

THE MUMMY'S CURSE

Mummymania in the
English-speaking world

Jasmine Day



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THE MUMMY'S CURSE

The riddle of the 'curse of the pharaohs' is finally solved via a radical anthropological treatment of the legend as a cultural concept rather than a physical phenomenon. The most penetrating study of the curse ever conducted shows that its structure and meaning changed over time, as public attitudes towards archaeology and the Middle East were transformed by events such as the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. Victorian women writers likened unwrapping to rape, but to exploit the growing popularity of Egyptology, Hollywood turned mummies from victims into monsters, destroying the curse's power to challenge abuses of human remains. Mummies came to symbolize everything wrong and rotten: pollution, age, death, difference and defiance of authority, becoming imaginary friends or cautionary examples for children.

The Mummy's Curse uncovers forgotten nineteenth-century fiction and poetry, revolutionizes the study of mummy horror films and reveals the prejudices embedded in children's toys. Original surveys and field observations of museum visitors demonstrate that media stereotypes – to which museums inadvertently contribute – promote vilification of mummies, which can invalidate demands for their removal from display. *The Mummy's Curse* asks: must we debase other cultures in order to practise our own?

Jasmine Day is a freelance lecturer in Egyptology.

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FOR DOMINIC MONTSERRAT

True of voice, repeating life

Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at
loggets with them? Mine ache to think on't.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.i.92–4
(Hubler ed. 1987: 152)

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
1 Unravelling the mummy	1
2 Sex and death: nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular culture	19
3 Fear and loathing: twentieth-century classic mummy films	64
4 Giggles and goosebumps: late twentieth-century popular culture	94
5 Attraction and repulsion: mummies in museums	129
6 Wrapping it up	169
<i>Appendix: questionnaires, interviews and participant observation</i>	181
<i>Notes</i>	187
<i>Bibliography</i>	193
<i>Objectography</i>	214
<i>Index</i>	216

ILLUSTRATIONS

Plates

1.1	Cover art, <i>Forbidden Worlds</i> #11, 1952	5
2.1	Mummies and coffins for sale, Ramleh, Egypt, 1888	37
2.2	(a), (b) Brass erotic statuette by Franz Bergman, c.1905–10	42
2.3	(a), (b) Kinney Brothers tobacco card, c.1885–95	59
3.1	Lobby cards. (a) <i>The Mummy's Curse</i> , 1944. (b) <i>The Mummy's Ghost</i> , 1944	84
3.2	US one-sheet poster, <i>The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb</i> , 1964	85
4.1	Toys and figurines: cute creatures dressed as scary mummies	99
4.2	Cover art, <i>The SpineChiller Collection</i> #4, 1997	104
5.1	(a), (b) Plaster ambulatory mummy model, New Walk Museum	140
5.2	British Museum posters, Holborn station, London	156
6.1	Mummy and visitor, Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum	176

Figures

2.1	Structural changes in the curse legend. (a) The Preclassic curse. (b) The Classic curse	61
5.1	Positions in which questionnaire respondents thought coffins were entombed (question 9)	147

Tables

1.1	Fieldwork projects in museums	13
5.1	Reasons given by South Australian Museum interviewees for mummies' fragmentation, <18 and ≥18 years (question 4)	132

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UNRAVELLING THE MUMMY

Picture this: A group of Egyptophiles have gathered for a social evening. We are all sitting watching a movie with an ancient Egypt theme. As we munch our popcorn, we are really waiting for only one thing, the star of the show – the mummy! We want to see him stagger around chasing the hapless heroine, rotted bandages falling away from his imperfectly preserved features.

L. Green, *Mummymania* (1992:34)

The mummy's conundrum

'[T]he fantasy world acquires a particular fabulous concreteness in popular intellectual life' whenever a fictional character divorces its original context, enters into public consciousness and takes on a life of its own (Gramsci 1985:350). The mummy has staggered out of pages and screens for two centuries, strewing a trail of laughter and terror in its wake.

It may seem strange that ancient Egyptian human mummies¹ have received an inordinate amount of attention since their rediscovery by Europeans. They have accumulated significances within contemporary cultures even greater than those originally attached to them. Yet few people realize what mummies' 'phantasmagoric other life in the western imagination' (Montserrat 1999a:20) means, know how it originated, or question the prejudices inherent in it. The passage of mummymania – the popular fascination with Egyptian mummies – through the underbelly of culture, from Victorian pulp fiction through horror films and into late twentieth-century children's toys and cartoons – has caused it to be largely overlooked by academics and public alike, even now that the long history of conflict between Western and Middle Eastern nations has come to a disturbing climax. The story of mummies' treatments in the hands and imaginations of English-speaking peoples has never before been told with sufficient depth of insight in conjunction with breadth of historical purview. It has the potential to persuade those who read it to reflect upon the insidiousness of

cultural stereotypes that seem harmless, and upon the power of the media to manipulate our thoughts.

I want to explain the problem and the irony that practising one's own culture can entail the distortion, even denigration of others' cultures. Hopefully, this will help you to avoid making the same mistake. I am not without fondness for my subject matter, sitting here at my desk cluttered with little Egyptian toys; this book describes some aspects of modern culture that are as important and interesting as their ancient sources of inspiration. However, a critical perspective upon mummymania tempered with affection for it reveals the nature of culture as a conundrum – a source of identity, meaning and pleasure, but simultaneously a generator of stereotypes and intolerance. Mummy fantasies should certainly be 'accepted and appreciated for what they are, rather than condemned or dismissed for what they are not' (Lupton 2003:46); fictions should not bear responsibility for educating the public about Egyptology. Judging by museum visitors' responses to my surveys, though, these fictions actively hinder many people's cultural education, not only obscuring historical facts but also perpetuating outdated racist assumptions and colonialist ideas disguised in some apparently innocuous form – a cartoon, a child's toy. Yet these same fictions are used, for instance, to engender values of responsibility and cleanliness in children, and may have inspired many people to become Egyptologists (ibid.:45). To sacrifice mummymania in the name of improving intercultural understanding might cost as much as it could gain. I cannot offer a solution to this problem; I only set out to describe and explain it more fully than others have done before. One must know the question before searching for its answer.

Mummies and the media

Trash and treasure

Egyptianizing products and media images are often based upon originals that are themselves at least once removed from their ancient sources of inspiration (Rice and MacDonald 2003:8). It is tempting to dismiss the results of this process as historically inaccurate and tacky, to condemn the 'cookie tins . . . that look like King Tut's treasures . . . [and the] "glow in the dark" mummy that springs from a plastic coffin and tosses rubber bats and cobras into the air . . . [as] warning signs . . . of the past being popularized and perverted by the present' (Holt 1986:60). However, this verdict misses an important point. Ancient Egypt is being manipulated in order to create new meanings for its old images, so that these venerable motifs can be put to work in culture today. Together, people negotiate standard meanings for particular motifs and establish the manner of their use in particular contexts. By tracing the development of fictional mummy images over time as they became increasingly abstracted from their sources, I can suggest what modern social

issues and beliefs must have influenced the mummies' creators to portray them in particular ways. I can demonstrate the mummies' derivation from their earlier imaginary counterparts. Finally, I can show how these mummies with their manipulated traits were made to serve particular causes and how they have influenced not only the appearances and functions of their fictional descendants, but also museum visitors' reactions to real mummies. Mummymania's production of some of the most radical reworkings of ancient Egypt in modern popular culture (Lupton 2003:23) suggests that the mummy may have been adapted to a wider range of uses than any other appropriated Egyptian motif.

Although Europeans first encountered mummies during the Middle Ages (Germer et al. 1997:95), they were celebrated mostly after the French conquered Egypt in 1798. Ancient Egypt became the subject of a new science and captured public imagination in continental Europe, Britain, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand during the nineteenth century, inspiring films, plays, poems, novels, paintings, jewellery, haute couture, objets d'art and architecture.² Imaginative expressions of public fascination with ancient Egypt, known as Egyptomania, include the subfield of mummymania. Popular interest in things Egyptian continued in the twentieth century, fuelled by the unprecedented discovery in 1922 of a royal tomb almost untouched by thieves: that of Tutankhamun. As images of his golden treasures sparked another wave of Egyptomania – dubbed Tutmania – it became clear that popular visions of ancient Egypt were pervasive and persistent, a challenge to the domination of Egyptology by academics (Frayling 1992:10–24). It is this conflict with authority shared by mass media and everyday behaviours that classifies them as a collective: popular culture (Hall 1981:234). Although relations between Egyptologists and the public are sometimes confrontational, laypeople are the source of Egyptological funding, so scholars should acknowledge popular culture, whether or not they agree with its content. Egypt's heritage does not belong to experts alone (Rice and MacDonald 2003:1–2).

Scholars once preferred to study 'high' culture, such as European Egyptianizing fine art and architecture, because as members of social elites, they regarded 'low' (popular) culture, especially horror films (Horrocks 1995:84), as shallow or harmful (Traube 1996:131). Even Lon Chaney Jr regarded his own mummy films as a waste of cinemagoers' money (Weaver 1995:75). Until recently, this attitude – along with an underestimation of the impact of mummies and funerary artefacts upon the Egyptian Revival (Pearce 2000:116) – caused mummymania to be neglected by academics (Lupton 2003:23). Most researchers have shunned mass-produced mummy kitsch. Mummy films have been widely discussed, but often superficially. Most mummymania books have been little more than annotated lists of films and works of fiction. Mummymania is not a mere collection of bric-a-brac but a cohesive system of ideas and images rooted in the history of colonialism,

archaeology and the media. In-depth analysis of it has been limited, so many of the other academic mummymania studies can be integrated into this project.³

'Trash' culture expels the fears and taboos repressed in mainstream popular culture (Hutchings 1993:187). The horror genre explores the forbidden realm of interrelationships between 'insanity, science, religion, sexuality, perversity' (Horrocks 1995:3) in a search for solutions to the most troubling elements of the human experience. In the patriarchal West, it also expresses anxiety about the instability of male authority (ibid.:85–6; Hutchings 1993:55). Mummies have become associated with symbols of physical and moral corruption that are crucial to both the catharsis of the horror genre and the anarchic spirit of children's culture. I am going to explore the ideas that animated cartoons, films and toys have associated with mummies, and demonstrate that similar ideas have been expressed through phenomena that are taken more seriously, such as mummy unwrappings and letters to newspaper editors. This approach enriches Egyptomania studies' conventional emphasis upon material culture with anthropology's focus upon cultural practice. It also expands the boundaries of anthropology. Until recently, anthropologists ignored popular culture (Traube 1996:127–30), so now they must find ways to 'connect an ethnography of everyday life with studies of how culture is produced and made available to be consumed' (ibid.:144). By showing that museum visitors may influence and be influenced by media portrayals of mummies, my ethnographic studies of visitors connect individuals' experiences with the books they read, films they watch and products they use.

The meanings of mummies

Since the nineteenth century, Western popular culture has represented mummies with reference to a myth called 'the mummy's curse', 'the curse of the pharaohs' or simply 'the curse'. Tutankhamun is apportioned a curse of his own: the deaths of people associated with the excavation of his tomb have been attributed by the press to his malice. These ideas are based upon a belief that the presence or possession of mummies brings bad luck, causing illness, injuries or death. The curse has been used to explain personal mishaps, warfare and disasters. Those who believed in curses tended not to differentiate between archaeologists and thieves; they thought that entering an Egyptian tomb for any reason violated the dead, and that the perpetrators would be punished by the mummy's magic. By 1922, these beliefs were so commonplace that press reports about Tutankhamun's curse appeared credible to many readers (Frayling 1992:43). Then cinema adopted the legend. Universal Pictures in Hollywood produced six mummy-themed films between 1932 and 1955, which inspired later films, notably four British Hammer Studios productions released between 1959 and 1971. Cinema popularized 'ambulatory mummies' (Holt 1986:60) as the means by which the curse is enacted:

animated by magic, a mummy avenges sacrilege by killing the offenders. The cinematic version of the curse has inspired popular culture ever since (Plate 1.1), but the media usually portrays curses as evil or trivializes them. Considering that indigenous peoples have recently protested against the



Plate 1.1 Cover art, *Forbidden Worlds* #11, 1952, © American Comics Group (author's collection).

excavation, display and museum storage of their ancestral human remains (Nail 1994; Simpson 1994; Southworth 1994), why has the curse, with its explicitly ethical argument, fallen into disuse as a protest against the archaeological management of Egyptian mummies? I do not think that the answer lies solely in the popularity of mummies as museum exhibits or in the fact that no specific group of people identify themselves as the rightful custodians of mummies. I must search for the real killer of the curse, the impact of its demise upon fictional mummies, and the effects of these events upon our views about real mummies. The search begins by considering what mummies have meant in the West and from whence meaning itself originates.

In many societies, the dead have been regarded as pitiful yet malevolent spirits. Sigmund Freud attributed this to attempts by the bereaved to purge their guilt at having held grudges against the departed; the fears of the living were projected onto the dead so that they seemed to pose a demonic threat (1940:89–92). Here is one example of the construction of an Other, an imaginary entity designed to act as a foil to the Self. An Other may be described and developed through language or images, even projected onto another person or object (Horrocks 1995:45). Yet it is the product of one's own mind, created to define oneself, to express one's own values by way of contrast and to impose those values upon other people. As mirror images of the Self, Other-figures often reflect the nature of their makers, incorporating elements of the Self (Karp 1991b:374). Those who are cured of their demons are left to face directly the problems that those fantasies sublimated (Freud 1940:92), but many people – even entire cultures – cling to their demons. The most notorious example is Orientalism, identified by Edward Said (1991) as the systematic stereotyping of the East by Western colonialism, government, literature and arts. Lumping the diverse peoples of the Middle East together into an undifferentiated Other, Europeans contrasted their own perceived virtues, such as Christianity and rationality, with the primitivism and paganness that they attributed to peoples whose cultures seemed alien (Karp 1991b: 374). The Eastern past was not exempt from this type-casting; Egyptomania, Tutmania and mummymania are forms of Orientalism (Frayling 1992:xi; Shohat 1997:61, footnote 35). Egypt fascinated the Greeks and Romans as a strange and exotic place, and became Orientalism's first victim when the Romans mounted a slanderous propaganda campaign against Cleopatra VII (Trigger 1995:23). As an ideological construction maintained through social practices and images and enforced by religious and political institutions – as a belief masquerading as a fact – the Other is a discourse (Said 1991:3). Discourses make value judgements (Mercer 1986b:188). Orientalists were obliged to condemn Oriental people, the very subjects of their study (Said 1991:209) and, despite its glorification of ancient Egypt, Western popular culture has singled out mummies as the component of its Egyptian fantasies that embodies its demons.

Ancient Egypt has some special quality that gives it universal and perennial appeal, but the nature of this quality is elusive (Rice and MacDonald 2003:20). To assume that the subject's interest value is intrinsic is to overlook not only ancient Egypt's massive commercial promotion (ibid.:2), but also the evidence that the meanings of things are not inherent, but read into them by the subjective viewer. Different individuals or groups could interpret the same text in a variety of different ways (Mercer 1986a:53). The text itself could invite multiple, even conflicting interpretations (ibid.:62). Classic horror films emphasize mummies as monsters, but it is also possible for viewers to sympathize with Im-Ho-Tep or Kharis when he longs to be reunited with his lover. Why, then, do so many people interpret Egyptian images, notably mummies, in the same way? How can different people with unique ideas also share some ideas in common with other members of their culture (D'Andrade 1995:149)? Something persuades a large proportion of people to attribute some meanings more often than others to mummies.

While meaning does not inhere in an object or image *per se*, its visual attributes (such as colour, shape or substance) have already acquired meaning within its native culture.⁴ Meaning seems able to be read out of objects because 'their meanings are inscribed in their forms' (Appadurai 1986:5). This structuring of the physical environment implants a matching blueprint of the structure in people's minds. The blueprint helps them to make sense of the surrounding cultural scene and, conversely, this environment supplies the images, words and behaviours via which they can make meaningful statements to others (D'Andrade 1995:146). The degree to which the personal blueprint and its cultural master plan match can nevertheless vary. People do not necessarily internalize rigid cultural rules, but 'loose associative networks that enable flexible reactions to the particulars of any given event' (Strauss and Quinn 1994:285). Our memories supply us with experiential precedents that guide our current behaviours (p.287), but we are free to change our behaviours in the face of contrary experience (p.290). For instance, an individual's prejudice against an ethnic group may lessen if that person has a friendly encounter with a member of that group. Some personal schemas – 'the generic versions of experience that remain in memory' – constitute 'cultural understandings' (p.285) that are influenced by the mass media and nation-state lifestyles and thus held in common with many other people, while other schemas are unique, even in conflict with the media (p.293). The sum of these ideas drawn from material culture studies and cognitive anthropology is that the individual's point of view is only unique up to a point. Beyond this, it responds to the codes embedded in something that signals which of various possible interpretations of it is intended by its producer and preferred by its other users. Like an hourglass that guides grains of sand through a bottleneck and into a single chamber below, culture is a process that sifts and sorts the people in a society, encouraging a majority of them to conform to a single fundamental ideology.

Just as an object signals its intended use – a pink garment is usually meant to be worn by a female, for instance – books or films signal to readers or viewers their preferred interpretations, their ‘dominant readings’ (Horrocks 1995:29), by coding characters. The hero or protagonist is portrayed sympathetically, the villain marked as evil by wicked deeds or a disgusting appearance. The invitation to readers or viewers to alternate their sympathies between ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ or dominant and submissive characters (pp.47, 177) is ultimately withdrawn as one character, usually the hero, triumphs. The consumer indulges a fascination for evil but is ultimately allowed to repudiate it by identifying with the heroic victor (p.83). Of course, this effort to determine the consumers’ interpretation may not prevent them from making a different interpretation. The meanings of texts (books, films or objects) are not dictated entirely by their producers or consumers, but via interactions between the two. When the media succeed in directing the ways in which people think, they do so by signalling their products’ preferred interpretations, limiting the range of interpretations that a consumer can choose from (Hall 1980:135).

What, then, is the meaning of the mummy, its dominant reading signalled by texts? Conventional approaches to mummymania emphasize either in-depth analysis (discussion of a single film) or breadth of scope (annotated chronological listing of films or fiction). By combining these approaches I will show for the first time that diverse works in a given period shared some common interpretation of mummies and curses, but also that interpretations changed over time as relations between archaeologists and the public altered. I recognize three principal periods in the history of mummymania: the Preclassic Period (c.1800–1931, Chapter 2), during which romantic visions of mummies competed with sinister legends of curses; the Classic Period (1932–71, Chapter 3), during which Universal and Hammer horror films dominated popular ideas about mummies; and the Postclassic Period (1972–present, Chapter 4), during which derivative works referenced the contrasting paradigms of previous eras, and the collapsing credibility of horror mummies relegated them to children’s culture. The unearthing of paradigms in the history of mummymania leads to several discoveries. First, the dominant meanings of mummies and their curses have changed over time, as transformations in the structure of curses and the personalities and appearances of mummies indicate. Preclassic curse legends challenged the Western imperial domination of Egypt, including archaeological exploitation, but coexisted with mummy romances in which this domination was sanctioned. Mummies were portrayed either as helpless victims of modern grave robbery or as alluring female spirits willing to be dominated by men. Classic films found ways to combine the exciting curse motif with the message of romance: Egypt belongs to the West and all Westerners have the right to participate vicariously in archaeology. The principal way was to convert mummies from victims into villains by overloading them with signs of pollution and evil.

Postclassic works perpetuated this imperialist fantasy in the postcolonial era, but also expanded the range of the mummy's signifying power to include representation of things besides the Middle East that the West still regards as abhorrent or aberrant – everything from unhygienic substances to children's misbehaviour. The changing meanings of mummies and curses show that there has been no such thing as '*the curse*' or even '*the mummy*'. The *raisons d'être* of mummymania cannot be understood if its different phases are glossed over.

The second implication of mummies' changing meanings is that romance and horror, which many authors have treated as two distinct themes, are structurally related. I will show how the concept of seduction, crucial to romances in which a man fell in love with a female mummy, was subverted by public debates about Tutankhamun's curse to forge a shocking equivalence between rape and the mistreatment of human remains. I will also demonstrate the derivation of Postclassic mummies' comical attributes from the horrific traits of their Classic movie forebears. Like an endless race in which the lead constantly changes, a group of competing paradigms yields, for a time, a champion. This dominant paradigm holds sway until a competitor eventually supplants it, but once defeated, it may remain in the contest rather than disappear. All of mummymania's paradigms, from Preclassic romances and curses to Classic horror and Postclassic humour, have remained viable and still exist today. Chapters 2–4 each focus upon one paradigm during its era of dominance, but also mention earlier or later examples of the same paradigm, as well as contemporaneous, competing paradigms. Despite their variation, all these paradigms evaluate mummies as creatures of difference, if not evil. The stark contrast between the filthy, rotting cadavers of Classic and Postclassic popular culture and the Western obsession with youth, beauty and personal hygiene cannot be coincidental; the dreadful imagery commonly associated with mummies, which I will explore in detail, signals that their dominant reading should be as loathsome creatures. Why were the sympathetic victims of marauding archaeologists and treasure hunters turned into monsters by cinema? I will consider another improbable coincidence: the growing popularity of archaeology during Hollywood's golden age of horror. The machinations of the media in this chapter of mummymania are exposed when we think in terms of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony.

Gramsci, imprisoned by the fascist dictator Mussolini as a member of Italy's Communist Party, had good reason to spend his sentence musing about the nature of political power. He considered how some governments maintain control by winning over the hearts and minds of their citizens rather than resorting to force. It occurred to him that the everyday ideas and practices of citizens 'on the ground' are selectively picked up by culture industries, reworked and presented back to the people as their own, supposedly still authentic traditions (Gramsci 1985:35–6). The state can intervene in

this process, removing subversive elements from the appropriated ideas and practices before they are presented back to the people (Bennett 1986a:xv). Apparently attuned to the people's interests, the state receives the people's support and quashes the threat of resistance (Gramsci 1971:244) using persuasion rather than violence (Bennett 1995:67). Writing during the early twentieth century, Gramsci thought in traditional terms of states and citizens. He could not have realized the uncanny accuracy with which he had, in effect, predicted the *modus operandi* of a future media-dominated world. However, he recognized that supposedly purely aesthetic and social activities can constitute political engagements (Williams 1977:110), so that a population can be controlled via culture, not just via politics (Gramsci 1971:242). This control-via-culture is called hegemony (Smart 1986:160), although equally, the term could refer to the very contest for power between rival factions that produces this outcome, this rule by a dominant group with its hegemonic ideology (Williams 1977:110).

Gramsci's definition of culture not as a product of social accord but as the site of a power struggle (Traube 1996:133) means that his model can be adapted to describe relationships between the two components of popular culture: the mass media and their audiences. The media, always searching for ways to generate profit, appropriate and market new concepts and fashions that everyday people invent. Many people accept this intervention because they enjoy using the consumer products that result (Mercer 1986a). However, this process not only erodes the originality and 'coolness' of innovations by replicating them, but also entails some covert doctoring of them by governments (Bennett 1986b:19) or the media (Rouse 1995) to prevent them from summoning opposition to the powers-that-be. The punk fashions of a disadvantaged minority lose their militant eloquence when marketed to the middle classes as 'radical' style. Hegemony is rule by stealth, the mind control of a populace through the exploitation of their culture, manipulation of their values and neutralization of their power by their political or cultural leaders. So could it be, then, that Hollywood sensed that hostile public attitudes towards Egyptology had abated following 1920s Tutmania, and decided to cash in on the new vogue for tomb-raiding by turning the mummy – the former victim of archaeologists in popular lore – into their aggressor? Did cinema's interpretation of the curse gain hegemony without being recognized by the public as a blatant inversion of a moral lesson they had once cherished? Were public values manipulated for the sake of profit? One thing, at least, is certain: after hijacking the curse, the media crippled its efficacy as a critique of archaeology, reducing it to the stuff of far-fetched movie plots. In capturing the public's imagination though, these films supplanted archaeology as the primary source of popular ideas about ancient Egypt. The media need not strive to invalidate the ideas and ethics of science and academia in order to win hegemony in the culture war; they need only furnish appealing distractions from them.

The long-term, if unintentional, effect of cinema's monstrous precedent has been generations of contempt for mummies, from their derogatory portrayals in cinema, cartoons and toys to children's jokes and casual putdowns by museum visitors. I will show that the same visual attributes that deride fictional mummies are referenced by museumgoers as they debate the meanings and authenticity of real mummies. A film is never just a film, fiction never just fiction; 'some schemas . . . [are] evoked in a wide variety of contexts' (Strauss and Quinn 1994:291), so ideas acquired from imaginary worlds are very likely to be put to use in this one. The Egyptological truth suffers as a consequence, but worse still is the potential for retro-racism against the peoples of the past. Many modern icons of ancient Egypt represent desirable qualities such as 'luxury, wisdom and eternity' (Rice and MacDonald 2003:8), but mummies are their inverse: icons of the abject, ancient Egypt's contribution to the Western lexicon of evil. Oriental things, representing that which we are not, can only be longed for as exotic or spurned as deplorable.

Researching mummymania

Source material

Until recently (Pollès 2001), few images of mummy-themed objects had been published. I collected a wide variety of items, from Victorian magazine artwork and Edwardian erotica to film memorabilia, toys, comics, Halloween ornaments, museum shop products and adult and children's fiction and non-fiction books. This collection is by no means comprehensive, given the rarity and expense of some items and the limits to the scope of this project. I focus upon the major media in which dominant mummy paradigms operated: fiction in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, cinema from the 1930s to the early 1970s and material culture since then. Mid- to late twentieth-century material and visual culture has been inadequately theorized, yet is likely to have had the greatest impact upon contemporary museumgoers' interpretations of real mummies. To complement the surfeit of studies of famous literary works, this book introduces some long-forgotten nineteenth-century stories and poems, and omits novels published after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and short stories from American science fiction magazines of the 1930s and 1940s.

Non-English language and ethnic minorities' mummymanias are not discussed here;⁵ my aim is to lay the groundwork for future research by focusing upon the dominant concepts that other mummymanias have derived from or reacted against. The need to traverse a wide range of source material makes it impossible to provide extensive historical, social and political background for every text, but much has already been written about the sociopolitical contexts of Egyptology and Egyptomania.⁶

The museum crusade

Nineteenth-century museums displayed exotic objects from foreign cultures, but interpreted them in Western terms, not from the viewpoints of their makers and users (Handler 1992:22–5). While curators now embrace indigenous and ancient perspectives, the original didacticism of museums endures in their claim to present objective and authoritative interpretations of the meanings of objects (Karp 1991a:14). Today this authority is under attack by the media, which wields far greater power to shape public views.

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

A: Can they come alive again

Male, 6–9 years, TBM questionnaire 1996

Museum professionals have striven to communicate their ideas more effectively, but if exhibits do not address the media stereotypes that influence visitors, they run the risk of reinforcing them. Popular mythology develops not only beyond, but also within, museums whose staffs have produced many 'haunted museum' legends. Museums' routine silence about the means by which they acquired their collections (Clifford 1988:229) – often by appropriation from former colonial territories (Beard and Henderson 1994:7) – leaves visitors to dream up fantastical explanations for mummies' appearances and their presence in museums. To compensate for declining financial support from governments, museums sell mummy products, some of which refer to curses and living mummies.

These problems do not invalidate museums' mission to bring the material past to the public, contributing to cultural and personal life and the resolution of social issues. The museum of the future could take a less didactic approach by posing questions instead of just presenting answers (Clifford 1997:217–18), and by acknowledging unique personal responses to exhibits (Silverman 1995:165, 167). However, the dilemma remains that mummies' original, ancient meanings can be overlooked, distorted or derided when visitors incorporate mummies into their own cultural or personal systems of meaning. If museums have the power to train people to respond to contemporary social issues (Ames 1992:108–9), then they could equip visitors to think more critically about stereotypes. The aim of an exhibition is 'to affect the viewer in some predetermined way' (Belcher 1991:37) and curators have a right to try to achieve this (Miles 1997:10–11). Our lives are enriched by museums, but their mission is threatened by the superior influence of the media. Should museums strike back, 'crusade on behalf of a cause' (Hudson 1991:458)? I think so, and offer to this endeavour an explanation of some of the problems museums can have in communicating with visitors, along with suggestions for solving them (Chapter 5).

