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Egyptosophy in the British Museum: Florence Farr, the Egyptian Adept and the *Ka*

Caroline Tully

In 1890 British actress, Florence Farr (1860–1917), joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret society in the tradition of Freemasonry that taught its members ritual magic. Founded in 1888 by Dr William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925), Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918), and Dr William Robert Woodman (1828–1891), the Golden Dawn augmented the Hermetic Egyptosophical tradition with the latest findings from academic Egyptology. “Egyptosophy” refers to “the study of an imaginary Egypt viewed as the profound source of all esoteric lore”¹ and reflects the idea – prevalent since antiquity – that the ancient Egyptians were a race of mysterious sages. The academic discipline of Egyptology split from Egyptosophy in 1822 with Jean-François Champollion’s decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Once texts by the ancient Egyptians themselves were able to be read the centuries-long belief in a mystical Egypt was revealed to be inaccurate. The fantasy image of Egypt continued however, in a parallel tradition alongside the scholarly one; and the two streams were utilized as complementary sources by the amateur Egyptologists of the Golden Dawn.

It was in an Egyptosophical vein that, as part of her quest for ancient Egyptian wisdom and her self-fashioning as a modern but historically authentic Egyptian priestess, Farr formed psychic relationships with two Egyptian antiquities – a mummy and a statue – in the British Museum.

Designating them as links between herself and once-living ancient Egyptians, Farr utilized the objects to gain direct access to the wisdom of ancient Egypt in order to enhance and validate her own feminine spiritual authority. Previous studies of Farr have been insufficiently

¹ Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1, 3.

critical of her engagement with animated Egyptian antiquities. None have satisfactorily ordered the sequence of events, and the identities of Farr's two Egyptian contacts have been confused and conflated. While Coghill and Greer have provided valuable background on Farr's Egyptian interests within the context of the Golden Dawn, neither author interrogates her choice of Egyptian antiquities or the objects themselves.² Gould primarily focuses upon only one of the objects and its potential significance to Farr, while Parramore affords the subject superficial treatment as part of a broader study of Egyptian motifs in nineteenth-century literature.³ In contrast, this essay situates Farr's activity within the wider context of popular nineteenth-century British receptions of ancient Egypt and the Egyptosophy of the Golden Dawn, interrogates the Egyptian antiquities that she utilized from an Egyptological perspective, and highlights the feminist implications of her imaginative archaeology.

The concept of Ancient Egypt was by no means an unfamiliar one in nineteenth-century London, initially amongst the upper classes and in later decades for all levels of society.⁴ In Egypt itself, a fast-growing body of British tourists were seeing the Egyptian monuments in context. The Suez Canal opened in 1869 and after the forced abdication of Khedive Isma'il Pasha in 1875 and the defeat of the nationalist, Ahmed 'Urabi, in 1882, Britain occupied Egypt,

² Sharon E. Coghill, "Florence Farr's Sphere Group: The Secret Society within the Golden Dawn", *Cauda Pavonis* 11: 1 (1992): 7–12; Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1995), 166–70, 190–5, 256.

³ Warwick Gould, "'The Music of Heaven': Dorothea Hunter," in *Yeats Annual No. 9: Yeats and Women*, ed. Deirdre Toomey (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1997), 167–171; Lynn Parramore, *Reading the Sphinx: Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Literary Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 111. Florence's biographer, Josephine Johnson, does not examine her encounter with Egyptian antiquities in *Florence Farr: Bernard Shaw's 'New Woman'* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1975).

⁴ David Gange, *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion 1822–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Chris Elliot, *Egypt in England* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2012), 17; James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 2005); John David Wortham, *The Genesis of British Egyptology 1549–1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 60.

making it an unofficial British colony for the next seventy years.⁵ Whether Farr developed her interest in ancient Egypt prior to her membership in the Golden Dawn in 1890 is not known, but that she was at least aware of the presence of Egypt in London is likely. Events such as the erection of the Egyptian obelisk, known as Cleopatra's Needle, on the Thames Embankment in 1878 when she would have been eighteen, were highly publicized. The enormous Egyptian Court at the Sydenham Crystal Palace incorporated reconstructions of Egyptian sculpture and architecture, and such was the public interest in the mummies and other Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum that by 1881 the Egyptian Rooms had to be opened daily.⁶

