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'A Woman is a Woman, if She had been Dead Five Thousand Centuries!': Mummy Fiction, Imperialism and the Politics of Gender

Nolwenn Corriou

- 1 Although the mummy has come to be known in popular media¹ under the features of a stumbling, decaying pharaoh hungry for revenge against those who disturbed his eternal rest, the first mummies that came to life in popular fiction were, for the most part, female. More than just female mummies, they are described as women: “this woman—I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse” (Stoker 236), says Malcolm Ross, the narrator of Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*², as he gazes on the unwrapped mummy of Queen Tera during the “Great Experiment” that is supposed to bring her back to life. Indeed, when the wrappings are torn away and the body of the queen is revealed, she loses her status as a mere archaeological object (a mummy) or even as a dead body (a corpse) to be reborn as a woman and a strongly sexual being.
- 2 In Stoker's novel as in many other texts from the late-Victorian years up to the 1920s, the archaeological remains, under the features of the mummy, are endowed with the attributes of femininity achieving, as it were, a return of the dead under the guise of the—often literal— *femme fatale*. A number of novels and short stories dramatise such a resurrection of a female Egyptian mummy who causes havoc in the modern society in which she awakens through ancient Egyptian magic. The most famous of these texts is probably *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, which revolves around the discovery of the mummy of a female magician queen, Tera, by the archaeologists Trelawny and Corbeck; a mummy who, when she is brought to England to be displayed in Trelawny's private museum, starts attacking her new owner to reclaim the jewel that was taken from her and is supposed to enable her to come back to life.

- 3 Although they are not driven by revenge and hatred for the archaeologist who disturbed their sleep, H.D. Everett's *Iras*³, and H. Rider Haggard's *Ma-Mee*⁴—both Egyptian mummies—shatter their discoverers' life and sanity by making them doubt the reality of their resurrection. In Haggard's short story, Smith, a young aspiring archaeologist, falls in love with a sculptured head he sees in the British museum and travels to Egypt to find the tomb of the woman it represented, Queen Ma-Mee. Even though he only finds the mummified hand of his beloved, he gets to meet her later when she comes back to life, along with all the mummified members of Egyptian royal families, as Smith finds himself locked in the Cairo Museum at night. However, when he wakes up the next morning, he is unable to decide whether what he saw was real or a mere figment of his imagination.
- 4 The plot of Haggard's story is strongly reminiscent of H.D. Everett's novel, *Iras: A Mystery*. Here, Ralph Lavenham, an archaeologist seemingly on the verge of madness, finds a living woman in the sarcophagus he has just received from Egypt. Having decided to marry, Lavenham and his living mummy run away to Scotland to circumvent British marriage laws and escape Savak, the priest who has sworn to kill *Iras*, should she choose to belong to another man. At the end of a series of adventures, Lavenham loses consciousness and is found with a decaying mummy who—he later claims—was his wife, *Iras*.
- 5 The figures of Tera, Ma-Mee and *Iras* all point to a construction of the ancient Egyptian⁵ body as a feminine entity⁶. This gendering of the antique object, and of antiquity itself, implies a problematic relation or even relationship between the British archaeologist and the historical past that takes the shape of a mummy. The characteristics of this relation must be questioned so as to throw light on the political implications of a definition of the antique body as female in the late-Victorian imperial context.

Antiquity as a feminine construct: the figure of the mummy

- 6 Just like the unrolling of Queen Tera in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* transformed her dead body into a seductive woman, so does the discovering or unveiling of antique objects construct them as a feminine entity. This stems from the archaeological process itself, a process of revelation of the antique artefact, and the relation(ship) it initiates between the archaeologist and the remnant of the historical past that comes back to life under the guise of the mummy.

Archaeology as rape

- 7 A perfectly serious scientific discipline for late-Victorian explorers as well as a most entertaining hobby for tourists visiting Egypt and the East, archaeology is repeatedly described as a sexual quest in archaeological fiction. If the narrator and hero of *Iras: A Mystery* merely defines Egyptology as “the absorbing interest of [his] life” (Everett 1), the origin of the characters' passion for archaeology in both *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and “Smith and the Pharaohs” is described as a love encounter. Corbeck, an archaeologist and adventurer in Bram Stoker's novel, describes his discovery of Egyptology in these words: “I fell in with Egyptology. I must have been bitten by some powerful scarab, for I took it bad” (Stoker 80). It appears here that his interest in archaeology, like some

powerful passion, pertains to both love and disease. In the case of Smith, the narrator of Haggard's short story, it is love *almost* at first sight that causes the young man to become an Egyptologist. As he gazes on the sculptured head of queen Ma-Mee for the first time at the British Museum, "Smith looked at it once, twice, thrice, and at the third look he fell in love" (Haggard 9).

