Journal of Victorian Culture, 2023, Vol. 29, No. 2, 266–286
https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcad040
Original Article

OXFORD

Amelia B. Edwards and Romantic Egyptology

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ABSTRACT

Amelia B. Edwards (1831–1892) was renowned for her profound mastery of Egyptology, possessing a knowledge some said surpassed that of her male counterparts. Her archaeological endeavours in Egypt merged with a vivid narrative approach, evident in seminal works such as *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877) and her captivating lectures across Britain and America. This harmonious blend of meticulous observation and romantic aesthetics not only carved her niche as a distinguished Egyptologist, but also heralded her as a forerunner in public history, adept at fusing erudite exploration with charming storytelling. Set against the tapestry of the Romantic era, Edwards forged a distinctive narrative, eschewing traditional academic boundaries to imbue her writings with heartfelt sentiment. This article delves into Edwards' impact on Egyptology's popularization: from her pivotal 1873 Egyptian sojourn, followed by her compelling lectures, to her personally curated Egyptian collection at home. With an adept fusion of artistic verve and academic rigour, Edwards bridged literature and archaeology. Her legacy signifies a refreshing deviation from orthodox methodologies, presenting a more immersive perspective on ancient Egypt. In stark contrast to the staid styles of her contemporary archaeological peers, she proclaimed herself the only romancer also versed in Egyptology, ardently championing a scientific discourse with broader appeal.

KEYWORDS: Egyptology, romantic legacies, women's travel writing, antiquarianism, public history

It is without doubt that Amelia B. Edwards (1831–1892) did more to foster the widespread mania for ancient Egypt than anyone in Britain and America during the Victorian period. Edwards, the artist, singer, pianist, composer, journalist, and novelist, had already established her record in the popular genre of picturesque travel writing by the time of her meticulously researched *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* of 1877.[1] Inspired by Harriet Martineau's famous work *Eastern Life, Past and Present* (1848) and Edward Lane's scholarly *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), as well as her own affectionate readings of *One Thousand and One Nights* as a child, Edwards' Egyptian bestseller secured her

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1 Amelia B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1877); on Edwards, see Joan Rees, *Amelia Edwards: Traveller, Novelist and Egyptologist* (London: Rubicon Press, 1998); Brenda E. Moon, *More Usefully Employed: Amelia B. Edwards, Writer, Traveller and Campaigner for Ancient Egypt* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2006); Margaret C. Jones, *The Adventurous Life of Amelia B. Edwards Egyptologist, Novelist, Activist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); further references are included in Dona M. Cady, 'Edwards, Amelia B.', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Victorian Women's Writing*, ed. by Lesa Scholl and Emily Morris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 471–77.

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position as the authority on 'popular' Egyptology and led to the establishment of the Egypt Exploration Fund in 1882.[2]

Armchair travellers would learn to consult her book as an advocate of a novel approach to archaeology, travel writing, and the intricate undertaking of safeguarding valuable artifacts and preserving unparalleled sites of the ancient Egyptian civilization.[3] The travelogue of her trip up the Nile, from Cairo to Abu Simbel, in the year 1873–1874, instigated a triumphant career as a public speaker in both Britain and America, where she was bestowed honorary doctorates. This academic acclaim ultimately resulted in the establishment of a named professorship in Egyptian archaeology and philology at University College London after her death.[4] '*Sui generis*', it was said, 'she knew the *whole* field of Egyptology better than any man, and no one could approach her 'word power' to describe the field, on the side of history, art and exploration'.[5]

Edwards has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation in recent years.[6] Her famous travelogue, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, stands as a remarkable example of a woman's voice in a field dominated by men, and her contributions to popularizing Egyptology have been recognized as trailblazing. Edwards' efforts to preserve ancient artifacts and sites, coupled with her meticulous documentation of the country's history, have solidified her position as one of the foremost female scholars of her time. The primary focus of this study concerns the interplay between Edwards' extensive knowledge of Egyptian history and her insistence on picturesque elements to convey her ideas to a lay audience through lectures and publications. Against the dry or emotionless style that characterized archaeological and exploratory accounts up to the time of her publications, she militantly proposed a fusion of empirical observation and romantic flair, branding her voice as a unique hybridization of artistic

[2] Nicholas Lanoie, 'Inventing Egypt for the Emerging British Travel Class: Amelia Edwards' "A Thousand Miles up the Nile"', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 40 (2013), 149–61; on Edwards' contribution for the establishment of the Egypt Exploration Fund, see Margaret S. Drower, 'The Early Years', in *Excavating in Egypt: The Egypt Exploration Society 1882–1982*, ed. by Thomas Garnet Henry James (London: British Museum Publications, 1982), pp. 9–36; see also Meira Gold, 'Victorian Egyptology and the Making of a Colonial Field Science, 1850–1906' (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2020), pp. 139–45.

[3] The heavy table-book was not produced as a portable guidebook (see Gold, 'Victorian Egyptology', p. 140); for the formula 'armchair travellers', see Catherine Waters, *Special Correspondence and the Newspaper Press in Victorian Print Culture, 1850–1886* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 29–57; Clare Pettit, 'Exploration in Print: From the Miscellany to the Newspaper', in *Reinterpreting Exploration: The West in the World*, ed. by Dane K. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 80–108.

[4] Rosalind Janssen, *The First Hundred Years: Egyptology at University College London, 1892–1992* (London: University College London, 1992), pp. 1–5.

[5] William Copley Winslow, 'The Queen of Egyptology', *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, 14 (1892), 305–15 (p. 312).

[6] Special attention, in recent literature, has been placed on the gendered dimension of her works. See Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Jana Nittel, *Wondrous Magic: Images of the Orient in 18th and 19th Centuries' British Women Travel Writing* (Berlin: Galda and Wilch Verlag, 2001), pp. 113–16; Melissa L. Miller, 'The Imperial Feminine: Victorian Women Travellers in Egypt', in *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*, ed. by Samina Najmi and Rajini Srikanth (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 227–41; Ruth Y. Jenkins, 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler: Spectacles and Phenomena', in *Gender, Genre, and Identity in Women's Travel Writing*, ed. by Kristi Siegel (New York, NY: P. Lang, 2004), pp. 15–30; Patricia O'Neill, 'Destination as Destiny: Amelia B. Edwards's Travel Writing', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 30 (2009), 43–71; Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge, Gender in History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 159–64; see, most recently, Bianca Walther, 'The Eminent Lesbian or the Passionate Spinster? Posthumous Representations of Amelia Edwards' Love for Women', *History | Sexuality | Law*, 2021 <https://hsl.hypotheses.org/1650> [accessed 19 March 2023].

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and scholarly perspectives. In claiming that she was the 'only romancist in the world who is also an Egyptologist', Edwards consciously challenged the commonly held belief that 'we must not expect the owl of Athena to warble like the nightingale of Keats'.[7]

Her widespread acclaim can be attributed to her skilful mixture of archaeological curiosity and sentimental enthusiasm, informed by her distinctive 'love of imaginary' acquired through an early exposure to the romantic school.[8] Her interdisciplinary definition of archaeology as an 'aggregate of sciences' aligns with the concept of 'romantic science', felicitously described by Noah Heringman as a merging of amateur antiquarianism, picturesque naturalism, and literary cultivation.[9] This perspective provides a new lens through which to comprehend how Edwards could consider herself a Romantic Egyptologist, drawing upon both artistic and scientific elements in a more imaginative style of travel.[10] In this way, she pioneered new approaches to the distribution of knowledge to the public. Edwards' dissemination of ancient Egypt and its study to wider audiences makes her a pioneer of public history, long before the term gained its recognition.

1. SENTIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

From November 1889 to March 1890, Edwards embarked on a riveting lecture tour across the United States, attracting vast audiences of enthusiastic attendees. Her talks on ancient Egypt were accompanied by lantern slides of her own illustrations and photographs taken by experts in the field, creating a vivid and immersive experience for her audience. Edwards' ability to blend her knowledge of Egyptology with her skills as a storyteller and artist made her lectures both informative and entertaining, and helped to further popularize the fascination with ancient Egypt that had taken hold in the Victorian era.[11]

William Copley Winslow, the founder of the American branch of the Egypt Exploration Fund and one of Edwards' most fervent admirers, acted as her agent and manager.[12] In March 1889, he put out a leaflet featuring her capacity to lecture and the range of her topics,

[7] Winslow, 'Queen of Egyptology', p. 309.

[8] Winslow, 'Queen of Egyptology', p. 309; this approach was pioneered in her equally successful representations of the Dolomite Mountains in the early 1870s, see Amelia B. Edwards, *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys, a Midsummer Ramble in the Dolomites* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873). On Edwards' 'sentimental' appreciation of the Dolomite landscape, see William Bainbridge, *Topographic Memory and Victorian Travellers in the Dolomite Mountains: Peaks of Venice* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp. 124–34.

[9] Amelia B. Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1891), p. 24; on Edwards' definition of archaeology as a combination of sciences, see Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 260–62. On the concept of 'romantic science', see Noah Heringman, *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), further developed in Noah Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 9–17.

[10] The notion of 'styles of travel' is here read in relation to Edwards' ability to perform multiple travel practices that are mutually 'coexisting and competitive, as well as blossoming, declining and recurring; . . . styles whose temporal boundaries inevitably blur', as expounded in Judith Adler, 'Travel as Performed Art', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94 (1989), 1366–91 (p. 1372).

[11] On Edwards' 1889–1890 lecturing tour in the United States, in which she was accompanied by Kate Bradbury, see Moon, *More Usefully Employed*, pp. 221–33; Roberta Muñoz, 'Amelia Edwards in America – A Quiet Revolution in Archaeological Science', *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 27, art. 7 (2017), 1–10; Alice Stevenson, *Scattered Finds: Archaeology, Egyptology and Museums* (London: UCL Press, 2019), pp. 79–88; Jones, *The Adventurous Life*, pp. 133–43.

[12] On Winslow, see Stevenson, *Scattered Finds*, pp. 70–77; in his 'Amelia Blanford Edwards', *Records of the Past*, 1 (1902), 227–31 (p. 229), Winslow confessed that 'No single achievement of my life is more gratifying to me than the successful effort to induce Miss Edwards to come to America'.

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based on her successful tour in Britain a year before. An official invitation to share her expertise in the States was endorsed by a group of about 200 'American statesmen, authors, college presidents, professors, editors, clergymen, and other noted individuals in the art and literary community'.[13] These are the words Winslow used to depict her unique lecturing style:

> Miss Edwards is addressing crowded audiences, this season of 1888-89, in the great cities as well as university centers of England and Scotland, upon Egyptian, Greco-Egyptian, and Biblical-Egyptian subjects. The picturesqueness of her style, the interest of her facts, and the sympathetic charm of her delivery have evoked unwonted enthusiasm. Her voice is peculiarly clear, agreeable, and far-reaching, and she possesses, in a remarkable degree, the power of holding her audiences. Herself a practical archaeologist, she relates the wonders of our inheritance in ancient Egypt and the stirring story of Egyptian exploration with an intelligent vividness which makes those faraway subjects as interesting as a sensational romance. Herself a skillful artist, she can, in an instant, deftly illustrate with chalk some hieroglyphic puzzle or curious relationship between Egyptian and Greek arts. Her delicate and spirited pencil, for example, produced the illustrations which so charmingly embellish her *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, and her book on the Dolomite Mountains.[14]

The secret of Edwards' success was that she treated archaeological facts as ingredients of a 'sensational romance'. The result was a blend of scientific and artistic practices aptly illustrated in Winslow's enthusiastic review to the second edition of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*:

> We know of no work by whose help one can make more instructively, more easily, more agreeably, a first acquaintance with Egypt and its wondrous river, its ruins, its history, its romance, its marvelous glow of color, its age, its chronology, its manifold and irresistible charms for the scholar, the scientist, the painter, and the poet.[15]

The focus here goes beyond the picturesque appeal of Edwards' prose, highlighting her remarkable delivery style and adroit adaptability in engrossing the interest of the lay audience. This mode of expression, as demonstrated by a woman, was regarded as a challenge by some established male archaeologists. Samuel Birch, the head of the Egyptian and Assyrian branch

[13] *The Literary World*, 16 March 1889, 93, which informed that 'Communications in regard to engaging Miss Edwards to lecture might be addressed to Rev. Dr. W. C. Winslow'; his role as Edwards' 'manager' is further reinforced in *The Literary World*, 9 November 1889, 392: 'More than one hundred invitations to lecture before the universities and colleges have been already received by Miss Edwards or her manager'.

[14] *The Literary World*, 13 April 1889, 128–29 (p. 128); the same description reappears in the obituary piece that Winslow wrote for *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* (see 'Queen of Egyptology', p. 314) as well as in his 'Amelia B. Edwards', *The Churchman*, 59 (1889), 343–44 (p. 343) and again in his biographical sketch for the *Records of the Past* (see 'Amelia Blanford Edwards', pp. 229–30).

[15] [William Copley Winslow], 'Up the Nile', *The Literary World*, 2 February 1889, 37, related to Amelia B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, 2nd edn (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1889), with preface dated October 1888.

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at the British Museum, dismissed such an approach as 'sentimental archaeology'.[16] Edwards' reputation as a writer of travelogues and novels, increasingly associated with femininity and deemed to be frivolous pursuits, was considered dangerous. The Lowell Institute, for instance, an esteemed educational establishment founded in 1836 with the aim of bestowing free lectures to the people of Boston, evinced a steadfast reluctance to entertain Edwards' visit. Winslow capitalized on the gender-based prejudice of such rejection to publicly increase her visibility and eventually attract a larger audience elsewhere in Boston.[17] In April 1889, he denounced the institute's rejection in *The Literary World*: 'The efforts made to secure a place for Miss Amelia B. Edwards as one of the lecturers before the Lowell Institute in Boston have been unsuccessful. No woman has ever yet delivered a Lowell course'.[18] True to his confident prediction, however, Edwards' series of six lectures at Boston's Chickering Hall, under the auspices of the Museum of Fine Arts, drew a significant audience.[19]

In his exchange of letters with Edwards, Winslow emphasized the significance of presenting archaeological knowledge to the general public in a manner that was both understandable and rigorous. This was particularly important for the Egypt Exploration Fund, which depended on contributions from the public to finance its research expeditions. Winslow believed that Edwards, with her captivating delivery style, could skilfully blend the need to engage a lay audience while maintaining academic standards. In particular, he advised her to devote special attention to the opening lecture, which he considered a pivotal aspect of her tour, and one destined to be 'telegraphed all over land'. Ideally, he suggested that the topic should be broad, appealing to a wide audience, and accompanied by visual aids, while at the same time exhibiting the scholarly expertise of the presenter: 'a lecture that with its sparkle shows that you are a thorough scholar'.[20] He also recommended that she prepare four to six additional talks for more specialized audiences ('more scholarly, perhaps, and more artistic, more intellectual'), featuring in-depth analysis of specific topics or themes.[21] This kind of versatility, which he had previously praised in a promotional article in *The Churchman*, was a quality, in his view, that no American archaeologist had yet achieved.[22] In Winslow's words, Edwards exhibited a unique talent for blending science and literature, erudition and art, antiquarianism and heritage.

On 7 November 1889, the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Montague Street hosted an engaging lecture called 'The Buried Cities of Egypt', signalling the beginning of Edwards' American tour. The audience was treated to an immersive experience, thanks to the accompanying stereopticon slides provided by Flinders Petrie, who would go on to become the first

[16] Margaret S. Drower, *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 66; in Drower, 'The Early Years', p. 14, she uses the formula 'emotional archaeology' as quoted by Birch, and as such it has been acknowledged by Melman, *Women's Orients*, pp. 257–58 and Lee Miller, 'The Imperial Feminine', p. 238. Birch did not condemn 'sentimental archaeology' per se, but considered it inadequate for procuring objects for his museum; see also Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology. 2, the Golden Age: 1881–1914* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2020), p. 14; and Muñoz, 'Amelia Edwards in America', p. 4.