That ancient Egyptian mummies could be subject to imaginative reanimation is evident in the response to Egyptologist William Matthew Flinders Petrie's 1888 exhibition of Roman mummy portraits from the Fayum in north-west Egypt. The exhibition was held at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, the first major building in England to have an exterior in the Egyptian Style and described by *The Times* as "England's Home of Mystery and Arcana." There was much public enthusiasm for the mummy portraits and the exhibition received extensive media coverage. Its location in a venue with overtones of mysticism and magic probably contributed to the generally embellished reportage whereby scholars, art historians and journalists tended to reanimate the subjects of the portraits, "evok[ing] the people of the past in a quasi-psychic way... as if through a medium."⁷ Reanimated mummies already had a long precedent in literary narratives – the first English mummy novel, Jane Loudon's *The Mummy!: A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century*, was published in 1827. Subsequent English and French mummy stories

⁵ Patrick Conner (ed.), *The Inspiration of Egypt: Its Influence on British Artists, Travellers and Designers, 1700–1900* (Brighton: Brighton Borough Council, 1983), 149.

⁶ Egyptian antiquities had been exhibited at the British Museum since its opening in 1759. Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 34, 65, 205.

⁷ 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), 172–4.

appeared intermittently from the 1840s onwards with the genre reaching its heyday between 1880 and 1914. Spiritualism, introduced into England in 1852 and which reached the height of its popularity between the 1860s and 1880s, may have also contributed to the avid biographizing of the Fayum mummy portraits, the idea that one could converse with the dead being at the core of the movement.⁸

Once inside the Golden Dawn, Farr encountered both the Egyptosophical and Egyptological constructions of ancient Egypt. The Orientalist trope of Egypt as the source of all religion, knowledge and architecture, characteristic of the Hermetic tradition, was augmented by recent research from academic Egyptology.⁹ To mark her entry into the Isis-Urania Temple in London, Farr was ritually inducted through the Golden Dawn's Neophyte Ritual which was suffused with Egyptian content.¹⁰ Intended to signify the journey from the darkness of ignorance to the light of understanding, the ritual involved the blindfolded candidate being taken by ritual officiants through various symbolic points within a temple room. Ten officiants participated in the ritual, each of whom represented an ancient Egyptian deity, with the Hierophant representing two. A further eleven Egyptian gods attended without human representation, in addition to another forty-two deities, the "Assessors," manifestations of the *nomes* (districts) of ancient Egypt.¹¹ There were thus sixty-four Egyptian deities within the temple, eleven of whom were alleged to possess the bodies of the ritual officiants while the other fifty-three were invisible. The room contained two pillars in the east, painted black and white and decorated with vignettes from Spells 17 (in which the deceased was equated with the sun god) and 125 (the so-called "Negative

⁸ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.

⁹ Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 118.

¹⁰ All the Golden Dawn temples had Egyptian names: the Osiris Temple in Weston-super-Mare; the Horus Temple in Bradford; Amen-Ra Temple in Edinburgh; and the Ahathoor Temple in Paris.

¹¹ Israel Regardie, *The Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*, vol. 6 (Scottsdale: New Falcon Publications, 1990), 6; vol. 8, 62–6.

Confession”) from the *Book of the Dead*, with the space between the pillars symbolizing the “gateway of Occult Science.”¹² The vignettes were intended to remind the candidate that within the Neophyte Ceremony she was identified with the deceased, as depicted in the *Book of the Dead*.¹³

Frequent reference to “the elements” (fire, water, air and earth) throughout the ritual, along with a “sacred repast” consisting of a symbolic elemental feast consumed at the ceremony’s conclusion suggests that the Isiac initiation in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (11.23), dating to the Roman period, also served as a model for the Neophyte ceremony.¹⁴ The syncretistic combination of Egyptian funerary literature dating to the New Kingdom with Roman era mystery initiations within the Neophyte Ceremony, emblematic of the comparative approach to mythology and religion espoused by Edward Burnett Tylor and James G. Frazer in which apparently similar components of culture could be lifted out of their original social contexts, was typical of all Golden Dawn rituals.¹⁵ In higher degrees members learned the mystical L.V.X. signs that encapsulated the story of Osiris’ murder by Typhon, the mourning of Isis, and Osiris’ eventual resurrection, as related in Plutarch’s *De Iside et Osiride* (13–19).¹⁶ Another set of gestures enabled initiates to rend and see beyond the “veil of Isis” (*De Iside*. 9),¹⁷ a prerequisite

¹² Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 3, 2; Raymond O. Faulkner trans., *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 44–50.