- 8 As a consequence of the close affinity existing between archaeological work and amorous passion, archaeology in fiction tends to take on the shape of a love quest—a quest for an antique woman whose conquest is at the centre of the plot. Having fallen in love with the sculpture of an Egyptian queen, Smith becomes a specialist of Egyptology and travels out to Egypt to study the original of the sculpture he first looked upon at the British Museum. He subsequently decides to join an archaeological dig in order to discover the tomb, and the mummy, of his beloved Queen Ma-Mee. The name is significant insofar as it sounds very much like the French "ma mie"—my beloved—as well as "mummy" (mother), suggesting that the archaeological quest is both a love quest and a search for a maternal origin. Names are equally important in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* as they also point to the archaeological nature of the narrator's love interest. Indeed, Queen Tera, the mummy discovered by the archaeologist Abel Trelawny, is to be found onomastically and in reverse in the Egyptologist's daughter, Margaret (Marg - ARET), who is herself the beloved of the narrator, Malcolm Ross. As a possessed double, or perhaps a reincarnation of the dead Egyptian queen, Margaret stands for the antique female who is at the core of the archaeologist's quest.
- 9 However, although passion seems to be the main motivation for archaeological work, the conquest of the antique woman is always marked by a great violence whose nature is clearly sexual—a violence, moreover, which systematically follows the same series of steps and makes archaeological work akin to rape. The first stage of the explorers' quest is the penetration into female territory: Allan Quatermain, perhaps the most famous explorer in archaeological fiction, has to go down an explicitly sexual path in order to reach Kukuanaland in *King Solomon's Mines*⁷. Following the woman-shaped map that will lead them to the mines, the heroes walk along a headless female body, across Sheba's breasts, all the way down to the cave which stands for her genitals. This cave bears a strong resemblance to the "mummy pit" fictional Egyptologists invariably penetrate after destroying the rock that was preventing the tomb from being violated. The sexual undertones of such a scene are quite obvious and the passage describing the penetration of Queen Ma-Mee's tomb in "Smith and the Pharaohs" is particularly unambiguous: having found the "mouth of the tomb" (Haggard 11), Smith feels drawn inside it by a mysterious power and has to break a "virgin rock" (Haggard 12) before he is eventually able to achieve what he himself calls "violating a tomb" (Haggard 15).
- 10 The ritual unrolling of the mummy is another leitmotiv of mummy fiction with strong sexual connotations. This climactic scene in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* is strongly reminiscent of the obviously sexual staking of Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*⁸. Margaret's reaction to the suggestion that the mummy should be unwrapped in order to carry out her resurrection is highly suggestive: "a woman! All alone! In such a way!" (Stoker 230). Margaret immediately perceives the indecency of a scene that soon begins to look like "gang rape". Indeed, what starts as a serious scientific experiment quickly takes on a clearly sexual overtone when the narrator underlines how he "grew more and more excited" (Stoker 233) as he describes the "sound of rending which marked the tearing away of the bandages" (Stoker 233). This violent undressing of what has become more a

woman than a mummy eventually reveals the body and “the beauty of the figure which, save for the face cloth, now lay completely nude before us” (Stoker 235).

Oriental mummies

- 11 This sexually aggressive attitude to antique female bodies seems rather at odds with the deep respect Victorian culture held for classical civilisations and their remains. However, it may be explained by the nature of the antique women who are discovered—or rather uncovered—by the work of archaeologists. Indeed, the ancient body encountered in Egypt is literally uncovered, brought back to the surface by a process that is yet another well-known leitmotiv of archaeological fiction: digging in the sand, lifting stones and removing a number of layers of time is the ritual through which the past is discovered, just like the mummy is discovered through the process of unwrapping. This form of striptease⁹ of the antique body clearly evokes the Orientalist motif of the unveiling of the Oriental woman. Whether or not this unveiling takes place, it is constantly at the heart of the relations between the Western male visitor or coloniser (in this case, the archaeologist) and the Oriental female (the mummy). This motif of the veiled woman that one must unveil in order to discover the secrets and the mystery of the East—or of the past in archaeological fiction—is only one of the features that construct the mummy as a modern Oriental woman. The antique women described in the works of Haggard, Stoker and Everett are all endowed with the main physical characteristics of the Eastern woman as she is imagined by Western cultures: dark eyes, long half-lowered eyelashes, long flowing black hair. Furthermore, they induce the same sense of attraction and repulsion as the Oriental woman. The mummy of Queen Tera, for instance, is described in these words: “the flesh was full and round, as in a living person; and the skin was as smooth as satin. The colour seemed extraordinary. It was like ivory, new ivory; except where the right arm, with shattered, blood-stained wrist and missing hand had lain bare to exposure” (Stoker 236)¹⁰. The description of the beautiful, statue-like skin and perfect body reaches an anticlimax when it comes to the abject stump left by the mummy's severed hand. Queen Ma-Mee herself, with her “alluring and mysterious smile” (Haggard 17) is also portrayed as rather hideous when she is described with the derogatory words that were used to portray Arabic and Black women in Victorian times: “perhaps the lips were too thick and the nostrils too broad” (Haggard 9). As for the charming Iras, when she is eventually unveiled and unwrapped by Lavenham at the end of the novel, all she has to offer to her lover is the ghastly spectacle of her “shrunk yellow skin” (Everett 102).
- 12 Yet, the Oriental mummy, as any Oriental woman seen by 19th century travellers and colonisers, is sexually provoking and strives to attract the Western man to her in order to be unveiled. Iras, for instance, when she is still in her sarcophagus, starts unveiling her own arm as an invitation for the archaeologist to unveil the rest:
Thrown carelessly out of the disturbed wrappings, and hanging over the edge, was a woman's arm—slender, exquisitely rounded, warm with life. [...] The rotten shreds of tissue had been torn apart by the movement of the arm, and there within lay the sleeper in the perfect bloom of her young womanhood, white robed from throat to foot, the darkly fringed eyes still closed, the soft breathing just stirring the linen folds which veiled her breast. (Everett 38)