Into the field

For my 1995–6 major fieldwork, I visited a variety of museums in England, the United States and Australia to observe the effects that museums' differing sizes and themes had upon visitors' experiences with mummies (Table 1.1). In three months, my intensive programme of visitor surveys and observations, exhibit photography, staff interviews and archival research amassed a large amount of data, not all of which can be included here. Many of the exhibits that I saw have since been modified or totally reinstalled, or are

Table 1.1 Fieldwork projects in museums

MUSEUM (<i>T</i> = temporary display, <i>L</i> = long-term installation)	CODE	LOCATION
<i>Preliminary doctoral fieldwork, 1995</i>		
• 'Through the Eye of Horus', Western Australian Museum (T)	WAM	Perth, Australia
• South Australian Museum (L)	SAM	Adelaide, Australia
<i>Major doctoral fieldwork, 1996</i>		
• Ripley's Believe It Or Not! Museum (L)	–	San Francisco, USA
• Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum (L)	–	San José, USA
• Field Museum of Natural History (L)	FMNH	Chicago, USA
• Milwaukee Public Museum (L)	–	Milwaukee, USA
• Metropolitan Museum of Art (L)	MMA	New York, USA
• Brooklyn Museum of Art (L)	TBM	New York, USA
• Manchester Museum (L)	MM	Manchester, UK
• New Walk Museum (L)	NWM	Leicester, UK
• Ashmolean Museum (T)	–	Oxford, UK
• Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (L)	–	London, UK
• London Science Museum (L)	–	London, UK
• British Museum (L)	–	London, UK
• Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (L) [outside of main fieldwork zones]	–	Leiden, Netherlands
<i>Supplementary doctoral fieldwork, 1998</i>		
• 'Life and Death Under the Pharaohs', Western Australian Museum (T)	WAM	Perth, Australia
<i>Supplementary doctoral fieldwork, 1999</i>		
• 'Life and Death Under the Pharaohs', South Australian Museum (T)	SAM	Adelaide, Australia
<i>Freelance fieldwork, 2004</i>		
• Manchester Museum (L)	MM	Manchester, UK
• New Walk Museum (L)	NWM	Leicester, UK
• British Museum (L, new installation)	–	London, UK
• Bristol City Museum (L)	–	Bristol, UK
<i>Freelance fieldwork, 2005</i>		
• Metropolitan Museum of Art (L)	MMA	New York, USA

Note: This is not a complete list of my fieldwork sites; it lists only the exhibits and visits mentioned in this book.

awaiting reinstallation. Throughout this book, my remarks pertain to the 1996 fieldwork unless otherwise stated.

Very little research into museum visitors' reactions to mummies had previously been conducted. In order to examine the impact of media stereotypes upon visitors – and speculate about stereotypes' origins in visitors' typical museum experiences – it was necessary to carry out some surveys. I also wanted to find out how people responded to fictional mummies and whether they regarded exhibits of mummies as unethical or believed in curses. My surveys included questionnaires at the Western Australian Museum, South Australian Museum and Brooklyn Museum and interviews at the South Australian Museum, Field Museum of Natural History and Manchester Museum (see Appendix). Interviewees were asked to explain their views, which revealed the logic behind the brief comments made by questionnaire respondents.

Participant observation is the cornerstone of anthropological field research. Instead of watching an activity from the sidelines, the anthropologist takes part in it to gain greater insight into its purposes and performance. While looking at mummy displays I recorded other visitors' statements in a notebook. Interviewees were serious and reflective, but the observed visitors made jokes and referred to monster movies. Children, who have not yet learned to lower their voices in museums, were easiest to record; this provided me with some really useful comparative data when I discovered that a large proportion of survey respondents had also been children. I ended up with a wealth of ethnographic background that I could use to interpret contemporary mummy toys and Halloween novelties.

Egyptian mummification: historical background

Introduction

It appears that Egyptian embalmers practised a secretive craft and did not record its methods. The Greeks Diodorus Siculus and Herodotus⁷ recorded the major ancient accounts of mummification. The craft evolved over many centuries and the styles and types of funerary provisions and tombs changed over time. Modern popular culture has often overlooked these changes, but so have museum exhibits with contents arranged by function rather than chronology (Ellis 1993:39, 54). Many people assume that nothing changed in ancient Egypt, so that its personalities and artefacts from disparate contexts 'float around in a rich soup' in their minds (Fisher 2000b: chart 7, cited by MacDonald 2003:96). If one knows something about ancient Egyptian history and funerary developments, the ahistoricism and inaccuracy of media stereotypes becomes apparent. So to introduce some concepts mentioned in this book, here are short histories of ancient Egypt and mummification, and an account of Egyptian attitudes towards death.

A history of ancient Egypt

Over 5000 years ago, during the Predynastic Period, nomadic hunter-gatherers from desert Africa settled in the fertile Nile Valley, developing a ribbon of settlements that eventually consolidated into southern and northern kingdoms. Upper and Lower Egypt were united by the first king, Narmer. The Fourth Dynasty initiated the Old Kingdom (c.2575–c.2134BC, Dynasties 4–8). Thereafter, Intermediate Periods of civil conflict or foreign invasion alternated with lengthy eras of native rule, the Middle (c.2040–c.1640BC, Dynasties 11–14) and New Kingdoms. Most of the pharaohs famous today ruled during the New Kingdom (c.1550–c.1070BC, Dynasties 18–20), including Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), who attempted to subordinate the Egyptian pantheon to one god, the Aten; Tutankhamun, who succeeded Akhenaten, restored the pantheon and died around eighteen years of age; and the warrior and monument builder Rameses II. The Third Intermediate Period (c.1070–c.712BC, Dynasties 21–5), a time of decline, was followed by Persian invasion during the Late Period (c.712–332BC, Dynasties 25–30 and Second Persian Period) that heralded the end of continuous rule by native pharaohs. Alexander the Great seized Egypt in 332BC; after his death, his general Ptolemy initiated a Macedonian dynasty that ruled until the suicide of Cleopatra VII ceded Egypt to Roman rule in 30BC. After the Roman Empire converted to Christianity, its emperors discouraged the practice of traditional religion in Egypt. As temples were closed, knowledge of the hieroglyphic language and Egyptian history, vested in the clergy, was lost. Egypt's Coptic Church became one of the first strongholds of Christianity. The Arabs arrived in Egypt in AD641, introducing Islam, which became the country's dominant religion (Baines and Málek 1994:30–55; Harris 1982:126–7).

Mummification

The dry sand of the desert bordering the fertile Nile Valley can desiccate organic remains, arresting their decay and preserving them indefinitely. Predynastic Egyptians probably noticed the preservation of human corpses exposed by wind or animals in shallow graves at the edge of the desert, and interpreted this as proof of the soul's immortality (Spencer 1991:29–30). Souls required material sustenance in the form of food offerings and grave goods; Egyptians pictured the afterlife as a continuation of life on earth, replete with its trappings of wealth and daily tasks. They therefore believed that corpses ought to remain fleshed and articulated so that their equivalent spirit-bodies would function like living bodies. As Predynastic society became more socially stratified, people of rank were buried with expensive goods. These were often stolen, so wealthy individuals were then entombed in more secure sepulchres carved into the bedrock – but separated from desiccating

sand, their bodies decayed (pp.33–4), destroying their spirits. I think that this was noticed because tombs were probably inspected or explored after robberies. To reconcile the desire to preserve corpses with the need to provide secure tombs, embalmers developed artificial means of mummification (p.34), refining them for centuries. Initially, royalty alone were embalmed, but nobles, bureaucrats and priests adopted the practice. Throughout most of ancient Egyptian history, only the wealthy could afford embalming; peasants continued to inter their dead in the sand (p.165).

During early Dynastic times, bodies were simply wrapped in resin-soaked bandages, expressing a desire to keep them whole (pp.34–6). According to legend, the god Osiris was dismembered by his evil brother Seth and revived after the pieces of his body were bound together by Anubis. If Osiris' dismemberment symbolizes decay, then mummification reverses this effect. However, wrapping alone cannot preserve flesh, so its continuation in later rites was probably symbolic, holding together a body that death threatened to rend apart.

By the Fourth Dynasty, embalmers had learned that decay begins in the viscera. They removed the liver, intestines and stomach via an abdominal incision, placing them in separate vessels (p.37) which, by the Twelfth Dynasty, developed into canopic jars (pp.114–16). In later periods, the lungs were also removed, but never the heart, to which the capacity of thought and emotion was attributed. A knapped blade⁸ was used to make the abdominal incision (Herodotus II.86, de Sélincourt 1996:115).

During the late Old to Middle Kingdoms, a means of preserving flesh was finally developed. Natron, a natural salt, leached from surrounding soil into the water of several ephemeral lakes including the Wadi Natrun. When the waters receded, the natron in solution solidified. These salt lumps were collected, ground and piled over an eviscerated body and its organs, from which the natron absorbed moisture. Bags of natron were temporarily placed within the abdominal cavity. Scholars assumed that Herodotus' description of natron application (II.86) referred to immersion in a saline solution, until experiments demonstrated that only powdered or crystalline natron preserves flesh (Manchester Museum 1979). Desiccated Egyptian bodies were blackened, shrivelled and had lost weight, but when carefully prepared like the finest royal mummies of the New Kingdom, could retain hair, nails and individuals' distinctive appearances (Spencer 1991:116; 119).

The wealthy paid for their bodies to be oiled and perfumed and their abdominal cavities packed with spices rather than mud or rags. From the Eighteenth Dynasty onwards, their brains were removed through a hole punched in the nasal ethmoid bone (p.117).⁹ This method left the face intact, reflecting concern for maintaining the individual's physical integrity. In the Twenty-First Dynasty, dried viscera were replaced inside the abdominal cavity; the use of canopic jars was revived after the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty (p.124). Limbs were wrapped separately, then bound to the body with

subsequent layers of wrappings. Beneath their outer shrouds, completed mummies resembled cocoons. Many bodies were wrapped not in expensive purpose-made bandages but in old garments or torn-up sheets (Ikram and Dodson 1998:153). Magical amulets to protect the body and soul and to restore bodily functions in the afterlife were bound into the wrappings (ibid.:137–51).

After the Twenty-Second Dynasty, embalming skills declined (Spencer 1991:124). So many Egyptians now aspired to an afterlife that only sub-standard embalming could render mummification affordable to commoners. Herodotus claimed that three grades of mummification, from most to least expensive, were available (II.86–8, de Sélincourt 1996:115–6). Evisceration, brain removal and desiccation, a process that took seventy days including accompanying rituals, was the most expensive. Medicinal black liquid bitumen was smeared on mummies in the Late, Ptolemaic and Roman Periods; it was inexpensive, but an ineffective preservative measure (Spencer 1991:125). Summarily prepared bodies often decayed within their elaborate wrappings (p.124). Poor preservation of Late Period and Greco-Roman bodies often resulted from decay prior to mummification; embalmers may have been unable to treat large numbers of corpses quickly enough (p.125). Greeks and Romans apparently kept mummified relatives in their houses, standing upright in shrines for several years prior to entombment (El Mahdy 1989:70). In the Fayum oasis, they incorporated naturalistic life portrait paintings into mummy wrappings (Spencer 1991:192–3). Since mummification was available to a greater proportion of Egyptians after the Third Intermediate Period, tombs of poorer people from later antiquity contained many bodies (pp.130, 193) and most surviving mummies postdate the reigns of native Egyptian monarchs. Mummification was integrated into early Egyptian Christian tradition, but the expense of funerary provisions discouraged their use and mummification was abandoned after the fourth century AD (pp.193–4).

Attitudes towards death

Tomb robbery was commonplace in ancient times. Some of the workers who constructed tombs or stocked them with provisions rifled them shortly after they were sealed. Efforts were made to police the Valley of the Kings, but during periods of civil strife, its tombs were looted (Reeves and Wilkinson 1996:188–93). During the Old Kingdom, some tomb owners cursed thieves with inscriptions such as, ‘Listen all of you! The priest of Hathor will beat twice any one of you who enters this tomb or does harm to it. The gods will confront him . . . [the] crocodile, [the] hippopotamus, and the lion will eat him’ (cited by Hawass 1997:43). One tomb owner threatened to ‘seize [the neck of a thief] like a bird’, but such curses did not reflect the modern popular idea that mummies would awaken and kill those who violated their tombs (Brier 1998:36). Visitors were welcome to pray, make offerings and

read the inscriptions in the public chapels of some types of tombs (El Mahdy 1989:174).

The lyrics of *The Harpist's Song* suggest that some Egyptians were resigned to the inevitable robbery and destruction of their tombs (Parkinson 1991:145–6). Revivals of types of funerary goods used centuries earlier (Spencer 1991:185–9) and the presence of hieroglyphic graffiti in some tombs demonstrate that Egyptians explored ancient sepulchres. Perhaps they were the first antiquarians, taking pains to recover centuries-old sarcophagi for reuse (Dodson 1988). Encounters with the works of their ancestors supported belief in the continuity of the royal lineage and their own traditions (ibid.:514). For all their piety, the Egyptians were pragmatic, interring their dead in abandoned tombs after discarding the remnants of previous burials. Official beliefs about the sanctity of the tomb were compromised in practice (Germer et al. 1997:129). Therefore, while the legend of the mummy's curse presumes that excavations and exhibitions of mummies would offend the ancient Egyptians, it is actually modern sensibilities that have been affronted, so we must examine the histories and values of our own societies to discover the reasons for this presumption.

SEX AND DEATH

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular culture

The remains of ancient Egypt are like the ruins of another world . . . All that relates to a people who could erect such works . . . is wonderful; yet scarcely more so than that the very individual artificers should be brought down in person to the present age. If we could . . . bring back the spirit which once animated . . . these bodies, what wonders would be revealed . . .

Anonymous, *The Egyptian Mummy*, 1823 (1985:3)

Introduction

The mummy characters of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries share a common origin in two nineteenth-century mythologies. One was a romantic fantasy about love affairs between mortals and mummies who came back to life. The other, instigated by moral panic about the excavation of human remains, was a vision of curses placed by ancient Egyptians upon tombs to punish looters. Both paradigms were inspired by typical experiences of the period: encounters with mummies in museums and tombs and at mummy unrollings. Mummies were once more freely available for handling and private ownership than they are today; often unmediated by specialists, these early encounters inspired idylls about communicating with mummies or nightmares about retribution against those who debased the dead.

Around 1900, when specialists' control of Egyptology became increasingly exclusive and Egypt's antiquities export laws were policed more effectively, popular culture expressed a collective frustration that ancient Egypt was no longer literally within the layperson's grasp. Fiction literature and curse legends now had to satisfy the desires once satiated by public unrollings and the black market in antiquities. Later though, as the public began to identify with archaeologists, the idea of mummies as their victims interfered with vicarious participation in their fabulous discoveries – so the evil mummy was born.

Historical overview

Many discussions of the physical and imaginative treatments of mummies during the nineteenth century have overlooked their cultural roles, often as a result of presenting them in chronological order and contrasting scientific with popular practices. The abandonment of these devices will allow me to compare literary works with everyday practices and archaeologists' views with popular lore, revealing that they held many ideas in common. The following outline of mummies' roles in Egyptian, European, British and American society and politics places the phenomena described in this chapter into historical context and refers to texts that discuss Egyptology's sociopolitical background in greater detail.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, into which it had been assimilated following the death of Cleopatra VII in 31BC (Clayton 1990:8), Egypt became increasingly isolated from Europe. The establishment of Islam in Egypt, which followed an Arab conquest in the seventh century AD, discouraged visits by European Christians (*ibid.*: 9–10). Only Crusaders during the Middle Ages (Vercoutter 1992:29), Christian missionaries of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (Clayton 1990:9–10) and those who sought mummies from which to manufacture medicines (Ikram and Dodson 1998:64–6) relayed information about Egypt and its mummies back to Europe. European perceptions of ancient Egypt were drawn primarily from exoticizing Classical accounts and Biblical tales that portrayed the Egyptians as decadent and cruel (Trigger 1995:23). This moral framework justified Europeans' later domination of Egypt and subjection of mummies to scientific study and moral judgement. Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt, which initiated the science of Egyptology, gave Europe its first major, direct contact with the country since ancient times. The French general was accompanied by a bevy of scientists and antiquarians. His scheme was ineffectual as a political manoeuvre to eclipse British conquests abroad, but was an academic triumph and inspired a lasting popular fascination with ancient Egypt (Ikram and Dodson 1998:66–7).

During the early nineteenth century, European consuls approached the Egyptian government for permission to appropriate antiquities. The ubiquity of ancient remains, along with prospects for financial and political benefit and European technological assistance, inclined Egypt's ruler, Mohammed Ali, to consent (*ibid.*:73). Rivals Britain and France competed to acquire the greatest number of objects; the British deployed adventurer Giovanni Belzoni to acquire artefacts for the British Museum (El Mahdy 1989:30). Large European private and public Egyptology collections were assembled. During the mid- to late nineteenth century, wealthy tourists frequented Egypt (Ikram and Dodson 1998:67), causing further despoliation. Professional tomb robbers supplied a burgeoning foreign market; mummies were favoured acquisitions. Transported to England and the United States, they

were unwrapped at travelling carnivals (Holt 1986:60) and elite soirées (El Mahdy 1989:30).

Meanwhile, the science of archaeology was evolving, resulting in more systematic excavations and mummy studies by the close of the nineteenth century (ibid.:35, 38). Preceded only by Thomas Greenhill's research (1705), examinations of mummies in Britain began in the 1830s–1840s with the work of Thomas Pettigrew. After 1850, most scientific unwrappings were conducted in Egypt (Taylor 1995:69). The Egyptian government founded an Antiquities Organization in 1858, although, initially, laws to limit antiquities' export were poorly enforced (El Mahdy 1989:33). In 1881 at Deir-el-Bahari, a cache of New Kingdom royal mummies, from which local villagers had periodically siphoned artefacts for illegal sale, was seized by government officials who relocated the mummies to the Cairo Museum (Ikram and Dodson 1998:77–9). Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 (Shohat 1997:36), so by 1898, many Egyptians resented foreign archaeologists (El Mahdy 1989:38, 40). Antiquities laws were enforced with increasing efficacy and after 1922, when Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered, artefacts recovered in professional foreign excavations remained in Egypt (ibid.:45). In 1924, as Egypt was gaining independence from Britain, its nationalist government expressed hostility towards the country's former colonial masters by temporarily closing the Anglo-American Tutankhamun excavation (Frayling 1992:31).

Thoughts and acts

The mummy as object

De rigueur

It would be hardly respectable, on one's return from Egypt, to present oneself in Europe without a mummy in one hand and a crocodile in the other.

Father Géramb to Pasha Mohammed Ali, 1833
(cited by Ikram and Dodson 1998:67)

In 1840, the Literary and Philosophical Society of Leicester set out to possess the world by collecting natural specimens, art, machinery, ethnographic objects and antiquities and, to represent Egypt, a mummy (Brown 2002:6). Society members hoped that these edifying exhibits, along with donations from professionals and amateurs, the gentry and the working classes (pp.6–7), would impart Christian and civil values to the community (p.4) by uniting its members in a common enterprise. Embodying Egypt, mummies represented one part of a world conquered by the British Empire. Their private possessors owned a microcosmic Egypt.

Wealthy travellers bought mummies and coffins illegally. Yet the Egyptian

government gifted similar specimens to visiting dignitaries. If each of these mummies was a Little Egypt, then Egypt was surrendering itself piecemeal to its colonial masters. In 1869, the Prince of Wales participated in a staged 'discovery' of around thirty mummies in a tomb at Thebes (modern Luxor), which he distributed among a number of British museums. Removed from other locations, they had been planted in the tomb – a common stragem for entertaining officials. Thomas Cook, pioneer of Egyptian package tours, adapted the practice to his guided excursions (Ikram and Dodson 1998:69).

Mummy fragments embodied Egypt just as complete bodies did. French novelist Gustave Flaubert souvenired a mummy's foot, which he displayed on his desk for the rest of his life (Pringle 2001:207). Its fictional counterpart, the foot of the princess Hermonthis in Théophile Gautier's 1840 story *The Mummy's Foot* (1992b), purchased as a paperweight, magically conjures up Hermonthis' spirit and a ghostly vision of pharaonic glory.¹ After 1835, the unauthorized export of antiquities was banned, so tourists souvenired fragments of mummies that could more easily be smuggled out of the country (Pringle 2001:208). They could be bought cheaply from vendors or simply wrenched from bodies (Ikram and Dodson 1998:67). The Reverend William Roby Fletcher of Adelaide, Australia, sent to Egypt in 1890 to collect antiquities for the South Australian Museum, captured the scene:

[T]his body-snatching is a curious business. It is an odd sensation to stand on a mound of rubbish and see bits of dirty sponge-like stuff, and shreds of cerements and human bones lying all about. You pick up one of these spongy bits and find that it is fibrous muscular tissue. You get interested and poke into the sand, and then, turning round, see a youngster holding a head in his hands, which he wants to sell you for 10 or 20 piastres, or the hand of some nameless beauty torn from her mummy. . . . [S]omehow one gets over the awkwardness of one's feelings, and is quite ready to pocket a rare scarab, or an amulet, or a papyrus roll if fortunate enough to get one.

Egyptian Sketches (1892:50)²

Fletcher accompanied the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army, General Sir Francis Grenfell, and his wife to Luxor, where local officials honoured the General with a mummy unrolling. The Reverend was absent during the event; those assembled were disappointed because '[n]o special treasures were found' and the body was poorly preserved. 'The only thing worth having' was her cartonnage (papier-mâché)³ mask, which was presented to Lady Grenfell. Arriving late, Fletcher saw 'the fragments of the poor princess in utter confusion . . . The Arab grandee . . . offered me all those fragments . . . I could not resist the temptation.' Lady Grenfell later gave him the mask (1892:50–1). Fletcher was an emissary from a British colony sent without funds to 'beg' for

antiquities (p.5). These would establish a microcosmic Egypt and thereby, via edification of the Adelaide public (p.110), a little England at an outpost of empire 'without a history, and without a single relic of the past'⁴ with which a reverence for great empires could be cultivated (p.7). Some Australian philanthropists regarded ancient Egypt as the source of the values Britain held dear and as a part of the Classical foundation of European culture, such that its remains would impart civility and wisdom to all who viewed them (Hope 2000). In 1899, the Egyptologist Norman de Garis Davies added that a gift of antiquities to Melbourne from the Egypt Exploration Fund would link 'the region of earliest civilization to that of the latest' and strengthen alliances between Australia, Britain and the United States through a common scientific endeavour (cited by Hope 2000). Not many years had passed since Fletcher had felt the tyranny of geographical, cultural and class difference between himself as an Australian and the noble Grenfells, salvaging the scraps of a body to which more eminent persons closer to the heart of empire were entitled first pickings. Humbly grateful for this opportunity and possessed by a romantic vision of the past, he fancied that his trifles were the remains of royalty, the gift and very stuff of his superiors.⁵

Museums presented mummies as exhibits *de rigueur*; even non-archaeological museums, such as the Field Museum of Natural History (Yurco 1989:30), acquired them to incorporate Egypt within their purview. Museums created a greater public craving for mummies than they alone could satisfy. Mummies were therefore toured through American country towns in circuses and carnivals (Bianchi 1982:25), as were their proxies, modern embalmed bodies of criminals or the destitute (Quigley 1998:59–102). When real mummies were absent, forgers made up the shortfall. A wax model was exhibited as a mummy's foot in the United States (odd1s 1998a). The Nelson Supply House in Boston, Massachusetts used human bone and other organic materials to forge natural history specimens for exhibitions and sideshows from around 1900 until the 1920s. The Tate Curiosity Shop of Phoenix, Arizona faked mummies during the 1940s and 1950s using a similar method (odd1s 1998b). A model mummy, claimed to be that of Tutankhamun, toured the United States during the 1920s (Bader 1996).

Some scientists valued heads as exemplars of the racial evolutionary theory then prevalent, an ideology that portrayed Europeans as the Egyptians' genetic descendants, legitimizing their control of Egyptian antiquities.

[I]f the *ka's*, or doubles, of the ancient Egyptians walk about . . . many of them must have rejoiced . . . when . . . they were no longer considered to be . . . negroes or savages . . . [E]xaminations of the skulls of Egyptian mummies . . . [show that they] belonged to the Caucasian race . . .

Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *Prefatory Remarks Made on Egyptian Mummies* (1890:4–5)

The quantities of skulls and preserved heads of indigenous peoples that were collected during the nineteenth century (Southworth 1994:24) were indices of the political and economic clout of colonial empires. However, Egyptian heads and fragments also appear to have been exhibited as substitutes for whole mummies or as supplements for them to bolster the size of exhibits. In my experience, small Egyptian exhibits are more likely to display fragments than to relegate them to storerooms. In contrast, the British Museum had already acquired an extensive Egyptian collection by the time its mummy heads were photographed in the mid- to late nineteenth century (n.d.). They were unlabelled, stored in bell jars and shelved alongside other funerary artefacts organized by type and size. Their peripheral position in the exhibit suggests that they were deemed inferior to whole mummies, so their quantity alone may have been intended to impress the visitor. As I will explain, ubiquity caused mummies to be regarded as objects; here, it was compounded by their fragmentation.

Many privately owned fragments were ultimately inherited by reluctant recipients who donated them to museums. In Melbourne, Australia, a mummy's head and hand were found in a trunk beneath the house of a deceased World War I veteran. He had told his family about these wartime souvenirs, but never passed them on (*West Australian* 1991). Perhaps nobody wanted them.

Ubiquity

Intact mummies with coffins were regarded as scientific specimens or *objets d'art*. Other mummies were treated as souvenirs, even industrial resources. Mummies had been consumed as medicine since the twelfth century AD. The bitumen placed upon bodies since 1200BC or earlier (Bahn 1992) resembled natural mineral pitch from a mountain in Persia, which was used by the Arabs to cure various ailments. Mummy bitumen was named *mumia* after the medicinal pitch, with which it was equated or confused (the term 'mummy' derives from *mumia*, Brier 1998:112). Egyptians and Europeans used ointments and consumed powders made from mummies (El Mahdy 1989:29), regarding the latter as a cure-all or stauncher of blood (Ikram and Dodson 1998:64–5). The Egyptian merchants who supplied Europeans with mummies often 'embalmed' fresh bodies of criminals and paupers to meet demand (ibid.:65). The English physician Sir Thomas Browne mused, 'Mummie is become Merchandise, *Mizraim* [Egypt, or its Biblical founder] cures wounds, and *Pharaoh* is sold for balsoms' (1658:78–9). In the early twentieth century, Theban villagers still applied a mixture of butter and powdered mummy to bruises. In the late twentieth century, in New York and Philadelphia, occult shops still stocked 'Mummy Dust' (Ikram and Dodson 1998:65–6) for magical use. Egyptologist Sir E. A. Wallis Budge noted that Theban villagers used the mummies of commoners as fuel (1890:26).

With such precedents, the Industrial Revolution developed new uses for mummies. Many were shipped to Britain and Germany to be ground up as garden fertilizer (*Manufacturer and Builder* 1870; Stuart 1879:90). Modern paper was initially manufactured from rag fibre; during a rag shortage, manufacturers in Maine, New York State and Connecticut found it cheaper to import mummy wrappings from Egypt (and cloth from Italy and France) than to employ domestic rag pickers (Wolfe 2003). One story about mummy paper – which may be only partially true (Reeder 2003) – is that Maine manufacturer Augustus Stanwood imported, stripped and discarded tons of mummies (Leca 1981:226), upon which his mill workers blamed an outbreak of cholera (El Mahdy 1989:33)!⁶

Artists also required mummies:

[M]ummy is the name by which artists call a special paint of a rich brown hue, made by grinding the bones of mummies together with bitumen . . .

[These] bandages . . . enclosed the mummy of 'H.A.R.' . . . His friends reverently preserved his remains, which are to-day being transmuted into paint at a factory in Long Acre. Perhaps it is as well that this august gentleman did not know his ultimate fate . . .

[Mummies] are getting dearer, as they are now no longer allowed to be exported out of Egypt . . . [B]efore long pictures . . . painted with . . . mummy pigment will be an expensive luxury.

Pictures Painted With Mummies (Illustrated Mail 1903)

The grinding of mummies for paint may have originated in twelfth-century Italy (Pringle 2001:201). Although 'the old Egyptians . . . could never have realized . . . that . . . their dust would be used in painting pictures in a world then undiscovered,' it was supposedly an honour to them to ornament the work of a famous artist. This would be even more appropriate if the remains used were those of a pharaoh or Biblical figure (*Manufacturer and Builder* 1877).

