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Appearance and Reality in Setne's Dialogue with "Pharaoh" in First Setne 5.31-35

Joseph Cross

"In Setne 1 almost no one behaves as they should, nor are what they seem." (Jasnow, 2001, p. 73)

Abstract

To demonstrate the relevance of politeness and facework for the analysis of ancient literary texts in Demotic, this paper focuses on a short, intriguing scene in the story of First Setne (P. Cairo 30646) where Setne, having just awoken from his hallucination about the beautiful Tabubu, speaks with a character who looks like the Pharaoh but whom the audience and, eventually, Setne realize is in fact Naneferkaptah. Nevertheless, Setne still addresses the character as the Pharaoh, and even the narrator of the scene continues to treat the appearances as if they were the reality. A close reading of this passage that focuses on politeness and elicits the nuances of the facework of the characters reveals that the text resolutely maintains a distinction between how the characters look and act and what they know about each other in order to depict an intricate meshing of motivations at an important juncture in the story. Setne is motivated to abide by the appearances—to treat Naneferkaptah as Pharaoh despite knowing that he is not—since this allows him to save as much face as possible. Nevertheless, whether Setne is being honest or calculated is left ambiguous. This subtle portrayal is enabled above all through the ancient audience's familiarity with politeness formulae in everyday language as well as with popular storytelling motifs and even other literary texts.

Keywords

First Setne – Demotic – Egyptian – literature – narrative – politeness – facework – performance

1. Introduction: Approaching Politeness in Demotic Narrative Literature¹

Studying politeness using a literary text presents certain challenges, even more so when the text is ancient and written in a language no longer spoken (cf. Kadar and House, this volume). In their discussion of the difference between emic and etic concepts of politeness, Kádár and Haugh (2013, p. 43) observe that "it is dangerous to make claims about...interactants' politeness behavior without a detailed contextual analysis, as the motivating factor behind a certain form of behavior might be entirely different from what we normally assume,". Fortunately, literature, in particular

¹ This paper results from research conducted within the project "From Texts to Literature: Demotic Egyptian Papyri and the Formation of the Hebrew Bible" (DEMBIB), funded by the European Research Council under the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program (ID: 101020304). I am grateful to Joachim Quack for his suggestions in reading and interpreting the passage in question, and would like to offer my sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. I would also like to express gratitude to Brian Muhs, for inspiring my interest in Demotic literature.

narrative, makes up for some of the (by design) untethered nature of its linguistic content by supplying ample context: the artificial frame of the work itself, which provides a constellation of events, motivations, and settings against which the speech and acts of characters are portrayed (Harshav, 2007, pp. 1–31). Context outside of the work is equally important as well: the precedent of other texts, of well-known stories, themes, motifs, and character types, as well as non-literary speech genres (formal and informal) and other kinds of textual knowledge and know-how, all contribute to the meaning-making process that is reading and/or hearing a work of literature that is a narrative. As an integral part of “the social dynamics of human interaction” (Kádár & Culpeper, 2010, p. 9), the universally-observed behavior of politeness and the closely associated phenomenon of facework, which can be identified in ancient literary narratives with some confidence following in the footsteps of research in linguistics and pragmatics of the past several decades, can be read within these internal and external frames of reference reconstructed by the philologist and literary critic.

In this contribution, inspired by Ruth Scodel’s study of facework in the *Iliad* (2008) but applying it on a far smaller scale, I wish to demonstrate the relevance of politeness and facework for the analysis of a work of ancient literature in Demotic by focusing on a single, short scene in the story of First Setne (P. Cairo 30646), the best-known work of Demotic literature today, so-called because of the existence of a second lengthy Demotic story about the same character which is referred to as Second Setne.²

Our copy of First Setne (P. Cairo 30646) is incomplete, beginning at the top of the original third column of the papyrus (fortunately our copy includes column numbers in the upper margin), about one-third of the way through the text. We begin in the tomb of a man named Naneferkaptah, where the ghost of his wife, Ihweret, is telling a long story to Setne Khaemwas, the son of the pharaoh. She tells how Naneferkaptah found a magical scroll of the god Thoth, but was punished for this theft and killed along with her and their son Merib. What’s more, she and her son are buried somewhere else far away, a fate of eternal separation worse than death itself. In the lost, earlier part of the story, Setne must have entered the tomb of Naneferkaptah to acquire the scroll, and Ihweret is warning him away. Furthermore, the events of the story that follow, once Ihweret is finished, suggest that she and Naneferkaptah were hoping that Setne would help them reunite the family’s bodies in Naneferkaptah’s tomb. Setne steals the scroll from Naneferkaptah’s mummy and begins to perform spells from it indiscriminately. Soon afterward, he falls in love with a beautiful woman named Tabubu, who leads him to her home and promises to have sex to him, but just as Setne is about to do so, he awakens in the public square naked: it was a hallucination, and, as we will see in the scene analyzed below, one engineered by Naneferkaptah (himself a practiced

² The editio princeps is Griffith (1900); see also Goldbrunner (2006) and Vinson (2018) for the text. Contemporary translations of First Setne can be found in Ritner (2003), Vinson (2018, pp. 113–129), and Hoffmann & Quack (2018, pp. 146–161). The fascinating story of the modern discovery and reception of the text can be found in Vinson (2018, pp. 1–107). Finally, for First Setne as part of a popular group or cycle of stories about this figure in Demotic, see Quack (2016, pp. 37–52) and Jay (2016, pp. 247–257).

magician). This brings Setne back to the tomb, where he agrees to seek out the mummies of Ihweret and Merib and reunite them with Naneferkaptah. Setne does so, and the story ends.

This entertaining and at times outrageous story very much relies for its effect, to draw on an observation of Richard Jasnow (2001, p. 73), on a perceived ironic distance between things as they appear and as they are in the reality of the world of the story. Politeness and facework themselves inherently concern the gap between these two: much polite behavior involves the careful manipulation of convention and expectation according to the demands of the context of speaking and acting, and mitigating the effects of what are perceived to be risks inherent in communication by leaving things unsaid or halfway said, or by saying more than what is required. What is said and done—appearance—does not always accord with actual attitudes, understandings, or desires—reality.³

These dynamics can be observed in the scene from First Setne under analysis, col. 5, ll.31-35. The situation is as follows. The episode in the story in which Setne tries to seduce the beautiful Tabubu (4.38-5.30)⁴ has just ended. To summarize what had happened: Tabubu, having lured Setne to her home at the Bubasteion, had successfully convinced him, as *quid pro quo* before having sex, to draw up a legal contract (a *sh-n-s'nh*; see Pestman, 1961, pp. 37–50) which promised her regular financial support from Setne, and to have his children—after being forced to cosign—killed (by defenestration!) to prevent them from contesting Tabubu's now-legal right. As soon as Setne begins to have sex with Tabubu, he awakens and finds himself, not in Tabubu's house or bed, but in public view on (so the text implies) the dromos of the Bubasteion, and in a highly compromising and embarrassing position, half naked and still showing the physical signs of sexual arousal. Setne then sees a wealthy-looking man who is “in the likeness of (m-qdy) Pharaoh” standing over him. This pharaoh-like person has long been recognized by modern readers of the story to merely appear like the Pharaoh of the story, and not to actually be this Pharaoh. Such a thing would be impossible, since, in the story, Pharaoh is currently at the court in Memphis (see, later, 5.35ff). Moreover, this figure tells Setne—twice—that Pharaoh is waiting there. This scene is important in the story because it reveals that the episode with Tabubu was a hallucination likely caused by Naneferkaptah in response to Setne stealing the magical Scroll of Thoth from his tomb: immediately afterward, Setne returns to the court and is told by Pharaoh to return the scroll to Naneferkaptah, which he does.