[17] Winslow's letter to Edwards of 7 March 1889, transcribed in Muñoz, 'Amelia Edwards in America', p. 5.

[18] *The Literary World*, 13 April 1889, 128–29 (p. 128).

[19] *The Literary World*, 9 November 1889, 393.

[20] Winslow's letter to Edwards of 21 March 1889, transcribed in Muñoz, 'Amelia Edwards in America', p. 6.

[21] Winslow's letter to Edwards of 23 April 1889, transcribed in Muñoz, 'Amelia Edwards in America', pp. 5–6, in which he compared her style to the one of American archaeologists.

[22] Winslow, 'Amelia B. Edwards', p. 343: 'Perhaps her versatility in composition is nowhere better illustrated than in her articles in the *Britannica Encyclopaedia*, as contrasted with her sketches and stories in *All the Year Round*, *Household Words* and *Chamber's Journal*'.

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Edwards Professor of Egyptian Archaeology and Philology at University College London.[23] The following day, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* published a glowing review of the event, including excerpts from Edwards' lecture, which only partially coincide with the revised version included in *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*.[24]

In contrast to its printed counterpart, the Brooklyn lecture took on a distinctively personal and witty tone, with an emphasis on establishing a direct connection with the audience. The point of view aligned with Edwards' first-hand experience in Egypt, lending a sense of authenticity and immediacy to her topic and offering an intimate glimpse into the speaker's world:

> I am secretary of a society which has been founded for the express purpose of opening the big mounds of Egypt and disinterring the buried cities which those mounds contain. Nothing in Egypt so excited my curiosity as these gigantic graves. I saw mounds everywhere, in the Delta, in Middle Egypt, in Upper Egypt and even in Nubia. But wherever there was a mound I saw the native husbandman digging it away piecemeal for brick dust manure. So I went home resolved to do what I could to induce my fellow countrymen to subscribe a little money for the purpose of excavation before it should be too late. I have worked steadily for that purpose for many years and I assure you the work of a galley slave is not to be compared with his or her work who undertakes to extract a guinea from the pocket of a Britisher.[25]

Within the printed version, the perspective conveyed is one of detachment and generality, lacking any explicit reference to Edwards' personal involvement with the Egypt Exploration Fund or her commendable endeavours in fundraising:

> Nothing in Egypt so excites the curiosity of the newly landed traveller as these gigantic graves, some of which are identified with cities famous in the history of the ancient world, while others are problems only to be solved at the edge of the spade. He sees mounds everywhere; not only in the Delta, but in Middle Egypt, in Upper Egypt, and even in Nubia. And wherever he sees a mound, there, but too surely, he sees the native husbandmen digging it away piecemeal for brick-dust manure.[26]

Readers are left here with a less vivid and dynamic portrayal of her pioneering efforts to secure funding for subsequent explorations and achieve her primary objective – she also concealed her gender by presenting herself as a conventionally male traveller.[27]

The Brooklyn lecture had a specific purpose beyond merely entertaining the audience with witty anecdotes and captivating stories. The real purpose of the lecture was to showcase the impressive achievements of the Egypt Exploration Fund and, more importantly, to encourage attendees to contribute financially to the organization's noble efforts. As evidenced by the hearty chuckles from the audience when the issue of funding was broached ('This hint of the necessity for contributing funds for the purpose of continuing the explorations caused

[23] The prestigious position was established by the Egypt Exploration Fund using the profits generated from Edwards' successful tour in the United States, see Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, pp. 199–201.

[24] 'Buried Cities', *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 8 November 1889, 1; Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*, pp. 37–69.

[25] 'Buried Cities', p. 1.

[26] Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*, p. 38.

[27] For a discussion of female philanthropy during the Victorian period, see the classic study by Frank K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

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considerable laughter'), it was clear that the message had been received.[28] The positive tone of the reviewer treated such benevolent reaction as a testament to Edwards' impressive skill at striking the delicate balance between fundraising and public relations. By deftly weaving together compelling narratives of the Egypt Exploration Fund's triumphs and challenges with heartfelt appeals for financial support, Edwards managed to win over the audience and inspire a sense of generosity and goodwill.

As the talk unfolded, Edwards continued to pepper her remarks with delightful asides, all delivered with the effortless grace of a seasoned raconteur. In a brilliant display of wit and charm, for instance, she introduced her visual aids with a humorous anecdote about the trials and tribulations of capturing images in situ:

> Of these pictures I must say that I regret that they are not better, but when you learn how they were taken you will believe them the most wonderful pictures you ever saw. They were taken by Mr. Petrie, of our society. His camera was a tin biscuit box [laughter], and he was forced to use such glass as could be found in Arab villages, and often times a broken bottle had to serve the purpose, so I ask your indulgence for the pictures [applause].[29]

Despite the fact, as the reviewer confirms, that 'The views, however, were not at all bad', these playful jibes allowed Edwards to underscore the remarkable ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Egypt Exploration Fund's explorers. By regaling the audience with stories of such intrepid adventurers making do with limited means and adapting to the unique challenges of a foreign land, Edwards was able to drive home the importance of supporting their critical work. It was a subtle but effective tactic, and one that left a lasting impression on her American audience.

2. ROMANTIC EGYPTOLOGY

In her American lectures, Edwards initiated a second circulation of cultural symbols related to ancient Egypt, which managed to captivate diverse social networks with a compelling emotional magnetism. Collins' 'Rules for Unravelling Symbols', from which I here derive my terminology, provides a theoretical framework for identifying the constituents that infused Edwards' innovative approach to ancient Egypt, combining the traditional appeal of literary romance with the contemporary positivistic world of science.[30] This synthesis sheds light on how ancient Egypt shifted from being fashionable solely among elite intellectuals to being embraced by a more mainstream audience during the mid- and late-Victorian periods. Egypt was no longer experienced merely through the written word but was also encountered in various forms of art and prints, architecture, stage design, and jewellery.[31] However, while modern science inspired Victorians to perceive progress in a linear fashion, thus looking forward, Egyptomania also enticed individuals to draw their gaze towards the past. Edwards,

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28 'Buried Cities', p. 1.

29 'Buried Cities', p. 1.

30 Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 95–101; a critical exposition of Collins' theory is offered in Jack Barbalet, 'Emotional Payoffs of Ritual', *European Journal of Sociology*, 47 (2006), 446–51.

31 James S. Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 2013); Judith Johnston, 'The Pyramids of Egypt: Monuments to Victorian Desire', *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, 7 (2020), 71–88.

in her approach, navigated both directions, suggesting an oscillation between progress and nostalgia without wholly committing to either a positivistic or a decadent stance.

