Cross-Dressing Scholars and Mummies in Drag: Egyptology and Queer Identity

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Egyptian-themed narratives depicted all kinds of behaviour deemed transgressive by contemporary standards. As Bradley Deane observes, for instance, mummy fictions "dissolve many of the oppositions that typically structure British identity: science/magic, Christianity/paganism, rationality/superstition, modernity/antiquity, colonizer/ colonized, and, at times, masculinity/femininity".[1] Interrogating this latter binary, recent scholarship has further sought to scrutinise the range of sexual complexities present in depictions of ancient Egypt in the modern world, especially those that verge away from the heteronormative; "many constructions of Egypt", as Lynn Meskell rightly states, "have been queered".[2] Angie Blumberg has, for instance, demonstrated the existence of queer archaeological motifs in literature of the late nineteenth century, focusing specifically on the works of Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee, a corpus that might be read as a forerunner to the emergence of "queer archaeology" in the 1980s.[3] Blumberg pays particular attention to Wilde's poem "The Sphinx" (1894), demonstrating how Egyptian mythology and imagery are alluded to in order to catalogue "illicit activit[ies] and desire[s]" that drive "all manner of unconventional relationships", which include same-sex couplings as well as problematic bestial and necrophilic encounters.[4] This essay complements Blumberg's analysis by focusing upon a single facet of queer archaeologies as defined by her, Meskell and others. Cross-dressing has a range of connotations, from the playful and comedic, to the sexual and the symbolic. It can be deeply personal, performative, public or private. Through unpicking some of the connotations of cross-dressing across the examples in

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[1] Bradley Deane, "Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperial Striptease", *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 51.4 (2008): 402.

[2] Lynn Meskell, "Consuming Bodies: Cultural Fantasies of Ancient Egypt", *Body & Society* 4.1 (1998): 64. For the sexual implications of archaeological practice in literature, see, for example, Jasmine Day's observation of parallels between the plundering of the tomb or the unwrapping of a mummified body and rape; Jasmine Day, *The Mummy's Curse: Mummymania in the English-Speaking World* (London: Routledge, 2006), 43, 46–7, 52–3, 62–3, 70.

[3] Angie Blumberg, "Strata of the Soul: The Queer Archaeologies of Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde", *Victoriographies* 7.3 (2017): 239–56.

[4] Blumberg, "Strata of the Soul", 249.

question, this article unearths the fluidity of gender identity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture, and suggests the influence of contemporary developments in the archaeological discipline. While these acts are largely depicted as transgressive in their suggestions of the unnatural or dangerous, as well as in the critical responses they elicited from their original audiences, they reflect unstable norms and a society in flux, and also hint not only at the "queerness" perceived in the ancient Egyptians, but also the individuals who encounter and engage with ancient Egypt themselves.

In her essay "Sexual Studies in Archaeology" (2008) Barbara L. Voss explains that in the nineteenth century "Europeans turned to Egyptology for counter-cultural models of sexual potency, bisexuality, gender ambiguity, and homoeroticism".[5] Cleopatra, renowned for her seductive powers, and fabled to have had her lovers slain after enjoying a single night with her, was the figurehead of this multitude of sexual connotations. Nineteenth-century images of the Egyptian queen, as Lynn Meskell observes, tend to focus on "the breast and the phallic snake", combining imagery of femininity and masculinity.[6] I would add that the combination of masculine and feminine about a single body, particularly towards the end of the nineteenth century during the Victorian magical revival, would be increasingly interpreted as alchemical. The quasi-mystical and hermaphroditic implications of Cleopatra's body during the final decade of the Victorian era would have been increasingly culturally apparent: across the nineteenth century Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* enjoyed growing popularity.[7] This version of history, focusing upon sex, luxury and death in Egypt, includes its own reference to cross-dressing in which, speaking of Antony, Cleopatra boasts of an occasion upon which

> I drunk him to his bed;
> Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
> I wore his sword Philippan.[8]

Wearing the sword of her male lover while he slumbers in her own female attire, Cleopatra adopts a symbolic phallus, the precursor to the asp with which she

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[5] Barbara L. Voss, "Sexuality Studies in Archaeology", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008): 318.
[6] Meskell, "Consuming Bodies", 66.
[7] Jeffrey Richards, *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 206.
[8] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Richard Madelaine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), II. 5. 21–3.

carries out her suicide (see figure 1). Most importantly, in Shakespeare's play Egypt is the location in which men and women exchange clothing and, by implication, gender roles. Perhaps directly correlating with an increased interest in Shakespeare's tragedy and its decadent image of role reversal, cross-dressing is a trope that, as I demonstrate, materialised in literary culture with Egyptian themes produced in the final years of the nineteenth century and, influenced by contemporary archaeological discoveries, continued into the twentieth. Transvestism, as we shall see, unites both ancient and modern characters, bringing their worlds into a queer synchrony.

