermaatre-nakht, this

[109] Caminos 1977:44, this can be read as being self-reflexive about the letter's own composition.
[110] Caminos 1977:44.
[111] Caminos 1977:65.

image needs to correspond with our current understanding of historical events in Egypt during the 21st Dynasty.

1.4 P. Pushkin 127 in the 21st Dynasty

Having established a timeframe for the text and examined the contents, we need to investigate how Wermai's account of Egypt fits in with the historical narrative of the period. The transition to and start of the Third Intermediate period was marked by significant political change, a weakening of Egypt's economic prowess and a loss of power in the wider region. At the close of the 20th dynasty under Ramesses XI the Viceroy of Kush, Panehsy moved to take control of Thebes and had out to be forced out by Piankh,[112] at the great cost of losing Nubian territory and its economic resources. Separately, possibly due to ongoing economic troubles, there was a sizeable issue with tomb robberies of the Royal Tombs on the West Bank.[113] At the start of the 21st Dynasty the country was ostensibly, once again, divided between the North and South[114] and suffered a loss of status in the Levant.[115] Back in the South the seat of power had transferred to the High Priests of Amun who began to style themselves as pharaoh,[116] leading a theocratic authority dominated by Amun. The rule of this theocracy does not appear to have been completely peaceful or untroubled, the dead pharaohs of the New Kingdom were reburied, some several times, by the High Priests of Amun and in

[112] Taylor 2000:331 *c.f.* the letters of Dhutmose on his journey to Nubia in year 10 of Ramesses XI (Wente 1990:185).
[113] Peet 1915:173.
[114] The clearest source is *Wenamun* which mentions Herihor in Upper Egypt and Smendes in Lower Egypt, although the level of its fictionality of the text is contested. Herihor's name appears within the royal cartouche and with accompanying royal titulary in the hypostyle hall at Karnak and the forecourt of Khonsu temple (Ritner 2009:82) whereas the Dibabieh Stela contains a full *Königsnovellen* of Smendes wherein he claims to have repaired Luxor temple in the aftermath of a flood (Ritner 2009:101).
[115] Wenamun's attempt to obtain cedar from Byblos for the bark of Amun requires a large payment to be made by the Egyptians when the impression is that Wenamun expects to be gifted the wood (Goedicke 1975:76).
[116] Lull 2006:336.

the process were stripped of all their grave goods, presumably to prop up an ailing economy struggling to manage with the loss of income from both Nubia and Lower Egypt.[117] Later on the 21st Dynasty there is more evidence of power struggles at Thebes when Menkheperre is forced to oust an opponent and retake the city, restoring it to the way it was.[118] It was not until the rise of Shoshenq I that Egypt was once again reunified.

The extent to which the upheaval in the upper echelons of society has a bearing on the wider social milieu is uncertain. Political headlines such as those detailed above give an indication of a country suffering an economic recession and where authority is frequently questioned but whilst these events overshadow the period which P. Pushkin 127 appears to refer to, the correlating evidence of social unrest is lacking. On a social level the Tomb Robbery papyri point to a forsaking of traditional morals to alleviate economic hardship.[119] Vernus proposes a situation which he terms 'a crisis of moral values' at the close of the New Kingdom wherein corruption is rife and the rule of law is ignored. An increased attention to corruption in normative texts, a democratization in the access to the divine, a decline in prosperity as a result of the instability of Egypt's empire, and contact with external societies eroded the traditional ideology and reshaped it to bring about the rise of the clergy at the end of the 20th Dynasty[120]. Wermai identifies corruption of both the social values in society when he is shunned by people, treated as an outcast, and when he is unjustly taken to court by a corrupt official. Vernus also suggests that the emphasis in texts such as the *Instruction of Amenemope* on denouncing the corruption of scribes[121] or in negative confessions in tomb autobiographies and the *Great Edict of Horemheb* point to a societal issue not previously apparent in such

[117] Ritner 2009:99.
[118] Ritner 2009:130.
[119] Peet 1930.
[120] Vernus 2003:131-149.
[121] Vernus 2003:135.

texts. This theory is lacking though, the attention accorded to corruption in such texts is sporadic and explained by the context in which these references appear: the *Great Edict of Horemheb* is politically motivated and looks to legitimate its author as well as provide stability after the Amarna period, it serves Horemheb's interests to present a corrupt and anarchic society for him to fix. The negative confessions in tomb autobiographies are used to exaggerate the virtues of the tomb owner are an archaic tradition. The *Instruction of Amenemope* is probably closer to the social reality but given its genre as a teaching text it is ideologically motivated and presents an ideal to aim for rather than a comment on the contemporary situation.

Furthermore, the 21st Dynasty letters from el-Hibeh do not provide such a tumultuous image of society. The letters to the god's father and temple scribe Horpenese are predominantly administrative in nature concerning the round –up of some runaway servants, a weaver evicting some tenants, landholdings of a troop captain and providing for a fowler.[122] One letter recommends that a watch be put on the walls and that el-Hibeh should be closed off[123] but it does not specify for what reason or for how long. The image of Egypt Wermai provides us is exceptional in that it presents an anarchic society suffering from economic loss, corruption and injustice. Taken literally this first-person perspective is powerful evidence for constructing a social history of non-elite classes for the period. It is because of this exceptional status it requires a much more rigorous and theoretical analysis of the way it expresses this image of the social landscape. The literati, the most likely source for P. Pushkin 127 and evidently a class Wermai at least used to belong to, would have been more exposed to political upheaval and instability than the lower classes because they stood to either gain or lose more as a result of changes in leadership. The representation of extreme injustice,

[122] Wente 1990:206-209; Spiegelberg 1917:1-30.
[123] Wente 1990:207.

poverty and despair in P. Pushkin 127 is just as equally motivated by a heightened awareness of the risks of political change and a demonstration of the author's concerns rather than a representation of the contemporary reality. In terms of the theme and ideas embodied by the text, a chaotic society is more serviceable for the purposes of Wermai as a character than a less extreme setting.

This is not to say that historical narrative must be completely discounted from such texts, there is an element of adapting broadly contemporary settings for the background of literary texts. Whilst *Sinuhe* is not a historical document, although some fiercely advocate that position,[124] it uses a historical setting which is corroborated with other sources as the backdrop for Sinuhe's story: the references to the transition between Amenemhet and Senwosret as well as geo-archaeological evidence from Memphis matching the geographic landscape within the text.[125] *Wenamun* similarly is based upon the premise that Herihor was constructing a bark of Amun, something that is corroborated by a representation in Khonsu temple.[126] Directly applicable to P. Pushkin 127 are the readings of Fecht and Lull. Fecht argues that P. Pushkin 127 is a representation of the suppression of HPA Amenhetep.[127] Similarly, Lull argues that the text is a representation of the events around the invasion of Thebes by Panehsy.[128] Lull's theory contends that Wermai is either representative of Amenhetep himself, or one of his collaborators who was also removed from office. The crimes that Wermai witnesses and suffers match those of the enemy troops and Panehsy in Thebes and the reference in the first section to enemies in the south is an allusion to

[124] Goedicke 2011:55-60.
[125] Bunbury & Jeffreys 2011:65-75.
[126] Kitchen 1973:252 n. 45
[127] Fecht 1962:28.
[128] Lull 2006:41.

Panehsy.[129] The request at the end of P. Pushkin 127 is a reference to the removal of Panehsy from Thebes by the pharaoh and the eventual reinstatement of the high-priests.[130] On the surface this theory appears convincing, the narratives match and the dating of P. Pushkin 127 is not far removed from the events Fecht and Lull are contending they relate to. The problem is that there is no externally verifiable evidence to support this historical reading. The events could just as easily refer to the issues at Thebes encountered by Menkheperre in the Banishment Stela.[131] The narrative fits, there is a tentative connection to the Kharga Oasis and there is very little external evidence to dispute the assertion. Herein lies the key issue when the text is read as a historical fiction, historiographically it adds a social depth to a political narrative. In P. Pushkin 127 they recognized a marginalized voice and, as is not uncommon with historical novels,[132] they reinterpreted the historical narrative to give the disempowered voice a situation and gravity. The use of a realistic or contemporary setting drawing upon the author's surroundings makes the treatment of historical information in the text uncertain and it is because of this uncertainty we need to investigate the text from a literary perspective.