In Collins' terms, Edwards' approach could be viewed not just as a notch upon a given timeline but as part of a series of repetitive chains of interaction rituals: 'symbols might find their consolidation in a given historical epoch, but what counts is their circulation and re-circulation in different interactions at different historical latitudes'.[32] Symbols that possess a strong emotional energy, or cultural magnetism, rely on a network of interrelated interactions to activate this attraction. Conversely, the energy of a particular symbol may decline, lay dormant, or become latent due to neglect of the practices associated with it. In his review of Edwards' travelogue, Winslow explains how Edwards' method revived a series of neglected romantic ingredients by inflecting them through a Victorian perspective:

> The imagination quickly possesses itself of all the salient points of the landscape – the broad stream, now placid, now white-capped; the rock-lined or sandy shores; the shimmering desert, the noisy and perilous cataract, the silent and somber pyramid with its hoary secrets, the majestic ruins of Thebes – temple, palace, and convent; the loneliness and wildness, the wealth of colour, the grotesqueness and rudeness of human life; and in and over all, the associations of the centuries.[33]

Edwards painted herself as the explorer of a bygone era, before the introduction of mass tourism, while, in fact, Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in Egypt*, written by John Gardner Wilkinson, had been available since 1847, and Thomas Cook's *Tourists' Handbook for Egypt, the Nile, and the Desert* appeared in 1876. She bluntly observed, even in the preface to the second edition of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* in 1889, that her book did not include practical or updated information about Egypt: 'All these things will be more satisfactorily, and more practically, learned from the pages of Baedeker and Murray'.[34] The epochal change was, however, registered by her reviewer:

> Nile travel has changed somewhat in its conditions in fifteen years, but the ideal of it is presented in these pages. The steam yacht can now take the place of the lazy dahabeeyah; and Cook's tourists miss much of the romance that the pioneers enjoyed. However one may ascend the Nile today, he ought to read this book to see how it used to be done.[35]

The feeling of belatedness that plagued so acutely Victorian travellers in their longing for a form of travel that was no longer possible is here skilfully transformed into a marketing strategy – a strategy that found in Edwards a lucid theorizer. Winslow's review reframes a series of nostalgic symbols into an updated version of picturesque voyaging in a manner that echoes the way in which Edwards herself had done in her frequent correspondence with him. The salient ingredients of an Egyptian landscape ought to be received, therefore, as a popularized version of a romantic orient.

32 Bainbridge, *Topographic Memory*, p. 19.
33 [Winslow], 'Up the Nile', p. 37.
34 Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, 2nd edn, p. VII.
35 [Winslow], 'Up the Nile', p. 37.

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James Buzard has articulated the Victorian 'dilemma of belatedness' in relation to the established styles of travel associated with the Grand Tour in Italy.[36] A similar anxiety is evident in travellers facing the reality of Egypt, its history, spirit, and imaginative space. Prior to Edwards' work, Egypt was off limits to all but the most privileged and well-read travellers. The 'belatedness' experienced by these travellers can be seen as a rebuke to the popular routes promoted by travel publishers like Murray, Cook, or Baedeker, viewed as a diluted version of a true romantic travel experience. Edwards occupies a complex middle ground between the arrival of mass-tourism to far-flung destinations beyond Europe and the transitionary moment when the traveller becomes the tourist. Her work thus captures a pivotal moment in the history of travel, one marked by shifting attitudes towards tourism and the emergence of a new form of mass travel.

Buzard might suggest that these two styles of travelling are mutually exclusive. With Edwards, however, there is a potential for a democratization, or a reconciliation between the elements at play, in this often-suggested competitive clash.[37] Edwards' accounts of Egypt, like those of the Dolomites in Italy, were created to serve as a remedy for Murray's or Cook's commodification of destinations – an antidote capable of salvaging an erudite approach to travel, which was rapidly becoming obsolete. This is not to suggest that Edwards held a dismissive attitude towards the emergence of tourism, nor towards Murray and Cook per se. On the contrary, her publications were intended to encourage travel to the pyramids and tombs along the Nile, and by using her verbal acumen, she endeavoured to solidify the picturesque image of Egypt as something attractive or pleasing in a visual representation. Her picturesque travel writing was responsive to this transition. She framed existing symbols of ancient Egypt along conventional channels of communication while simultaneously conveying new information supplied by contemporary travel guides. Ultimately, she merged old 'ways of seeing' this ancient world with new 'ways of being' in it that were more in line with modern sensibilities.

Edwards' romanticization of science was destined to clash with the progressive establishment of Egyptology as a branch of archaeology, with its report-like style and its rigorous procedures. As it happened before in relation to her book on the Dolomites, which was mildly criticized as a plagiarized version of Gilbert's and Churchill's pioneering 1864 Dolomite book, similar accusations arose in the case of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* and her subsequent lectures on Egyptian antiquities.[38] Similar controversies also targeted Edwards' lively style, allegedly employed only to popularize scientific discoveries made by others. Such style,

[36] James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 106–10, 158–61.

[37] James Buzard, 'A Continent of Pictures: Reflections on the "Europe" of Nineteenth-Century Tourists', *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 108 (1993), 30–44.

[38] Winslow, 'The Queen of Egyptology', p. 310, in which he referred to criticism on one of Edwards' American lectures, formulated by an anonymous reviewer in 'Miss Amelia B. Edwards's Blunders', *The Epoch*, 6 June 1890, 125–26, to which Edwards replied, via her manager, in William Copley Winslow, 'Miss Amelia B. Edwards's Blunders: A Reply from Miss Edwards', *The Epoch*, 7.174 (1890), 277–79. The borrowing from other sources, openly or tacitly, was a practice inherent to the very genre of travel writing, see Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 1–11 (pp. 9–10); Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1–14 (p. 5); see Felix Driver, 'Distance and Disturbance: Travel, Exploration and Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 14 (2004), 73–92 (p. 75): he maintains that 'It is not that boundaries do not exist between, say, scientific exploration and adventurous travel, the sober and the sensational, or the analytical and the aesthetic. It is just that these boundaries are always in the process of construction'.

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however, was precisely what the presidents of the Egypt Exploration Fund were expecting when reading the reports of the expeditions they had funded. For instance, when Édouard Naville's memoir on Goshen was published in 1887, Winslow found its style 'too dry to produce the effect in the United States'. He had wished for a style that could aid 'in influencing people' to continue supporting the Fund.[39] Edwards popularized Naville's accounts, previously featured in *The Academy*, in an article in *The Times* and defended her approach in a letter to Winslow:

> My dear friend, it is of no use to compare Naville's reports in *The Academy* with mine in *The Times*. You must remember that the Egyptologists do not write a picturesque and popular style like that of A. B. E., who has had thirty years of literary work in the romantic school, and who has especially cultivated style – worked at it as if it was a science – and mastered it.[40]

The letter is specially telling because it distinguishes between two different kinds of agencies – two different 'sciences', pertaining to two different 'vocations' as well as potentially two gender prerogatives:

> I study style like a poet; calculating even the play of vowel sounds and the music of periods. Style is an instrument which I have practiced sedulously, and which I can play upon. But our Egyptologists, etc., what do they know of that subtle harmony? They have never flung themselves into the life and love of imaginary men and women; they have never studied the landscape painting of scenery in words; they have no notion of the art, the dexterity, the ear required for musical English; they have no time for such things. It is not their vocation. I am the only romancist in the world who is also an Egyptologist.[41]

In a previous letter to Winslow of 1885, Edwards illustrated her interpretation of romantic Egyptology in terms of the divide between 'theorists' and 'positivists', reconfiguring here romanticism as a strategy for concealing competence and professionalism. Her audience was and remained the 'general public':

> If your people find me reliable, I rejoice that they are so convinced, because they do me justice, and it shows they know enough (I mean the general public) to discriminate on abstruse subjects between theorists and positivists. I am a positivist in science, and like the elephant, I try the bridge with my trunk before I venture to cross it . . . I try to let nothing escape me, and, perhaps, take me all round, I know more about Egyptian history and recent results than anybody else; but I am not a translator, and I fear now I never shall be.[42]

[39] Edouard Naville, *The Shrine of Saft El Henneh and the Land of Goshen (1885)* (London: Trübner, 1887), 'published by order of the committee [of] the Egypt Exploration Fund'.

[40] Winslow, 'Queen of Egyptology', p. 309, see [Amelia B. Edwards], 'The City of Onia and "The Mound of the Jews"', *The Times*, 20 April 1887, 15; in Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, 2nd edn, pp. 270–73, she updated her information on the site with references to Édouard Naville, 'Pithom-Heroopolis', *The Academy*, 22 March 1884, 210.

[41] Winslow, 'Queen of Egyptology', p. 309. The passage is discussed also in Julia Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire: From Eliot to Woolf* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), p. 125, although she transcribes 'romancist' as 'romanticist'.

[42] Winslow, 'Queen of Egyptology', p. 311.