- 13 Smith's discovery of Ma-Mee's tomb, is also caused by a strange attraction, which encourages him to unveil the antique body: "something seemed to call on him to come and see" (Haggard 18). But it soon turns out that the "virgin rock" has actually been broken before and that Smith is not the first man to penetrate the queen's tomb... Nevertheless, the archaeological quest which starts out as an amorous one always seems to find an encouraging response from an Oriental, and therefore seductive, mummy.

The corpse bride

- 14 The sexual character of the archaeological encounter between a male scientist and an antique woman establishes gendered dynamics in their subsequent relation which, in fact, tends to become a relationship. The power and domination the male archaeologist exercises—or strives to exercise—over his female find reproduces the movement of appropriation which follows the discovery of antique artefacts. Once the archaeological object has been brought back into the modern world, and the mummy back to life, the archaeologist endeavours to appropriate it, by denying its otherness and trying to absorb it into his own culture and society. Since she embodies radical otherness—as dead, female, foreign—the mummy has to be subjugated in order for her discoverer to dismiss the threat she might present to her Victorian owner. This attempt to appropriate the antique female ranges from the locking of the object into a museum (Cairo Museum in Queen Ma-Mee's case and Abel Trelawny's private museum, which he has set up in his own bedroom, as far as Queen Tera is concerned) to the labelling of the object according to a Victorian scientific order. This is illustrated by Lavenham's naming the mummy he has been sent from Egypt by a colleague. Indeed, the nameless mummy refuses to reveal her real identity and leaves it to her "owner" to christen her. He finally opts for the names of Cleopatra's two maids in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*¹¹, Iras Charmian. Both the collecting and the naming of the mummy highlight this attempt to absorb the antique into the Victorian world: she is required to integrate the space of her conquerors and is defined by a British reference as much as by an Egyptian one (the Shakespeare play). But this absorption goes even further when the archaeological artefact is asked to become part of Victorian society by becoming family. Although the mummy as an antique object relates to the characters' origins (she can embody the mother, the "mummy"), it is as a love object that her relationship to Victorian males is defined. As it turns out, the rape-like discovery of the mummy is only the first step towards the full appropriation of the antique woman by the British archaeologist.
- 15 The motif of the hand is central in these three texts as it acts as a metaphor of the relationship between the scientist and the antique artefact. In both Haggard's short story and Stoker's novel, the severed hand is an independent entity that focuses the desire of the Egyptian Queen's suitor¹². The plot of both stories is in great part articulated around the characters' efforts to, literally, win the hand of the mummy¹³—or her reincarnation in Margaret's case in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*. On finding Queen Ma-Mee's hand, Haggard's hero, Smith, clearly shows what type of relationship he has in mind by kissing it and taking it away, thus refusing to have it be part of the museum collection. Later in the narration, the confusing exchange of rings¹⁴ that takes place between the two characters effectively achieves the marriage between the Victorian

man and the antique female, reproducing the exchange of rings that H.D. Everett imagined between Lavenham and Iras. At the end of *Iras: A Mystery*, the ring is indeed the only clue hinting back to what happened between the archaeologist and his mummy—the most obvious proof that the mummy did come back to life.

- 16 In *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, the courtship is made more intricate by the double presence of the hand: Queen Tera's hand appears as the instrument of her revenge and a constant threat for the men who hold the body of the Egyptian queen, whilst Margaret's hand is constructed as an aesthetic object of desire that the narrator wants to appropriate in the way Trelawny appropriated the rest of the body. In the 1903 ending of the novel, the mummy disappears mysteriously and escapes appropriation. However, the second ending, written in 1912, relates Malcolm's victory in winning the hand of his beloved who then legally becomes his possession by marriage, just like Iras became Lavenham's: "to have one belonging to me, depending on me, how sweet the possession!" (Everett 44). Possession is clearly what is at stake in all three texts: the antique and Oriental woman is constructed as the object of desire that one must discover and unveil in order to possess her. Thus, from the portrayal of Egyptian antiquity as a female figure transpires a dynamic of conquest, appropriation and even subjugation through sexuality and marriage. These motifs are quite obviously reminiscent of the imperial discourse of the Victorian era and of the military and political conquest of the Orient, so that one may contend that the antique female stands for the colonised native, whilst the fictional representation of archaeology suggests its interpretation as a metaphor for colonisation.

