

ANNE RICE AND THE MYSTERIES OF EGYPT

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Abstract: Egyptian culture is as popular today as it was centuries ago. The Egyptian customs, religion and mythology are unique. Therefore, an endless source for artists. Imagine a setting. Invent a plot and characters with unexpected reactions and feelings. It's easy to access the supernatural when it comes to writing; and fun as well. You get the chance to create a world you believe in and which is a part of you. As a result, you express emotions to the reader. Horror novelist Anne Rice uses historical facts and legends related to Egypt in order to construct her novels.

Akasha and Enkil are "Those Who Must be Kept", the creators of all the vampires; they lived thousands of years before brat prince Lestat was born. "The Queen of the Damned" depicts the beginning of vampires and their kind; almost all of the vampires from "The Vampire Chronicles" are present in this particular novel because they have to fight against Akasha's destructive forces.

"The Mummy or Ramses the Damned" illustrates the gap between the passionate people of ancient times and the superficial ones at the beginning of the twentieth century. Immortal pharaoh Ramses II steps into modern Cairo only to discover its values long gone; lust, money and cruelty are the new conditions of survival.

Rice describes gifted characters with strong traits. They are immortals, have magical powers or supernatural features. The reader can expect a cat-and-mouse chase at any time and a variety of suggestive states of mind and lasting impressions.

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Writing novels gives one the opportunity to experience all sorts of adventures. We get life for a reason: to live it when we have the chance. We enjoy this moment knowing that life's only certainty is death. So, seize the day! Living forever would be dull and tiring instead of fun and amusing. Still, immortality is a recurrent theme for most writers of SF or supernatural genre.

Horror novelist Anne Rice creates powerful characters that transcend the text; you feel you get to know them as soon as you understand their passions, suffering and disappointments. Rice's setting and characters are fictional, but convincing. If her vampires live with blood, Rice's mummy ("The Mummy or Ramses the Damned") gets strength from the sun. Ramses made the elixir of eternal youth and drank it thousands of years ago while still Ramses II, king of Egypt. He learned how the magic potion is made from a Hittite priestess and is forced to keep the secret formula for himself. That's because the elixir cannot perish; Ramses tried to destroy it by means of water and fire but that led to disastrous consequences: plants that wouldn't stop growing, fish turned into monsters and the death of many people.

Leading an immortal life for centuries, Ramses retreated from the Egyptian throne and only served as confidant and advisor for his royal followers. One of whom is Cleopatra; they fall in love one with the other. It is Ramses who advises her to lure Caesar; but she immediately falls for Mark Anthony. Upon his deathbed, Cleopatra asks Ramses to give Mark Anthony the elixir in order to save him but Ramses refuses. He knew that Mark Anthony wanted to create an immortal Roman army which would have led to a terrible future for humankind. Desperate after losing Mark Anthony, Cleopatra commits suicide being bit by a venomous snake. This affected Ramses so much that he decides to disappear for centuries,

leaving notes so that future generations will know of his curse. He asks his priests to enclose him in a sarcophagus and to secure traps in the tomb so that no one may enter.

Centuries later, in 1916, English archaeologist Lawrence Stratford discovers what he presumes to be the mummy of Ramses II. Lawrence believes the pharaoh's mummy and belongings are imitations because they're in a very good condition. The pharaoh mentions in his notes that he was a contemporary with Cleopatra, when in fact he reigned thousands of years before her. Lawrence also reads about Ramses' curse; in case the tomb will be opened, the immortal pharaoh will reign over the world forever. Letting the sun in, Ramses' mummy awakens little by little and witnesses Lawrence's murder. His nephew Henry poisons him in order to inherit Lawrence's business, Stratford Shipping. To honor Lawrence's memory and activity in archaeology, his family exhibits the mummy of Ramses II, Lawrence's most successful discovery in his London home. The mummy will, eventually, be included in a collection at the British Museum.

Elliott Savarell, Earl of Rutherford was Lawrence's close friend; his son Alex proposes to Lawrence's daughter Julie. It is but an arrangement among wealthy families, although Alex truly loves Julie. Randolph, Henry's father and Lawrence's brother has been stealing money from the family business for years; the huge sums are spent on Henry's addictions: gambling and alcohol.