¹³ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 3, 10.

¹⁴ “I went up to the borders of Death; I put the threshold of Proserpina beneath my heel; I passed through the trials of earth and air, fire and water; I came back up alive. At midnight I saw the sun flaring in bright white light; I went down to the gods below, up to the gods above, face to face; I worshipped them at their side.” Joel C. Relihan, trans., *The Golden Ass* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 249. Considered the Egyptian Initiation par excellence in later centuries in Europe, the symbolic “meal” consisted of smelling a rose for air, feeling a flame for fire, eating bread and salt for earth, and sipping wine for water. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 6, 5–22, passim.

¹⁵ Robert Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 46.

¹⁶ John Gwyn Griffiths, trans., *Plutarch’s De Iside Et Osiride* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970), 137–147; Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, Vol. 7, 53.

¹⁷ A metaphor for Nature derived from Plutarch’s description of the statue of Saite Isis “I am all that has been and is and will be; and no mortal has ever lifted my mantle.” (*De Iside*. 9), later elaborated by Proclus with the additional sentence “The fruit I bore was the sun,” which during the eighteenth century was considered to be an extremely profound and sublime metaphor for “veiled truth” by poets, musicians and philosophers. Hornung, *Secret Lore of*

to entering the “tomb of Osiris” within which, after experiencing a symbolic death, they were reanimated through a version of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.¹⁸ Egyptian deities were visualized wearing garments of symbolic complimentary color schemes, deriving from Hermetic color theory,¹⁹ while human ritual participants donned the Pharaonic *nemyss* headdress and crook and scourge.²⁰ The Order’s biannually enacted Equinox Ritual incorporated the Egyptian myth of kingly succession; the officer, who had for the previous six months played the role of Hierophant, representing Osiris, vacated his position in favour of the officer representing Horus.²¹ The Egyptian gods were even combined with the revelations of Elizabethan Magus, John Dee, where, in the form of images most probably derived from the *Mensa Isiaca*,²² they became chess pieces in the complex spiritual game, “Enochian Chess.”²³

In addition to the presentation of Egypt within Golden Dawn rituals, members were encouraged to do extra research in Westcott’s Hermetic Library, and study in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Westcott’s library contained academic Egyptological studies, such as Salt’s 1825 *Essay on Young and Champollion’s System of Hieroglyphics* and Wilkinson’s *The Egyptians in the Time of the Pharaohs* of 1857. It also had significant holdings of Egyptosophical material such as *Crata Repoa – Oder Einmweihingen in der alten geheimen Gelleschaft der Egyptischen Priester*, published in 1785 which purported to detail the initiatory

Egypt, 134–5. Golden Dawn members of the Adeptus Minor grade utilized the “Portal Signs” to “open the veil.” Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 17–19. In the Hermetic tradition Osiris and Isis featured as promoters of Hermetic wisdom. Florian Ebling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 127; Caroline J. Tully, “Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers and Isis,” in *Ten Years of Triumph? Academic Approaches to Studying Magic and the Occult: Examining scholarship into witchcraft and paganism ten years after Ronald Hutton’s “Triumph of the Moon”*, eds. Dave Evans and Dave Green (Harpden: Hidden Publications, 2009), 62–74.

¹⁸ Regardie *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 7, 151.

¹⁹ Rather than from Egyptological observation. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 62.

²⁰ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 126.

²¹ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 1–13; vol. 6, 84; Caroline J. Tully, “Walk Like an Egyptian: Egypt as Authority in Aleister Crowley’s Reception of *The Book of the Law*,” *Pomegranate: International Journal of Pagan Studies* 12 (2010): 20–47.

²² Curl, *Egyptian Revival*, 110–112; Hornung, *Secret Lore of Egypt*, 185.