Imperial archaeology

- 17 This reading of archaeological fiction is consistent in the broader literary context of imperial Gothic. Although Stoker's terrifying horror story has little to do with Everett's and Haggard's "supernatural romance[s]" (Everett 118), all three stories nevertheless pertain to what Patrick Brantlinger defines as imperial Gothic¹⁵ insofar as the return of the mummy, a creature of colonial origin, invariably constitutes a threat for the main characters. This dramatises the late-Victorian anxiety about the decline of the British Empire, the empowerment of the colonised and, more broadly, a general concern about the empire striking back. The Gothic dimension of texts haunted by living dead mummies and portentous ruins is perfectly manifest as is the imperial motif, as well as the anxieties which are built into the narrative.

The quest for origins

- 18 Archaeology, as it is represented in fiction, is very much concerned with the sort of imperial adventure that became an immensely popular motif of children's literature, through the works of Haggard and many others. As I will discuss further later, archaeology is also imperial since it is part of a wider scientific enterprise aimed at constructing as comprehensive a knowledge of the colonial territories as possible, with control and power (such as it is conceived by Foucault) over these territories in mind. Moreover, archaeology as an imperial activity is itself a form of colonisation, insofar as it shares the same dynamics of territorial occupation (the archaeological dig is constantly described as a place of British occupation working under British rule, even

as late as in the 1930s and 1940s, when Agatha Christie uses excavation sites as the setting for a number of stories¹⁶), exploitation (of the locals as workers on the dig as well as of the land's cultural wealth), and of appropriation of the land's human production—in the case of archaeology, the produce of antique history.

- 19 However, as a search for individual as well as collective origins—a major cultural phenomenon of the whole Victorian era—archaeology takes on a new meaning and serves to rid the coloniser of any form of imperial guilt. The colonial or archaeological appropriation of antique territories and artefacts is therefore not depicted as an appropriation but as a re-appropriation; Egypt is envisioned as the land of the ancestors and, as such, belongs to Britain by historical right. The motif of an antique ancestry is present in both Stoker's novel and Haggard's short story and serves to justify the appropriation of the past by modern archaeologists. In an unexpected twist, Smith turns out to be the reincarnation of Queen Ma-Mee's lover, in "Smith and the Pharaohs". He is recognised as Horu, the sculptor who cut the image of the queen that Smith finds in her tomb, and was subsequently killed for kissing the queen's hand. This motif of reincarnation changes the meaning of Smith's quest: appropriating the sculpture and content of the tomb is no longer akin to looting, since the image of the queen was his in the first place. In the same way, Smith's decision to steal the hand is but a fair re-appropriation of what belonged to him in ancient times: the mummy's hand, symbol of Queen Ma-Mee's love.
- 20 Similarly, Margaret, Trelawny's daughter in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, seems to be a reincarnation of Queen Tera—or a least a receptacle for the queen's Ba, the spiritual part of the dead. The story relates how she was born of a dead mother at the very moment her father penetrated the tomb of Queen Tera whose spirit, then deprived of the body the Egyptologist appropriated, took shelter in the newborn baby. In the same way, when the mummy's body disappears at the end of the novel, the narration strongly suggests that her spirit survives in Margaret and that Tera has found what she was after: love, in the person of Malcolm Ross.
- 21 As a consequence, claiming the hand of either Ma-Mee or Margaret, or in other words, making them the man's legal possession, is justified insofar as it only gives the husbands back what was already theirs in a long-forgotten past. More broadly, and in a colonial perspective, appropriating Egypt and its treasures only gives Britain back what belongs to it through the right of inheritance. In this logic, colonisation is not so much an invasion as a return to the motherland or, one might say, to the land of the "mummy".
- 22 However, this return is overshadowed by the fear of regression towards a more primitive state. Indeed, when he lifts the successive layers of history, the archaeologist takes the risk of relapsing into a primitive condition. This possible relapse appears metaphorically in the leitmotiv of the descent into the tomb and the pits which threatens to turn the modern man into the object he discovers. In *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, following the discovery of Queen Tera's tomb and her installation into Trelawny's private museum in his bedroom, the archaeologist starts presenting a disturbing resemblance with the mummy as she first appeared in her tomb. When plunged in a coma after Tera attacked him, he is described as follows: "this purposeful, masterful man, lying before us wrapped in impenetrable sleep, had all the pathos of a great ruin" (Stoker 82). Furthermore, the bandages that cover the wounds inflicted by the mummy on the archaeologist's arm immediately call to mind the mummy's wrappings. In his

feebleness and decline, Trelawny appears to be reverting to the primitive state of the antique remains. This concern about the British protagonists taking on certain characters of their archaeological find parallels the imperial fear of going native by returning to a primitive state that would make them similar to the colonised natives. This relates to the late-Victorian trope that Anne McClintock describes as the “anachronistic space” in her analysis of the racial and gendered dynamics of the British empire¹⁷. This anachronistic space - “prehistoric, atavistic, and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity” (McClintock 1995, 40)-is where all the degenerate forms of humanity can be located (the women, the colonised, the industrial working class). In the colonial context, this same trope represents imperial progress as a journey backward in time. It is the signs of this regressive journey that Trelawny evinces when he takes on some of the physical features of the mummified body.