While the mummy still at Lawrence's house, Henry tries to poison his cousin Julie in order to get free access to the family's money. Completely resurrected from his long time sleep, the mummy grabs Henry, interfering with his evil plan. Ramses and Julie instantly fall in love with each other. To the others' surprise and to Henry's shock, she presents Ramses as Reginald Ramsey, an Egyptian archaeologist and Lawrence's friend. Samir, Lawrence's help while in Egypt learns of Ramses' immortality; so does Elliott.

After moving around modern London alongside Julie, Ramses decides to visit his homeland one last time. Julie accompanies him; so do Elliott, Samir, Alex and Henry. Furthermore, they're suspicious about the Egyptian archaeologist who appeared all of a sudden in Julie's life.

While visiting the museum in Cairo, Ramses comes across Cleopatra's mummy; sensitized at a possible reunion, he sprinkles immortal elixir on the mummy. Since there was a little elixir left, only a part of Cleopatra comes back to life. She returns as an avenging monster who kills many people, including Henry. Moreover, she remembers Ramses' refusal to offer Mark Anthony eternal youth and wants to punish him for that.

Covering a great deal of dangers and twists, Ramses and his group succeed in stopping Cleopatra; she perishes in a great fire resulted from a car accident. Julie drinks the elixir in order to live along Ramses; Elliott does the same in order to escape the pain caused by health problems. However, Cleopatra survives the accident and is rescued by an Egyptian doctor. Readers are left to believe there will be a sequel.

Writing fiction gives one the chance to challenge the real world by all means. In "*The Mummy*" it is the elixir of immortality that brings the characters together, letting the reader know them the way they really are. How far can one go for a sip of magical potion? Elliott eventually appears as the character thirsty for eternal youth; he follows Ramses from the start, eager to change his miserable life. For, he can hardly walk, having terrible leg pains and is disgusted by the dead society he is living in. He doesn't want to hear anymore about status, titles or inheritance and drinks to forget about boredom and physical pain. Elliott longs for the loving days with Lawrence when they were young and travelling with no cares. Initially, Elliott seems to be a well educated man and a dedicated friend; he uses his erudition to utter short but smart and ironic ideas. To Ramses' shock and mine as well, he puts away morality

and cares for others; he doesn't actually come to Cairo for Julie and Alex's sake, but for his secret purpose: to become immortal. Elliott's presumable dignity and honor slowly fade by the end of the novel; he phones all the authorities back in London so that Alex can return home safely. In fact, for Elliott, everything does come down to influence, money and status.

Compared to Elliott, Ramses is aware of the danger the elixir holds. Evens so, he still pours a little on Cleopatra's mummy; Ramses, therefore, hoped in a reunion like in the old days. Unfortunately, the new 20th century Cleopatra is but a replica of the old one known to be wise and passionate. The new Cleopatra suffers from pain and is in a state of shock to discover her body only partially recovered. When the ones around feel repulsed by her body and reject her, Cleopatra breaks their neck.

The one who drinks the elixir has strong physical power and his/her senses over developed. He/she has a craving for food and drink, but can survive without them; his/her eyes turn blue and has a strong sexual appetite.

The lovers in the novel urge for eternal relationships. Julie holds the readers in suspense long before she decides to live forever alongside Ramses. Their love ceases at one point when Cleopatra reawakens. Ramses' fascination with the queen of Egypt makes Julie grow distant from him. The same air of transcendence can be sensed in Cleopatra and Alex's short affair; he is young, beautiful and naive, developing a surreal bond with the mysterious and cunning queen. For, this is how she introduces herself; as "Queen". It's the ball night in 1916 Egypt with everyone flirty and holding a drink in their hand. Alex can't care less about the name of this ravishing lady. They're in love for a day and a night; he is foolish to believe this is the woman of his dreams and she tempts him in believing so. To me, their love is real, since Alex is the first man who appreciates and cares about Cleopatra the way she needed. In the end, the others interfere, warning Alex about dangerous Cleopatra. A love beginning to grow is suddenly banned.