[129] Lull 2006:42.
[130] Lull 2006:42.
[131] Ritner 2009:127.
[132] de Groot 2010:149

2. Narrative and Fictionality

What we read into P. Pushkin 127 varies dramatically based upon whether we interpret the text as a fictional piece of literature or a non-fictional, literal text. Investigating whether the text takes place in a model universe where both the author and the reader are in agreement as to the fictional setting, or whether the reader is made to understand the text as a sequence of events which take place in their shared universe, fundamentally changes the meaning of the text. The concept of 'fictionality' is easily nested in the wider structure of 'narrative', which is a presentation of a sequence of connected events. Studying the way in which the events are presented in a text, the way they progress and the connections between them accentuates those events which are given greater attention and highlights the more aesthetic and literary devices at play. A narratological approach is one of the most basic methods of investigating fictionality, rather than beginning by scouring the text for small linguistic markers the whole narrative should be considered and then the finer details need to be examined.

2.1 Narratological Approach

Modern narrative theory is rooted in a distinction, proposed within Russian formalism by Shklovsky, between the *fabula*, 'a series of logically and chronologically related events caused or experienced by actors',[133] and the *sjuzhet*, the way in which those events are presented.[134] The difference between these two poles and where the text can be placed in relation to them can give us an idea as to the literariness of a text.[135] This does not determine the extent to which a text is fictional but provides us with a measure of the level of

[133] Bal 1997:5.
[134] Lowe 2000:17.
[135] Cunningham 2011:83.

embellishment and manipulation of the content which we can then develop into a more focussed and specific approach for Ancient Egyptian literature designed to identify markers of fiction. Overall in our methods of analysis, defamiliarization is the key concept: it means that the content of a text is subordinate to its language and, as in Shklovsky's analysis of *Tristram Shandy*, 'by violating the form he [Laurence Sterne] forces us to attend to it'[136], 'the most literary thing a writer can do is to draw attention to the devices themselves'.[137] Whilst this concept is rooted in western criticism, when we look for the literariness of Ancient Egyptian texts through *belles-lettres* or the mdt-nfr.t we are looking for these devices and judging how much more perceptible they are in a sbAy.t than in a decree. This, defamiliarization is one of the reasons why P. Pushkin 127 has been called literary; Caminos for example considered its vocabulary to be more verbose than he would expect for a typical letter and as such, the form was unfamiliar to him.[138]

Within this model of analysis, there are five different rhythms which are used in narratives making up the *sjuzhet*: ellipsis, where an event is skipped; summary, where an event is only outlined; scene, where the event is presented as close to the *fabula* as possible; slowdown, where the event is stretched out; and pause, where everything is stopped (as in a description of a setting or individual reactions).[139] In P. Pushkin 127 we are not accorded a narrative clock which informs us how long each event took. *Wenamun* contains some very loose temporal markers from which we can vaguely identify a timeframe,[140] but in P. Pushkin 127 in fact there is not even a relative time to work with, the tempo is controlled entirely by the level of detail given in explaining each event. There are only four types of rhythm used in P. Pushkin

[136] Shklovsky trans. Lemon & Reis 1965:30.
[137] Selden 1988:269.
[138] Caminos 1977:80.
[139] Lowe 2000:40; Cunningham 2011:84-5; Bal 1997:103-111.
[140] Sass 2002:248.

127, perhaps even only three depending on how one reads Wermai's run in with the local official at the end. We also have an issue with the form of the text: as it is presented as a letter we could read it as a one-sided conversation. In which case the lengthy preamble can be classed as a scene, a real time discussion between two people, but it is more prudent to approach this text as story and thus consider it a narration of a story, in which case the preamble is best understood as a pause, outside of the narrative clock. On the whole we would expect a letter to be predominantly summary with pauses for the preamble; a fast pace with minimal detail and rhetorical embellishment of events, and surprisingly, given Caminos' interpretation of P. Pushkin 127 as a 'Tale of Woe', the narrative in his translation mostly sticks to this form. The *sjuzhet* is not far removed from the *fabula*. After the preamble, the details of Wermai's fall are dispatched with curtly and his journey beyond the borders of Egypt is itself on the border of ellipsis and summary given its sparse detail. The second robbery, where he loses his chariot and horses, is also quickly outlined and it is only after this that Wermai offers some insight into his thoughts in a pause of the narrative. This is also why the request for a copy to be made of his letter seems the natural ending for this text both in terms of the typical form of a letter and the symmetrical narrative rhythm: a lengthy pause for the preamble, several summaries of events and rounded off with a pause for the request.

However the text carries on and, when Wermai has a run in with local official, the rhythm changes. For this second stage of the text we have an ellipsis during which Wermai has settled, started a farm and become part of the local community. A brief pause follows for Wermai to describe the effect of the famine on himself and his neighbours then a very brief summary of the causes. A scene ensues between the 'master' and the 'inquirer' trailed by another summary between Wermai and the 'master' where our protagonist is reported to the 'magistrates'. A final scene details how Wermai is being oppressed by these burdensome

taxes and the text finishes with an extended pause in the form of a prayer for justice. This entire second part of the text has an unusual rhythm compared with the first part but it is fitting for the final request being made at the end: more detail is required to justify the larger request so it makes sense that more embellishment and detail is required in the *sjuzhet*.

The gauge of this text's literariness from such an approach is minimal and predictable given the form as a letter. The ending reveals a greater degree of literariness but in general P. Pushkin 127 presents a summary of the *fabula* with pauses for courtesy, requests and Wermai's personal opinions. Caminos' opinion that the 'writing is terse and direct; the story is well-told and unfolds rapidly and smoothly'[141] is given credibility in this model but this raises the question as to why he considered it literary when the plot was 'simple' and 'realistic'. Caminos' assertion appears to be based upon the text's linguistic features and intertextuality, namely a wide vocabulary, restrained use of metaphor and that the 'elements of the story had already been treated in one way or another by earlier writers', particularly Middle Kingdom 'literature of propaganda'.[142] Perhaps the reason why there is little deviation between the *fabula* and the *sjuzhet* lies in the form of the text as a letter: 'whether or not we are predisposed towards acceptance of them [forms], we learn them as we learn a language…if they appear in shapes preposterously false we will reject them'.[143] P. Pushkin 127's strict adherence to the narrative structure of a letter makes it more palatable and realistic to an Ancient Egyptian audience.

Later developments in narratological approaches are considerably more difficult to apply to Ancient Egyptian literature. The development of Propp's morphology, the fairy-tale functions, provided a more 'systematic analysis of folktales' and created a rigid schematic of the types

[141] Caminos 1977:79.
[142] Caminos 1977:80.
[143] Kermode 1967:144.

of characters and events in a narrative.[144] In two completely contrasting studies of P. D'Orbiney (*Tale of Two Brothers*) Assmann concluded that Propp's functions mark the tale as a rite of passage which is not known as a form from Ancient Egypt,[145] whereas Tower Hollis concludes that the rite of passage is a universal folk tale regardless of its disconnect with Ancient Egyptian cultural forms.[146] It is worth noting that Cunningham found the application of such a model to the narrative of the Mesopotamian story of *Sargon and Ur-Zababa* straightforward but advocates a wariness towards the subjectivity 'inherent in correlating characters and events'.[147] The subjectivity of an approach which looks for common character types and events is cause enough to progress and consider Loprieno's more linguistic approach to fictionality.

2.2 Fictionality

The narratological analysis has identified P. Pushkin 127 as replicating the form of a letter in a less than literary way, this could be because the text is intended to be convincing to its audience who will not be as effected by its contents if it is presented in a more embellished and slower narrative. Therefore we need to look closer at the text to find evidence of fictionality. Loprieno's approach to fictionality requires us to look at the meta-linguistic features of P. Pushkin 127 and is best carried out when the text is studied apart from its historical context, this negates the risk of subjectively attributing interpretations to the text based upon external events. Rarely, at least for the semantically subjective definitions that surround discussions of 'literariness', the term 'fictionality' is simple to define: an agreement between the author and the reader as to the nature of the world where the text takes place.

[144] Cunningham 2011:85.
[145] Assmann 1977:24; Moers 2011:166.
[146] Tower Hollis 1990.
[147] Cunningham 2011:86.

