

a multivalent text, one in which Conan Doyle is not only rejecting the earlier ideologies of *The Lost World* but is also defiantly positioning himself against the *Strand* by demonizing the popular press and the “media-enforced materialism” of orthodox science, which emerge in this novel as the true disruptive forces of hearth and home.

In his final years with the magazine, which coincided with the decline of the *Strand*’s “ability to set or participate meaningfully in the nation’s literary and cultural agenda,” Conan Doyle sought reconciliation as he “self-consciously evacuated [his writings] of spiritualist dogma.” Although Conan Doyle’s final contributions to the *Strand* “can appear to be the worst kind of bric-a-brac, the residual sediment of a decent mind and a great career,” Cranfield finds value in these later works by reading them as part of his long career arc. Whether in the posthumous hard-boiled story “The Last Resource,” the counter-factual history of “The Death Voyage,” or the last gasp of Professor Challenger in “When the World Screamed,” Conan Doyle was still “restlessly engaged with the contemporary moment and battling, however clumsily, with the vicissitudes of modernity.” Unfortunately, in the postwar years both author and magazine remained “brands that became retrospectively fixed in the public imagination as Victorian,” and thus in significance both “drift[ed] towards the margins of British cultural life.” Ironically, while Conan Doyle may have drifted to the margins of cultural life, his most famous creation never did, remaining steadily at the core of his nation’s literary imagination for more than one hundred and twenty years. As Cranfield’s important study reminds us, however, we do well to remember the role that the *Strand* played in making this happen. Stumbling upon “a serendipitous mixture of form and content” that did more than simply feature the Sherlock Holmes stories, the *Strand* actually “created a thriving textual world into which the character was integrated.” Cranfield recovers that thriving world for us, and in doing so not only integrates the Holmes stories into Conan Doyle’s larger body of writing, but also makes a strong and welcomed case for the *Strand* as a singular text of modernity.

CHRISTOPHER METRESS
Samford University

Women Writers & Ancient Egypt

Molly Youngkin. *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt, 1840–1910*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xxvii + 229 pp. \$95.00 £58.00

MOLLY YOUNGKIN'S *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt 1840–1910* constitutes the first extended study of the figure of the female Egyptian—both mortal and divine, ancient and modern—in nineteenth-century women's writing. Scholars of the period 1840–1910 will be familiar with its better-known male-authored representations of Egyptian femininity which include H. Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* (1889) and "Smith and the Pharaohs" (1920), extensive reporting on Britain's occupation of Egypt after 1882, and George Bernard Shaw's play *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899). In recent years these texts have been examined—most notably by Bradley Deane in "Mummy Fiction and the Occupation of Egypt: Imperial Strip-tease" (2008) and Roger Luckhurst in *The Mummy's Curse* (2012)—in light of Victorian eroticization of the Eastern womanhood and the craze of Egyptomania. Youngkin's book, then, with its determined focus on female authors including Florence Nightingale, George Eliot, "Michael Field," and Elinor Glyn, is both a timely counterpoint as well as a worthy addition to the burgeoning field of nineteenth-century Egyptian receptions.

Unflinching in its adoption of a third-wave feminist perspective, this book exposes the feminist imperialism inherent in the treatment of Egyptian women by writers including Nightingale, Eliot, Field and Glyn, and the extent to which British women writers were, consciously or unconsciously, complicit in upholding Western imperial power structures, even as they championed gender equality at home. As Youngkin explains in the introduction: "British imperialism influenced women's visions for their own emancipation—broadly defined as the ability to think, speak, and act for oneself ... British women's ideas about their own emancipation were contingent on denying emancipation to Eastern women, who were subject to the imperialist views and practices of British women."

Unlike ancient Greece and Rome, which were familiar to Victorian culture as literary pasts as much as material, artistic, or architectural ones, the experience of Egypt was overwhelmingly material. The chapters devoted to the writings of Nightingale, Eliot, Field, and Glyn respectively benefit from a similarly persistent cross-disciplinary energy, exploring fiction, travel writing, art, architecture, sculpture, history, and theology. Chapter two in particular examines the responses of Nightingale to the art and architecture of ancient Egypt. Her travel writing, letters, and journals record reactions both aesthetic and theological to the images of, among others, Ramesses II and Nefertari at Abu Simbel. Nefertari, for Nightingale, "occupies the place which the

most advanced Christian civilization gives to woman” and is praised according to Western, Christian gender ideals. Although the book is prone to over-simplification of the meaning and reception traditions of ancient goddesses—Hera, for instance, is associated with “softer [feminine] qualities” with no acknowledgement of the long tradition of Hera as cruel and vengeful tormentor of Heracles—Youngkin demonstrates how gendered praise of ancient wives and goddesses often went hand-in-hand with the exclusion or rejection of contemporary Egyptian women as models of femininity and matrimonial equality.

Similarly in chapter four Youngkin offers a colourful glimpse into the cultural lives of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper (“Michael Field”). They received instruction in art from the critic Bernhard Berenson, who accompanied the pair to several major museums and galleries across Europe. Their lessons are documented in a collaborative journal which Youngkin uses to demonstrate how Field, rather than reaching an understanding of the female nude rooted in the male gaze and Orientalist visions of the eroticized Cleopatra, instead “chose the ancient Greek ideal of Venus because it offered a way to express lesbian love in a way ancient Egyptian ideals about women could not.”