Figure 1: The British-American actress Lillie Langtry
brandishing a dagger as Cleopatra.[9]

I focus predominantly on works that involve modern Europeans who seek knowledge of or a relationship with ancient Egyptian characters, often mummies, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though I gesture to the development of the trope of cross-dressing in relation to more recent interpretations of ancient Egypt in this essay's conclusion. I have already noted how "these monstrous [mummified] bodies began to assert their power through

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[9] "Lillie Langtry as Cleopatra" by Henry Van der Weyde, albumen cabinet card, 1890, 107 mm x 166 mm, Photographs Collection, NPG x197344 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

an affront on gender and sexual norms" at the *fin de siècle*.[10] A multitude of mummy fictions at this time grappled with the necrophilic associations of unwrapping idealised female corpses, as well as the racial (potentially miscegenous) implications of the desire that so often bubbles up between the ancient Egyptians and modern European (often British) protagonists in these narratives. This article contributes to these burgeoning critical conversations by focusing upon a selection of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary and cultural sources—Richard Marsh's novel *The Beetle* (1897), Bram Stoker's novel *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903; reissued in 1912), and a French pantomime entitled *Rêve d'Égypte* (1907)—in which Egyptological investigation not only uncovers mummies in drag, but provides an opportunity for investigators too to cross-dress. I use the term "Egyptology" broadly here, denoting both the academic subject as it formally emerged across the nineteenth century,[11] as well as amateur engagement with ancient Egypt encouraged by an explosion in popular publishing on the subject, often works by expert authors or in consultation with Egyptological professionals. While *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and *Rêve d'Égypte* focus on the interplay between mummies and scholars, *The Beetle* features an ancient Egyptian adversary that the novel's protagonists—none of them Egyptological experts—seek to comprehend. Nevertheless, their investigations might be understood as operating on the edge of amateur Egyptological discourse, as these characters attempt to understand and apprehend the malign, supernatural Egyptian being. As in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and *Rêve d'Égypte*, with their "academic" Egyptological focus, the "queerness" that defines ancient Egyptian presences in *The Beetle* extends to the modern Western characters. This, I claim, might be seen as one way in which all varieties of "Egyptologist" and the ancient civilisation that they seek to understand might be brought into alignment, dissolving divisions between "self" and "other" in the cultural consciousness more broadly.

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[10] Eleanor Dobson, "Emasculating Mummies: Gender and Psychological Threat in *Fin-de-Siècle* Mummy Fiction", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 40.4 (2018): 397.

[11] In Britain, see, for instance, Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Alice A. Stevenson, "The Object of Study: Egyptology, Archaeology, and Anthropology at Oxford, 1860–1960", in *Histories of Egyptology: Interdisciplinary Measures*, ed. William Carruthers (London: Routledge, 2014), 19–33.

I. *The Beetle*: Sexual Nightmare and the New Woman

Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* was first published in 1897, the same year that saw the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which, as a number of critics have been quick to point out, Marsh's novel originally outsold.[12] The plot concerns a mysterious ancient Egyptian antagonist which can change its sex, age and species at will, appearing at various points male, female, young, old, human and beetle. This creature seeks revenge on a British Member of Parliament, Paul Lessingham, with whom, it is implied, it once participated in a romantic affair, but was spurned some time before the events of the novel take place. Its telepathic and hypnotic powers are typical of *fin-de-siècle* supernatural villains, and it uses these to manipulate the novel's protagonists who ultimately seek the creature's destruction.

The Beetle's characters (and critics) have trouble ascertaining the antagonist's true gender: "the shady Egyptian man/woman/beetle hybrid who (that?) haunts London";[13] "man and woman";[14] "it/him/her";[15] a "man-woman-goddess-beetle-Thing";[16] "he, she, or it";[17] "goodness alone knows what the infernal conjurer's real sex may be".[18] Its appearance rapidly fluctuates between masculinity, femininity and an androgynous middle-ground. In *The Beetle*'s third chapter, the first character from whose perspective the narrative is told—Robert Holt—reasons that the antagonist must be male because "it was impossible such a creature could be feminine", but by the fifth he notices "something which was essentially feminine; so feminine" that he instead believes the creature to be a

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[12] Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 208; Julian Wolfreys, "Introduction", in *The Beetle*, by Richard Marsh, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004), 11; Stephan Karschay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 124.

[13] Aviva Briefel, "Hands of Beauty, Hands of Horror: Fear and Egyptian Art at the *Fin de Siecle*", *Victorian Studies* 50.2 (2008): 263.

[14] Roger Luckhurst, "The Mummy's Curse: A Genealogy", in *Magic, Science, Technology and Literature*, ed. Jarmilla Mildoft, Hans Ulrich Seeber and Martin Windisch (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2006), 130.

[15] Wolfreys, "Introduction", 17.

[16] Roger Luckhurst, "Trance-Gothic, 1882–1897", in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 160.

[17] Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004), 253.

[18] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 253.

woman.[19] Later still, Holt considers that the entity "could be nothing human,—nothing fashioned in God's image could wear such a shape as that", suggesting an unholy abhumanity.[20] The antagonist also bridges the boundary between life and death; while very much physically and psychologically active, it is suggested that it acquires its supernatural shape-shifting abilities *post mortem*.

The creature vacillates between such varied categories, embodying several different threats associated with ancient Egyptians more broadly across *fin-de-siècle* culture. Firstly, when the antagonist assumes masculine form, the threat is that of the homosexual man. Holt relates that the creature's fingers were "thrust into my mouth" and "blubber lips were pressed to mine—the soul of something evil entered into me in the guise of a kiss", a scene that evidently carries connotations of sexual assault.[21] This account of the penetration of one man by another masculine entity, published in the same year as *Dracula*—another text concerning an androgynous monster with an invading and corrupting kiss—was written at a time when the trials of Oscar Wilde just two years prior were still fresh in the public mind.[22] Indeed, Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas had "wintered" in Egypt from December 1893 to February 1894 at Wilde's suggestion. The sojourn was intended as an eschewal of the burgeoning rumours about his private life in London; Egypt was, however, one of several countries where "European homosexuals" might encounter "willing indigenous partners", as variously documented by the likes of Gustave Flaubert and Richard Burton.[23] Consequently, we might read the Egyptian element of Marsh's text and the antagonist's various encounters with British men while in its male form as channelling one of Victorian society's most taboo concerns.