Within this structure, fictional literature is set in a 'model universe' where 'thematic and ideological means' are used to manipulate the setting.[148] However we need to be able to discern when the universe used by the text is a model universe or when it is mimicking reality. Furthermore we need to be able to identify which features of the text can be used to demarcate fictionality when the usual stylistic markers such as prosodic structure or oratorical style would also, within the Egyptian context, typically identify the funerary corpus as also being predominantly fictional.[149]

The most obvious signs of fictionality are texts involving prophetic, oneiric and supernatural features – easily recognisable features of a text that are beyond reality, features that can only exist in a world where our 'basic conventions of concrete reality may be broken'[150]. For example, the *Shipwrecked Sailor* transfers our protagonist from the known world set in Egypt to an island where he is greeted by a snake:

'*I found it was a snake that was coming. He was of thirty cubits; his beard was over two cubits long. His body was overlaid with gold; his eyebrows were of real lapis lazuli…he said to me: "who brought you…?"'* [151]

However, with dreams, prophecies and extra-real events comes the issue of relativism wherein our modern scepticism disagrees with alternative beliefs developed within ancient ideological systems and potentially clouds our judgement. If a text appears fictional to us because of these features, that is not to say an Ancient Egyptian would make the same distinction, especially in texts which have strong religious connotations such as oracular texts. In addition to such features, it can be argued that literary texts are accompanied by different

[148] Baines 2003:6.
[149] Loprieno 1996a:43.
[150] Loprieno 1996a:44.
[151] Lichtheim 1973:212.

meta-linguistic features which are restricted to literary fiction and which allow a differentiation with the funerary corpora. The 'features of meta-linguistic character' which add a 'multiplicity of interpretive layers'[152] are the key to separating literary from theological texts. This 'multiplicity of interpretive layers' refers to sections in the text which can be both understood explicitly and as an allusion to an external event or character at the same time. Loprieno's choice example concerns the use of names in literary texts: he posits that the name Wenamun is an allusion to the later plot of Wenamun's adventure. *Wn-jmn* (May-Amun-Live) he cites as referring to the protagonist's eventual role[153] in proclaiming the virtues of Amun to Zeker-Baal.[154] The absence of a name is another good illustration of fictionality: such as in the *Discussion between a Man and his Ba*, the troubled and anonymous character is left available for the reader to insert themselves into the text rather than the text being experienced as a commentary expounded in the third person.

Applying this approach to P. Pushkin 127, the name Wermai (Wr-mA.j) is the only recorded instance[155] as a personal name but it derives from a priestly title wr-mA.w, 'Greatest of Seers',[156] which is attested as a personal name in several New Kingdom sources.[157] This connects nicely with Wermai's more modest previous role as an jt-nTr at Heliopolis and certainly the name is not without irony in the text. The layering of meaning required for

[152] Loprieno 1996a:44.
[153] Goedicke 1975:154.
[154] *Wn-jmn* is not an uncommon name in the late Ramesside period (Ranke 1935:78, 21), it is also known from P. Abbott and the letters of Dhutmose (P. Berlin 10494, P. Berlin 198.III). The use of this theophoric name in *Wenamun* is more likely an attempt at contemporary relevance than wordplay, making the character topical by giving him a common name appropriate for the time.
[155] Ranke 1935:81, 3; *TLA Lemma: 600201*.
[156] This title is attested from the tomb of Tjeti at Akhmim, 6th Dynasty (Kanawati 1992:312) but frequently occurs in the New Kingdom at Thebes (P. MMA 27.3.560/Tb 115/Tb 172/Amarna Boundary Stela K). The variant dilemma wr-mA.w-jwn.w, 'Greatest of Seers at Heliopolis' is attested from the 4th Dynasty at Giza in the mastaba of Weneshet, the mastaba of Merib and the mastaba of Seshat-hetep. This variant was altered to wr-mA.w-n-pA-jtn and the longer form wr-mA.w-n-pA-jtn-m-Ax.t-jtn, 'the Greatest of Seers for the Aten in Amarna' during the Amarna period (tomb of Meryre at Amarna and house of Pa-wah).
[157] Ranke 1935:81, 2.

deliberate irony would certainly help push the text into the fictional sphere but to understand the irony we have to understand the Ancient Egyptian response to such a device. Eyre attempted to understand the use of irony in *Wenamun* but when confronted with the question as to whether the use of irony was a deliberate rhetorical device in Ancient Egyptian texts he concedes that we can only perceive Ancient Egyptian rhetoric in our own horizon. He further notes that the 'central importance of wordplay' and the 'multiplicity and layering of meaning inherent in literary irony can never be discounted'.[158] In the Ancient Egyptian sense the ironic name is priming the reader: the name creates a connection with a respected and official title as well as the idea of vision. The tension is created between the social expectation arising from the name, the emotional expectation implied by the title and the resulting reversal of fortunes for Wermai.

The second name in P. Pushkin 127, that of the addressee, is Usermaatre-nakht (Wsr-mAat-ra-nxt), one of the names of Ramesses II.[159] There is a lot which can be read into this in the context of P. Pushkin 127 but first it needs to be acknowledged that in the period it is a particularly common name and, as with the name Wenamun above, could be used to make the text relevant to a contemporary audience. Looking further into the allusions cast by this name it is possible that Wermai is not necessarily addressing a royal scribe but royalty itself, the idea of kingship embodied by the name of Ramesses. As Wermai asks for justice against the injustices he has suffered and his request is aimed at the name Usermaatre-nakht, it could also be an allusion to the enforcement of justice within the text,

These multiple interpretations of the names in P. Pushkin 127 alone are not indicative of fictionality however they do demonstrate the depth of meaning which can be attached to

[158] Eyre 1996:237.
[159] Ranke 1935:85, 16.

character names within Ancient Egyptian texts. Combined with our previous study of the form of the text from a narratological perspective, the name Usermaatre-nakht is better understood as a contemporary reference than an allusion to the concepts of justice and kingship. However Wermai's name is unique in the available evidence and carries a greater depth of meaning with regards to the contents of the text. Thus his name has the appearance of being fictional in the wider context.

Another key part of Loprieno's model is that a text has to be placed between two poles, those that take the shape of topos and those that are mimetic: the 'ideological expectations of Egyptian society as transmitted to its officials' as opposed to the 'individual response to these expectations'.[160] The closer a text is to one of these poles, the more probable the fictionality of the text. If a text is deeply ideological and deterministic it will most likely be unrealistic. Similarly if a text is interpretative of the prevailing ideology, a response to it, then it is more likely to be expressed in a fictional setting for the comfort of both the author and the reader. The trap comes from attempting to define all Ancient Egyptian literature on this scale: to apply this model Loprieno has to divide texts into genres and locate the genres between these two poles. Genre definitions in Ancient Egyptian terms are different from modern definitions; they come in part from ancient terminology – for instance the mdt (discourses) or the sbAy.t (teachings) - but predominantly from style. Parkinson's approach, which is derived the critical works of Alasdair Fowler, is the preferred method of genre mapping and divides texts between teachings (sbAy.t), tales and reflective discourses.[161] Critically, Loprieno's division between topos and mimesis creates a system that only concentrates on the ideological content of texts; the literary text becomes a tool for either furthering an ideological belief or

[160] Loprieno 1996a:45.
[161] Parkinson 2002:109.

for responding to it from the individual, the system is closed off to alternative readings and reasons for the creation of fiction.

The *Prophecies of Neferti* would fall firmly into the topos category, as would the *Dialogues of Ipuwer*, they are both icons of the lamentation genre. Lamentation literature is best identified by the lament motif, a rhetorical 'then-now' formula[162] creating juxtaposition between mAat and jzft (disorder/chaos),[163] for which the argument can be made, is encoded into P. Pushkin 127. Lamentation texts 'describe truth though its absence', they depict the effects of ignoring Maat and describe a world which has abandoned the ideology.[164] In the case of P. Pushkin 127, the 'then' part of the motif is the preamble and use of Wermai's titles which he loses, the 'now' part is the incentive for, and requests in, the letter. This would place our text on the topos end of Loprieno's scale. However, P. Pushkin 127 is also mimetic, the language is eloquent for a late Egyptian letter but the style and form as a letter lends itself to be classed as a commentary rather than a lamentation. While the *Lamentation of Khakheperre-Sonbe* is similarly styled, discursive and set in the present, it lacks the detail of P. Pushkin 127 which brings in the element of realism that sets the text apart. The characterizations of topos and mimesis apparent within P. Pushkin 127 can be merged by an appreciation of its audience and its authorial intention, the latter element, Loprieno was evidently attempting to avoid. If the purpose of the text is teaching and wisdom then it falls under the topos category, if we class it as a discourse and commentary, it falls under the mimesis category: both indicate fictionality.