²³ Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 10, 95–108.

system of the ancient Egyptians. Farr was well read in both the British and French Egyptology of her day, citing works by archaeologists such as Flinders Petrie and Gaston Maspero, and British Museum curator, E.A. Wallis Budge in her own writing, but also engaged with Hermetic literature.²⁴

The Egyptian Adept

In 1895, five years after joining the Golden Dawn, whilst researching material for her book, *Egyptian Magic*, in the British Museum, Farr “made contact” with what she described as “an Egyptian Adept” whom she would subsequently introduce to a secret group formed within the Golden Dawn.²⁵ This “Adept” was a long-dead ancient Egyptian mummy that Farr obviously felt perfectly comfortable speaking to. By now the living mummy was a well-known character in popular literature, and as previously mentioned communication with the dead was a staple of Victorian Spiritualism.²⁶ While Spiritualists and psychics did frequent the Egyptian Rooms of the British Museum,²⁷ rather than performing as a medium, Farr is described by fellow Golden Dawn member W. B. Yeats, in his unfinished novel *The Speckled Bird*, as “meditating”. In his novel Yeats recreated Farr’s activity in the British Museum when the hero, Michael Hearne (Yeats), accompanied by Maclagan (Mathers), was to meet a certain woman at the British Museum who is later discovered meditating “with her eyes half closed on a seat close to the Mut-

²⁴ George Mills Harper, *Yeats’s Golden Dawn* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 290–305; Alison Butler, *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011), 55, 129–137; Darcy Küntz ed., *The Golden Dawn Legacy: The Magical Writings of Florence Farr* (Austin: Golden Dawn Research Trust, 2012).

²⁵ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 195.

²⁶ The founders of the Golden Dawn officially disapproved of Spiritualism – seeing spirit mediums as completely passive vessels, in sharp contrast to the active will power cultivated by Golden Dawn magicians. Alex Owen. *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 83, 136, 152. Farr’s activity can be classified as a quasi-Spiritualist technique in that the Egyptian Adept to whom she talks is dead.

²⁷ Roger Luckhurst, *The Mummy’s Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142–3.

em-menu mummy case.” She is not to be disturbed because, according to Maclagan, “she is doubtless conversing with Mut-em-menu” who was, among other things, describing Farr’s past incarnations.²⁸

The mummy with whom Farr formed a psychic relationship was acquired by the British Museum in 1835. Like other museum attendees, Farr would have been under the impression that Mutemmenu was “a lady of the college of the God Amen-Ra at Thebes,” as described in the museum guidebooks for many years.²⁹ X-rays of the mummy undertaken in the 1960s and more recent CT scans show however that this description is only half correct. While the coffin is indeed that of Mutemmenu, a Chantress of Amun, dating from the 19th (1295–1186 BCE) or 20th (1186–1069 BCE) Dynasties, the mummy in the coffin dates from the Roman period (30 BCE–395 CE) and is actually that of a man whose wrappings are padded and swathed in such a manner as to appear to imitate feminine features such as breasts and rounded thighs.³⁰

The mummy EA6704 (Fig. 1) is an unidentified adult male that was mummified in an unusual way. When the head was wrapped the scalp was left exposed so that the hair was visible, the face was padded with textile material to form the features and then painted, the limbs, fingers and toes were wrapped individually, and certain bodily features were accentuated. The mummy has prominent breasts with gilded nipples, formed by the insertion of rolled up cloth into the wrappings, and extra textile was also employed to give the thighs a rounded plump shape. This treatment gives the overall impression of a female body, however this was not necessarily related to the deceased’s gender, nor what the embalmers intended. CT scans show that the skin of the

²⁸ William H. O’Donnell, ed., *The Speckled Bird* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Caroline J. Tully, “Florence and the Mummy,” in *Women’s Voices in Magic*, ed. Brandy Williams (Stafford UK: Megalithica Books, 2009), 16.

²⁹ E.A. Wallis Budge, *A Guide to the First and Second Egyptian Rooms. Predynastic Antiquities, Mummies, Mummy-Cases, and Other Objects Connected with the Funeral Rites of the Ancient Egyptians* (London: British Museum, Dept of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, 1898).

³⁰ John H. Taylor and Daniel Antoine, *Ancient Lives New Discoveries: Eight Mummies, Eight Stories* (London: The British Museum Press, 2014), 142.

legs has many folds, suggesting that the man may have been overweight. So, although the padding of the breasts and thighs *might* have been intended to signify femininity, it may also have been an attempt to restore the plump appearance that he had in life.³¹

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1. Mummy EA6704 ©The Trustees of the British Museum