While some translators have used subtle, often non-linguistic cues in their running text and/or included a comment,⁵ many simply render the Demotic literally and leave the subtleties

³ For irony in Sinuhe, see Chantraine, this volume, who elicits examples in character dialogue. While Chantraine elicits a polemical as well as a didactic purpose for such irony in earlier Egyptian narrative literature, I would gently suggest that the irony in the scene of First Setne in question seems to have a strictly aesthetic basis in the way in which it fosters an ambiguous and layered storytelling experience.

⁴ All subsequence citations by column and line number alone in this paper are from the P. Cairo 30646 manuscript of First Setne.

⁵ Griffith (1900, p. 37) uses a qualified “(the) Pharaoh” each time in the rest of the passage for this person, as opposed to the normal use of the plain “Pharaoh” for the actual figure who is in Memphis. See also Ritner (2003, p. 466) and Vinson (2018, p. 126 (text), and p. 171 (comment)).

regarding the identity of the Pharaoh figure implicit.⁶ Strategies of translation aside, the full effect of this scene relies on more than knowing this fact and reading the interaction between this figure and Setne with that in mind. This can be seen in Setne's question to this figure, once it is likely that he knows the reality of the situation: "My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! How can I go to Memphis without any clothing at all on me?" (5.33-34). Following the observation made by many that this figure cannot be the Pharaoh, but must in fact be Naneferkaptah, the question becomes, why would Setne speak in this way? Why is he flouting the conventions of speech (see Kádár & Haugh, 2013, pp. 13–14) in pretending that he is speaking to the Pharaoh by adhering to the decorum? To what end? If for pragmatic reasons having to do with character motivation, why does the narrator corroborate Setne's stance by stating matter-of-factly that Setne "spoke in the presence of Pharaoh" (5.33)?

To answer these questions, I will engage in close readings of this passage centered around aspects of politeness as well as facework in what Setne and the Pharaoh figure say and do, with the guiding question being why the text represents this exchange in this way, keeping appearance and reality separate by resolutely maintaining a distinction between how the characters look and act and what they know about each other. The first close reading (§2) will clarify the state of knowledge of the text's ideal ancient audience (so far as it can be reconstructed) and of Setne regarding the identity of the Pharaoh-like figure. Following this, the second close reading (§3) will work through the exchange between the two figures step-by-step. Here I will consider how both figures attempt to give and save face, carefully charting the options the text presents its audience regarding its perspective on their motivations for speaking and acting one way or another, and grounding this as much as possible in conventions of written Demotic, both literary and non-literary.⁷ Finally, by way of conclusion, I will point to ways in which a careful observation of the dynamics of politeness and facework in this fascinating, short scene in First Setne can help illuminate more concrete aspects of the Ancient Egyptian encounter with Demotic narrative literature.

2. Close Reading 1: Who is "Pharaoh" in First Setne 5.31-35?

First Setne 5.31-35

*w^c.t wnw.t t3 i.ir hpr r.ir stne nw r w^c rmt-3 iw.ft3 r w^c.t mkwt.t iw wn rmt 3šy dde hr-rd.wy.t.f
iw.fm-qdy pr-3 stne iw.w^(5.32) r dwn.fbn-pw.frh dwn.fr-db3 p3 šyp dd mn hbs hr-3t.t.f dd pr-3
stne ih r.r.k n p3y gy nty-iw-iw.k n.im.f dd.fn3.w-nfr-k3-pt3 p3 i.ir ir.w n.y dr.w^(5.33) dd pr-3 m-šm*

⁶ Lichtheim (2006, p. 136), Goldbrunner (2006, pp. 25–26), Agut-Labordère & Chauveau (2011, p. 36), and Hoffmann & Quack (2018, p. 159), relying on the reader to discern the nuance (without any note) and interpret the identity of each "Pharaoh" in this scene and the next accordingly.

⁷ In this way, my reading of First Setne is fundamentally similar to Lazaridis, this volume, who studies the interaction of characters in earlier Egyptian literary texts and uncovers the ways in which their texts encode and presume certain kinds of audience knowledge to promote intelligibility.

*r mn-nfr nzy.k hrd.t.w st whz n.im.k st 'h' r pzy.w rt m-bzh pr-ʿ3 dd stne m-bzh pr-ʿ3 pzy(.y) nb ʿ3
i ir.f p3 'h' n p3-r' ih p3 gy^(5.34) n šm r mn-nfr nty-iw.y rh ir.f iw mn hbs n p3 t3 hr-3t.t.y ʿš pr-ʿ3 r w' r
hl iw.f 'h' y.k tw.f tw.f hbs n stne dd pr-ʿ3 stne m-šm r mn-nfr^(5.35) nzy.k hrd.t.w st 'nh st 'h' r
pzy.w rd.wy.t m-bzh pr-ʿ3*

Some time later,⁸ Setne saw a ‘great person’⁹ riding on a chariot¹⁰ with many people running beneath him, in the likeness of Pharaoh. Setne began^(5.32) to raise himself,¹¹ but he could not raise himself on account of the shame¹² that he had no clothing on him. Pharaoh said, “Setne, what is with the situation you are in?”¹³ He said, “Naneferkaptah is the one who has done all these things to me!”^(5.33) Pharaoh said, “Go to Memphis! As for your children, they are seeking you: they are standing in their place in the presence¹⁴ of Pharaoh.” Setne spoke in the presence of Pharaoh: “My great lord! O may he attain the

⁸ *w'.t wnw.t t3 i.ir hpr* literally translates “it was an hour that happened.” This is a stock phrase in Demotic narrative literature, used to mark a major change of scene and division of the story, at least according to examples with well-preserved story contexts, as in First Setne 4.8, 5.21, and here, and in P. Spiegelberg 14.18 (Spiegelberg, 1910, pp. 173, 175). Note a similar formulation, *t3 wnw.t*, found with a following infinitive, which just as likely means “when” as it does “at the hour/moment when” (e.g. First Setne 3.20 and 5.1; see also P. Krall 8.23-24). As the usage of this phrase shows, the word *wnw.t* “hour” is not meant to be taken literally (cf. however Agut-Labordère & Chauveau, 2011, p. 35) but simply marks an indefinite period of time passing (as in Vittmann, 2015, p. 398). Exactly how much time is difficult to say, and one translation of *wnw.t* probably will not suffice in every occurrence. In two occurrences of the phrase in the Story of Petese, Ryholt translates it as “suddenly” (see Ryholt, 2006, p. 58), a rendering which fits some but not all of the other attested contexts (e.g. in First Setne 4.8 and 5.21). For the present attestation in First Setne, Ritner renders *wnw.t* as “moment” (similarly, Lichtheim, 2006, p. 135), much like its use in P. London-Leiden (25.23), where a spell is said to be “done in a *wnw.t*, and happening instantly” (*t3y hte.t*). The phrase *w'.t wnw.t t3 i.ir hpr* can also be found in P. Berlin 13640 (Naneferkasokar and the Babylonians), x+1, 24 (Spiegelberg, 1936, pp. 173, 175) and P. Carlsberg 207, x+1.9. Though fragmentary in these examples, it is reasonably clear that the phrase has the same meaning as well as storytelling function.

⁹ For a discussion of this translation, see below.

¹⁰ *mkwt.t* could refer to a litter or palanquin (cf. Second Setne 4.16-19), but also to a chariot (cf. P. Krall 22.23). Since the present text describes how numerous people are beneath it, the translations opt for the former. It is hard, however, to picture the men who are carrying the litter running, as described here, while doing so. Thus, I understand the text to depict Pharaoh mounted on a chariot, and the men surrounding him running alongside. For the verb *ts* used for riding horses, cf. Khasheshonqy (P. BM EA 10508) 10.11. For the use of chariots for general transportation, and not just in warfare, see Köpp-Junk (2015, pp. 196–199).