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The issue of agency here is tied to a hybrid profession, which simultaneously encompasses the roles of traveller and writer to engage a broader audience. In a letter to Flinders Petrie, whose exploration journal she avidly consulted through his mother's mediation to extract short articles for *The Times*, Edwards likened such a profession to the role of a prophet:

> I know you so intimately now, through your journals, that I feel we are old friends – at all events on one side, and I address you accordingly. I wish to tell you again with what deep interest I follow you in these records of your daily life and arduous work: and how heartily I appreciate your courage, your endurance, your wonderful pursuit of good humour under difficulties, and your thoroughgoing style of work in whatever you do or undertake. In adapting your material to journalistic purposes, I beg you to believe that I take a hearty pleasure and pride in the task of making your manner of work known to the public, and I feel that you are setting a splendid example of scientific excavation to all Europe . . . I tell Mrs. Petrie that there is but one W. F. P. and that I am his prophet. I am delighted to be his prophet.[43]

In this way Edwards 'explored' Egypt by staying at home, and her articles transformed Petrie's journal entries – originally destined for his family and immediate friends – into picturesque views of Egypt and its antiquities for the lay reader.

3. PICTURESQUE EXPLORATION

In her incisive analysis of Edwards' writings, Julia Kuehn has identified a fascinating interplay between romantic ('almost Keatsian') and empirical modes of observation in Edwards' description of the bazaar in Cairo.[44] This fusion of styles has led scholars such as Jenkins and Miller to discern a gendered dimension in her prose, one that moves away from the masculine paradigm, whose ingredients would allegedly be 'scholarship, travelling, rationality, detachment', and towards a more feminine mode characterized by 'chatter, tourism, sensibility, involvement'.[45] This gendered reading, Kuehn maintains, is somewhat reductive, and, I would add, also beside the point. Edwards' emphasis on her hybrid approach to Egyptology – one that combines her skills as a novelist and her knowledge of composition with an eye for archaeological detail and a deft analytic touch – presents itself as a distinct form of 'picturesque' exploration of a field that archaeologists typically approach from a different perspective. In other words, the distinction here is not between genders but between genres. Edwards' unique approach to Egyptology initiated a shift towards a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to the study of the past, one that accentuated the importance of imagination, creativity, and subjective experience alongside the more technical toolbox of archaeological research.

But, we should ask, who were Edward's readers? Were they prospective tourists, recurring to her literary style as an alternative to Murray's guides, were they potential philanthropists, ready to support the endeavours of the Egypt Exploration Fund, or were they simply armchair archaeologists, fantasizing from the comfort of London's drawing rooms about an exotic far-off landscape with romantic ruins, sentimentalized picturesque inhabitants, and majestic

43 As quoted in Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, p. 80.

44 Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire*, p. 125.

45 Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire*, p. 125, with reference to Miller, 'The Imperial Feminine' and Jenkins, 'The Gaze of the Victorian Woman Traveler'.

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sceneries? In the time of Edwards' life and work, as Buzard has shown, the line separating the traveller from the tourist had become a strong sign for status and market distinction in Britain and America. The recirculation of Byron's quotations in Murray's handbooks, for example, functioned as an index of quality against other competitors, such as the tourist guides published by Thomas Cook. While Murray might have offered his audience practical information still, this manoeuvre allowed him to forge a semblance of erudite connoisseurship.[46]

Towards the end of the century, another distinction emerged – the one between the tourist and the scientific explorer. This new explorer was utterly different from the natural, 'romantic' scientist of the previous century; a type readily epitomized by celebrities such as Saussure, Goethe, or Humboldt.[47] Such writers 'could draw upon both art and science to explore the *ur-Phänomen*, the essential pattern and process of the natural world, or attempt "a physical description of the Universe" in *Kosmos*'.[48] A century or more later, the art historian and mountaineer Martin Conway would strongly associate travel with the emerging discipline of geography: 'Geographical experiment', he maintained, 'is called Travel. A careful and observant traveller is to the science of geography what a careful experimentalist is to other sciences'.[49] It became increasingly difficult, therefore, to associate travelling with the old symbols of picturesque voyaging as a way to distinguish it from simple touring. But what could not be applied to other outlandish destinations, such as Africa, Latin America, and, in the case of Conway, the Himalayas, could be still applied to Egypt for its heady mixture of antiquarian curiosity and oriental exoticism.[50]

'Few, very few, probably, of those who "sit at home at ease"', Edwards explained in *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*, 'have any clear notion of the qualifications which go to make an explorer of the right sort – still less of the kind of life he is wont to lead when engaged in the work of exploration'. All they can consider, in their capacity as good tourists, is that travelling to Egypt offers an escape from the dreary English winter; or that, as scientific explorers, Egypt offered occasions for 'discovering things'.[51] For Edwards, instead, the good explorer ought still to live out the romantic paradigm in which discovery is intertwined with charm:

> Now what can be more romantic than life in a tent? And what can possibly be more charming than 'discovering things?' They may not be very clear as to the nature of the 'things' in question; but they, at all events, conceive of his life as a series of delightful surprises, and of himself as the favorite of fortune, having but to dip his hand into a sort of archaeological lottery-box, and take out nothing but prizes.[52]

[46] Buzard, 'A Continent of Pictures', p. 31; Jan Palmowski, 'Travels with Baedeker: The Guidebook and the Middle Classes in Victorian and Edwardian England', in *Histories of Leisure*, ed. by Rudy Koshar (New York, NY: Berg, 2002), pp. 105–30 (p. 108).

[47] Anne Buttimer, 'Beyond Humboldtian Science and Goethe's Way of Science: Challenges of Alexander von Humboldt's Geography', *Erdkunde*, 55 (2001), 105–20.

[48] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 237.

[49] William M. Conway, 'The Development of Mountain Exploration', *The New Review*, 10 (1894), 736–45 (p. 736); see also William Bainbridge, 'Picturesque Lost: Martin Conway's Experimental Travels into Geography', *Performance Research*, 24 (2019), 100–8.

[50] On the paradigm shift presented by the exploration of far and distant destinations in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, see Dane K. Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[51] Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*, pp. 21–22.

[52] Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*, p. 22.

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The duality in Edwards' prerogative, which oscillates between Victorian modernity and a nostalgia for a romantic idea of antiquarianism, was a tension subtly cloaked by Edwards herself. This sentiment was also echoed by others of the period, like Lucie Duff Gordon and Emmeline Lott, for whom places like Egypt were emblematic of British (and French) imperialism.[53] However, one cannot easily overlook that Edwards, despite her leanings towards a more romantic age, remained deeply embedded within the 'feminised' imperialist ideology, actively promoting it.[54] That being said, she also attempted to exempt herself from the limitations her gender might have sometimes imposed.

Parramore reminds us, however, how at the start of the trip along the Nile, Edwards and her companion Lucy Renshawe were quizzed on their reasons for visiting Egypt as women, such was the novelty of their arrival.[55] In a style that is reminiscent of her popular Dolomites travel account, which is equally charming, humorous, and adventurous, she quips that 'with no excuse of health, or business, or any serious object whatever', she and Renshawe 'had just taken refuge in Egypt as one might turn aside into the Burlington Arcade or the Passage des Panoramas – to get out of the rain'.[56] This nonchalant humour belies the reality, however, not only of Edwards' reputation as a travel writer and novelist but also as an Egyptologist in the scholarly field itself, and the role of women in a world usually dominated by men.