This 'multiplicity of interpretive layers' can go further with regards to P. Pushkin 127; it is a paradigm of connotative reading, if it is taken as a literary text. Within the form of the letter,

[162] Parkinson 2002:59.
[163] Tb 17 (P. London – On Horus' two heads: '[wnn] wa Xr mAa.t ky Xr jsf.t', 'one under Maat, one under Isfet'.
[164] Parkinson 1991:26.

the ‘multiplicity of interpretive layers’ has to be deduced from a study of its intertextuality connections, both deliberate and unconscious. The arrangement between the author in their personal context and the reader becomes embodied within the text as a result of social groups and the ideological discourse that they have all been exposed to. Loprieno assumes the ‘universe of texts’[165] theory from post-structuralism and adapts the work of Kristeva to the Ancient Egyptian universe of texts. She defines intertextuality as a ‘transposition of one or several sign systems into another’.[166] Within such a small corpus as that of Ancient Egyptian literature, a text will always score highly on a scale of intertextuality, as Parkinson phrases it: ‘the remarkable degree of cross-fertilisation’.[167] Loprieno counters this with two further criteria limiting a high score in intertextuality: firstly the text ‘must appear outside of its purported contextual frame’.[168] Both Baines and Loprieno cite the P. Pushkin 127 as ‘clearly composed fictional instances of genres that are extra-literary’,[169] ‘assigning the text to the proletarian narrative genre’.[170] The grounds for use of P. Pushkin 127 as an example are thin, making the text a copy of a letter separates it from the traditional form allowing a degree of freedom, and *Sinuhe* is a far more recognizable case in its adoption of the structure of an autobiography. Instantly classifying this stylistic device as indicating the fictional is presumptuous and debatable, adopting recognized formats merely permits the author to stay within Ancient Egyptian decorum but in Parkinson’s entrapment theory it also creates a secure area within which any malfeasances can be controlled. The second criteria is publicity, the text must be ‘accessible beyond the time and space of its composition’.[171] This a condition to allow monumental epigraphic texts to move in the literary sphere when their medium is

[165] Loprieno 1996a:51.
[166] Kristeva 1984:60.
[167] Parkinson 1991:26.
[168] Loprieno 1996a:51.
[169] Baines 2003:5.
[170] Loprieno 1996a:51.
[171] Loprieno 1996a:52.

changed, namely the *Loyalist Teaching* or the *Qadesh Inscription* and has little bearing on our single papyrus.

In conclusion, according to Loprieno's approach to fictionality there is a strong argument that P. Pushkin 127 displays some of requisite markers of fictionality in Ancient Egyptian texts: meta-linguistic devices which can be interpreted in multiple ways and can easily be located at either end of the topos-mimesis scale. A major part of Loprieno's theory we have not yet considered is the degree of intertextuality, how the text interacts with genre and how its form has a bearing on the content. Once these issues are investigated we will have a clear idea of how fictional, and by extension how literary P. Pushkin 127 is in terms of the rest of the Ancient Egyptian literary canon.

3. Form and Genre

Of equal importance to the narrative and meta-linguistic markers in P. Pushkin 127 for assessing both its fictionality and its meaning is the genre of the text. We have already established that its narrative does not argue strongly in favour of the text being fictional but in terms of Loprieno's theory of fictionality, P. Pushkin 127 so far rates highly. A key factor in Loprieno's theory is how the text fits in with other Ancient Egyptian genres so we therefore have to consider how P. Pushkin 127 fits within a genre framework. We need to examine the similarities and differences with other texts from the corpus and identify what effect these comparisons have on our understanding of the meaning of the text.

For a full understanding of the genre of P. Pushkin 127 we need to make a clear distinction between 'genre' and 'form'. This thesis uses Parkinson's citation of Raymond Williams, who defines genre as 'a convenient term to categorize the multiplicity of notations and conventions evident in actual writing',[172] and this definition is only applicable to the content of the text. 'Form,' on the other hand, is the way that content is presented, the frame of writing within which the plot, the emotions, the interpretations all reside. For P. Pushkin 127 and a number of other Ancient Egyptian texts, the form is taken from the administrative and theological sphere: *Sinuhe* has the vague form of a tomb autobiography and *Wenamun* takes the form of an administrative report. The form is a fixed and rigid design which, to an extent, can shape the content: P. Pushkin 127 displays the narrative style of a letter whilst containing content which has been previously perceived as a 'tale' and a 'lamentation'.[173] By first considering the impact of the form and by identifying literary texts with similar forms, when we come

[172] Parkinson 2002:34.
[173] See pg. 4.

later to investigate genre we can see the extent to which the text has been warped by its form, how the genre has adapted to the frame.

3.1 Form

P. Pushkin 127 takes the form of a copy of a letter, a form we have already discussed when studying the text's narrative.[174] Letter writing was abundant in Ancient Egypt, our earliest example, P. Berlin 11301 from Abusir, dates back to the 5th Dynasty.[175] The evidence of the use of letters in a literary context is much rarer and surviving literary texts in the form of a letter is restricted to just P. Anastasi I (*Ramesside Satirical Letter*) and P. Pushkin 127. If we expand our range to include fictional instances of letters then we can incorporate a selection of the Late Egyptian Miscellanies, the *Book of Kemit* and other model letters (P. Kahun III.2).

The *Ramesside Satirical Letter*[176] is the closest in form to P. Pushkin 127 in that it is a recognizable literary text in the epistolary format. As with Wermai, the 'author' Hori begins with a lengthy preamble consisting of an encomium to himself followed by one to the addressee, Amenemope, before continuing with wishes of health and happiness in both this life and the next. The content of the letter has been interpreted as a polemic against scribal education and makes extensive use of sarcasm to convey the message.[177] Hori also, like Wermai, demonstrates a wide vocabulary to convey a 'stylistic superiority' through eloquence.[178] The main similarity for the current discussion though is that they both use the recognized format of the letter to criticize and advise. Eventhough P. Pushkin 127 is more implicit in its advice, the target audience remains unclear. Separately from the *Ramesside*

[174] See pg. 30-34.
[175] Bakir 1970:3.
[176] Wente (1990:98-110) offers a good translation into English of the Theban version of the text but the most detailed analysis remains Fisher-Elfert's 1983 edition and 1986 commentary.
[177] Wente 1990:99.
[178] Wente 1990:99.

Satirical Letter, the much older *Book of Kemit*[179] from the 11th Dynasty uses the form of a letter to educate scribes. The language is functional rather than artistic, despite its slightly embellished narrative. The emphasis of the text remains on the form of the letter and its function as a model. It was one of the most widely received texts in Ancient Egypt, known a large number of New Kingdom ostraca and a writing board.[180] However, while the *Ramesside Satirical Letter* appears to be more a response to teaching texts due to its numerous aphorisms and sarcastic tone, the *Book of Kemit* was clearly used for teaching purposes: the conclusion extols the virtues of being educated in 'good' texts and tempts the reader with the prospect of being a scribe at the Residence.[181] Similar fictional model letters can be found in P. Kahun III.2,[182] although they are far more spartan than the *Book of Kemit* in their use of narrative and their content and appear to be focussed on standardising the form of the letter. At least nine such letters have been found on a single papyrus, all with a matching layout and similar language, which highlights their function as demonstrations of the epistolary form for scribal students or institutions.

These literary and model letters outline a clear form for Ancient Egyptian letters. The first line should contain the name the recipient and preferably the sender too, as well as their titles and location.[183] Then the 'complimentary preamble' follows: an encomium with wishes for the health and general wellbeing of the recipient. The length and effusiveness of this section can depend upon both the social or professional relationship between the sender and recipient, and the size of the request contained within the body of the letter; when the letter is from a

[179] Wente's translation (1990:15-16) is the standard. A more recent study has been undertaken by Dakin (1992). It was initially compiled by Posener in 1951 with key studies from Barta (1978), Brunner (1980) and Parkinson (2002).
[180] Wente 1990:15.
[181] Wente 1990:16.
[182] Griffith 1898:67-70; Wente 1990:69-70.
[183] Bakir 1970:35-40.

superior to subordinate this section tends to be omitted entirely.[184] The second section of the letter will outline the reasons for the request and is followed by the request itself. The letter will end with a brief conclusion containing more praises, which will be considerably shorter than the preamble but their length is still reliant on the relationship between the sender and recipient.[185] This relationship also has some bearing on the overall style of the letter.[186] Whilst the length of each section will vary depending on the relationships involved and the specifics of the request, the form of the letter will always remain the same due to the training and instruction scribes received. P. Pushkin 127 generally follows this form[187] but the wide vocabulary and elements of self-reflection in short, punctuating passages - notably similar to the aphorisms in the *Ramesside Satirical Letter* and absent from any model letters - denote the text as being a variation on the form and it is these elements which have helped lead to the classification of P. Pushkin 127 as literary.

