

Travel the Nile with Pharaohs

Pauline Gedge
The Twelfth Transforming
 MacMillan of Canada
 416 pages
 \$22.95 hardcover

review by David Jordan

On Nov. 4, 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter brushed aside a pile of limestone chips at a site alongside the Nile River to discover a stairway. At the foot of that stairway stood a stone door that had been sealed shut over 3,000 years ago.

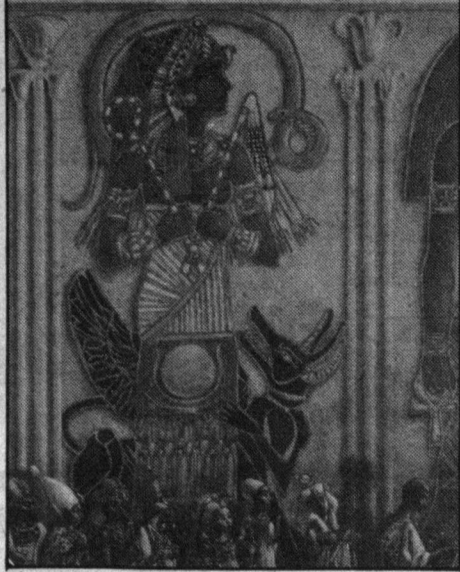
Behind the door lay the body of a 19 year-old pharaoh, preserved inside a 250-pound, solid gold coffin.

Tutankhamun was the last direct descendant of a royal family that had ruled Egypt for nearly two centuries. His father, Amunhotep IV, had nearly destroyed a kingdom that previous Amunhotep pharaohs had consolidated during Egypt's 18th dynasty, and it was Tuntankhamun's place in history to keep Egypt from crumbling entirely under the encroaching armies of neighbouring Assyria and Palestine.

Egypt was at the height of its glory under the reign of Amunhotep III, "The Magnificent," from approximately 1403 B.C. - 1366 B.C. Tutankhamun took the throne somewhere around 1360 B.C. The intervening decade, during which Amunhotep IV (who later named himself Akhenaten) nearly crushed Egypt with his heretical reformation, is the subject of Pauline Gedge's novel.

The plot is based on recorded Egyptian history, a history with no lack of details to provide intricate twists and subplots. Over 400 clay tablets survive from Akhenaten's

The
Twelfth Transforming
 Pauline Gedge
 Author of *Child of the Morning*



foreign office, providing a complete record of Egypt's shrinking borders under his reign. Surviving artwork gives us detailed images of the royal family, and letters have survived chronicling the personal relationships between pharaohs and empresses, queens and princes.

No matter how complete the archive, though, no collection of artifacts will succeed in recreating the living, breathing world of ancient Egypt. Gedge begins with all the historical data, then takes off on her own, using her considerable artistic talent to fill in

the blanks between names and dates.

In *The Twelfth Transforming*, we see Tiye, the wife of two successive pharaohs, fighting to maintain her exalted position as empress, and to secure the throne for her sons. We witness the intense rivalry between Tiye and Nefertiti, Tiye's niece who is beautiful enough to take the throne away from Tiye, but not cunning enough to keep it. We see jealousy drive Nefertiti to the murder of her cousin, and greed impel Tiye to accept her own son's insane plea to marry him.

Akhenaten, the insane heir to the Amunhotep dynasty, is the center of the drama, and while Ms. Gedge is artful in her portrayal of the motivations behind cat-like battles between empress and queens, it is in her insight into the gradually developing madness of the last Amunhotep that she really excels.

Akhenaten has a plan to unite all Egypt's myriad religious sects under one god. His peace plan goes awry when neighbouring countries fail to accept his divinely-inspired vision of a unified world. Driven further and further into seclusion, Akhenaten loses all perspective, until he ends up draining the entire country's coffers to shower the streets of his holy city with gold.

Gedge delves deep into the psyche of the madman, and she reminds us that there is at least a little madness in all of us. For example, the twisted reasoning in Akhenaten's proposal to his own mother is so skillfully constructed that this powerful scene leaves the reader actually sympathizing with Tiye and her acquiescence.

The world that Gedge constructs is not limited to personalities and historic events.