It is not clear why Farr was initially attracted to mummy EA6704 – apart from its unusual appearance compared to other mummies in the British Museum’s collection. One possibility is that the diagonal bands passing over the hips and upper thighs form a shape reminiscent of an inverted pentagram. The pentagram was a commonly used symbol within Golden Dawn rituals and Farr may have noted the similarity of the decoration on the mummy. More likely, she was influenced by the (erroneous) description of the mummy as Chantress of Amun, as in addition to being a priestess herself, Farr was also musical.³² That the mummy dates to the Roman period but came to the British Museum in a coffin belonging to a Chantress of Amun, dating to the Ramesside period, can be explained by the fact that Roman period burials in the Theban Necropolis, where this mummy probably originated, often reused earlier tombs and funerary goods such as coffins and shrouds.³³

So, despite initially being described in the sale catalogue of 1835 as a “male, Graeco-Egyptian,”³⁴ at some stage after the purchase, the Roman period male mummy was identified as

³¹ Seven other mummies (as well as several lone heads) prepared in a similar way are known: three males in Leiden, two females in Liverpool, one female in Avignon and one female in Rio de Janeiro. In two cases – one male and one female – rolls of cloth were used to enhance the breasts. Taylor and Antoine, *Ancient Lives*, 146–7; Nigel Strudwick, *Masterpieces of Ancient Egypt* (London: The British Museum Press, 2006), 311.

³² Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 262–3, 128.

³³ Taylor and Antoine, *Ancient Lives*, 142; Christina Riggs, *The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt: Art, Identity, and Funerary Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 180–1; “The Egyptian Funerary Tradition at Thebes in the Roman Period” in *The Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future*, eds., Nigel Strudwick and John H. Taylor (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 189–99. The mummy is now displayed without the coffin, which is in storage.

³⁴ Taylor and Antoine, *Ancient Lives*, 141.

the female Chantress, Mutemmenu, owner of the wooden anthropoid coffin EA6703. It is understandable that by the time Farr was looking at this mummy in 1895, along with the description in the museum's guidebook explicitly identifying the mummy this way, it would have easily been taken at face value as female. Farr went to Paris in early 1896 to confer with Mathers about Mutemmenu whom she interpreted as an "Egyptian Adept."³⁵ She had previously sent him a letter that included "a charged drawing of the Egyptian," asking whether she was "not grossly deceived by her [Mutemmenu] claiming to be equal in rank to an 8°=3° of our Order."³⁶ Mathers agreed that because Mutemmenu had responded appropriately to signs that Florence had shown her,³⁷ she was indeed "one of the 8°=3°," making her one of the "Secret Chiefs."³⁸ He subsequently gave permission for Farr to form a group with higher degree members of the Golden Dawn to "work with" the Egyptian.³⁹

Mathers also suggested that Farr should make offerings to Mutemmenu.⁴⁰ Despite having spent the previous six months in the Reading Room of the British Museum researching ancient Egypt for her forthcoming book, rather than investigate ancient Egyptian funerary offerings, Farr chose the Hermetic method of obtaining knowledge through revelation to discern what kind of offerings would be suitable. On March 1st she assembled a small group of Golden Dawn higher degree members who, through clairvoyant means, made contact with Mutemmenu. According to Florence's transcript of the vision:

³⁵ In *Egyptian Magic* Farr claims that "there is every reason to suppose that only those [ancient Egyptians] who had received some grade of initiation were mummified." Florence Farr, *Egyptian Magic* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1982), 2.

³⁶ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 169; Küntz, *Golden Dawn Legacy*, 168.

³⁷ Probably Golden Dawn signs symbolic of each grade or degree in its ten-degree system.

³⁸ "Unknown Superiors," a feature in many nineteenth and twentieth century Western esoteric societies, as for example, the "Mahatmas" of the Theosophical Society. They were of so lofty an initiatory grade they need no longer inhabit earthly bodies. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 57.

³⁹ Mathers and Farr were obviously ready to believe that Golden Dawn degree characteristics were applicable to, let alone recognizable by, an ancient Egyptian.

⁴⁰ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 167.