Later, the creature changes its appearance from man to beetle to woman in front of another male protagonist, Sydney Atherton. The antagonist is left "naked from top to toe […] by no means old or ill-shaped either"; the voice and face, meanwhile, remain "a man's".[24] The implication of sexual attraction in Atherton's report further cements the antagonist's disturbing power. Before encountering this creature, Atherton only expresses socially-acceptable

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[19] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 53, 61.

[20] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 57.

[21] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 57.

[22] Talia Schaffer, "'A Wilde Desire Took Me': The Homoerotic History of Dracula", *English Literary History* 61.2 (1994): 399.

[23] Robert Aldrich, "Homosexuality in the French Colonies", *Journal of Homosexuality* 41.3–4 (2002): 201.

[24] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 152.

heterosexual attraction towards young, white, living women. Not only is Atherton's desire in this moment directed towards a creature which, moments before, was in its male form, it maintains its masculine voice and face while in its more conventionally appealing feminine shape. Atherton's attraction, therefore, is for an entity that verges on hermaphroditic, a close relative of Cleopatra, a queen who bears her lover's sword and combines the imagery of snake and breast.

As a result of its confusingly alluring and repulsive sexuality, critics including Kate Hebblethwaite have identified the creature's greatest threat as the "sexual corruption of all with whom [it] comes into contact, unsettling gender boundaries and exposing the licentious proclivities of supposedly upstanding citizens".[25] The antagonist certainly wields a profound psychological power over other characters, exposing sexual difference via hypnotic coercion. Most significantly, this is achieved by the creature's control over the dressing and undressing of the novel's protagonists: it commands Holt to strip, and has him dress in "[a] long dark cloak".[26] Our first indication that the antagonist might take particular care over his victims' clothing occurs at this moment: Holt finds the cloak in a cupboard "full of clothing,—garments which might have formed the stock-in-trade of a costumier whose speciality was providing costumes for masquerades".[27] These are garments that look as though they have been produced for a theatrical performance, in which true identities are masked, the known becomes the unknown, and where age, race, sex and gender might be "put on" or "cast off".

Victoria Margree has been the first to examine the significance of the antagonist's sartorial control in detail, commenting upon the feminisation of Holt as the antagonist assumes the role of sexual aggressor, and the equivalence that Marsh establishes between the feminised man, and "the masculinised woman, Marjorie Lindon", Lessingham's fiancée.[28] Margree observes that Marsh questions "whether gender is an essential part of the self or something that is 'played' like a role, or worn like a garment", citing in particular the antagonist's

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[25] Kate Hebblethwaite, "Introduction", in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, by Bram Stoker, ed. Kate Hebblethwaite (London: Penguin, 2008), xxv.
[26] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 55.
[27] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 55.
[28] Victoria Margree, "'Both in Men's Clothing': Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*", *Critical Survey* 19.2 (2007): 67–8.

capture of Marjorie which involves the substitution of her clothes for Holt's.[29] The protagonists discover Marjorie's discarded clothing:

> An entire outfit was there, shoes, stockings, body linen, corsets, and all,—even to hat, gloves, and hairpins;—these latter were mixed up with the rest of the garments in strange confusion. It seemed plain that whoever had worn those clothes had been stripped to the skin.[30]

The image of the Victorian woman throwing off her corset inevitably calls forth associations with the New Woman, a late-nineteenth-century feminist ideal whose proponents called for greater freedom for women (connected, somewhat inevitably, with dress reform which sought to liberate women from the confines of tight-laced corsets and restrictive bustles). This, however, is something that Marjorie does not do willingly: bundled on the floor, her clothing "was all soiled and creased and torn and tumbled".[31] The violence of her abduction is emphasised by the sharp, hissing consonance in phrases such as "stripped to the skin", as well as a sense of urgency suggested through multiple use of "and": "all soiled *and* creased *and* torn *and* tumbled" (my emphasis). The frantic brutality of her stripping is furthered by the discovery of "a long plait of woman's hair […] cut off at the roots,—so close to the head in one place that the scalp itself had been cut, so that the hair was dotted with blood".[32] It is the ancient Egyptian antagonist that drives Marjorie to transvestism, dressing her under duress in clothing that once belonged to Holt: "a rotten, dirty pair of boots; a filthy, tattered pair of trousers; a ragged, unwashed apology for a shirt; a greasy, ancient, shapeless coat; and a frowsy peaked cloth cap".[33] The male protagonists are flummoxed: "what on earth should make her do a thing like that? Marjorie, the most retiring, modest girl on God's earth, walk about in broad daylight, in such a costume, and for no reason at all!"[34] The antagonist's hypnotic influence is deemed the only explanation (besides madness), making the evident physical violence of the event seem all the more sadistic in its unnecessariness. Having commanded Holt to change his attire through the power of its mind alone, the antagonist's physical attack of Marjorie speaks to an aggressive, animalistic streak that emerges as the creature more desperately seeks the realisation of its revenge.

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[29] Margree, "'Both in Men's Clothing'", 71.
[30] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 264.
[31] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 264.
[32] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 264. Wolfreys notes the "implied violation" in the violent details of Marjorie's abduction; see Wolfreys, "Introduction", 25.
[33] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 285.
[34] Marsh, *The Beetle*, 285.

