

## BOOK REVIEW

*Ancient Egypt in the Modern Imagination: Art, Literature, and Culture*. Edited by EL-EANOR DOBSON AND NICOLA TONKS. New York, NY and London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. xiv + 365. Hardback, \$120.00. ISBN: 978-1-78831-339-1.

This well-edited volume of fifteen essays derives from two conferences. The first, titled “Taking Tea with the Sphinx: Ancient Egypt and the Modern Imagination,” was organized by the volume’s editors and held at the University of Birmingham (UK) in September 23-24, 2016 and the other, titled “Tea with the Sphinx: Defining the Field of Ancient Egypt Reception Studies,” was held in the same place in September of the following year. The book is based on scholarship “from a variety of backgrounds” by academics “at various stages of their careers,” and it testifies to “the increasing interest” in the reception of ancient Egypt in the modern world by both professionals and by members of the general public (1, 2).

The collection is arranged in an even tripartite division. Each contains five essays which examine the categories: “The Egyptological Imaginary,” “Death and Mysticism” and “Gender and Sexuality.” Although certain essays are focused on the British Isles, such as the fascinating piece about the extravagant mausoleum built by Alexander Hamilton, the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke of Hamilton (1757-1852) in South Lanarkshire, Scotland, for the purpose of holding his remains mummified in a Ptolemaic period sarcophagus that he had purchased specifically for the purpose, or the article on the English writer, painter and co-founder of the Vorticist movement of World War I, Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), others discuss international celebrities, famous and infamous, such as the serial killer Jack the Ripper (fl. 1888), the actors Liz Taylor (1932-2011) and Richard Burton (1925-1984), as well as the writer Alan Moore (1953- ), who is known across the world for his work on super hero comics and Eddie Campbell (1955- ) an artist with whom Moore collaborated to write the graphic novel, *From Hell* which is studied in this volume.

But the book has an even broader scope in its topics, ranging from the Italian-Argentinian surrealist painter Leonor Fini (1907-1996), the master jeweler and global style setter Louis Cartier (1875-1942), the American writer William S. Burroughs (1914-1997) to the prolific French author and Egyptologist Christian Lacy (1947-). The contents are intellectually arresting and in fact stimulated me while reading the book to hunt for more evidence of the current reception of Egypt. My findings include the pair of sphinxes bearing the head of the 11<sup>th</sup> Duchess of Marlborough, the American socialite Gladys Deacon, (1881-1977) which were placed in the Water Terrace that Charles Spencer-Churchill (1871-1934), the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough, had constructed between the years 1925-1930, and a white limestone portrait statue found in Deir El-Bahri that Frederick Dufferin, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Dufferin and Ava (1826-1902), shipped back to Clondeboye House in Ireland. Now owned by the Cranbrook Art Galleries in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, its exact identity is still uncertain, having been identified as both the pharaoh Amenhotep II (fl. 1427 B.C.) in the guise of Amūn and as Tutankhamun (fl. 1335 B.C.). In the world of fiction is Jodi Picoult's (1955-) 2020 novel, *The Book of Two Ways* whose plot is built upon a 4,000-year-old Egyptian guidebook of the same name which gave the routes to Rostau, Osiris's realm in the afterlife.

If there is a fault to be found in the book, it is in the uneven quality of the illustrations and their use. Most of the essays have a few, but I found much to my astonishment that others, such as the essay on the artwork of Leonor Fini, had none. All are in black and white and their clarity is almost uniformly low. But if you are hoping to find some relief from our current global turmoil, read this provocative book. You'll find yourself made curious, as I did, and then turning to the internet and various print sources for more on our eternal fascination with ancient Egypt whose deep roots go back well-beyond our modern day.

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