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By Eleanor Dobson[1]

Abstract

This essay examines the relationship between mummy fiction and the fairy-tale genre in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. It argues that dormant and perfectly-preserved female mummies that populate much of *fin-de-siècle* mummy fiction emulate the figure of Sleeping Beauty or Snow White, preserved in glass coffins or museum display cases. Concurrently, it observes that while the suggestion of the marriage of the mummy is raised in a number of these texts, any chance of longstanding romantic union is often foiled, in contrast to the distinctly marital "happily-ever-after"'s characteristic of the fairy tale. As human remains that were bought, sold and collected throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and beyond, mummies invited (and still invite) objectification. Yet the frequent disintegration or disappearance of these desirable mummies before they can be bound by the legal and religious strictures of marriage in these fictions demarcates them as objects which cannot be tamed. This essay claims that we might read this in light of Britain's contemporary imperial involvement in Egypt, a political and historical context that scholars have recognised as responsible for a number of narratives revolving around the notion of the mummy's curse: the female bodies which cannot be fully controlled could be seen to resist Britain's imperialist mission. Ultimately, through this analysis, this essay seeks to reconcile the "imperial Gothic" whose tales of imperial adventure and danger are often held to be "masculine," with the fairy tale, held by many theorists as "feminine." This approach aims to establish the influence of fairy-tale tropes and conventions far beyond the genres traditionally aligned with this "feminine" tradition.

Keywords: Mummy Fiction, Fairy Tale, Art

Introduction

If this be sleep, how soft! if death, how fair!
(Wordsworth, 1835: 56)

Largely held to be macabre and unattractive objects in the contemporary cultural consciousness, mummies—specifically female mummies—were, in fact, decidedly beautiful in the fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Depicted thus by male authors who were predominantly male, the mummified female body functions as a site of both sexual and

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imperialistic desire.[2] Indeed, a number of critics including Ailise Bulfin, Nicholas Daly and Bradley Deane have identified that the body of the mummy in this period is caught up in a web of concerns: the sense of male entitlement to the female body (particularly pertinent at the moment that saw the emergence of New Woman),[3] as well as British entitlement to the East (specifically to Egypt), which was often, as Edward Said notes in *Orientalism* (1978), depicted as the feminine foil to the masculine West.[4] This essay seeks to contribute to this critical conversation by demonstrating how these narratives conform to, and indeed defy, the conventions of the fairy-tale genre, a form intimately entwined with feminist debate. These narratives rely upon the objectification of "Sleeping Beauties" to present these denizens of Egypt as collectible commodities, but, ultimately, the denial of a "happy ending" suggests the foolhardiness of imperialistic attempts to appropriate Egypt and her antiquities.[5]

To begin, I wish to turn briefly to two works by the artist John Collier that illustrate the parallels that this essay perceives in mummy fiction and the fairy tale. The first of these, *The Sleeping Beauty* (Fig. 1) was completed in 1921, though its subject matter and execution is distinctly Victorian. A medieval-era Sleeping Beauty reclines on an ornately carved bed in a castle interior; her two unconscious attendants frame her body with their own. Comparing this image with Collier's earlier 1890 painting, *The Death of Cleopatra* (Fig. 2) reveals a number of telling commonalities. Again, the royal woman lies upon a decorative couch inside a palace; two female attendants flank her. Of course, Cleopatra is not sleeping at all: having succumbed to the poison of the asp, she has yielded to the grasp of death and cannot be awakened. Her attendants, presumably Charmion and Iras, adopt similar poses, one dead or dying on the ground, while the other supports herself languidly on one arm, about to fall to the floor.[6] Considering these paintings concurrently emphasises the desire that drives most mummy fiction: like Sleeping Beauty, Cleopatra lies, luminous and desirable, seemingly awaiting a prince's kiss to revive her. As Nina Auerbach has identified, there is an "alluring conjunction of women and corpses" present in literature of the *fin de siècle*, mirroring late Victorian and early Edwardian society's increasing interest in the supernatural (1982: 15). I would add, however, that fiction concerning the ancient Egyptian female relies on this trope in a particularly significant way. This longing for the ancient Egyptian woman, the hope that she is not dead as she first appears but rather, like Sleeping Beauty, in a dormant state, is not unusual. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, much of mummy fiction conforms—initially—to the outline of this fairy tale, in the rendering of the (frequently) royal female as physically desirable and fundamentally passive.

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[2] Note, for example, the few exceptions: unattractive female mummies were depicted by Louisa May Alcott in her short story *"Lost in a Pyramid, or the Mummy's Curse"* (1869) and Marie Corelli in her novel *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895).

[3] The New Woman was a feminist ideal in the late nineteenth century, championing women's independence and education.

[4] See Bulfin (2011); Daly (1994); Deane (2008).

