

"A MANN PERISHETH - AND WHERE IS HE?"

A Kit Kat Essay

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DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

I. Introduction

A. If my first grade teacher had had our contemporary labelling system for students with reading difficulties, I might have been disadvantaged all my life. Because my beloved grandfather taught me to read Hebrew before I was of school age, I kept trying to read about boys and girls who would play if the rain went away, but I thought I could discover those words by reading the English print from right to left.

Fortunately, my second grade teacher, Miss Graff, had more insight into the problems of multilingual children because of her own German extraction. If it were not for Miss Graff, I would never have been invited to membership in this Club thirty-one years ago. As it was, I spent the first half of those years wondering about my qualification; the kindness and encouragement of the members reassured me so that I became much less anxious after two decades of membership than I was when I read my first Kit Kat essay, "Cruise on Unchartered Seas", only to discover that my esoteric title was little protection. The members found it quite transparent, prepared themselves for a sophisticated discussion of Talmudic literature, and I found myself in the midst of the waters, to sink or swim.

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This evening, after three decades, I want to begin my tribute to Miss Graff who was the first to point out to me how much fun it was to read English if one went from left to right. By the time I was in the fourth grade, I had set myself the impossible goal: to read all the books in Cleveland's Superior Branch Library which was nearest to our home. I started with the top shelf at the front window, drawing out four books at a time, the allowable limit, and read. Much was dull reading, much was unsuitable for a nine-year old, much was beyond my comprehension, but I read. Somehow or other, as I became more selective, I developed reading addictions, beginning with Ralph D. Paine, who wrote books and stories for boys, and continuing on during the years with Horatio Alger, Jr., Booth Tarkington, and Mark Twain. There was no system in my selections; as far as I can see looking backward introspectively, the sequence of my literary enthusiasms was completely fortuitous. In high school, they included Charles Darwin and H. G. Wells. As a freshman in college, I began to be interested in literary style and went from Oscar Wilde to Anatole France. But it was on "The Magic Mountain" that I discovered Thomas Mann and joined with many who regarded him as one of the greatest novelists of the century.

B. After his death in Zurich in 1955, his name was mentioned less frequently and soon the Modern Library editions of his English translations were appearing on

bookstore bargain counters before they disappeared altogether. Although I had developed new addictions in authors, I could not help but think of the three words in the Hebrew text of the Book of Job: **יָאָדָה וְאֵינֶנּוּ** "A MAN PERISHETH, AND WHERE IS HE?" (Job 14:10).

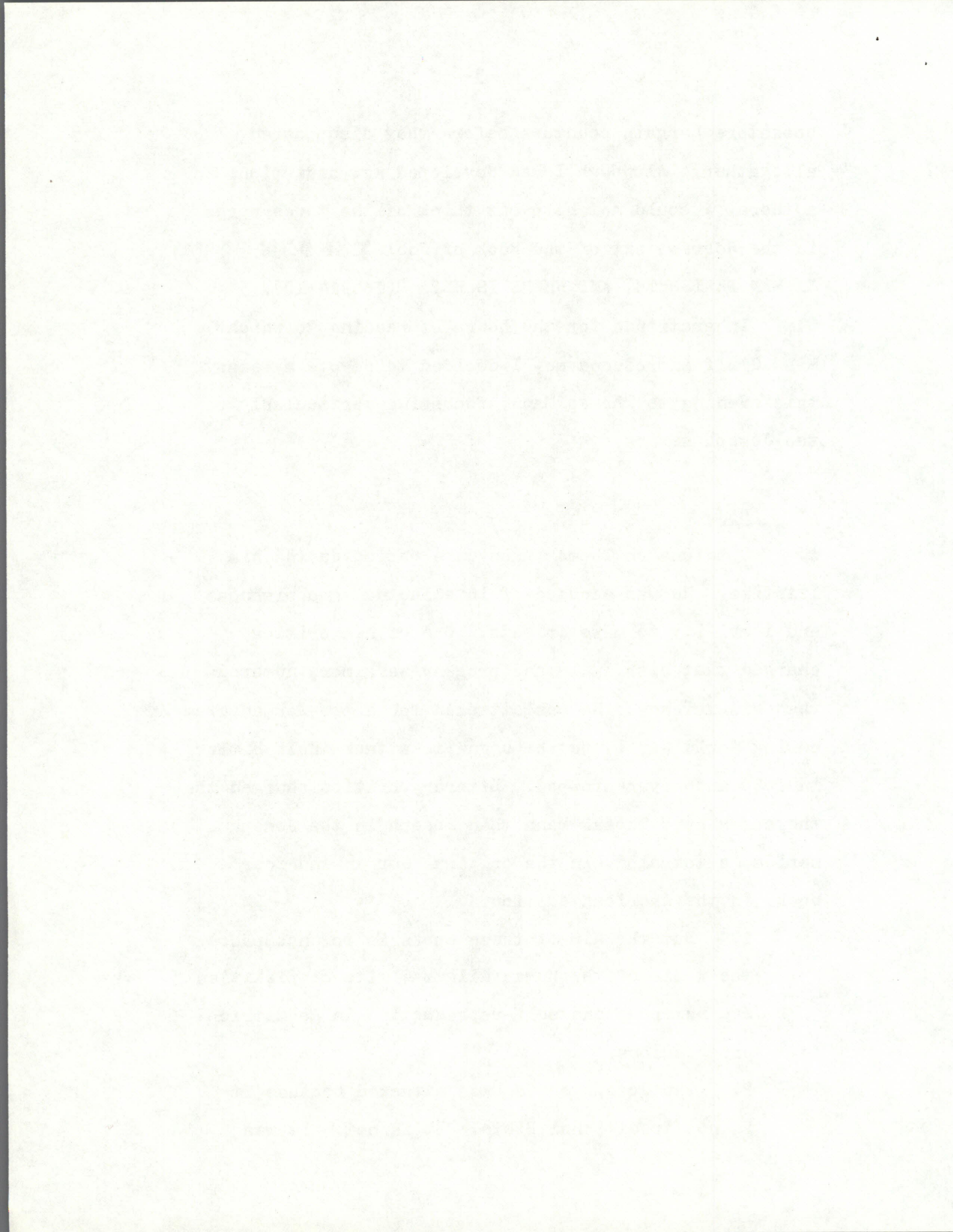
C. In gratitude for the hours of reading to which Miss Graff introduced me, I decided to devote my essay this evening to Thomas Mann, focussing particularly on the Joseph series.

II. Body

A. Opinions on Thomas Mann were varied during his lifetime. He was accused of intellectual snobbishness and inability to make friends. One of his critics charged that his family and progeny were more numerous than his friends. He was attacked for a pro-German bias during World War I, but he began to attack Adolf Hitler in 1930 and never stopped. Literary critics charged that there was more Thomas Mann than Joseph in the Joseph series, a tetralogy in the original German and four books in the American edition.

1. But the aim of these books is to encompass the whole of the human dilemma; its complexities are numerous and self-reproductive in geometric progressions.

2. The Joseph series was attacked because it is not traditional Bible. It is not. It was



attacked because it is not scientific exegeis. It is not. Mann has used thirteen chapters of Genesis as embellished by centuries of legend-makers and as illuminated by hundreds of scientific students of the Bible. He has incorporated Midrash, homiletic elucidation, legendary accretions and scientific investigations into a unified totality.

3. The Nazis burned the work because it was "Jewish". It shows tremendous rabbinic scholarship. Actually, however, it is Christian work because the point of view is definitely Christian. In the same sense, of course, Michelangelo's "Moses" is Roman and Sir Jacob Epstein's "Jesus" and "John the Baptist" are Jewish.

- B. How did Mann do this? How did he make one totality out of rabbinic, Christian, and scientific sources?
1. He has actually created a symphony of words. He begins with the affirmation: "Very deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless?". In this bottomless well of man's past, Thomas Mann went brooding about. If it had been music he was writing, it would have been broad, sweeping, rumbling, and chaotic with the nervousness of not-being eager to become.

2. Soon he began to pick out of this muddled past themes that are clearly heard and that are subsequently repeated again and again.

a. For example, consider the sacrificial child theme. Laban puts a child into the foundation of a house. There is no Biblical evidence to support this, but there are legends and some scientific evidence of this ancient practice.

b. The Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac was actually written as an attack upon the ancient practice of child sacrifice, and Joseph was reported dead to his father, Jacob. Mann treated this as a death, a sacrificial death, followed by the miracle of resurrection when Joseph is rescued from the pit. This is an obvious prelude to the sacrifice of Jesus and the miracle of his resurrection.