¹¹ *stne iw.w r dwn.f* could be literally translated, “Setne came to raise himself up,” which seems to depict the process, and not the completion of the action. This idiomatic use of *iw + r + infinitive* may be unique here. The writing of the qualitative *iw.w* is the same as passim in First Setne (except for *iw* in 3.25 and *n-iw.w* in 4.33), but the verb *iw* has the sense of a helping verb with the meaning of “approach” i.e. “begin to.” In some ways, the syntax is reminiscent of the progressive use of the qualitative of *n'* “to go” (Johnson, 2004, pp. 64–66), e.g. *in tw.y n3 hys.f.k*, “I am about to praise you” (P. London-Leiden 20.19). The present text may opt out of this form since it wishes to depict Setne as attempting to fully raise himself, but, upon trying, realizing he is unable to do so.

¹² As Vinson (2018, p. 172) notes, *r-db3* is written “exceptionally” with the determinative of the dead man or bound captive, which encourages the Demotic reader to see a pun with the word for “retribution” or “avenger,” *db3*: Setne is in this shameful position because of the vengeance of Naneferkaptah.

¹³ Literally, “What is with you in the way (*gy*) that you are in?”

¹⁴ Most modern translations render *rt* here as something like “rank,” by analogy to Coptic *phTE* “manner, fashion, likeness,” a more literal translation being “style” (Griffith, 1900, pp. 133–134). Vinson (2018, p. 172), however, argues that the word can also refer to a physical position, as in Khasheshonqy (P. BM EA 10508) 3.9-10, where it means “position.” In English, the phrase “in their place” captures both of these nuances.

lifetime of Pre! How can I ^(5.34) go¹⁵ to Memphis without any clothing at all on me?" Pharaoh called to a servant standing by. He had him give clothing to Setne. Pharaoh said, "Setne, go to Memphis! ^(5.35) As for your children, they are alive: they are standing in their ranks in the presence of Pharaoh!"

After waking up from his hallucination, Setne sees a *rmṯ-ʿ3* whom the narrator does not simply identify as Pharaoh, but rather says was "in the likeness" (*m-qdy*) of him. Though called "Pharaoh" explicitly by the narrator several times in this scene, and treated as such by Setne, this figure is clearly not the ruler himself (who is a character in the story), since he later tells Setne that his children are "standing in their place in the presence of Pharaoh." Further proof of this occurs in the next scene, when Setne returns to Memphis and speaks with the true Pharaoh, who does not yet know what has happened to Setne (see 5.35-36), despite Setne having previously told the figure called Pharaoh in 5.32 "everything" (*ḏr.w*) which had happened to him. The Pharaoh figure from the Bubasteion and the Pharaoh at the court in Memphis of the next scene are not the same person.

Who, then, does Setne speak with after he wakes up? The early critics of First Setne considered this figure to be a vision or hallucination (Revillout, 1879, p. 15, n. 3; Griffith, 1900, p. 37). It was later suggested that this figure was in fact either Naneferkaptah or the god Ptah in disguise (Gee, 2002, pp. 86–87; Ritner, 2003, p. 466, n. 39). The former seems likely since the deceased Naneferkaptah "arises" (*nhse*) as an old man and appears to Setne at the end of the story (6.10-15). Naneferkaptah may have done something similar in the lost, earlier portion of the story in order to lure Setne to the tomb (suggested by Vinson, 2018, p. 171), much like in the similar Setne stories of P. Carlsberg 207 (Tait, 1991; Quack & Ryholt, 2000), where a ghost appears to Setne in order to enlist his help, and, especially, of P. Cairo 30692 (Spiegelberg, 1906a, pp. 112–115, Taf. LI), where another ghost tells Setne how to enter the tomb of Naneferkaptah, and may be the latter himself.

An important connection between the current passage and the stories of P. Carlsberg 207 and P. Cairo 30692 is the way in which the figures speaking to Setne are called *rmṯ-ʿ3*, both the ghost in the latter two texts as well as the Pharaoh figure here. It is clear in general that a deceased person or tomb owner can be called this in Demotic (first observed by Spiegelberg, 1906b, p. 256; 1912a, p. 33, n.12), a usage which may be derived from the practice of referring to tomb owners in inscriptions as such (Quaegebeur, 1977; Vittmann, 1998, pp. 341–342). On a limestone tablet published by Spiegelberg (1912a), a *rmṯ-ʿ3* addresses Pharaoh in a dream in a literary narrative, and in the aforementioned Setne story of P. Carlsberg 207, x+2.5, the *rmṯ-ʿ3* vanishes "as a shadow" (*nhyby*) once he has finished speaking with Setne.

¹⁵ Literally, "What is the way in which I can go...?" The wording here, especially the use of *gy* "manner," has an important resonance with Naneferkaptah's earlier question; see n.13 above. Cognizance of the resemblance of wording here is crucial for reconstructing the facework strategies implicit in the text, as discussed in §3 below.

This does not mean, however, that *rmt-ʕ* should be simply translated here as “ghost.” While the figure is first described as a *rmt-ʕ*, the narration is focalized through Setne,¹⁶ and thus the salience of *rmt-ʕ* in the text is primarily as a description of this figure as Setne saw him: a *rmt-ʕ* “riding on a chariot with many people running beneath him, in the likeness of Pharaoh.” Jasnow (2001, p. 74, n. 75) has observed a progression of detail in this sentence which, he argues, matches Setne’s growing cognitive awareness of what he is looking at, and serves to “to escalate the humorous impact of the meeting.” The detail of the figure riding a chariot and being accompanied by underlings also serves to underscore the relative hierarchy between him and Setne (see Lazaridis, this volume), something which sets the stage for the facework in the ensuing dialogue. The sentence begins by delaying the exact identity of the person whom Setne sees, describing him first—without identifying him—according to his appearance, as a *rmt-ʕ*, and then describing with two circumstantial clauses his situation, before saying not who he is but whom he looks like. The description of him resembling Pharaoh is particularly marked, using the preposition *m-qdy* in an apparently unique way in Demotic narrative literature to describe a character’s appearance.¹⁷ For this reason, the usual translations of “noble,” “wealthy,” or “distinguished” person are more than appropriate since they match Setne’s perception, and thus, in the translation above, *rmt-ʕ* was literally rendered as “great person.”¹⁸ The meaning of “ghost,” nevertheless, is part of the undertones of the text, recognizable perhaps generally by a knowledge of the phrase’s full range of meaning, but in this context more likely through a familiarity with the storytelling motif of a visiting *rmt-ʕ*.¹⁹ Nevertheless, its presence in at least three Setne stories suggests that the motif was closely associated with folklore and/or literature about Setne Khaemwas. Thus, it is natural to interpret the appearance of the *rmt-ʕ* as someone wealthy and important-looking like the Pharaoh, but also, as an ancient member of the text’s audience experienced in the language and motifs of what we now call Demotic narrative literature would, to recognize the undertones associated with the phrase, and suspect that something else is going on. For this reason, the translation “great person” above is kept in scare quotes. Appearance and reality are close, but do not completely overlap.

If the text’s ancient audience was cued into thinking the figure called Pharaoh is the ghost of Naneferkaptah, what about the character Setne? As mentioned above, the narration here is focalized through him, drawing attention to the appearance of this figure. Setne’s reaction, however, is not conveyed. Certainly, at face value it seems like Setne is not initially aware of the

¹⁶ For focalization, see Rimmon-Kenan (2002, pp. 73–87). For the focalization in this passage from First Setne, see Vinson (2018, p. 252).

¹⁷ The preposition is found in The Prebend of Amun (3.16-17; 5.1-2; 9.1; 13.12-13) and The Armor of Inaros (16.13; 18.4-5; 22.11-12; 23.3-4) in a series of striking and evocative Homeric-like similes to describe emotions, behaviors, and actions. See Jay (2016, pp. 116–119) for further discussion of these passages. It can also be found passim in similes in the Great Demotic Wisdom Text of P. Insinger, e.g. “The patience of a fool is like the flame that flares and dies out” (21.20).

¹⁸ As shown by Vittmann (1998, pp. 339–342), the adjective ʕ following *rmt* can mean “great” in terms of both status as well as wealth, and so “distinguished” or “noble” would also be appropriate.