[5] Some, such as Alison Lurie, have claimed that the fairy tale is a distinctly feminine form, being handed down over the course of generations of women (1970: 42). Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher iterate this perceived connection between fairy tales and female storytellers: "Fairy tales […] were grounded in an oral narrative tradition that may well have been initiated by women. The antiquity of fairy tales, their anonymous origins, had the feel (and perhaps the fact) of a lost, distinctively female tradition" (1992: 3). Marina Warner similarly observes the strong tradition of female authorship (1994: xii). Others, meanwhile, have criticised fairy tales for presenting largely passive and submissive female characters. For an overview of the debate beginning with Lurie's controversial claims, see Haase (2004).

[6] Charmion and Iras were recorded as being among Cleopatra's named servants in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. The pair famously appeared in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, a work influenced by Plutarch's text.

Fig. 1. John Collier, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1921), https://www.wikiart.org/en/john-collier/sleeping-beauty-1929.

Fig. 2. John Collier, Detail from *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_death_of_cleopatra.jpg.

Sparked by the publication of a number of translations and anthologies, such as the works of Hans Christian Andersen, a popular cultural interest in fairy tales developed in Britain in the early nineteenth century (Keene, 2015). This fervour cast its shadow over a variety of discourses, including archaeology. Virginia Zimmerman, for example, records that the excavations of Pompeii begun in the eighteenth century were spoken of in fairy-tale terms in the nineteenth:

> Many writers allude to Sleeping Beauty to describe their magical powers to
> reverse the volcano's eruption and the passage of time. Like the castle in the fairy
> tale […], the city of Pompeii seems frozen, its inhabitants sleeping yet quivering
> still with life; it falls to writers to awaken them
> (2008: 111)

Positing the writer as the hero with the ability to lift the spell of perpetual sleep, the "happy ending" in these writings is the ability to conjure up the past: to use the archaeological fragment in order to comprehend the ancient world. We might read the influence of fairy tales as extending through archaeological texts into archaeological fictions: the fairy-tale form so frequently characterised as "feminine" might be seen to have made a profound influence on works in the literary genre that Patrick Brantlinger has termed "the imperial Gothic" (1988: 227), so often considered "masculine." This essay broadens critical understanding of the range of literary genres influenced by fairy tales, extending into (and perhaps encroaching upon) the "masculine" literary world.

This essay's epigraph, taken from William Wordsworth's poem "The Egyptian Maid; or, The Romance of the Water Lily" (written 1828; published 1835), is an early instance of the combination of Egyptian and archaeological motifs with those of the newly-popular fairy tales. Set in the time of King Arthur, "The Egyptian Maid" tells the story of the eponymous princess, sailing from her native Egypt to British shores. The wizard Merlin, suspicious of this approaching vessel, creates a storm, wrecking the ship and drowning the maiden. Reprimanding him for his rash actions, the Lady of the Lake aids Merlin in taking the princess's body to Arthur's court wherein resides, it is stated, the knight whom the maiden was to marry. In turn, each of Arthur's knights takes the princess's lifeless hand. Finally, at the touch of Sir Galahad, she stirs:

> […] a tender twilight streak
>   Of colour dawned upon the Damsel's cheek;
>   And her lips, quickening with uncertain red,
> Seemed from each other a faint warmth to borrow.
> […] to the mouth, relenting Death
>   Allowed a soft and flower-like breath,
>   Precursor to a timid sigh,
> To lifted eyelids, and a doubtful shining.
> (Wordsworth, 1835: 65)

Galahad is the knight whose divine destiny it is to marry the maiden, and the touch of his hand magically awakens her from her deathly slumber in an act that mimics the kiss of the fairy-tale princes who rouse their princesses, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, from similar states.

While this poem certainly draws upon many of the same cultural sources as the later texts that form the *fin-de-siècle* corpus that this essay interrogates, Wordsworth's literary precursor offers an optimistic vision of cultural integration: crossing the seas, his Egyptian maiden who has

converted to Christianity marries her English knight. Their union is blessed by God, and the poem ends with celebration. Of course, Wordsworth's poem was written at a time when Britain's involvement in Egypt was met with confidence and national pride, represented in "The Egyptian Maid" by the legendary Arthurian setting: the golden age of British mythological history and culture. In the closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth, Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt had catalysed a widespread interest in this ancient civilisation and, after the British had defeated the French and demanded the relinquishment of priceless antiquities (including the Rosetta Stone: the most famous artefact in the history of the decipherment of the hieroglyphic script), Egyptian antiquities themselves came to stand for British military and imperial might.[7] Wordsworth's "happy ending" mirrors the sense of a generalised contemporary optimism when it came to Britain's involvement in Egypt.

