

MPM

a bulletin on the doings and undoings of
Barbara Mertz/Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels
Issue 40
Summer/Fall 2002
Kristen Whitbread, Editor

The Amelia Peabody Books By Elizabeth Peters

In chronological order:
Crocodile on the Sandbank
Curse of the Pharaohs
The Mummy Case
Lion in the Valley
Deeds of the Disturber
The Last Camel Died at Noon
The Snake, the Crocodile, and the Dog
The Hippopotamus Pool
Seeing a Large Cat
The Ape Who Guards the Balance
The Falcon at the Portal
He Shall Thunder in the Sky
Lord of the Silent
The Golden One

also look for:

mpmbooks.com

MPM: Mertz ● Peters ● Michaels

The official Barbara Mertz/Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels website

by Margie Knauff & Lisa Speckhardt

PUBLISHING

THE GOLDEN ONE	April 2002	Hardcover	Avon Mystery
Lord of the Silent	April 2002	paperback	Avon Mystery

other Elizabeth Peters paperbacks recently (or soon to be) released by Avon Mystery:

Legend in Green Velvet	September 2002
The Jackal's Head	June 2002
The Night of Four Hundred Rabbits	March 2002
Die for Love	January 2002

Barbara Michaels paperback released by Harper Torch:

Smoke and Mirrors	February 2002
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Life comes in clusters, clusters of solitude, then a cluster when there is hardly time to breathe.
May Sarton, *Journal of a Solitude*

MPM

We have had our noses to the grindstone and our shoulders to the wheel. And taken the bit(s) between our teeth(s). The Compendium is almost finished. If I had realized how complicated it was going to be I probably wouldn't have started it, but I got two other people to do most of the work, and the result is sensational. We will brag about it more in future issues of the newsletter. Since it will not be published (by Morrow) until September of 2003 there will be time for us to work up your appetites with tantalizing hints and maybe even a quote or two.

Children of the Storm, the next Amelia, is also in the final stages. (What that means is that I have written most of it and am desperately trying to figure out how to tie up the loose ends.) I haven't been notified about pub date yet, but it will be in April or May of next year.

Otherwise, we haven't done a darned thing except loll around trying to keep cool and ignore the effects of the drought on the garden. Thanks to our assiduous gardener and his assistant (his son) it isn't as bad as it might be. And the well hasn't gone dry yet.

I also did a few interviews and dashed off tributes to a couple of friends, and wrote the introduction to a book of short stories about Egypt, and in an idle moment composed the following diatribe.

I love getting letters from you people and I try to answer most of them. Most of them.

Letters I don't answer:

1. Form letters (Dear Famous Author, or an unconvincing variant thereof), asking for an autograph or a signed picture.
2. Letters from schoolchildren who want me to do their homework. You'd be surprised how many of these ill-taught kids request a list of my books or a long bio. That information is readily available, at libraries and on the net. Why should I look it up for them?
3. Letters (often of Type 1) asking for a signed book or other contribution for a "worthy cause" which may indeed be worthy, but which is unknown to me.
4. Letters from readers complaining about what I did wrong in the last book and telling me how to write the next one.
5. Letters from total strangers asking me to read their book or manuscript and give them a quote.

Letters I do answer:

1. Requests for autographs from individuals -- "for my mom, a big fan, on Mother's Day" sort of thing. I'll always send a note or sign a book for real readers as opposed to dealers and collectors.
2. Letters asking for a signed book or other contribution from a library, or a cause with which I am in sympathy and which is a registered charity.
3. Letters from schoolchildren who have done their homework and who ask specific questions or just want a note of acknowledgement. I remember fondly one candid youth who told me he hadn't liked the beginning of the book much, because it was pretty slow going, but that it picked up okay by the end. (Yes, he got an answer.)
4. Letters from informed readers who give me fascinating tidbits of information about such matters as how to make kerkedah, or tell me about the experiences of a friend or relative who visited Egypt.
5. Fulsome compliments.

AMELIA PEABODY'S EGYPT! KDW

"The long-awaited, authoritative and extremely entertaining compendium to the journals of Amelia Peabody Emerson" will include:

Contemporary photographs and engravings of places and persons mentioned in the journals, many published here for the first time!