Archaeology and reverse colonisation

- 23 The Victorian anxiety about relapsing into a primitive state that would, as it were, turn the British into the very natives whose territories they conquered, is only one facet of a broader anxiety about a shift in the balance of power in favour of the colonies. The concern regarding “reverse colonisation” is another facet of the same fear. In his chapter “The Occidental Tourist: Stoker and reverse colonization”¹⁸, Stephen Arata describes Dracula's moving to England as well as his efforts to master English language and culture as the first step towards a colonisation of the colonisers' land by the formerly colonised people. This motif, which is recurrent in late-Victorian literature and announces the invasion-scare fiction of the early 20th century, is also present in archaeological fiction where antique females come back to life and threaten to appropriate their owners' space.
- 24 The archaeological process itself paves the way for reverse colonisation. If the first part of the archaeological activity (discovery and appropriation of antique artefacts) is akin to colonisation, the second movement (bringing the finds to England and displaying them in a museum) initiates reverse colonisation. Indeed, for the archaeological objects, the museum constitutes the first gate of penetration onto the British territory. Trelawny's private museum in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* as well as the Cairo museum in “Smith and the Pharaohs” are both described in terms of overabundance and invasion of bodies and objects. They induce a sense of haunting and possession suggestive of an inversion of power:

There were so many mummies or mummy objects, round which there seems to cling forever the *penetrating* odours of bitumen, and spices and gums [...] that one was unable to forget the past. [...] The room was a large one, and lofty in proportion to its size. In its vastness was place for a multitude of things not often found in a bedchamber. In far corners of the room were shadows of uncanny shape. More than once as I thought, the multitudinous presence of the dead and the past took such hold on me that I caught myself looking round fearfully as though some strange personality or influence was present. (Stoker 35, emphasis mine).
- 25 The repetition of words (“and... and...”, “multitude / multitudinous”) emphasises the omnipresence of antique objects which, by their number and mystery, suggest the presence of a living mind with a will of its own. In the same manner, Smith is overwhelmed by the presence of the dead when he finds himself locked inside the

museum at night. The long list of dead kings, with their respective positions or particular features, that unfolds in the narration concludes with those words: "on he went, mummies to his right, mummies to his left, of every style and period, till he began to feel as though he never wished to see another dried remnant of mortality" (Haggard 28). Again, the threat of the dead kings awakening and taking their revenge is underlined by the mention, for instance, of Menephtah "whose hollow eyes stared at him from between the wrappings" (Haggard 28) or again Seti II who "seemed to wear an air of reproach" (Haggard 28). However, those are male mummies whose ominous character is quite explicitly suggested. Female mummies have a more insidious way of bringing about reverse colonisation.

- 26 Through the private museum, such as the one Stoker describes, the mummy finds her place in a British home but also, as is the case for Queen Tera, in the archaeologist's bedroom. The second ending of the novel stages the completion of the invasion of the British family sphere by the Egyptian Queen when her mummy disappears and her spirit presumably passes into Margaret before she marries Malcolm. Tera has achieved the occupation of the coloniser's body and the infiltration of the colonial mind into the heart of the nation. Iras's journey follows the same pattern: introduced into Lavenham's house as a mummy, she comes out of it as the archaeologist's fiancée. Having left the confined space of the museum, she is then able to start travelling to new spaces.
- 27 As the marriage motif suggests, there is a sexual dimension to reverse colonisation. In fact, if the antique body is the victim of a symbolic rape by the archaeologist, it is also capable of implementing an act of revenge of a somewhat sexual nature. The motif of the hand is once again essential: when the male hand of *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, the hand of the Egyptologist, appears as the instrument of manly power, sexual dominance, and perhaps political domination, the hand of the mummy may be read as a variation of the Freudian motif of the *vagina dentata*. Just like the archaeologist's hand was portrayed as the instrument of sexual violence, the mummy's severed hand can also implement a revenge with clear sexual undertones, as it strives to bite back the hand that violated the Queen's tomb. For instance, Queen Tera's repeated attempts at tearing Abel Trelawny's hand off may be read as a form of emasculation which itself symbolises an imperial fear of disempowerment.
- 28 Another facet of the same fear emerged in the last decades of the Victorian era in the shape of an anxiety regarding degeneration¹⁹, a phenomenon that could be accelerated by reverse colonisation and the absorption of colonial women into the Victorian family. Smith's and Lavenham's marriage to antique women leaves them both physically diminished and on the verge of madness²⁰. Smith, for one, becomes obsessed with the question of what really happened to him in the museum in Cairo. The short story's final sentence—a question—shows his irresolution and incapacity to dispel his doubts. The same doubts—about whether Iras did or did not come back to life—plague Ralph Lavenham and eventually drive him insane. The last sentences of the novel announce his impending death: he has fallen victim to the mummy's curse, in other words, the return of an empowered native hungry for revenge.