¹⁹ The availability and even pervasiveness of this motif for the understanding of a proficient ancient audience can be gleaned from a dream text in the Archive of Hôr, which depicts a *rmt-ʕ* calling out to the dreamer on the dromos of the Serapeum and predicting the dreamer’s future (no. 8, ll.14-24; Ray, 1976, pp. 38, 41, 43 n. 1).

identity of the figure, leading Vinson (2018, p. 171) to suggest that Setne is mistaken when addressing him as Pharaoh. The ancient audience, however, eager to see the way that Setne, and this scene, are “played” in this version of a story that they very likely are familiar with, eagerly waits for Setne’s first response to this Pharaoh-like figure. What does it reveal? First, the text portrays Setne saying “Naneferkaptah...”: is this a vocative (they wonder), and thus an address, perhaps even the beginning of a confrontation (cf. First Setne 6.3, which begins the same way when Setne confronts Naneferkaptah)? As it turns out, “Naneferkaptah” is the topicalized noun in a cleft sentence: Setne is talking about Naneferkaptah, not to him. The force of Setne’s speech here can be rendered conveniently in English thus: “Naneferkaptah...is the one who has done all these things to me!”

The key exchange then follows:

^(5.33) *dd pr-ʿ3 m-šm r mn-nfr n3y.k hrd.t.w st wh3 n.im.k st ʿhʿ r p3y.w rt m-b3h pr-ʿ3 dd stne m-b3h pr-ʿ3 p3y(.y) nb ʿ3 i ir.f p3 ʿhʿ n p3-rʿ ih p3 gy ^(5.34) n šm r mn-nfr nty-iw.y rh ir.f iw mn hbs n p3 t3 hr-3t.t.y*

^(5.33) Pharaoh said, “Go to Memphis! As for your children, they are seeking you: they are standing in their place in the presence of Pharaoh.” Setne spoke in the presence of Pharaoh: “My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! How can I ^(5.34) go to Memphis without any clothing at all on me?”

Setne’s response is curious in two senses. Not only is he portrayed by the narrator as if he is speaking with Pharaoh, using the customary *m-b3h* (to be discussed in more detail in §3), he begins his address to the figure in a highly formal way which, again, is appropriate for addressing Pharaoh: “My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre!” (5.33).

Thus, the ancient audience of the text (construed here in an ideal way) has good reason to suspect that the figure called “Pharaoh” is in fact the ghost of Naneferkaptah. Though visually passing as Pharaoh, this figure does not identify himself as such. Rather, both the narrator and Setne make that identification. This is the case despite the fact that, possibly even from the start of the scene, it is known that this identification is untrue and the likelihood that, eventually, Setne knows it as well. Why, then, do both the narrator and Setne make this identification, and continue to do so, even when it is clear that it is Naneferkaptah with whom Setne is speaking?

3. Close Reading 2: Politeness and Facework in the Dialogue between Setne and “Pharaoh”

The goal in this section is to recapture the interplay between appearance and reality in the text by imagining Setne and Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh as two realistic speaking figures utilizing strategies of politeness in their speech and engaging in facework. Their attempts to both give and save face are embedded within wider chains of motivation in the story, and potentially framed in literary conventions with which the ancient audience would be familiar, something already glimpsed in

our discussion of the phrase *rmṯ-ʿ3*. To aid in this close reading, I have focused on the verbal exchange between the two characters, beginning with Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh’s initial question to Setne, and have divided the remaining scene into alternating lines of dialogue (and, in one case, action), with each given a letter designation (a through f) for easy cross-referencing.

a. *dd pr-ʿ3 stne iḥ r.r.k n pzy gy nty-iw-iw.k n.im.f*

Pharaoh said, “Setne, what is with the situation (*gy*) you are in?”(5.32)

Seeing a person naked, exposed, and in a compromising and shameful position is a textbook example of an interaction that quite overtly puts the compromised individual’s positive face at risk: this person is not only at risk of ridicule, but is equally likely to be avoided, and thus not helped, by passers-by (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 66–67). A number of strategies of positive politeness can be imagined to mitigate such a situation: not only sympathizing, but downplaying, joking, distracting, even complimenting while offering to help (what Brown and Levinson call “anointment”; see 1987, p. 70). Speaking as the Pharaoh, and thus as someone with a close relationship to Setne who would take interest in what had happened and seek Setne’s best interest (as Pharaoh eventually does in 5.36-38 and 6.5-6), any overture towards Setne by Naneferkaptah, verbally or otherwise, would result in a face-threatening act.²⁰ Asking bluntly “What happened?”, as Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh for all intents and purposes does, not only is absent any form of explicit positive politeness, but blatantly disregards Setne’s position, apparently offering no face. Yet, after this initial question, he does not proceed to admonish, remind, or even further threaten Setne. In speaking vaguely and suggestively about Setne’s situation or state (*gy*), Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh refers to his specific, embarrassing physical situation, but initially leaves the entire ordeal which Naneferkaptah knows Setne to have experienced off record (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 69, 211ff.). Since Pharaoh had previously warned Setne about the consequences of stealing the scroll, and predicted that Setne would return to Naneferkaptah embarrassed and ashamed—a warning that Setne, of course, ignored (4.37-38)—Naneferkaptah, in this exchange, is acting convincingly as if he is Pharaoh.

Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh’s question may have a strong air of bluntness and thus impoliteness to modern readers. Two examples from the roughly contemporary Story of Petese, however, suggest that it was conventional. Posing a question similarly phrased as *iḥ r.r.k smt* (*smt*, which also means “state” or “situation,” taking the place of the similar *gy*),²¹ the wife of Petese displays true concern for her husband (P.Petese A, 2.26 and 8.20 Ryholt, 1999, pp. 14, 20, 53, 59). This suggests that Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh, in playing to his appearance as Pharaoh, and thus to his closeness to Setne, is speaking in a maximally efficient way that does not take Setne’s face into explicit account (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 94–95), getting instead right to the point in

²⁰ Since Naneferkaptah is presenting as Pharaoh, he may be able to rely on the ability of a figure in such a high hierarchical standing to dispense with politeness; see the analysis of Lazaridis, this volume, of the “sharp” style of Senusret’s speech to Sinuhe when welcoming him back to the palace.

²¹ For the construction *iḥ r.r.k*, see Erichsen (1954, p. 41) and Hoffmann (1996a, p. 207, n. 1056).

looking for information as a prelude to helping (which he eventually does!). The face-threatening act of speaking to the situation is mitigated by using conventional speech that is appropriate when individuals in close relationships speak with each other. The threat is also mitigated by the necessary expedience of the situation. A similarly blunt, though differently worded question by (the actual) Pharaoh in 5.35-36 (*in thy p3 nty iw ir.k [s] t3 h3.t*,²² “Was it drunkenness that you did before?”), achieves some of the same effect, but contrasts strongly with the present question in its accusation, which overtly damages Setne’s face, both by insulting him as well as by assuming something about him (and not verifying it through inquiry).²³

b. *dd.fn3.w-nfr-k3-ptḥ p3 i.ir ir.w n.y dr.w*

He [Setne] said, “Naneferkaptah is the one who has done all these things to me!” (5.32)

Setne’s first response to Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh has an ambiguity to it, especially in the word *dr.w*, which could represent Setne tacitly referring to the entire Tabubu ordeal (if not more specifically to the complicated situation he is presently in), and thus implying that he knows very well with whom he is speaking. Assuming that is the case, by referring to Naneferkaptah in the third person as if he is not present, Setne plays along with the appearances, which means he is deliberately being dishonest. In this scenario, Setne would also be admitting that he knows that Naneferkaptah was responsible for the hallucination, implying it was in response to his absconding with the Scroll of Thoth (which goes unmentioned). Setne also fails to admit explicitly to committing this wrong. This could be taken as a token of honesty, or calculatedness. By being fully aware of what is happening, but not speaking honestly to it, Setne could be going off record (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69) in only referring to only part of the reality. He could be trying to save face by being honest and at the same time being too embarrassed to admit fault, connecting “all of these things” to the one who did them, but not to what deep down is the reason for them happening in the first place—trying to salvage face and remain defiant.