It is a Temple on the mainland [...] The place is very hot and the sun most powerful. She [Mutemmenu] was the keeper of Documents connected with the Mystic Order and was in a position of authority, so much so that some of her enemies plotted for her death and downfall: but before they could kill her, she died of a plague or disease generated after a Battle had been fought, and thus was not killed by the plotting of her enemies. The Box in which I have placed her should be painted white, preferably with coloured designs from the Egyptian temples of a suitable character, and a wand should be placed therein the height of the Box coloured white with a Blue Lotus Top, green petals outside and blue in – she would prefer a Phoenix⁴¹ Wand, but a Lotus⁴² one is better for her. She will not be of so much use to me in my mental Studies as in Magical Physical work [...] In appearance she is Tall and Slender, born under Leo, with Black Hair and Eyes and Face, Almond Eyes and pointed chin dressed in white with a jewelled girdle round her waist and a jewelled head Dress. I should place a white water lily before her in her present position. [End of transcript].⁴³

Farr enshrined Mutemmenu's spirit in a wooden box (19.5" x 11.5" x 9") decorated with a solar sunflower and a lunar water lily, made by Edmund Hunter, a craftsman and co-Golden Dawn initiate. Inside the box she placed two psychic artworks of Mutemmenu that she had painted.⁴⁴ She also formed a group within the Golden Dawn, known as the Sphere Group, in which Mutemmenu played an important role. The group consisted of twelve members who each represented one of the Zodiac signs and a thirteenth who acted as a seer. Their main ritual activity involved visualizing themselves on the astral plane positioned around a sphere, upon which was projected an image of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, with Mutemmenu – the Egyptian Adept – in the center. During the Sphere rituals the participants began by invoking the Egyptian Adept into the center of the sphere, which was then expanded in size through an effort of group visualization. The sphere was first enlarged so that it encompassed the place of working, then the city of London, the earth, and finally the entire Solar System. After receiving an astral

⁴¹ A type of wand held by ritual participants impersonating Egyptian deities in the Neophyte Ceremony. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 8, 63.

⁴² A type of wand assigned to members of the Golden Dawn's Zelator Adeptus Minor Grade. Also held by ritual participants impersonating Egyptian deities in the Neophyte Ritual. Regardie, *Complete Golden Dawn*, vol. 4, 44; vol. 8, 64.

⁴³ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 176–8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 168–70.

communication, the sphere was then slowly retracted while the members chanted “Let Ra live, let Apophis be destroyed.”⁴⁵

Farr was the only Order member to be in direct contact with an ancient Egyptian priestess who, according to her invented biography, was also an Adept of high degree, even one of the Secret Chiefs. In addition, Farr had come to believe that she had actually *been* Mutemmenu in one of her past lives.⁴⁶ Although the real Mutemmenu, owner of the coffin EA6703, was a New Kingdom Chantress of Amun from 19th or 20th Dynasty Thebes, Farr probably assumed that both she and Mutemmenu were speaking the same religious language. The spiritual prestige associated with Farr’s relationship with Mutemmenu may have contributed to her elevation to the role of “Chief in Anglia,” or head of the Golden Dawn in England, in 1897.⁴⁷ However, although according to the group vision mentioned above, Mutemmenu was a “keeper of Documents connected with the Mystic Order [...] in a position of authority,” the historical Mutemmenu who served in the cult of the god Amun as a singer and musician probably had far less responsibility than Farr did in Golden Dawn.⁴⁸

In the relationships between mortal humans and ancient Egyptian mummies portrayed in the mummy-reanimation fiction of the 1880s and 1890s, the combination of archaeological scholarship and romantic (necrophilic) passion is a prominent theme. Up to the turn of the century most reanimated mummies were women with whom the protagonist (a male collector or Egyptologist) fell hopelessly in love,⁴⁹ while the malevolent male mummy, first appearing in Arthur Conan Doyle’s “Lot 249” (1892), is characteristic of twentieth-century horror films.

⁴⁵ Küntz, *Golden Dawn Legacy*, 166–72; Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 54.

⁴⁶ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 169; O’Donnell, *The Speckled Bird*.

⁴⁷ She had already become Praemonstratrix in 1893, meaning that she was in charge of all rituals, invocations and teachings, as well as being Mathers’ representative in England. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 130.

⁴⁸ Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 146–8.

⁴⁹ Bradley Deane, “Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperium Striptease,” *ELT* 51 (2008): 387; Nicholas Daly, “That Obscure Object of Desire: Victorian Commodity Culture and Fictions of the Mummy,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 28 (1994): 24–51.