3. This symphonic interpretation of the Joseph series is more than my own imagination. In Thomas Mann's tribute to Bruno Walter, he wrote of his own ambition to be a musician and his failure. He described music as the truest form of the soul's expression: "If the world is music, conversely music is the reflection of the world."

C. In the Joseph series, Thomas Mann has undertaken to show the struggle of the human spirit against the hazards, accidents, and attractive snares of the physical world as well as the pain and suffering of creativity. He has allegorized this theme in his "The Transposed Heads".

1. Joseph is the creative spirit trying to identify itself to his fellows, especially his brothers, failing again and again, winning only their animosity, without knowing why.

2. So, too, Israel, the Jewish people, are Joseph and Joseph is the Jewish people, trying to make the world one great human brotherhood under the supreme Fatherhood of God, but suffering and misunderstood at every turn.

3. Jesus, too, is Joseph, dying on the cross to make a better world.

4. But in every variation of the theme there is creativity, as when a mother brings a child into the world.

D. "Joseph and His Brothers"

1. In the first book of the series, "Joseph and His Brothers", Mann stressed the theme of timelessness. The primeval chaos contained everything of the future; all of the present existed potentially in the remotest past. The theme was verbalized in the "Prelude".

"In this world of form and death conceived out of the marriage of soul and matter, the task of

the spirit is clearly outlined and unequivocal. Its mission consists of awakening the soul, in its self-forgetful involvement with form and death, to the memory of its higher origin; to convince it that its relation with matter is a mistaken one, and finally to make it yearn for its original source with ever stronger yearning, until one day it frees itself wholly from pain and desire and wings away homewards."

2. Joseph was shown as a tree-worshipper, star-worshipper, and also a moon-worshipper. When his father, Jacob, discovered him at this latter pre-occupation, he was displeased because of its violation of monotheistic concepts. But the indulgent father favored Joseph too much to be stern with him. In the same way, Reuben resented Joseph, the informer, when he told their father of Reuben's relations with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine; at the same time, Reuben admired Joseph for holding his father's honor high.

3. Before going back to Abram for the sources of these conflicts, Mann explained:

"Is a man's ego a thing imprisoned in itself and sternly shut up in its boundaries of flesh and time? Do not many of the elements which make it up belong to a world before it and outside of it? The notion that each person is himself and can be no other, is that anything more than a convention, which arbitrarily leaves out of account all the transitions which bind the individual consciousness to the general?"

a. Mann treated the conflict between Joseph and his brothers as an elaboration of the theme in Cain and Abel and Jacob and Esau.

b. In the house of Laban, Jacob was ill-treated; he had deceived his father, Isaac.

c. Leah bargained with Rachel for the services of Jacob and conceived the ill-fated little minx, Dinah. Aided by the fertility fetiches for which she traded Jacob's services, Rachel conceived and bore Joseph. Later Benjamin was born in an inn, an obvious parallel to the story of the birth of Jesus. Jacob paused to wrestle with God, and Mann explained that Jacob

"...had two great passions in life: God and Rachel. Here they came in conflict; and yielding to the spiritual he brought down disaster upon the earthly one."

d. Having fulfilled her mission, giving birth to Joseph and Benjamin, Rachel died and was buried by her bereaved husband-lover.

E. "Young Joseph"

1. In the second book of the series, "Young Joseph", Thomas Mann brought Joseph up-stage at the age of seventeen (Genesis 37). Joseph studied with Eliezer, the son of Isaac, and entered upon the religious life, continuing the quest of their ancestor, Abraham. At the same time, Joseph transmitted to his brother Benjamin the mourning for Tammuz, suggesting the mourning for Jesus.

Benjamin asked:

"Why was it that the young and lovely one had to be mangled, in the grove, in the green field, and in the world and be lamented with such anguish?"

"Thou canst not yet understand," Joseph said.

"He is the sufferer and the sacrifice. He descendeth into the abyss that He may rise again and be glorified. Abram knew that of a surety, when he raised the knife against his true-born son. But when the knife fell there was a ram in the place. Thus, it is that when we sacrifice a ram or a lamb, we hang about him a seal with the image of a man, as a sign that it representeth a man."

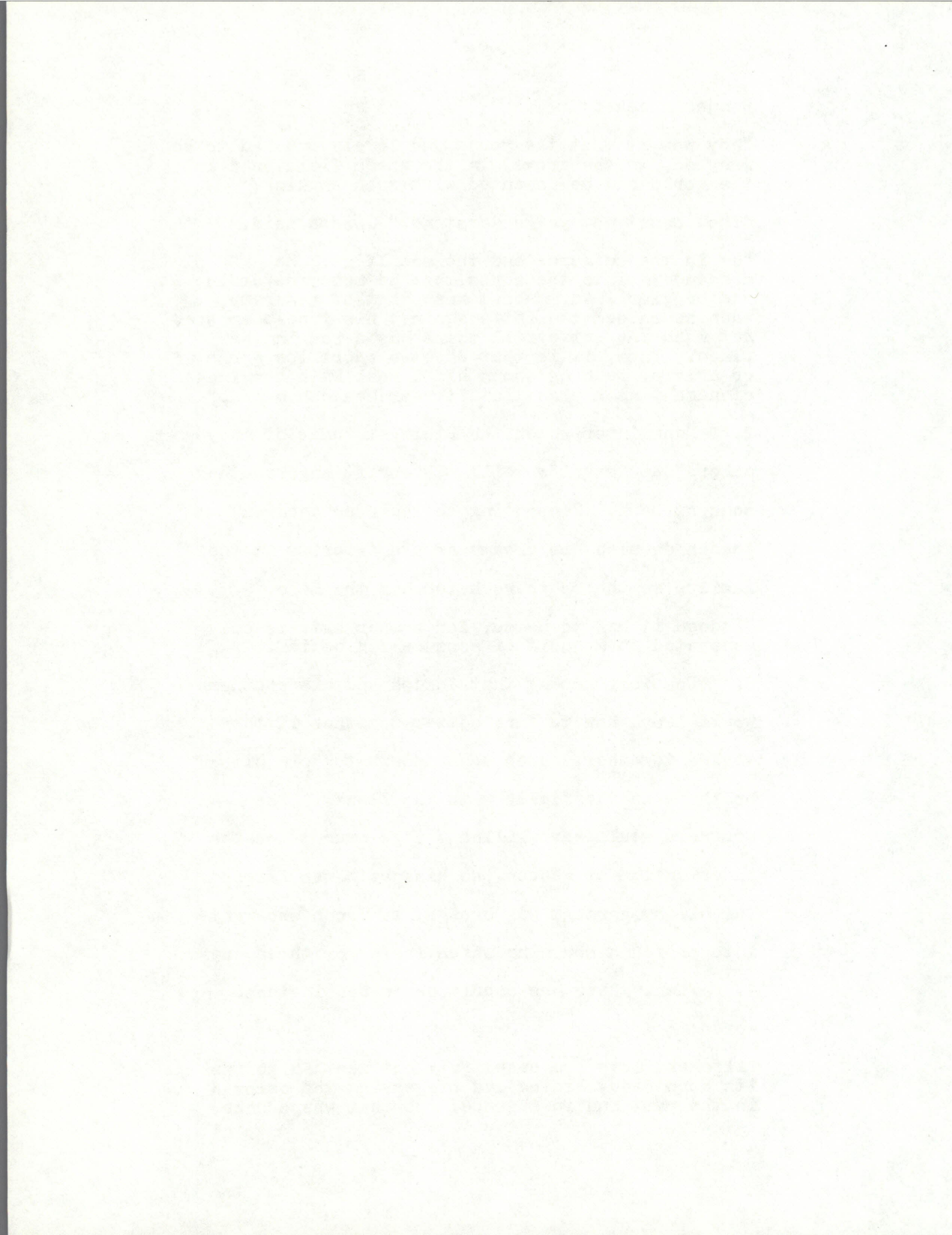
2. Mann interpreted the Biblical "coat of many colors" as Rachel's veil. This gift angered the sons of Leah. Responding to their antagonism, Joseph dreamed his dreams of his priority in the family, so the brothers hated him the more.

"Indeed it had to be so, for proper hate is only generated on a basis of some common belief."