The scenario is significantly different if Setne is still unaware that he is speaking with the ghost of Naneferkaptah. From the perspective of the audience, this is just as plausible. By blaming Naneferkaptah to someone who not only can help him, but whose opinion of him is of the utmost importance—his own father—Setne seeks to restore positive face: his self-image and self-esteem has been affected, concretely represented by the “shame” (*šyp*, 5.32) he feels in being naked in public view—a situation that is extremely unbecoming of an aristocrat like him.²⁴ This shame

²² The reading follows Hoffmann (1996b, pp. 59–60). For a brief discussion, see Vinson (2018, p. 172).

²³ A similar example occurs in P. Krall when Pekrur desperately asks the yet-unrecognized Montubaal, who has appeared in the fray unexpectedly, who he is, knowing that he must be on his side given the way that he is fighting, but unsure of his identity (P. Krall 19.22). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer of this chapter for giving important corrections and nuances to my interpretation of 5.32 and 35-36.

²⁴ I thank Joachim Quack for this observation. For hierarchy and characterization in earlier Egyptian literary texts, see Chantraine, this volume. The ambiguous as well as comedic portrayal of the aristocrat Setna Khaemwas in First Setne should be compared with the earnest depiction of appropriate kinds of conduct for the elite in instructional literature; see Lazaridis, this volume.

literally prevents him from getting up and redressing his situation, without further damaging both his positive face (from exposing himself even more while desperately walking around in public looking for help) and his negative face (from further losing the autonomy which comes from his status as a superior person): he is immobile and powerless without help, and if anyone can help him, it is his father. Of course, Setne does not immediately explain why Naneferkaptah has done this, since he knows that, on knowing this, Naneferkaptah(-as-Pharaoh) would tell Setne that he must make amends instead of continuing with face-saving acts responding to Setne's situation. This is exactly what happens when Setne returns to the court after this scene and tells the actual Pharaoh every detail about what happened, to which Pharaoh responds by chastising him and ordering him to return the Scroll of Thoth (5.36-38).

Since the text wants its audience to, if not know it outright, strongly suspect that the Pharaoh figure is Naneferkaptah, but leaves it ambiguous whether Setne knows this, a certain focus and expectation is put on how Setne will respond to his precarious position. Setne is seen trying to save or gain face in his first response, but is not explicit enough in his response to Naneferkaptah(-as-Pharaoh)—whether in a calculated sense or not—leaving the possibilities for his future line of action expressly open, especially regarding whether he will admit to his fault, apologize, and make amends by returning the Scroll of Thoth. Finally, regardless of what Setne knows, his negative face vis-à-vis Naneferkaptah in particular, a crucial motivating relationship of the story, is severely compromised: Setne is clearly unable to get away with stealing the magical scroll and using it as he sees fit. This definitive loss of negative face, then, coincides with the story's final turning point: whether and how Setne will subordinate himself to Naneferkaptah. Thus, his shame is not only of body but of ego.

c. dd pr-ʿ3 m-šm r mn-nfr nʒy.k hrd.t.w st whʒ n.im.k st ʿhʿ r pʒy.w rʒ m-bʒh pr-ʿ3

Pharaoh said, “Go to Memphis! As for your children, they are seeking you: they are standing in their place in the presence of Pharaoh.” (5.33)

In this extraordinary statement, Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh openly and baldly contradicts his very appearance by referencing the climactic part of Setne's hallucination in telling Setne that his children are in fact alive, something that only Naneferkaptah could know. By breaking the frame, but still maintaining the appearance, Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh engages in a measure of face protection for Setne. On the one hand, speaking clearly as Naneferkaptah, and knowing all of the things that happened, he assures Setne that no dishonor will accrue to him as a result of consigning his children to oblivion, implying that Setne cares deeply for them (cf. his embrace of them in 5.35, the first thing he does when he returns to the court) and that he is worthy of his honor being restored. Yet, speaking as if the Pharaoh still, Naneferkaptah is able to remain off record in addressing what happened, tacitly maintaining the validity of punishing Setne for stealing the Scroll of Thoth, but showing a degree of graciousness by postponing the judgment and the fallout from Setne's act. In short, Naneferkaptah is prioritizing comfort over confrontation.

This face-saving act of Naneferkaptah is evident no matter how we take Setne's state of knowledge at this juncture. Taking Setne as having gone off record and tacitly admitting fault (knowing with whom he is speaking), Naneferkaptah would then be receptive of his overtures. He would not be trying to harm Setne more and cause him to lose even more face (by treating him with contempt), but shows some concern for him, and is even willing to reassure Setne that everything is okay. Naneferkaptah's willingness to engage in a non-face-threatening act is even more noteworthy if he had previously perceived Setne to be acting in a calculated way: now, he is giving him a second chance.²⁵

d. *dd stne m-b3ḥ pr-ʿ3 p3y(.y) nb ʿ3 i ir:f p3 ʿḥ n p3-r ʿiḥ p3 gy n šm r mn-nfr nty-iw.y rh ir:f iw mn ḥbs n p3 t3 ḥr-ʿt.t.y*

Setne spoke in the presence of Pharaoh: "My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! How can I go to Memphis without any clothing at all on me?" (5:33-34)

It seems clear that we as a modern audience of this text must assume that Setne realizes, by this point, that the Pharaoh figure is Naneferkaptah. To return to the originating question: why, then, does Setne speak to Naneferkaptah as if he is Pharaoh? And why does the narrator continue to play along? Addressing Naneferkaptah in this way is even more marked given the use of deferential formulas of address—not only by Setne but by the narrator—that add to the verisimilitude and explicitly invoke conventions and strategies of politeness. In a situation that in certain respects is not highly conventionalized, i.e. a literary narrative with multiple and competing ongoing frames of reference, the choice of this wording represents an important pragmatic decision of rhetoric by the text on behalf of the character of Setne.

Even with these strong linguistic markers of politeness, however, it is not a given that Setne's intention is in harmony with his actions and words, since he avoids explicitly addressing the Scroll of Thoth and his ultimate culpability for what just happened. Nevertheless, Setne knows both that Naneferkaptah has punished him for taking the Scroll of Thoth, and that he is standing before him in disguise as the Pharaoh his father. While it is possible that he is being honest and grateful, he may also be acting sarcastically, which would suggest that he is stubbornly refusing to take responsibility, and is even unrepentant.

The ambiguity of Setne's intention is grounded first of all in the way that the narrator frames his speech act: he speaks "in the presence of" or "before" (*m-b3ḥ*) the Pharaoh, and then prefaces what he is going to say using a common formula of deference (to be discussed more below). The usage of *m-b3ḥ* reflects a common locution and is example of conventionalized indirectness, where the preposition *n* after *dd* when the pharaoh or a deity is being addressed is replaced by *m-b3ḥ*. While a convention, it is used here to reflect not just that Setne is speaking (as

²⁵ Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh's encouragement to Setne that he should return to the palace should be compared with Senusret's assurances to Sinuhe in its use of politeness dynamics; see Lazaridis, this volume.

if) to the Pharaoh, but the manner in which he is doing so, i.e. in a posture of subservience that anticipates something important is about to be said.²⁶