Farr's relationship with Mutemmenu does not fall into either of these categories: Mutemmenu is neither love interest nor threat. As Parramore notes, Farr's interpretation of Mutemmenu is akin to Loudon's wise mummy of 1827.⁵⁰ Historically, the mummy in western culture has been associated with arcane wisdom and semi-magical medicine⁵¹ and as MacFarlane notes, the idea that mummies contained "lost and powerful knowledge" is a prevalent theme in both romantic and horror mummy fiction.⁵² In Loudon's mummy story the protagonists have a "racking desire [...] to explore the mysteries" of the "ancient [Egyptian] inhabitants [who] possessed knowledge and science far beyond even the boasted improvements of modern times."⁵³ For Farr, Mutemmenu functioned as a direct link to the ancient Egyptian source of Hermetic wisdom, its acquisition through revelation complementing her mundane study of Egyptosophical and Egyptological texts.

Where Farr's encounter with Mutemmenu does echo the wider corpus of mummy fiction is in its occurrence in the British Museum, as museums are often the setting for mummy reanimation.⁵⁴ As MacFarlane explains, the mummy is "an all too physical presence of the unknowable and indecipherable at the heart of Europe's repositories of knowledge."⁵⁵ Golden Dawn leaders, MacGregor and Moina Mathers, doubted that professional curators – in contrast to Hermetic seekers of wisdom – could truly understand the secrets of the Egyptians, maintaining that their own understanding of Egyptian religion involved "beautiful truths [...] dead to the

⁵⁰ Parramore, *Reading the Sphinx*, 112.

⁵¹ Susan Pearce, "Bodies in Exile: Egyptian Mummies in the Early Nineteenth Century and their Cultural Implications," in *Displaced Persons: Conditions of Exile in European Culture*, ed. Sharon Ouditt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 56.

⁵² Karen E. MacFarlane, "Mummy Knows Best: Knowledge and the Unknowable in Turn of the Century Mummy Fiction," *Horror Studies* 1 (2010): 6. N.1.

⁵³ Jane Loudon, *The Mummy!: A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 41–2.

⁵⁴ Daly, "Obscure Object of Desire," 31–6.

⁵⁵ MacFarlane, "Mummy Knows Best", 15.

Egyptologist, but so living and so full of vital force to them.”⁵⁶ This echoes Doyle’s “Ring of Thoth” (1890) when Sosra, an un-dead Egyptian priest, chides the protagonist, an Egyptologist, saying “The whole keystone of our old life in Egypt was not the inscriptions or monuments of which you make so much, but was our hermetic philosophy of which you say little or nothing”.⁵⁷ As a New Woman who embodied the feminist ideal of the late-nineteenth century, Farr’s choice of an (ostensibly) female mummy with which to commune was surely emblematic of her commitment to female empowerment.⁵⁸ By identifying Mutemmenu as an “Egyptian Adept” equivalent to a Golden Dawn initiate of high degree, Farr foregrounded the role of the priestess in modern Hermetic magic. Doyle’s Sosra, Boothby’s *Pharos* (1899), Tera in Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), and Pratt’s Ptahmes in “The Living Mummy” (1910) are all high priests, and the female mummies in the earlier romantic mummy fiction also tend to be associated with lost and powerful knowledge.⁵⁹ As MacFarlane points out, female mummies are “priestesses, sorceresses, and witch-queens. Their power is intimately connected with their access to types of knowledge that challenge the power of the masculine authorities who attempt to define and categorize them.”⁶⁰ In choosing an ancient Egyptian priestess as a spiritual guide, Farr was asserting herself as a spiritually accomplished woman in a man’s world.

The *Ka*

By March 1901 the Sphere group had lost contact with the Egyptian Adept who had ascended to a higher astral plane and could no longer work with them. In future rituals the group replaced

⁵⁶ Frederic Lees, “Isis Worship in Paris: Conversations with the Hierophant Rameses and the High Priestess Anari,” *The Humanitarian* 16: 2 (1900) n.p.

⁵⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Ring of Thoth,” in *The Best Supernatural Tales of Arthur Conan Doyle*, ed. E.F. Fleiler (Toronto: Dover, 1979), 211.

⁵⁸ Farr was a self-described “New Woman.” Cassandra Laity, “W. B. Yeats and Florence Farr: The Influence of the ‘New Woman’ Actress on Yeats’ Changing Images of Women,” *Modern Drama* 28 (1985): 620.

⁵⁹ MacFarlane, “Mummy Knows Best,” 7, n.6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 6–7.