Mark Twain claimed to have been told that mummies were purchased 'by the ton or by the graveyard' for locomotive fuel in Egypt, and that an engineer complained, 'D—n these plebeians, they don't burn worth a cent – pass out a king' (1869:632). This remark has often been cited credulously but judging by his footnote, Twain was joking (ibid.:632). Yet in a time of industrial exploitation of mummies, Twain's reference to the quantities of bodies allegedly used rings true. Perhaps he witnessed or had heard about Egyptian peasants' use of mummies as fuel and imaginatively transposed it to the railway.⁷

The exposure of thousands of mummies must have impressed entrepreneurs with a spectacle of ubiquity. This led them to make several assumptions. The first was that one mummy was more or less the same as another,

an idea that contrasted with contemporary portrayals of mummies as individuals (see below). One mummy salvaged from a score consigned to destruction appeared to be representative of his or her fellows; a 'non-European' was often regarded as 'an atom in a vast collectivity' (Said 1991:252) – a uniform one. This attitude drove Egypt's black marketeers to fill empty coffins inscribed for missing occupants with mummies acquired elsewhere to create 'complete sets'. A second assumption was that the supply of mummies would never run out. Egypt's sands were imagined as cornucopias of treasure; the public expected the exceptional richness of Tutankhamun's tomb to be replicated by future discoveries (Frayling 1992:64).

Mummies' usefulness, ubiquity and presumed uniformity prompted one wag to draw a resonant analogy with a contemporary American prospecting boom:

The recent discovery near Thebes of a bonanza of ancient Egyptians is one of the most important discoveries of the century. . . . Herr BRUGSCH, of the Boulak Museum . . . struck a vein of enormous richness . . . [T]he vein yields about seven mummies to the ton, together with 30 per cent, by weight, of gods and manuscripts. . . .

[T]his great Egyptian bonanza ought to attract the attention of those ingenious persons who are constantly forming silver mining companies . . . Royal mummies and ancient papyri are of more value than their weight in silver . . . [T]he Egyptian monarchy came into existence about eight thousand [*sic*] years ago, so that there is little fear that the mines of mummied Kings can be exhausted in one day.

Mummy Mining (New York Times 1881b)

When Egyptology was in its infancy, even some experts' treatments of mummies bore similarities to those described above. Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, a methodical excavator, recovered the oldest mummified Egyptian human remains, a piece of the arm of a Predynastic mummy bedecked with bracelets (Brier 1996:81). He sent it to the Boulak Museum (forerunner of the Cairo Museum). However, the curator 'only cared for display; so from one bracelet he cut away the half that was of plaited gold wire, and he also threw away the arm and linen. A museum is a dangerous place' (Petrie 1931:175).

The handling of mummies in bulk and haste in industrial contexts must have discouraged sympathetic regard for them as individuals as much as did their appointment with the crushers. Did the multiplicity of mummies in large museums similarly discourage visitors' identification of them as people? Museums' attribution of historical, artistic or archaeological worth to mummies counteracted their commercial evaluation as rubbish or resource. Yet even visitors who distinguished between individual mummies could be

stunned by their abundance. The outward signs of their preservation, wealth, sex and age at death were many visitors' sole means of differentiating between them and were even used to determine their intangible characteristics such as personality and profession.

[Y]ou ask if they have got . . . a mummy . . . and they rush you into a whole Greenwood Cemetery of them – old mummies, young mummies, he mummies, she mummies, high-toned mummies, ragged mummies, old slouches, mummies in good whole coffins, mummies on the half-shell, mummies with money, mummies that are “busted,” kings and emperors, loafers and bummers, all straightened out as comfortable and happy in a Christian museum as if they had brought their knitting with them and this was the very hotel they had been hunting for, for four thousand years and upwards.

Mark Twain, *The British Museum*, 1872 (1962:180)

Despite objectifying mummies in some ways, large museums inspired visions of them as human or sentient, as contemporary fiction and poetry shows. Museums provided visitors with opportunities to engage emotionally with mummies, which were lacking in industrial contexts.

Disclosure

During the first half of the nineteenth century, systematic mummy examinations were conducted in Britain (Taylor 1995:69). Mummies were unrolled, the positions and types of amulets noted, and bodies inspected and sometimes dissected, although not all procedures were adequately documented (Brier 1996:158–71). In apparent imitation of scientific examinations, mummies were unwrapped at society soirées following dinner. No records were kept and the bodies were usually discarded (Ikram and Dodson 1998:69). Unwrappings had been staged as entertainments as early as 1698 (p.69). No clear distinctions may be drawn between unwrappings on the bases of their social, political and scientific roles, considering that Egyptology was not yet an entirely methodical discipline and Egyptologists were closely associated with governments and social elites. The royal mummies found at Deir-el-Bahari in 1881 were roughly unwrapped by Egyptologists before dignitaries including the Khedive (p.69). Bak-Ran was unwrapped at University College, London on 18 December 1889 (Budge 1890:2) for a varied audience:

The spectacle of the theatre . . . was quite dramatic. On the platform the fine figures of the Principal and the lecturer, behind them a few rows of ladies and gentlemen; every seat of the auditorium crowded, and . . . students lining the wall above them . . .

Mr [Henry] Rider Haggard [the British novelist], who sat in the front row . . . was the observed of all observers . . .

The Unrolling of the Mummy (New York Times 1890)

Thomas Pettigrew's scholarly examinations (1983), which began in 1833, were conducted before a paying audience of 'antiquarians, excavators, Egyptologists, Members of Parliament, artists, authors, peers, princes, statesmen, diplomats, physicians, army officers, as well as anyone else who could purchase a ticket'. The Archbishop of Canterbury, who had to be turned away, received a personal demonstration later (Ikram and Dodson 1998:70–1). Pettigrew's showmanship developed through his involvement with the 'public spectacle' of unwrapping mummies brought to England by Belzoni (ibid.:70) and displayed at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly (Pearce 2000:112).

The intense sensuality of encounters with mummies made them tangible. 'Haggard . . . handled, smelt, and turned the pieces of mummy-cloth which were passed round . . . and once . . . thought he had got hold of an Egyptian pin . . . which, however, turned out to be nothing but one of those vile modern creations called the black or foreign pin' (New York Times 1890). Belzoni described the stench of tombs piled high with bodies, and works of fiction attributed the power to cause hallucinations and soporiferousness to the scent of mummies' unguents and spices (Alcott 1998:75, 83; Stoker 1978:19, 38, 52–3, 68, 87–8) or of the bodies themselves (Anonymous 1862:435–6). Familiarity with the texture, taste and olfactory dimension of mummies counteracted the fears about filth and questioning of authenticity that characterize reactions to mummies sequestered behind glass today (Chapter 5).

[I was] surrounded by . . . heaps of mummies . . . [T]he dust . . . [choked] my throat and nose . . . I could taste that the mummies were rather unpleasant to swallow. . . . I . . . contrived to sit; but . . . I sunk . . . with a crash of bones, rags, and wooden cases . . . I could not pass without putting my face in contact with that of some decayed Egyptian . . . [nor] avoid being covered with bones, legs, arms, and heads rolling from above.

Giovanni Belzoni, *Narrative of . . . Egypt and Nubia* (1820:156–7)

High mortality rates accustomed Victorians to physical contact with the deceased and contemplation of death (May 1996:3), so their curiosity about the contents of mummies' wrappings was not discouraged by fear of pollution or corpses. It could be motivated by a scientific desire to learn how mummies were made, by Christian determination to bear witness to evidence for Biblical events (*Adelaide Register* 1907; *Milwaukee Journal* 1930), or by a collector's anxiety to discover whether a purchase was authentic in a market awash with forgeries (Germer et al. 1997:107, 108 Ill.111). Yet these

concerns were often accompanied by an unabashed inquisitiveness. Sideshow mummies were 'dramatically stripped down to skin and bones' before paying audiences (Holt 1986:60) without regard for modesty or moral edification. In shedding the pretensions of upper-class unrollings, sideshow unwrappings exposed the inquisitive motivations of both. Walter Booth's film *The Haunted Curiosity Shop* (1901) carried destructive curiosity to its fullest extent: through the magic of special effects, a mummy's wrappings disappeared as it transformed into a living man, but then its flesh also vanished, exposing its skeleton (Cowie and Johnson 2002:57).

Scientists were not exempt from exercising a 'peekaboo' principle, unwrapping mummies in ways that revealed subjective motivations. Isolated records imply that the appearances of mummies – the preservation of their bodies and intactness of their wrappings – determined whether they were displayed; ugly or naked bodies might not be exhibited. In 1849, Thomas and Cooper Fenteman donated a mummy and coffin to the Leeds Museum, but 'the body [was] not in so good a state of preservation as to admit of its exhibition' (Slade and Roebuck 1851 cited by Brears 1992:89). Bob Brier (1998:136–7) accounts for the unwrapping of Padihershef's head by surgeon Dr John Warren as a verification of authenticity designed to leave the mummy 'attractive' enough for display at Doggett's Repository of the Arts to raise funds for Massachusetts General Hospital. The most commonly unwrapped parts of mummies – heads – may betray unwrappers' desire to individualize, humanize, even 'greet' the deceased. The blurb from a pamphlet advertising Padihershef's exhibition (cited at the beginning of this chapter) expresses a longing to communicate with the dead.

Concern for aesthetics did not extend to fragments. A head mounted in a Victorian bell jar, which I viewed in storage at the British Museum in 1996, was once displayed in a private residence. It appears to have been collected because its appearance is ghastly: the cloth packing has dropped out of its empty eye sockets and dilated nostrils, and the flesh has been torn away from its sagging jaw. It seems to scream in torment. The desire to penetrate the gauze with the gaze was countered by an awareness – or belated discovery – that what lay hidden might look awful.

A similar ambivalence founded another concept. Concern about the appearance of unwrapped mummies, the removal of their amulets and the disposal of some bodies after unwrapping expresses dismay that corpses were juxtaposed with precious treasures. Christianity represents corpses as worthless shells vacated by souls (*Genesis* 3:19). The Egyptians' exotic material wealth was celebrated in literature (Gautier 1992b:156; Stoker 1978:164), heightening the contrast between corpses and jewels. European tradition includes legends in which a hero slays a dragon to rescue a maiden or retrieve a treasure that the monster has captured. In his cross-cultural studies of mythology, Joseph Campbell interpreted these tales as moral lessons about the individual's responsibility to interact with others to establish productive

social relationships. Exchanges of knowledge and goods put human and material resources to proper use, but selfishness and psychological withdrawal squander them. The dragon is an abomination, threatening economic and social systems by hoarding things it cannot use. 'Western dragons represent greed' (Campbell 1988:184), alluding to waste.

Given their treatments as paradoxical packages of rubbish and riches, mummies may have similarly personified waste because corpses have no use for treasure. '[I]t's weird because you think of [emaciated, dried bodies] and in the background you think of . . . the decorated sarcophagus, and the gold . . . it's . . . very strange' (female, 25–34 years, Field Museum interviews 1996). With limited technology for extracting data from mummies, scientists regarded them as the lesser contents of the package: '[m]ummies are not . . . of great interest in themselves as a rule – it is the objects found with them that are of so much importance' (Murray 1910:11). Haggard responded to the 'ancient' pin in Bak-Ran's wrappings as if it were a surprise hidden in a packaged gift. Given that Christmas gift wrapping, introduced to Britain by Prince Albert in 1840, quickly spread throughout Europe and the United States (Golby and Purdue 1986:61) and was popularized by American department stores in the late nineteenth century (Belk 1993:90), it surely lent analogy, if not also impetus, to mummy unrolling: that which is wrapped is *meant* to be unwrapped and *invites* unwrapping. Orientalists portrayed the Middle East, incarnate as a sexually submissive woman, as a mysterious realm willing to yield its secrets to European enquirers (Said 1991:187, 207). Mummies who refused to yield trinkets provoked indignation: 'the wrappings were undone to reveal . . . the . . . perfectly preserved body of a maiden . . . Not a single amulet, no jewellery, no rolls of papyrus were found . . . Everyone felt the same sense of disappointment' (Brugsch 1883 cited by Germer et al. 1997:111).

In terms of Joseph Campbell's 'Dragon Principle' (Konner and Perlmutter exec. prods 1988, ep.1), riches – here, things of monetary, curio or scientific value – are wasted on corpses who must yield them to the living. In one poem, a mummy clasping a funerary offering of seeds of life-giving wheat in its hand is analogous with the sins that withhold Christian enlightenment from humanity (Anonymous 1855:62). Like mummies concealing valuables, modern Egyptians were regarded as 'ignorant [people] . . . sitting on a land full of historical treasures' whose significance they were incapable of recognizing (Shohat 1997:35). Many Europeans believed that a gulf existed between the past and the present that they alone could bridge with expert knowledge, and that they were charged with rescuing the remains of the past from its foreign captors (ibid.:34–5). The Orient was therefore imagined to welcome its conquerors; Belzoni thought that a statue he planned to souvenir was 'smiling on me, at the thought of being taken to England' (1820:39). As saviours of Egypt, mummy unwrappers were absolved of guilt.

Anonymity

Separated from their inscribed possessions, many mummies lost their identities and, in the early nineteenth century, few Europeans could translate hieroglyphs. Padihershef's outer coffin became separated from the inner coffin containing his body because when they arrived in the United States in 1823, nobody could read their matching inscriptions. So Padihershef was merely 'the mummy' (Brier 1998:137).

'I bet I know [what the inscription says],' Red spoke up quickly . . .
'It's the mummy's name,' he said.

'Shucks! Mummies don't have names,' scoffed Peg. 'A mummy is just a mummy.'

Leo Edwards, *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy* (1923:11)

Arguably, anonymity also resulted from a refusal to re-ascribe identity by supplying mummies with provisional names. Like industrial fodder, objects of scientific study often went nameless.

*The mummy as subject**Dead men do tell tales*

Speak! for thou long enough hast acted Dummy,
Thou hast a tongue – come – let us hear it's tune;
Thou'rt standing on thy legs, above ground, Mummy
Revisiting the glimpses of the moon,
Not like thin ghosts, or disembodied creatures,
But with thy bones, and flesh, and limbs, and features.

Horace Smith, *Address to the Mummy, at Belzoni's Exhibition* (1821:128)

The tangibility of mummies inspired fantastical attributions of sentience, even speech to them. In poems and stories, the mummy spoke, was asked to speak or, in mystery tales, was alleged to speak. Speech was often a mere whisper, as if to express the supernatural quality of the faculty or the uncertainty of its possession. The likes of *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy* (Edwards 1923), a children's mystery in which a criminal makes a mummy seem to speak in order to frighten away investigators, established a scenario revisited by later works such as *The Mystery of the Whispering Mummy* (Arthur 1985). People longed for mummies to reveal the secrets of the past or confirm that the ancients possessed familiar modern tastes or technologies.

Tell us – for doubtless thou canst recollect,
To whom we should assign the Sphinx's fame;

Was Cheops, or Cephrenes architect
Of either Pyramid that bears his name?

Horace Smith, *Address to the Mummy, at Belzoni's Exhibition*
(1821:128)

'I should have thought,' observed Mr. Buckingham, 'that it is high time you were dead.'

'Why,' replied the Count [Allamistakeo] . . . 'I am little more than seven hundred years old! . . . [Y]ou are yet in the infancy of galvanism and cannot yet accomplish with it what was a common thing among us in the old days. . . . I fell into catalepsy . . . I was embalmed *alive*, as you see me at present.'

Edgar Allen Poe, *Some Words With a Mummy*, 1845 (1990:110–11)

Rouged cheeks . . . painted lips [and] tight 'silhouette' dresses are nothing new to the mummies in the public museum. 'No,' said Tha Hir . . . 'we see nothing unusual in the present fashions, except, . . . that the women are wearing more than they did in Egypt 4,000 years ago.'

Was Joseph's Rival for Favor of Pharaoh (Milwaukee Journal 1930)

boss i went
and interviewed the mummy
of the egyptian pharaoh
in the metropolitan museum . . .
insignificant
and journalistic insect
says the royal crackling
in my tender prime
i was too dignified
to have anything as vulgar
as ambition . . .
we used to spend our time
feeding the ibises
and ordering
pyramids sent home to try on . . .

Don Marquis, *archy interviews a pharaoh*, 1922 (1927: 21–2)

Those interested in history, especially Biblical episodes set in Egypt, wished that mummies could recount their life experiences. To Horace Smith, it seemed a pity to come face to face with someone who lived in antiquity but as an 'incommunicative elf / . . . sworn to secrecy' could tell nought of it (1821:128). This longing to penetrate the mysteries of the past was often fulfilled by planting words in mummies' mouths. Edgar Allen Poe satirized the

longing: Allamistakeo discovers that his questioners are less interested in learning about ancient Egypt than in proving the United States its superior.

After the Bohemian Club's mummy mascot was destroyed during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, club members asked Jeremiah Lynch, its purchaser, to find a replacement. He eventually acquired an encoffined mummy from an impoverished noble family in Cairo (Lynch 1914:4–7). Her coffin filled with fresh flowers (Lynch et al. 1914:21), Lady Isis was installed as the Bohemians' new avatar in a ceremony including a costumed funeral procession and a play portraying her 'reincarnation' (pp.7–10). Standing behind her erect coffin, a Bohemian recited a poem composed for the club's first mummy (p.21), making Isis 'speak':

My sire was monarch of a mighty race:
Daughter of Pharaoh, I; before my face
Myriads of grovelling creatures crawled, to thrust
Their fearful foreheads in the desert dust. . . .
Where be ye now? And where am I at last?
With gay Bohemia is my portion cast;
Born of the oldest East, I seek my rest
In the fair city of the youngest West.

Charles Stoddard, *The Daughter of Pharaoh to Bohemia*, 1894 (1914:22)

This mummy puppet obligingly embraced the West as Egypt's successor. Conversely, other talking mummies were wise elders with the moral authority to censure the follies of the modern world. Having lived in sin and learnt the error of his ways, King Cheops arrives in the corrupt England of 2126 and campaigns for reform (Loudon 1827), expressing the author's condemnation of the immorality of contemporary Regency England. Another pharaoh exhorts Americans to support the Whigs, describing ancient ruins as a warning to modern nations to avoid the fate of Egypt's fallen empire (Anonymous 1838). Mummies taught the lessons of history to a world in need of guidance during political and social upheavals.

Befitting a terrifying rupture of normality, real mummies were alleged not to speak but to scream. Education Division staff at the Field Museum told me that one night during the 1930s or 1940s, the guards patrolling the Egyptian exhibit heard a scream. They found no intruders but one mummy, originally standing upright, now leaning its forehead against its display case – but it was face down on the floor according to Henry Field (1953:233; *Field Museum Bulletin* 1974). My informants identified the screamer as Harwa (acc. no. 31839), but Field described him as naked, so perhaps it was the only unwrapped mummy at the museum, that of a child (acc. no. 30017). Frank Yurco (1996), a Field Museum Egyptologist, told me that illicit lovers often hid in museums overnight, since security was once less rigid, and that in this instance they probably collided with a display case and raised a din before

escaping! Perhaps intruders thought that the fearful reputation of mummy exhibits would deter investigation. Intruders' behaviour (as misunderstood or creatively interpreted by staff) probably originated present-day stories about haunted museums (Chapters 4 and 5).

Individuation

Some mummies were referred to by their names or by modern nicknames. This may have assuaged viewers' concerns about their own mortality or reflected mummies' lifelike appearances, but the quantities and social classes of mummies, their commercial exhibition and identification with local communities also determined whether they were named. At the British Museum, the naked, naturally desiccated body of a Predynastic man with auburn hair was dubbed 'Ginger' by visitors after his first display in 1900; while undergoing conservation in 1987 he was temporarily replaced by a female mummy who was christened 'Gingerella' (Tagholm 1992:8). A mummy in the Niagara Falls Museum, supposedly a general of Thutmose III, bore the imperfectly translated name of Ossipumphnoferu (Gibson-Kirwin 1992). Two mummies in Derby were regarded as a male and female, Arek and Arafek, but examination in 1991 revealed that the former was named Pypy and the latter was of uncertain sex and identity (Volley 1991). In 1971, two unrelated coffins were acquired by the Neiman-Marcus department store and advertised for sale as 'His and Hers' *objets d'art* (Ikram and Dodson 1998:72). After their sale to the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, an unnamed mummy was found in the male coffin; curators dubbed him 'Usermontu' after the coffin's original occupant (Wageman 1992). The inability of Padihersef's exhibitors to read his name was no impediment to his fame.

In each of these cases, a mummy was a solo exhibit, partnered with another mummy or distinctive in appearance, identity or provenance among a collection of bodies – a local celebrity. Conversely, encounters with mummies *en masse* or knowledge that they were destined for destruction discouraged emotional attachment to them and, thus, naming of them. Mummies were more likely to be individuated wherever viewers had opportunities to concentrate upon one of them at a time, notably in museums. Whole mummies were more likely to be christened than fragments.

Ancient Egyptians' classes also determined the extent of their individuation, but not only because inscriptions identifying the deceased most frequently accompanied wealthy burials. The royal mummies from the Deir-el-Bahari cache were revered as famous names from historical and Biblical records whose personalities might now be revealed by phrenological studies, their physiognomies read for signs of greatness or decadence. The Egyptologist Gaston Maspero said of Rameses II, 'The forehead is low and narrow . . . the eyes are small and close together; the nose is long, thin, hooked . . . the

jawbone is . . . strong . . . [I]t may be said the face of the mummy gives a fair idea of the face of the living king' (cited by Romer 1988:147). Then thought to have enslaved the Israelites (*Exodus* 9:35), Rameses II was judged to possess the stern features of a callous man.

His mummy . . . indicates that he was tall and handsome, and had . . . refined but haughty features. It is only natural that a Pharaoh who was such a studenous egotist . . . should also have been a tyrant. Rameses . . . was the Pharaoh . . . whose cruel oppression of the children of Israel is recorded in the Bible.

World's Greatest Fraud: Pharaoh the 'Faker' (Adelaide Register 1907)

Among his perfumed wrappings Ramses lay . . .
His keen hawk nose such pride, such power expressed,
Near Kadesh stream we heard the Hittite cries,
And saw by Hebrew toil San's temple cities grow.

H. D. Raunsley, *The Mummy of Sesostris* (1886)

The regal identities of the other cache mummies prompted favourable assessments of their appearances. Many commoners' mummies are as well-preserved as Seti I, but only he has been praised as handsome, with a 'fine kingly head' and a 'calm and gentle smile' (Maspero cited by Fagan 1992:295). The importance of individuating mummies of kings is indicated by the 'great disappointment' experienced by the unwrappers of a mummy presumed to be Rameses III. '[T]he face of the king was coated with a compact mass of bitumen, which completely hid the features. At 20 minutes past 11 His Highness the Khedive left the hall of mummies' (Maspero cited by Romer 1988:149). In small museums, the individuality of commoners was equally important because they were local 'royalty'. The male sex of the Niagara Falls Museum mummy dubbed Septhnestp was overlooked in order to claim that 'she' was the wife of Amenhotep IV – the famous Nefertiti (Gibson-Kirwin 1992). Couplehood, a form of individuation that could supplement or substitute for naming, may have been inspired by the couples among the royal cache mummies.

Christian burials

A few mummies were given a 'decent' reburial by sympathetic people. Christian blessings were extended to ancient Egyptians, it being known that they shared with their keepers a belief in life after death, but it was assumed that a Christian deity now presided over pagan remains.

I well remember how [an acquaintance] shrank from entering the Mummy Room at the British Museum under a vivid realisation of

how the general resurrection might occur even as one stood among those solemn corpses turned into a sight for sightseers.

And at that great and awful day, what will be thought of supposititious heads and members?

Christina Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* (1885:128)

In 1881, the artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema – famous for his romantic ancient Egyptian scenes – saw his paint preparer grinding up a piece of a mummy. Realizing where ‘mummy brown’ came from, he alerted his fellow painter, Edward Burne-Jones. Together with some family members, the remorseful artists held an impromptu funeral, burying a tube of mummy paint (Burne-Jones 1909:114).

An infant named Amun-Her-Kepesh-Ef, claimed to be the son of pharaoh Senwosret III (Wolfe 2005a), was sold to Henry Sheldon for his museum in Middlebury, Vermont by Spanish sailors visiting New York (Wolfe 2005b) in 1886 (Holt 1986:61). Disappointed with its ragged appearance, the curator relegated the mummy to the attic. By the time that George Mead, president of the Sheldon Museum’s board of directors, rediscovered Amun-Her-Kepesh-Ef in 1945, decay had set in. He feared that if the body were to be buried, local college students might exhume it for a prank. A devout Episcopalian, Mead had the mummy cremated and buried in his family plot at West Cemetery in 1950. The boy’s headstone was engraved with both an Egyptian *ankh* (representing eternal life) and *ba*-bird (an element of the soul) and a Christian crucifix (Wolfe 2005b), and a date of death of ‘1883BC’ (*Roadside America* 2005). Mead declared, ‘This was once a human being. It is fitting and proper that it should have a Christian burial’ (cited by Brier 1998:166–7). According to some Egyptian doctrines, the destruction of a body destroyed its soul;⁸ nevertheless, mummies were presumed to deserve, even desire, Christian burials. In a New Zealand poem, the spirit of a mummy appears to a curator to request that his body be removed from exhibit and buried in the local cemetery. The mummy awaits an ultimate resurrection reminiscent of the Christian Last Judgement (Skey 1889:110).

The Argus effect

Mary Beard and John Henderson included busts and photos of faces in their parody of a museum exhibit (1994:16–17), deliberately creating an effect that displays usually produce inadvertently. Since mummies were often regarded as sentient beings in the nineteenth century, perhaps some contemporary people feared that mummies or anthropoid (human-shaped) coffins, especially when displayed in large numbers (Plate 2.1), were watching them like the hundred eyes of the mythical Greek Argus. Mummies’ subjectification could turn from sympathetic to sinister.



Plate 2.1 An exhibition of mummies, coffins and a marble sarcophagus for sale, Ramleh, Egypt, 1888.
© The Field Museum, Chicago IL, Neg. no CSA17486, Cat. no 31842. Photo: L. Fiorillo.

The room and all in it gave grounds for strange thoughts. . . . There were so many mummies, or mummy objects . . . that one was unable to forget the past. . . . [T]he multitudinous presence of the dead . . . took such hold on me that I caught myself looking round fearfully, as though some strange personality or influence was present.

Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, 1903 (1978:37)

The ubiquity that elsewhere reduced mummies and coffins to objects suddenly transformed them into menacing supernatural adversaries. This consciousness of being watched and outnumbered could explain some people's refusal to enter mummy exhibits. A security officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, posted to the Egyptian wing for the first time, refused to follow me into a cul-de-sac exhibiting coffins and mummies (Gallery 21, Dyn.21–25 Coffins). 'It's creepy,' he groaned. Coffins' staring eyes could compound a fear of mummies; the returned gaze challenges the viewer (Lutz and Collins 1993:197).

An Argus effect must have contributed to the frightening auras around mummy rooms, products of the Victorian 'cultural–historical presentation' of Egyptian artefacts (Bothmer 1976:159) that arranged them according to materials, function, theme and chronology (Fazzini 1995:38–9). Hyperreality – replica historic settings exhibited as being 'real' to give visitors a sense of being in some other time or place (Eco 1987) – has traditionally been employed in Egyptian displays, albeit mainly those with a funerary theme (Ellis 1993:55). A funerary emphasis is difficult to avoid because many Egyptian artefacts come from tombs, yet museums heightened it by turning exhibits into hyperreal 'tombs'. The walls of the Egyptian Room at the South Australian Museum (Merrillees et al. 1990:45 plate III) and the Egyptian Tomb display at the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne, Australia around 1896 (ibid.:14, 18 plate 19) were painted with motifs copied from tombs and coffins. Even the selection of display spaces sought a funereal air: 'The old records room [in the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia], which in itself was extremely sepulchral in effect . . . has been turned into a Mummy Room,' the Keeper of Antiquities reported in 1938 (cited by Merrillees et al. 1990:14). It was intended that mummies, coffins and tomb sculptures line the walls of the South Australian Museum's Egyptian Room to emphasize the funereal associations of its contents (ibid.:27). Curators posing as undertakers encouraged later popular culture to typecast museums as haunted places.