For these portraits we are indebted to the compendium's designer Dennis Forbes (also editor of *KMT, A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt*) who conducted an extensive search of the holdings in the Emerson library at the family home in Kent (which was only recently - and very briefly - opened to the public...for a fee). Despite the disappointing and puzzling absence of the original Emerson family photo albums, Mr. Forbes managed to unearth a small cache of photographs and etchings of a number of the individuals the Emersons had the pleasure, and displeasure, to know. Unfortunately, while he was conducting his research, the estate notified him that they had reversed their original decision and were closing their doors to the public. (I think it is worthwhile to mention that they kept the - dare I suggest exorbitant? - fee.) While disappointed at the brevity of contact with the original documents, documents which most certainly would have yielded remarkable revelations had he been allowed to continue his research, he nonetheless has made some astounding discoveries. Just one more reason you will find the compendium to Amelia Peabody's journals to be an "indispensable guide to Victorian Egypt and Egyptology which no one interested in Mrs. Emerson's journals or this period should be without!"

There is a world of difference between truth and facts. Facts can obscure the truth.

Maya Angelou in Brian Lanker, *I Dream a World*
Since MPM won't go to the internet, the internet has come to her.

Kathy Hedges (on behalf of her Yahoo group discussion pals) has been plying us with questions which we have saved for this newsletter (and for future issues): At the end of The Golden One...Sethos says, "Loving you has not prevented me from loving Margaret as much. You understand, I think." Amelia says, "Yes," and kisses him.

I have been maintaining...that "Yes" means "Yes, I understand. Loving Emerson has not prevented me from loving you as much." It's a really subtle, well-done scene, having Amelia and Sethos confess their love for each other but also agree that they are going to remain loyal to the other person in their life.

A few other people in the newsgroup see it the same way, but a number of them disagree vehemently. They claim she just kissed Sethos out of sympathy and some of the old attraction. "Amelia would never love anyone but Emerson," "If she said she loved Sethos, he'd dump Margaret in a minute" etc. have been some of the responses. So now we have to resort to the ultimate authority - what *did* Amelia mean by saying that?

MPM Love, my children, cannot be limited or measured. Loyalty is only one of the many elements that enter into one individual's love for another - but if anyone thinks Amelia is sticking to Emerson solely out of loyalty, s/he hasn't been paying attention. I leave ambiguities because life is ambiguous. What would you guys have to argue about if I spelled everything out?

Kathy Hedges: There seems to be some confusion among people on the Amelia-list as to the nature of Maude and Geoffrey's relationship in "Falcon." A number of people were under the impression that Maude was pregnant when she died, and I said that I thought there was no evidence for this.

Amelia refers to Geoffrey as Maude's "lover," and I assumed she was using the word in its Victorian sense, that they were emotionally attached but not physically so. A number of other people...seem to have assumed that Amelia meant "lover" in the modern sense, and that this was proof that Geoffrey and Maude had gone to bed together.

MPM I don't believe Maude was pregnant and neither did Amelia - tha's why she wanted an autopsy, to quell malicious gossip. She suspected (as do I) that Geoffrey and Maude had been lovers in the physical sense. He was an unscrupulous scoundrel. But we'll never know for sure, will we?

Connie Miller: In your last newsletter you asked what we thought of the cover on the paperback of Lord of the Silent. My first response to it was mystification...what the heck does this blue flower have to do with Egypt? It didn't represent any Egyptian flower I knew of. Then I thought that perhaps it had something to do with the plot. But after reading the book last week, I still had no answers. So in response: I hated the cover and think it showed a decided lack of knowing what they were doing.

MPM The flower is an Egyptian lily (lotus). It doesn't have a darned thing to do with the plot. I wasn't in favor of the cover, but my publisher insisted it would attract new readers. Who am I to object to higher sales? We'll see if that happened. I will always prefer the Egyptian theme covers, which are painted by a marvellous artist named Phill Singer. Check his website if you are interested in purchasing prints or

originals of any of them: www.psingerart.com

Dorothy Fincher: I have wondered about the similarity between many of the characteristics of Emerson and John McIntire from The Jackals Head. I find it interesting.

