

**BETWEEN EGYPTOLOGY AND “EGYPTOMANIA”:
ANCIENT EGYPT IN SELECTED WESTERN
NOVELS AND FILMS, 1990 TO 2020**

**Synopsis of
Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)
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Synopsis

The Thesis, with references to the important insights provided by the Egyptologists and scholars who studied ancient Egypt, attempts to trace the influences of Egyptology and "Egyptomania" in the primary texts listed below. In the list below, the Chapters are mentioned in which the films/novels are discussed. Chapter Two and Six are Introduction and Conclusion respectively.

Films

1. *The Mummy* directed by Stephen Sommers (1999) - Chapter Two
2. *The Mummy Returns* directed by Stephen Sommers (2001) - Chapter Two
3. *Stargate* directed by Roland Emmerich (1994) - Chapter Three

Novels

1. *The Mummy* (1999) - Max Allan Collins - Chapter Two
2. *The Mummy Returns* (2001) - Max Allan Collins - Chapter Two
3. *StarGate* (1994) - Roland Emmerich, Dean Devlin, and Sheila Black - Chapter Three
4. *The Age of Ra* (2009, 2015) - James Matthew Henry Lovegrove - Chapter Three
5. *Resurrection* (2001) - Arwen Elys Dayton - Chapter Four
6. *Sphinx: The Second Coming* (2014) - James Thornton - Chapter Four
7. (i) *The Red Pyramid* (2010) - Rick Riordan - Chapter Five
(ii) *The Throne of Fire* (2011) - Rick Riordan - Chapter Five
(iii) *The Serpent's Shadow* (2012) - Rick Riordan - Chapter Five

The four main Chapters, from Chapter Two to Five, show the progression of arguments addressing the "Egyptomaniac" fascination and speculation at work in Western science fiction and fantasy. The references to the Egyptologists' insights, the scholars' views on adaptation of ancient Egyptian themes, and supporting details from fiction and films are cited in the footnotes in all the chapters. In each Chapter there are accompanying photographs taken by the researcher

during his visit to Egypt in 2019. In total there are forty-five photographs in the Thesis. Each photo is provided with a title, and under that there is a paragraph that explains the Egyptological and “Egyptomaniac” relevance of it, in connection with the Thesis. The date of photography is provided for each image.

Chapter One, entitled “Introduction,” provides the overall methodology used in the Thesis and the development of arguments. It also provides justification behind the selection of the novels and films. The Introduction acquaints the readers with concepts related to Egyptology and discusses, with examples, how “Egyptomania” makes use of Egyptological information in fiction, visual media and films. The introduction section briefly discusses, with references to Egyptological scholarship, the chief features of the ancient Egyptians’ architecture, arts, and their thoughts regarding the afterlife. The “Egyptomaniac” recontextualization of the mysteries concerning the Giza Pyramids, the sarcophagus, the “cartouche,” the hieroglyphs, and magic are discussed. The Introduction also discusses the features that make the ancient Egyptian deities unique and different from the deities venerated in other civilizations, and how these features make ancient Egypt a constant source of ideas for Western writers and directors. The Introduction chapter is provided with seven photographs taken by the researcher.

Chapter Two, entitled “Stephen Sommers’s Films and Max Allan Collins’s Novelizations: *The Mummy* (1999) and *The Mummy Returns* (2001): Funerary Magic and the Underworld” referring to *The Mummy* and *The Mummy Returns* (2 films, followed by 2 novels based on them) discusses (i) mummies, (ii) tombs, and (iii) museums, and (iv) funerary spells and practices. This chapter discusses information regarding the cults of Osiris and Anubis, the importance of the scarab, the issues regarding the afterlife, the cinematic recontextualization of White Egyptology and the native Egyptian standpoint regarding excavation in Egypt. The Chapter argues how “Egyptomania” creates an ambivalent version of ancient Egypt for the West. Chapter Two is provided with five photographs taken by the researcher. The Chapter discusses

that our contemporary standards of perception of the world, hierarchy, cause and effects are different from the ancient Egypt of Antiquity. However, beneath our structured selves, there lie apprehensions for the liminal condition, the connections between the life and the afterlife, between the unseen forces that rule our existence. These apprehensions surface in a gothic atmosphere, the funerary realm, the mortuary spaces, which are conspicuously found in the necropolis and spaces connected with the dead. The Pharaonic realms connected with the dead bring out such apprehensions which form the basis of the mummy-fascination.