As Eric Gidal records, in the early nineteenth century "[t]he Greek, Roman, and Egyptian origins of the [British Museum] collections became secondary to their new-found position as part of the British cultural tradition" (1993: 3). The Roman artefact that inspired Wordsworth's poem, a marble portrait bust of a woman emerging from a lotus flower, was acquired by the British Museum in 1805.[8] Thought by some to depict the Egyptian goddess Isis (who was integrated into the Roman pantheon), this bust is adopted by Wordsworth to represent ancient Egypt through the reassuringly classical medium of marble (a far cry from the British Museum's genuine Egyptian mummies). Rather than using this object as the basis for his Egyptian princess however, Wordsworth instead leaves the bust a bust: the sculpture becomes the figurehead at the prow of the maiden's ship. Its associations with Isis and the lotus flower render the bust a fitting emblem for the Egyptian maiden and the country from whence she hails. Yet there is an important distinction to be made between this artefact (which, through its modern place in the British Museum, was evocative of British greatness) and the Egyptian princess herself. While the maiden is certainly passive (given neither a name nor a voice), she is never objectified to the extent that the mummy-women of *fin-de-siècle* fiction are: their characters, unlike hers, are directly inspired by objects that might be purchased, collected and catalogued. And, while Wordsworth's Egyptian princess lives happily ever after with the gallant Sir Galahad—a union approved of by the Christian God, symbolizing contemporary British and Egyptian symbiosis—the objectified mummies and the modern men who seek to control them in fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries never achieve their own traditional resolutions of marital bliss. With increasing imperial anxiety since the start of the Anglo-Egyptian War in 1882, fictional British protagonists are ultimately denied the possession of Egypt, symbolised by these dangerous, titillating and, ultimately, unattainable female forms. By demonstrating the ways in which the female mummy is depicted, at first, as a passive sex object (in contrast to the monstrous and threatening male mummy, and the Western men who seek to own these bodies), and highlighting the range of texts which approach—although never realise—a "happily ever after," this essay next identifies the nexus at which the fairy tale and the imperial Gothic meet.

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[7] The ill-fated French Campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798-1801) saw Bonaparte attempt to weaken Britain's access to India whilst defending French trade.

[8] This artefact, known as *Clytie/Antonia*, is still on display at the British Museum, catalogued under the museum number 1805,0703.79.

Beauty and the Beast: Male and Female Mummies

This section examines the fundamental differences in the appearance of male and female mummies as they are described in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, noting that male mummies are more likely to be depicted as troublesome and active artefacts, a far cry from the unmoving classical sculptures that female mummies often evoke. Statuesque in her perfection, the female mummy is often represented as constructed from precious materials in a bid to idealise her form and render her passive to the objectifying gaze. Often, these female mummies conform to a single, heavily Westernised physical ideal; unlike the perfectly preserved white female mummies that feature in sensationalist fiction with a more erotic emphasis, the male mummy—and the ancient Egyptian male in general—tends to show the realistic effects of time in his physical degradation and discolouration. The ancient Egyptian male mummy is almost always visually "other," demonstrated by his desiccated and skeletal appearance, while the female mummy's desirability marks her out as a relic with which the Western protagonists might attempt to forge a close sexual relationship, establishing them as idealised love interests that chime with depictions of the fairy-tale princess.

In Arthur Conan Doyle's influential short story "Lot No. 249" (1892) the unnamed mummy is described as "withered" (1892: 530) and "gaunt" (1892: 531). In fact, the mummy's appearance is so inhuman that it is only referred to as "he" (1892: 531) by the man who resurrects it, and simply the "thing" (1892: 531), the "creature" (1892: 541) or "it" (1892: 534) by the other characters, depriving the mummy of its sex, and consequently, any hint of sexuality. More animal than man, its strength and movement is likened to that of "a cat" (1892: 534), "a tiger" (1892: 540) or "an […] ape" (1892: 542) at various points in the narrative, the comparison between the mummy and an ape being particularly revealing, suggesting not only a sort of devolution—a return to the primitive (itself an element common to *fin-de-siècle* texts)—but also an exaggerated vitality directly at odds with its deathly looks. The mummy's features are reminiscent of that other great Victorian monster, the vampire, with its "[t]wo thin teeth, like those of a rat" (1892: 531) which hang over the bottom lip and "crooked, unclean talons" for nails (1892: 532). Existing in a state that combines realistic features of ancient, decayed mummies with the supernatural and animalistic, Doyle's mummy is the physical opposite of the story's heroes: young, white, healthy British men.

Doyle's other (and earlier) short story featuring ancient Egyptian elements, "The Ring of Thoth" (1890), throws the common differences between the ancient Egyptian male and female bodies into relief. Sosra, an ancient Egyptian priest who has discovered the chemical secret to longevity of life, is depicted as the physical embodiment of ancient Egyptian culture, with his "parchment skin" evoking Egyptian papyrus and his ambiguous "dusky complexion […] the exact counterpart of the innumerable statues, mummy-cases and pictures" within the Louvre (1890: 48). Sosra's representation is further linked to the museum exhibits through his "cadaverous" (1890: 50) and "corpse-like" (1890: 52) appearance; while he is not technically a mummy, he shares many of their bodily traits including the visible signs of decay. Although the physical evidence of his impressive age align him with dead things, his defining characteristic is his restless activity in pursuit of the remains of the woman he loves, as well as the chemical that will end his extended life: he, like Doyle's unnamed mummy, is an active rather than a passive body.