Mutemmenu in the center of the sphere with an image of the Holy Grail.⁶¹ Farr, however, had another ancient Egyptian contact called “Nemkheftka” who, like Mutemmenu, was (and is) part of the Egyptian collection in the British Museum. Nemkheftka – actually Nenkheftka – is a painted limestone statue of a provincial official from Deshasha (Fig. 2), dating to the 5th Dynasty (ca. 2450 BCE), at the height of the Old Kingdom, and was acquired in 1897 as a gift from the Egypt Exploration Fund. The statue was discovered by Flinders Petrie in a small shaft with a chamber at the bottom filled with fragments of statues, situated next to the remains of a base of a stone-built *mastaba* chapel on a hillside. When reassembled the statue fragments made up twelve statues bearing the name Nenkheftka, two of which, E1239 and R29562, are in the British Museum, with E1239 on display.⁶² This type of statue would have originally been situated in a *serdab* (chamber) within the tomb and functioned as a home for the *ka* (life force) of the deceased in the event that his body was destroyed.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Figure 2. Statue of Nenkheftka ©The Trustees of the British Museum

While the statue is of high quality it is not the most exciting Egyptian statue in the British Museum and it is unclear why Farr was attracted to it. According to Edmund and Dorothea Hunter, members of the Sphere Group to whom Farr entrusted the wooden shrine that was once Mutemmenu’s – and subsequently Nenkheftka’s – home, not only was Nenkheftka Farr’s new Egyptian contact, he was also her *ka*.⁶³ Farr considered the *ka* to be the celestial double of the material person, the real ego or self, whose mission was to grow and develop through “celestial

⁶¹ Küntz, *Golden Dawn Legacy*, 166–72; Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, 54.

⁶² Strudwick, *Masterpieces*, 58; Andrew Bednarski, “Deshasheh, Denderah, and Balabish,” in *The Egypt Exploration Society – the Early Years*, ed. P. Spencer (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007), 235.

⁶³ Gould, “Music of Heaven”, 167. Farr left the shrine with the Hunters when she emigrated to Ceylon in 1912.

evolution” just as physical bodies evolved in the material world.⁶⁴ Warwick Gould suggests that Farr may have either associated the last syllable of Nenkheftka’s name with the idea of the *ka*, or else thought she had been the *wife* of Nenkheftka in a previous incarnation.⁶⁵

Farr collaborated with her friend Olivia Shakespear in writing two Egyptianizing one-act plays in late 1901, *The Beloved of Hathor* and *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk*.⁶⁶ In the former, a story of conflict between earthly love and divine wisdom, the male protagonist, Aahmes, is torn between the carnal sorceress, Nouferou, and his betrothed, the wise Ranoutet, High Priestess of Hathor, played by Farr. *The Shrine of the Golden Hawk*, staged in January 1902, the same month Farr resigned from the Golden Dawn, involves a spiritual contest between a male magician, Gebuel, and a princess, Nectoris, the latter displaying her superior magical technique resulting in her receiving the favour of the deity Horus and assumption of the rulership of Egypt. Nectoris, played by Farr, is aided by her female *ka*, played by her niece Dorothy Paget. Although possibly inspired by Nenkheftka, the *ka* is referred to as the “sister soul” and has been explicitly feminized. Farr’s portrayal of the female characters in the plays as wise, highly skilled in magic and even immortal, confirms her use of ancient Egypt to argue for the value of female spiritual authority, as well as real political power.

Farr utilized Egyptian antiquities to gain access to an imaginary Egypt believed to be the source of ancient wisdom. The mummy EA6704 and the statue of Nenkheftka were appropriated in order to serve as talismanic objects that, whilst ostensibly providing a direct line to ancient Egypt, actually served as *tabulae rasae* for the projection of Farr’s own concerns with female spiritual and worldly empowerment. Through the Hermetic method of inspired revelation Farr

⁶⁴ Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn*, 169.

⁶⁵ Gould, “Music of Heaven”, 170.

⁶⁶ Darcy Küntz, *The Serpent’s Path: The Magical Plays of Florence Farr* (Austin: Golden Dawn Research Trust, 2001).

freed herself from reliance upon Egyptological research, bypassed her male Golden Dawn superiors, and escaped the constraints of time itself. By establishing an explicitly feminine transmission of Hermetic knowledge straight from ancient Egypt, Farr highlighted the importance of female wisdom, power and creativity. Farr's apparent intimacy with ancient Egypt provided prestige commensurate with her roles within the Golden Dawn, sanctioned her creative contribution to the Order, and supplied precedents for female competency, and even superiority, in both the spiritual and material worlds.

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