With its dangerous antagonist threatening to destroy the protagonists' sense of healthy and lawful heteronormativity, *The Beetle* is a prime example of what Jeff Nunokawa has described as the "works that inhabited and indeed helped to ignite the climate of sexual controversy that characterized the later part of the nineteenth century".[35] The antagonist's threatening sexual and gender fluidity anticipates Marjorie's own unwilling transformation, demonstrating the continued and perilous power that the ancient world still wields over the modern one, but particularly over London as the centre of the British Empire. It is deeply symbolic that the antagonist transforms Marjorie. After a transgressive sexual relationship with Lessingham (established as such through the antagonist's ambiguous gender and racial identity, as well as its supernatural power), the creature seeks vengeance by transforming his new object of desire. The mirror image of the antagonist's metamorphosis from male to female, Marjorie is transformed—through her clothing and personal appearance—from female to male, establishing a close connection between both of Lessingham's love interests. Ancient monster and modern woman are united; gender "worn like a garment" might not only be adopted or discarded, but imposed and endured.

II. *The Jewel of Seven Stars*: **Flat Chests and False Beards**

First published in 1903 and reissued with an alternate ending in 1912, the year of the author's death, Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* is one of the defining works of the Egyptian Gothic at the *fin de siècle*. The plot revolves around an experiment to reanimate an ancient Egyptian mummy. An Egyptologist, Abel Trelawny, has the body of a female mummy in his possession. It transpires that there is a supernatural alignment between this mummy—the fictional Queen Tera—and Trelawny's daughter, Margaret, who bears an uncanny resemblance to the ancient Egyptian monarch. Margaret, we learn, was born at the very moment in which her father broke into Tera's tomb, and over the course of the novel she increasingly channels the queen's spirit. In the novel's bleak original ending the experiment that seeks to revive the ancient queen goes terribly awry. Her body disappears, and all of the characters except Malcolm Ross—the narrator and Margaret's love interest—are left dead. When the novel was reissued the conclusion was substituted for a more traditional one in which, after the experiment seems to fail, Ross and Margaret marry. It is unclear as to

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[35] Jeff Nunokawa, "Sexuality in the Victorian novel", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Dierdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 126.

whether it was Stoker or his publishers who rewrote the ending, although Stoker's failing health at this time may suggest that the revisions are more likely to have been the publisher's work rather than his own.

In many ways, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* replicates the tropes common to contemporary fiction addressing ancient Egyptian (and particularly Gothic) themes. Tera, like many female mummies, is remarkably beautiful, being preternaturally well-preserved. Her white skin, dark hair, full lips and pearly teeth align her with images of an exotic East, but she remains physically close enough to the white male protagonists—paler, as Katie Harse notes, than the coffee-brown Englishman, Corbeck[36]—to be a suitable object of sexual desire, sidestepping implications of miscegenation that more explicitly haunt most narratives featuring male ancient Egyptians. Tera's considerable bloodlust, however, divides her from the swathes of sexually-available female mummies of *fin-de-siècle* fiction, a tradition which stretches back to Théophile Gautier's short story "Le Roman de la momie" (1857), likely with its own roots in the sexual attractiveness attributed to some female mummies in Herodotus's accounts of embalming. While physically beautiful, Tera is connected to threatening notions of vampirism; *The Jewel of Seven Stars* has much in common with *Dracula* in that it sees an ancient and Eastern undead aristocrat invade modern London. As in *Dracula* too, a group of largely male professionals are pitted against the supernatural powers of this adversary.

Tera, in her vampiric inclinations, diverges from most representations of alluring female mummies as passive and unthreatening sex objects. The very real danger that she represents is intensified through a combination of masculine and feminine qualities: male ancient Egyptians are often aligned with scientific learning—in Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Ring of Thoth" (1890), for example, the (male) ancient Egyptian Sosra is a learned chemist, who has discovered the chemical secret to extreme longevity—while female ancient Egyptians often demonstrate more spiritualistic power. Male and female mummies are further distinct in their representations; as Nicholas Daly states "[s]ome stories deal with hostile mummies who revenge themselves on those who have disturbed their original resting places" while "[o]thers exploit the erotic possibilities of the

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36 Katie Harse, "Dracula's Reflection: The Jewel of Seven Stars", in *The Fantastic Vampire: Studies in the Children of the Night; Selected Essays from the Eighteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. James Craig Holte (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 29.

mummy".[37] Broadly speaking, hostile, vengeful mummies tend to be male, while erotically-appealing mummies tend to be female.[38] Tera, meanwhile, blurs these gender boundaries. She is a "Wizard Queen"—a masculine and feminine hybrid—expertly skilled in potent "'black' magic".[39] Her feminine occult power is given a masculine twist in Stoker's presentation of her magic as "the science of her time".[40] Multiple critics have noted this unusual emphasis on Tera as sorceress-*cum*-scientist, whose unique brand of knowledge can "undermine" that of the modern West.[41] Yet there is more to Tera's threat than merely her androgynous supernatural/scientific abilities. Her severed hand strangles the Arabs who tear it from her body, leaving her victims in "strange contorted attitudes of violent death".[42] The sheer physical force of the strangling leaves "their hands and necks […] smeared with blood which had burst from mouth and nose and eyes" in a gory demonstration of masculine destruction.[43] The female mummy is, in other works, rarely the physical aggressor; for example, in Conan Doyle's short story "Lot No. 249" (1892)—one of the most influential mummy tales—the reanimated male mummy is defined by the physical attacks it carries out on passers-by. The number of Tera's victims, tellingly, is far higher, and her attacks are—more often than not—fatal.