In contrast, the lifeless mummy of the woman Sosra loves, Atma, remains, for a time, perfectly preserved, to an uncanny degree. She is an idealised beauty, very much like Snow White in both her appearance and her containment within a museum display case: a glass coffin. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas records, "[a]s it confuses sleep and death, the glass coffin […]

becomes a powerful patriarchal symbol: it ensures male control over the rebellious woman and transforms the latter into an objectified icon of femininity for ever available to the male gaze" (2007: 93). This, certainly, holds true of mummy narratives, in which the female body is displayed for (predominantly) male approval. Removing the bandages that enclose Atma's mummified body reveals "long, black, glossy tresses," "a low, white forehead, with a pair of delicately arched eyebrows," "a pair of bright, deeply fringed eyes," "a straight well-cut nose," "a sweet, full, sensitive mouth, and a beautifully curved chin" (Doyle 1890: 51). Far more than Sosra, she is physically attractive, youthful, and looks as if at any moment she might awaken from a death-like slumber. She is also heavily objectified: the catalogue of her attractive features reads like a romanticised portrait or, particularly in descriptors such as "well-cut," a statue. At the point of unwrapping, and, fittingly, already in one of the world's most famous art museums, the Louvre in Paris, Atma is more of an idealised *objet d'art* than an artefact, a Sleeping Beauty rather than an Egyptian mummy. Sosra meanwhile, though likened in appearance to Egyptian relics, is a museum attendant, working within a hierarchy that places all of the museum's artefacts, including the bodies of the dead, under his control. While his origins are ancient Egyptian, through working for the Louvre he also comes to stand for the modern Western world and its appropriation and ownership of the ancient East.

A parallel depiction of the female mummy can be read in Bram Stoker's novel *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, first published in 1903 and then reissued with an alternate ending in 1912.[9] At the heart of Stoker's narrative is the body of the fictional Egyptian Queen Tera, an individual based, as Roger Luckhurst (2012) has suggested, upon the pharaoh-queen Hatshepsut, whose tomb was discovered by Howard Carter in 1902. The first part of Tera's body subject to the male gaze is her severed seven-fingered hand, "so perfect that it startled one to see it" (Stoker, 2008: 94). The number seven is, of course, significant in various fairy tales (for example, in the seven dwarfs who befriend Snow White), but also in a number of religious and folkloric contexts (Schimmel, 1993), and in ancient astronomy when there were held to be seven planets (Bettelheim, 1976). The number seven recurs throughout *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, in a combination lock, the claws on a cat's paw, the different forms of the goddess Hathor, seven-sided pillars in a tomb, seven lamps, the seventh month of the year (the month of Tera's birth), seven stars (each with seven points) in the asterism of the Plough carved onto a scarab, and in Tera's severed hand (as well as one of her feet). The colour of the hand's skin is described as that of "old ivory" (Stoker, 2008: 94) and, later, (referring to her whole body) "like marble" (2008: 113), suggesting material as well as aesthetic value. Torn from the mummified queen's body by Arab grave-robbers, the hand's monetary value is instantly recognizable as it is taken along with other treasures contained within her tomb, thus beginning Tera's treatment as an object to be modified and displayed by the novel's male characters. More sexually charged, perhaps, is the Egyptologist Trelawny's decision to install her body within his bedroom, itself museum-like in the sheer density of ancient Egyptian relics it houses.

In a scene that is often compared to the sexualised staking of the vampire Lucy Westenra in Stoker's earlier and more famous work *Dracula* (1897), Tera's unwrapping is eroticised and overseen by a band of male professionals. Trelawny tries to justify his actions to his daughter, Margaret, by reminding her that Tera is "[n]ot a woman, dear; a mummy!" although his use of the feminine pronoun to refer to Tera suggests that he is all too aware of her beguiling femininity. Her body is no mere artefact, referred to as "it" or by its auction number as the male mummy in Doyle's "Lot No. 249;" instead it is inherently female, a unique artwork, visually akin to precious materials rather than the dried and desiccated remains of human flesh. Underneath the outer wrappings,

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[9] Stoker's interest in fairy tales and folklore has been the subject of recent scholarly studies; see Heiniger (2011).

which have the appearance of the genuine rather than the romanticised artefact—"darkened by dust," "patchy," "chipped" (Stoker, 2008: 233)—Tera's body conforms to the representation of the ancient Egyptian female nude as an idealised art object. As Piya Pal-Lapinski recognises, her body is an erotic and exotic exhibit; the visible bone in Tera's wrist becomes "opal" in "an uncanny image" that sees the female body transformed into precious materials (2005: 99). Strikingly, the description of Tera's face shares remarkable similarities with Doyle's female mummy. Her hair is "glorious in quantity and glossy black," she has a "white forehead," eyes fringed with "long, black, curling lashes" (although Tera's eyes—unlike Atma's—are closed), "nostrils, set in grave pride" and "full, red lips," behind which can be seen "the tiniest white line of pearly teeth," again equating her with precious materials of monetary and visual, not simply historical, value (Stoker, 2008: 236). Once fully exposed, her form is described as "like a statue carven in ivory by the hand of a Praxiteles" (2008: 235). Here, Stoker's reference to the art of antiquity is telling: an ancient Greek sculptor, Praxiteles was the first artist to produce a life-size statue of the female nude. The work, the Aphrodite of Knidos, is the kind of form that Stoker wishes the reader to imagine, significantly, the female body as it was imagined and created by a male (Western) sculptor: very much a static male fantasy of female beauty.[10]