3.2 Genre Theory

Genre has been one of the foremost considerations in Egyptian literary theory since Hermann's identification of the *Königsnovelle* in 1938. Categorisations of Ancient Egyptian texts by genre have been applied in anthologies from Erman to Simpson as a method of defining and describing Ancient Egyptian literature. In general these tended to focus on definitions recognizable to modern, wider, less academic audience. The influence of certain Egyptian genres has been identified and tracked through non-Egyptian texts such as the Coptic *Cambyses Romance*[188] and some have even gone so far as to advocate for an influence

[184] Bakir 1970:55.
[185] Bakir 1970:65-70.
[186] Bakir 1970:71-93.
[187] See pg. 30-34.
[188] Spalinger 2011:269-278.

of Ancient Egyptian genres on Herodotus' *Histories*[189] and Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos*.[190] Genre is particularly important as a method of analysis as it shapes the reading process, it prompts an expectation in the reader as to the kind of events which will occur and how they will be presented, an expectation which then allows reader to judge the text in comparison to others. In a context where a complete literary tradition is now lost, a clear definition of genre can create a closed intertextuality to work within.[191] Nonetheless it is important to note that this is a process imposed by us from outside their culture and our interpretation of their genres would likely be quite alien to an Ancient Egyptian reader.[192] This is mitigated by the consistent form and structure of Egyptian literature which suggests a strong adherence to decorum by Ancient Egyptian writers and readers.[193] This argument for consistency of form is supported by Parkinson who reckons that fictional literature was a free space in which the sub-elite were able to express dissidence within understood limits: if the sub-elites have only defined limits within which to express themselves, forms will naturally repeat.[194] Genre is essentially the reader's frame of reference, the various forms are learned with literacy and language and texts that stray too far away from the confines of these learned forms tend to be rejected. Most importantly genre study mitigates our lack of interaction with the ancient society. Through studying genres we construct a view of societal expectations, the ideas in a text which would be approved or disapproved of by Ancient Egyptian society, so our key to understanding a text's meaning is how that text works with genres.

[189] Dillery 2005:387-406.
[190] Laukola 2012.
[191] Parkinson 2002:33.
[192] For example Redford (1979:15) on Form-Critical Analysis: 'In Egyptian history-writing one encounters "historical stela", "Tagesbuch", "annals", "royal documents", without any indication that the users of these items are aware that their terminology is not necessarily derived empirically from Egyptian usage. What is the Egyptian for "Königsnovelle", for "royal document"? Why not let the texts speak for themselves and show forth their own categories?"
[193] Parkinson 2002:33.
[194] Parkinson 2002:107.

Genre definitions have been developed along every measure of a text, from metrical structures through to commonalities in theme. This thesis uses the definitions developed by Parkinson. This schematic rejects all Western genres such as comedy and tragedy, and instead uses Ancient Egyptian terminology as far as is possible. As these genre labels are derived primarily from the rubrics at the start of Egyptian texts (sbAy.t, mdt, Tsw *etc.*), it is not a theory which is directly applicable to P. Pushkin 127, as this theoretical reading alone would define it solely as a letter (Sat). Nonetheless, Parkinson's broader approach to terminology and his hierarchical categorisation of texts into the genres of Tale, Teaching and Reflective Discourse,[195] and latter sub-genres, makes his theory the most useful for understanding P. Pushkin 127 and its intertextual relationships with identified genres. By viewing P. Pushkin 127 within Parkinson's nested approach it is possible to recognise the text as a hybrid, and as an example of a genre in its own right.

There are two genres to investigate with regards to P. Pushkin 127: the first being Fischer-Elfert's argument that the text is a curse formula, the second is a more general comparison with lamentation texts from the corpus.

3.3 Curse Formula

Fischer-Elfert's reappraisal of P. Pushkin 127 argued convincingly that the text was a literary embellishment of the New Kingdom curse formula.[196] In a two-pronged approach derived from Loprieno's theory, he first looks at the general literary characteristics of the text, looking specifically at fictionality, and then goes on to look at the intertextuality of P. Pushkin 127 in comparison with Third Intermediate Period curse formulae.

[195] Parkinson 2002:109.
[196] Fischer-Elfert 2004:81.

The features of P. Pushkin 127 he considers to be indicators of its fictionality are: the juxtaposition between the opening formula and the subsequent narrative of misfortunes, the theme of loneliness in spite of Wermai travelling around inhabited places, Wermai's general treatment as a social pariah, and the lack of detail about Wermai himself. Some of these motifs, such as the lone wanderer, are identifiable in other literary texts. The lone wanderer is known from a several Middle Kingdom literary texts and whilst not a specific marker of fictionality, it can be understood as useful motif to plant the reader in the text, especially when the lone wanderer is in the first person, and to highlight the positive effect of society on the individual.[197] This feeds into the Ancient Egyptian meritocratic ideology, the rags-to-riches ideal, especially when the texts have happy endings.[198] When the endings of such texts are more fraught, it makes the consequences of the events in the text more personal to the reader.[199]

There are issues however with Fischer-Elfert's comparing of the preamble at the start of P. Pushkin 127 with the subsequent narrative and reading it as an aesthetic, binary device. As we have already established, such a preamble is not outside the 'stream of tradition' in common with the form of a letter and its length is accounted for by the hierarchical gap between Usermaatre-nakht and Wermai, given Wermai's new status as an exile. Interpreting this preamble as foreshadowing and as a juxtaposition of the latter issues which Wermai comes up against is a modern aesthetic judgement. It identifies binary oppositions as a method of creating tension. The form of a letter also explains the lack of detail concerning Wermai as person, presumably the sender and recipient are acquaintances and such detail would be redundant between them. However, the form does not explain why Wermai omits the details

[197] For example *Sinuhe*, the *Eloquent Peasant*, the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, the *Discourse of the Fowler*, *Discussion Between a Man and his Ba*.
[198] For example the *Eloquent Peasant*.
[199] For example the *Discussion Between a Man and his Ba*.

of his ousting as a titled figure which certainly seems relevant to the subsequent narrative. Given the previous assumption that Wermai and Usermaatre-nakht are acquainted, Usermaatre-nakht may already know of Wermai's loss of status. A stronger explanation in support of Fischer-Elfert's curse formula theory is that the precursor to the situation is irrelevant because it is the cursed status of Wermai which is the main focus of the text.

The syntax of curse formulae is split by Morschauser into two parts: the stipulation - a conditional clause, and the injunction - the actual threat.[200] Fischer-Elfert's argument is that P. Pushkin 127 is an example of the consequences to a victim of the injunction. Wermai's sufferings are as a result of him becoming cursed. Curse formulae were used in many situations: spells, wills, decrees, land transactions *etc.* They can be broadly split between apotropaic uses and juridical uses.[201] The juridical usage of such formulae is more prevalent and the curse tended to be 'effective long after the lifetime of the individual who imposed it',[202] intended to preserve the author's wishes in posterity. The several injunctions which Fischer-Elfert argues have been applied to Wermai begin with the giving a man's inheritance to another (Col 2.6). Wermai's property was taken from him thus leaving him with nothing to pass on. The loss of an estate was the 'destruction of the criminal's physical and financial support'.[203] The killing at his estate of the women (Col 2.7) is better understood in this context as the killing of his wife (or wives) and parallel threats against the family. Threats against the family are typically sexual in nature but the overall aim is to dissolve the familial line.[204] Next, Fischer-Elfert takes the emphasis on health and well-being in the preamble to correlate to a threat of affliction (Col 1.7). Death by divine affliction is explicitly indicated in

[200] Morschauser 1991:1 – he also takes care to re-label 'curse formulae' as 'threat formulae' because the word 'curse' is loaded with many connotations of divine intervention in English, I persist in using 'curse' in line with Fischer-Elfert's '*fluch*'.
[201] Morschauser 1991:xii.
[202] Morschauser 1991:2.
[203] Morschauser 1991:113.
[204] *c.f.* Morschauser 1991:122.

the Apanage stela.[205] There is an emphasis on death by disease, hunger and famine which can be identified at the end of P. Pushkin 127 in the episode Wermai has with the corrupt land-owner: 'I am sick at heart…I and those who are with me ache with hunger'[206] (Col 4.1-4.3). Wermai's treatment as a stranger by his friends (Col 3.8) and his general malaise (Col 3.10) is similarly attested in threat formulae. Furthermore there is the loss of a title[207] (Col 2.4) and the denial of burial rights[208] (Col 3.11).