Tera's performance of both male and female roles (at least within the remit of mummy fiction), might be seen to be influenced by contemporary events. Tera's sexual hybridity seems emblematic of the transition from queen to king. Published so shortly after the death of Queen Victoria, at this point the longest reigning monarch in British history, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* can be read as offering a seemingly immortal hybrid of Victoria and her successor, King Edward VII. It also appears to engage with notions of queenship and kingship as it was then

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[37] Nicholas Daly, "That Obscure Object of Desire: Victorian Commodity Culture and Fictions of the Mummy", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 28.1 (1994): 36.

[38] For physical differences between male and female mummies, see Eleanor Dobson, "Sleeping Beauties: Mummies and the Fairy Tale Genre at the *Fin de Siècle*", *Journal of International Women's Studies* 18.3 (2017): 24–7.

[39] Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, ed. Kate Hebblethwaite (London: Penguin, 2008), 128, 166.

[40] Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 167.

[41] David Glover, "The Lure of the Mummy: Science, Séances and Egyptian Tales in Fin-de-Siècle England", *Australasian Victorian Studies Annual* 1 (1995): 4. For an examination of *The Jewel of Seven Stars* in the light of contemporary physics, and parallels between Tera and Marie Curie, see Eleanor Dobson, "Gods and Ghost-Light: Ancient Egypt, Electricity and X-Rays", *Victorian Literature and Culture* 45.1 (2017): 129–32.

[42] Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 133.

[43] Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 133.

being explored in contemporary Egyptological knowledge. Kate Hebblethwaite records that the discovery of the tomb of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut by Howard Carter in 1902 made its influence felt upon Stoker's text. In the ancient world, Hatshepsut was often depicted "in emphatically masculine form, with a naked male upper torso, short kilt and royal beard" (xxii), symbolising her autonomy (see figure 2).[44] Like Hatshepsut, Tera is a cross-dresser, if not in life then in iconographic representations. While our first glimpse of Tera is of her as sexually tempting and nude (like many female mummies), Trelawny "underscores the mummy's status as a mere object […] representing Tera's remains as gender-neutral".[45] Complicating this, however is Tera's assumption of the clothes and crowns of the male pharaohs as a physical symbol of her "[claim to] all the privileges of kingship and masculinity".[46] Tera is, as Piya Pal-Lapinski states, "a hybrid of the New Woman and Egyptian monarch".[47] I would take Pal-Lapinski's statement one step further and argue that in her autonomy, her physical, psychic and sexual power, as well as her adoption of masculine raiments, she is a fusion of the New Woman and the Egyptian *male* monarch, upsetting traditional gender roles by becoming, like her historical counterpart Hatshepsut—at least through early twentieth-century eyes—a troubling androgynous hybrid. Both real and fictional queens, Hebblethwaite asserts, "are women in possession of an anomalous degree of power who assume the role of men", "blurring [the] boundaries between male and female".[48] This breakdown can be understood not just as vaguely unsettling to contemporary minds, but seen as symptomatic of degeneracy within the emerging field of psychology. British and German physicians including Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld (who coined the term "transvestite" in 1910) referred specifically to Hatshepsut in their works on "sexual inversion" and "sexuelle Zwischenstufen" respectively, medicalising what seems to some twenty-first-century Egyptologists and museum-goers to be Hatshepsut's progressive gender fluidity, and to others merely the anachronistic misinterpretation of iconography symbolic of power within a patriarchal system.[49] Regardless of the modern reader's interpretation,

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[44] Hebblethwaite, "Introduction", xxii.

[45] Meilee D. Bridges, "Tales from the Crypt: Bram Stoker and the Curse of the Egyptian Mummy", *Victorians Institute Journal* 36 (2008): 155.

[46] Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 129.

[47] Piya Pal-Lapinski, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture: A Reconsideration* (Hanover, NH; London: University of New Hampshire, 2005), 105.

[48] Hebblethwaite, "Introduction", xxiii.

[49] Dobson, "Emasculating Mummies", 399; Jen Grove, "Egyptology, Sexual Science and Modern Gender Identity", *Notches*, April 11 2017,

to Stoker's original readers Tera—and Hatshepsut—would have seemed to cross distinct gender lines in an assertion of masculinised female power, symbolised by sartorial choices.

Figure 2: "Head of Queen Makare Hatshepsut".[50]

Tera's nudity, as well as emphasising her physical desirability, also establishes her as a form to be dressed, and undressed, a body that can sustain multiple identities through the range of clothing it can sport, harking back to Marsh's antagonist's gender fluidity as well as its dressing and undressing of its victims in order to assert its dominance over them. One wall painting in Tera's tomb, we learn,

http://notchesblog.com/2017/04/11/egyptology-sexual-science-and-modern-gender-identity/.