The novelist H. Rider Haggard—himself an ardent amateur Egyptologist—reversed the trope in his short story "Smith and the Pharaohs" (1912-13).[11] Instead of noting the sexual allure of the statuesque mummy, Haggard's protagonist instead falls in love with a plaster cast of a sculpted head hanging on the wall of a gallery in the British Museum. The ghost of the Egyptian lady, Ma-Mee, who later appears at the Cairo Museum, conforms to the popular representation of the female mummy as fair-skinned and dark-haired. Her mummy, however, has been burned, and all that remains are bone fragments, some "small, white, regular" teeth and one of her hands (Haggard, 1920: 29). Prior to this, the protagonist appears apprehensive about the prospect of finding the mummy: "it hurt him to reflect that the owner of yonder sweet, alluring face must have become a mummy long, long before the Christian era" as "[m]ummies did not strike him as attractive" (1920: 13). Yet, upon discovering the mummy's hand he is pleased to find it, somewhat paradoxically, "withered" and yet "perfect," "a woman's little hand, most delicately shaped" (1920: 29). "[P]aper-white" and with "long fingers" and "almond-shaped nails" (1920: 29-30) it is a world apart from the mummies at the Cairo Museum, with their discoloured "parchment-like" skin (1920: 44). It certainly appears to boast the beauty and value of a sculpted hand: it was, like the hand of Stoker's Queen Tera, removed by grave robbers who also took with them fragments of gold jewellery from the tomb.

Certainly, as Nicholas Daly states and as these examples reveal, in mummy fiction the masculine consumer first gazes upon the feminised object, an item to be purchased, uncovered and enjoyed (1994). Mummies were, after all, part of Victorian commodity culture, increasingly available to tourists and frequently brought back from Egypt as souvenirs. Rather troublingly, however, in fiction, these close encounters with the Egyptian dead often result in characters falling in love—or at least finding themselves sexually attracted to—objects that are essentially human corpses. This state of infatuation often occurs after the ancient Egyptian woman is disrobed or,

[10] While the original has not survived, it was one of the most copied statues of the ancient world. Resultantly, there are a number of faithful replicas housed at the Vatican Museums, the Musée du Louvre, the Prado Museum and Hadrian's Villa.

[11] Haggard was close friends with Andrew Lang, with whom he sometimes collaborated, and whose Fairy Books published between 1889 and 1910 are some of the most celebrated collections of folk and fairy tales. "Smith and the Pharaohs" first appeared in serialized form in *The Strand Magazine* (December 1912, January 1913 and February 1913), and was later published in *Smith and the Pharaohs and Other Stories* (1920).

more appropriately for a mummy, unwrapped, an act that Bradley Deane describes as "imperial striptease" (200: 381). Before the unrolling of mummies became fashionable public events, these pseudo-scientific demonstrations were conducted by men and for all-male audiences, a practice to which Stoker in particular nods in the scene in which Tera is unwrapped. Participants were very much aware of the titillating potential inherent to these undertakings, which were often performed in secret. The unwrapping of the ancient female body is not only voyeuristic; it is verging on necrophiliac, and there is more than a hint of sexual violence in these performances.[12] Justifying this perversion in fiction is the female mummy's lifelike beauty, implying that she is close to being revived. If life can be restored to these Sleeping Beauties, then attraction is defensible rather than perverse.

Happily Ever After? Severed Hands and Bridal Gowns

"Marriage is," as Marcia R. Lieberman states, "the fulcrum and major event of nearly every fairy tale" (1972: 386). In many of the *fin-de-siècle* tales to which this essay has already turned, there is a specific focus upon the hand, which in mummy fiction is, as Nolwenn Corriou has established, more often than not symbolic of marriage (2015). In "Smith and the Pharaohs" and *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, Haggard and Stoker both use the image of the severed hand as indicative of the marital intentions of the men who admire them. In Haggard's tale, the finding of Ma-Mee's hand is complemented by a mysterious switching of rings between the ghost and the protagonist after their spectral encounter. The symbolism here could not be more transparent: like the exchanging of rings at the culmination of the marriage ceremony, this substitution of jewellery is an act of commitment and devotion between these individuals. But Ma-Mee is a mere shadow; the majority of her body destroyed, there can be no consummation of this spiritual marriage. Instead, Smith must await his own earthly death before their souls can meet again and, in the meantime, he must cease all archaeological activity. While the theme of reincarnation suggests a justification for Smith's attraction to ancient Egyptian culture and to this individual woman whom he had known in a previous life in particular, as Maria Fleischhack records, Smith's unusual desires are observed and noted by others: British Museum workers suggest that he "go and look at 'a live'un' for a change" (Haggard, 1920: 13). Smith's obsessive longing for the deceased woman is acknowledged and disparaged, and while there is an implication that the two might be reunited after Smith's own death, his necrophiliac desires on the earthly plane are left unsatisfied.