This argument that Victorian women writers overwhelmingly chose to avoid references to ancient Egypt in favour of other ancient pasts is simultaneously one of the most compelling and frustrating aspects of Youngkin’s book. For a volume on receptions of ancient Egypt, the majority of the chapters have as their core thesis the fact that women writers of the period 1840–1910 downplayed or refused to engage with Egyptian history in favour of other classical pasts, such as ancient Greece and Rome in the case of Nightingale; Judaism and the Old Testament by Eliot; and Judaea and the Roman Venus for Michael Field. In one sense, the “avoidance” argument, and its requirement that the author necessarily prove a negative with regards to women writer’s use of ancient Egypt, was always going to be a difficult task. Nonetheless, these sections on non-Egyptian or only tangentially Egyptian pasts offer us a valuable glimpse into the complexly gendered reception traditions which permeate Victorian women’s writing. It might simply have been worth a slight adjustment of the book’s title to encompass these broader ancient pasts and to adjust reader expectations in favour of this compelling but less strictly Egyptian material.

With chapter five we move chronologically into the period when Egyptomania was reaching its height in Britain and Egyptian references were becoming more overt in the works of writers such as Glyn.

She is presented both as a participant in the culturally imperialist project of “commodification of the east,” whilst simultaneously using the romance novel and references to powerful Egyptian females as vehicles for imagining a more sexually equal society. Furthermore, this chapter makes a fun and compelling case for the rehabilitation and study of texts like Glyn’s erotic novel *Three Weeks* (1907), which received largely negative reviews upon its publication but which “provided a setting in which women could act as imaginary Eastern goddesses, guiding Western men to a spiritual union without threatening them, as the more radical British suffragettes did.” Indeed, one of the strengths of *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt* is its drawing together of authors, genres, and texts not normally considered together to offer a new perspective on nineteenth-century notions of feminine empowerment.

In terms of its theoretical basis this book positions itself at the intersection of the vast fields of feminist studies, postcolonial criticism and reception theory. In an opening chapter entitled “Bound by an English Eye” Youngkin surveys important scholarship in classical reception by major critics like Yopie Prins, Shanyn Fiske, Stefano Evangelista, Isobel Hurst and T. D. Olverson and offers some crucial historical context pertaining to the expansion of British imperial interests in Egypt in the mid to late nineteenth century. However, “bound by an English eye” becomes a kind of touchstone concluding phrase at the end of each subsequent chapter: Therefore “Bradley and Cooper remained ‘bound by an English eye.’” We assume that the author uses this phrase to summarise the interaction of a number of critical mechanisms. Yet the reader is left in some doubt that they are attaching the same significance and precisely the same combination of relevant ideas from Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Antoinette Burton, Sara Suleri and others to the phrase as Youngkin intends. The effect is that repeated use of this phrase as a conclusion in its own right occasionally feels like it short-circuits a fuller, more integrated discussion in each chapter of how these texts contributed to the fabric of nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist imperialism and how we might understand them through the critical framework of third wave feminist critique.

The final chapter undertakes a temporal jump to consider the work of Egyptian women writers after the mid-twentieth century and the era in which women writers in Egypt attained “widespread access to the publishing world.” The juxtaposition of modern Egyptian writers such as Latifa Al-Zayyat, Sahar Tawfiq and Ahdaf Soueif with Victo-

rian authors is boldly set up to compel the reader into confronting the continued exoticization of Egypt in modern Western culture and to call for the establishment of an Egyptian female canon. In one memorable example from Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), Youngkin notes how the novel's protagonist, Asya, having slept with an English lover, berates herself: "You've committed adultery ... you've joined Anna and Emma and parted company forever with Dorothea and Maggie." With its reference to Eliot's chaste heroines (and their adulterous counterparts in the form of Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary), this example not only creates a pleasing symmetry with the authors addressed in the early chapters of Youngkin's book, but moves "beyond the concepts of second wave feminism" to position the self-expression of Egyptian women writers not only against a rigidly patriarchal imperial tradition, but also against a more complex network of feminine archetypes and nineteenth-century female receptions of Egyptian heritage. By exploring the use of Egypt by Victorian and modern women writers in a single volume, Youngkin glances beyond the simple binary of Egyptian women's "writing back" to a Western tradition. Rather she presents Egyptian writers as being engaged in a more complex dynamic in which female identity and cultural practice are concerned with the constant reception and reworking of ancient pasts.

If you are prepared to meet the book on its own terms regarding its deviations from the purely Egyptian expectations set up in the title, *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt* offers a new perspective on a set of authors and texts which will help to open up the study of Victorian receptions of ancient Egypt, as well as being of interest to scholars and students of nineteenth-century literature, postcolonialisms, and gender studies.

LAURA EASTLAKE
Edge Hill University

Oscar Wilde & Family

Emer O'Sullivan. *The Fall of the House of Wilde: Oscar Wilde and His Family*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2016. xii + 495 pp. \$35.00

CALLING HER BOOK "a piece of biographical storytelling," Emer O'Sullivan traces in an accessible style the history of two generations of the Wilde family. The principal figures, besides Oscar, are his parents, Sir William Wilde and Jane Elgee Wilde, his older brother Willie, and his wife Constance, though other persons, including Bosie of course,

Copyright of English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920 is the property of ELT Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.