[50] Copy of a Painted Low Relief in the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir al-Bahri by Howard Carter, watercolour heightened with white, 1893–6, 545 mm x 475 mm, Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection, SD.209 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

depicts her "in man's dress, and wearing the White and Red Crowns. In the following picture she was in female dress, but still wearing the Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, while the discarded male raiment lay at her feet".[51] Margaret takes it upon herself to dress Tera in the vestment with which she is buried—a simple white garment that she takes to be "a marriage robe".[52] This might be interpreted as a bid to consign Tera to heteronormativity, something which, at this stage, seems to be wishful thinking on Margaret's part: by this point Tera has clearly made her destabilising and masculinising influence felt on Margaret. Carol A. Senf notes, for example, that Tera makes Margaret "less feminine […] less dependent on [Ross] or any other man, characteristics most uncommon for socially acceptable women in the nineteenth century".[53] Several critics have further commented on Tera's problematic nature (by nineteenth-century standards, at least) and how this is transferred to Margaret; as an individual representing the "horror of women's empowerment" which sees her "transgressing her gender delineation socially" and "[destabilising] her physical womanliness", Tera is a monster who corrupts the modern female, an ancient prototype of the New Woman.[54] She is "frightening because she has usurped power usually allotted only to men", and therefore "subverts nineteenth-century notions of distinctly separate genders".[55]

These observations dovetail with Mara Gold's analysis of femininity, feminism and ancient Egypt across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gold asserts that:

> It was not only the femininity of exotic ancient women that the [modern] woman would have wanted to emulate; their rights and power would have also seemed attractive. While women's rights advocates often had their femininity stripped from them by their critics—particularly through depictions of the "mannish" New Woman […]—they were able to consolidate feminism and femininity through ancient Egyptian […] women, who were considered both beautiful and powerful. The newly-found interest in ancient women as a justification for

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[51] Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 129.

[52] Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 235.

[53] Carol A. Senf, *Science and Social Science in Bram Stoker's Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 87.

[54] Andrew Smith, "Love, Freud, and the Female Gothic: Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*", *Gothic Studies* 6 (2004): 88; Hebblethwaite, "Introduction", xxiii.

[55] Smith, "Love, Freud, and the Female Gothic", 86–7.

women's rights was a direct result of new information gleaned from […] archaeological discoveries.[56]

Gold refers specifically to Hatshepsut as part of her analysis; this queen, "a highly successful ruler and one of only a handful of truly female pharaohs" was, Gold claims, "of greatest interest to suffragists". She notes that "many women were drawn to Hatshepsut as a representation of their political goals" and that "some even treated her temple as a site of suffragette pilgrimage".[57] Gold has expertly demonstrated the concurrence of the rise of scholarly archaeology and first wave feminism: "virtually all female archaeologists working in Egypt" in the early years of the twentieth century, she states, citing figures such as Gertrude Caton Thompson and Margaret Murray, "were actively involved in the suffrage movement". Of course, while Gold establishes that "despite the masculine stereotypes, female archaeologists often prized their femininity", refusing practical trousers in favour of feminine skirts, the image of the female archaeologist as masculine in her work and apparel nevertheless existed and persisted.[58] Indeed, given the high regard in which early twentieth-century feminists and female Egyptologists held the cross-dressing Hatshepsut, there seems to be a softening of lines between the traditionally beautiful female queen and the masculinised pharaoh wearing the ceremonial false beard. Hatshepsut might be seen as another Cleopatra, feminine and alluring, but brandishing the powerful phallic symbol, be it sword, snake, or beard. If Tera is the ancient Egyptian "other", then, and Margaret the Western "self", the transference of Tera's masculine influence (symbolised in part by her evocation of what contemporary psychology thought of as the "transvestite" monarch Hatshepsut) to Margaret establishes a blurring of boundaries between heteronormative modern female and "queer" Egypt.

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[56] Mara Gold, "From Sekhmet to Suffrage: Ancient Egypt in Early Twentieth-Century Culture", in *Ancient Egypt in the Modern Imagination: Art, Literature and Culture*, ed. Eleanor Dobson and Nichola Tonks (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).

[57] Gold, "From Sekhmet to Suffrage".

[58] Mara Gold, "From Hatshepsut to Haute Couture: Women and Egyptian Archaeology in Early Twentieth Century Britain", paper presented at *Tea with the Sphinx: Ancient Egypt and the Modern Imagination*, University of Birmingham, September 23–4, 2016.

III. *Rêve d'Égypte*: Female Egyptologists and Lesbian Love

On January 3, 1907, a pantomime at Paris's famous Moulin Rouge cabaret ended in a riot. Evidently, this was a performance too scandalous even for the Moulin Rouge's fairly liberal standards, though the most outrageous element of the production has since been the subject of debate. The show, entitled *Rêve d'Égypte* (*Dream of Egypt*), was performed by the French author Colette and her lesbian lover Mathilde de Morny, the Marquise de Belbeuf, known by the nickname "Missy" (see figure 3).[59] The pantomime featured Colette wrapped up in imitation of a mummy, who was inspected by Missy in the guise of a male Egyptologist. Colette, bound in ribbon concealing gold dust, was unwrapped, and the voyeuristic encounter between mummy and Egyptologist climaxed with a kiss. Indeed, Terry Castle, suggests that the unwrapping extended beyond the ribbons, to part of Colette's costume; in "[a] startling publicity photograph from around this time", to which, sadly, Castle does not provide a reference, "a bare-naveled Colette [is] carefully divested of a silk skirt by the ponderous Dracula-like, astonishingly masculine Missy".[60] Ten performances were intended to take place, but this first enactment was the last with Missy in the role of the archaeologist; after the public backlash she was replaced by a male actor, Georges Wague.[61]

Figure 3: Colette and Mathilde de Morny in *Rêve d'Égypte*, c. 1907.[62]

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[59] Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse*, 164.

[60] Terry Castle, *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex, and Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 259.

[61] Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2006), 110.

[62] Original provenance unknown, http://www.amisdecolette.fr/colette-sur-scene/.