Stoker is more explicit in highlighting the unnaturalness of this desire for the dead: the severed hand of Queen Tera should stand for her subordination, given that it is cut from her body by men who recognise its material value as an object.[13] Once removed, however, her hand becomes the one part of her that she can move. It is not only dangerous, strangling those who desecrate her tomb, but represented as such through her seven fingers, which symbolise her occult power. A romantic union with Tera is, evidently, not something that should be pursued. Nevertheless, Tera's status as a potential bride is indeed emphasised: when her sarcophagus is first opened, a "full robe of white linen […] as fine as the finest silk" is draped over her nude form (Stoker, 2008: 234). Margaret, her modern doppelgänger, instinctively knows that this vestment "is no cerement! It was

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[12] For an analysis of the theme of rape in mummy fiction, see Day (2006).

[13] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas discusses this idea of the fragmentation of the female body more figuratively, claiming that we might read the "cutting up [of] the female body" in authors' focus on particular (often beautiful) body parts (2007:42). This, he claims, "secures gendered positions of male domination and female subordination" (ibid).

not meant for the clothing of death! It is a marriage robe!" (2008: 235). Margaret dresses Tera in this garment, and lays white flowers atop her, emulating a bridal bouquet. Tera's aim, it transpires, was to awaken and find love in the modern world. There is more than a suggestion that the queen secures this aim: over the course of the novel, Margaret increasingly channels Tera, and when their striking physical resemblance is recorded, the implication is that is as a result of a unique psychical bond.

The two versions of the text of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* differ significantly in the novel's ending. In the 1903 ending, the experiment to revive Tera fails; the room fills with a noxious gas and all except the narrator, Ross, are killed. In the 1912 ending, however, Ross marries Margaret. Having dressed Tera in this bridal gown before the band of men attempt (and fail) to reawaken her, Margaret dons the robe herself. As Ross records, "[i]n the autumn Margaret and I were married. On the occasion she wore the mummy robe and zone and the jewel which Queen Tera had worn in her hair" (Stoker, 2008: 250). In this latter version of Stoker's tale, the union between Ross and Margaret may seem like the traditional happy ending of an Edwardian love story (and the romantic fairy tale), but the hints that Tera occupies Margaret's body might be interpreted as a sinister inversion of this trope; as the narrator relates:

> We often think of the great Queen, and we talk of her freely. Once, when I said with a sigh that I was sorry she could not have waked into a new life in a new world, my wife, putting both her hands in mine and looking into my eyes with that far-away eloquent dreamy look which sometimes comes into her own, said lovingly:
>
> "Do not grieve for her! Who knows, but she may have found the joy she sought? Love and patience are all that make for happiness in this world; or in the world of the past or of the future; of the living or the dead. She dreamed her dream; and that is all that any of us can ask!"
> (2008: 250)

Tera, if indeed she has entered into Margaret's body, is certainly neither the model Edwardian bride nor fairy-tale feminine ideal: over the course of the novel she proves physically violent and vengeful. And, taking the novel's original ending (in which she leaves all of the characters besides Ross dead) into consideration, one wonders whether or not Ross's expectations of nuptial bliss will be realised, or if, like the powerful Ayesha in Haggard's *She* (1887) who plans to overthrow Queen Victoria, his bride will "assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth" (Haggard, 1887: 256).

An earlier story, *Iras: A Mystery* (1896) by Mrs. H. D. Everett, published under the pseudonym Theo Douglas, sees another male protagonist fall in love with the statue-like body of an ancient Egyptian woman, a "sculptor's dream" (Douglas, 1896: 108). This instant is one in which the exposure of the female body and the realisation of amorous feelings occur instantaneously:

> The face I looked upon was beautiful, but it was a marvel the more that I did not regard it in the least as one looks upon the beauty of a stranger. I knew my heart's one love when I saw her face to face. All the aching loss of my solitary life—all I

had lacked hardly knowing—was present to me in that moment, as I recognised a
need filled, an incompleteness suddenly made whole.
(1896: 89-90)

Iras Charmian (as the protagonist and narrator Lavenham names her, using the names of
Cleopatra's handmaidens derived from Plutarch) is a conventional dark-haired, fair-skinned
princess, attraction to whom is justified as "the rich tint of [her] cheek" is reported to be "hardly
darker than an English brunette's," suggesting the ease with which her body might be appropriated
into British society (1896: 94). The "pure white" gown that she wears (1896: 94), along with the
exposure of one hand and arm before any other body part is suggestive of the centrality of the
marriage plot to *Iras*. Indeed, her hand is the site of Lavenham's kisses until their marriage
ceremony takes place: "I kissed her hand […]—I would not touch her lips till she was mine" (1896:
128).