3. Possibly hoping that Joseph and his brothers would learn how to fare better together if they worked together, Jacob sent Joseph to join his brothers in the fields with the flocks. The brothers would have killed Joseph except for the intervention of Reuben, so his death was feigned. The bloody garment was brought to Jacob who went into profound mourning which lasts for three days.

4. Then, there was a calm described in these words:

"Life and love are beautiful; but death also has its good side, hiding and preserving the beloved in the past and in absence; so that where once



there was care and fear there is now perfect calm. Where was Joseph? In Abraham's bosom. With God, who had 'taken him unto Himself'. Or whatever other words one finds for that last absence - all of them chosen to express gently and finally, if not somewhat hollowly and bleakly, the ultimate security of all.

"Death, after having restored, preserves. What had Jacob done to restore Joseph, since he had been dismembered? Death itself had seen to that, and quickly. Death had recomposed a whole out of fourteen pieces (or even more), recomposed it in laughing beauty, and thus preserved him more sweetly and better than the people of the evil land of Egypt preserved their dead with bandages and spices; inviolate, unchanged, unchangeable, that dear, vain, brilliant, wheedling youth of seventeen... .

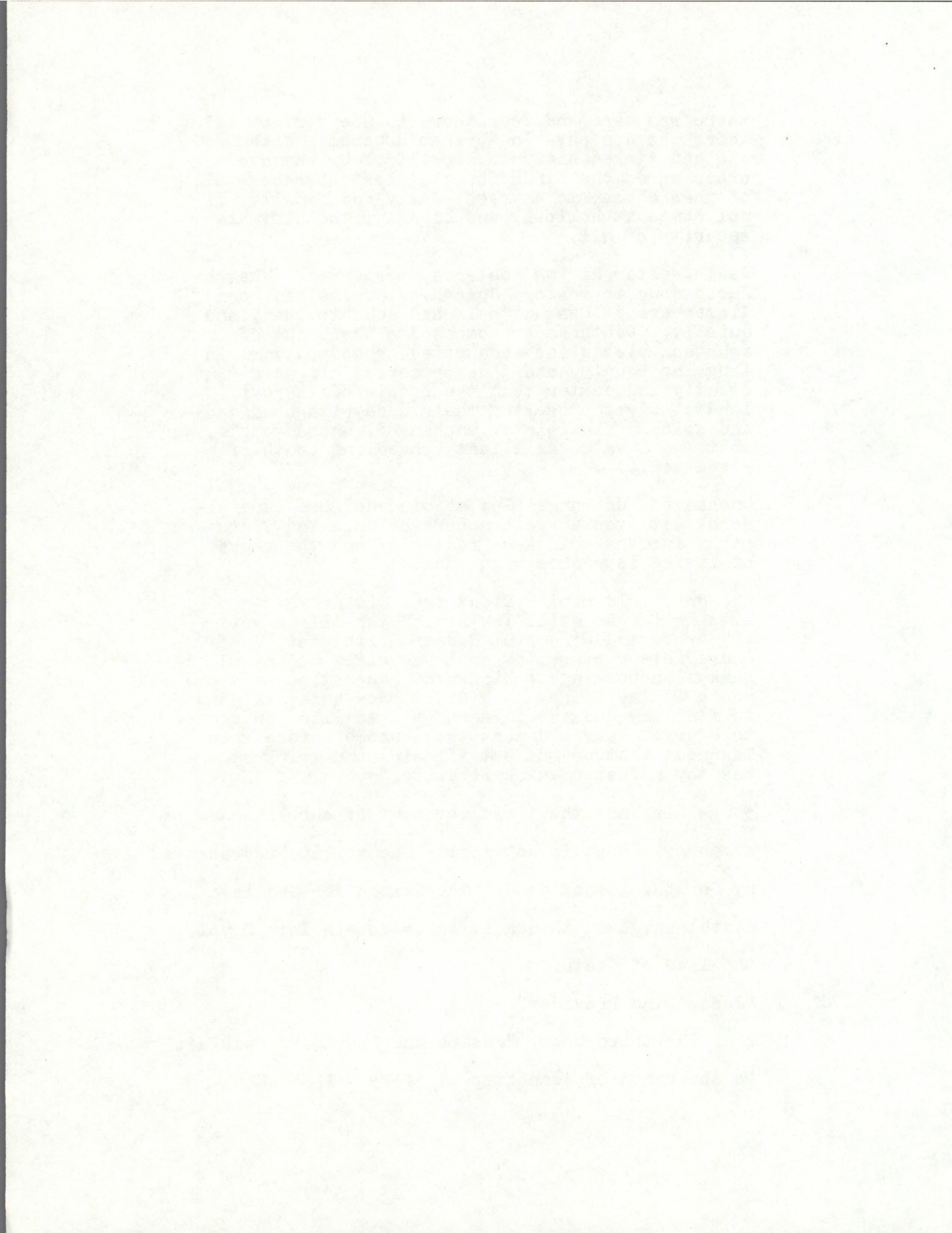
"Unchanged, unchangeable; needing no more carefulness, yet ever seventeen however much the years might increase since he rode away and the years of living increases with them... .

"Ah, good old man! Didst thou divine what amazing favour still lay behind the silence of thy dread and wonderful God and with what incredible rapture thy soul was still to be shaken, according to His word? When thou wast young in the flesh, thou didst once awake at dawn to find thy dearest bliss turned to illusion and trickery. Very old must thou become before thou learnest that nought but illusion and trickery was thy sorest anguish likewise."

5. This ends the first movement of our literary symphony. Hope is not lost. The spirit, represented by Joseph, is not dead. The search for God is deathless, even though it takes Joseph into Egypt, the land of death.