Paradigms in fiction and legend

Introduction

Emotional detachment characterized people who destroyed mummies while sympathy motivated those who named or reburied them, but this alignment

of subjectification with sympathy and objectification with detachment could be reversed in the imagination. Creators of fiction and legend produced romances, which bestowed speech and movement upon mummies only to manipulate them like objects, and curses that subjectified mummies sympathetically at first, but ultimately portrayed them as evil. As if to counter the prevalence of mummies' treatment as objects, both paradigms emphasized fictional mummies' sentience.

The curse overtook romance as the dominant mummy myth, but in so doing betrayed its original credo, reworking its self-critical Christian moral lesson into a self-righteous Orientalist treatise. This reversal was apparently engineered by the mass media to suppress opposition to archaeology, a subject of increasingly lucrative press reportage. It initiated mummies' transformation from ambivalent figures into the more overtly evil ones they were to become in cinema.

Romance

In romantic tales, a male character fell in love with the ghost or mortal reincarnation of a female mummy. Nicholas Daly (1994) interprets romances as analogies for the disruption caused to traditional economic systems by the advent of consumer economies. Romances were regressive fantasies in which resistance to collectors' control of objects, and thereby to European domination of the Orient, were ultimately contained.

Romances' subjectification of mummies protested against their everyday treatment as commodities (ibid.:36). Satires had already established an anti-objectification theme: a mummy impersonator who narrowly escapes dissection holds up an auger, rebuking a scientist, 'Now, I hope you are convinced I have a brain?' (Bernard 1890:23), a revived mummy berates the scientists who have poked and prodded him (Poe 1990:107–9) and an intoxicated antiquarian, trapped overnight in the British Museum, fantasizes that its Egyptian statues and mummies cavort together in a drunken dance (Anonymous 1857). Subsequent romance literature condemned the commodification of human remains, but also expressed fears about the replacement of traditional economies by mass production. In the new industrial economy, production processes were unseen, foreign objects invaded local markets and face-to-face trading was supplanted by an impersonal traffic of objects (Daly 1994:28–30).

Economic chaos manifested itself in fiction as topsy-turvy subject/object relations. In Gautier's 1840 story (1992b), *The Mummy's Foot*, the foot rejects the narrator's attempts to use it as a paperweight, coming to life and conjuring a vision of the princess to whom it was attached. In Haggard's *Smith and the Pharaohs* (1912–13), the discoverer of a queen's tomb is himself objectified, scrutinized by pharaohs. Mistaken for objects, subjects retaliate by objectifying their objectifiers. Fiction also subjugated threats

posed to European economies by the material seductions of Oriental products, including mummies, by gendering the mummy as female and her lover as male. The unruly mummy is finally re-objectified (turned into a sex object) when the hero seduces her, or the possibility of such a seduction is raised (Daly 1994:38). Mummy romances are regressive, longing for a defunct type of subject/object relationship and the European colonialism that it supported.

Since the humanization of fictional mummies condemned the commodification of real ones, romance's analogy with economic relations did not preclude references to moral scruples, which became the basis of the curse paradigm. Gender was a means of addressing not only economic and political problems, but also moral crises generated by the exposure of living and dead bodies. Romantic mummies were usually female and exceptionally beautiful:

The particular character of the ideal Egyptian gave to the beautiful body . . . a lightness of line that antique marbles rarely have. The . . . cup of the breast, small and pointed; the swelling of the hip and thigh; the long leg . . . all was of a type of grace that was very youthful . . . As a rule mummies . . . become . . . petrified into a hideous form that one can only behold with fright or disgust. But here, the body . . . had preserved . . . the . . . amber tone of flesh that . . . must have been the lovely young Egyptian's tint in life.

Théophile Gautier, *The Romance of the Mummy*, 1858 (1992a:150)

When . . . the last roll had been removed from the four-thousand-year-old head . . . a cascade of long, black, glossy tresses poured over the workman's hands and arms. A second turn of the bandage revealed a low, white forehead . . . A third uncovered a pair of bright, deeply fringed eyes, and a . . . well-cut nose, while a fourth . . . showed a sweet, full, sensitive mouth . . .

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Ring of Thoth*, 1890 (1992:187)

Science tried to desexualize the female body (Lutz and Collins 1993:175) but given its agenda of conquest, it operated within a sexualized and masculinized paradigm of penetration (Horrocks 1995:115), of knowing the Orient 'in the epistemological and biblical senses' (Shohat 1997:35).

The wrappings were undone to reveal before the gaze of the onlookers the brown, perfectly preserved body of a maiden who had departed this earth in the flower of her youth.

Heinrich Brugsch, 1883 (cited by Germer et al. 1997:111)

From the formation of the head, and the height of the body, which

was exactly the same as that of the Venus de Medicis, while every part was in the most delicate, just, and exquisite proportion, the doctor asserted that this mummy must have been an Egyptian Venus!

Eyewitness account of an unwrapping performed by Dr Augustus Granville, *A Mummy* (Albion 1828)

Possession-by-exposure grounded scientific and fictional unwrappings. A brass statuette by the Austrian sculptor Franz Bergman portrays a nude woman inside a coffin with a lid that may be opened and closed (c.1905–10, Plate 2.2). A 1920s German celluloid letter opener conceals a nude female figurine inside its coffin-shaped handle; the upper part of the lid is removable. Objects that reveal and hide their contents encapsulate the sexual ambivalence of their era; curiosity parries with prudery. The mummy, a body concealed by removable wrappings and coffins, lent itself to this erotic game. French mimodrame and American burlesque featured mummy-themed strip-teases (Montserrat 2003). In the Australian satirical play *The Mummy-Makers of Egypt* (Capper 1868), husbands and wives hide from each other in coffins, feigning death in order to adopt new identities and swap partners.

The corpse-and-treasure paradox mentioned above could be raised by the otherwise erotic juxtapositioning of a maiden and her jewels (Gautier 1992a:150; Stoker 1978:298), for a mummy was both woman and corpse. Confiscation of her jewels as wealth wasted on a cadaver conflicted with the appropriateness of bedecking a woman's body with gems – the analogy being that the taking of maidenhead can seem alternately proper and cruel. The commodification of women necessitates their representation as 'rare, concealed and hard to get to' (Horrocks 1995:112), like a mummy's hidden jewels or a bandaged body. Vaginas (Williams 1990:1–2) and virginity have been metaphorically referred to as 'jewels' or 'treasures', so that 'to take the jewels from a dead woman is to kill her a second time!' (Gautier 1992a:150). The dilemma of whether to unwrap (penetrate) or not contained in its sexual metaphor its own solution: in the words of an Egyptian scribe, 'The waste of a woman is not knowing [presumably in the Biblical sense] her' (cited by Watterson 1991:13, original parentheses). The subjectification and sexualization of corpses in the popular imaginary distracted from the possibility of interpreting romance as necrophilia; an analogy with loss of virginity lent actual and fictional mummies' exposure an inevitability and naturalness. Whether corpse or woman, the mummy assented to being looked at/unwrapped/penetrated, just as the Orient/Oriental woman was imagined to consent to conquest by Europeans (Said 1991:187, 207). In a magazine advertisement (Palmolive Company 1918, illustrated by Pollès 2001:163), a young modern woman emerges from an Egyptian coffin, unwrapping herself before the viewer, albeit to reveal a clothed body.



Plate 2.2 Brass erotic statuette, (a) closed, (b) open. Franz Bergman, Austria, c.1905–10 (author's collection).

UNVEIL, sweet priestess! waken as thou'rt bidden,
 That "the subscribers" may behold thy beauties . . .
 Benjamin Shillaber, *Opening the Mummy* (1853)

The sexual possession of fictional mummies arrested their critique of objectification (Daly 1994:38) but later, following the discovery of Tutankhamun's mummy, the critique prevailed when seduction was recast as rape. Guilt at the rape of Egypt is a theme usually associated with curses, yet it also arose within the romance genre. In *The Romance of the Mummy*, the financier of a tomb excavation baulks at the sacrilege he is about to commit (Gautier 1992a:148–9). Roger Horrocks (1995:110–11) questions the feminist assumption that pornography is always exploitative, arguing that images of women can act as projections of the male Self; the European image of the suffering woman may reflect, by way of inversion, men's oppression by patriarchal stereotypes of manhood (p.176). '[I]n dreams and fantasies . . . the subject/object split breaks down: I am what I see' (p.110) – an equivalence apparent in the song *Mummy Mine*, in which the fate of the mummy, 'a million years . . . sleeping friendlessly', mirrors the singer's 'million years . . . weeping . . . endlessly' (Coburn and Rose 1918) and in a story in which the narrator dreams that he is mummified, transported to Europe and almost unrolled by scientists (Waller 1856). The denuding of fictional mummies was open to empathetic interpretation as a figurative rape and, therefore, so was the unwrapping and viewing of real mummies. A culture that problematizes sex as mysterious or hostile tends to sexualize the very act of looking (Stoller 1977:96). Moral outrage condemned mummies' nudity rather than the horror of corpses, suggesting that the indignation that originated the Western curse legend was based less upon morbid angst than upon displaced sexual anxiety. Now that the defilement of mummies might foreshadow their viewers' fates and bore necrophilic connotations, romance's sexual metaphor turned sour.

Now [Tutankhamun] . . . may be stripped, and . . . laid half-naked to rot in a glass case . . . at Cairo . . . thus exposed I doubt whether any [mummies] will last another century; and meanwhile to be made the butt of the merry jests of tourists . . . Is this decent? . . . Examine them by all means . . . but then hide them away again for ever, as we ourselves would be hidden away.

Sir Henry Rider Haggard, *To the Editor of The Times* (1923a)

In his 1903 novel *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, Bram Stoker explicitly presented unwrapping as rape. Instead of using a metaphor of sexual intercourse to make a romantic scenario seem natural and pleasurable, he inverted the metaphor to produce a scene of defilement with a shocking paedophilic implication. This was achieved by inserting a living female character, Margaret, into the event to counter the perspective of the male scientists

about to unwrap the mummy of Queen Tera. Tera turns out to be the spitting image of Margaret – the daughter of the chief unwrapper, Trelawny.

'Father, you are not going to unswathe her! All you men . . .! And in the glare of light! . . . Oh! it's cruel, cruel!' . . .

'Not a woman, dear; a mummy! She has been dead nearly five thousand years!'

' . . . A woman is a woman, if she had been dead five thousand centuries!' . . .

'[I]t was men who embalmed her. They didn't have women's rights or lady doctors in ancient Egypt, my dear! And besides,' [Trelawny] went on . . . 'We are not at a pleasure party. We are all grave men, entering gravely on an experiment which may . . . enlarge human knowledge indefinitely . . .'

Margaret's face cleared. 'All right . . . But oh! it seems a horrible indignity to a Queen, and a woman.'

(1978:292–4)⁹

The male narrator's fantasy is cut short:

[T]he figure . . . now lay completely nude before us. . . . As . . . the whole glorious beauty of the Queen was revealed, I felt a rush of shame sweep over me. It was . . . indecent; it was almost sacrilegious! And yet the white wonder of that beautiful form was something to dream of. . . .

With . . . a mouth that drooped with pity, with eyes that flashed with anger . . . Margaret threw over the body the beautiful robe which lay across her arm. . . . This woman – I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse – was the image of Margaret . . .

Mr Trelawny was overcome as he looked . . . and when Margaret flew to him . . . I heard him murmur brokenly:

'It looks as if you were dead, my child!'

(1978:299–300)

Tera resembles a living woman; Margaret resembles a dead one. This extraordinary refusal to distinguish clearly between the living and the dead defends the sanctity of the human body in all its states.

The curse

Q: Could you tell me what the 'Curse of the Pharaohs' is?

A: Anybody who breaks into a tomb tends to have misfortune . . . for ever afterwards.

Male, 55–64 years, FMNH interviews 1996

My interviewees referred to the bad luck that allegedly dogs tomb infiltrators to punish their sacrilege (Chapter 5). Yet today, the media represent 'misfortune' as a cruel attack by evil spirits upon innocent people. People speak of 'the' curse, as I was obliged to do in my interviews – but since assessments of it are so polarized, there are really two extremities to which interpretations of a curse may be taken: an ethical critique of tomb infiltration (whether by archaeologists or thieves) and a backlash against this critique. The backlash, which began in the late Victorian era, intensified in the 1920s during the excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb and reached its apogee in cinema (Chapter 3). This most famous version of the curse, in which infiltrators were the heroes, I shall call the Classic curse. Its precursor that portrayed them as the villains was, therefore, the Preclassic curse. Yet Classic and Preclassic versions were not just opposing interpretations of the same scenario; each constructed its moral universe differently.

Jinn spirits were believed to guard the treasures in Egyptian tombs and even to repel attempts to appropriate mummies for *mumia*. 'Perhaps demons envy men the salutary remedies which are recovered from those corpses of Egyptians. For they guard with unusual diligence the hidden treasures and kill those who dig them up' (Bodin 1975:85). An Arabic tomb-robbing manual from the Middle Ages, *The Book of Buried Pearls and of the Precious Mystery, Giving Indications Regarding the Hiding Places of Finds and Treasures* (Kamal trans. 1907), supplied magical incantations to ward off *jinn* (Green 1992:35). Some spells were meant to cause treasures believed to have been rendered invisible by the ancients to materialize, and depictions of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony¹⁰ on tomb walls were interpreted as proof that mummies could come back to life (El Mahdy 1989:170–1). Malevolent spirits manifest the guilt – or fear of social stigma – at robbing the dead that must be suppressed to satisfy a need or greed for their riches. Repressed thoughts return to consciousness with a vengeance (Horrocks 1995:109).

The vengeful dead of Egypt entered Western tradition via the *mumia* trade. Jean Bodin's religious treatise *Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of the Sublime*, completed around 1588 (Kuntz 1975:xxxvii–xxxviii, footnote 69), reported that mummies smuggled out of Egypt were believed to cause storms at sea, so were thrown overboard to avert shipwrecks (Bodin 1975:13–14, 74).¹¹ This practice provided an opportunity for smugglers to avoid prosecution (ibid.:14) and could have been a pretext for discouraging smuggling, but it was fundamentally a magical act, the propitiation of a deity with a sacrifice (van der Spek 2005). As storms threatened their vessels, mixed crews of Greeks, Ishmaelites and Jews chanted to their gods and saints for salvation (Bodin 1975:11–12), lighting upon mummies as their common enemy and most convenient scapegoat. The nineteenth-century elaboration of the malevolent mummy concept as a warning against disturbing the dead converted the mariners' magic, with its self-interested motivations,¹² into the first incarnation of the Western curse myth. This

investment of mummies with moral import received its greatest contribution from fiction writers.

The first major mummy story, notable for its introduction of an ambulatory mummy character, was a novel by Jane Webb Loudon, *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century* (1827). The author could have been inspired by the recent translation of hieroglyphs by Champollion, publication of the Egyptological discoveries of Napoleon's scholars in the *Description de l'Égypte* and acquisition of antiquities for Britain by Belzoni (Lupton 2003:25). Loudon may have known about, if not witnessed, England's first public unwrappings conducted upon Belzoni's mummies in London (Montserrat cited by Keys 2000). Her king, Cheops, awakened with electricity, travels to England to usurp its throne. Cheops, who judges the degenerate society of 2126–7AD with reference to his own former despotism (Lupton 2003:24–5), is based upon Herodotus' scandalous portrait (II.124–6, de Sélincourt 1996:131–3) of the Old Kingdom monarch Khufu, also known as Cheops (Lupton 2003:25).

European mummy lore had become firmly established in the United States by the mid-nineteenth century. Now the curse scenario proper, with its sin-and-punishment theme (Pringle 2001:190) and rape analogy – whether or not also with a revived mummy – began to take shape. In 1869, just prior to writing *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott published *Lost in a Pyramid; or, the Mummy's Curse* (1998). In this story, the character Forsyth steals a box of magical seeds from the mummy of a woman, then burns the body to assist his escape from a tomb. When planted, the seeds produce a poisonous bloom that saps the vitality of his bride, who becomes like a living mummy. Although this dastardly magic seems cruel, the mummy attracts Forsyth's pity: '[T]o me there was something sacred in the bones of this unknown woman. . . . I [wondered] . . . if this dark, ugly thing had ever been a lovely, soft-eyed Egyptian girl' (ibid.:75). Dominic Montserrat (1998:75) thought this to be the first American curse fiction, but *The Mummy's Soul* (Anonymous 1862) predates Alcott's piece and (along with any other lost or forgotten similar stories) might have inspired it – or even been plagiarized by it. In *Soul*, the narrator unwraps a female mummy that crumbles away. He souvenirs some of its dust in an ancient vase that contains a fascinating mummified insect, and takes a scarab amulet inscribed with a spell implying that its owner will reawaken after 3000 years. At his American home, a servant accidentally revives the insect. It drains the blood of the narrator's wife, such that '*she resemble{s} the mummy in the tomb*' (ibid.:440). After her death the narrator too is fatally bitten, but he smashes the vase against the insect and tosses it into the fire. The commingling of the dust with the blood in the insect physically reconstitutes the mummy, who drives the terrified narrator out of his house!

In Jane Austin's *After Three Thousand Years* (1868), Millard Vance fulfils the request of his proud sweetheart, Marion Harleigh, that he bring back

from Egypt a trinket from a princess' mummy for her to wear. He presents her with 'a necklace of golden scarabæi, with diamond eyes and green enamelled wings' and an inscribed clasp (p.38). She is prevented from wearing it when an Egyptologist translates the inscription as a warning that the wearer will die: 'See me, the beloved of a king. I scorned him for a lesser love, and thus I lie . . . The gods who give life, also take it' (pp.41–2). Neglecting to return the gift, Marion becomes engaged to Vance, but her haughtiness drives his affection towards her pretty cousin, Juliette Randolph. Realizing her mistake, Marion sends a note to Vance with her own interpretation of the curse: 'Behold me, who fancied myself the beloved of a king among men. He scorned me for a lesser love, and thus I lie.' Vance finds Marion dead, wearing her wedding gown and the necklace. The scarabs have come to life and pierced her neck with their poisoned claws (p.44).

The curse that punishes sacrilege but shows no mercy, works through objects, infects like a disease or poison and reduces the living to virtual or actual corpses is common to Anonymous', Austin's and Alcott's stories, but Austin and Alcott eschew the then-novel living mummy motif to concentrate upon more sympathetic portrayals of mummies. Anonymous' narrator reacts with more disgust than sympathy when unwrapping his mummy, thinking first of the beauty she must have been but finally of the horror she has become (1862:437). Forsyth's thoughts occur in reverse (Alcott 1998:75). Vance's princess possesses 'a rare loveliness of the days gone by' and died under tragic circumstances – but he coldly slices her wrappings open 'from neck to heel with a sharp knife' (Austin 1868:40). This alludes to rape, as does Forsyth's remorse: 'I never have quite forgiven myself for stealing [the mummy's treasure], or for burning her' (Alcott 1998:75). In an ambivalent interplay between a curious, acquisitive attitude towards mummies and guilt resulting in fear of them, the mummy is victim but also menacing victor. A conflict between moral and material values, so eloquently expressed by nineteenth-century writers, suggests that the geneses of the sympathetic Preclassic and unsympathetic Classic curses occurred simultaneously.

Amelia Edwards toured Egypt in 1873–4. After exploring ransacked graves at Saqqara, she confessed,

We soon became quite hardened . . . and learnt to rummage among dusty sepulchres with no more compunction than . . . a gang of professional body-snatchers. These are the experiences upon which one looks back afterwards with wonder, and something like remorse; but so infectious is the universal callousness, and so overmastering is the passion for relic-hunting, that I do not doubt we should again do the same things under the same circumstances.

Amelia Edwards, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1877:76)

By polarizing opinions, the despoliation of Egypt initiated a more vocal ethical critique.

Of late years the American traveler . . . has become . . . addicted to the . . . loathsome vice of collecting relics. . . . Every tourist of this variety . . . if . . . able to violate the sanctity of death by stealing a bone from the Roman catacombs . . . feels that he has achieved the grandest feat of which a man is capable. . . . [I]t is surely the duty of the Government to discourage relic-hunting by forbidding the importation of relics.

Relic-hunting (New York Times 1881a)

[T]he steamers that now run frequently up and down the Nile bring in larger numbers than ever the strangers to see the ruins. . . . The destruction caused by the tourists is really serious . . . How is it possible to censure this . . . mischief when the removal of noble obelisks to London and New York is thought worthy of public applause and national honours?

Tourists Who Infest Egypt (New York Times 1882)

Edwards urged the public to curtail the destruction, founding the Egypt Exploration Fund to promote study and conservation (Fagan 1992:321–3). Such probity challenged the Victorians' sense of superiority over Egyptians modern and ancient (ibid.:312, 322). Curse legends also criticized prevailing values (Towers and Wallace dirs 1992, ep.4). Yet they captured the moment when public sympathy for mummies was redirected to archaeologists – the dawn of the Classic curse. The most famous curse prior to that of Tutankhamun belonged to the Unlucky Mummy.

I used to take my students to the British Museum . . . I always had to stop . . . and say . . . 'We are now going into the room where the so-called Unlucky Mummy is; if you believe in it you needn't come . . . ' To my surprise, I found always there were a certain number of people who wouldn't face the thing.

Margaret Murray, *My First Hundred Years* (1963:176)

Mistaken for a mummy in popular lore, the coffin lid of an unknown priestess (acc. no. EA22542) presented to the British Museum by A. F. Wheeler in 1889 (Budge 1920:392, footnote 1) was reputedly cursed. The 'mummy' was claimed to bring misfortune to all who encountered her, even to innocent people and relatives of her victims. Legends that accumulated around her during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries originated from disparate British and American sources, were elaborated following major disasters and were embellished by several authors during the late twentieth

century (Macklin 1965; Vandenberg 1976:196). Major points of agreement between the numerous, conflicting versions of the myth can be summarized as follows. The Unlucky Mummy was allegedly purchased in 1860 by a party of Englishmen, whom she blighted with death, injury and bankruptcy (Adkins 1964). Sent to a London house in which she caused fires (Macklin 1965) or poltergeist activity (*Man, Myth and Magic* 1970: facing page 604), she was condemned as evil by the noted Spiritualist Madame Blavatsky (Adkins 1964). The mummy was sold to the British Museum, causing deaths and frightening night watchmen by making strange noises (Macklin 1965). In photographs, her face appeared to be contorted with agony (*New York Times* 1923a). When sold again and transported abroad, she sank the *Titanic* (Macklin 1965) or *Empress of Ireland* (Budge cited by the British Museum 1995:2).

This legend was the handiwork of occultists, sensationalist journalism and incremental embellishments,¹³ embroidered with famous personae and events to augment its credibility. Its formation reveals much about public perceptions of mummies and the role of museums in popular culture. First, given their close association, human forms and ability to 'watch' museum visitors, mummies and coffins can be conflated (Chapter 5). Second, British and American versions of the myth indicate a parochial localization of legends. The sale of the coffin by the British Museum to a wealthy American (Budge cited by the British Museum 1995:2) or Briton (Vandenberg 1976:196) who foolishly dismisses the curse and causes the *Titanic* disaster indicates prejudicial tailoring of the story in the context of transatlantic rivalries. Third, the attribution of magical power to one of many British Museum coffins was circumstantial: it arrived at the museum while a separate poltergeist mummy legend was circulating (Budge cited by the British Museum 1995).

Fourth, given the origins of the Unlucky Mummy tale in a museum, one must revise Antonio Gramsci's formal distinction (Hall 1986:22) between civil and state spheres – broadly speaking, between culture as it is lived by individuals and as it is regulated by governments (or by the mass media). Gramsci assumes that popular ideas could not issue from authoritative institutions and that authorities' exploitation of everyday culture is always deliberate (*ibid.*:35–6). Yet popular ideas, absorbed by museums through their security staff drawn from the lay community, become an unintended part of museums' output. In 1927, British Museum visitors or security personnel joked that a ghost inhabited the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery; when viewed through a particular glass case, the space inside an empty upright sarcophagus base was 'occupied' by the superimposed reflection of an upright anthropoid sarcophagus lid displayed nearby (*Illustrated London News* 1927). A security guard at the same museum explained to me that one of his co-workers' photographs of Ginger revealed markings resembling a face on the mummy's back. If he had mentioned this to any of the visitors to whom he chatted, then here was another legend in the making.

I noticed that security personnel in smaller museums knew the curators. In contrast, the many security staff at the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art comprised a separately managed division and seldom encountered curators. One 'Met' guard who taught himself Egyptology by reading labels said that boredom affected most of his co-workers, for which reason their posts were regularly rotated. This would limit their familiarity with each culture displayed, and the obligation to remain near their posts would restrict the amount of information that they could read. Extrapolating this situation back through time, the origins of some curse legends are suggested. The fame of large museums did not account entirely for their associations with these legends. Museums' sizes determined numbers of security personnel and, hence, their opportunities to acquire knowledge 'trickling down' from curators. Security staff in large museums were disadvantaged and this, along with boredom, may have inclined them to improvise fantastical histories for the objects surrounding them as they socialized with one another on patrol.

Like the curse fiction that preceded it, the Unlucky Mummy myth interwove two prevailing attitudes: Egypt as wronged avenger and Egypt as infernal menace. The disease-like spread of the Unlucky Mummy's curse, whereby even subsequent owners of a stolen object were tainted by it, enabled this double reading; contagion could be cruelly indiscriminate as well as punishing. In encompassing opposing attitudes, this myth embodied the rapidity with which moral panic gave way to self-righteousness. By the turn of the century, the stage was set for a confrontation between those who warned of retribution for sacrilege and those who championed archaeology. Then, by coincidence, Tutankhamun's tomb was discovered. In the midst of an ethical crisis aggravated by postwar grief, it was inevitable that a curse would be attributed to 'Tut' in order for his excavation to serve as the staging ground for a moral showdown.

Englishman Howard Carter, financed by the Earl of Carnarvon, discovered Tutankhamun's tomb, the only royal burial in the Valley of the Kings to have remained substantially unlooted. Occurring at the dawn of the age of mass media, the excavation attracted wide press reportage and treasures from the tomb influenced contemporary fashions (Frayling 1992:10–24). However, journalists seeking to raise profits and compensate for a lack of information after being denied exclusive reportage of the dig (p.55) interviewed noteworthy people who believed in Egyptian magic, popularizing the idea that the tomb was cursed (pp.46–58). Serialized press reportage and incremental elaboration of Tutankhamun's curse presented it as a continuously unfolding narrative that resembled the novellas serialized in newspapers of the day, not to mention the curse myths with which the public were already familiar (p.43). Journalists made life imitate art.

Tutankhamun's curse included portents such as a cobra killing Carter's canary (p.55) and Carter's discovery of an object or inscription bearing the

warning, 'Death shall come on swift wings to whoever toucheth the tomb of Pharaoh' (pp.49–50). The deaths of people associated with the tomb, including famous visitors, relatives and friends of Lord Carnarvon and, eventually, the expedition members themselves were attributed to the curse (pp.52–3). Most spectacularly, within months of the opening of the tomb and following novelist Marie Corelli's (1923) warning to him about poisons placed in pharaohs' tombs, Carnarvon died from an infected mosquito bite (Frayling 1992:38). Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, author of several mummy stories and member of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Spiritualist movement, attributed Carnarvon's death to 'elementals', spirits dispatched to guard Tutankhamun's tomb (1992:46–7). At this time, church leaders were protesting against materialism (pp.42, 46) and some Britons and Americans, discontent with conventional church doctrine (p.41), embraced pagan revivals including Spiritualism. Many of those bereaved during World War I were comforted by faith in life after death (p.40).

In this social setting, the excavation and display of human remains outraged many people, even though their extension of sympathy to pagans defied prevailing notions of European superiority. The realization of an ethical argument in the form of a myth reflected the novelty of such debate and the risks it entailed in questioning Europe's domination of Egypt. Even Christian commentaries did not question archaeological investigation of the remains of foreigners (Frayling 1992:63) or interpret the recovery of artefacts as a type of materialism. Christianity embraced the Dragon Principle that wealth is wasted on the dead:

{Tutankhamun} returns to his bare tomb with the admonition of the modern burial service: "We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can take nothing out of it." . . . [H]is name . . . will be remembered as long as that of RAMESES the Great. He cannot regret to exchange even "the collar of Nekhebet" . . . for such fresh posthumous laurels.

(*New York Times* 1926)

Scepticism about supernatural phenomena was concomitant with the spirit of scientific conquest; one Methodist minister argued that God would not allow pagan magic to oppose civilization and science (*New York Times* 1923b). Christianity and science were not always at loggerheads; they were old allies against paganism as a type of prescientific reasoning.