Her detailed descriptions of the warm desert nights, of cool marble hallways and bed-chambers drenched in the pungent odours of incense and lotus blossoms, are so convincing as to be almost eerie. It seems impossible that she has not actually been there, sharing a table with Amunhotep III at the feast of Opet, or gliding down the Nile alongside Akhenaten in the royal barque.

As a historical novel, *The Twelfth Transforming* ranks with the best. There are brief moments, though, when the historian speaks louder than the novelist, as in such explanatory asides as: "Egypt worshipped many lesser monkey gods, and baboons were considered sacred," or "only men wove cloth, just as only men baked bread."

Where she departs from factual data and enters into artistic speculation, Gedge's insights into the religious and social influences on her characters are timeless. The imposed political world she constructs, though, is oddly reminiscent of a familiar 20th century outlook. We can't help but be just a little suspicious when over and over again, the fall of the empire is attributed to

Akhenaten's lack of military spending. And we can only smile when Egyptians see the merit in Tuntankhamun's restraint plan: "... the wealthy courtiers ... knew that the end result of such harsh policies would be their ultimate enrichment once the economy stabilized."

If you can't afford to haul your body to Hawaii or Jamaica this Christmas, let your mind take you to 14th century B.C. Egypt. I guarantee that *The Twelfth Transforming* will keep you transfixed for at least a week.

record reviews from p. 13

Blackfoot
Vertical Smiles
 Atco/WEA

In *Blackfoot* we have some veteran rockers. Ken Hensley, for instance, has been around for a coon's age (remember Uriah Heep and "Easy Living" circa 1974?). And on the back cover of this album the band thanks some guy "for fourteen years of dedication and agony."

The years seem to have taken their toll, and left the band open to the most devastating charge that can be made against anyone from the Van Halen school — they sound tired. True, there is some spark on "Get It On" and "A Legend Never Dies," but not enough to carry the songs or the album.

And it is just coincidence that every song here is about decay, and the spectre of

dreams slipping away? Even in "Get It On," where the freneticism matches the title, the signer sees the red light in the rear-view mirror and the men in white coming to take him away. Perhaps rock and roll really is a young man's game.

Actually, there is one standout track on the album: a cover of Tim Rose's 1967 classic "Morning Dew." It is probably the best anti-nuke song in existence, and if the anti-nukers had any brains (a debatable hypothesis) they would make it their anthem.

Blackfoot keep their version quite simple, as it should be (Jeff Beck ruined his version with a lot of extraneous wah-wah guitar), and though the final version isn't quite transcendental it is still damn fine. About the only complaint I can make against it is that, in a song this pure, the word "baby" should not be pronounced bay-beh.

TRIVIA ENTERTAINMENT

Yes, we have a winner. Would Don Blazevich please come by The Gateway office (282 SUB) to pick up his two albums. The jackpot is back to one album - to win, answer all the following questions before noon Friday. Drop off entries at The Gateway Office.

Music

1. The bodysnatchers were a product of the ska craze of 1979-1980. Into what band did the Bodysnatchers evolve?
2. Who makes a cameo appearance in the video of The Bangles 'Going Down To Liverpool'? What band originally recorded the song?
3. What is the name of the building Cyndi Lauper is dancing in front of on the cover of 'She's So Unusual'?

Movies

4. In *An American Werewolf in London*, what was the name of the small country pub?

5. In 1972, Diana Ross portrayed the lady who sang the blues. Which legendary performer did she portray?

Television

6. What was the name of Marcus Welby's nurse?
7. *Another World* has produced two short lived daytime spinoffs. The second was *Texas*. What was the first?
8. Before she was on *Dynasty*, Pamela Sue Martin was what 'super-sleuth'?

Last week's answers

1. Formerly in *The Jam*
2. Siouxsie and The Banshees
3. Tommy Ramone
4. Adron, Ohio
5. *Gregory's Girl*
6. James Stewart, Alfred Hitchcock
7. Andrews Sisters
8. Gil Gerrard
9. Ginger Grant, *Gilligan's Island*

Entertainment Writers meeting following

Staff meeting Tuesday at 1:00 pm

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