MPM How clever of you to notice that McIntire was an early Emerson. I didn't notice it myself until I was checking the galleys for The Jackal's Head - after all, I wrote it over thirty years ago. Our forgetful authors....

KDW Joan DeFato sent us the background information about kerkedah, which MPM drinks while in Egypt and about which we have had some discussion in the newsletter. Kerkedah is made from the blossoms of the Hibiscus sabdariffa plant which was originally native to India and Malaysia. The plant has since naturalized throughout tropical and subtropical climates and is also known as Roselle and Sorrel (the plant Barbara Armistead mentioned that they offer in Panamanian markets at Christmas), in addition to a number of regional names. And yes, Ms. Armistead, it did travel as seeds with the slaves to the New World. The dried blossoms (some varieties are green rather than red) are used in sauces, relishes, beverages, and soups. (It is also used in Red Zinger Tea. In a previous newsletter Henri Hartman mentioned Stash Ruby Mist tea as a substitute - it is likely derived from the same plant as well.) The plant has anti-scorbutic and diuretic properties. Oil extracted from the seeds is used in herbal pharmacology and is often "applied to camel sores," according to Useful Plants of West Tropical Africa. The sap from the leaves is used for external sores. The variation of this plant var. altissima Wester is grown for its hemp-like fiber throughout Africa, Central America, and the Phillipines. In any case, I believe we can safely isolate at least one of the ingredients in Kadija's salve!

MPM We strive to inform as well as entertain.

Elizabeth Edwards asks what the little symbol (Sethos's mark on page 417 of The Golden One) is supposed to signify. She also writes: If you (as I) object to the current fad of verbalizing everything, how about a recent "suicidized"!!

MPM The symbol is supposed to be the horns and sundisc of the goddess. I told my editor it didn't work! "Suicidized" is appalling! Where will it end?

KDW I'm just trying to figure out how, precisely, one suicidizes? You can't *be* suicidized since that implies action on the part of another, which would be murderizing, of course.

Wayne and Carolynn Walter: We believe we recognize Inspector Cuff (from "Deeds" and "Snake") as the (promoted) Sergeant Cuff created by Wilkie Collins, in his classic detective novel, The Moonstone, (1868). Assuming we are correct, can you tell us if the character is based on an actual person of the 19th century? We've had no luck trying to track him down.

MPM Wilkie Collins, yes. So far as I know, Cuff is purely fictitious, but - difficult as it may be to believe this - I don't know everything.

Drusilla Carter: In Naked Once More you mention three unsolved mysteries. Lizzie Borden is a familiar figure to anyone raised in New England, as I was. The princes in the tower are also familiar to any reasonably well-read person with an interest in history. But who was

"the guy who went back into the house to get his umbrella and vanished off the face of the earth?"

MPM Intense cogitation failed to resurrect the memory, so I resorted to a friend of mine who got back to me within an hour. The friend is Daniel Stashower, author of (among other books) a great bio of Arthur Conan Doyle - and the answer is: In the short story, "The Problem of Thor Bridge" (in Conan Doyle's The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes) Dr. Watson mentions his famous despatch box, which contains memoranda about such cases as that of "Mr. James Phillimore, who went back...." I didn't make it up; Conan Doyle did, and I have no shame about borrowing from him.

Jennie Grant: You changed audio publishers and the confounded idiots abridged your book! Next time, please don't allow an abridgement. Barbara Rosenblat is a superb narrator, but if she has changed publishers, find a new narrator. It would be very difficult to get used to a new narrator, but listening to an abridged version is unthinkable.

MPM The full length audio of The Golden One will be available - as always - from Recorded Books, read by Barbara Rosenblat, in August. They are slow. We are waiting for it as eagerly as you. I wouldn't let anyone but Barbara do the real version; I hate abridged books in any form, but my publisher has those rights.

KDW Short lesson in publishing: the rights to publish an audio abridgement often belong to the publisher who actually drafts the abridgement, hires the reader, tapes the novel, and then releases it simultaneously with the book. On the other hand, MPM, who owns the rights to the unabridged version, has always insisted that the first full length audio be read by Barbara Rosenblat.

