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Matters of the Heart in Ancient Egyptian Secular Poetry

Due to the discovery of Ancient Egyptian secular poetry written by literate tomb-builders, there is a greater understanding of the more common people who lived during that time period. Much of this casual poetry addresses matters such as love and anguish, much like poems written in the modern day. However, there is a stark difference between poems that were written by females, and those that were written by males, mostly in the way that they perceived relationships and the benefits of those relationships. Poems that were written by females addressed concerns with acceptance and how society viewed them, while those written by males were more concerned with the physical aspect of their relationship.

In "My Brother Torments My Heart", the speaker discusses her anguish regarding the one she loves, and how she is unable to voice these desires to him directly. Towards the end of the poem, she writes, "Father, mother will rejoice! / My people will hail you all together." By saying this, the writer explicitly shows that if the two of them were to be in a relationship, then her family and other people around them would happily approve of it. She desires this acceptance of the society that she lives in and feels that being in this relationship will successfully achieve that goal. Similarly, in "My Heart Flutters Hastily," the speaker discusses her love for another, and how she doesn't act rationally because of it. In a fashion that mirrors the previous poem, she addresses how society might view her by writing, "And many eyes as well. / Let not the people say of me: / 'A woman fallen through love!'" She also has concerns about what the people think of her, and does

not want to have a negative reputation. By highlighting this concern, she shows that this is one of the main reasons she feels that she has to restrain her heart, because of this fear of not being accepted. Both female writers showcased these fears and insecurities in their poems, and explained how their relationships were affected because of it.

Conversely, in "I Wish I Were Her Laundryman," a poem written by a male speaker, one of the main topics throughout is the physical feelings that result from him washing the clothes of his desired one. At the conclusion of the poem, he voices his appreciation for this by saying, "Thank god for the body, / its youthful vigor!" He writes this with no embarrassment, showing that he is in no way ashamed of his feelings, which is a stark contrast to the concerns voiced by the females. The payoff of this act is enough to satisfy the writer, as he feels closer physically to the one that he loves. Similarly, in "Sickness Invaded Me," the speaker writes about the sickness that he feels as a result of being away from his lover. At the end of the poem, he is cured due to her being at his side once again, "Embracing her expels my malady - / Seven days since she went from me!" This simple act of a hug is enough to "cure" his illness, showcasing his focus on the physical aspects of his relationship. The speaker is concerned with always being near his lover, and when he isn't, he feels sick. In both male speakers' poems, they focused more specifically on the physical feelings that they received from their relationship with a loved one.

In conclusion, the poems written by male and female speakers addressed different topics and concerns that they had regarding their relationships. The female writers were more concerned with societal acceptance of them and their feelings, while the male writers focused on the physical feelings that they were able to receive from their relationships. The contrast between the two topics displays how the typical male and female view would have differentiated from each other during the Ancient Egyptian period, when they were first written.