With the narrator conveying Setne as speaking as well as acting reverentially and deferentially to someone who looks exactly like Pharaoh, Setne himself speaks in a deferential way (as he does with the actual Pharaoh later in 6.6) that fits the appearances perfectly, prefacing his statement by exclaiming “My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre!” Calling Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh “my great lord!” follows the exceedingly common convention in Demotic literature of using this honorific when characters address the Pharaoh.²⁷ The phrase which follows, “O may he attain the lifetime of Pre!”, is equally conventional (though not as ubiquitous) and adds an optional weight to the address. A standard formula (see Vittmann, 1998, pp. 487–488), it is found equally in literary and non-literary texts. Already used in First Setne (in Ihweret’s story) when Naneferkaptah offers his services to the old priest in order to obtain the Scroll of Thoth (3.15), and when the Qnb.t address Pharaoh (4.24), it consists of the vocative particle *i* “O!” followed by a prospective *sdm.f* referring to the one being addressed in the third person, either as the subject of the verb (often, as here in First Setne, wishing that they “live the lifetime of Pre”),²⁸ or as the direct object of a verb whose subject is a god who is invoked to bless the person in question.²⁹ This honorific formula was normally used in Demotic when an inferior addressed a superior, whether a fellow private citizen, a pharaoh, or a god, but it also could be used as an expression of respect between equals³⁰—an example of positive politeness (making the hearer feel as if they are being treated with respect), especially when uttered by someone who is of a higher rank than their interlocutor. The formula was prominent in oracular questions as well as letters to the gods (see Martin, 2004), with a derived literary usage in many of the model petition

²⁶ The use of *m-b3h* in P. Spiegelberg is telling in this regard. In this story, where Pharaoh Petubastis is frequently in dialogue with characters, both friendly and hostile, *m-b3h* is only used twice (in the preserved text; cf. however the broken P. Spiegelberg 18.13) when another character speaks with him. First, in P. Spiegelberg 2.7, the priests of Amun speak *m-b3h* Petubastis (called “Pharaoh” by the narrator) when admitting to him that they have never heard anything to support the young priest Horus’s claim to the office of the high priesthood of Amun. It is also found in 2.18-19, when the young priest of Horus informs Petubastis why he had not made his claim to the office previously known; the priest then embarks on a long, formal response to Petubastis’s question. Both of these situations of address involve apologetic explanations that have the potential of provoking strong emotions in the Pharaoh, even if the young priest of Horus is being mockingly deferent to him, which is certainly plausible given what happens soon afterwards in the story.

²⁷ It is used passim already in the proto-Demotic story of P. Vandier (26th dynasty) and is also found in the early Demotic Saqqara papyri (e.g. no. 1, 13.16), as well as throughout P. Rylands 9. The phrase occurs uniquely in the Contendings of Horus and Seth in the New Kingdom (6.8, Isis speaking to Seth as a sycamore tree) but, as far as I know, not in other pre-Demotic literary texts.

²⁸ E.g. P. Rylands 9, 3.11 (Vittmann, 1998). For the shorter formulation “O! may he/she/they live!” and similar, cf. e.g. P. BM EA 10591, 1.8 and 2.14 (Thompson, 1934, pp. 3, 4) and P. Rylands 9, 13.5.

²⁹ I.e. *i di hnm q(y) p3y.f h’*, “O, may Khnum grant that his life be long!” in P. Berlin 13539, 1-2 (Spiegelberg, 1928, p. 611). See also the letter of P. Berlin 13544, 1.4-5 (Zauzich, 1978, pp. 9–11). The two petitions preserved in P. Rylands 9 begin this way (1.1, 5.13).

³⁰ In the letter of P. Louvre E 7855, 1.3, 8, and 9 (Cruz-Urbe, 1985), and in P. Rylands 9, 13.5. An interesting exception to this is use in the proto-Demotic narrative of P. Vandier (Posener, 1985), where the Pharaoh uses it when addressing Merire (1.13, 14; 2.3, 5). This unusual use, in which the normal relationship of speakers is inverted, juxtaposes humorously with Pharaoh’s eventual dishonest treatment of Merire.

writing exercises of the Krugtexte (Spiegelberg, 1912b; Hoffmann & Quack, 2018, pp. 254–262). As Wertiamunniut's use of the formula when addressing his adversary Petubastis in P. Krall 9.30 shows, it could be used to create verisimilitude when depicting a pharaoh being addressed when it is nevertheless clear that the sentiment is not fully felt by the speaker. Similar ironic usages in literary texts occur in the "Lion in Search of a Man" fable from the Myth of the Sun's Eye (Lichtheim, 2006, pp. 156–169; Hoffmann & Quack, 2018, pp. 233–235), where a human servant of a bear addressed his master this way, before the latter tricks him and pull his teeth and claws out (P. Leiden I 384, 17.26; Spiegelberg, 1994), and, perhaps, in P. Spiegelberg B.1-2, in the mouth of the conniving Djedhor.

If we read Setne's request as coming from a place of honesty and gratitude, his question responds directly to what Naneferkaptah just said: since he now knows his children are alive, he wishes to see them right away, but is currently unable to move. On the surface, this would then be a classic example of an off-record request: by asking how it is possible for someone in his state to travel to Memphis, Setne is asking Naneferkaptah for help. It is significant that, at this juncture, Setne would be trying to soften the face-threatening act of asking for help, even though it is not much of a request. It may also be that he is expressing gratitude to Naneferkaptah for not killing his children in reality, or for not punishing him further for the theft of the scroll, but wanting to save face by not admitting yet that he is wrong for stealing it.

A negative reading is possible as well. Since Setne stays off record, his question is equally intelligible as a sarcastic question that does not truly expect an answer, or any help. In English, we might render this nuance, "How exactly can I go to Memphis..." As with the positive reading, this involves an off-record statement, but what is left implicit is not a request, but a rejoinder and even protest, though couched indirectly, against what Naneferkaptah has done to him. If we compare the language of Setne's off-record request here with Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh's initial question (a. above), Setne may be deliberately mirroring, mimicking, or even mocking him. Setne's *ih p3 gy n sm r mn-nfr* (5.33-34) begins much like Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh's *ih r.r.k n p3y gy* (5.32), both built around the same word *gy*, which is used to carry the weight of the question. It is difficult to tell if the former question is as conventional as the latter appears to be, but either way, the implications of Setne coining the phrase in this way would be pronounced. Setne would be turning the bald-on-record politeness of Naneferkaptah on its head, showing that he interpreted it to be threatening beyond the inherent face threat of the statement: his protest would not certainly lack a hint of sarcasm. Setne would also be conveying to Naneferkaptah that he knew from the start to whom he was speaking and was playing along not for the purposes of politeness, but ultimately to save his own face. Setne may be doing this because he does not think that Naneferkaptah could, or would be willing to, provide him clothes and help him along.

e. *š pr-ʕ r wʕ hl iw fʕhʕy.k tw.fhbs n stne*

Pharaoh called to a servant standing by. He had him give clothing to Setne. (5.34)

With this, the scene quickly moves towards its conclusion. Naneferkaptah's response—whether or not Setne is being sarcastic—is to take what he said matter-of-factly and provide him with clothing, meeting Setne's most immediate need, giving him face by ensuring that he is not further humiliated. If he picked up hostile tones when Setne mirrored his speech, he reveals nothing verbally, saying in fact nothing to Setne (as of yet). Indeed, he avoids confrontation altogether. This itself is a strategy of politeness: not only does Naneferkaptah avoid further conflict, but he focuses on a pressing matter at hand, taking care of Setne's nakedness—thereby maintaining his own positive face—and following Setne's own advice in doing so—saving Setne's negative face.³¹ On the other hand, by actually helping Setne and physically meeting the need that Setne referred to only (potentially) as a way to criticize Naneferkaptah, the latter still demonstrates that he has the upper hand in the exchange, implying that any face-saving and -giving is purely out of the goodness of his heart.

f. *dd pr-ʕ stne m-šm r mn-nfr* ^(5:35) *nʒy.k hrd.t.w st ʕnh st ʕh r pʒy.w rd.wy.t m-bʒh pr-ʕ*

Pharaoh said, “Setne, go to Memphis! As for your children, they are alive: they are standing in their ranks in the presence of Pharaoh!” (5:34-35)

The text does not give us any insight into Setne's response to this act. Setne, in fact, disappears from the scene altogether, apart from implicitly being the interlocutor for Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh's final statement, appearing again on stage in the next scene in Memphis. Setne's protest, whether by appearance (“how can you expect me to do this without any clothes?”) or by reality (“how could you have done such a humiliating thing to me?”), goes unacknowledged. Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh repeats verbatim what he had said previously, adding “they are alive.” This could be a gentle rejoinder on Setne's attitude, tantamount to saying, “Remember, Setne: you experienced the death of your children, but they are alive.” On a more abstract level, it is as if the text is not allowing even the possibility of Setne being defiant by “restarting” the narration again. Setne is not upbraided or held responsible for his actions, and is once again urged to return to Memphis. He acquiesces to Naneferkaptah implicitly by playing along and not protesting or bantering. The close repetition also does not explicitly consider anything implied by Setne beyond the literal, on-record meaning of his words; in fact, even those have been retroactively annulled by Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh's face-saving action of clothing Setne as well as ignoring whatever ill intentions he had implied in his complaint.