Many interpret the lesbian kiss as the moment which was met with the greatest scorn. Emily Apter, for example, positions *Rêve d'Égypte* within a broader culture that saw "turn-of-the-century French gay and lesbian identity" collide with sensuous Oriental imagery.[63] Her analysis of the pantomime establishes Colette as one of a bevy of "Orientalist phallic women" whose personae might be adopted "as a means of partially or semi-covertly outing Sapphic love".[64] This is a position shared by Pal-Lapinski, who states that the pantomime's "frisson" centred on "the unsettling potentialities inherent in the figure of the exotic woman/odalisque".[65] Michael Lucey, however, has suggested that rather than the threatening "phallic" figure of Colette, the negative response that the performance received was the result of Missy's social position; members of aristocratic circles, he claims, were outraged that she "would sully her name by appearing onstage in a public music hall".[66] Perhaps the most balanced comment on the combination of factors that contributed to the derision expressed by the pantomime's audience is Dominic Montserrat's elegant and succinct summation that "[t]he scandal […] was concerned with the way [*Rêve d'Égypte*] dissolved sexual and social boundaries: a transvestite lesbian aristocrat disporting herself on the stage with her lover in the compliant presence of the lover's husband".[67] In most accounts that attempt to dig down into the causes of the riot little has been made of the fact that Missy performed in drag. Indeed, this was not simply the adoption of masculine garb for the sake of the performance; Missy (also known to her friends as Uncle Max) customarily wore men's clothing, as did Colette on occasion.[68] It is likely that at this point the prevalence of female cross-dressing on stage, as well as Missy's own reputation for dressing in drag more generally, had numbed audiences who might have once found such behaviour shocking. In this instance, however, Missy's masculine clothing comes to stand for something more than a simple inversion of gender identity. The trope of the

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[63] Emily Apter, "Acting out Orientalism: Sapphic Theatricality in Turn-of-the-Century Paris", in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London: Routledge, 1996): 17.

[64] Apter, "Acting out Orientalism", 19.

[65] Pal-Lapinksi, *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture*, xiv.

[66] Lucey, *Never Say I*, 103.

[67] Dominic Montserrat, "Unidentified Human Remains: Mummies and the Erotics of Biography", in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, ed. Dominic Montserrat (London: Routledge, 1998): 194.

[68] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992), 145.

male Egyptologist falling in love with (or at least feeling instantaneous sexual desire for) a female mummy was well-established by the early twentieth century,[69] and the easily-unwrappable bandages with which most fictional female mummies were bound marks them out as objects to be exposed. This is in contrast to the clothing of male characters, which often goes unremarked. Dressing bodies which are not meant to be revealed, the clothing that men wear establishes their power over the female form: with smart masculine clothing comes authority, and in the case of the Egyptologist, the suggestion of expertise. The disrobing of the female mummy may well be titillating, but it might be sanitised via an air of academic inquiry.

The donning of more masculine apparel deemed practical by some female archaeologists, though shunned by others as an affront on their femininity, complicates Missy's adoption of male garments. While she was certainly meant to look like a man, with her suit and short hair, there is an echo of the changes taking place in the wardrobes of certain women participating in archaeological digs. With ever more women taking part in Egyptological activity, might the scholar who unearths the mummy not be a woman rather than a man after all? Might the female Egyptologist herself be accused of gender-swapping and "inversion"? On the advertising material produced for the pantomime, Missy was credited as "Yssim", a pseudo-Arabic masculine name connecting her to modern Egypt. By adopting a pseudonym which was her own nickname spelled backwards, the symbolism is one of reversal (both in terms of gender and racial identities). This echoes the symbolism woven throughout the names of Stoker's characters in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*: as others have observed, Tera's name is the final four letters of Margaret's reversed.[70] If we see ancient Egypt as a late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century catalyst for gender reversals, transitions, and transgressions, then these sartorial metamorphoses are also coded linguistically. Clothing becomes explicitly entwined with personal identity, which might easily be reinterpreted, removed or reversed.

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[69] Daly, "That Obscure Object of Desire", 44.

[70] William Hughes, *Beyond Dracula: Bram Stoker's Fiction and its Cultural Context* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 38; Glennis Byron, "Bram Stoker's Gothic and the Resources of Science", *Critical Survey* 19.2 (2007): 61; Roger Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 174.

IV: Conclusion

While the unconventional desires and gender fluidity of troublesome mummies and Egyptian monsters might not surprise us (these are, after all, typical features of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic antagonist), the attribution of this "otherness" to Victorian and Edwardian women can be seen to break down boundaries of "self" and "other", revealing the extent of the perception of Egypt's corrupting—and liberating—effect upon the modern imagination. In each of the cases considered in this article—Marjorie Lindon who is forced by a sexually-fluid ancient Egyptian entity to cross-dress, the ancient Egyptian Queen Tera who wears masculine garb to denote her power, and the Marquise de Belbeuf dressing as a man in part to exude scholarly Egyptological expertise and with it the authority to unwrap the female body—women don masculine apparel. This article demonstrates that this transvestism common to women encapsulates a number of interlinked contemporary associations and connotations: the rise of the New Woman, a figure who sought greater freedom, access to education, and sexual independence, and who, Cleopatra-like, was feared by some to be an insatiable *femme fatale*; contemporary archaeological discoveries that shed new light on ancient female rulers who enjoyed the same power as their male predecessors; and the opportunities for intellectual and financial independence that Egyptology itself provided women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the *fin-de-siècle* the female body was the mannequin which might be dressed with concerns regarding expanding female authority, dissolving boundaries between antiquity and modernity.