Here again Edwards recirculates old symbols in new attires. She makes no excuse for repeatedly seducing her readers with a particular narrative that evokes the pretty, the picturesque, or the sublime. In her chapter on the landscape of Abu Simbel, for example, with its monumental temples dedicated to Rameses the Great carved into the mountainside, her response is almost spiritual: 'We divine the rest; and the poetry of the place at all events is ours. Even in these barren solitudes there is wafted to us a breath from the shores of old romance. We feel that Love once passed this way, and that the ground is still hallowed where he trod'.[57] Through this subjective epistemology, she repurposes symbols that encourage a particular gaze upon the world. This gaze often aligns with male, scholarly, imperialist, colonizing, and at times, racially charged perspectives, as exemplified in her encounter with a fortune-teller in the village of Minieh:

> Coming back through the town, we were accosted by a withered one-eyed hag like a reanimated mummy, who offered to tell our fortunes. Before her lay a dirty rag of handkerchief full of shells, pebbles, and chips of broken glass and pottery. Squatting toadlike under a sunny bit of wall, the lower part of her face closely veiled, her skinny arms covered with blue and green glass bracelets and her fingers with misshapen silver rings, she hung over these treasures; shook, mixed, and interrogated them with all the fervour of divination; and delivered a string of the prophecies usually forthcoming on these occasions.[58]

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53 Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt, 1863–65* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1865); Emmeline Lott, *The English Governess in Egypt: Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople* (London: R. Bentley, 1867); see, Johnston, 'The Pyramids of Egypt'.

54 Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire*, pp. 122–30.

55 Lynn Parramore, *Reading the Sphinx: Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Literary Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 139.

56 Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. 3.

57 Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. 433.

58 Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. 129.

> The picturesque congeries of obsolete magical objects would comfortably fit in Francesco Orlando's category of the 'sinister-terrifying', but the detached and derisive tone in which Edwards evokes them suggests more pertinently the category of the 'threadbare-grotesque'[59] – a pitiless, sardonic depiction of a degenerate race, plagued by 'ophthalmia':I certainly never saw so many one-eyed human beings as that morning at Minieh. There must have been present in the streets and market-place from ten to twelve thousand natives of all ages, and I believe it is no exaggeration to say that at least every twentieth person, down to little toddling children of three and four years of age, was blind of an eye. Not being a particularly well-favoured race, this defect added the last touch of repulsiveness to faces already sullen, ignorant, and unfriendly. A more unprepossessing population I would never wish to see-the men half stealthy, half insolent; the women bold and fierce; the children filthy, sickly, stunted, and stolid.[60]

As Melman has noticed, Edwards is less interested in the customs, manners, and morals of the contemporary Middle East. She is in fact callous and insensitive to the poor and wretched condition of its inhabitants.[61] Her Egypt is a land of the past, inhabited by the 'old and half-forgotten friends' known through books, as it becomes evident in her Thebes chapter:

> As a child, [John Gardner Wilkinson's] *The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* had shared my affections with *The Arabian Nights*. I had read every line of the old six-volume edition over and over again. I knew every one of the six hundred illustrations by heart. Now I suddenly found myself in the midst of old and half-forgotten friends. Every subject on these wonderful walls was already familiar to me. Only the framework, only the colouring, only the sand under-foot, only the mountain slope outside, were new and strange. It seemed to me that I had met all these kindly brown people years and years ago – perhaps in some previous stage of existence; that I had walked with them in their gardens; listened to the music of their lutes and tambourines; pledged them at their feasts.[62]

The only moments in which her gaze on contemporary Egypt yields positive remarks is when she detects in the customs of its inhabitants some family resemblances with the rituals of their distant past, as in a funeral on the road from Korosko to Abu Simbel:

> The ceremonial, with its dancing and chanting, was always much the same; always barbaric, and in the highest degree artificial. One would like to know how much of it is derived from purely African sources, and how much from ancient Egyptian tradition . . . We afterwards saw it represented in paintings of funeral processions on the walls of several tombs at Thebes, where the wailing women are seen to be gathering up the dust in their hands and casting it upon their heads, just as they do now.[63]

[59] Francesco Orlando, *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination: Ruins, Relics, Rarities, Rubbish, Uninhabited Places, and Hidden Treasures*, ed. by David Quint, trans. by Gabriel Pihas and Daniel Seidel, with the collaboration of Anna Grego (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 139–57 ('sinister-terrifying'), 74–97 ('threadbare-grotesque').

[60] Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. 130.

[61] Melman, *Women's Orients*, p. 258.

[62] Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, pp. 608–9.

[63] Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. 369.

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In those fleeting moments where the past and present meld into one, Edwards emerges as a 'picturesque explorer' in line with Coleridge's very definition of the term: a harmonious effect that cannot be entirely rationalized, but must be felt.[64] In such instances, captured in Edwards' evocative writing, Egyptology itself becomes an enchanting realm, where the power of imagination and the allure of science converge. Her meticulous attention to detail is never reduced to a catalogue one could find in a guidebook for tourists, but always in service of a larger purpose: to construct with words a coherent and meaningful pictorial composition. This is a skilful balancing act that Edwards performs with great finesse, interweaving individual objects into a personal and engaging tapestry that immerses readers in the world of Egyptology. Her appropriation of more scientific ideas related to such a world did not mean abandoning her novelistic or antiquarian credentials; rather she offered her audience a lesson in distinguishing between 'her own emotional "romantic" brand of archaeology' and the sometimes 'emotionless writing of her close associates'.[65]

4. DOMESTIC EGYPTOLOGY

The 'archaeological lottery-box' of prizes that Edwards refers to in her description of the ideal Egyptian explorer in *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers* find a parallel in the strange cabinet of curiosities into which she transformed her house in Westbury on Trym, near Bristol. In 1891, one year before her death, Edwards accepted the invitation from *The Arena*, an American magazine, to write a piece about her house, and give its readers a glimpse into the world of a celebrity now better known to them. Here is what any potential visitor ('If my visitor is admitted at all') would see on first entering the home:

> As soon as the front door is opened, the incoming visitor finds himself in the midst of modern Egypt, the walls of the hall being lined with Damascus tiles and Cairene woodwork, the spoils of some of those Meshrabeeyeh windows which are so fast disappearing both in Alexandria and Cairo. In a recess opposite the door stands a fine old chair inlaid with ivory and various colored woods, which some two hundred years ago was the Episcopal chair of a Coptic bishop. The rest of the hall furniture is of Egyptian inlaid work.[66]

The scene is a crowded one – the visitor is invited through a domestic itinerary in which curious objects jostle for space on every available surface, evoking images of a Renaissance Wunderkammer filled with a diverse collection of unusual and intriguing rarities.[67] And in the midst of this bustling environment, Edwards weaves her domestic space into a mesmerizing tapestry that draws from the bazaars and markets that had previously captured the imagination of her readers. Unpacking her library, both physically and figuratively, she adeptly

64 Kuehn, *A Female Poetics of Empire*, p. 127; for Coleridge's definition of the picturesque as an overall effect of a composition, in which the individual parts create an harmonious whole that must be rather felt than rationally understood, see Jill Heydt-Stevenson, 'The Pleasures of Simulacra: Rethinking the Picturesque in Coleridge's Notebooks and "The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution"', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 29 (2002), 20–50; see also Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 29–30.

65 Melman, *Women's Orients*, p. 258.

66 Amelia B. Edwards, 'My Home Life', *The Arena*, 4 (1891), 299–310 (p. 303).

67 For the practice of 'travelling at home', see Thijs Demeulemeester, *Wunderkammer: An Exotic Journey Through Time*, trans. by Lee Preedy (Tielt: Lannoo, 2017).

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employs the naturalistic model of the geological configuration of a territory that she alone knows intimately. In doing so, she masterfully fuses her artistic, literary, antiquarian, and archaeological interests into a single, cohesive whole. Through her innovative approach, Edwards reveals how seemingly disparate fields of knowledge can be united into new harmonies.