Following the ambiguous description of (Naneferkaptah-as-)Pharaoh as a *rmt-ʕ*, working equally well for both appearance (a wealthy- and important-looking person) and reality (a ghost), the decoupling between these two textual levels happens gradually throughout the scene. At sentences

³¹ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this suggested interpretation.

(a) and (b), the figure resembling Pharaoh speaks with his son Setne who is in a humiliated position without knowing why, but, having already urged him to return it (see 4/37), is likely to suspect that he was punished for stealing the Scroll of Thoth from Naneferkaptah. Setne's reply fits in perfectly, mentioning Naneferkaptah but none of the backstory of the theft of the scroll, which the real Pharaoh would know. The clue that Setne is speaking about "everything that happened" to him (*p3 i.ir ir.w...dr.w*) raises the possibility that he is dissembling, and quickly gives way to a decisive turn away from mere appearances at sentence (c) (Naneferkaptah telling Setne his children are alive) and (d) (Setne continuing to address Naneferkaptah as Pharaoh).

If all communication is potentially an antagonistic situation in need of defusing (Kasper, 1990, p. 194) through deliberate effort (Leech, 1980, p. 19), and since this is fundamentally connected to the need to save and/or gain face, the situation for Setne is especially fraught. Though confronting Naneferkaptah, whom he had wronged by stealing the scroll, Setne's culpability remains only implicitly addressed. Instead, by the conclusion of the scene, the text has in retrospect resolutely maintained the appearance of (Naneferkaptah-as-)Pharaoh throughout, even when both the ancient audience and (at least eventually) Setne knew the true situation. What's more, Setne gains a measure of face in return, since, at least by appearances, Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh reassures him.

To consider the text's strategy in representing these speakers in this way and refusing to allow appearance and reality to recombine, it is best to think in terms of how the language of politeness and the related facework carried out and implied in the words and actions of the speakers relates to the artistic presentation of the scene in general, as seen in the characterization of the figures as well as in the placement of this scene in the wider plot of the story.

As conventionalized yet realistic depictions of human figures, Setne and Naneferkaptah speak and act using face-saving and -giving strategies that draw on everyday speech as well as formal textual genres, not only narrative literature but others (like letters) as well. This twofold verisimilitude contributes to their characterization in a way legible to native Egyptian speakers, based not only on linguistic cues but on verbal formulations that have resonance (so far as we can reconstruct) in other Demotic literary texts. Setne is motivated to abide by the appearances—to treat Naneferkaptah as Pharaoh despite knowing that he is not—since this allows him to save as much face as possible. It is in Setne's interest not to be candid about his ultimate responsibility for what happened (provoking Naneferkaptah by stealing the Scroll of Thoth), since that would cause him to lose even more face. With Naneferkaptah maintaining the appearances throughout the dialogue, Setne is able to "keep up appearances," to save a modicum of face, to move on from the embarrassing episode with Tabubu without having to humiliate himself further. He takes advantage of Naneferkaptah remaining disguised as the Pharaoh his father. This means that Naneferkaptah remaining as such even after giving it away (sentence c) is his most general and ultimate act of granting Setne face.

Naneferkaptah's own motivation for abiding by the appearances is also related to facework, not for his own face but for Setne's. Though extraordinarily powerful and able to manipulate Setne by producing hallucinations and by shape-shifting, Naneferkaptah is still, when it comes down to

it, in need of Setne's help, and is counting on him in order to be reunited with his wife and son. The actual request for this comes only in 6.3-5, when Setne returns to the tomb and Naneferkaptah speaks as his own self. It is worth taking a brief look at that episode. There, Naneferkaptah—perhaps surprisingly—treats Setne with respect by using conventionalized indirectness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 70–71) when asking him to take on the major task at hand:

my hn.w s i.ir-hr.k mtw.k šp w^c.t hyy.t mtw.k šm r qbt mtw.k in.t.w¹ r bw-nzy

“May it be commanded before you that you accept a burden and go to Coptos and bring them [Ihweret and Merib] here.” (6.3-5)

Naneferkaptah's need and request threatens Setne's negative face (his desire to remain unimpeded): it is not an easy task to arrange for a reburial from another location; witness Setne's need to enlist Pharaoh's help in 6.6, and the fact that Naneferkaptah will later refer to this task as a “burden” (*hyy.t*, 6.4), a word which also means “suffering,” and which Ihweret had previously used to describe the havoc that the Scroll of Thoth wreaked on her family (3.40). This request by Naneferkaptah will certainly burden Setne. The indirect formulation used by Naneferkaptah (*my hn.w*) is found in literary texts (P. Dem. Saqqara 1, 13.27; P. Krall 9.19, 30), but, more importantly, passim in early Demotic letters (Depauw, 2006, pp. 264–265),³² as well as in the school exercise of P. Berlin 13639 (Erichsen, 1948), which consists entirely of different ways to write requests beginning with this phrase, showing its importance and ubiquity as a (learned) politeness convention. By speaking in an utterly conventional way, Naneferkaptah saves his own positive face as well as Setne's negative face when doing the face-threatening act of asking something major of him, avoiding literally asking him to do this as a command spoken in virtue of his own desires, but at the same time expressing its importance.

Returning to the dialogue between Setne and Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh: by almost immediately reassuring Setne that his children are safe, Naneferkaptah may indeed engage in face giving, but he also may be speaking off the record about his own situation. In engineering this experience for Setne, Naneferkaptah seems to have been counting on the fact that, having experienced the loss of his own family, Setne would feel a sense of obligation to remedy Naneferkaptah's experience of the same, even if the outcome of the Tabubu episode was also Setne feeling threatened, powerless, and thus compelled to act according to Naneferkaptah's wishes. Naneferkaptah is assuming that the burden is worth it to Setne. This shared sense of responsibility—we could even call it piety—is what Naneferkaptah counts on to counteract the face-threatening act of his impending request to Setne. Perhaps Setne could have sympathized with Naneferkaptah previously, but now he is able to empathize with him, having just experienced the loss of his children, but not burdened by the fallout of this having taken place in reality.

³² See Cromwell and Delattre, this volume, for deferential language in Coptic letters, which are relevant for the study of politeness in Demotic in general due to the closeness (diachronically and otherwise) of these two phases of Ancient Egyptian.

When it comes to the motivation of the two characters, then, strategies of politeness are leveraged as a means of conflict avoidance, a classic *raison d'être* of polite behavior (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 17). Setne takes advantage of the still-valid appearances and does not need to confess completely (even if he cannot help himself in being a bit sarcastic), while Naneferkaptah is careful to not add insult to injury in anticipation of asking Setne for a major favor. By maintaining the appearances, the interlocutors have avoided explicit conflict, but at the same time have moved towards its resolution, one awaiting the audience as they continue to hear the story, which now moves towards its conclusion.