E. "Joseph the Provider"

1. The third book, "Joseph the Provider", was set in the reign of Amenhotep IV (1375 - 1358 BCE).

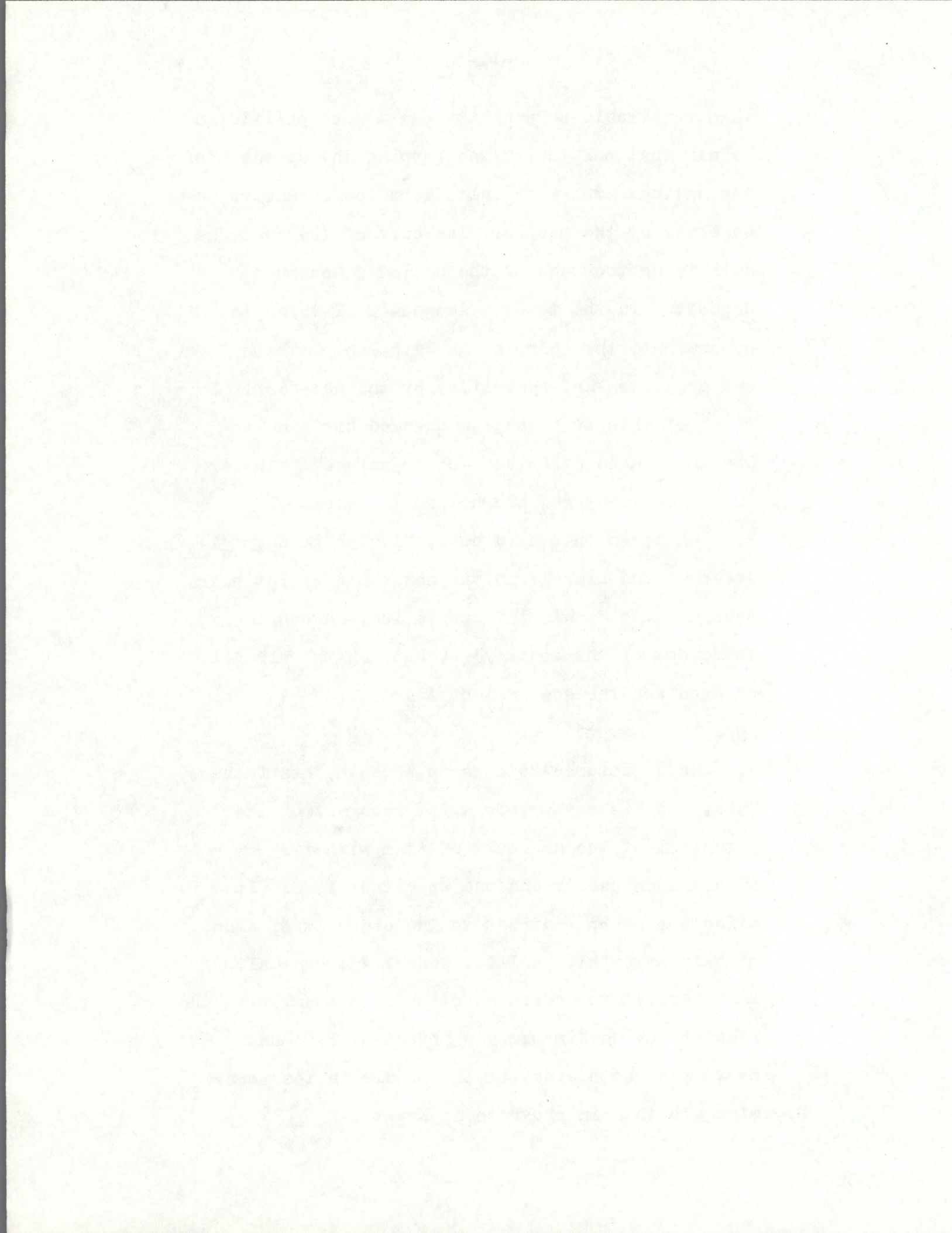


This remarkable personality was a weak politician. He saw that polytheism was sapping the strength of the nation; the many cults were too expensive to be borne by the people. The cult of the dead was nullifying too much of the nation's wealth deposited in the tombs. Amenhotep IV tried to subordinate the gods in the Egyptian pantheon to one god, Atum-Re, symbolized by the sun-disk. In token of this position, he changed his name to Iknaton. Mann described Joseph as a sympathizer with the Atum trend who helped it develop.

2. When, in the third book, "Joseph in Egypt", Joseph found himself in the household of Potiphar, according to Mann's interpretation, he was in the midst of the controversy between the old cult of Amun and the new cult of Atum.

F. "Joseph in Egypt"

1. Mann pictured Potiphar's parents, his father, Huia, and his mother, Tuia, as recognizing the potential of the new cult of Atum with its emphasis on purity and the spiritual life. It offered a sharp contrast to the old cult of Amun, crassly material, phallic, sexual and sensual. They decided to dedicate Potiphar to Atum, with the idea of having him marry a priestess of Amun so as to play both sides to the middle in the power struggle then in progress in Egypt.



a. Following an ancient myth, Huia and Tuia castrated their son to free him of sensuality.

b. Of course, this is less of a victory of the spirit than a rejection of the flesh.

Mann pointed this out in an indirect meditation attributed to Joseph "In Egypt":

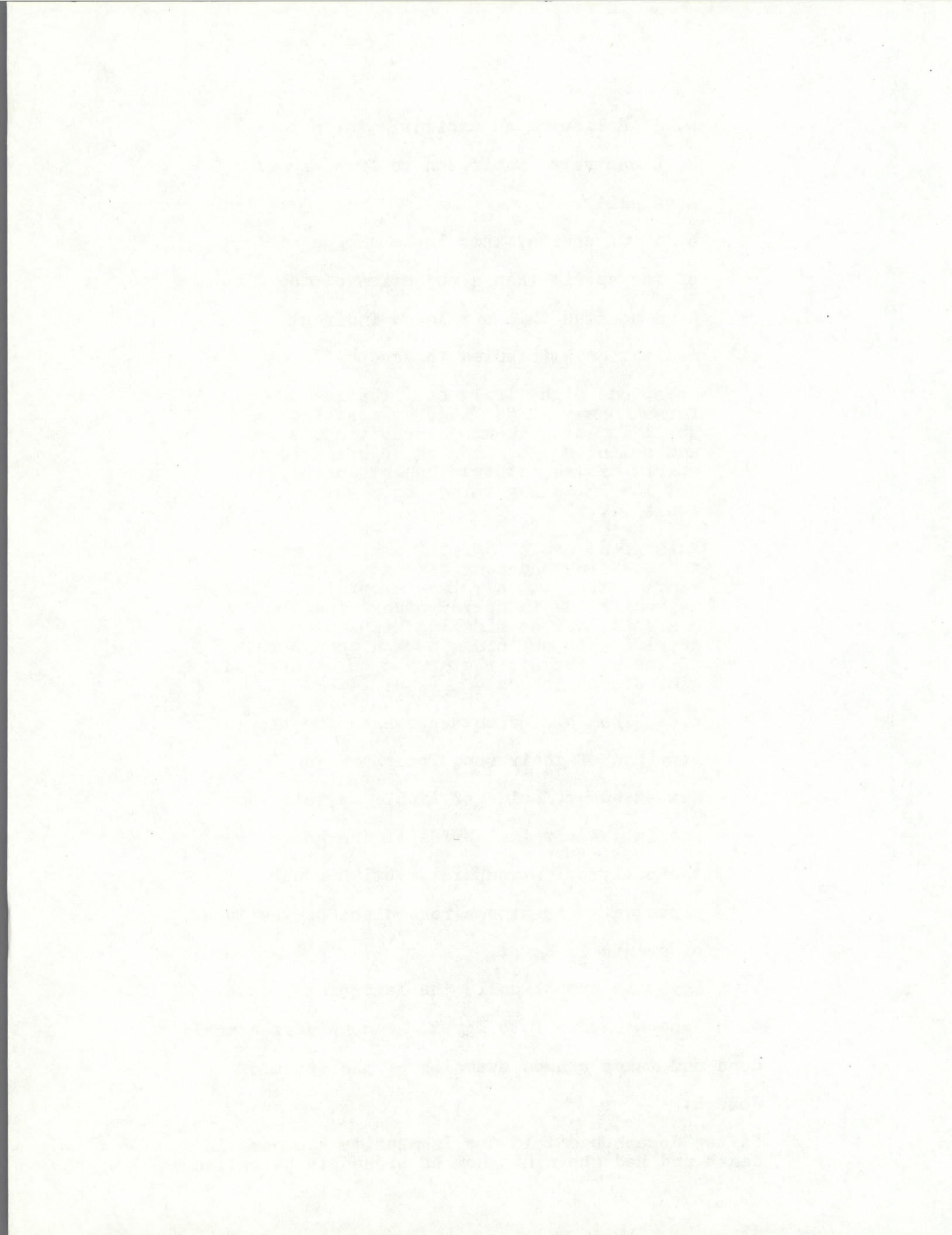
"Yes, one might truly call that a God-forsaken way of dealing, a gross lack of skill in going about to propitiate a new and splendid age. For an approach to the spirit of the father, thought Joseph, did not lie in taking things out by the roots ...

"This great man of Egypt (Potiphar) was a noble, fine and sensitive soul; and kindly, too, in the slave's opinion. True, he took pride in making others tremble for his sake; but considering his status as a sacrifice to certain mistaken conceptions of the spiritual, that ought to be allowed him, Joseph thought." (240; 241-2)

c. Then his parents arranged for the marriage of their son, Potiphar, to Mut-em-en-et, bride of Amun. We note that she is the virginal bride of the god. From the political standpoint, Potiphar was directed to greatness regardless of the turn of events in Egypt.

2. Egypt is symbolically the land of the dead. When Joseph enters into Egypt, he considers himself dead and takes a name symbolic of the death of Joseph:

"After Joseph had told the Ishmaelite his name in death and had shown him how he wished to be called



in the land of the dead... ." (36)

The name he chose was "Usarsiph."

a. When Joseph came into the service of Potiphar, he was asked by his master:

"How did your present then grow out of your past?"