Knowing and controlling

- 29 Evidently central to the colonial situation, power relations are also at stake in the archaeological process. In his study of the "Imperial Archive"²¹ inspired by Foucault's notion of power-knowledge, Thomas Richards argues that power in the colonies and over the colonised peoples was intrinsically linked to knowledge. His analysis of the Victorian project (the archive) that consisted in gathering all the objects, documents, facts or pieces of information that would contribute to making up a global image of the colonised territories and populations demonstrates that the ultimate aim of this archive was to exercise a better control over the colony through a comprehensive knowledge of it. This is also congruent with Edward Said's notion that archaeology was only one of the numerous scientific fields (philology, anthropology, sociology, economy, history, etc.) which participated in constructing an Orient that would be understandable and therefore manageable for the Western coloniser.
- 30 As a colonial and orientalist science, archaeology may be conceived as part of this project of an imperial archive, insofar as the knowledge it gathered and constructed about the past was thought to be useful to the understanding of the present. In keeping with the idea that the mummy could be considered as an Oriental woman of the present time, Victorian culture imagined that the modern Egyptian was not so different from the ancient one, if slightly degenerate (the same degeneration that threatened the Victorians, the other descendants of Egyptian Antiquity). 19th century travel literature, such as Amelia Edwards's *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, therefore constantly emphasises the static condition of Egypt, a land that had supposedly not changed since Antiquity: I believe that the physique and life of the modern fellâh is almost identical with the physique and life of that ancient Egyptian labourer whom we know so well in the wall paintings of the tombs. Square in the shoulders, slight but strong in the limbs, full-lipped, brown-skinned, we see him wearing the same loin-cloth, plying the same shâdûf, ploughing with the same plough, preparing the same food in the same way, and eating it with his fingers from the same bowl, as did his forefathers of six thousand years ago. (Edwards X)
- 31 It appears that, thanks to the permanence of Egyptian identity and culture, the knowledge of the antique achieved by the work of archaeology may be put to use in order to understand, and therefore control, the present British colonies. The title of chapter XVI in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, "Powers—Old and New", suggests such continuity. It also underlines the possibility of progress that ancient Egyptian science may represent for modern science. Indeed, in this chapter is developed the fantasy that, once revived, the antique woman may offer all her knowledge to her "owners", thus bringing about a revolution of modern science through magic. However, this fantasy is not all positive as the idea of a "power" emanating from the past (old) or the colonies (new) is in itself an ominous one.
- 32 The museumification of antique objects also enacts a desire for the perfect control of colonial otherness: unveiled, packed away to England, locked in a case and labelled according to an alien scientific order, the antique woman is nothing more than one of the archaeologist's possessions, one that can be purchased and exchanged like any other commercial product²². Iras, for instance, is smuggled out of Egypt bearing the label "Turkey sponges" before she is delivered to Lavenham as a result of his ordering

an unopened mummy-case. She is then successively "labelled" Iras Charmian and Iras Lavenham by the man who claims to possess her.

- 33 However, this fantasized notion of complete control of the possessed woman is never quite fulfilled. In *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, the characters choose to read their various experiences in a rational light and therefore neglect to notice the signs that the antique woman might have a will of her own, just like the colonised subject. However, by rejecting the supernatural, they are excluded from a complete knowledge of their archaeological find and thereby unable to master their subject (both as a discipline and as a subjugated woman). The reverse happens in the case of Haggard's and Everett's heroes: they both embrace the supernatural as real and thus seem to achieve perfect knowledge—and therefore control—of their archaeological find. Both of them marry their mummy, thereby making her their possession by law. This acquisition paves the way to greater knowledge since both archaeologists are offered a certain amount of historical knowledge through conversation with their resuscitated mummies. However, the epistemological power thus acquired is double-edged and eventually leads to a sense of loss of both knowledge and power: the two characters are, in the end, victims of insanity and, to a certain extent, rejection from Victorian society.
- 34 Finally, knowledge may also serve as the instrument of reverse colonisation. Indeed, if the modern man is fascinated by antiquity, the antique woman is just as keen to learn about the modern era. In a culture that associated science with vision, knowledge could be acquired by the simple act of looking. In his *Vision, science and literature*²³, Martin Willis defines archaeology as one of the most visual sciences of the late-Victorian years, due to its reliance on description, illustration, photography, but also on the museum culture that enabled the members of a large audience to look into the past with their own eyes. However, it soon appears that vision is not the privilege of the Victorian archaeologist, tourist or museum visitor. When Smith walks around the museum at night, the circulation of looks is twofold, the mummies looking back at the museum visitor who is himself looking at them: "he turned round and *gazed* at Meneptah, whose hollow eyes *stared* at him" (Haggard 28, emphasis mine). Later, when all the mummies have come back to life and discover his presence in the museum, he is subjected to their curious and admiring gaze, becoming both an object of study and of desire, as was the female mummy:
- Here it may be stated that Smith was a tall man, still comparatively young, and very good-looking, straight and spare in frame, with dark, pleasant eyes and a little black beard.
- "At least he is a well-favoured thief," said one of the queens to another. (Haggard 39)
- 35 Soon, the lustful looks of the queens turn into threatening gazes when Smith is recognised as the reincarnation of Horu, the sculptor who was sentenced to death for trying to win the queen's hand, as Smith tried to win her body. A metaphor for the empowerment of the colonised native, the motif of a look that is returned by the dead emphasises the threat the mummy represents as soon as she opens her eyes and becomes a woman.
- 36 It is as a woman that the mummy best embodies the qualities which suggest that the works of archaeological fiction can be read as metaphorical narratives for colonial relations. The representation of the archaeological find as a female discovered by a male Egyptologist enabled Stoker, Haggard and, to a lesser extent, Everett to establish between their characters dynamics of power and domination, counterbalanced by a

possible threat of rebellion of the oppressed female mummy. These relations unquestionably reflect on the colonial dynamics at stake in Egypt, and other territories occupied by the British at the turn of the century.