In Edwards' domestic environment, the boundaries between disciplines blur, and the pursuit of knowledge takes on a vibrant and dynamic energy. Her exposure to the Dolomites, and their significance to the development of geology as a scientific discipline, is evident in the example of the order of layers visitors might observe as they wander through the labyrinthine shelves of her library:

> Like the geological strata in the side of a cliff, they show the deposits of successive periods, and remind me, not only of the changes which my own literary tastes have undergone, but also of the various literary undertakings in which I have been from time to time engaged.[68]

Appropriately, the final stratum of her domestic geology – the one that comes last in her lifetime, after poetry, history, classic literature, artistic catalogues, travel books, folkloric studies, and so on – is devoted to Egypt:

> For dearer to me than all the rest of my curios are my Egyptian antiquities; and of these, strange to say, though none of them are in sight, I have enough to stock a modest little museum.[69]

Edwards' approach to antiquarianism was anything but timid – far removed from what some might label as quaint or overly sentimental. Tucked away between dusty tomes and scholarly publications, she offers her readers (or those deemed to have 'congenial tastes') a 'secret' tantalizing peek into her own personal vision of a romantic, exotic orient:

> Here, for instance, behind the *Revue Archéologique* packed side by side as closely as figs in a box, are all the gods of Egypt, – fantastic little porcelain figures plumed and horned, bird-headed, animal-headed, and the like . . . or here, in a tin box behind the *Retrospective Review*, are specimens of actual food offerings deposited three thousand years ago in various tombs at Thebes – shrivelled dates, lentils, nuts, and even a slice of bread.[70]

Among the rolls of mummy cloth, amulets, funerary statuettes, and scarabs that populate her collection, Edwards weaves a typically suspenseful narrative that echoes the elements of a classic ghost story. Her *Arena* piece masterfully combines the allure of ancient artifacts with the spine-tingling thrill of the unknown, leaving readers on the edge of their seats and hungry for more.

The style of a ghost story, in fact, was a genre in which she excelled during her youth, as exemplified by her *The Phantom Coach* of 1864, a tale which helped fashion the aesthetics,

[68] Edwards, 'My Home Life', p. 304. See William Bainbridge, 'Geological Riddles: The Origins of Geotourism in the Dolomite Mountains', *Histoire des Alpes – Storia delle Alpi – Geschichte der Alpen*, 26 (2021), 167–83.

[69] Edwards, 'My Home Life', p. 308.

[70] Edwards, 'My Home Life', p. 308.

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popularity, sensationalistic, and even sentimental drive of Victorian supernatural literature.[71] The above example, and one the below, show how the old link between Egyptian and Gothic supernatural is well remembered:

> And there are stranger things than these, – fragments of spiced and bituminized humanity to be shown to visitors who are not nervous, nor given to midnight terrors. Here is a baby's foot (some mother cried over it once) in the Japanese cabinet in the anteroom. There are three mummied hands behind *Allibone's Dictionary of English Authors*, in the library. There are two arms with hands complete – the one almost black, the other singularly fair, – in a drawer in my dressing-room; and grimmest of all, I have the heads of two ancient Egyptians in a wardrobe in my bedroom, who, perhaps, talk to each other in the watches of the night, when I am sound asleep.[72]

The reader-visitor is here left with a glow of pleasure and a sense of having been uniquely honoured by informal and intimate contact with a delightfully learned if quirky personality and her collection of material objects – as if extracted from *The Antiquary* by Walter Scott (1816). Scott was one of Edwards' 'first educators', in fact, and was, she assured, 'all read before I was fourteen'.[73]

That she might have read *The Antiquary*, the third novel in the Waverley series, is telling. Inspired by Scott's exploration of the epistemological connection between storytelling and objects in his novel, Edwards indeed seemingly draws from her upbringing in the romantic school of Scott. Her vivid, novelistic writing both heightens the potential for amateur yet passionate archaeology (whether practiced or not) and enhances the recognition of rigorous scientific inquiry.[74] Edwards' own career trajectory in Egyptology mirrors this movement from amateur to professional, which neatly corresponds to her evolution from holidaymaker to collector-connoisseur, from handbook-led tourist to consummate explorer.

The apparent domestic intimacy displayed in Edwards' home, however, is illusory. Far from being an example of 'straightforward simplicity', 'My Home Life' is a carefully arranged text designed to achieve a dramatic effect, as in everything else Edwards wrote about, whether a mountain landscape, a ghost story, or ancient Egypt. The congeries of Egyptian knick-knacks, hidden in every corner like the rolls of mummy cloth, but also the rings, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, laid here and there 'in a sacred gloom', do not, however, leave much space for word-painting: the walls are all too crowded with ephemera, instilling in the visitor the diffused sense of a haptic phantasmagoria. To the visitor, Edwards' home appears as a

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71 The tale was published for the first time in the Christmas special edition of Dickens' *All the Year Round* in 1864 (pp. 35–40). Its success brought the editor to commission a ghost tale from Edwards every year for the Christmas issue of *Household Words*, see Jones, *The Adventurous Life*, p. 8; for the context, see Anthony Mandal, 'The Ghost Story and the Victorian Literary Marketplace', in *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story*, ed. by Scott Brewster and Luke Thurston (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), pp. 29–39 (p. 37); see also Nick Freeman, 'Sensational Ghosts, Ghostly Sensations', *Women's Writing*, 20 (2013), 186–201.

72 Edwards, 'My Home Life', pp. 308–9.

73 Matilda Betham-Edwards, *Mid-Victorian Memories* (London: John Murray, 1919), p. xxviii; Moon, *More Usefully Employed*, pp. 5–6, quoting a letter from Edwards to Edward Abbott, editor of *The Literary World*; see also Matilda Betham-Edwards, 'Amelia B. Edwards, Her Childhood and Early Life', *New England Magazine*, 7 (1893), 549–64.

74 Porscha Fermanis, 'Word and Picture in Walter Scott', *Essays in Criticism*, 71 (2021), 283–305; Shawn Malley, 'Walter Scott's Romantic Archaeology: New/Old Abbotsford and "The Antiquary"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 40 (2001), 233–51; Mark Westgarth, *The Emergence of the Antique and Curiosity Dealer in Britain 1815–1850: The Commodification of Historical Objects* (London: Routledge, 2020).

Wunderkammer of 'portable landscapes' – objects, that is, which carry an inherent sense of place and instil in the viewer the fantasy of mentally travelling to their exotic location.[75]

This is not to say that Edwards, the accomplished artist, and sometime illustrator of her own publications, did not exhibit a passion for collecting engravings, particularly those of Turner ('of which I believe I possess nearly all'), as a visual counterpart to her literary education. The dedication of *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys* to American artist Elihu Vedder reveals her artistic sympathies – although the symbolist world of Vedder remained for her a mirage. As Winslow's review reminds us:

> It is a distinct feature of Miss Edwards's skill that she writes as an artist, that she *sees* things and describes them as things seen, and so carries her readers literally along with her. The very cabin in which she sits and writes and plies her watercolors becomes a reality. The imagination quickly possesses itself of all the salient points of the landscape . . . the shimmering desert, the noisy and perilous cataract, the silent and somber pyramid with its hoary secrets, the majestic ruins of Thebes . . . the loneliness and wildness, the wealth of color, the grotesqueness and rudeness of human life . . . the associations of centuries.[76]

In carrying 'her readers literally along with her' and allowing the imagination of her readers to possess the landscapes she depicts, Winslow evokes here the notion of portable landscapes in a palpable way. Within the pages of her works and through the material objects found in her domestic sphere, Edwards promotes endless possibilities in the minds of her readers for a passionate engagement with ancient Egypt. In the same way that she vividly describes trinkets and trifles in the *Arena* article, her word power pushes the symbols to a higher level. If what has been discussed up until now could be located within a secondary realm of interaction rituals, one might now see, with Winslow's helpful summary, how Edwards aptly exemplifies Collins' third order of circulation: the one in which symbols are generated 'inside individuals' minds, in the inner conversations that make up thinking, in the fantasies that make up the inner self'.[77] This phenomenon acknowledges a shift from a circulation of symbols in conversational networks, among real people, to imaginary conversations held in the mind during the very act of thinking.[78]

The skill Edwards possesses in allowing her readers to 'literally' travel within the pages of her works and through the material culture of the objects found in her domestic Wunderkammer marries both the notion of epistemological portability, which sees Egypt magically moving to England, with the one of sedentariness. Edwards, the producer, allows her readers, or consumers, to become 'armchair travellers', engaging with her text as tourists, as archaeologists, or as simple admirers of her work.[79] Her readers are invited to perform Egypt, to see and 'do' it in a material sense; but the invitation might only extend up to the physical act of touching

75 On the concept of 'portable landscapes', see Veronica Della Dora, 'Travelling Landscape-Objects', *Progress in Human Geography*, 33 (2009), 334–54.