The number of correlations with curse formulae demonstrates a thematic consistency; the overall aim of any threat is to interrupt the cosmological process of Ancient Egypt. This process is multi-layered and complex but to cover the relevant points: the aim of a person is to transform into an Ax after death, this can only be achieved with the help of one's living relatives who provide a proper burial. In return they inherit the deceased's property and in many cases, titles - as with all relationships in Ancient Egypt it requires reciprocity. A dissolution of inheritance, separation or even destruction of the family line, death without proper burial all interrupt this cycle and prevent one from joining the Ax.w, instead one is damned, one of the mwt.w.[209] Wermai's sufferings are those of a mwt. Fischer-Elfert draws a comparison with Job in reference to Wermai's hope that the divine will alleviate him of these injunctions but whilst the punishment of Job is an experiment with divine punishment, Wermai's suffering is the outcome of a formal process against him. This theory offers an explanation for why there is little detail about how Wermai lost his title, why the plot flits between seemingly unrelated events, why the language appears 'literary' to philologists and gives the text a meaning. Instead of trying to decipher why Wermai would send such a letter

[205] Morschauser 1991:93; Legrain 1897:16.
[206] Caminos 1977:71.
[207] Morschauser 1991:113.
[208] Morschauser 1991:120.
[209] Janak 2013:2.

or what kind of character he is we can focus on why the author would want to dramatize a curse formula. P. Pushkin 127's similarity with another genre has given us a purpose to look for in the text. A comparison with a broader, more literary genre is therefore needed to see what other variations can be read into the meaning of the text.

3.4 Lamentation

In addition to examining the thematic approach Fischer-Elfert takes, we should also consider P. Pushkin 127 in the much broader context of lamentation genres. Whilst there are clearly significant similarities with curse formulae, some of these similarities also crop up in other texts. The image of the lone hero searching for his place in the world is common throughout Middle Kingdom literature in particular and draws upon the advice of certain teachings; this is from the *Teachings of Amenemhet* giving reasons for avoiding such loneliness:

> 'None can fight by himself; no successful result can come without an ally'[210]

The *Loyalist Teaching* has an eloquent phrasing of the form:

> 'There shall be no sleep for the solitary man, one does not send a lion on a mission, no herd exists which can isolate itself from the enclosure'[211]

Alternatively, within the *Teachings of Ptahhotep*, the lone man is praised but the context is different. Children can either be a blessing or a curse, thus it is better to be alone.[212] The negative effects of individualism are prevalent in these texts, solitary men are robbed, driven from city to city by a desolation that has seized the land and nobody is available to help the pauper:

[210] Simpson 2003:170.
[211] Parkinson 1996:147.
[212] Simpson 2003:134.

'The land is seized by mobs and as for the brave man, the craven seizes his property'[213]

The *Dialogues of Ipuwer* carries a strong thematic connection to P. Pushkin 127, in the calamity described by both, men of integrity are turned to hapless paupers, poor become affluent, people are ambushed along the roads, the wealthy are thirsty, the grain is depleted and perhaps most iconic:

'Deafness has set in with regards to complaints'[214]

P. Pushkin 127 mirrors this calamitous world detailed in the *Dialogues of Ipuwer*. Whereas mAat is expressed in the Teachings in terms of ideals and tenets to live by, jsf.t is expressed in negative terms highlighting the social reaction and the upheaval of the order of the state.[215] Man is the detriment of order, the creator has provisioned the order to be maintained. The *Book of Two Ways* (CT 1130) depicts an image of the imposition of an ethical order on forces of chaos, depicted as serpents and storms. When Maat is undermined the world is upturned:

'Mounds will be towns, towns will be mounds'[216]

In this same way, Wermai's world has been inverted in the P. Pushkin 127: he had a title, family and belongings and now he has none whilst others who should not own such things (those who robbed him), now are owners of property. The relationship with these representations of a chaotic world in discourses such as the *Dialogues of Ipuwer* and the *Prophecies of Neferti* have previously been understood as linking P. Pushkin 127 to

[213] Simpson 2003:198.
[214] Simpson 2003:194.
[215] Parkinson 1991:31.
[216] Parkinson 1991:33.

'lamentation' as a genre.[217] However given wisdom literature's role in identifying the effects and helping the continuation of the Ancient Egyptian cosmological order these might be allusions to previous texts experimenting with such a world-view. In terms of genre, P. Pushkin 127 is best termed a discourse not because of its intertextual relations with other discourses but because the audience is already provided and the form entraps the contents of the text, it is an experiment with the role of mAat and what happens when it is violated.

P. Pushkin 127's role within genre can be variously interpreted as incredibly specific when considered as a literary representation of a curse formula, or loosely tied into the concept of wisdom texts when viewed in a broader comparison with other texts. In either reading the conclusion is that P. Pushkin 127 refers to a world without Maat in a fashion that has strong parallels with non-literary forms and earlier literary texts. In exploring this relationship with other genres we have highlighted the features and common themes which give the text its literary flavour but we have not yet considered the impact of these themes on the overall meaning of the text. It is for this reason we must look into the various roles ideology plays with P. Pushkin 127 and the effects of different ideological readings on the meaning of the text.

[217] Quirke 2004:19.

4. Ideology

In order to understand the meaning of P. Pushkin 127, we need to understand its ideological environment. We have already established its political context and identified how that has affected readings by Fecht and Lull, we now need to investigate the effects of more literary readings of the text. This technical area requires a significant theoretical understanding before looking at the comparisons between explicit representations of the ideology and P. Pushkin 127. Once these bases are determined, we can then progress to understand the various ideological readings which can be taken of P. Pushkin 127 and the effects of our modern ideological horizon on those readings.

The prevailing set of ideas, attitudes and social rules in Ancient Egypt are usually referred to collectively by Egyptologists as the principals of 'Maat'. The general definition of an 'ideology' is that it refers to a system of ideals that subjectively guide individual or collective reaction to specific events, but definitions vary in the scope of 'ideology's' application. In some scholarship, 'ideology' refers to the ideals of a particular social class whereas in others it is referred to as a political theory, it is even used in some cases to define an individual's set of attitudes.[218] 'Maat' as a term is a synecdoche when used by Egyptologists, in the modern definition it combines both influences from class strictures and political policies to the extent that it comes to encompass a lot more than what was included under the Ancient Egyptian set of principles. The use of the term 'Maat' in this chapter will be used in line with Egyptological scholarly convention as an aggregate of Ancient Egyptian ideologies. However to avoid the issue of presenting Ancient Egyptian ideologies as a homogenous whole under

[218] Žižek 1994:3 *c.f.* Eagleton 1991:1-2. For Egyptological positions see Parkinson 2002:86 who draws on the work of the cultural materialist Raymond Williams for his definition: 'a system of ideas propounded by the elite…manifest[ed] in official discourse – not just in legal and moral texts but also in religious and elite texts of commemoration and display'.

the banner term of Maat, Ancient Egyptian terminology and explicit identification of the sources will be used to foreground the different facets that make up our understanding of Maat and the differing expressions of it across different mediums. Another issue, as with Ancient Egyptian literature in general, is that the majority of the evidence expressing different aspects of Maat is from the elite classes. As such, the interpretation of Maat as part of an Ancient Egyptian ideology is only applicable to this group in society; that's not to say that the lower classes were completely separated from its influences but that there is almost no evidence to corroborate any potential implications of adherence to, or prevalence of Maat.

4.1 Maat

One of the most recent studies of Maat has been Karenga's monograph, drawn from his PhD thesis which undertook a critical analysis of Maat from a philosophical and Afrocentric perspective.[219] His broad definition of Maat is that:

> "Maat is rightness in the spiritual and moral sense in three realms: the Divine, the natural and the social…Maat is an interrelated order of rightness which requires and is the result of right relations with and right behaviour towards the Divine, nature and other humans…Maat is the constantly achieved condition of and requirements for the ideal world, society and person."[220]

He approaches Maat as a moral ideal which, by using the approach of the philosopher A. S. Cua, can be examined through two lenses: the ideal norm wherein Maat is a standard of

[219] Karenga 2004:12. Whilst the philosophical approach has clear merits at a theoretical level, the emphasis on separation from the Egyptological perspective has its flaws on a historical level, namely the application of evidence outside of its historical context. For example his study on the expression of Maat in the Old Kingdom uses the Shabako stone as a primary piece of evidence (2004:31), although it is a text from the 25th Dynasty written in an archaic style. Later in the same section he highlights inscriptions from the tomb of Rekhmire, from the 18th Dynasty (2004:36).
[220] Karenga 2004:10-11.

excellence and scale against which personal and societal conduct can be measured, and the ideal theme wherein Maat is an inarticulate and vague aspiration, a 'framework of possibility' rather than a clear and enunciated code.[221] Although he does not explicitly refer to Maat as an ideology, there is a crossover in that Karenga considers an ideal theme to be a plurisignation: "a notion that possesses as it were the power to suggest and stimulate different thoughts and interpretations".[222] This multi-faceted definition and approach to understanding Maat explains several issues which occur when Ancient Egyptian ideology has an effect on Egyptological scholarship.