- 37 The choice to represent the colonial in the shape of a woman also makes sense in the context of the emergence of the New Woman since this figure also appeared as a threat to patriarchal Victorian society. As a strong woman, one who returns the gaze of the male archaeologist and asserts her own sexual power, the mummy may be read as an avatar of the New Woman. Quite paradoxically, the mummy, an ancient woman, redefines herself as a New Woman—and therefore a possible threat to her male companions—when she comes back to life.
- 38 However, it is not the figure of the female mummy that has left a trace in popular culture. As soon as imperial anxiety receded after the Great War to make place for more European concerns, the Oriental, seductive and sexually threatening female mummy disappeared to make way for the iconic Imhotep, the monstrous and bloodthirsty male mummy who would haunt the film industry throughout the twentieth century. The mummy thus joined the pantheon of 19th century male monsters, alongside Frankenstein's creature and Dracula. This might be explained by the convenience of casting actors recognised in the industry of the horror movie (Boris Karloff, Christopher Lee) to sport the mummy's wrappings as well as the vampire's cloak, as well as by the difficulty of adapting literally novels with strong erotic undertones in the cultural context of the 1930s and 1950s. It is only as late as the 1980s that the sexual dimension of the mummy is reintroduced by Anne Rice in her *The Mummy or Ramses the Damned*²⁴. In this mildly erotic novel, however, all the features of the Victorian mummy are reversed. The mummy is no longer a female victim of male desire seeking revenge and empowerment but an alluring and benevolent male who saves the archaeologist's daughter's life and soon becomes the willing object of her desire.

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NOTES

1. The 1932 film *The Mummy* from Universal Studios, starring Boris Karloff as Imhotep, popularised the figure of the decayed and bloodthirsty mummy, which was to appear subsequently in a great number of films: *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942), *The Mummy's Ghost* (1944), *The Mummy's Curse* (1944), *The Mummy* (1959, directed by Terence Fisher and starring Christopher Lee as the mummy Kharis) amongst others. More recently, Stephen Sommers brought the character of Imhotep back to life in *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Mummy Returns* (2001).
2. Stoker, Bram. *The Jewel of Seven Stars*. 1903. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.
3. Everett, H.D. *Iras: A Mystery*. 1896. Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2009.
4. Haggard, Henry Rider. "Smith and the Pharaohs". 1913. In *Smith and the Pharaohs and Other Tales*. Holicong: Wilsie Press, 2003.
5. In that respect, Egyptian antiquity stands in sharp contrast to the Victorian representation of Greek antiquity as the realm of masculine values.
6. There are very few male mummies in archaeological fiction. The most famous of them is perhaps the killing mummy invented by Conan Doyle in his short story "Lot No. 249".

Conan Doyle, Arthur. "Lot No. 249", 1894 in *Tales of Unease*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2008.

7. Haggard, Henry Rider. *King Solomon's Mines*. 1885. London: Penguin Classics.

8. Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 1897. Ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. New York: Norton, 1997.

9. Deane, Bradley. "Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperial Striptease". *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. Greensboro: 2008. Vol 51, No. 4.

10. The image of the mummy's skin as "ivory" contributes to the depiction of the Egyptian body as a work of art, reminiscent of antique Greek statuary. The first appearance of Tera's naked body, described as "nude," already points to the artistic and aesthetic value of the Egyptian body. Moreover, the archaeologists' desire for the mummy's statue-like body, as well as their hope to revive it in the "Great Experiment" that concludes *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, call to mind the legend of Pygmalion, thus linking Egyptian antiquity with Greek mythology.

11. Shakespeare, William. *Antony and Cleopatra*. Ed. David Bevington. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

This choice is interesting as it might be understood to show the vision Lavenham has formed of Egypt through the medium of English literature. Indeed, Shakespeare's play already presented Egypt as seductive and fascinating but also dangerous and even lethal for the Western man who attempts to conquer it. Much like Antony, but on a smaller scale, Lavenham is a victim of Egyptian charm: his passion—for the maid rather than the queen—leaves him powerless, symbolically emasculated. Moreover, Antony's defeat finds an echo in Lavenham's madness and both eventually succumb. The choice of the name "Iras", although it shows an appropriation of the mummy via the medium of classic English culture, also suggests an intertext that announces the archaeologist's fate.

12. Although it has not been severed from the rest of the body, Iras's hand is nevertheless always distinguished as the focus of desire: it is the first part of her body that is seen by Lavenham and also the only part of her body that does not decay at the end of the novel when Iras is found as a mummy again.