The combination of ancient Egyptian themes and cross-dressing can also be fruitfully charted forward onto more modern media, suggesting how the trope has persisted and evolved. As Lynn Meskell observes, for example, transvestism and Egyptian antiquity collide in the science fiction film *Stargate* (1994), in which the Egyptian god Ra (played by Jaye Davidson) wears clothes that are "feminized" (see figure 4).[71] The major difference between the *fin-de-siècle* examples that have been the main focus of this article and *Stargate*'s Ra appears to be a simple gender reversal: Ra is a male entity in clothing associated with femininity, as opposed to the three women in masculine apparel. If we agree to have seen three cross-dressing Cleopatras over the course of this article, then Ra is the slumbering Antony awoken in Cleopatra's attire. We might read this change as the result of the relative ease with which women might appear in

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[71] Meskell, "Consuming Bodies", 71.

clothing held to be traditionally male in late twentieth-century culture, but for which the New Women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were ridiculed or vilified. Men in drag, meanwhile, retained more of the implications of sexual difference (and thus its impact) into the late twentieth century; indeed, male cross-dressing is increasingly celebrated. However, it is telling that Meskell observes a nineteenth-century quality in Ra's costumes, particularly considering the film's futuristic science-fiction aesthetic; she states that "[t]he sort of tight bodice or corset we see Davidson in, emphasizing the chest and waistline, is more reminiscent of erotically charged Victorian porn".[72] Ra's clothing denotes his queerness, but it does so in such a way as to hark back to a nineteenth-century past in which cross-dressing was far more scandalous than it was in 1994, a past in which, as we have seen, ancient Egypt encourages and stimulates transvestism in the modern world.

Figure 4: Jaye Davidson as Ra in *Stargate*, dir. Roland Emmerich, 1994.

Similarly, in Philip Glass's opera *Akhnaten* (1983), the titular monarch, depicted somewhat androgynously in ancient Egyptian art, is given a decidedly fluid gender identity. As Susan McClary observes, for the opera's original production directed by David Freeman, "Robert Israel designed a bodysuit to make countertenor Christopher Robson look like the deformed version" of the pharaoh.[73] The effect was so convincing that some audience members purportedly believed this to be Robson's own body. "In this production in particular", McClary continues, "the countertenor's sonority raises the specter of abnormality and monstrosity".[74] John Richardson further suggests the

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[72] Meskell, "Consuming Bodies", 71.
[73] Susan McClary, "Soprano Masculinities", in *Masculinity in Opera: Gender, History, and New Musicology*, ed. Philip Purvis (New York: Routledge, 2013): 45.
[74] McClary, "Soprano Masculinities", 45.

complex interpretations of Akhnaten's gender identity, referring to this same production:

> Akhnaten stood alone, center-stage, dressed from the waist down, in contrast to the earlier appearance of the lament, in which he was totally naked. His physical abormalities were still clearly visible. [...] Nefertiti was absent, presumably because her feminine principle was incorporated somehow in Akhnaten's physiology. Both of these interpretations can be supported by the music and the libretto; one features a man and a woman, and the other a paradoxical man-woman being (predominantly male).[75]

Richardson's analysis illuminates Akhnaten's alchemical, hermaphroditic embodiment of both the masculine and the feminine. The ideas of "monstrosity", "abnormality", and of "a paradoxical man-woman being" recollect *fin-de-siècle* characters like *The Beetle*'s antagonist and Queen Tera, though Akhnaten is recast as hero and visionary in Glass's work. "To depict him in that way", as Richardson asserts, "clearly makes for good drama, and it is, moreover, a highly appropriate allegory for his innovative religious and social ideas".[76]

More important to my focus in this essay in particular is Phelim McDermott's 2016 production of *Akhnaten* for which the costume designer, Kevin Pollard, produced an array of costumes to enhance the gendered implications of various moments. In this production, Akhnaten—played by Anthony Roth Costanzo— first appears entirely naked on stage, his body fully exposed to the audience. Later in the opera, echoing the hermaphroditic associations of the original production, he and his consort Nefertiti emerge in matching slips, printed with a nude female torso; again Akhnaten's androgyny is made flesh. For our purposes, however, it is the first costume in which Akhnaten is dressed that harks back to the *fin-de-siècle* culture upon which this article has focused. After his father's death, Akhnaten is prepared for his coronation, dressed by attendants. His naked form is first outfitted in simple white breeches, before the addition of a gilded cage about the hips which creates a curvaceous silhouette. The effect is much like the crinolines popular in the mid-nineteenth century— the clothing that is layered on top is supported by the structure underneath, providing a sense of a greater volume of fabric. Large, leg-of-mutton sleeves akin to those considered stylish in the 1890s add bulk to the top of the coronation

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[75] John Richardson, *Singing Archaeology: Philip Glass's Akhnaten* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 206.
[76] Richardson, *Singing Archaeology*, 142.

costume. The overall image is one that is somewhere between a gilded pharaoh, formal portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, and a composite of the fashionable Victorian woman at distinct points in the nineteenth century (see figure 5). Costanzo's Akhnaten is a figure who physically bears the weight of the gender-bending ancient Egyptians and Egyptologists that precede him in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture. His is a queer form at once imposing and smothered, evocative as much of power as it is of entrapment.

Figure 5: Anthony Roth Costanzo as Akhnaten, in *Akhnaten* by Philip Glass, dir. Phelim McDermott.[77]

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[77] Metropolitan Opera, "Phelim McDermott on Akhnaten", YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ia7b10Ay-b0, 20 February 2019.