Characters at the beginning of the 20th century are shown as hurt, disappointed about their accomplishments and, nonetheless, brokenhearted. Elliott misses Lawrence deeply; they were lovers when young and while in Egypt. This is opposed to Elliott's one night stand with Henry. The latter proves false and mischievous, sleeping with Elliott in order to steal from him. Henry is the prototype of excess and self-destruction; his drugs are whiskey, loose women and gambling. He goes so far that he owes money to dubious, threatening people like Sharples; father Randolph is depressed about Henry, feeling helpless whenever he asks for money he never pays back. Henry's addictions destroy him inside out, keeping his mind busy and setting him apart from the others. This way, Henry treats lovers Malenka and Daisy Banker like mere objects, sources of short pleasures. Desperate to drink and to bet, he does anything for money. He murders his uncle Lawrence and tries to do the same with Julie when he has the chance. He feels threatened when confronted by Sharples who asks for his money; scared and powerless, more exactly penniless, Henry kills him in order to feel safe and with no burdens. His violent outbursts are similar to Cleopatra's; characters act according to their very first impulse, not minding of the consequences. To me, Henry appeared as a sure victim, a character that would be eliminated with no hesitation. Furthermore, he is a loser, a burden for all close to him, possessing no qualities except for physical beauty. When around Lawrence, he looks at Egyptian ancient culture with disgust and ignorance. Ironically, after killed in a whim by angry Cleopatra, Henry ends up a forged mummy exhibited for curious tourists.

Egyptomania was at its best in 1916; back then, commerce with false mummies and their belongings was popular. Consumerism was everywhere, people having a laugh and enjoying themselves. It is in this context that Rice develops the setting. Ramses misses his

homeland, but, to his disappointment, he revisits a decayed 20th century Egypt; to his shock, people make photos with the mummies simply to get a thrill. They have fun pointing at Egyptian artifacts, not taking enough interest in them. For Ramses this was more than he could bear, watching his legacy the least appreciated. It was in this very state, on the spur of a moment, that he decided to bring Cleopatra back to life.

Characters are governed by bias and excess. They hurt, destroy the others, going to the end of the world to get what they want. Ramses is melancholic about his old Egypt and feels a misfit in the speedy, artificial world of 1916. However, he comes to find that bringing ghosts of the past to the present time, can only lead to disaster. Julie is stubborn with her position against eternal life but feels distressed when realizing she would lose Ramses; she pushes her destiny to the limit, contemplating suicide. Still, by following her gut instinct she pursues happiness.

“*The Queen of the Damned*” describes Lestat’s efforts to stop Akasha from destroying the world. She is the mother of all vampires, queen of Egypt six thousand years prior to the present time. Young, beautiful, she’s nonetheless evil on the witch sisters Mekare and Maharet. Uneasy at the queen’s request to reveal their magical powers, the two witches are punished, having their tongues cut. In return, the spirit Amel, protector of the sisters, avenges them by turning Akasha and husband Enkil into creatures thirsty for blood. Along the centuries the vampire kind is created. Lestat, now a rockstar, wakes Akasha from her long time sleep with his loud music. Observing how everything has evolved after thousands of years, greedy Akasha wants all of this bliss for herself. As a result, she decides to kill anyone who opposes her and to create a new vampire order that will rule the world. Lestat manages to stop her with the help of his fellow vampires.

“*The Queen of the Damned*” and “*The Mummy*” present scenes of dismemberment and fragmentation. Akasha organizes a carnage through spontaneous combustion; she kills the ones around, proving her powerful gifts. Cleopatra is only partially brought back to life; an arm and a leg are mummified, to the others’ shock. When rejected, feeling scared and angry, she breaks their necks ; this happens to Henry, his Egyptian mistress Malenka, a saleswoman while Cleopatra was purchasing a dress and a couple of men whom she has sex with.

Both Akasha and Cleopatra are thrilled by the new world they wake up in and by its ignorance and moral decay. They find it easy to lure people and engage in sexual intercourse with them. But these ancient women use primitive means to get what they want; so violence is their second nature.

Anne Rice’s characters eat themselves from the inside out; most are desperate to find peace with themselves and they succeed. But some don’t and are still looking for redemption. “*The Mummy*” presents the search for shared love and “*The Queen of the Damned*” tackles matters like dominance, survival and inner balance. These vampires are Christ haunted creatures, struggling like wild animals in a cage. They want the truth about God and life; they pursue it by destroying Akasha and re-establishing serenity in the human world. This way, the queen of the damned is not their queen after all. In addition, they become less damned, less fearful and eager to be accepted by humans. They are closer to light, to self forgiveness.

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