13. This motif was already developed by Théophile Gautier in his short story "Le pied de momie" when the narrator humourously requests the princess' hand as a reward for returning her mummified foot: "je lui demandai la main d'Hermonthis: la main pour le pied me paraissait une récompense antithétique d'assez bon goût" (27).

Gautier, Théophile. "Le pied de momie". 1840. In *Le pied de momie et autres nouvelles fantastiques*. Paris: Hatier, 2009.

14. This symbolic marriage to an antique female may have been inspired by Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille" in which the ring accidentally given to a newly-discovered statue seals the fate of the unlucky Alphonse de Peyrehorade.

Mérimée, Prosper. "La Vénus d'Ille", 1837. In *Colomba; La Vénus d'Ille; Les Ames du purgatoire*. Paris: Flammarion, 1949.

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18. Arata, Stephen. *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

19. Introduced by Cesare Lombroso, and later developed by Max Nordau, the idea of a degeneration affecting Western civilisations is very much present in fin de siècle culture and thought. The physical and intellectual decline it was believed to bring about is quite clearly staged in archaeological fiction where scientific genius often borders on madness.

Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. 1892. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.

20. One may read in their affliction the symptoms of syphilis, then a very common colonial disease.

21. Richards, Thomas. *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. London; New York: Verso, 1993.

22. Daly, Nicholas. « That Obscure Object of Desire: Victorian Commodity Culture and Fictions of the Mummy ». *Novel* 28 (1994).

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24. Rice, Anne. *The Mummy or Ramses the Damned*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989.

ABSTRACTS

This article tackles the way the archaeological fiction of the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras constructs the work of Egyptology as a gendered pursuit, which brings about the encounter of an archaeologist, who embodies the masculine values of the British empire, and a female—and highly sexualised—artefact in the guise of the mummy. In the texts of H. Rider Haggard, Bram Stoker and H.D. Everett which constitute the corpus of this article, this encounter invariably turns into a love encounter, as the mummy sets about seducing the British archaeologist who violated her rest. Seductive, lustful and promiscuous, fictional mummies are indeed represented with the features and attributes of the Oriental female such as she was constructed in Orientalist literature and thought.

In the 19th century, archaeology was indeed part of an imperial and Orientalist scientific apparatus whose aim was to elaborate as comprehensive a knowledge of the colonised territories as possible, in order to better control those territories. Archaeological investigations thus contributed to the construction of the image of an eternal Orient, forever frozen in an antique past, and thereby threatening its discoverers of regression to a primitive form of humanity.

Taking into account the imperial dimension of Victorian archaeology, the fictional representations of Egyptology act as a metaphor of colonial relations by emphasising the power dynamics at stake in the relation or relationship between the antique artefact and the British archaeologist. As a consequence, the motifs of archaeological fiction (the quest, the museum, the mummy's return to life) all become vehicles for the expression of the Victorian fears of regression and degeneration which increased proportionally with the imperial progress.

Cet article considère la manière dont la fiction archéologique de la fin de l'ère victorienne et de l'époque édouardienne dépeint le travail de l'égyptologue comme une activité genrée qui met en contact un archéologue porteur des valeurs masculines de l'empire britannique et une femme antique à la sexualité exacerbée et qui prend les traits de la momie. Dans les romans et nouvelles de H. Rider Haggard, Bram Stoker et H.D. Everett qui constituent ici notre corpus, ce contact prend invariablement la forme d'une rencontre amoureuse, la momie entreprenant de séduire l'archéologue britannique qui a dérangé son repos. Séduisante et lascive, la momie du roman archéologique arbore en effet les traits et caractères de la femme orientale telle que la construisent la pensée et la littérature orientalistes.

Au 19^{ème} siècle, l'archéologie s'inscrit, en effet, dans un plus large projet scientifique et orientaliste, mené par l'empire Britannique, et dont l'objectif était d'élaborer un savoir aussi

exhaustif que possible des territoires coloniaux, et ce afin d'exercer un meilleur contrôle sur ceux-ci. La recherche archéologique a ainsi contribué à la construction de l'image d'un Orient éternel, à jamais figé dans son passé antique, et qui, pour cette raison, menace de régression vers un état plus primitif celui qui ose le dévoiler.

Prenant en compte la dimension impériale de l'archéologie victorienne, les représentations fictionnelles de l'égyptologie permettent de métaphoriser les relations coloniales en soulignant les dynamiques de pouvoir qui sont en jeu dans la relation établie entre le vestige antique et l'archéologue britannique. Cette représentation métaphorique est, par ailleurs, le moyen de donner voix, à travers les différents motifs du roman archéologique (la quête, le musée, le retour à la vie de la momie) aux angoisses de régression et de dégénérescence qui hantent l'époque victorienne et se développent à mesure que progresse l'empire colonial.

INDEX

Keywords: archaeological fiction, archaeology, egyptology, mummy fiction, Orientalism, imperialism, gender, Victorian, colonisation, regression, degeneration, antiquity

Mots-clés: roman archéologique, archéologie, égyptologie, momie, orientalisme, impérialisme, genre, Victorien, colonisation, régression, dégénérescence, antiquité

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