MR BEECHER, in a recent sermon, alluded to those who still believe that the world was created in six ordinary days. He said that such individuals were twin brothers of the oldest mummies in Egypt, and the mummies were the best men of the two sorts.

Mr Beecher (San Diego Union 1874)

What motivated some people to volunteer sympathy for mummies when doing so challenged conventional attitudes towards them? Curses echoed Biblical and Classical ideas about transgression and punishment and reflected the ancient Greek concepts of hubris and nemesis. Hubris is the sin of pride and arrogance that propels rash behaviour; the gods chasten the sinner with nemesis, divine retribution. A belief that acquiring dangerous forbidden knowledge would invite punishment was reflected in the Biblical tale of Adam and Eve (*Genesis* 3) and the Greek legend of Pandora. The nineteenth-century British novels *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the legend of Dr Faustus represented scientists as iconoclasts whose defiance of the laws of God and nature precipitated their doom (Frayling 1992:46).

Although pity for mummies invoked traditional altruism, it seems to have incorporated a displaced self-interest. Mummies' fates were feared to foreshadow those of the living; some sympathizers were ultimately concerned for the destinies of their own or fellow Christian bodies. In Victorian Britain, graves were plundered to supply cadavers for medical dissection (Richardson 1987). Memories of bodysnatching probably compounded the distastefulness of mummies' exhumation and dismemberment.

[One] argument is that these departed [pharaohs] avowed a faith different from our own, and that therefore what might be . . . wrong, in the case of early Christian kings . . . is . . . right . . . where these Egyptians are concerned. Surely this reasoning is very dangerous, both ethically and because . . . it will be found that Christians owe more to the beliefs of ancient Egypt than most of them imagine.

Sir Henry Rider Haggard, *To the Editor of The Times* (1923a)

Surely no . . . person can survey the dismal and dilapidated remains of the great Pharaohs, exhibited like so many natural history specimens in . . . the Cairo Museum, without disgust. . . . The instinct of all mankind in all ages has been to hide the bodies of the dead. Keep . . . the funeral furniture . . . but let the bones of the Pharaohs be re-interred . . .

Martin Conway, Director-General, Imperial War Museum,
To the Editor of The Times (1923)

The sympathy involved in picturing unwrapping as rape – even if it was really about sympathizers' own fear of being raped – set a precedent for the use of curse stories as moral censorship, because it broke away from the tradition of emotional detachment that had allowed guilt-free despoliation of mummies. Curse tales are a modern version of an ancient, cross-cultural myth of defilement and revenge. Once commodified, woman and her image must be made difficult to access (Horrocks 1995:112) so, paradoxically, the

cloistered virgin/wrapped mummy/sealed treasure-filled tomb will not only invite but also repulse penetration. In 1918, Sigmund Freud interpreted tribal sexual taboos as evidence for a male belief that women are different and dangerous. He claimed that girls suffer penis envy, seeing themselves as castrated men (1957:204–5). Feminist Barbara Creed reinterprets Freud's data as proof that men viewed women not as castrated, but castrating (1993:119–21).¹⁴ Tribal taboos concerning defloration were attempts to shield men from loss of the penis in the *vagina dentata* – the swallowing or biting vagina which, shaped like a mouth and producing blood that appears to come from its victim, tries to destroy the penetrating instrument that causes pain.

If some women have indeed resented defloration, it must surely be because the associated fear, pain and even coercion could cause first intercourse to be experienced as a sort of rape and therefore to merge with rape on a symbolic level (furthermore, rape of virgins is both an ancient theme and actual occurrence). However, it is not necessary to debate this point further in order to argue that Egyptian tombs were conceptualized as *vaginae dentatae*. Images of curses or living mummies avenging the penetration of tombs suggest that the cycle of defloration/rape, resentment and revenge existed as a concept, whether or not also as a common rationalization of personal experiences. The application of this concept to mummies could have been suggested by an existing sexual metaphor for the conquest of Egypt: the feminized and passive Orient (Said 1991:187, 207). Tombs Egyptianized the metaphor. 'I have an idea that we shall find . . . a tomb that has never been tampered with . . . but that shall deliver up to us, untouched, all the riches of its virgin mystery' (Gautier 1992a:144).

Sympathy for mummies arose in part from fears of defilement of the Self through the loss of bodily integrity during life (rape) or death (grave robbing). Frayling suggests an additional reason for opposition to interference with mummies, especially once professionals dominated archaeology: jealousy. Laypeople without specialized Egyptological knowledge devised their own, more abstract and spiritual terms (1992:46) for interpreting scholarly documents. Hieroglyphic papyri 'translated' by Mormon prophet Joseph Smith as a lost Christian gospel were identified by Egyptologists in 1873 as Egyptian funerary texts – a claim the Mormons rejected (Terry and Whipple 1968:101–2). In 1888, Graham Hamrick, a West Virginian farmer and inventor, produced a secret mummification formula with which he embalmed two cadavers purchased from a local insane asylum (*Roadside America* 1997). Granted access to the arcane knowledge supposedly possessed by the ancient Egyptians (Trigger 1995:24–5), laypeople felt superior to scientists, just as some romantic Orientalists claimed that by practising Middle Eastern culture they could gain greater insight into it than scholarly observers (Said 1991:187–8).

Spiritualists' pronouncements about curses likewise attempted to usurp Egyptologists' authority. Reporters consulted occultists in preference to

academics (Frayling 1992:46). Yet expert envy implies that the critics who deemed archaeology insensitive also found it alluring. 'One suspects . . . that greed had something to do with [Tutmania], greed at the sight of so much treasure preserved from human eyes throughout four millennia' (Halliwell 1986:207). The fashions inspired by Tutankhamun's treasures allowed consumers to appropriate spoils from the tomb by proxy. Popular culture also performed a miracle that science failed to deliver: reviving mummies to satisfy curiosity about the past and confirm that souls survived beyond the grave. A desire to possess academics' authority and access to the treasures of the past accounted for tales of Tut's revenge as much as selfish fears or sympathy for the dead. Along with the Unlucky Mummy, Tutankhamun heralded an about-face in attitudes towards curses. As archaeology became desirable, mummies' antagonism towards the living was no longer accepted. The dead were sacred, but ancient Egyptians were only pagans and impeded the treasure hunt. Thus Tutankhamun, who launched his comeback as a glamorous 'boy king', became a wicked pharaoh.

Carnarvon's death prompted hundreds of terrified owners of Egyptian artefacts and replicas to post them to the British Museum (*Daily Express* 1923) or bury them in their gardens (El Mahdy 1989:173–4). Relatives of John Rowntree, who had acquired a mummy in 1904, vindictively buried it in the garden of his Yorkshire house after his premature death (Cowie and Johnson 2002:191–3). Egyptian objects resisted possession; instead, people owned their own curses after the fashion in which collectors purchased the mystique or prestige thought to cling to objects (Daly 1994:38). Personal curses reassured victims that they, not mummies, were persecuted. The supernatural punishment of wrongdoers had become an intemperate vendetta.

The first American curse fiction had already represented Egyptian magic as malevolent, not merely punitive. In *The Mummy's Soul*, *After Three Thousand Years* and *Lost in a Pyramid*, the male protagonist's desecration of a mummy, theft of her grave goods and reckless experimentation with them, or treatment of them as a trifling gift, constitute hubris. To these crimes are added, in *Lost*, the refusal of his fiancée to heed his warnings about planting the mummy's seeds; in *Three Thousand*, his inability to recognize a curse inscription's prediction of the future; and, in *Soul*, his dismissal of his own premonitions about nemesis. The wife in *Soul*, like Evelyn in *Lost*, develops a foolish fascination with the mummy's treasures so that she becomes as guilty as her partner. In *Three Thousand*, Juliette shares this fascination but Marion bears the greatest guilt for demanding that Vance violate a mummy for her. In each story, the narrative presents a man and woman sympathetically – despite their mutual hubris – as a couple whose companionship is wrecked by a cruel, unseen force that sadistically turns a beautiful young woman into the likeness of a corpse (or, in *Three Thousand*, kills her outright). In *Soul* and *Lost*, the protagonist finds himself ironically partnered to a living mummy

and in *Three Thousand*, he becomes a mummy of sorts, emotionally distant from his wife Juliette.

The hand of my wife was dry, feverish and shrunken . . . [with a] parchment-like skin . . .

Every second was affecting her appearance, developing a woman whose features were shrivelled and brown; the eyes, once animated by holiest love, were cold, passionless, and fixed in a soulless gaze.

Anonymous, *The Mummy's Soul* (1862:440)

[T]here gleaming spectrally on [Evelyn's] bosom was the evil blossom . . . [Her] young face, so lovely an hour ago, lay . . . aged and blighted by the baleful influence of the plant which had drunk up her life.

Louisa May Alcott, *Lost in a Pyramid*, 1869 (1998:85)

Writers invented merciless, irrational curses that worked through intergenerational transmission or contagious objects, harming innocent people. Curses' contagion between family members (Frayling 1992:53; Macklin 1965) is reminiscent of the Biblical punishment of people for their ancestors' sins (*Exodus* 20:5; *Numbers* 14:18). Walter Ingram, son of the founder of the *Illustrated London News*, was said to have bought an Egyptian princess' hand in 1884, to which was affixed 'a golden disc, inscribed with . . . a formidable hieroglyphic curse' that caused the destruction of his home by flood and fire, his best friend's murder and his death on safari in Africa (Copperthwaite 1976:14).¹⁵ The Associated Press claimed in 1937 that a fragment of bone from a pharaoh's skeleton, owned by Sir Alexander Seton, had produced apparitions, fires and illness in his house and injured his friend's maid (MacDougall 1958:18).¹⁶ Some Tutankhamun curse incidents were also intergenerational or contagion events. Perhaps to defend archaeology, which by 1922 was selling newspapers galore, the media inverted the ethical principle of the curse – not by undoing its moral argument but merely by attaching negative attributes to mummies. It is easier to slander the enemy than to engage it in debate. This strategy is a form of abjection.

The abject, according to feminist Julia Kristeva, does not 'respect borders, positions, rules' and it 'disturbs identity, system, order' (1982:4). All that threatens social order, moral standards, hygiene, conventional gender roles, economic stability, authority or the laws of nature – everything from corpses, filth and death to depravity, cruelty and corporeal instability (Creed 1993:9) – can be termed abject when deployed so as to portray some party as evil. Consider, for instance, the Nazis' use of propaganda to ostracize the Jews. Abject things symbolize threats (ibid.:13) to the ordered systems that they define by way of contrast. This role of playing the foil to our cultural norms and moral values resembles the function of the Other, where this Other is not

desired but despised. When curses began to be maligned, mummified Others suffered guilt by association. The Tutankhamun and Unlucky Mummy legends converted curses from warranted nemeses to merciless afflictions by portraying their effects as arbitrary. Indiscriminate contagiousness made curses resemble an archetypal abjection: disease. As curses' executors, mummies were progressively stripped of sympathy, even while their depiction as sentient beings continued.

Whether out of conservatism or concern for profits, the media tended to defend the powerful institution of professional archaeology. Journalists and fiction writers had financial incentive to forge new ways of abjecting the mummy. Loudon's Cheops was a cruel-faced fiend and most subsequent ambulatory mummies were frightful monstrosities. In *The Mummy's Soul*, a female ambulatory mummy – 'The Form, the Death in Life' (Anonymous 1862:446) 'with . . . small cunning eyes' (p.445), one of the earliest American ambulatory mummies and possibly the first female ambulatory mummy – suddenly materializes in the narrator's house. She terrifies him, appearing as she did when he first unwrapped her in Egypt:

A woman's features, black and shrivelled, were revealed. I was startled – even sickened – at the hideous revelation. . . . This woman might have been handsome in the era in which she existed . . . But the dark, parchment-like skin, wrinkled and rough, made me loathe the corpse . . . (1862: 437)

While romances' soft-porn unwrappings shunned 'hideous revelation[s]', *Soul* abjected the body of a mummy in order to signify her depraved personality. Abjection was fully realized in Doyle's famous 1892 story *Lot No. 249*, with its mummified murderer. As the first author known to have presented an ambulatory mummy as the deadly servant of a vengeful master (Lupton 2003:27), Doyle also turned the character into a mindless automaton – a motif which, along with the master-servant and murder themes, was later adopted by Hollywood. The plethora of polluting, frightening attributes that mummies acquired there can be traced back to Doyle's sinister reading of mummies' appearances, although this in turn evolved from works forgotten by Doyle's time, such as *The Mummy's Soul*.

[T]he mummy case . . . framed the lank body of its horrible occupant, who stood . . . with his black, shriveled face toward the door. [T]here still lingered . . . some faint sign of consciousness in the little eyes which lurked in the depths of the hollow sockets. (1990:28)

Something was coming swiftly down [the road] . . . and was fast closing upon him. Out of the darkness he had a glimpse of a scraggy neck, and of two eyes that will ever haunt him in his dreams. . . .

As he rushed madly . . . he . . . could see, as he threw back a glance, that this horror was bounding like a tiger at his heels, with blazing eyes and one stringy arm outthrown. . . . He heard a hoarse gurgling at his very shoulder. (1990: 33)¹⁷

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Lot No. 249*, 1892

The seeds of abjection had long been sown. To Christians, mortal remains were destined to be vacated by the soul, so attempts to prevent their decay seemed vainglorious, producing merely 'poor wretched bodies without *spirit*'¹⁸ (Bernard 1890:24). The American cartoonist and political reporter Thomas Nast used this idea to condemn corruption in the Democratic Party (1877, 1878, 1880a, 1880b). Its leader, Samuel Tilden, caused one scandal after another, but revived his career every time. A dead body should not presume to imitate life and a political corpse should not pretend to retain a good reputation. Nast lampooned Tilden as a mummy whose coffin was emblazoned with pseudo-Egyptian 'hieroglyphic' ciphers alluding to the coded correspondences through which he had attempted to buy the presidency (Brier 1992:9–15, 1998:125–9). The Biblical prophets Jacob and Joseph were mummified (*Genesis* 50:26) and the Egyptians shared with Christians a belief that the soul survives beyond death. Yet the Bible also declared that the dead be allowed to decay in the earth to release their souls (*Genesis* 3:19). The mummification of early Christian Egyptians was therefore discouraged by their clergy (Brier 1998:149) and thereafter permitted only for church leaders, condemned as 'a sinful expression of human vanity for ordinary believers' (Germer et al. 1997:95). Mummification was a folly of the misguided pagans commemorated as corrupt and proud in Classical literature (Wilson 1985:32–3). It seemed a bizarre process, conserving filthy corpses for obscure reasons, defying nature, hygiene, humility and commonsense.

There's a mummy, as they calls it – a sort of pickled body from Egypt – where they keep their dead relashuns in great caves and peerhymeeds, instead of buryin' of 'em as we do . . . Lady standin' by said . . . 'Them Egyptshun priests war main cunnin' clever fellos, and they made millions upon millions believe in 'em for ages. Who believes in 'em noo? Not a soul!' says she. Them Egyptshuns mun have been queer foaks to pickle each other in this fashion; The funny thing is they pickled cats and crokadyles, and other varmints the same way. They mun have had plenty of vinegar, I think, and lots of spare time in them old days!

Timothy Goorkrodger, West Yorkshire textile worker,
describing a visit to the Leeds Museum in the 1860s
(Fetherston c.1870, cited by Brears 1992:89)

[W]hen a certain Leicester citizen wishes . . . to speak slightly of the museum, he refers to it as the 'mummy house', a mummy evidently appealing to him as the last word in futility and dryness . . .

E. E. Lowe, Director, Leicestershire Museum, Art Gallery and Libraries, *Romance in the Museum*, 1922 (cited by Brown 2002:16)

Mummification was a pointless pursuit, so its products were ridiculous caricatures of the human countenance, monumental failures to achieve the impossible dream of making the dead live. The thin or elderly were likened to wizened Egyptian cadavers and vice versa.

Great Mummy! wonderingly we thee behold,
But thy old flesh is hard as nether stone . . .
Surely, old lass, you're safe from Time's aggression,
His ancient teeth on you can't make impression.

Benjamin Shillaber, *Opening the Mummy* (1853)

[Thin lady:] How do you like my Egyptian costume? It's the rage
now
[Fat lady:] Don't make me laugh
[Thin lady:] My dressmaker says I am just the type to wear it
[Fat lady:] Yes you always looked mummified
[Thin lady:] You are just jealous because you are too fat to wear
this style
[Fat lady:] I'd rather be fat than to look like a bow legged
mummy
Maurice Ketten, *Can You Beat It!* comic strip (1923)

People with outmoded ideologies were also likened to the benighted Egyptians. *Punch* thought that paper manufactured from mummy wrappings ought to bear appropriate political sentiments: 'On mummy-paper Gladstone should dilate / On old-world theories of church and state' (1847). If Westerners had to avoid becoming Egyptian, the Egyptians needed saving from themselves, lest their backwardness should thwart their progressive aspirations. On a folding souvenir card from a packet of Kinney Brothers tobacco (c.1885–95, Plate 2.3), a mournful mummy representing Egypt's past transforms into a smiling, debonair fellow in a modernizing makeover courtesy of Sweet Caporal cigarettes. One whiff of the West updates even the most ancient relics.

This use of mummies as cautionary examples – a routine of casual denigration that nineteenth-century popular culture embedded in the idiom of the English language – persists even today (Chapter 4). The mockery of mummies as part of a broader strategy of abjection may explain why the



Plate 2.3 Consumption of Western products cures Egypt's obsolescence. Folding collectible card from a packet of tobacco, (a) closed, (b) open. Kinney Brothers, c.1885-95 (author's collection).

satirical play *The Mummy* (Bernard 1890) established farce as the genre of most subsequent mummy-themed theatre productions (Madison 1980:63–4).

In humour and horror, mummies were becoming abject, but Tutankhamun and the Unlucky Mummy were still invincible. Only if mummies could become defeatable might their threat to the West be fully subdued. Curses implied the existence of pagan gods and magic, an idea whose challenge to Christianity could only be offset by depicting mummies as evil. Mockery was not enough; mummies were now to be hated.

The curse myth originally condemned sacrilegious people and self-styled experts by claiming that a supernatural realm of arcane powers existed, in which the sanctity of the dead was vindicated. This realm surrounded and incorporated the known world but lay beyond the comprehension of self-righteous people (Figure 2.1a). Slightly misquoting Shakespeare (*Hamlet* I.v.166–7, Hubler ed. 1987:64), Corelli warned Carnarvon, ‘There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy’ (1923:4).¹⁹

The idea that European control over the world might fail was offensive and terrifying to some. ‘Do you suppose that God Almighty would permit a Pharaoh, who after all was only a man with a crown on his head, to murder people by magical means, thousands of years after his own death . . . ? If that can happen, let us abandon all hope, for indeed we are in the hollow of the hand of darkness’ (Haggard 1923b). Ancient Egypt seemed demonic even to those who refuted its magic; the abjection device of fiction was becoming a standard term of discourse in public debate.

In true heathen hopelessness Conan Doyle . . . would charge the death of Lord Carnarvon to devilish evil [spirits] . . .

Such doctrines belong to the days of witchcraft. . . . If a good God made us He does not allow devilish spirits to vent their vengeance on friends of investigation and civilization . . .

Reverend Dr Christian F. Reisner, *Assails Laying Lord Carnarvon's Death to Spirits* (New York Times 1923b)

A rupture of the laws of nature and rule of God, representing threats to empire and economy, had to be reversed. Doyle simply had his mummy cut into pieces and thrown into the fire (1990:38). *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, the first major work to combine a curse with romance, depicts nature as a pawn

Figure 2.1 Structural changes in the curse legend. (a) The Preclassic curse: hubris is followed by nemesis. Western experts lose control over their ordered world (1) when they discover that it is part of a larger, supernatural universe (2) whose threat they are ill-equipped to vanquish. (b) The Classic curse: nemesis is overturned. Like a nut in a shell, the supernatural universe (2) that threatens the experts' control of their world (1) is eventually trapped and defeated by a Western hero (3). Illustrations: © J. Day 2005.



in a struggle between Christian and pagan forces (Stoker 1978:233); God Himself defeats Tera, materializing as a storm (ibid.:306–8). This investment of the universe with divinity finally provided a means for knowledge to be consciously valued above the sanctity of death: the inherently Christian universe ejected mummies as pagan aliens.

Trelawny's hubris lies not so much in the violation of Tera's tomb, which the queen invites in order to attain immortality, but in dabbling with dangerous pagan powers. This mistake indicts science yet confirms the superiority of Christianity and, despite her sinister magic, Tera is sometimes a romantic and pitiful figure (Leatherdale 1996:12). God's rescue of the world but His failure to save innocent Margaret is another incongruity. The Classic curse, with its more decisive (but not entirely uncontradictory) representation of heroes, villains and victory, was still under construction. Stoker's achievement was to refine the divine universe as a mechanism for inverting attacks upon archaeology. A second, partially rewritten 1912 edition of *Jewel* (Stoker 1996:251–6), its revisions possibly the work of an unknown editor (ibid.:251, editor's footnote 2; 254, editor's footnote 16), omits Chapter XVI of 1903, 'Powers Old and New', which explicitly proposes that Egyptian gods might coexist with the Christian God (Stoker 1978:232–3). This edition also spares Margaret, Trelawny and the other experimenters, but without God's help: all references to the storm are omitted. Although the 1912 conclusion can be interpreted as a suggestion that Tera survives by permanently possessing Margaret and so marries Ross, 'one doubts whether Stoker would tolerate a confirmed sorceress making marriage vows before God within the walls of a Christian church . . . It seems probable that the new ending was meant to be happy for everyone except the Egyptian Queen' (Stoker 1996:256, editor's footnote 22). The revisions seem to confirm, with a deposit of dust, that Tera perishes; the lack of dust in the 1903 story implies that she survives in the original version (ibid.:255, editor's footnote 19), while being thwarted. Despite undermining the divine universe device, the revisions complete Stoker's original, half-realized project of vanquishing the mummy. By refining both the rape imagery that supported curses and the divine universe device that defeated them – and, most importantly, by setting a precedent for the mummy's defeat – Stoker arguably made as great a contribution to mummy lore as he did to vampire lore with *Dracula*.

Conclusion

'The curse' is a generalizing term for a series of conflicting ideas that resolved, at their polar extremes, into an ethical argument against digging up the dead (the Preclassic curse) and a condemnation of opposition to archaeology and colonial conquest (the Classic curse). Nevertheless, any given curse narrative is amenable to both interpretations. This, along with a lack of formal differentiation between Preclassic and Classic narratives, lends

'the' curse its fantastic duplicity as both the scourge of wrongdoers and the bane of the innocent. Since romance shared with the Classic curse a purpose of suppressing threats to local economies and colonial rule abroad, it too generated a counterpoint: the metaphor of rape, a critique of Europeans' control of Egypt. Despite representing Tutankhamun as evil, his curse was not a completely Classic curse because it was invincible. Yet it heralded the decline of sympathy for the mummy and a longing to possess his treasure, so it was a proto-Classic curse. In the next chapter, I will show how cinema further shifted popular morality to a potentially full identification of audiences with archaeologists.

Romance literature and early to mid-nineteenth-century curse fiction both imagined European domination of the Orient in terms of a phallogocentric penetrative sexual metaphor. Curses interpreted the metaphor as rape; romances recast it as seduction, but by the twentieth century, this benign reading was subverted back to its original rape form. Other authors' treatments of romantic and curse themes as distinct modules used in varying combinations in films and stories have hitherto obscured their common symbolic basis and the integral role that each played in the structural formation of its opposite. The two paradigms emerged more or less simultaneously as complementary reflections upon the problems of colonialism. However, as consumerism replaced colonialism and the West grew more confident of the righteousness of its global domination, the mummy-victim was portrayed as a menace. The next project of popular culture was to perfect Stoker's secret weapon: a moral device to swallow the mummy who threatened to consume the ordered world in which commodities and cadavers consented to possession. Only then could the guilt manifested by curses finally be repudiated.

FEAR AND LOATHING

Twentieth-century classic mummy films

[T]here is a place for a national bogey man in the scheme of things . . . *The Mummy* . . . stalks out of his winding cloths after 3,700 years of restless sleep, and that is a hideous enough theme to freeze the most callous imagination . . .

A.D.S., *Life After 3,700 Years* (*New York Times* 1933)

Introduction

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and tales of its curse carried Egyptomania into a new century. The media enriched the curse legend, establishing it as a guaranteed seller of books and newspapers. They were fast becoming the paramount influence upon public perceptions of ancient Egypt, wresting control from academics and shifting attention away from the minutiae of archaeological practice, towards sensational discoveries and mummies' vengeance. Media domination of Egyptomania and mummymania was fully realized in the new medium of cinema. During the quarter century beginning in 1899, more than forty mummy films were produced, mostly comedies and fantasies (Lupton 2003:36–7). Then came *The Mummy* (Freund dir. 1932). Released by Universal Pictures ten years after the Tutankhamun discovery and starring Boris Karloff, it stunned and terrified viewers and is still regarded as one of the finest horror films ever made. Its novel depiction of an ambulatory mummy, rather than invisible forces, as the means by which a curse is executed ensured its lasting influence, along with its status as the first mummy 'talkie' (Lupton 2003:37). *The Mummy's* popularity prompted Universal to produce more, albeit inferior, mummy films. Hammer Studios later created its own, based partly upon Universal's series. While twentieth-century mummy literature perpetuated a nineteenth-century romantic theme (ibid.:30), cinema's principal mummy theme was horror. To this day, no mummy film, fiction or product escapes the influence of the Universal and Hammer films.¹

The extent of this influence earns these films the title of 'Classics' (Madison

1980:67, 69, 80). I also regard Universal's last mummy film of the period, a comedy, as a Classic. Leon Abrams' draft treatment (cited by Feramisco 2003:85–97) of Universal's *The Mummy's Curse*, titled *The Mummy's Return*, provides comparative material worthy of consideration. The brief dismissal of Classic films in Egyptology books reflects an assumption that it is not worth studying formulaic plots and characters. Most discussion has been left to horror enthusiasts, whose commentaries are often superficial. However, superficial imagery is the key to understanding Classic films' relationships with attitudes towards real mummies.

According to Antonio Gramsci, states can control citizens by manipulating their minds. The contents of popular ideas borrowed by states (or by the media) are altered to eliminate anti-establishment elements before the ideas are presented back to communities as their 'own' culture to practise (1985:35–6). Classic films conflate archaeology with treasure-hunting, representing tomb excavation as immoral, so why did they fail to inspire protests against archaeology? Is there some element in the films that detracts from the righteousness of the curse but is not immediately evident – some evidence that the powers-that-be have tampered with the curse to alter its purpose? The answer lies in a second discrepancy: like the Preclassic version of the curse, the films' curse claims to support ethical behaviour but the mummy, its instrument, is portrayed as evil. In Chapter 2, I explained how curses were changed from a just punishment into a perverse affliction when they were alleged to harm innocent people. Here, I will chart the further contributions made to the abjection of mummies and curses by cinema; the repulsive imagery it elaborated around the mummy failed to defeat ethical criticisms of digging up the dead, yet gave an impression of doing so. Judging by the mummy's roles of aggressor, idiot and symbol of pollution in popular culture today (Chapter 4), the abjections of cinema have crippled the curse as a vehicle for ethical protests.

Classic plots seem simple: 'a tomb is despoiled, a curse is invoked and a mummy goes on the rampage before finally being destroyed' (Brosnan 1978:45). Collectively, however, the films built a profile of 'the' curse that differed from the Preclassic hubris/nemesis model and inverted its moral lesson. I will show how this new curse paradigm was formed through incremental developments in storyline, characters and imagery and a creative adaptation of museum display elements and Egyptology. Most writers have examined the films individually, but in light of their present reputation as a cohesive body of work, this approach does not pin down precisely what ideas they shared. The resulting failure to define the Classic curse creates the impression that it does not differ from nineteenth-century curses. Only by interweaving discussions of all of the Classic films can parallels between their characters and plots become apparent, and a definition of their curse formula be distilled. The extent of its variance from the Preclassic formula then becomes evident. It is obvious that the powers-that-be neutralized the

subversive power of popular culture when cinema turned the curse from a criticism of grave-robbing into a celebration of it.

Classic film plots²

The Mummy begins in 1921. Egyptologist Sir Joseph Whemple and his assistant Ralph Norton have discovered the tomb of Im-Ho-Tep, High Priest at Karnak Temple, while excavating for the British Museum. Whemple's friend, occultist Dr Muller, discovers that Im-Ho-Tep was buried alive, punished for a crime. Norton insists that a box from the tomb be opened; within lies an inscribed casket.