"I died the death of my life," answered

Joseph, "and a new one was vouchsafed unto me in your service, my lord." (266)

b. Then, in "Joseph the Provider", when Joseph was called to the court of Pharaoh from the prison to which he had been

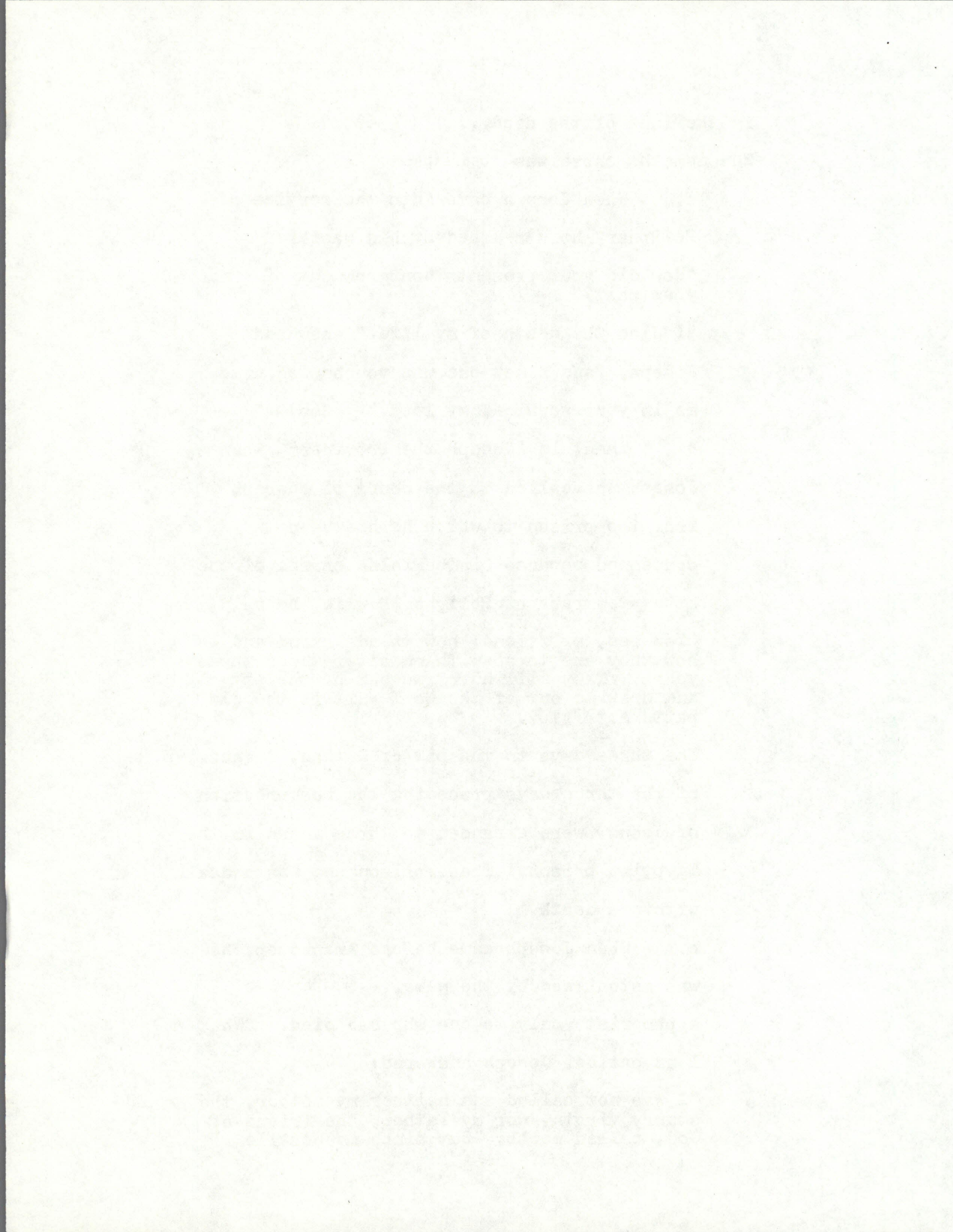
condemned because of the false charge of the attempted rape of Potiphar's wife, he said:

"You see, my friend, how things stand and how they are to go with me after these three years. They will hurry me out of the pit and draw me out of the well - it is the old pattern." (107)

The three days in the pit of Dothan, suggestive of the three days preceding the resurrection of Jesus, were expanded to three years in the Egyptian prison. The imprisonment was a death within a death.

c. When Joseph came before Amenhotep, he was astonished by the name, Usarsiph, appropriate only to one who had died. "What I am called," Joseph answered:

"I was not called and neither my mother, the starry virgin, nor my father, the friend of God, called me so. But since my hostile



brothers flung me in the pit and I died to my father . . . what I am has taken on another name; it is now Osarsiph." (187)

This gave Amenhotep the idea of changing his name later to Ikhnaton. Amenhotep asked:

"Why did you give yourself a name of death? Even if your father thinks you are dead, after all you are not."

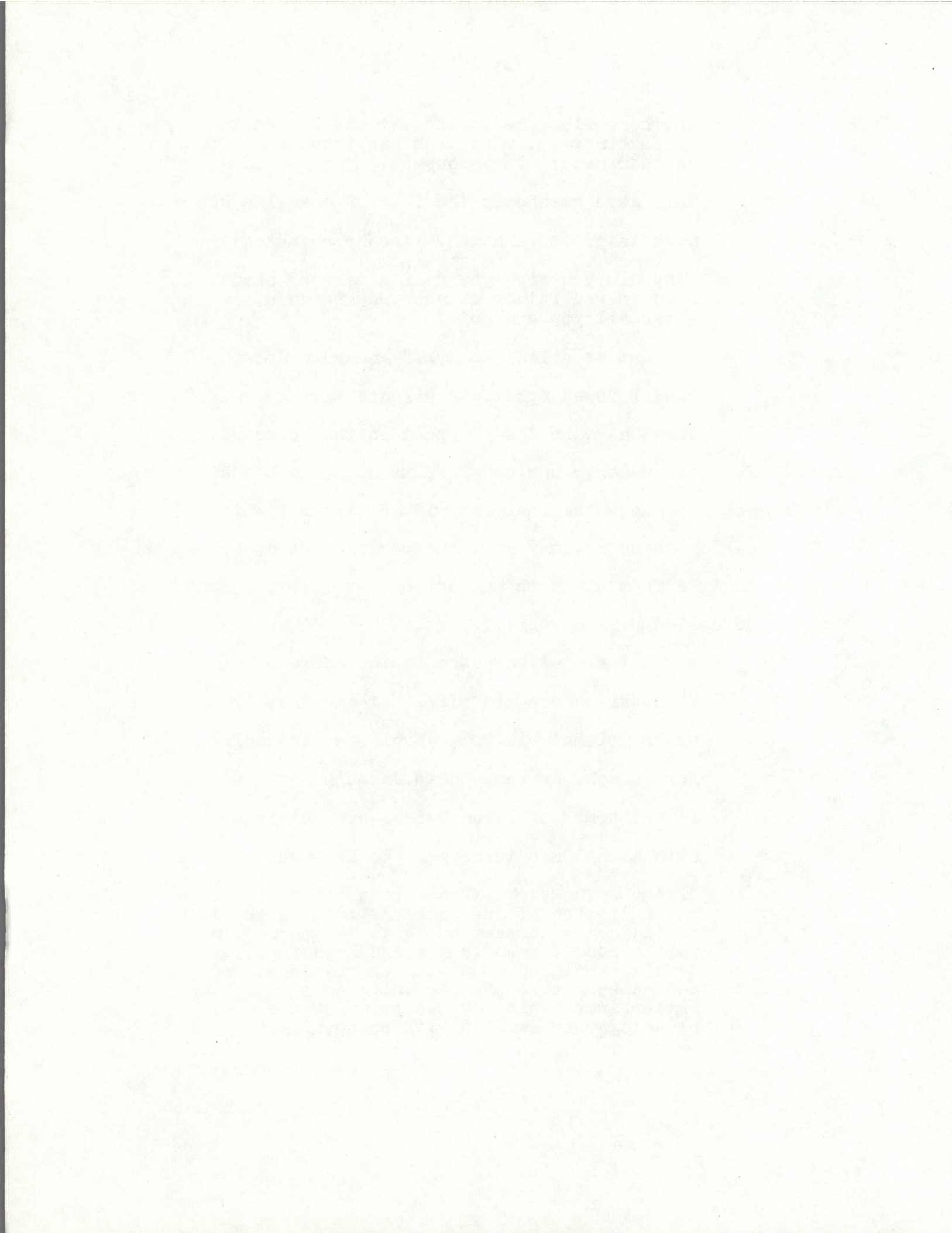
"I must be silent to him," answered Joseph,

"and I vowed myself to silence with my name."

3. The ten years Joseph spent in the house of Potiphar deserve our consideration. Mann had seven years precede the incident with Potiphar's wife; during these seven years, the position of Joseph changed from slave to master, or, at least, parent. He called her "My child".

a. These seven years in the house of Potiphar before his wife, Mut-em-en-et, symbol of materialism, developed the desire for Joseph, correspond to Jacob's seven years in the house of Laban before his marriage with Rachel who turned out to be Leah.