KDW Thank you so much, Joyce Koontz, for the recipes from Larousse Gastronomique for leftover camel parts. ("Larousse" is France's attempt at The National Center for Biotechnology Information Taxonomy Database's Joy of Cooking. Looking to create a culinary classic with that bit of endangered Kalahari Aye Aye, or perhaps you'd like to incorporate the *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* bacteria into your cream for a more piquant flavor? Look no further!) I had planned to simply simmer the camel's feet in a soup, but now I can make Pieds de Chameau a la Vinaigrette: "Soak the feet of a young camel. Cook them in a White court bouillon in the same way as for calf's feet. Drain them. Serve with Vinaigrette sauce." Sort of pickled pigs feet Arabian style. Now, if I can just get the camel to cooperate...

He believed in the Good, in the balance of things, and in an eventual, tremendous pay-day.

Elizabeth Bowen, *Making Arrangements*

AND THEN THERE WERE NINE... KDW

Recall that Agatha Christie mystery Ten Little Indians? I certainly do. Daily. You see, I have been raising ducklings. I suppose in order for that apparent non-sequitor to make sense I should begin at the beginning, when my mother discovered a little tub of 28 eggs, neatly cradled in downy feathers and dried grass, upon her doorstep. Twenty eight potential foundlings. She took them in. Then she went to retrieve her incubator from the jumble in the attic where it had sat, dusty and unused, for over twenty years. This is where I come in. For years I had asked to borrow that incubator; I fondly remembered raising geese and ducks as a child and wanted to raise just ONE goose. However, it is like using your fingers to pry an oyster open for its pearl to get my mother to relinquish anything that was of any use at any time in her life. Nonetheless, rather like the oyster farmer intent upon retrieving the pearl, I knew I simply needed the right tool. My father. I waited until my mother was out of town for a week and mentioned to him that I had noticed an incubator cluttering up the attic, which I'd be glad to take off his hands. (And after

all, what were the chances that after twenty years of disuse she would actually need it?) The following week she called to inquire after her incubator. I came clean - admitted my crime; she offered me 28 duck eggs to incubate. At the time I assumed that meant absolution for my sins.

All but six eggs hatched. Twenty two.

Two emerged prematurely and, with tremendous time and effort, I managed to bring one of those along to ducklinghood. Twenty one.

One got stepped on and squashed by the other ducklings. Twenty.

One died of initially mysterious causes. Nineteen.

I found the next one sick at two the following morning - I held him until he died. Eighteen.

In a panic I called my mother at 7am and described the symptoms which three others now exhibited. She encouraged me to call Ruby. Ruby has raised water fowl for over 40 years. Ruby sounded a bit feeble when I spoke to her on the phone and I thought perhaps it was the hour of the day. She diagnosed the problem, told me to get them on an antibiotic and out of heat, and then, in the background, I heard a voice saying, "Honey, your gonna hafta hang up now; we've got to prep you." Yes, my mother had given me the number of Ruby's room at the hospital where she was being prepped for a major back operation.

In all, during the Great Pneumonia Epidemic of '02, one more died and two were waning. Seventeen. Then there were sixteen. That would be after Jack, our Australian Cattle dog, attempted to herd them into a tight circle and one duckling tried to make a break for it. Foolish, foolish duck.

Then there were fifteen - sort of. That would be following the attack by Bob, one of our cats, who seriously wounded (but did not kill) one of the ducklings. It is still in the house hanging by a thread as I write. It joined the other two who survived the Great Pneumonia Epidemic but who have various other, possibly mortal, health problems as a result.

Now there are 12 healthy ducklings and three housebound "Iffies." I do a head count every time I handle them. I believe the parallels to Ten Little Indians should be obvious by now. In an attempt to be philosophical about it I recall the words of Madeleine L'Engle, "to be born is to start the journey towards death," albeit a somewhat condensed journey in our house.

While I do not wish to be unkind, in retrospect I begin to wonder whether mother actually pardoned me for my transgression.