Whemple [reading]: 'Death – eternal punishment – for – anyone – who – opens – this – casket. In the name of Amon-Ra, the king of the gods.' Good heavens, what a terrible curse!

Norton [grabbing the casket]: Well, let's see what's inside!

Muller: *WAIT!* – You have read the curse!

Muller fails to convince Whemple to rebury the casket that contains the magical Scroll of Thoth, with which the dead may be raised. Meanwhile, Norton recites the Scroll's spell, awakening Im-Ho-Tep. Whemple returns to find the Scroll and mummy gone, and Norton laughing deliriously. He keeps Im-Ho-Tep's escape secret.

Eleven years later, Whemple's son Frank completes a fruitless excavation. An Egyptian, Ardath Bey, claims knowledge of the location of Princess Anck-es-en-Amon's tomb. The tomb is found, its treasures and the Princess' mummy displayed in the Cairo Museum and Whemple returns to Egypt to congratulate Frank. Bey attends Anck-es-en-Amon in the museum. After closing time, he produces and recites from the Scroll of Thoth to revive her – he is Im-Ho-Tep in disguise. Meanwhile, Muller introduces Frank to English-Egyptian Helen Grosvenor. Bey's chanting fails to revive the mummy but sends Helen into a trance; possessed by the spirit of Anck-es-en-Amon, she travels to the museum and collapses. Frank takes her home. Bey loses the Scroll; Whemple and Muller find it. Bey visits Helen, recognizes her as the Princess and senses the Scroll's presence in the adjoining room. Whemple plans to destroy the Scroll, so Bey leaves, then utters a spell that kills him. Realizing that Bey is Im-Ho-Tep, Muller offers Frank a protective amulet of the goddess Isis. Frank grudgingly takes it but refuses to believe that Bey is a living mummy.

Bey retrieves the Scroll. He lures Helen and conjures a vision of their past lives. In this flashback we learn that Im-Ho-Tep was forbidden to marry Anck-es-en-Amon, sacred virgin of Isis, who died young. He stole the Scroll of Thoth to revive her, but was discovered. For this sacrilege her father, the pharaoh, condemned Im-Ho-Tep to be buried alive. Wrapped as a mummy,

he was entombed with the Scroll. Released from trance, Helen returns to the Whemples' house. Bey lures her back, delaying Frank's pursuit by striking him down with magic. Frank's amulet saves his life. To reunite himself with the soul of Anck-es-en-Amon, Bey prepares to kill and mummify Helen at the museum. Frank and Muller arrive to rescue her. Terrified, Anck-es-en-Amon, incarnate as Helen, begs forgiveness before a statue of Isis. The statue raises its arm, destroying Bey and the Scroll with a bolt of lightning.

The curse, the date of Whemple's expedition and the Princess' name (that of Tutankhamun's wife) are inspired by the Tutankhamun excavation. Themes of reincarnation and reviving mummies in museums at night are apparently plagiarized from *The Ring of Thoth* (Halliwell 1986:207, 212–13). However, *The Mummy* introduces an ambulatory mummy as the means by which curses are effected. He may be inspired by the mummy in *Lot No. 249* or *Some Words With a Mummy*. The Egyptian myth *The Tale of Khamuas and Neneferkaptah*, which features a living mummy and a magic scroll hidden within a series of boxes, must also have provided inspiration (Daughterty 1989:14). John Balderston, Egyptology enthusiast and final writer of the screenplay, was surely familiar with the myth (Lupton 2003:33) and in my view may have read its first English translation (Griffith trans. 1900).³

The Mummy's popularity prompted Universal to produce a series of low-budget films featuring a mummy named Kharis: *The Mummy's Hand* (Carbanne dir. 1940) and its sequels *The Mummy's Tomb* (Young dir. 1942), *The Mummy's Ghost* (le Borg dir. 1944) and *The Mummy's Curse* (Goodwins dir. 1944). The latter three films starred Lon Chaney Jr as Kharis. When the genre became hackneyed, the studio reworked it as a farce, *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* (Lamont dir. 1955).⁴ Adopting Universal's characters and scenarios, Hammer revived the genre with the critically acclaimed *The Mummy* (Fisher dir. 1959), starring Christopher Lee as Kharis. Later Hammer films – *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* (Carreras dir. 1964), *The Mummy's Shroud* (Gilling dir. 1966) and *Blood From the Mummy's Tomb* (Holt dir. 1971), which were not sequels – were less popular.

Most Classic films have similar plots: a mummy kills those who pillaged the tomb of his beloved princess (or, in *Shroud*, of a prince in his care). Sometimes he also pursues a woman as the reincarnation of this princess, or as a bride for his Egyptian master. He is destroyed before he or his master can claim her or kill the man she desires, who is the youngest of the tomb violators. Some of the violators ignore warnings about the curse and refuse to believe that the dead can revive, so they are slain by the mummy. The violator who escapes his fate and defeats the mummy questions experts' assertions that the dead do not walk and recognizes others' deaths as a warning.

In varying this formula, Universal's *Curse* produces an anticlimactic denouement. The hero, Halsey, regards Kharis' curse seriously from the outset and the scepticism of Pat Walsh, which never abates, goes unpunished

(although in a scene that was never filmed, Walsh was to have witnessed proof that the reincarnation of Kharis' lover, Ananka, turned from a living woman back into a mummy, Feramisco 2003:129–30). Nobody undergoes a transformation of values, so nobody is morally positioned to defeat Kharis. Therefore, the mummy effectively commits suicide by slaying Ragheb, the assistant of his Egyptian master, who alone can sustain his life. More orthodox narratives criticize academic, legal or patriarchal power, from which the hero must divorce himself to defeat the mummy. Paradoxically, this defeat represents the triumph of these powers. *Ghost* and *Blood* are exceptions. Kharis claims the heroine and escapes in *Ghost*, but only because a sequel, *Curse*, was planned, in which Kharis is finally killed. *Ghost* recalls the mummy-victory Preclassic myths. It offered an alternative vision of the curse that was available for further development but rejected by later films, save perhaps *Blood*, the ambiguous denouement of which could be interpreted as the survival of the spirit of the Egyptian queen Tera in Margaret's body.⁵ Departing from formula (Kinsey 1998:412), *Blood* was based upon the Preclassic novel *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, in which Tera destroys the protagonists (Chapter 2).

Even the most ambitious attempt to deconstruct formula by questioning archaeological values could not make its mummy victorious. In Hammer's *Mummy*, an Egyptian, Mehemet Bey, and an Egyptologist, John Banning, debate the ethics of digging up the dead. Bey describes the British Museum as an imperialist institution and condemns the exhibition of human remains. The debate is complicated by a mutual engagement in pretence. Bey feigns support for the racist beliefs he supposes John holds. His apology for aspiring, as a barbarian, to civility seems disingenuous alongside his militant politics. While John ultimately supports imperialism, his callousness in this scene is out of character; by feigning contempt for Bey's worship of the ancient god Karnak, he hopes to provoke Bey's anger to elicit proof of his involvement in some local murders (which unbeknown to him, have been committed by a mummy under Bey's control). This scene appears to disrupt imperial or archaeological authority (Hutchings 1993:70–1) but the combatants' subterfuges, which unmask Bey as an accessory to murder, make Egypt's victory illusory. *The Mummy* engages with imperialism but finally retreats. Its Victorian setting distances its conflicts from the present era (Lupton 2005), permitting nostalgia for times when European colonialism held sway. Other 1960s and 1970s Hammer films raise feminist ideas but, constrained by patriarchal stereotypes, are forced towards conservative conclusions (Hutchings 1993:183). Similarly, *The Mummy* introduces a radical element into an inflexible formula that ejects it.

Norton is disappointed with Whemple's finds. The veteran responds, 'Much more is learned from studying bits of broken pottery than from all the sensational finds.' *The Mummy* initially challenges popular fixation with the glamorous side of archaeology but, ultimately, the discipline's reputation is

sacrificed to create tension. Archaeologists are portrayed as staid, incapable of comprehending the wonder of what they uncover like Whemple, or as fools oblivious to dangerous powers like Norton. Dr Petrie, awestruck as Kharis reawakens, does not flee (*Hand*). Professor Norman's obsessive experiments expose him to Kharis' attack (*Ghost*). Only when archaeology is popularized as a quest for 'gold and diamonds' (*Hand*), or contrasted with crass commercialism (personified by the entrepreneurs Alexander King in Hammer's *Curse* and Stanley Preston in *Shroud*), are its advocates sympathetic.

Usually, however, archaeologists (as opposed to amateur treasure-hunters), museum curators, detectives and scientists are portrayed as fools. Fixated upon wealth or knowledge, they cannot see that the world is enchanted. Archaeologists' integrity is undermined to create a reason for the mummy's awakening, not to criticize archaeology *per se*, although impatience with scientific minutiae seems to inform the films. With the addition of Egyptian gods, curses and magic, the bounds of the cinematic universe exceed those of our own, limiting the range of fictional professionals' knowledge of their universe to the mundane and the visible. Their dismissals of curse warnings and disregard for the sanctity of the grave constitute sin. Whemple sees Im-Ho-Tep's hand print, hears Norton's explanation and observes that both mummy and Scroll have disappeared, but it takes eleven years and Muller's persistence to convince him that the mummy came to life and took the Scroll. This signifies that Whemple is doomed. He realizes the truth unwillingly, with assistance and too late.

An attack upon experts' authority entails one upon their gender. In the 1960s, conventional cinema representations of men as powerful authority figures gave way to depictions of them as monsters or victims in response to feminist critiques (Horrocks 1995:99–100, 171). Following social changes in Britain after World War II, notably the decline of imperialism, some 1950s Hammer films displayed similar attrition of male authority, according to Peter Hutchings (1993:55). He suggests that concerns about masculinity and imperialism were interrelated, even used to represent each other (p.71). Hutchings interprets Hammer's *Mummy* as an Oedipal narrative (pp.71–6), the failure of a succession of men to fulfil patriarchal law (p.75). The Universal Kharis' limp is transferred from mummy to man when Hammer archaeologist Stephen Banning injures his son John. In Hutchings' view, John's limp signifies emasculation (p.71). An intergenerational curse, one that is transferred to the descendants of the guilty party (Chapter 2), is appropriately chosen as the vehicle for John's wounding by his father and his inheritance of Ananka and the guilt of her desecration from him. John has married Isobel, the reincarnation of Kharis' lover Ananka; his marriage is incestuous and regressive (p.74). Towering Kharis is a father figure, an older man who punishes the son's coveting of the mother, an older woman (p.72). Deborah Del Vecchio and Tom Johnson (1992:124–5) read John's wounds as proof that he is reliving the sin and suffering of Kharis, but they locate

the basis of conflict in two men's competition for the same woman, not her role as a pawn in men's struggle with the legacy of father-figures. Carol Siri Johnson's interpretation of Universal's *Mummy* casts Ardath Bey as Helen's substitute father; seeking to raise Helen's mother-ancestor Anck-es-en-Amon, he instead makes Helen the object of his affections. Isis acts as her mother, saving her from an incestuous union (Johnson 1991:109–10). These Freudian interpretations of two films agree that the weakening of masculinity symbolizes, and is among, the threats posed by mummies to Western values. Otherwise, though, these interpretations conflict and I am not convinced that all the other Classic films can be explained with an incest metaphor.

Rape, not incest, is the pivotal Classic sexual metaphor for sacrilege and theft. The precedent for the sexualization of Egyptian genres was set by early Victorian Orientalist seduction and rape metaphors, not later Freudian ideas. Most Classic films did not contain a female figure such as Isis who rescued the heroine from her 'father'; a male became the rescuer as the genre developed. This scenario is reminiscent of a European mythological hero's rescue of a maiden or treasure from a dragon, which condemns the monster as wasteful (Campbell 1988:184) and counteracts the mummy-monster's sympathetic character as the victim of a figurative rape. Sexual intercourse can be experienced by one party, but not the other, as rape; likewise, one party may feel entitled to appropriate the goods of another, who claims to have been robbed. Sexual and economic issues, each of which may be viewed from opposing perspectives, can act as metaphors for each other, as they did in mummy romance literature (Daly 1994). Classic films blend sexual and economic themes in a feedback loop: objects or mummies are manipulated in ways that allude to rape, which in turn invites interpretation of this manipulation as theft. Carol Siri Johnson suggests that allusions to incest are made mainly through characters' relationships with each other and not with their material environments. This makes incest less effective than rape as a metaphor for mummies' objectification.

Universal's Kharis series derives from its *Mummy*, but separates the Ardath Bey persona from the Im-Ho-Tep mummy persona to introduce a new character, a fez-wearing High Priest of a cult that has sustained the mummy's life for millennia with a brew made from tana leaves. This character who revives a mummy with a drug brewed from an ancient plant and uses him as a hitman is clearly based upon Edward Bellingham in *Lot No. 249*. The High Priest's erudition and crisp suit veil his antagonism towards Europeans. As a modern yet pagan Egyptian, he imposes the past of Egypt over its present. 'This [is a] turning away from contemporary Islamic Egypt in favour of the more distant and reassuring civilization of the ancients' (Towers and Wallace dirs 1992, ep.5). Foreign peoples have been associated with the past because their rituals are rooted in tradition (Lutz and Collins 1993:91). This implies that they suffer stagnancy, 'a bad sort of eternity'

(Said 1991:208), and that Western assumptions about them are permanently viable and beyond reproach (ibid.:239).

In *Hand* and *Tomb*, the High Priest is attracted to the hero's sweetheart, who is not a reincarnation of Kharis' lover, and sends Kharis to fetch her but is killed by the hero or his allies. In *Ghost* and *Curse*, the heroine is the reincarnation of this lover, so the lustful High Priest (*Ghost*) or his novice (*Curse*) are slain by Kharis. The High Priest, or another character with a similar role, became integral to the genre, included by Hammer in *The Mummy* (Mehemet Bey), *Curse* (Beauchamp⁶) and *Shroud* (Hasmid Ali). Yet only in *Curse* is he a rival for the heroine's affections; Hammer scriptwriters recognized that domination of the mummy was his principal function. The mummy's resistance to domination resolves the plot. The High Priest or equivalent character is usually responsible for the failure of the mummy's mission, often as a result of his desire for the heroine (his abandonment of his vow of celibacy, as in the Kharis films) or his callousness towards her that offends the mummy (Hammer's *Mummy* and *Curse*).

By 1955, mummy films had become hackneyed and were frequently lampooned (Brunas et al. 1990:229). 'Chaney [Jr] once complained that if you met Abbott and Costello you were dead' (Davis 1987:157). *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* has been ridiculed, but it is actually a complex and fascinating film. Its emphasis upon ancient Egypt suppresses the visibility of modern, Islamic Egypt; the Egyptian characters are pagans who worship Klaris, a mummy. 'Corpse fanciers, unconscious worshipers of a soulless body, are . . . preeminent representatives of inimical religions, identified by their murderous cults' (Kristeva 1982:109). Materialism, personified by Madame Rontru and her gangsters who intend to steal the treasure of Klaris' lover Ara, and ethics, personified by High Priest Semu and his cultists, exist in traditional opposition. Yet both are sullied by their exponents' villainy, and archaeology is withdrawn from combat prematurely with the murder of Dr Zoomer. The conflict between ethics and materialism is depoliticized, even mocked; it cannot (and need not) be resolved. Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, hapless Americans caught up in civil conflict abroad, bumble their way between the warring parties. Klaris is destroyed by accident, not by a hero whose values have been transformed, or as a result of betrayal by his High Priest. No single party is identified as the recipient of Ara's treasure. Capitalism alone prevails: Bud and Lou convert the mummy's tomb into the Kafé Klaris! The mummy escapes possession, but is reincarnated as a club; Egypt, no longer able to be colonized in 1955, is instead turned into an object and purchased by Americans, foreshadowing the massive commercialization of the name and likeness of Tutankhamun in the United States during the 1970s (McAlister 1996).

All characters seek to possess Ara's treasure rather than the scientific knowledge pursued by Universal's earlier archaeologists. The curse is collapsed with the materialism from which it is distinguished in previous productions

because what Klaris defends is treasure, not sanctity. The wasteful hoarding mummy whose treasure may be rightfully confiscated and put to better use by capitalists (the Dragon Principle, Campbell 1988:184) was later elaborated in popular culture. Another contribution of *Meet the Mummy* to posterity was its elaboration of the possibilities of concealment and revelation suggested by coffins and bandages, and its revitalization of Egyptian objects and mummies as props in farcical confusions between subjects and objects. Coffins hide thieves, bandages disguise impostors who are mistaken for real mummies, and Klaris' ambulation is mirrored by the things around him: Zoomer's corpse 'moves', relocated by the cultists, as does Rontru posing as a mannequin. These theatrical devices (Bernard 1890:20; Capper 1868) had been inherited by literature (Rohmer 1928) and cinema shorts (Bernds dir. 1948; Lord dir. 1939) but *Meet the Mummy* developed them for feature-length films that later influenced television. It was the first major twentieth-century product of an emerging humorous paradigm (Chapter 4).

Searching for the curse

The Classic formula

By comparing the themes and character roles in each of the Classic films, a generic genre plot can be distilled. Definition of the Classic version of the curse reveals its derivation from museum displays, the Tutankhamun excavation and Victorian fiction, and exposes the imperfection of its melding of romantic with curse themes, and pro- with anti-archaeology arguments. Lying on the cusp of an old romantic paradigm and a new consciousness of archaeological ethics aroused by the Tutankhamun controversy, Universal's *Mummy* juxtaposed a reanimated corpse with the concept of reincarnation borrowed from Victorian romances and Spiritualist beliefs. Such contradictions, along with the continuity errors for which critics pilloried Classic films, did not always result from poor production values, but often from an attempt to blend two incompatible paradigms.

The plot stages shared by Classic films unfold as follows.

Warning

Tutankhamun's curse was allegedly recorded upon an object or wall in his tomb, or foretold by a clairvoyant. An inscription or a character I call the Cassandra figure⁷ forewarns archaeologists of a curse. Some films without tomb-opening sequences displace warnings onto violable objects, such as the sealed box containing the Scroll of Thoth.

Warnings are integral to hubris/nemesis curses. They give characters an opportunity to avoid sacrilege, which they decline and so become guilty. Nemesis follows and interest develops around prospects of defying fate.

Repeated warnings from characters, inscriptions or portentous events – including mummy attacks themselves, which foreshadow a climactic attack upon the main character(s) – reinstate tension. Hammer's *Mummy* passes the Cassandra role from Mehemet Bey to Stephen Banning to a drunken poacher: 'something very unpleasant's gonna happen here tonight'. *Shroud* innovates several female clairvoyants who constantly speak of impending doom. Hammer's John Banning has an initial encounter with Kharis that prepares him for the mummy's final attack, but *Shroud's* Paul Preston has no idea that Prem lives until shortly before the mummy's sole attack upon him. It is women's warnings that convince Paul to abandon the conventional logic that is impotent in the face of the supernatural.

Some Cassandras are antagonistic towards archaeologists – High Priests, tomb guardians, the fortune-teller Haiti (*Shroud*) – while others are archaeologists themselves, their friends or employees. While antagonistic Cassandras perish, it does not follow that kindred ones survive. Some, like Muller and Barbara Preston, are innocent of sacrilege and so spared, but Babe Hanson (*Tomb*) and Hammer's Stephen Banning and Hashmi Bey (*Curse*), who desecrated tombs, are slain. Claire and Paul in *Shroud* are guilty but, as the young lead characters, they must live. The Preclassic curse's punishment of the guilty is disrupted by films' duty to spare sympathetic principal characters, as well as incidental characters, often Egyptian labourers like Ali (*Hand*) whose deaths would supposedly bear little import for Western audiences. Punishment of hubris is also disrupted by the Classic precondition that curses and their anti-Western Cassandra-accomplices be destroyed. There is an additional need to preserve Cassandras whose constant warnings substitute for other evidence of supernatural activity. Hubris/nemesis is beginning to break down, although traces of an impassive Preclassic morality survive in tomb-defiling Cassandras, for whom sympathy is built only to be dashed at their deaths. They are pathetic figures, their foresight mistaken for insanity (Hammer's Stephen Banning, *Shroud's* Basil Walden and *Blood's* Berigan).

In *Shroud*, Prem's reflection 'in a crystal ball for Sir Basil, in developing fluid for Harry and only hazily visible to the myopic Longbarrow' (Barnes and Rigby 1995:31) renders literal the blindness of men to the supernatural. Previous Hammer mummy films depicted injured legs and severed hands; Prem smashes heads before crushing his own. These injuries symbolize the failure of masculinity (Hutchings 1993:71–6). Prem cannot save young prince Kah-to-Bey, whom he swore to protect; Stanley abandons his son Paul in his desperation to escape Egypt. If men lack vision, women must possess it, yet it cannot be of the patriarchal, logical kind (ibid.:71–6), so Claire, Barbara and Haiti are all clairvoyant (Barnes and Rigby 1995:31).

Hubris I: activation

Curses are invoked when the Principal Violator among a team of tomb-defilers ignores warnings and infringes the margins of the sacred and uncontrollable, whether by breaching the seal upon a tomb door or closed box, entering a tomb, opening a coffin or reciting a curse inscription. Hubris usually involves interference with a mummy who does not desire, or at least expect, to be disturbed. Im-Ho-Tep and Tera hope to be resurrected, so archaeologists' assistance of their evil plans constitutes hubris. Some characters commit several types of sacrilege, compounding their guilt. Most archaeologists and their associates are guilty of at least entering tombs, save for those who inherit intergenerational curses.

Initially, archaeologists and their allies, apart from any Cassandra in their midst, are Doubting Thomases who are ignorant about curses, including the Principal Violator and the protagonist destined to emerge as the Hero. The Principal Violator's death is a warning to the Hero. *Tomb* and *Ghost* unfold in the United States, their Principal Violators (Stephen Banning and Professor Norman respectively) having survived previous involvement in sacrilege (Banning in *Hand*) or abetting of defilers (Norman in *Tomb*). That is, the Principal Violator is the most senior male supporter of archaeology, even if he did not open a tomb. Hubris does not arise solely from entering tombs, but also from the sin of arrogance: of claims to authority, blind faith in logic and the treatment of mummies as objects. Hubris applies to attitude more fundamentally than even to action. Thus Norman's scientific experiments are permitted to convince John Banning that Kharis walks, while Norman himself is slain (*Ghost*). Victims of intergenerational curses would seem innocent, but commit hubris by ignoring Cassandra's warnings (a collapse of Activation with Warning).

Babe:	Thirty years ago your father and I met up with this curse on Ananka's tomb. . . .
John:	Oh, Babe, it's ridiculous . . . [T]he only clue we have are the dust marks on Dad's throat . . .
Babe:	It's not dust. It was mould that came from a mummy.
John {amused}:	All right, Babe, have it your way . . .
Babe:	. . . Go as far away as you can, as quickly as you can. . . . The curse on that tomb extends to the blood relations of all the men that entered it . . .
John:	. . . I'm a doctor. I can't believe in a live mummy. . . .
Babe:	I'm going to find someone who'll listen to me . . . before it's too late . . .!

The Mummy's Tomb

Pronouncement

The mummy's attacks are often preceded by a soliloquy by his High Priest (if he has one) proclaiming the mummy's right to revenge. Warnings to tomb-defilers from tomb guardians (such as Hasmid Ali in *Shroud*) also act as Pronouncements.

Nemesis

In the visual medium of cinema, murder by magic is usually replaced with killings of emphatic physicality. Horror demands death, not just bad luck, as the curse's outcome. Victims' deaths warn the Hero that his life is endangered, giving him an opportunity to re-evaluate his scepticism. The Principal Violator is often first to die. However, Fuchs in *Blood* survives until the denouement because no Hero for whom his death would serve as warning emerges to defeat Tera.

If the Principal Violator, not the Hero, is derived from Howard Carter and paired with a Carnarvon-style financier in *Hand*, Hammer's *Curse* and *Shroud*, then in cinema Carter gets the comeuppance he never received in life. His survival – the failure of life to fully imitate art – frustrated the closure of historical events. The death of the arrogant Carnarvon figure may provide sadistic satisfaction; Stanley Preston's rapid exit was originally scripted as a collision with a wine cask, the reflection of Prem in the spilled wine, Preston's head dashed against a wall and the mingling of his blood with the wine (Barnes 1995:27). If the Hero derives from Howard Carter, the Carnarvon figure's death is a warning to him as Carnarvon's death was allegedly a warning to Carter.

Attitude, not simply action, invites nemesis so other victims are Doubting Thomases, whether they entered the tomb or not and whether they are sceptics or, like Tante Berthe (Universal's *Curse*), innocent bystanders. The 'random' curse, while struggling to raise the body count in scenarios lacking tomb violation and sufficient experts to kill, targets ignorance just as the hubris/nemesis curse targets denial and the intergenerational curse punishes guilt by association. Curses demand deference, not just recognition; the ignorant, dismissive and defiant are not humble.

Hubris II: escalation

Following initial deaths, vengeance upon other Doubting Thomases may be delayed and extra Cassandra warnings supplied so that the guilty aggravate their hubris with continued scepticism or a failure to repent. They earn a sadistic death or, in the Hero's case, run greater risk of it. Continued scepticism reflects a stereotype of experts as people who refuse to adapt to revolutionary thinking. Howard Carter's status as Principal Violator and his

cynical remarks about curses – 'all sane people should dismiss such inventions with contempt' (cited by Frayling 1992:52) – must have convinced believers that he would die a particularly nasty death.

Challenge

Classic films portray an ordered world upset by a supernatural invasion that is eventually contained. This exemplifies what Roger Horrocks (1995:86) terms the representation of conflict between reason and unreason by horror films. Reason causes problems that it cannot solve (ibid.:87); Egyptology promises, but fails, to tame Egypt.

- Inspector: Dr Ayad, as an authority on Egyptian, what do you make of this?
 Ayad: I don't know what to make of it. There's not a trace of Ananka's body.
 Inspector: . . . [T]his is one time you museum fellers had something put over on you. . . .
 Ayad: . . . [N]ot a single wrapping has been cut. I don't know how to explain it.

The Mummy's Ghost

The problem is only solved once protagonists relinquish conventional logic, accepting that the mummy has come to life. However, a second factor, 'youth against age' (Halliwell 1986:217) – preservation of the young male romantic lead even if he is guilty – also determines the identity of the mummy's successful challenger. Its corollary of sacrificing male elders reflects the theme of failed expertise. The Principal Violator and the challenger both begin as Doubting Thomases but the latter changes his attitude to become the Hero. Heroes' repudiation of reason articulates horror's attack upon masculinity. In Hammer's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 'one of its most confidently authoritative films of the period', a supernatural encounter forces the detective Sherlock Holmes to alter his methods but not his beliefs (Hutchings 1993:78). In contrast, Hammer's *Mummy* sees John Banning and a police inspector revise their opinions completely (pp.73, 78). Such revisions occur in most Classic films. The two settings of *Hound* (civilized London and the wild moors) are contemporaneous, enabling Holmes to contain chaos and maintain his logic, while the settings of *The Mummy* – ancient Egypt and Victorian England – are not contemporaneous, so that evil from the past can only be contained by abandonment of contemporary thinking (p.78). A coincidence between the undoing of authority by both the horror genre (Horrocks 1995:85–6; Hutchings 1993:55) and the curse myth amplifies Classic films' emphasis upon the failure of professionalism, producing many explicit references to scepticism and its retraction.

Preclassic curses are infallible, portraying violation of the dead, even by

those who believe in curses, as sinful. In contrast, the guilty might evade the Classic curse by acknowledging its existence. They may kill the mummy or discover that fate favours them when he is unexpectedly destroyed. The Preclassic curse empathizes with the Other's capacity for suffering, but its Classic counterpart stands upon some higher moral ground from which the reflection of the Self in the Other can be disavowed and threats to imperialism, capitalism or patriarchy defused.

Victory

Many Hammer heroes defeat enemies with 'a no-nonsense approach' (Hutchings 1993:62), but curse films demand that the protagonist modify his worldview. Hammer's John Banning is thus exceptional (ibid.:78). The Classic hero is flawed, but subsequently enlightened and so victorious. The alleged insensitivity and amorality of archaeology is criticized, but the discipline is ultimately cherished as the public's only means of accessing the remains of the past and sharing in the excitement of their discovery.