76 [Winslow], 'Up the Nile', p. 37.

77 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 99.

78 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, p. 101; on the concept of internal conversations, see Norbert Wiley, *The Semiotic Self* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 40–73; Margaret S. Archer, *Structure, Agency, and the Internal Conversation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Johannes I. Bakker, 'The Self as an Internal Dialogue: Mead, Blumer, Peirce, and Wiley', *The American Sociologist*, 36 (2005), 75–84.

79 For 'armchair travellers', see note 3 above.

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and turning the pages of her works from the comfort of one's home.[80] Edwards' romanticism becomes a practice, a performance, a style, in short, of writing, travelling, and living. Her orient, instead, is a destination, or better the result of a knowledge work, taking the form of a sensational narrative or a picturesque scene, carefully and artfully composed to be enjoyed by those armchair geographers or armchair archaeologists who, closed in their London clubs, travelled the world by browsing through her books.

5. RECYCLED MODERNITIES

The symbols of ancient Egypt, with which Edwards captured the minds of her readers, did not originate with her. Harriet Martineau, Edward Lane, and others had already established a British cult attached to ancient Egypt by the time of her account.[81] In later years, sensational scientific and literary events, such as the famous discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun or Agatha Christie's 1937 detective fiction *Death on the Nile*, somehow eclipsed her legacy in the storyline of popular Egyptology, replacing Edwards measured approach with what might be termed a 'mania'.[82] Edwards' contribution occupies a middle ground between an earlier, first circulation of symbols, where emotional energy is firstly attached to an object or idea, and a third one, where symbols are imagined by individuals and retold within their innermost, personal conversations and fantasies.

The Victorian mania for Egypt was not particularly novel. Roman emperors saw themselves as the new pharaohs and as the rightful inheritors of an august ancient Egyptian civilization as much as they did with Greek civilization. In the great capitals of Europe, obelisks were set up in prominent places from the time of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance onwards, transferring the prestige associated with old Egypt to other, newer centres of power, like London or Paris. Caligula brought a large red granite obelisk from Alexandria to Rome in 37 CE, and although now placed in the middle of Bernini's St Peter's square, it remained beside the old basilica until 1586.[83] But whereas Egypt gave emperors and popes a legacy to exploit in order to bolster their standing in their own communities, the Victorians entered such a 'zone of civilizational prestige' with the aspiration that Egypt could also stand for progress and modernity.[84]

More than the those who preceded her, including other female travel writers like Martineau, Edwards conjured up this modernity through an adherence to scientific process and discipline, while, crucially, still maintaining the mystery and magic of Egypt through her romanticized narrative style. The remarkable result was a successful popularization of ancient Egypt: 'The interest her book stirred and the influence of the Egyptian Exploration Society created an atmosphere of curiosity and intrigue among the public that would set the stage for the most famous archaeological find to be made in Egypt'.[85]

80 Veronica Della Dora, 'Performative Atlases: Memory, Materiality, and (Co-)Authorship', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 44 (2009), 240–55 (p. 245).

81 The literary legacy upon which Edwards was writing also included Lane's sister Sophia Poole's *The Englishwoman in Egypt* (1844), Thackeray's *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846), Trollope's short story, 'An Unprotected Female at the Pyramids', published in *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* (1860), among others.

82 Lanoie, 'Inventing Egypt', p. 161; Christina Riggs, *Treasured: How Tutankhamun Shaped a Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2021).

83 Nancy T. de Grummond, ed., *Encyclopedia of the History of Classical Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 818; see also Courtney Luckhardt, *The Charisma of Distant Places: Travel and Religion in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2020).

84 Randall Collins, 'Civilizations as Zones of Prestige and Social Contact', *International Sociology*, 16 (2001), 421–37.

85 Lanoie, 'Inventing Egypt', p. 161.

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Like others, however, Edwards has to be placed into the rubric of Victorian gender politics, which saw women travellers trying and succeeding in overcoming the 'rigid ideologies which set them so firmly apart from men.'[86] The scholarly attributes and linguistic competencies that she associates to an accomplished explorer were still largely confined to men, making Edwards' own accomplishments all the more impressive. Far from being an amateurish or undemanding exercise, her writing reveals a deep understanding of the intricacies of Egyptology and an unwavering dedication to scholarly rigor. It is a testament to her skill and determination that she was able to thrive in a field that was so heavily dominated by men.[87]

It comes as no surprise that one finds in the preface to the first edition of *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* an engraving of Elihu Vedder's celebrated painting, *The Questioner of the Sphinx*.[88] Painted in about 1875, it is now found in the collection of the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts. What is interesting about this painting is the fact that it was produced long before Vedder ever stood in Egypt itself, basing his ideas on those images and imagery more readily available in the popular repertoire of other orientalist painters such as Holman Hunt, who also painted the Sphinx, or poems such as 'Kubla Khan' by Coleridge or 'Ozymandias' by Shelley.[89] The inclusion of a 'Fellah', an Arab wayfarer in ragged clothes, holding his head to the Sphinx's monumental lips, seems to speculate upon an idea that he has travelled through the desert wilderness in the hope of garnering some universal truth, as if the mysterious statue might be able to whisper something magical to him.

But whereas the human skull featured in Vedder's painting might intimate that his quest was a futile one, Edwards labels the illustration with the tellingly more assured, if enigmatic phrase, 'Each must interpret himself | The secret of the Sphinx' before tantalizing her readers with the idea that the Sphinx 'tells its own tale; or rather it tells as much of its own tale as the artist chooses.'[90] Her own journey to Egypt, of course, was not futile at all, and her own tale of Egypt gave great clarity to the questions posed to the man in Vedder's painting, 'What does he seek to know? What does he hope to hear?'[91] What she hoped to see in Egypt and what she hoped to learn were destined to become what her readers hoped to see and hoped to learn by turning the pages of her book.

If *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* began with the Sphinx, it happened to end with it as well. In her depiction of the necropolis encircling the Great Pyramid, Edwards captures the Sphinx seamlessly embedded within the landscape's familiar contours. The Sphinx, a whisperer of truths and half-truths, gazes into the future while revering the deep currents of cultural history, a continuity as potent then as it remains today. Edwards adeptly circulated and recirculated symbols of ancient Egypt, infusing them with emotional magnetism and civilizational prestige during an era when these symbols regained increasing attraction. Her efforts breathed life into the public's engagement with its historical dimensions to remarkable effect:

86 Johnston, 'The Pyramids of Egypt', p. 71.

87 Edwards, *Pharaohs, Fellahs and Explorers*, p. 22.

88 There are several versions of this painting; the 1875 one, used by Edwards, offers a slightly different angle on the positioning of the Sphinx's face in relation to the viewer in comparison to the 1863 version in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

89 Vedder's first encounter with the Sphinx itself only came about during his Egyptian journey of 1889–1890; see Patricia D. Pierce, 'Deciphering Egypt: Four Studies in the American Sublime' (PhD diss., Yale University, 1980), p. 62.

90 Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. xvi.

91 Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. xvi.

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A little way to the Southward, from the midst of a sandy hollow, rises the head of the Sphinx. Older than the Pyramids themselves, older perhaps than even the Pyramid of Ouenephes at Sakkarah, the monster lies couchant like a watchdog, looking ever to the East, as if for some dawn that has not yet risen.[92]

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at *Journal of Victorian Culture* online.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

[92] Edwards, *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, p. 718.

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