One of the principal issues is Maat's existence in multiple realms; as a concept it is epistemological, moral and metaphysical. The immanency of the metaphysical, the lack of separation between what we as post-Enlightenment scholars would consider to be the spiritual side of the Ancient Egyptian cosmos with the physical can cause problems in modern interpretations where our ideological background leads us to impose a separation between the physical and the spiritual. For example, in Loprieno's attempt at defining Ancient Egyptian literature he struggles to come up with criteria to exclude theological texts from being included in his definition of literary texts.[223] Ancient Egyptian people were pragmatic in their approach to death and refused to identify death as an ending. In their perception, their cosmos, death is a continuity of life which just requires a formal transformation after the physical act of dying.[224] This concept of continuance through death is the key to understanding Maat, by imposing a modern distinction between life and death, spiritual and physical, Egyptologists skew the interpretation of Ancient Egyptian ideology attempting to make it fit a modern, western ideological horizon.

[221] Karenga 2004:4-5.
[222] Karenga 2004:5.
[223] Loprieno 1996a: 218.
[224] Finnestad 1989:89.

The problem in understanding Maat is the variance in its expression across different mediums and different archaeological contexts. Maat as represented in funerary culture (tomb texts such as autobiographies, Pyramid and Coffin Texts, lamentations *etc*.) is different from its presentation in Ancient Egyptian literature. In literature, Maat is presented in less certain terms,[225] whereas in tomb autobiographies the owner's heart is clear and knowable, wisdom literature teachings warn against the fickle nature of the heart.[226] The core concepts of Maat are not fundamentally different across texts but they are generally more sceptical in their expression in literature, we need to foreground the distinction between Maat as represented in literature and Maat as represented in other sources, otherwise we mingle two different perceptions under one banner term and hide the nuance which helps set literature apart. Nevertheless this is an understandable trait if Maat is considered in some respects to be an ideal theme, the variety in its expression stems from a lack of understanding of Maat in any concrete terms by Ancient Egyptians. A final principle to be wary of comes from a political perspective, adherence to an ideology will always vary on an individual basis and certain people will be more fundamental and literal in their understanding and application of an ideology than others. As the evidence from Ancient Egypt is heavily tilted in favour of a broadly homogenous group of people in terms of wealth and status, the elite, and one of the most common sources is the tomb autobiography, which has to essentially present the owner in a highly favourable manner ensuring continued attention after death, our perception of Maat is going to be focused on this level of society and evidence of its expression is going to be mostly fundamentalist.

4.2 Maat in P. Pushkin 127

[225] Parkinson 2002:92-98.
[226] Parkinson 2002:93.

Maat as expressed in literature is attested at the earliest from the *Teaching of Ptahhotep*,[227] which is vitally important when discussing the role of Maat in society not just because of its content but also because of its manuscript tradition and reception in the Middle and New Kingdom. A special mention of Ptahhotep is given in P. Chester Beatty IV, which offers a rare meta-textual insight to reception of Ancient Egyptian teaching texts and recognizes Ptahhotep as one of the eight sages with famed wisdom:

> "Is there another like Ptahhotep, or the equal of Kaires? Those sages who foretold the future…the children of others are given to them"[228]

The *Teaching of Ptahhotep* discusses Maat as a timeless concept that has been in place since the mythical past and elaborates on its juridical role in relation to 'greedy one(s)'.[229] It is predominantly a guide on etiquette for officials in the court but there are correlations with P. Pushkin 127, for instance maxim 17 helps explain why Wermai would consider formulating such a lengthy petition to Usermaatre-nakht:

> 9,4 - "be patient when listening to the words of a petitioner, do not dismiss him until he has completely unburdened himself"[230]

A more important excerpt which explicitly parallels P. Pushkin 127 is maxim 34 on generosity:

> 14,13 - "he whose stomach is empty is an accuser, and such an opponent becomes a bringer of woe"[231]

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[227] The only complete version is in P. Prisse (Lichtheim 1975:61; Parkinson 2002: 314), dated to the 12th Dynasty, but Lichtheim argues that stylistically it is a composition of the latter 6th Dynasty (1975:7;61). Hagen (2012:130-131) convincingly rejects such arguments that point to an Old Kingdom date and scholarly convention currently tends to date the text to the early Middle Kingdom (Hagen 2012:131; Parkinson 2002:49).
[228] Lichtheim 1976:177 *c.f.* Gardiner 1935:39.
[229] Lichtheim 1992:16.
[230] Simpson 2003:137.

The fear of famine and hunger is a long-standing concept; Pepinakht-Heqaib declares 'I have given bread to the hungry'[232] in his autobiography from the reign of Pepi II. Contrasting with P. Pushkin 127 in that the finale of the text is an elaboration of Wermai's and his neighbours' hunger and state of famine and furthermore (*Col*. 4,1-5), earlier in the text Wermai is depicted as being shunned by society, with nobody listening to his pleas. The *Teachings of Amenemhet*[233] correlates the treatment of strangers in society:

> 1,5 – "I was generous to the pauper, I sustained the orphan, I caused him who had nothing to become at length like a man of means"[234]

Similarly in the *Instruction of a Man for his Son*:[235]

> 4 – "He causes the lesser folk to emulate the great, the last become as the first.
> He who was lacking in possessions is (now) the possessor of riches.
> He who had only a little land is now the possessor of tenants.
> He brings land to him who had no successful landing.
> He who was homeless is now the possessor of a dwelling."[236]

What we would consider philanthropy and humanitarianism is a Maat-positive action in Ancient Egyptian ideology. In P. Pushkin 127 where Wermai is ignored by people and treated as a stranger (*Col.* 3,8), a xppw, he has no support structure to rely upon, as the support of other people abides by the ideals of Maat.

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[231] Simpson 2003:144.
[232] Lichtheim 1992:14.
[233] Originally translated from the now lost, 18th Dynasty P. Millingen but copies also exist on numerous New Kingdom ostraca as well as P. Sallier II (Simpson 2003:167).
[234] Simpson 2003:168 *c.f.* Lichtheim 1976:136; Quirke 2004:127.
[235] Similar to the *Teaching of Amenemhet* (Parkinson 2002:316), it is known only from New Kingdom copies (Quirke 2004:102).
[236] Simpson 2003:177 *c.f.* Quirke 2004:102.

Texts such as the *Prophecies of Neferti* and the *Dialogues of Ipuwer* offer an inverted perspective of Maat, one where the world is without the moral ideals and judicial role of Maat. As a result of this absence of Maat they are very similar to P. Pushkin 127 in their presentation of the world but the similarities result from commonalities in the perception of the effects of Maat as an ideology rather than direct or indirect references. The *Dialogues of Ipuwer* focus on the judicial effects of Maat in society:

> 2,5 - "Verily, faithful servants, their hearts have become surly, and the magistrates do not satisfy their people when they [cry out]"[237]
>
> 4,1 - "Verily, deafness has set in with regards to complaints, there is no honesty of speech in this time of complaints, and there is no end of complaints"[238]

Wermai's issues with corruption around the grain measure, a complete lack of people to turn to and the apparent incomprehension of what is happening to the world fits with such presentations of the absence of Maat offered by catastrophic texts. Whereas in P. Pushkin 127 (*Col*. 3,13), the blame is laid completely upon the 'horizon god', in the *Prophecies of Neferti* it is expressed more explicitly:

> 50 – "As for Re, he has withdrawn himself from men. He will arise at the appointed time, but none will know when noon has come. None will behold his shadow, none will rejoice when he is seen."[239]

The connection with kingship and the creator god is apparent early in the expression of Maat, Pyramid Text 1582a connects Maat to Re and the king in one image:

[237] Simpson 2003:191.
[238] Simpson 2003:194.
[239] Simpson 2003:219.

> "May you shine as Re repressing wrong, and let Maat stand behind Re"[240]

This could be part of the reason why Wermai addresses his letter to a character named Usermaatre-nakht, the name being a reference to the concept of kingship and an allusion to Ramesses II. The king is not only bound by Maat but is also the bringer of Maat (PT 1775a-b):

> "Sky is at peace, earth in joy, when they hear the King has set right [in the place of wrong]"[241]

Wermai's problem is that Maat no longer has any effect upon him, the world he inhabits rejects its principles whenever he is involved. Maat has not been abandoned, aspects of it clearly still work for others such as the inspector turning up to investigate the corrupt official, it has just been abandoned in his personal interaction with the world. His petition is aimed at both Usermaatre-nakht and the god to return Maat to him and restore his place in society, which is clearly so dependent on the ideals of Maat, to free him from his curse and his sufferings.