The defeatability of Classic curses represents them as evil, yet their moral status and Heroes' victories over them are portrayed with ambivalence. The price of the mummy's defeat is the Hero's renunciation of logic. The restoration of normality alludes to victors' dislocation of it, their culpability (Horrocks 1995:86). Victory is often largely fortuitous, resulting from acts of nature or the High Priest's or mummy's dalliance with a woman. Since Classic films offer no substantial defence of archaeology to match critiques of it, they possess no explicit reasoning with which to void such critiques, so that curses tend not to be defeated from without by moral arguments but to collapse from within.

Popular definitions

My interviewees' definitions of 'the' curse vary from the Classic formula in their omission of reference to the mummy's love interest, which is often overshadowed in current popular culture by the hubris/nemesis theme. People might also regard hubris/nemesis as the defining element of mummy movies because romance is not unique to this genre. Many interviewees were children aged six to twelve who had probably never seen any Classic films, and adults' recollections of viewing them years ago may have been imperfect. Respondents were not only predisposed to focus upon hubris/nemesis but also inclined to overlook mummies' denigration and defeat in most Classic films, so, curiously, their curse definitions plucked the Preclassic core out of the Classic curse.

Q: Could you tell me what the 'Curse of the Pharaohs' is?

A: [T]o frighten; you've done something wrong . . . upset the gods . . . (Female, 25–34 years)

A: [I]f you violate a tomb . . . then you bring the curse of the person who's died onto [yourself]. (Female, 65+ years)

A: Retribution if you mess with [the mummy] . . . (Female, 35–44 years)

A: [M]ummies chasing people around. . . [because] they'd invaded a sacred place . . . (Male, 18–24 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

A: [I]f you open the tomb . . . the mummy will . . . go alive, and try to . . . kill you, because you . . . intruded on its life. (Male, 12 years)

A: You die mysteriously of grisly deaths. . . . Because you disturb the rest of the person who's dead. (Male, 25–34 years)

MM interviews 1996

Museums versus tombs

Some children's horror stories and responses to my visitor surveys portray museums as haunted places in which mummies come back to life (Chapters 4 and 5). In Chapter 2, I discussed the basis of the Preclassic curse myth as an analogy between desecration of the dead and rape, and I believe that the further evolution of this analogy in Classic films (along with the misadventures of overnight interlopers⁸ in museums) could explain the myth of haunted museums. Many Classic films are not set in Egypt, so museum exhibits of mummies and tomb provisions are substituted, resulting in a unique augmentation of the *vagina dentata* theme (Creed 1993:119–21) inherited from Preclassic curses. The sexual symbolism of films' nineteenth-century sources – not necessarily any conscious inclusion of sexual analogies by filmmakers – explains films' use of mummies and museums as phallic and vaginal allegories.

Some exhibits recreate Egyptian tombs, as if to transport the visitor back to ancient times. They are hyperreal (Eco 1987), but even conventional 'glass box' displays may be interpreted as tombs because they present the contents of a single burial, or simply because they contain Egyptian (funerary) artefacts – even if these are arranged according to modern classifications such as type, date or provenance. This tendency to read real museums as virtual tombs turns fictional museums into functional tombs. Consider the exhibit of the 'mummy and complete funerary equipment of the Princess *Anck-es-en-Amon*' in Universal's *Mummy*. An individual's body and grave goods, along with replica tomb paintings on the walls, make this a tomb even though its label neglects its poignancy. Bey lingers wistfully before Anck-es-en-Amon's mummy as if mourning at a sepulchre. He wanted the Princess exhumed, so accepts the Cairo Museum as her new tomb. It almost becomes Helen's tomb too when Bey attempts to kill her in the adjoining exhibit, a replica embalmers' workshop (Smith 1992:82) that is more

explicitly hyperreal. Bey puts its tools of mummification to practical use; onscreen, hyperreality is a form of equivalence, not analogy.

Fictional museums deconstruct the boundaries between Egypt and the West, tombs and museums. Their sedate visions of Egypt are decimated by another, more authentic and potent Egypt. Museums proudly show off the contents of a newly discovered tomb to assembled press and dignitaries (Universal's *Mummy*, *Ghost* and treatment of *The Mummy's Return*, Hammer's *Curse*, *Shroud*) only to have them either appropriated by mummies as functional tombs (Im-Ho-Tep in the Cairo Museum, Ananka awakening in *Return's* Stanley College museum) or vandalized by mummies who resent being incarcerated (Prem in the Mezzera Restoration House). Kharis takes out his frustration at Ananka's failure to revive upon the exhibits in the Scripps Museum in *Ghost*, and in *Return's* treatment he rejects his categorization as an object (and a 'fake' one at that) by smashing the carnival exhibit in which he was used as a stage prop (Feramisco 2003:92). King places Ra-Antef in a travelling exhibit in London, but the mummy escapes and kills him. Fuchs reconstructs Tera's tomb in his British basement, but the queen's power brings his house crashing down.

Characters inadvertently import the supernatural Other-world into their home countries or museums within or outside Egypt when they souvenir mummies or artefacts. Their safety zone is penetrated by a phallic Little Egypt that often takes the form of a museum-cum-tomb. Conversely, however, tombs in Egypt are presented as inviting, penetrable vaginas, tombs-cum-museums with coffins standing upright and boxes of jewels lying open, exhibited for the panning camera that places viewers in the subject position of treasure-hunter. According to the Dragon Principle, tombs and mummies are obliged to yield their secrets, and it is presumed that they do so willingly; just as the possessive patriarchal gaze projects acquiescence onto an object, tombs obligingly reveal their contents, or at least their whereabouts. The intactness of fictional tombs is emphasized: 'Marvellous! Absolutely undisturbed!' declares Hammer's Stephen Banning. This intactness derives from the exceptional precedent of Tutankhamun's tomb but is also analogous with virginity; most cinema tombs also contain the body of a chaste young princess. Men enter the tomb/vagina – often by breaking a seal (hymen) on its door – and interfere with objects within or removed from the tomb. We do not see Im-Ho-Tep's tomb entered, so the penetration scene is displaced onto the unsealing and opening of the box containing the Scroll of Thoth, which Johnson (1991:109) interprets as a vagina. Hammer's Stephen Banning opens a box containing the Scroll of Life within Ananka's tomb, compounding his initial penetration of the tomb itself. Sacrilege and rape represent each other; terms denoting religious desecration ('sacrilege') and connoting rape ('violation') are used interchangeably by Mehemet Bey in Hammer's *Mummy*. Further evidence for cinematic tombs as metaphorical vaginas is the location of many of them

within caves, mouths into a dark, dangerous feminine underworld (Creed 1993:106).

Carter Lupton wonders why the means for reviving mummies are interred with them (2003:39), but this rather protrusive plot device constitutes the nemesis that lies in wait for those who commit the hubris of rape. For tombs are not ordinary vulnerable vaginas, but retaliatory; they are *vaginae dentatae*, mouth-vaginas that try to destroy the penetrating instrument. The avenging mummy is the tomb's piercing tooth when he assails intruders within the crypt (Kharis attacks Dr Petrie, Hammer's Kharis startles Stephen Banning). Yet unlike the standard *vagina dentata*, the cinematic tomb can avenge penetration not only within but also beyond itself. The Classic mummy introduces a new dimension to the *vagina dentata*, converting its tooth into a long tongue which, lashing out at the enemy as a chameleon catches a fly, expands the range of revenge. Now the mobile mummy, like cursed souvenirs, delivers nemesis to the West's doorstep; the good folks of Mapleton are terrorized when Kharis moves into their local cemetery (*Tomb*). The unease of Hammer's John Banning following the clearance of Ananka's tomb stems from his fear that some malevolence may yet escape from it to pursue him; this explains why he dynamites its entrance. Banning attempts to suture the lips of the vagina to seal its tongue inside its mouth. Paul Preston anticipates a tongue-lashing: 'Someone – or something – is trying to destroy us and I believe it'll find us wherever we go.'

When the mummy-tongue penetrates the West or its outposts in Egypt, it doubles as a penis, reversing sacrilege by violating the violators. Egypt appropriates the penis after severing it but, finally, original roles are usually restored as Egypt is again suppressed. The mummy, vulnerable 'in his adversaries' ballpark' (Feramisco 2003:38), is destroyed outside Egypt or placed or destroyed in a museum; Egypt is castrated in its attempt to rape its rapist, having failed to wield both penis and *vagina dentata* with complete success. Tombs (via mummy agents) and museums are bitten and bite back; each tries to penetrate and swallow the other. This balance is ultimately lost. High Priests dream in vain of taking their mummies home, while fires, swamps and sewers – Western *vaginae dentatae* – consume those mummies whom museums cannot contain.

Museums attempt to defuse the potential controversy of corpses and funereal objects by removing them from their morbid or violent contexts (Innes 1997:13). However, their fictional counterparts betray a popular consciousness of these dangerous original meanings. Cinema's museums are much more, or much less, authentic than they claim to be. Hyperreality is upgraded so that some become the perilous tombs they were only meant to allude to, or is downgraded, derided as a veneer for imperialist greed. Whether the museum is the mummy's home or prison, he wields it against the West. The upgrading of hyperreality to actuality condemns museums as failed attempts to contain Egyptian powers, but in later children's fiction (Chapter 4) the

museum is aligned with the mummy. It inherits his magic, becoming a haunted island of menace within suburbia rather than an ineffectual bastion of logic. Museums that once bore the brunt of criticism are now its instrument.

The curse inverted

Cinema does not disprove the idea that digging up the dead is wrong, yet somehow manages to vitiate it. How is this done? The answer lies in the manipulation of imagery to malign the mummy and the High Priest. The ordered world is threatened when the full extent of the universe, which also contains supernatural adversaries, becomes known. These adversaries are vilified as evil. Although male experts are chided as foolish sceptics, the expanded universe is restored to their rule at the close of most films, contained by their values like a nut inside a shell (Figure 2.1b). The nutshell device tacks an additional event onto the end of the Preclassic curse that reverses its outcome: Classic mummies are victorious, like their Preclassic forebears, but then they are defeated. The nutshell embodies nostalgia for a time when the West suppressed opposition to its colonial rule abroad.

The imagery associated with Classic mummies demonstrates that as both executor of the curse and magnet for repulsive traits, the ambulatory mummy undermined the moral integrity of the anti-exhumation claim. If the mummy looked bad, then the curse looked evil, no matter how logical its argument. The mummy's escalating abhorrence also disrupted the romantic elements in Classic films. The melding of romantic and curse elements by the films was imperfect anyway since the two paradigms, drawn from disparate literary sources, were partly incompatible and produced structural disjunctions in the plots.

Classic films take liberties with archaeological knowledge in order to privilege the expression of particular themes. Universal's *Mummy* sets precedents for this strategy. Make-up artist Jack Pierce (Campbell 1977:vii) plasters Karloff's face with cotton strips which, when coated with collodion, wrinkle (Mank 1989:24) to produce an aged complexion that differs from the taut skin on real mummies' heads. Im-Ho-Tep assumes the countenance of an elderly man to indicate his antiquity, just as his tattered bandages attest to decay and decrepitness.

Im-Ho-Tep's coffin stands upright in the archaeologists' hut, its lid removed. This assists the mummy's ambulation, allowing him to step out. Whether or not this was suggested solely by the upright placement of coffins in museums,⁹ it coincides with their orientation, which evokes in the minds of museumgoers to this day the idea of a sleeping mummy ready to awaken.

While mummies' separately wrapped limbs were bound to their bodies by outer layers of cloth, Im-Ho-Tep, supposedly discovered intact, has separately bound limbs. This permits his ambulation.¹⁰ His head and hands are

uncovered to indicate Ardath Bey's similarity to him. The unexplained absence of Im-Ho-Tep's outer wrappings obscures the causes of similar conditions of actual mummies (including scientific study and interference by tomb robbers), implying that they were interred in this state. Im-Ho-Tep's appearance was copied from the mummy of at least one king: Seti I, if not also Rameses III. Both of these mummies were ravaged by tomb robbers and partly unwrapped in the nineteenth century; both retained only their innermost bandages, their arms wrapped separately and their unwrapped and detached heads reattached by ancient priests who restored their burials. A cloth that the priests wound around the neck of Rameses III to disguise the damage reappears on Karloff's outfit (Brier 1996:313, figures 116, 117) and Seti I (illustrated by Ikram and Dodson 1998:123, figure 126, 325) wears a similar 'scarf'. Karloff's costume is probably based at least partly upon Cairo Museum photographs of Seti I (Glut 1978:165). Im-Ho-Tep's hands are unwrapped like those of Seti I, and his head uncovered like those of Seti I and Rameses III, surely practical advantages to Karloff in his costume. Those who saw Seti I's uncovered face described it as handsome (Fagan 1992:295); a less attractive mummy might have been too difficult or horrific for special effects to reproduce. In contrast, the grotesque mummies in *The Mummy* (Sommers dir. 1999) are computer-generated and less likely to raise objections now that gore is accepted in popular cinema. Im-Ho-Tep's design reveals the filmmakers' motivations: desire for historical accuracy despite limited understanding of the reasons for mummies' present appearances, tempered by concern for actors' comfort, audiences' sensibilities and the limits of what special effects of the era could achieve.

Other Classic films' historical inaccuracies suggest that Egyptological information has been selectively modified so as to portray mummies as frightening, evil creatures. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, introduced in Chapter 2, can be used to explain how films turned mummies into monsters. The abject incorporates 'sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest' (Creed 1993:9), stock subjects of the horror genre. Patriarchy, imperialism, socially acceptable behaviour, natural laws and hygiene are threatened, yet defined, by their antitheses (Kristeva 1982:4). Anthropologist Mary Douglas (1969) shows that ordered systems are 'device[s] of discriminations, of differences' that classify things and guide people's behaviour in social life, but in threatening to destroy these systems, 'the danger of filth' reveals 'the frailty of the symbolic order itself' (Kristeva 1982:69). The abject could expose the truth that social order is not stable and permanent but mere human handiwork and, therefore, vulnerable to change or destruction. A person or idea can be vilified through association with abject attributes, for physical pollution or visual repugnance connotes evil. This is why the 'bad guys' in films and stories usually look strange or ugly. The mummy is a corpse; the corpse is '[t]he ultimate abjection' because

unlike living bodies that eject waste, it is the body-become-waste, from which the Self or, in Biblical accounts, the soul has been ejected (pp.108–12). The abject is an abstract concept, but the corpse gives it concrete form, so the horror of the corpse is that '[i]t is death infecting life' (p.4, Plate 3.1). The Classic films cumulatively elaborated the mummy as a polluter and a soulless automaton – a threat to hygiene connoting a threat to moral order.

In *Tomb*, Professor Norman's examination of Kharis' bandage is an extravaganza of chemistry, yet the chemicals constitute only 'mould'. According to a poster, Ra-Antef is 'HALF-BONE HALF-BANDAGE AND ALL BLOOD-CURDLING HORROR!' (Plate 3.2) – a misunderstanding of mummies as unfleshed remains that I encountered amongst museum visitors (Chapter 5). The delicate Kah-to-Bey mummy envisaged by the *Shroud* shooting script (cited by Kinsey 1997:312) was replaced with a 'disturbingly realistic' body prop (Glut 1978:193). Prem's ghastly self-destruction exposes his bones. Onscreen, Im-Ho-Tep skeletonizes at death but in an earlier magazine story version, in which everything and everyone he touches turns to dust, the mummy himself finally crumbles into powder (Whitlatch 1989:50). Mummies are embellished with skeletal, dusty or filthy attributes to accentuate their fearfulness.

The Classic mummy is a gross body, ragged mouldering bandages hanging from his wrinkled skin, caked in blood (*Shroud*) or mud (Hammer's *Mummy*). Two fearful things converge here. First, pollutants that are not usually found on mummies are added to compound their horror, along with backgrounds of dusty tombs, fetid swamps (*Ghost*, *Curse* and Hammer's *Mummy*) or sewers (Hammer's *Curse*). As Kharis, Chaney Jr was coated with paint, clay, gauze and dust (Feramisco 2003:31). Second, decrepit old age is realized in the mummy's craggy features, untidiness and retarded movement. Instructions in *Hand's* script for Kharis to move nimbly were disregarded during filming (ibid.:27).

Mummies' stiff movement may be caused by actors' costumes – Christopher Lee's tight bandages (Del Vecchio and Johnson 1992:124) and Lon Chaney Jr's stifling bodysuit and heat exhaustion (Chaney Jr cited by Glut 1978:181–2). In *Hand* and *Tomb*, it is caused when Kharis is maimed by fire. However, stiffness also connotes feeble old age. Kharis' consumption of the tana leaf potion that maintains his life resembles an old man taking his medicine! Universal's Kharis has contorted limbs because *Hand* actor Tom Tyler suffered from arthritis (Halliwell 1986:218) and Lon Chaney Jr, taking up Kharis' role, was obliged to perpetuate this behaviour. Christopher Lee's 'awkward, disjointed way of walking' (Brosnan 1978:43) and Eddie Powell's gait in his zipper-backed Prem suit (Barnes and Rigby 1995:31) recreated what restrictive costumes and arthritis had previously produced. Happenstance greatly affected the mummy's image once invested with meaning and imitated by later productions; the media exploit even coincidence in a search for new ideas.



Plate 3.1 Death infects life: Kharis menaces women and kills men. (a) *The Mummy's Curse* US lobby card prefaced with a slogan abjecting the mummy. (b) *The Mummy's Ghost* US lobby card depicting Kharis' murder of the Scripps Museum's night watchman. © Universal Pictures 1944 (author's collection).



Plate 3.2 The mummy abjected in text and image. *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* US one-sheet poster, © Columbia Pictures 1964 (author's collection).

Mummies' decrepit appearance signifies the illegitimacy of paganism: what right has a defunct system to rule the modern world? Mummification accordingly becomes a barbaric sacrificial ceremony in which Im-Ho-Tep and Kharis are buried alive. *Curse* specifies Kharis' menace as demonic: the mummy and his High Priest, Ilzor, seize a monastery by force, it is later destroyed and superstitious Goobie exclaims that 'The devil's on the loose and he's dancin' with the mummy!' A discarded section of the script of Universal's *Tomb* describes Egyptian deities as '*demon gods*' (Feramisco 2003:41).

Another type of abjection presents the mummy as paranormal: '[h]e is dead, but he has the power to move – and kill' (*Shroud*); 'not dead, not alive – waiting' (*Blood*); '[l]iving or dead, I'm going after it, whatever it is' (*Tomb*). This liminal creature is an outrage against nature, dead and yet alive or, from another perspective, neither dead nor alive. 'Death was not for [Hammer's] Kharis; nor was life', yet he also endures 'a comatose state of living death'. Kharis is like a corpse but never died, while Im-Ho-Tep, Ra-Antef and Prem are revived cadavers. They are all freaks, overpowering their victims even while disintegrating into dust. Im-Ho-Tep's successors lack his psychic powers, killing by brute force, so their bodies must somehow withstand the strain. The contrast between the unwrapped corpse props and wrapped Klaris in *Meet the Mummy* confirms that mummies are no ordinary corpses. Hammer's Kharis is an emotional, sad-eyed character, but 'I tell you, it wasn't human!' The liminal mummy is man and monster, alternating between a tragic lover and terrible ogre as romance gives way to a new curse paradigm.

The physicality of Hammer violence (Hutchings 1993:57–9) heightened the portrayal of mummies as corpses in Prem's spectacular self-dismemberment. The exposure and rending of the corpse is horrific as it is unhygienic and breaks taboos against gazing upon death. The near-total concealment of earlier Classic mummies' bodies suggests aversion to sighting the corpse; *Lot No. 249*'s unswathed mummy was too horrific for early cinema, if also impossible to depict with existing special effects. The mummy must be concealed yet able to see, so a compromise is reached between denial and practicality. The bandages dramatically wound over living Im-Ho-Tep's face have inexplicably disappeared from his mummy,¹¹ Universal Kharis' head and Klaris' eyes were never wrapped, Hammer's Kharis has 'just a slit for his eyes' and Prem's opening eyelids tear peepholes through his wrappings.

Behaviour is another forum for abjection. Im-Ho-Tep's deadly willpower is inspired by that of Ayesha in Haggard's 1887 novel *She* and by German cinematic tradition (Jensen 1996:10, 12), but it is supplanted by Kharis' strangulation, courtesy of the physicality of B-grade matinee action serials (Brunas et al. 1990:232). Prem crushes Walden's head, burns Newton, throws Longbarrow out of a window and attacks Paul with an axe. Attempts to vary formula by representing Ra-Antef as a sympathetic figure cannot be sustained; he bludgeons one victim and steps on another's head. This proliferation of violence to enliven an ailing genre (Kinsey 1997:312) magnifies the mummy's abjection. Along with corpse attributes, violence explains

why Classic mummies are almost exclusively male. Despite the increasingly abject portrayal of women in mid- to late twentieth-century horror films (Creed 1993), the mummy genre harks back to its origins in Karloff's era, when female monsters were less common, less violent and their bodies less polluting. The deadly hand of Tera must part from her beautiful body to kill.

The abjection devices that undermine sympathy for the curse also disrupt the theme of love between mummies and mortals. The heroine's own spirit fights against the Egyptian soul trapped within her body. After reverting from her Anck-es-en-Amon persona, Helen refuses to allow Im-Ho-Tep to sacrifice her; in *Ghost*, Amina is frightened of Kharis even in her Ananka mode and in *Curse*, Ananka retains this fear (since her final acceptance of Kharis, mentioned in the original script, was not filmed, Feramisco 2003:127, 129). Unlike her counterparts, Amina is claimed by the mummy – whereupon she withers into a crone as Kharis carries her into a swamp. A beautiful woman should not mate with a corpse, so she becomes one herself, infected by the mummy's antiquity. Abrams' treatment of *The Mummy's Return* tried to bypass this principle, with the result that Kharis clasps revived Ananka's 'youthful body . . . closer to be embraced by his hideous one' (ibid.:94). This grotesquerie was never filmed.

Im-Ho-Tep is 'a menace', but suffers terribly for love (Jensen 1996:6). 'It's difficult to despise a character with such richly romantic aspirations' (Brunas et al. 1990:55). Nevertheless, Im-Ho-Tep's darker side is his contribution to popular lore. When compared with Lon Chaney Sr, an earlier horror actor, Karloff responded, 'Chaney had his own distinct way of playing a bizarre character with whom the audience sympathized. My type is one in which sympathy is diverted to the romantic leads of the picture' (cited by Bojarski and Beals 1974:22). Im-Ho-Tep's abomination undermines his tenderness.

The discrepancy between Im-Ho-Tep's ambulation and Anck-es-en-Amon's reincarnation results from screenwriter John Balderston's derivation of the plot from disparate sources. They include cinematic and stage adaptations of *Dracula*, *She* and an earlier draft screenplay of *The Mummy* by Nina Wilcox Putnam, *Cagliostro* – each of which featured a reincarnated or immortal character (Jensen 1996:6–11).¹² Additionally, Anck-es-en-Amon reincarnates to avoid abjecting a female body and to abject the mummy by juxtaposing a corpse with a woman. Her love for Im-Ho-Tep dissipates when Bey's crumbling flesh leaves a dusty mark on her arm. Abrams' treatment of *The Mummy's Return*, in contrast, features the physical reanimation of Ananka, but here too the woman must not be horrible; Ananka is beautiful (Feramisco 2003:94). This conceit is preserved in the filmed version, *Curse*, when her muddled corpse, after bathing in swamp water, emerges wearing a nightgown and stylish coiffure. Recalling Campbell's Dragon Principle, the wasteful dragon (mummy) hoards treasures and virgins, which he cannot use; the hero slays the monster to retrieve these prizes and put them to proper use

(1988:184). The need to kill Helen Grosvenor and Annette Dubois (Hammer's *Curse*) in order to immortalize their souls emphasizes the waste theme. The Dragon Principle operates even where the High Priest rather than the mummy longs for the heroine, and where she is nobody's love object but simply the Hero's ally (*Shroud*); no matter what, the mummy always pursues her, threatening to waste a maiden.

In its anxiety about threats to patriarchy, cinema's Dragon Principle echoes Hutchings' discussion of attacks upon masculinity (1993:71–6). The heroes' victories in most Universal films seem to express an American political and economic confidence later lacking in Britain, since Hammer heroes, although victorious, are wounded. John Banning's father cripples him, John Bray (*Curse*) is cuckolded and Paul Preston's father abandons him. In a country recently stripped of its last vestiges of imperial power, Hammer rethinks Universal's portrayal of American international clout, mourning the attrition of patriarchal authority. However, even Hammer heroes must follow formula and beat their mummies in the end.

Classic films increasingly abjected the mummy's mind. Im-Ho-Tep and the American and British Kharises experience love, but dumb Klaris roars like an animal, attacks indiscriminately and cannot express his love for Ara. Ra-Antef's affection for Annette is muted, Prem protects a boy-king rather than a lover, and Tera is unpartnered. Im-Ho-Tep thinks independently but thereafter, the ambulatory mummy becomes a 'faceless automaton . . . a steamroller with no operator' (Hogan 1988:103), 'an unfeeling and mechanical killing machine' (Brunas et al. 1990:318). Ironically, this zenith of abjection caused the demise of Classic cinema as mummies' behaviours became predictable (Brosnan 1978:43). Little innovation was possible, beyond Christopher Lee's 'effective use of his eyes . . . to give the impression that there was a tortured mind involved' (ibid.:43). The Kharises and Ra-Antef rebel against their masters but Prem, who was a slave when alive, is the ultimate robot in death, serving anyone who holds Kah-to-Bey's magical shroud, even his enemy. A private report for *Shroud*'s distributors denounced the film's strict adherence to formula (Halliwell 1986:239), indicating Prem's full realization of the automatism towards which his predecessors had lumbered: 'this is rather a run-of-the-mill would-be thriller . . . the spectacle of stalking and murdering people has had its day in this field of entertainment' (McCarthy cited by Cowie and Johnson 2002:104).

Klaris cannot distinguish between the motives of the various parties he encounters, so he attacks them all without reason. The robot mummy – later interpreted literally in science fiction (Russell dir. 1975) – attacks indiscriminately if unable to be directed by spells. His unpredictability is predictable, so that a gangster, taking precautions, clouts Klaris as the mummy wakes up! Victims' responses are equally predictable, liable to be spoofed, portending the rise of humour as mummymania's new dominant theme. In the 1959 song *The Mummy* (McFadden and Dor), a forlorn mummy cannot

help terrifying everyone he meets: 'I wish there was somebody somewhere who wasn't afraid of me!'

Having discussed abjection and its implications for romance, I now turn to evidence for films' attempt to retain some sympathy for mummies and High Priests. Like curses and romance, abjection and sympathy do not mix; they produce plot disjunctions. Any sympathy won by Im-Ho-Tep results from his ability, as Ardath Bey, to verbally express love. Deprived of speech, most Classic mummies express themselves through violence. In Universal's Kharis cycle and the first three Hammer films, the mute mummy obeys his High Priest, dependent (in the Universal films) upon the Priest's provision of life-giving tana fluid, and unwilling or unable to think for himself except when the Priest threatens his mission. Im-Ho-Tep's subtle seduction is reduced to brutish physical domination as his cinematic progeny terrify heroines into a faint and carry them away. The withdrawal of speech from Classic mummies was initiated by practical constraints. Chaney Jr's mask, intended to reduce the time previously taken to apply make-up to Karloff and Tyler (Halliwell 1986:221), prohibited characterization via facial expression (Hogan 1988:103). Despite their more refined special effects, such as the removable cloth headpiece of Prem actor Eddie Powell (illustrated by Barnes 1995:16), subsequent productions were obliged to maintain mummies' silence. The severing of the mummy's tongue (*Hand*, Hammer's *Mummy*) is a plot device contrived to excuse a silence initially imposed by actors' costumes, but thereafter by tradition.

The High Priest is the mummy's mouthpiece, pronouncing the righteousness of defending tombs and generating compassion for his charge by recounting the mummy's tragic past life. The flashback sequences of Universal's *Mummy* and Kharis saga and Hammer's *Mummy* present the mummy as the victim of a romance thwarted by religious dogma; his sacrilege is a desperate act of love. This should win sympathy, but High Priests' reminiscences are followed by threats of violence.

Ilzor: Kharis . . . loved Ananka . . . [H]e stole the forbidden tana leaves . . . to restore her . . . to mortal state. . . . For the sin he had committed, he was . . . buried alive . . . waiting to bring death to him who would desecrate Ananka's tomb . . . An American archaeologist . . . dared to desecrate the burial place of Kharis. . . . Two High Priests of Amon-Ra came to America to bring [Kharis] and Ananka home to Egypt . . . And now you . . . shall help me to succeed where they have failed. We shall fulfil our sacred duty, or die by violence.