Iras and Lavenham are indeed married over the course of the novel, but they are pursued
by an ancient Egyptian priest, Savak, whose love for Iras during her life in ancient Egypt was
unreciprocated. Each time Savak steals a lotus pendant from a magical necklace that Iras wears,
she becomes weaker, and although Lavenham can still see her, she becomes increasingly invisible
to other characters. Similarly, as Iras herself fades, so does her name on her marriage certificate.
Lavenham records that

While my signature […] remained plain to read in all the ordinary blackness of
ink, that of Iras was faded so as to be barely legible. I could just distinguish the
faint brown characters I had taught her to trace, but the beloved name was without
doubt gradually disappearing; a few more months and the paper will be blank.
(1896: 271)

While Lavenham hopes that this legal contract will tether Iras to his modern world, it is the power
of ancient Egypt that ultimately tears her away from the man who seeks to possess her. Although
they are married, it is unlikely that consummation takes place: Iras's declining health as she fades
away means that a kiss is likely the extent of the romantic contact between the lovers.

Lavenham's account is, by his own admission, markedly unreliable. He confesses his own
shaky grasp of the events he relates, assuming when his friend recommends that he see a doctor
that he should consult "[a] specialist for mental cases" (1896: 66). Furthermore, his declaration
that he "had for long suspected that in the higher walks of the embalmer's art—as mentioned by
Herodotus and others—existed certain secrets both of ingredient and method" very subtly gestures
towards the necrophiliac implications more readily visible in Stoker's and Haggard's narratives.
In his descriptions of mummification Herodotus records that the bodies of "women of great beauty
and reputation, are not at once given over to the embalmers, but only after they have been dead for
three or four days; this is done, that the embalmers may not have carnal intercourse with them"
(1999: 373). Iras, who technically has not been dead at all but merely dormant inside her
sarcophagus, is a virgin: ripe for sexual appropriation.

Lavenham cannot keep possession of Iras. The pair slip into unconsciousness in the snow,
and when they are discovered, Iras has undergone a startling transformation, now nothing more
than "the mummy of a woman; a thing swathed and bandaged in cerements and dry as a stick,
which had been dead for hundreds—nay, thousands—of years" (Douglas, 1896: 219). The
mummy, no longer evoking the idealised princess but the elderly crone (another staple depiction

of the female in the fairy-tale form) is "wrapped from head to foot in a fur coat, and had a modern gauze veil tied over its own bands of long hair" (1896: 220). While many are doubtful of Lavenham's story, believing that he had hallucinated a living woman in place of the mummy, when the bandages are unwrapped a "new broad wedding-ring of shining gold" is discovered on one finger (1896: 240). The ring sports not only "the modern hall-mark, [that proves] that it was really a Victorian ring on the hand of a mummy three thousand years old," but the couple's "two names engraved within" (1896: 240), the only material evidence of the marriage after the beautiful and dormant Iras has transformed into a crumbling mummy. The image of the youthful, marriageable, fertile woman gives way to the deathly associations of the wizened hag.

In "The Ring of Thoth," a comparable physical transformation takes place. After Atma's removal from the glass coffin, Doyle's narrative diverges from fairy tale conventions. While, in the fairy tale, the confinement of the glass coffin is exchanged for the confinement of marriage, female mummies resist captivity within marital bondage. After she is unwrapped and kissed, Atma's body reacts to the air. Her skin disintegrates, the eyes sink into their sockets and her lips and teeth darken. Doyle's narrator records that once the Louvre attendant has been reunited with the body of his lover and found the antidote that counteracts the elixir keeping him alive, a story appears in *The Times* newspaper. This, he relates, tells that "one of the attendants" was discovered "lying dead upon the floor with his arms round one of the mummies. So close was his embrace that it was only with the utmost difficulty that they were separated" (Doyle, 1890: 61). The "long-standing disease of the heart" that the journalist supposes to have been the cause of death is strikingly apt (1890:61). The removal of the female body from the coffin, and the kisses to its perfectly preserved surface only herald death and decay. There is an echo here, however, of love for an individual who transitions between beautiful and unattractive forms: in a reversal of tales such as "Beauty and the Beast" in which physical ugliness is transformed into attractiveness with the realisation of true love (and with a spell-breaking kiss), Sosra's love for Atma continues beyond her metamorphosis, like so many female mummies, from princess to crone, or from woman to mummy.