Chapter Three, entitled “Chapter Three: Roland Emmerich’s *Stargate* (1994), *StarGate* by Dean Devlin, Roland Emmerich, and Sheila Black (1994, 1995), and James Matthew Henry Lovegrove’s *The Age of Ra* (2009, 2015): Interpreting, Questioning, and Resisting the Deities” discussing *Stargate* (film, and the novel based on it) and *The Age of Ra* novel, explores the issues surrounding the interpretation of objects unearthed (in *Stargate*) and modified use of ancient Egyptian objects (in *The Age of Ra*). The deities Ra, Nut, Geb, Shu, Tefnut, Osiris, and Seth receive attention in this Chapter. The importance of the sarcophagus, the cartouche, and ancient Egyptian game of “*Senet*” are also discussed with reference to the novels and the film. The ancient Egyptian beliefs regarding the stars, regeneration, and the ancient Egyptian worldview are also mentioned. The Chapter discusses how these beliefs are recontextualized in terms of coverage of ancient Egyptian influence in and beyond Earth. The Chapter argues that the studies of and speculation regarding ancient Egypt involve institutional directives but also create apprehensions, and the ancient Egyptian deities is fluid which can be approached in terms of dissent. Chapter Three is provided with four photographs taken by the researcher. Through comparison between the *Stargate* film, the *StarGate* novel, and *The Age of Ra* one theme comes up prominently: the human perceptions towards deities waver between dependence and discomfort. When humans are in crisis they depend on the deities; simultaneously the humans are also capable of questioning and doubting. Doubt and inquiry are also connected with the development of technology, and often technology has its roots in the concepts which were

originally developed in religion and mythology. *Stargate* film and the *StarGate* novel communicate that technology is a source of power that can distinguish between users of power and the exploited, and the user might be mistaken as a deified figure. In *The Age of Ra*, as we see, religion might continue along with technical expertise and cults might give rise to recontextualizations of beliefs.

Chapter Four, entitled “Chapter Four: Arwen Elys Dayton’s *Resurrection* (2001) and James Thornton’s *Sphinx: The Second Coming* (2014): Ancient and Modern Egypt, Alien Humans, and ‘Multiverse’” further explores the speculative possibilities of extraterrestrial assistances from the alien visitors. In argument, the Great Pyramid of Giza will be cited (its purpose, mystery concerning inner chambers) and it will be argued how Egypt becomes the conduit between Earth and the other galaxies / “multiverse” in the Western imagination. Osiris, Amun-Ra, and the Great Sphinx received attention in this Chapter. Another important element discussed is the reed, which as a motif recurs in ancient Egyptian art; with reference to reed, botanical technology will be discussed in Arwen Elys Dayton’s *Resurrection*. Similarly the ancient Egyptian beliefs regarding the “Rostau” will be mentioned in connection with Thornton’s *Sphinx: The Second Coming*. Chapter Four is provided with eight photographs taken by the researcher. Dayton’s and Thornton’s novels thereby fictionally recontextualize the “alternative” theories regarding the building of the Great Pyramid. The texts also urge us to look towards the different alien worlds through the lens of humanity; in both the texts the zeal for human existence is prominent, and the test of humanity is pursued having the divine cults at the background. The texts also broaden our minds; enable us to consider mysticism and impossible possibilities of science. The interaction between Earth and the alien worlds take place through Egypt; thus Egypt remains as the representative of human endeavor before the extraterrestrials.