4.3 Ideological Criticism

As it is clear P. Pushkin 127 demonstrates numerous aspects of Maat we can now submit the text to multiple lenses provided through ideological criticism. Criticism and readings of Ancient Egyptian literature usually result in an ideological, somewhat Marxist and mostly

[240] Lichtheim 1992:16.
[241] Lichtheim 1992:17.

historical reading. The common interpretation is that the superstructure of Maat is not driven by the economic base but by a dialogue between the state and the elite/sub-elite.[242] When reflected onto literature, it is the social context of the author which has a bearing on the content. From a modern perspective we would expect any ideology presented in literature to be fragmented, reflective of numerous contradictory opinions of authors, but given that the majority of our remnants of Ancient Egyptian literature are almost all from the same social class and raised in a society which foregrounds adherence to Maat as an ideology in most of its external expressions, an ideological consistency make sense. Karenga has also suggested the Maat is ecological in the sense that it ‘opposes all enterprises which tend to destroy the cosmic order and thereby commits itself to the future or destiny of humanity’.[243] Its consistency stems from a fear of its absence.

The alternative is to depart from this basic model and in doing so release art which has been 'imprisoned by economics'. In this approach, Maat is a hegemony, a combination of state ideological apparatuses which foster a set of attitudes and ideas sympathetic to the political status quo. In such cases an ideological interpretation of Ancient Egyptian literature assumes ideology is implicit in the social structures on display, it feels invisible and natural, which then begs the question how are we to identify it? Teaching texts also highlight a flaw in this approach as the ideological 'trick' where the individual cannot identify when they are being ideologically led, is not hidden, the interpellative choice is crude and obvious which fits more with the basic Marxist model. When applying it to P. Pushkin 127 we can read Wermai's fall from grace and lack of understanding about the situation as a consequence of moving across class boundaries. Before we meet Wermai he was an educated man with a title but in the text he loses that title and all the status he previously held in society, he moved from a land-

[242] Parkinson 2002:86.
[243] Karenga 2004:7.

owning class to the lowest position. In the latter part of the text where he has finally been able to settle (*Col*. 4,4), his bewilderment at the conflict between the local official and himself demonstrates the gulf between the elite and the lower classes (proletariat), having never been exposed to such a situation he exacerbates it (*Col*. 4,11) with horrible consequences for himself (*Col*. 4,12). This is reminiscent of modern postcolonial criticism, his general inability to empathise across social boundaries would have been paraded as an example of colonial attitudes to cultural diversity.[244]

Foucault's post-structuralist theories of discourse offer an alternative perspective. Derived from Bentham's panopticon, a hypothetical circular prison where all the cells could be watched by a single guard sitting in a tower at the centre of the circle, the panoptic state circulates ideology through 'discursive practices' throughout every level of every structure in a society. The aim of this construction is to 'induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power'.[245] Thus in this model, ideology suffuses everything from the institutions of the state to the family unit, making the state a monolithic structure immune to change: deviant thinking becomes unthinkable. This is similar to the repressive structures of Marxism (the hegemony of Maat) in that it deals with an ideology which reinforces central power. Maat is particularly applicable as a panoptic ideology in that the 'power is visible and unverifiable'.[246] The ideal theme of Maat makes the concept unverifiable, its vagueness is the hidden guardian, and it allows multiple interpretations as to its effects thus removing the power of any potentially contradictory interpretations. This can complement the idea of P. Pushkin 127 as a literary embellishment of a curse formula; rather than reading the text as an interpretation of Maat, it is a threat against

[244] Barry 2002:193.
[245] Foucault 1977:201.
[246] Foucault 1977:201.

rejecting Maat. Although not necessarily propaganda, it has the same effect. Using a character that embodies the typical reader and narrated in the first person, it mixes reality and literature. The reader is projected into the text and, as the cursed Wermai, the reader's potency is completely removed. The emphasis on the lack of help from others (*Col*. 3,7) and his wandering aimlessly across boundaries into foreign lands (*Col*. 2,13-3,4) reinforces that he has been removed from the system. In the discourse he is disempowered and disconnected from all social structures which form the state, thus he becomes a model of the consequences of deviance from the central power.

P. Pushkin 127 is an ideological text and as tribute to Maat's effectiveness and sustainability, several ideological readings can be taken from it. An exact definition as the meaning of P. Pushkin 127 is impossible in this ideological environment due to Maat's transience as a concept: Wermai's sufferings can be taken as a threat in a panoptic ideology, an experiment on interactions across social boundaries in a postcolonial interpretation or even a Marxist fiction highlighting entitlement and inequality. This 'multiplicity of interpretative layers' corresponds to Loprieno's criteria for establishing a literary text.[247] We have already covered the various genre interpretations in the previous chapter and in the light of the various ideological interpretations we can see the full range of P. Pushkin 127's inconsistency as a historical source. Rather than linking it to a single historical event on the basis of minor allusions and commonalities we can take a broader view with implications on Egyptian literary tradition and ideological development.

[247] Loprieno 1996a:44.

Conclusion

The primary question of this thesis was what is Papyrus Pushkin 127? Through a thorough analysis of the form, genre, intertextuality, fictionality and ideology of the text it aimed to present a fuller understanding of the meaning and purpose of the so called 'Tale of Woe.'

An analysis of the fictionality of the text in chapters one and two rejected any literal reading of P. Pushkin 127 as a genuine letter and accepted it as a purely fictional text. The possibility of it being derived from a genuine letter was also rejected. In particular the text's use of self-referential, literary devices such as the meaningful character names, and the verbosity and wide literary vocabulary set it apart from the other genuine letters that were assessed. The shape of the text adheres closely to the epistolary form, which is testament to the author's scribal skill. Furthermore, a tentative dating of the text through palaeography to the 21st dynasty and a thorough assessment of its place within contemporary historical narratives demonstrated that whilst the events described in P. Pushkin 127 can be made to fit with our understanding of the 21st dynasty, a purely historical reading is limited and risky. Thus the historicity of the document is questionable and this thesis concludes that the text is better treated as a fictional representation of Ancient Egypt unconnected to a specific historical event.

In chapter three, a deep analysis of P. Pushkin 127's relationship with currently understood Egyptian genre categories was undertaken. Using Parkinson's genre model, it is concluded that the text is best described as a discourse, but that it is in fact unique in the Egyptian literary corpus as the fictionalised, literary inversion of a curse formula. Thus this thesis accepts the assessment of Fischer-Elfert. It is clear that P. Pushkin 127 adheres rigidly to the narrative structure of a letter, but its theme and content define the text as a representation of a

curse formula. Moreover, this analysis rejected a previously held assessment that P. Pushkin 127 is a lamentation text.

Chapter four assessed the ideological purpose of P. Pushkin 127 and whether it can be viewed as an inherently ideological text using a variety of means of assessing ideology. This demonstrated that P. Pushkin 127 is a neat example of the function of language in determining the nature of ideology. Ideologically, the text can be seen subconscious form of enforcement of the role of justice and punishment in Egyptian society – as a panoptic discourse; or as an ideological 'experiment' concerning the role of Maat in society in Parkinson's theory of entrapment; or as a post-colonial discourse examining the differences between urban and rural Egypt. Exact definitions are likely impossible, but it is clear that P. Pushkin 127 is an inherently ideological text, steeped in the ideology of Maat and the consequences of an upset Maat. As this thesis has defined P. Pushkin 127 as an inverted curse formula, it can be read as demonstrating the consequences of a disturbed Maat when an individual is punished.

On the basis of this analysis, this thesis concludes that P. Pushkin 127 is a fictional text drawn from curse formulae and it is a literary experiment in ideological punishment. Finally, it proposes that it should be better named in English "The Curse of Wermai."

Whilst this thesis has not contributed directly to historical narrative of the transition between the 20th and 21st Dynasties or the situation at the start of the 21st dynasty, it has cast sufficient doubt on a piece of evidence which has previously been used in support of a 'War of Amenhetep'.[248] To go further would be to consider a similar commentary on *Wenamun*, contextualising the 'report' and applying similar theories with the aim of probing its validity as a historical source and looking into alternative readings beyond the historical narrative. It

[248] Fecht 1962:30.

would also be useful in later examining any relationships between the el-Hibeh papyri and hypothesising whether the fact that they were found as a cache is more than an accident of archaeology.

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