In 1903 George Griffith published a short story, "The Lost Elixir," heavily based on Doyle's precedent. This tale, too, focuses on the reunion between the living lover and the mummified dead that, instead of awakening the perfectly preserved beloved, stimulates physical deterioration. Griffith describes the exposure of the body of an Egyptian woman, another "unswathed, white-robed figure of an exquisitely beautiful girl, who, instead of having lain there hidden from the sight of men for thirty centuries, might have fallen asleep only an hour before" (1903: 165). The living ancient Egyptian kisses the woman and

> No sooner had their lips met than the fair flesh of the mummy grew dark and
> shriveled into a thousand wrinkles. The eyes sank back into the sockets, the gloss
> faded from the gold-brown hair, and the rounded form shrank together under the
> garments.[14] (1903: 165)

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[14] The unusual fairness of the mummy's tresses in Griffith's retelling of Doyle's story perhaps suggests an allusion to the tale of Sleeping Beauty rather than Snow White. Sleeping Beauty was often depicted in nineteenth-century art as having blonde hair, such as in works by Edward Frederick Brewtnall, Walter Crane, and Edward Burne-Jones. This representation of Sleeping Beauty as fair-haired continued into the twentieth century, in imagery such as John Collier's painting of 1921, as well as illustrations by Edmund Dulac.

This caress is, as the narrator relates, a "Death-kiss," whose magic not only catalyses the rapid decay of the mummified body but the death of the Egyptian lover: "He who a moment before had stood with me, a living, breathing man, holding my hands and speaking to me in his now familiar voice, became, as it were in an instant, not a corpse, but a skeleton covered with a dry brown skin, through which the grey bones broke their way as they dropped with a gentle rustling sound into the case." There is another twist upon the Sleeping Beauty tale in Griffith's narrative: the ancient Egyptian and his dead lover were married while she was alive. The Egyptian recounts how "[o]n our marriage night I instilled the elixir into my veins and hers" (1903: 163), speaking of the magical draught that grants him such extreme longevity; there is, of course, the twin euphemistic implication of the sexual consummation of their marriage, an act which is again evoked in the moment directly after the "Death-kiss," "in which the ashes of the long-parted lovers at length were permitted to mingle" (1903: 165). In this instant, both transform from beauties into beasts, in a fairly progressive mingling of usually distinctly gendered fairy-tale conventions.

Conclusion

As Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher argue, male authors engaged with the conventions of the fairy tale as collected and popularised by "redactors like Perrault and the brothers Grimm [who] had appropriated […] the genre that was once associated with authoritative women, the *sages femmes* or *Märchenfrauen*" (1992: 6-7). They claim that "[t]he male writer's sentimental return to a myth of matriarchal origins was for the woman writer a colonisation of one of the few literary spheres she was allowed to consider her own" (1992: 7). Yet these largely male-authored stories expose the cracks emerging in this colonisation: these are not typical fairy-tale narratives, constraining women within marital bonds at their conclusions. Indeed, although the female mummies therein do begin in idealised, objectified and passive forms, unlike stories of fairy-tale princesses which "bind or chastise the female body until the heroines fit the feminine ideal" (Talairach-Vielmas 2007: 9), these women merely begin as sexually-appealing and submissive. Over the course of these narratives they deteriorate in appearance (for instance, becoming crones), disintegrate or disappear, resisting the status of objects to be owned. Rather than the conventional fairy tale "happy ending" of being "married and securely locked up in their homes" (Talairach-Vielmas 2007: 1), ultimately, the female body is destroyed. Dismembered, disintegrating, fading like ghosts, bodies once encountered as flawless sex objects resist consumption, just as Egypt resisted assimilation into the British Empire.

As guilt of plundering became increasingly apparent, and the introduction of legal restrictions limited the removal of antiquities from tombs, the beautiful bodies of ancient Egyptian women began to slip through male protagonists' fingers, in narratives that invert the "happily ever after" of wedded bliss that concludes the traditional fairy tale. The possibility of romance is almost universally revealed to be an unattainable fantasy as the object is removed—or removes herself— from existence. Rather than submitting to Western notions of desire and control, the empire strikes back. Attempts to objectify or to sexually claim the ancient Egyptian body are thwarted, suggesting that although bodies might be contained for a while, this relationship between the empowered (masculine) collector and the passive (feminine) body cannot last. While Egypt had once offered up its riches to Western explorers and archaeologists, Britain's imperialistic hold over Egypt was loosening.

This essay has recognised the parallels between mummy fiction and the fairy tale, demonstrating the idealised ways in which the ancient Egyptian mummified body was presented

(in contrast to more realistic depictions of the male mummy). This establishes as the female mummy as an object of desire, a "Sleeping Beauty," an artefact to be bought, owned and controlled. It has also demonstrated the bid to confine these bodies within marriage once they have been removed from their glass coffins, a trope which might be read alongside Britain's imperial involvement in Egypt as a metaphor of political and military control. As this essay has revealed, the conventions of the "feminine" fairy-tale genre were weaved into supposedly "masculine" imperial Gothic texts. This was not merely the appropriation of genre, however, but one in which the female resists constraint, reflective of all manner of *fin-de-siècle* anxieties regarding not only women's increasing power, but Egypt's imperial struggle, as represented by the enigmatic figure of the mummy.

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