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Global Literature

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December 13th, 2021

Literary Analysis Paper

I believe *The Tale of Two Brothers* to be a story of betrayal and justice. Throughout this ancient Egyptian story, the reader is given a glimpse into this culture's ideas of true justice after betrayal has occurred. The story follows two brothers, Bata and his older brother Anubis as they encounter this series of betrayals and eventually seek justice together. The story helps us to understand how the ancient Egyptians viewed justice. It seems to be an inevitable force that will be brought supernaturally if necessary. We can also see in this story what the ideal man would be to the Egyptians.

The character of Bata is presented as this ideal man. He is extremely handsome and very strong. "Indeed his younger brother was a beautiful young man, there being none of his form in the whole land. Indeed the strength of a god was in him"(p. 5). He loves his brother Anubis very much and helps to care for him and his wife, as well as their cattle and land. Bata is very hardworking and knows how to work well with the animals and land, which shows that he is very smart and resourceful. He is also honorable and has strong values. When he is approached by Anubis' wife, he gets angry but does not disgrace her. He agreed to keep her advance a secret for her sake. "Do not say it to me again. Further I will not speak of it to anyone and I will not

cause it to go forth from my mouth to any people” (p. 6). This very honorable decision is what gets him into trouble.

Anubis’ wife is furious by his refusal and in her rage, she accuses him of forcing himself on her. Anubis has a very difficult choice at this moment, to trust his wife’s word or his brothers. He sides with his wife, and tries to kill Bata. In this moment Bata is betrayed by both of them, and it almost seems that injustice has won. But, Bata escapes. He is rewarded for his careful watch over the cattle, and they begin to speak to help him sneak out safely. He then faces a river, and prays to Pre-Harakhty for help. Here, Bata receives a divine form of justice for the first time in this story. The river parts and Bata is able to make his escape.

This provides a chance for a confrontation between the brothers, on either side of a crocodile infested river, Bata helps Anubis to see the great injustice and betrayal that has occurred. Anubis is distraught and faces a choice of carrying out his own form of justice. He returns home and kills his wife. This shows us that he, and therefore the author, see this as the appropriate punishment for betrayal. We will later see justice and death interact, but not in this same way.

Bata goes to the Valley of the Pine looking to start a new life. He meets Ennead there, the nine gods who created and ruled the land. They take pity on him for his situation, and want to make things right. They inform him that his brother has taken up justice by saying, "Ho, Bata, bull of Ennead, are you here alone, you having escaped your town because of the wife of Anubis, your older brother? See, he killed his wife. Now you are avenged by him upon all the transgressors against you.” (p.8). The gods verify this act as a form of justice and say that it is Anubis avenging Bata. Moved even further by the injustice they have seen committed, they create a wife for Bata so he doesn’t have to live his life alone because of someone else’s mistake.

Bata loves his wife, caring for her and telling her all of his secrets. He shares with her that his heart is on top of the flower of the pine, and that he is in a weak state. This is the source of the next betrayal. Bata's wife is kidnapped by the Pharaoh and she was amazed by all of his riches. She decided to betray her husband by telling the secret that kept his life hanging in the balance. This way she could be with the Pharaoh instead. She instructed the Pharaoh to have his men cut down the flower of the pine, and that would instantly kill her husband. They did just that, and betrayal and injustice met Bata with a swift demise. However, Anubis was alerted that this happened, and set out on a journey to avenge his brother again.

He searched for four years for his brother's heart, and found it. He gave it back to Bata and he was brought back to life as a bull. This reincarnation was a divine chance for justice to take place. The two brothers went to Egypt to confront the Pharaoh. They were sly and made their way into the palace as celebrated guests. Anubis became beloved by the Pharaoh, and Bata began to seek out his wife to tell her of his return. He approached her and said, "I am Bata. I noticed when you had one destroy the pine for the Pharaoh on account of me that I not live. See. I have been made alive again. I am a bull" (p.10).

His wife was terrified and planned to betray her husband once more. She asked to have the bull killed to be made into a feast. This happened, but the gods would not allow injustice to prevail. Bata's blood fell on the ground and grew into two persea trees. They were beautiful and celebrated by the people in the kingdom. Bata was these trees, and found another chance to speak to his wife. He said, "Ha, traitor, I am Bata. I am living despite you. I noticed that one was caused to cut the pine for the pharaoh, it was because of me, and I became a bull. And you caused me to be killed." (p.11). In an attempt to escape the consequences of her actions, his wife had the

trees cut down. However in another act of miraculous justice, a piece of one of the trees went in her eye, causing her to conceive a baby. This baby was Bata.

Bata was reborn, a future ruler. Then the Pharaoh later died, and Bata became the new Pharaoh. His ultimate form of justice was given to him. In reward for being a good man who endured many injustices, he was now the ruler of Egypt.

Work Cited:

Susan Tower Hollis, The Ancient Egyptian “*Tale of Two Brothers*,” University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. pp. 1-12.