"These seven years then were a repetition and imitation of the father's life in the life of the son; corresponding to the period in which Jacob turned from a landless fugitive to a man weighed down with possessions, and an indispensable partner in Laban's enterprises, which by the power of the blessing were swollen with prosperity."



b. The seven years were building up to a great climax in the love affair between Joseph and Potiphar's virgin wife, Mut-em-en-et.

(1) The chief steward in the house of Potiphar when Joseph arrived was Mont-kaw who welcomed Joseph's aid.

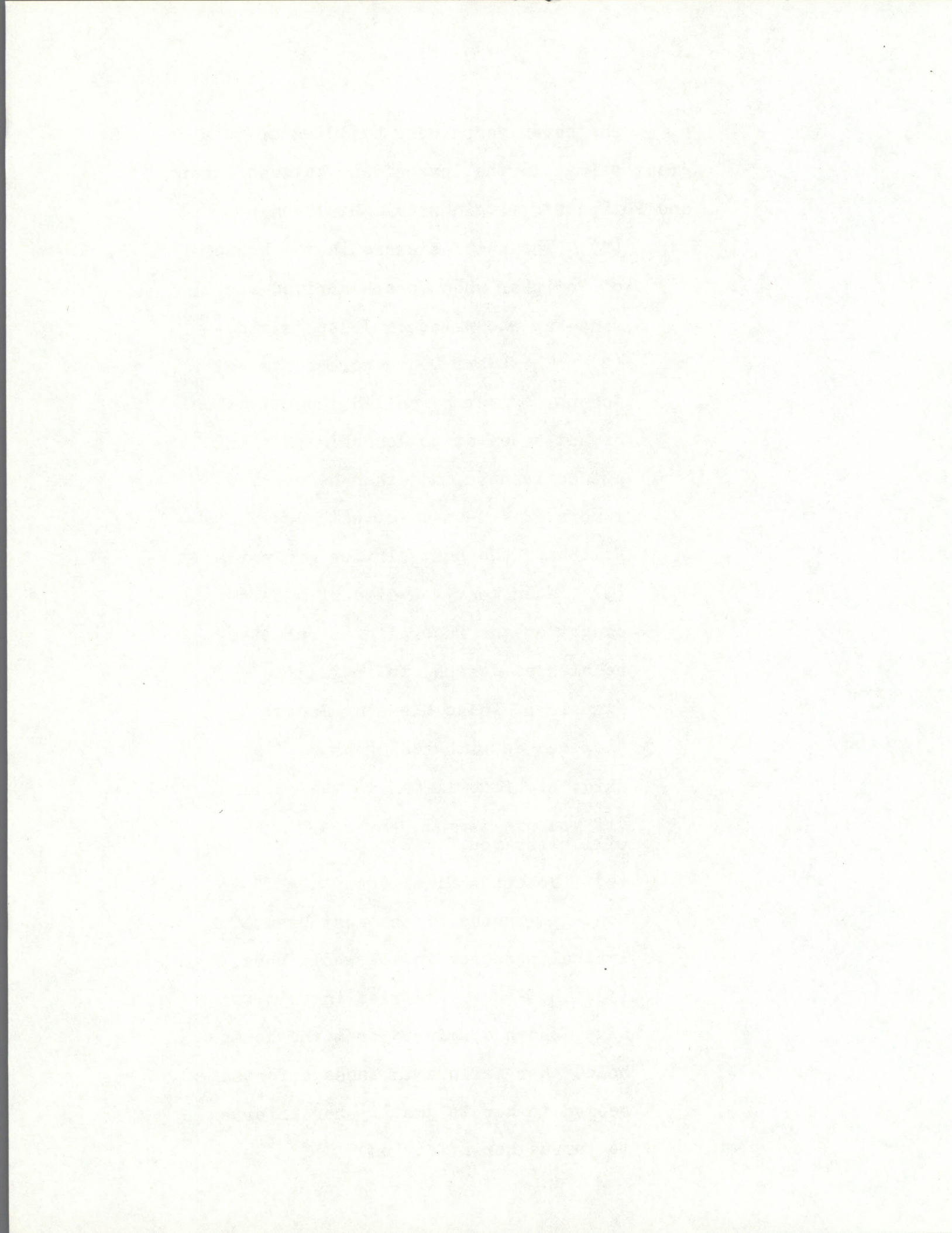
(2) The Dwarf Duddu worked against Joseph. First he called the attention of Mut-em-en-et to Joseph's physical attractiveness, and then he carried rumors of Mut-em-en-et with Joseph to Potiphar. He beat him for his pains.

(3) When Mont-kaw died of a cold caught at the funeral of a relative, he blessed Joseph, following the example of Isaac blessing Jacob:

"Let me see with seeing hands," he said, his face lifted to the ceiling, "if you are Osarsiph, my son, for I will bless you." (E. 360)

(4) Joseph's final "good night" to Mont-kaw is one of the most beautiful lyrical passages in the whole book.

(5) Mut-em-en-et tried in vain to have Joseph dismissed from the household. Her failure in these efforts seemed to her to justify her efforts to pursue her affection.



c. Here Thomas Mann masterfully escaped the over-simplification of pairing a chaste and righteous Joseph with a wicked, scheming Mut-em-en-et.

(1) A true bride of Amun, Mut-em-en-et tried for three years to conceal her love for Joseph. In the next phase of the relationship, she let him see it. Finally she offered it to him.

(a) During the first phase, the discussions between Mut-em-en-et and Joseph were limited to the fiscal affairs of the household.

(b) In the second phase, she confided in her two chambermaidens. The first advised her:

"Why sigh? Is not the handsome youth the bought slave in this house? ... If you would have him, what have you else to do but beckon?"

The second suggested magic. Mut-em-en-et declined their suggestions with this explanation:

"For you speak as though he were but body and not soul

and spirit to boot. And over these my beckoning would have no power, no more than magic; for both can command the body and bring me that only - a living corpse."

Mut-em-en-et resorted to the worship of Atum-Re.

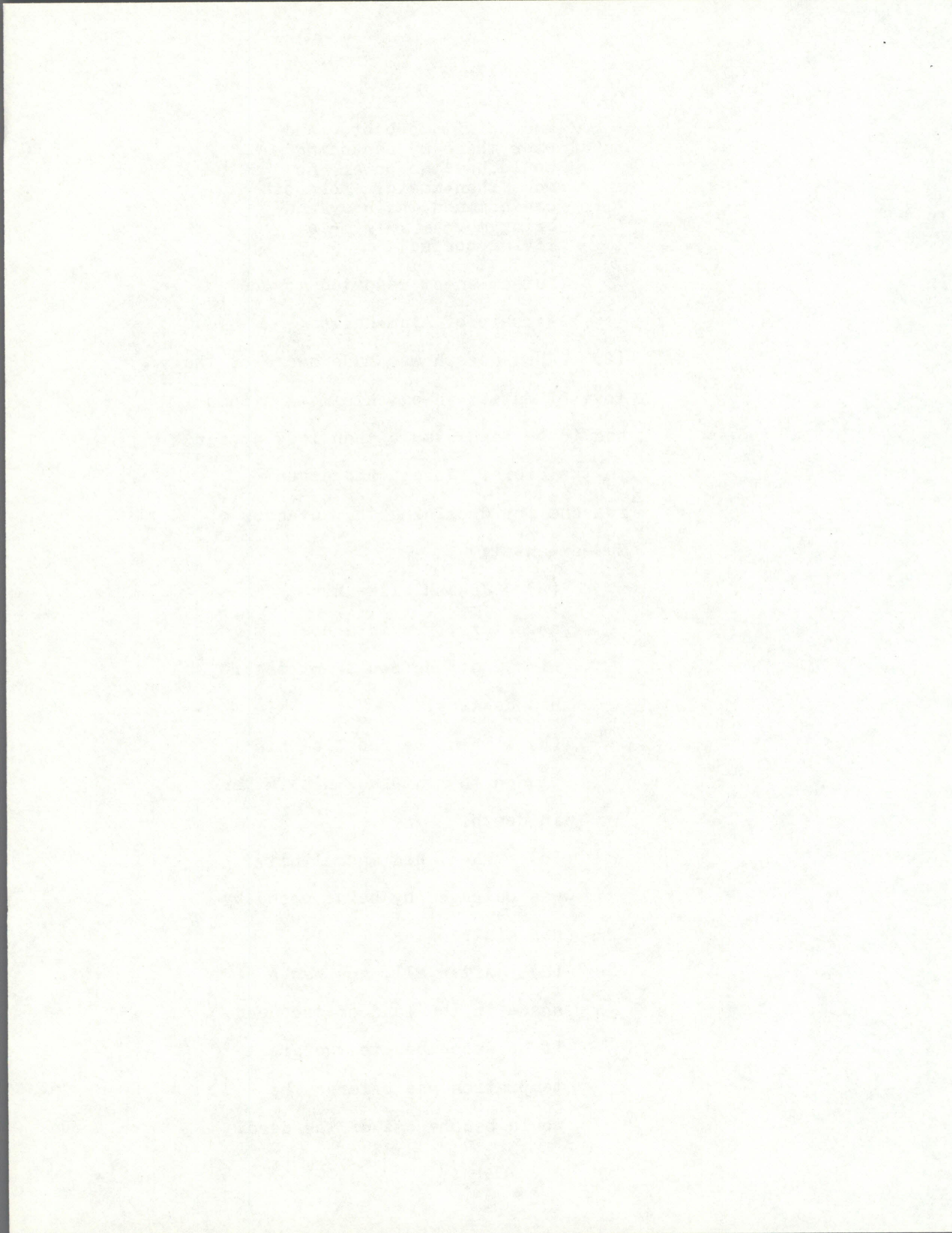
(2) When Joseph was made aware of the love of Mut-em-en-et, his motivations had to be less simple than they appear in the Bible. Joseph had seven reasons for declining the advances of Mut-em-en-et:

(a) Joseph, like his ancestors, was in a compact with God. He could not desert his destiny.

(b) Then, he recalled his pledge to Mont-kaw, his father in death.

(c) Then, his masculinity was outraged by being wooed by his mistress.

(d) After all, she was a shade in the land of the dead. If he succumbed to the great temptation she offered, he would become one of the dead.



He would drop out of the story of his people.

(e) Then, too, he thought of his own father, Jacob.

(f) He did not want to sin, because

(g) that would expose him to annihilation, ending the struggle, the story and all.

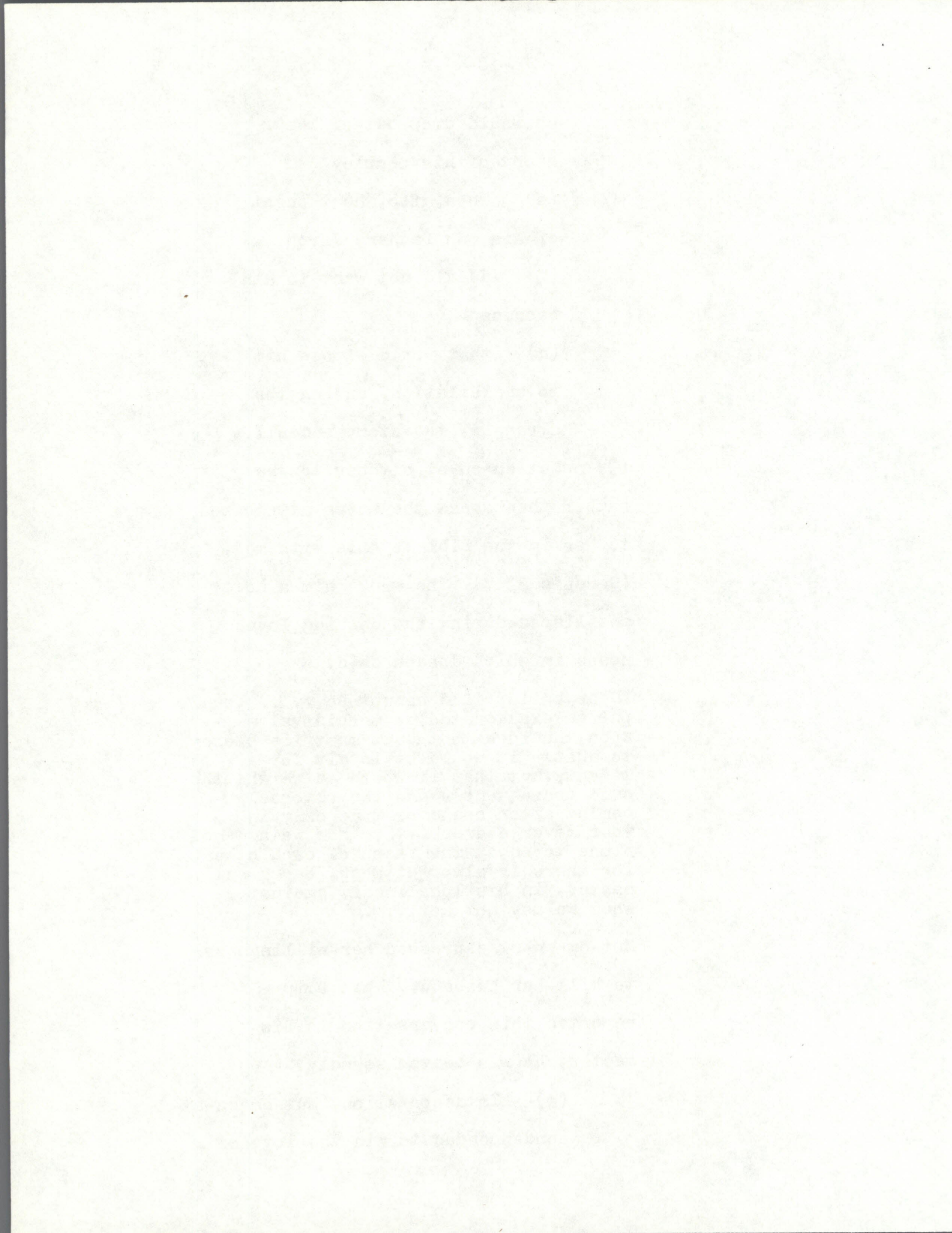
(3) Mut-em-en-et bit her tongue rather than speak the words attributed to her in the Bible: "Lie with me".

(Genesis 39:7) She wrote him a note, and lisped during the ensuing love scene in which Joseph said:

"Dear child, that cannot be... . You put an exaggerated, a morbid value upon the idea that dust must lie close to dust; it would be lovely for a moment, but that it would outweigh the evil consequences and the remorse coming after could be true only in your fevered dream... . For we are not alone to enjoy the flesh of each other, for there is also Potiphar, our great master, in his loneliness, against whom we may not act... .

Mut-em-en-et expressed her willingness to kill her husband. When Dudu reported this conversation to his master, he was beaten soundly.

(a) In desperation, Mut-em-en-et condescended to win the love of



Joseph by magic, knowing full well that she would have to be satisfied with his body only. Failing that, she decided to bring about his fall, which was a second death within death.

(b) Mut-em-en-et returned to the Amun cult, but she had a valuable possession:

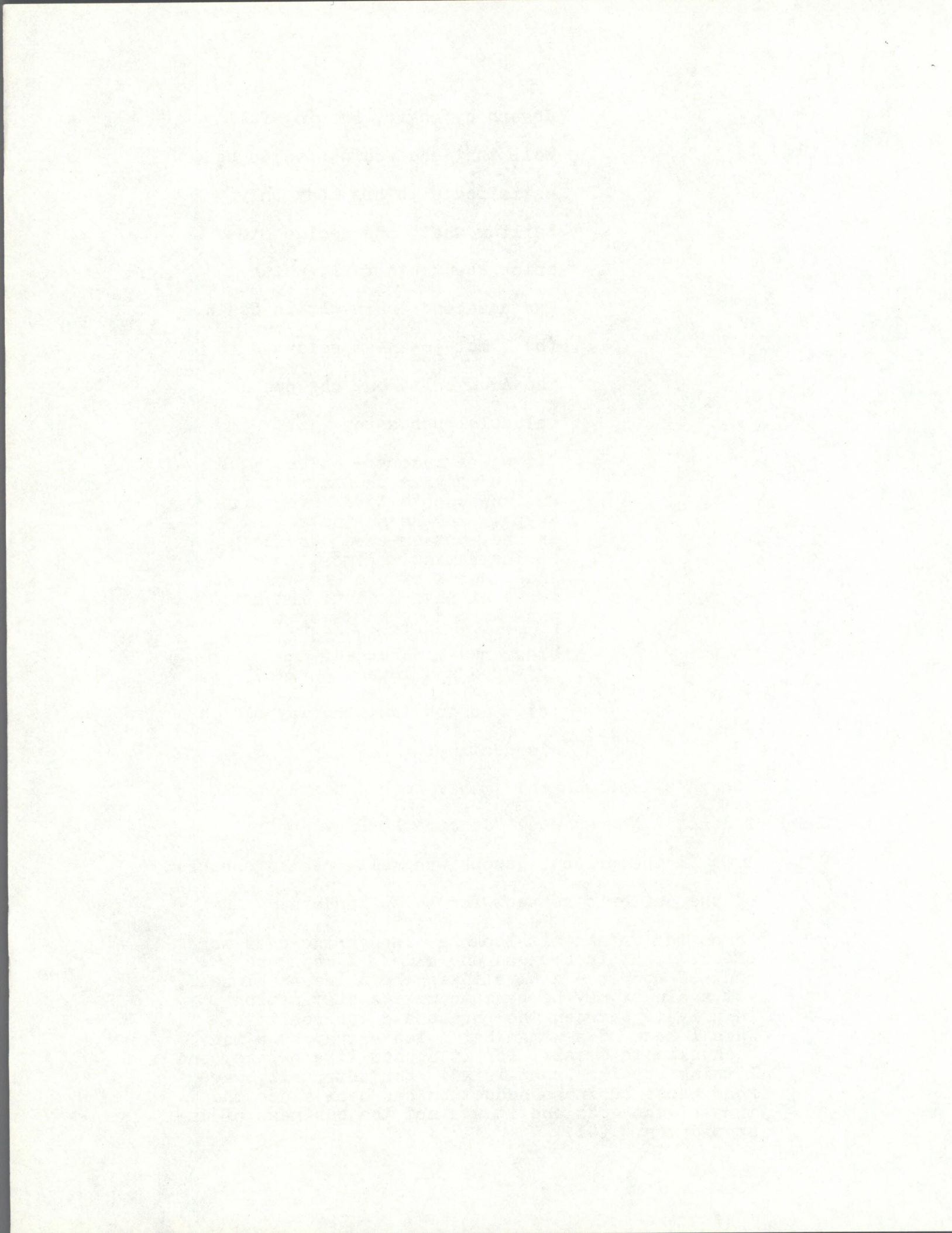
"It was a memory - not so much of him who, as she had heard, was now become lord over all Egypt. He was an instrument - as she, Mut-em-en-et had been an instrument. Almost independent of him was her sense of having justified her own existence, her secret knowledge that she had once blossomed and burned, once suffered and loved." (246)

(c) Joseph went the way of his destiny.

G. Joseph's imprisonment is his second death in the land of death. Now we meet "Joseph the Provider".

1. In the prison, Joseph was well-treated because of the jailer's respect for sex offenders:

"From the outside it looks as though the case were clear; that is because one side - I mean the man, of course - always takes the blame on himself, yet again it may be best to make a distinction in private between the phrase and the reality. When I hear of a woman being led astray by a man, I chuckle to myself, for it sounds like a joke, and I think: by the Great Triad! For after all, we know whose business seduction has been since the time of the gods and it was not the business of us stupid men." (41)



2. In the same prison, Joseph met two fellow inmates, a royal butler and baker, each of whom had a dream, which Joseph interpreted by a method that suggested Sigmund Freud. Consequently, he was called upon to do the same for Pharaoh - Amenhotep IV. This, as I have previously indicated, is Joseph's resurrection. This is a victory over matter and sensualism.

3. When Joseph's brethren come into Egypt, the re-union of the brothers is Hell conquered.

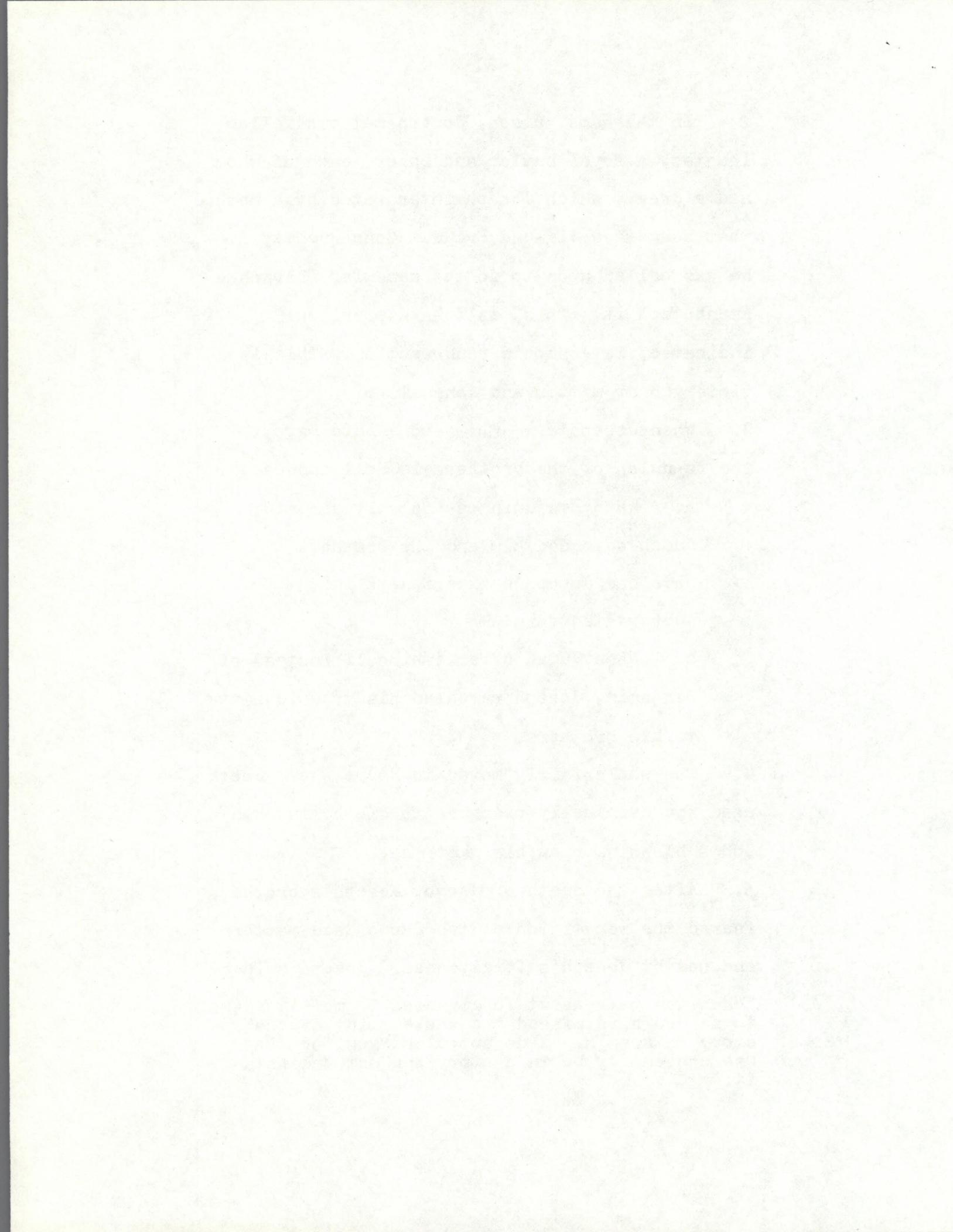
a. When Benjamin was falsely accused, Judah defended him and the brothers have had Joseph's experiences in abbreviated form.

b. When Judah offered himself instead of Benjamin, Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers.

4. The whole family moved to Egypt where Jacob aged and eventually prepared to die by invoking God's blessing upon his posterity.

5. After the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers feared the repetition of the Jacob-Esau pattern and sought Joseph's forgiveness. Joseph said:

"When you talk about forgiveness to me, it seems to me you have missed the whole point of the story we are in. I do not blame you for that. One can easily be in a story and not understand it."



III. Conclusion

- A. Joseph did not blame the brothers who put him into this great story. The mind that rises over matter does not blame the stumbling blocks; these were steps on which the ascent was made. Israel, which is Joseph, does not blame the world for not grasping the idea of the supreme Fatherhood of God of which the universal human brotherhood is an inevitable corollary.
- B. Jesus, who is Joseph, did not blame those who crucified him because otherwise his message might not have been given to the world.
- C. Thomas Mann, who is Joseph, did not blame the fate that made an exile out of him; it made it possible for him to see his experience in a universal light.