Chapter Five, entitled “Chapter Five: Rick Riordan’s *The Kane Chronicles* (2010–2012): Humans, “Maat,” and the Ancient Egyptian Deities,” with reference to the three novels in Rick

Riordan's *The Kane Chronicles* (*The Red Pyramid*, *The Throne of Fire*, and *The Serpent's Shadow*) combine different points discussed in the previous three Chapters: magic, science, architecture, human-divine interaction through studies involving both Egyptology and "Egyptomania." In Chapter Five it will be argued how Western imaginations have helped to broaden Egyptian legacies globally. The Chapter discusses "Maat," a very important ancient Egyptian concept in mythology, administration and everyday dealing, and looks at its recontextualization in Riordan's Trilogy. The deities given attention in this Chapter are Ra, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Set, Anubis, Bes, Taweret, Neith, and Khepri. The elements of ancient Egyptian magic or "*Heka*" will be discussed, and the importance of the Obelisk will be noted. The Chapter discusses how the ancient Egyptian mythology and magic live on and they intrigue globally; Riordan's Trilogy rekindles our interest in ancient Egyptian texts and funerary Books, which usually remain as subjects of detailed study in Egyptology. Because of their specific ritual nature, these texts have not globally spread like the ancient Greek plays which have been contextualized as early literature covering human condition and perseverance. However, the mindsets of the ancient Egyptians in many aspects were broad, inclusive, and they featured powerful feats by humans even before the deities. These elements can be studied from the reliefs, material culture, temple architecture, the interactions between the deities and the humans in connection with the transition into the Afterlife. Riordan has provided the most important concepts from ancient Egyptian mythology and these shall encourage the non-Egyptologists to have an understanding about the timelessness of the human values communicated in the Egyptian mythologies in terms of justice and family structure and closeness. Chapter Four is provided with eight photographs taken by the researcher.

The Sixth and the final Chapter is the Conclusion and it sums up how the Thesis has shown the balance between Egyptology and "Egyptomania." Thus it revisits the important features discussed in Egyptology and speculated/adapted in "Egyptomania," for example the symbols, the "material culture," the mythical landscape. The uses of Myth as a repository of

ideas has been discussed and the sector of Myth is connected with material, archaeology, and concepts in Science Fiction, like alien worlds and entities. The discussions of these concepts had been provided with examples drawn from the primary texts studied and explored in the Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five, and the Conclusion ends with the hope of expansion of Egyptology beyond specific field to other disciplines. The Conclusion-chapter is provided with thirteen photographs taken by the researcher.

The research questions pursued in the Thesis are given below. These questions are listed in the “Introduction” chapter.

- (i) How the artists and writers pursue “Egyptomania” after studying Egyptological facts.
- (ii) Is it possible to see that a balance is visible between “Egyptomania” as well as Egyptology in the various expressions in popular culture?
- (iii) The themes of ancient civilizations are always fruitful for the novelists as well as filmmakers; why is Egypt chosen in terms of plots, contexts, and spaces?

To address the questions above, and to show the balance between “Egyptomania” as well as Egyptology, the approaches selected are given below. These questions are listed in the “Introduction” chapter.

- (i) References shall be drawn to the ancient Egyptian deities, and the events and the plots will be discussed to see how they have been presented.
- (ii) The photographs have been provided to draw comparison between ancient Egyptian contexts and the recontextualization of arts and material by Western writers as well as directors.
- (iii) The novels and films chosen can connect Literature departments with Egyptology. With references to the sharing of ideas and approaches it will be discussed that the legacy of non-Claassical ancient Egyptian civilization is relevant globally.

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- Thornton, James. *Sphinx: The Second Coming*. London: Barbican Press, 2014.
- Note: The synopsis has given a short summary of the chapters. Please see the footnotes in the chapters for sources of information. The synopsis has listed only the primary texts and films in the bibliography above. The complete list including secondary and critical sources is in the Thesis's bibliography.

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