Turning to the place that this dialogue has in the plot of First Setne, the very position of this scene is significant: it does not itself further the plot, but represents a kind of denouement of the Tabubu episode. While not furthering the plot, the dialogue between Setne and Naneferkaptah is still an important part of the story in general since one expects a confrontation between the two. When thinking about the plot of First Setne and what expectations an Egyptian would have after Setne's hallucination is dispelled, it is important to keep in mind (as discussed earlier regarding the phrase *rmṯ-ʿ3*) that stories about Setne were popular in Demotic narrative literature and that, specifically, multiple stories about Setne and Naneferkaptah are known to us today. We have license to reckon, then, not only with someone proficient in literary Demotic, but who was familiar with (we might even say “well read” in) Setne stories, including in different versions of what we call First Setne. The fragmentary P. Cairo 30692 discussed earlier contains episodes that are quite close to what one imagines took place in the lost beginning portion of First Setne, leading some to argue that it does consist of the lost beginning of P. Cairo 30646, which we call First Setne, as Quack (2023, pp. 16–17) believes (see also Jay, 2016, p. 250) and which was entertained already by Spiegelberg in the editio princeps. Quack (2023) has recently published another Setne and Naneferkaptah story, P. Leiden Pap. Inst. Inv. 1004 (a–c) + 1005 (a, c–e) + P. Marburg Inv. 38.³³ It may be that such an encounter with First Setne would have fostered a certain expectation for what Setne did after waking up: the surviving papyri certainly warrant the likelihood.

While this may seem overly speculative, there is in fact some justification in considering the text of First Setne to play with expectations in the way discussed, since P. Leiden Pap. Inst. Inv. 1004+ contains—albeit in a highly broken context—a likely parallel to this scene which shows Setne, after waking up, speaking with a character called Pharaoh.³⁴ Whether this was the true Pharaoh or not is impossible to tell. Although very little is preserved, it seems reasonable to hold that, in this fragment, Setne: 1. discusses a certain house, possibly ownership of it, with a figure who seems to be female (frag. e. ll.1-4); 2. has some kind of a sexual experience which led to an

³³ Quack first identified this text in the Marburg fragment (Quack, 2006). It is strikingly similar to the story of First Setne though not closely parallel in wording (Quack, 2023, p. 14), which is not surprising given the textual fluidity which is endemic to Demotic narrative literature. Quack observes that this text conveys significantly more detail in narration in comparison to First Setne in some places, while in others it omits what we find in the latter (2023, p. 16). Whether these are three versions of the same story with a single literary archetype or three different literarizations of a popular folktale—and whether and how such a distinction can be made in Demotic narrative literature{Demotic:literature} in the first place—needs further discussion.

³⁴ Frag. e; see Quack (2023, p. 16) for this reconstruction and *ibid.* (2023, pp. 20–21) for text, translation, and comments.

ejaculation that happened somewhere where it could be “found,” that is, not inside Tabubu (l.6, something which may have happened in First Setne but is not reported); and 3. speaks with a character called Pharaoh (*dd.f m-b3h pr-ʕ*, l.5)—as in sentence (d) above. These sound like they come from a version of First Setne. Since other parts of P. Leiden Pap. Inst. Inv. 1004+ parallel First Setne so closely, one can put the pieces together and see a reflection of the end of the Tabubu episode in this scene, as Quack has done in his edition of the text.

Assuming for the sake of argument that Setne could be expected to speak with Pharaoh right away, as seems to be the case in P. Leiden Pap. Inst. Inv. 1004+, the scene in First Setne would follow expectations but with a remarkable twist, sticking with the script, so to speak, but on the order of appearance only, and artfully adding a new level of meaning on the order of reality. This artful twist, and the way that the separation of appearance and reality is maintained, is enabled by the language of politeness, which reinforces the appearances and adds an ironic and entertaining dimension to everything said. If we assume it was equally likely that the intended ancient audience of First Setne expected an immediate confrontation by Naneferkaptah in some guise, then the text would meet that expectation, but also surprise, since, reinforced by the use of politeness conventions, both the narrator of the text and Setne himself treat this figure like Pharaoh, against the convention by the order of appearances.

4. Conclusion: Politeness, Literature, and Performance

What at first appeared to be a transitional scene in the story that simply moved it forward, while also providing the comedic effect of depicting Setne in such a humiliated position, has ended up being a passage of high interest. This has become clear because of a close observation of the use of polite language in Setne’s address to the Pharaoh figure which, at first, appeared to stand in tension with the perspective of the speakers, especially Setne’s. A close reading of this passage that was attuned to the dimension of politeness, and that sought to elicit the nuances of the facework of the characters, revealed that, by resolutely maintaining a distinction between how the characters look and act and what they know about each other—what we have been calling the levels of appearance and reality—the text depicts an intricate meshing of motivations, with effort to both give and save face, which looked backwards towards what Setne did (stole the Scroll of Thoth) and forwards to what Naneferkaptah would ask him to do (rebury his wife and child). This subtle portrayal is enabled above all through what we have postulated to be the intended audience’s familiarity with politeness formulae in everyday language as well as in formal genres. It also takes advantage of further familiarity with popular storytelling motifs and even other literary texts (that is, specific features of well-known stories about Setne), beginning with the use of the highly charged phrase *rmt-ʕ* to describe the pharaoh-like figure.

The primary beneficiary of this multilayered, short scene is the character of Setne. When saying, “My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! What is the way in which I can go to Memphis without any clothing at all on me?” (5.33), it is left to the audience to decide whether he is being honest or calculated, whether he is protesting merely according to appearance, pointing

out how he is naked and exposed, or according to reality, insinuating sarcastically to Naneferkaptah that his punishment for stealing the scroll went above and beyond propriety. The irony of this polite statement of Setne's is clear in the text, but the meaning that its irony has for the reality of Setne's perspective on the events remains ambiguous.

This ambiguity would have been immensely appealing for the text's intended ancient audience. With clear evidence of multiple stories about Setne and Naneferkaptah in the literary marketplace of the day, the subtleties of this scene would set apart this particular "narrative (*sdj*) of Setne Khaemwas and Naneferkaptah and Ihweret his wife and Merib her child," as P. Cairo 30646 identifies itself in its colophon. Whether this scene was a radically different take on the important moment in the story after the Tabubu episode, or a clever and subtle reworking, something quintessentially literary is happening in the resulting interplay of appearance and reality, the two being unreducible to each other, thereby making this scene and First Setne as a whole "news that STAYS news" (Pound, 1934, p. 29; cf. Fludernik, 1996, p. 11).

The potential of this scene, finally, would be equally great for a would-be performer. Since it is clear that Demotic narrative literature was written to be read aloud (Jay, 2021) and, framed by omniscient, third-person narration, was performable by a single voice (Cross, 2023), a would-be performer of First Setne was faced with a choice for how to portray Setne and Naneferkaptah-as-Pharaoh according to their understanding of the text. By supplementing the politeness formulas which connect to different kinds of linguistic and textual audience expertise with tone, gesture, and other non-verbal representations, the performer could make more vivid the negotiation of face-giving and -saving taking place between Setne and Naneferkaptah. Linguistic features of politeness and the related practice of facework, represented as here in a story, require, or at least encourage non-linguistic nuances for the full realization of their illocutionary force. Merely imagining the ways in which a dynamic performer could render Setne's exclamation, "Naneferkaptah...is the one who has done all these things to me!" or, above all, "My great lord! O may he attain the lifetime of Pre! How can I go to Memphis without any clothing at all on me?", given what we now know concerning the widely different understandings of Setne's character that they can voice, and given the interplay of appearance and reality in this scene, drives this home.³⁵ Politeness and facework are tools to help us ascertain better not only what an ancient work of narrative literature like First Setne says, but the ways in which they could have been realized as concrete works of storytelling.

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³⁵ Compare the discussion of Lazaridis, this volume, of the narrator's use of an unusually high amount of detail in the initial encounter of Djedi and Hordedef in the Tales of Wonder of P. Westcar). Lazaridis argues that this is in order to more surely anchor the relative hierarchy of the interactants at this crucial juncture of the story, the implication being that the written text cannot, by itself, provide the text's audience with the same level of context that would be present in a real face-to-face interaction. In my reading of this passage of First Setne, I am suggesting that the text's ambiguity is cultivated and thereby (it would seem deliberately) gives room for, even requires dramatic interpretation by a reader-performer.

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