The Mummy's Curse

Bey's argument in Hammer's *Mummy* transcends crude bellicosity; it tackles the ethics of archaeology fearlessly, resonating uncomfortably throughout

the rest of the film. The soliloquies of Universal's High Priests, in contrast, pervert their principles with alienating talk of violent retribution. These speeches identify villains and provide audiences with background information, although they also result from scriptwriters' imperfect fusion of romantic and curse paradigms. They create the paradox that as a man, the subject of the High Priest's speech is pitiful, but as a mummy he is not.

Various commentators have noted inconsistencies in the settings and scripting of the Classic films but have not detected other, more fundamental contradictions embedded in the plots. An imperfect melding of paradigms explains why Im-Ho-Tep, forbidden to exhume the dead, directs archaeologists to do his dirty work. His opportunism results from use of the pity aroused by the mummy's doomed romance as an argument against sacrilege. The mummy must protect his lover's tomb not only as punishment for his own sacrilege, but to remain close to his companion, so he must exist in the same place and life/death phase as her. Awakened from death and expelled from his tomb, Im-Ho-Tep must excavate and revive Anck-es-en-Amon. The tethering of romance to the sanctity of the grave shifts the source of archaeologists' sacrilege away from simply disturbing the dead to dividing a loving couple. Substitution of romance for ethics converts the apparent basis of the curse from moral precepts to the mummy's personal interests, distracting viewers from ethical issues with appealing tales of lost love. This substitution could have successfully grafted the curse onto romance if archaeologists, not mummies, were abjected. Instead, having introduced mummies as victims, the films heap sinister attributes upon them, reversing the direction that plots seemed poised to take. Signs of the original direction – the Doubting Thomases' demise, the Cassandra figure prophesying nemesis – appear intermittently as the writers struggle to work two box-office draws, love scenes and monsters, into one plot. The result is a romance soured and a curse debilitated by the abjection of the mummy.

Attitudes towards mummies during the Preclassic era displayed marked polarization. Insofar as Classic films could be read in conflicting ways, they reflected the popular ambivalence that preceded them. However, they concluded with an endorsement of only one of their two moral perspectives. I have yet to consider whether viewers embraced this message.

The elusive audience

I am convinced that films are the source of mummies' abjection in current popular culture (Chapter 4). If this is the case, it follows that the majority of the Classic films' original viewers gained the impression that mummies and curses are evil – but in the absence of contemporary survey data, can this be proven? As explained in Chapter 1, interactions between the audiences and creators of media texts determine their meanings. Texts themselves can invite multiple, conflicting interpretations (Turner 1996:108–9), yet they often

signal which of these interpretations is the preferred one (ibid.:83–4). If the ‘evil mummy’ idea is Classic movies’ dominant meaning, did the majority of cinemagoers follow this prompt or did they read films ‘against the grain’?

Consideration begins with identifying Classic films’ first viewers. By the 1940s, adults had become desensitized to Universal horror films (Glut 1978:170) and mummies were transferred to children’s matinees (Brunas et al. 1990:232). As Kharis ‘supplanted Karloff’s urbane Imhotep [*sic*] as *the* Hollywood personification of the killer mummy . . . the series of films in which he starred made tana leaves and the Curse of Amon-Ra a part of . . . American culture (and fodder for nightclub and television comics)’ (ibid.:229). ‘[R]egional humor clearly establishes [*Hand*] as a juvenile-oriented, non-prestige production’ (Thornton 1998:42). Glaring continuity errors do the same for *Curse*. *Hand* was released in Britain under an ‘A’ certificate that allowed children accompanied by adults to see the film, and in the United States no restrictions were placed upon viewing age (Halliwell 1986:218). Thus a film dismissed as lame by adults could still frighten other audience members (ibid.:221). ‘[I]t was usually kids and teenagers that went to see that kind of a picture’ (LeBorg cited by Brunas et al. 1990:434). Universal’s sale of its horror features to television, which began in 1957, made them more accessible to children, who particularly enjoyed them (Feramisco 2003:1). Hammer’s reputation for gore attracted older audiences. Horror filmgoers have until recently been predominantly adolescent (Horrocks 1995:101) and male (ibid.:3–4, 83).

The ambivalence with which Classic mummies are represented mirrors the vacillating ethical views of some museum visitors (Chapter 5). Viewers may be invited to identify with a succession of characters and the contradictory ideals they represent (Ellis 1982:43), especially in horror films, where shifting identification – the opportunity to indulge in sadistic fantasies then repudiate them – constitutes the pleasure of viewing (Horrocks 1995:83). A viewer may fantasize about supremacy by identifying with an empowered character, then identify masochistically or sympathetically with a dis-empowered character (p.47); camera shots alternate between Prem’s view of cowering Paul and Paul’s view of towering Prem during the climax of *Sbroud*. Universal’s Kharis has many fans; identification with mummies has a Preclassic precedent, but since identification with villainous characters in playful defiance of social norms is pleasurable (p.29), it is not tantamount to a criticism of archaeology.

While Classic films’ first audiences were not entirely discouraged from identifying with mummies, they would ultimately have been compelled to embrace the texts’ ‘dominant readings’ (Horrocks 1995:29). Media producers use visual and linguistic codes to limit the range of received meanings of a text (Hall 1980:134–5); the mummy’s abject traits, emphasized by lurid promotional poster slogans and artwork, mark this character as evil. Changing

social and political issues constantly alter the dominant readings of a given text (Bennett and Woollacott 1987:267), producing transient 'reading formations' (ibid.:64). In effect, the text itself changes over time (Turner 1996:118). For instance, my museum visitor interviews in Chapter 5 suggest that today, curses are no longer taken seriously as expressions of concern about the treatment of human remains. Yet insofar as current stereotypes reflect widespread abjection of mummies, it appears that Classic films did yield an enduring dominant reading that current imagery preserves. Whether or not viewers consciously recognized in the films a confirmation of their own values, given their youth they probably embraced the thrilling 'evil mummies' idea without question.

Horrocks (1995:28) asks whether radical ideas incorporated into mass culture represent fleeting doubts about dominant ideologies, limited concessions to their challengers, or signs of the imminent breakdown of the *status quo*. The survival of the Preclassic ethical critique within Classic films did not precipitate changes in archaeological management of mummies; it represents only a momentary hesitation in films' support for a nostalgic, neocolonial vision of archaeology. In recognition of their troubling subject matter, horror films continuously circulate viewers' sympathies between heroes and villains, but reinstate natural laws and social norms at their denouements by halting this circulation and settling upon the heroes as victors (ibid.:49, 83–4). Turhan Bey, who played High Priest Mehemet Bey in *The Mummy's Tomb*, reminisced,

I guess it's my favourite [role] because . . . it was a young Egyptian who believed in something which we could not comprehend with our five senses. . . . I do like people who are in contradiction with all laws of human decency because of . . . some inexplicable belief that they have. . . . I would have [preferred more roles as] these kinds of heavies, people who . . . are acting against the positive side of the plot of the picture. I like heavies with a cause . . .

(cited by Weaver 1995:75)

The High Priest is both visionary and villain, but as Bey's 'heavies' label indicates, *Tomb* fixes the latter as his character's fundamental status. While the heroes and villains of 1970s and 1980s radical horror films were less clearly drawn (Horrocks 1995:84), most of the Classic films exhibit traditional horror structure. They acknowledge the possibility of, but do not confirm, the immorality of patriarchy, colonialism and archaeology. Classic films reflect a dwindling moral scruple in a medium becoming increasingly besotted with archaeology and materialism, which was to culminate in the brazen acquisition fantasy *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Conclusion

Classic films are more than just battles between 'goodies and baddies'. The ambivalence of public attitudes towards archaeology is captured in their structure, which invites viewers to alternate their sympathies between mummies and their excavators. Ultimately, however, films halt this process after the mummy's climactic rampage, elevating the protagonist to hero status to symbolize the superiority of his Western cause, and they also abject the associates, personality and body of the mummy to buttress the impression that this character is evil. This is all a bluff. Classic films do not decisively prove the righteousness of Western ideology, but by disparaging its opposition, they feign the solution of a moral debate. At the heart of the cinematic myth of the mummy's evil lies a memory of the mummy's victimhood; the Preclassic curse's critique of archaeological ethics remains intact, embroidered with superficial abject motifs that attempt to distract the audience.

Critics have condemned contradictions in the Kharis saga plots (Brunas et al. 1990:316–17). These might have been caused by a surfeit of complex imagery designed to abject the mummy, as much as by low-budget production. Elaboration of imagery at the expense of plot made the Classic movies formulaic and stale, but this imagery was to prove highly effective and versatile when adopted and embellished by Postclassic popular culture.

Cinema's attempt to meld conflicting romance and curse paradigms wounded both. Romance exhorted the viewer to identify with the mummy's sacrilegious slayer, and was in turn contaminated by the mummy's abjection. A maid could no longer love a mummy, so transferred her affections to the leading man, severing the link between romance and curses. Even though the two represented each other (violation/possession of a tomb or a woman), they were no longer interdependent; romances between male and female protagonists were excised from the last three Classic films and from many curse narratives to this day. The mummy shuffled into the late twentieth century as a loveless and loathsome creature deprived of the moral high ground.

GIGGLES AND GOOSEBUMPS

Late twentieth-century popular culture

Ancient Egypt, down by the Nile
 Mummy's gonna be in a tomb for a while
 Fair go Pharaoh, it's not funny
 Tell King Tut I want my mummy
 Colin Buchanan, *The Mummy Song* (1993)

Introduction

When the Classic movie era ended, it seemed that mummies had lost their relevance to contemporary life. In the wake of World War II, the monsters of Hollywood's golden age looked quaint. Yet this derision resurrected mummies by transforming them into a new type of creature. The mockery that had dogged them since Victorian times was overtaking romance and horror as mummymania's new dominant paradigm. The bandaged clown who had lurked in the shadows cast by his beautiful and horrible siblings for over a century was about to steal the limelight.

In the late 1950s, the advent of television and the *Famous Monsters of Filmland* fanzine revived the careers of Hollywood's monsters (Lupton 2003:40), introducing them to a new generation of American boys. Mass-produced mummy-themed products were marketed to these new fans, including comics, model kits and the earliest types of action figures. Monsters were still chic in children's culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Hollywood monsters made guest appearances in American animated cartoons and their comic book spin-offs, notably the many television series of *Scooby-Doo*, the adventures of four young sleuths and a dog who solve supernatural mysteries (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969, 1976–9). Occasionally, mummies had an opportunity to do more than just grunt in a cameo role. A member of *The Groovie Goolies* (Sutherland dir. 1970–1, 1971–2) – Mummy, a television news presenter – hinted at a new, funny and friendly direction for his kind of monster. Mummies had appeared in animated cartoons every decade since at least 1926 (Lupton 2003:41), and the growth of the medium through the

proliferation of television (Erickson 1995:8) made cartoons their favourite haunt. However, cartoons' censure as violent, overcommercialized trash by American lobby groups during the late 1960s and early 1970s forced animation studios to switch to comedy formats and produce programmes without funding from product endorsements (ibid.:28–31). Mummies' lowbrow reputation, established by Hollywood, cast them into the subaltern realm of children's programming where they were now further reduced to crudely animated clowns or emasculated brutes forbidden to take a victim.

By the 1960s, mummies and other Hollywood creeps had joined the retinue of witches, demons, skeletons and ghosts in American Halloween iconography (Lupton 2003:40). With the mummy's repertoire expanding and the range of mass-produced children's products increasing, material mummymania exploded into a bewildering array of objects and images. Children's mass culture suffers an inelegant combination of immature humour, repulsive imagery and crass commercialism, so scholars have largely ignored it in favour of romantic Victorian fiction and the nostalgia of Classic films. I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s in the midst of Postclassic mummymania and can see that much remains to be explained about it. The dramatic increase in the number of mummy products available suggests that mummies have come to perform some vital function in contemporary Western culture, but what? The only way to find the answer was to collect as many products as possible and compare them with each other and with cinema mummies and museum visitors' remarks to identify the system of stereotypes that governs the appearances, behaviours and personalities of fictional mummies. This stereotype typology of mummymania is a field guide that you can use to unravel the meanings of fictional mummies. Curators may find it useful in developing strategies to address the ideas that influence museum visitors' reactions to real mummies.

Postclassic mummy stereotypes

Mummy dearest

[Larry:] [W]hat the devil does he mean by *his* mummy? his mother?

[Susan:] No, no – a mummy is a dead man preserved.

William Bernard, *The Mummy*, 1833 (1890:9)

Why was the Egyptian confused? Because his daddy was a mummy! Jokes like this employ a pun that exploits the coincidence between the English language word 'mummy' (a young child's term for 'mother') and the term for preserved bodies. Puns appeal to children who are discovering the intricacies of language, but seem clichéd to adults. Where young children giggle, adults groan, signalling to other adults that they are laughing at, not with the joke.

Mummy jokes were originally aimed at adults (for example, Lamont dir. 1955), but eventually films that lampooned the horror genre were themselves scorned. The solution was to sell humour to children – and retain a little of the adult market with a tacit acknowledgement that mummy jokes are corny.

Some jokes exploit the rhyme, assonance or alliteration of words such as 'mummy' or 'tomb' with other words, Egyptianizing popular sayings and making colloquial references to wrapping and winding appear to refer to mummies.

Q: What is the mummy's favorite musical program?

A: Name that tomb. [From *Name That Tune*]

Q: What was a favorite saying in ancient Egypt?

A: A fool and his mummy are soon parted. [From the saying 'A fool and his money are soon parted']

Bob Brier, *The Encyclopedia of Mummies* (1998:157)

You'll be wrapped with \$300 off a Solahart. ['Wrapped' a homonym for 'rapt']

Hot water system advertisement featuring a mummy (Solahart 1997)

The mother pun is a homophone in which two words of different meaning have a similar or identical pronunciation. In this case, they also have identical spellings. The implications for children's understandings of the meanings of the words are profound, as I will show. First though, how do Americans make the pun work, since they refer to their mothers as 'mommy'? They pronounce the mother term as 'mummy', or depict characters misunderstanding 'mummy' as meaning 'mother' or mishearing 'mummy' as 'mommy'.

Rifle: . . . I want you now to make folks believe you are a mummy.

Ginger: Whose *mommy*?

Rifle: You don't understand. I said mummy not mommy.

Charles White, *The Virginny Mummy*, c.1840–9 (1876:7)

Anaka: [This test] was the only way to really make sure you were the right one.

Hercules: The right one for what?

Anaka: To find my mummy.

Hercules: Your mommy?

Anaka: Not my mommy, my *mummy*.

Hercules: the Legendary Journeys (Williams dir. 1996)

Of all the media's jokes, the mother pun is most frequently invoked in everyday life. I overheard many uses of it by museum visitors, including

adults and children around six to ten years of age. They made the joke self-consciously, laughing at the irony of life imitating art:

Mother [to her children, as they look at some mummies]: Fancy
calling me mummy in a place like this!

WAM 1998

Child [to mother]: There's a mummy behind you! There's a
mummy behind you!

Mother: There's a mummy behind *you*!

Boy: Why aren't there any daddies?

NWM 1996

I was surprised to encounter pun use by children of only three or four years of age. Had they learned the joke from television already? These are the people to whom the infantile term for 'mother' is taught; they were not joking, but perplexed. The neurosis of 'Little Hans', one of Sigmund Freud's patients (1955), may have stemmed partly from associations he drew between the meanings of German words with similar pronunciations (Creed 1993:101).

Mother [correcting a very young child]: Not mommies, mummies.
[She explains that some of them might have been
mommies.]

MMA 1996

[A boy of about four years of age wanders about, frustrated that his mother is paying more attention to her other child.]

Boy: Mummy! Mummy! [He approaches a cartonnage
mounted upright in a tall, narrow case. Still chanting
'Mummy! Mummy!' he throws his arms around its case,
looking up at its face. He stops hugging for a moment
until his mother approaches, then resumes.]

Mother: Don't do that.

MM 1996

Children learning language grapple with discrepancies such as homonyms. They respond playfully, creating associations between the objects described by similar words understood to have different meanings. Before this understanding develops, however, a child fails to grasp the difference between mummies and mothers and may seek equation rather than analogy between them (Kristeva 1982:51). An Australian Mother's Day card depicts a child mummy running to its mother mummy (Katauskas 1999). It follows that some mummies might be daddies; an actor portraying a mummy becomes a father (Dear dir. 1987). A South Australian Museum curator once

commented, 'The children I take through the museum . . . regard [the mummy] with a mixture of awe and cheekiness. One of their favourite comments is, "Who's the mummy's daddy?"' (*Woman's Day* 1983). The mother pun mocks inconsistencies in the English language, complaining that the rules of the adult world are illogical and unfair. It may also hint that mummies can come back to life.

Q: Do you believe in the curse?

A: [Yes.]

Q: Do you think that mummies really do go around and get people?

A: Mm-hmm [yes]. Like that mummy. [Indicating her mother.]

Female, 8 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Fascinating bandages

Embalmers wrapped most mummies in scrap cloth, as only the wealthiest clients could afford specially manufactured bandages. During the Old and Middle Kingdoms, folded sheets were used for padding and broad linen strips for wrapping; spiral-bandaging only began during the New Kingdom (Ikram and Dodson 1998:153). Limbs were wrapped separately, then the legs were bound together and the arms bound to the torso (*ibid.*:157, 160). Arm positions varied according to sex and rank; crossing of the forearms over the chest was restricted to pharaohs of the Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties (Spencer 1991:119). A shroud was often tied over the wrapped body (Ikram and Dodson 1998:157, 162–4). Despite ample evidence for these varied and changing wrapping techniques, the media have long represented all mummies as bandaged bodies with separately wrapped limbs and arms crossed over the chest. They have shown more interest in royal mummies from Egypt's later pharaonic periods than in mummies from other periods and classes. A preference for representing bandages rather than scrap cloth and sheets results from their resemblance of modern gauze bandages. Mummies' portrayal as moving creatures demands omission of the outer layers of wrappings, but I wonder whether this omission was also suggested by the appearances of mummies that had been partially unwrapped by tomb robbers, collectors and scientists. These interferences have seldom been mentioned on museum labels, so how were costume designers to know that the bodies they were studying had not originally been interred in their present semi-clad state?

Bandages have become synonymous with both real and imaginary mummies, so that wrapping living people figuratively 'mummifies' them. The personalities of fictional mummies – usually marked by malevolence, stupidity or obsolescence as discussed below – are signified by their wrappings, so the donning of bandages confers these qualities upon the wearer. These undesirable qualities are ridiculously inappropriate (Plate 4.1).



Plate 4.1

Humorous Halloween toys and figurines depicting cute creatures dressed as scary mummies; the objects' small sizes further diminish the creatures' threat. *Clockwise from left:* 7" 'Mummy' Kid (© Annalee Mobilitee Dolls® Inc., 1998); 'Mummy Troll' with bloodied bandages (© Russ 1994); 'Monster Trolls: Mummy Troll with Band-Aids' (© The Toy Boys! Galoob 1993); A 'Spooky, Kooky Beartown™ Collectible: Mummy Bear' (© The Judith G. Collection 2001); bear © The Boyds Collection Ltd.® 1990–8); Hallmark Merry Miniatures rabbit (© Hallmark Cards Inc. 1991); Calico Kittens®: Mummy Mischief (© Enesco Corporation 1997) (author's collection).

Mummies are popular subjects for home-made and mass-produced Halloween costumes. Only the lighthearted mood that prevails at Halloween gives adults a licence to dress up as monsters. Children in mummy costumes play the monster role in earnest, but to adults they look cute, since a harmless child impersonating a savage mummy is incongruous.

[T]he room plunged into darkness . . .

A white bandaged figure . . . stood in the doorway. Then, its arms outstretched, it stumbled into the room . . .

Mr Smith was sitting bolt upright . . . his dark eyes bulging with fear . . .

. . . 'The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb!'

. . . [T]he light came on.

. . . Victoria, . . . in the bright light from the chandelier, looked very much like a small girl, rather badly bandaged.

Pat and Laurence Hutchins, *The Curse of the Egyptian Mummy*, 1983
(1993:90–3)

The bandaging of injuries prompts joking at hospitals and sporting events, where reference to the casualty as a mummy associates that person with the humorous qualities – or, in jest, with the fearful qualities – of fictional mummies. During an Australian Rules football match, Richmond player Nick Daffy sustained a facial cut. He returned to the field with a bandage wrapped across his face. Soon afterwards, umpire Bryan Sheehan was also injured and left the field holding his nose. Musing that Sheehan might be patched up like Daffy, television commentator Gerard Healy quipped, 'Well we've got Tutankhamun out there – maybe we'll see another mummy come out' (Australian Football League 1998).

Everyday allusion to this hospital analogy inspires media references to it. In *Mummy Daddy*, an actor dressed as a dishevelled mummy rushes into a hospital searching for his wife who is in labour, only to be advised by a passing doctor, 'See that those bandages get changed.' In the television cartoon series *Mummies Alive!*, Ja-Kal, his injured arm in a sling, sighs, 'One good thing about being a mummy: you always have plenty of bandages' (Kearsley dir. 1997, ep.40). A Halloween mummy version of the Troll doll wears Band-Aids® (*Monster Trolls: Mummy Troll*, © The Toy Boys/Galoob 1993, Plate 4.1). These examples reverse the conventional simile: mummies are interpreted as injured people. Their wrappings – interpreted as medical bandages – make them look like outlandish accident victims. Anthropologist Ivan Karp recognizes that while Others are designed to reinforce our own values by representing a set of opposite values, they must nevertheless incorporate some familiar ideas in order to make sense (1991b:374).

Allusions to injury portray the mummy as tired, incompetent and broken down, an obsolete automaton developing faults. This use of ragged, dirty

bandages to represent dilapidation recasts a trait of horror film mummies in a humorous vein. The repulsiveness of Classic mummies' appearances signifies evil, but funny mummies' repulsive traits, such as bandages or body parts falling off, are meant to look silly. When the legs of *The Real Ghostbusters: the Mummy Monster* (© Columbia Pictures/Kenner Toys 1989) are squeezed, his arm falls off and his bandages pop off to reveal an ugly little head. Humorous mummies are evil but incompetent, or friendly but simpletons like *The Magnificent Mummies* (Bradman and Chatterton 1997:8–9). Mummies' traits condemn them as jokes, if not monsters.

The hospital analogy is humorous not only because it confers inappropriate qualities, but also because this bestowal occurs against the victim's will or without this person's knowledge. Fictional scenarios amplify the gag: other characters mistake the victim for a real mummy.

A small mummy . . . lay in a plain sarcophagus. . . . The mummy groaned, then sat up.

If my legs hadn't turned to rubber, I would have run the fastest hundred-yard dash ever. But . . . the mummy . . . said, 'Hi, Joe. Have I been asleep long? . . . I was tired, so I lay down in this little bed . . . and used some of these covers. But now I'm all wrapped up.'

Jon Scieszka, *Tut, Tut* (1996:61–3)

A gauze disguise can be worn to scare people away in order to execute one's criminal plan, a favourite ploy of *Scooby-Doo* villains. Deliberation cancels the bandages' humour – unless an unwilling person is forced to wear them. In the Three Stooges' comedy *We Want Our Mummy*, Curly accidentally destroys the mummy of Hotsie Totsie and must impersonate her to conceal his mistake (Lord dir. 1939). The wearer's intent contrasts with other characters' reactions to the wearer's outfit; Abbott and Costello discover that a disguise can frighten one's friends. Doctor Who has his assistant Sarah wrap him in order to infiltrate a group of mummiform robots:

The Doctor: How do I look?

Sarah: Must have been a nasty accident!

The Doctor: Don't provoke me.

Doctor Who: Pyramids of Mars (Russell dir. 1975, ep.3)

Like coffins, bandages can hide and reveal their contents. Comedy plays upon the resulting confusion between living and dead people that is compounded by mummies' ambulation. In the American farce play *The Virginia Mummy* (Rice 2003),¹ a Black servant, Ginger Blue, is disguised as a mummy by an army captain, Rifle, and presented to a scientist, Dr Galen. Initially, the ruse succeeds, but Ginger startles Galen's assistants by 'coming to life' and eating Galen's breakfast. The liquor with which Galen hopes to restore life to a mummy appears at first to work.

- Galen: {*Placing funnel and pouring the liquor*} See! It winks! It moves. . . .
- Omnes: 'Tis brought to life – it lives! It lives!
- Galen: . . . Most reverend mummy, what shall I order for your dinner?
- Ginger: I isn't hungry 'case I eat up all de breakfast.
- Charles [*Seizing him*]: Curse me if it isn't Ginger Blue, the nigger that lives at the hotel. . . .
- Galen: Get me a gun, I will shoot him.
 Thomas Rice, *The Virginia Mummy*, 1835 (2003:176–7)

There are also more complex disguise jokes. In *Under Wraps* (Beeman dir. 1997), a mummy is mistaken for a costumed reveller at a Halloween fancy dress party, while other guests dressed as mummies are unceremoniously defrocked by agents seeking the real mummy. Mummy impersonators might meet a real mummy, even another impersonator, and be frightened off (Lamont dir. 1955). They also confuse other characters who cannot tell which mummy is real.

The positioning of audiences to know something that characters do not generates humour. In some scenarios, however, neither knows that an ambulatory mummy is a disguised impostor until the denouement, as in *Scooby-Doo and a Mummy Too* (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969). Scooby's adventure is a crime mystery rather than a mummy comedy proper, as it lacks that critical difference between how much the audience and the characters know. Since the laws of nature are not conventionally disrupted in the crime/mystery genre, bandaged criminals are substituted for living mummies in children's mysteries (for instance, Sobol 1973). Living mummies are absent in curse-themed adult mysteries, among them some of the novels of Agatha Christie, which have been adapted into television programmes and films (including Barber-Fleming dir. 1993; Guillermin dir. 1978). Children's mummy mysteries probably evolved from adult versions, which were popular during the first third of the twentieth century (Lupton 2003:40). They included works by Sax Rohmer, such as *She Who Sleeps* (1928) in which a magician hoaxes the excavation and resurrection of a 'mummy' played by his daughter, and *The Mummy That Walked* (1938) in which a magician exchanges a wrapped woman for a museum's mummy (Lupton 2003:31). It seems probable that Victorian magic shows featuring mummy-themed tricks – including the magic of Georges Méliès (dir. 1899) and Walter Booth (dir. 1901) – inspired mystery tales, along with plays' prototypical hoax scenarios in which a scientist is tricked into thinking that a disguised man is a revived mummy (Bernard 1890; Rice 2003; White 1876). In a genre that celebrates the triumph of the detective's logic over superstition, living mummies would appear implausible. The curse is just a legend appropriated by the criminal who uses fear to discourage investigation of his activities and an Egyptian coffin is simply a convenient place to hide a corpse (Lupton 2003:40). No supernatural realm

threatens the world, so 'whodunits' are not true mummy or curse tales, but appropriate their imagery and adapt their plots.

Mummies are sometimes misrepresented as having been wrapped in a single, long bandage, which when pulled makes a mummy spin like a top, shedding its wrappings.

Q: What does a typical mummy look like?

A: The kinds in cartoons where the bandages are all . . . falling.
Someone'll pull it and it'll start spinning . . .

Q: . . . Is there anything on the inside?

A: [I don't know,] I can never picture one.

Female, 12 years, FMNH interviews 1996

The mummy top's contents consist of anything besides a desiccated corpse. There may be a mummy impersonator (Bernds dir. 1948; Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969), a kidnap victim (Goscinnny and Uderzo 1985:34–5) or nothing at all (Kearsley dir. 1997, ep.37). Mummies can be reduced to their principal visual feature; *Talos the Mummy* (Mulcahy dir. 2000) is just a creeping, strangulating mass of bandages. Empty wrappings could mean that the mummy is not absent, but that the mummy *is* the bandages – which explains why the gauze disguise 'mummifies' people. Yet why should Klaris be '[b]andages with eyes' (Lamont dir. 1955), without flesh and bones? Creative licence is being used to evade the distasteful fact that a mummy is a blackened corpse. A mummy stripper in *The Far Side* cartoons (Larson 2003a, © Universal Press Syndicate) reveals pale flesh and the *Mummies Alive!* have grey but supple and muscular bodies. In contrast, horror mummies' wrappings reveal putrid decaying flesh (rubber mask, © Distortions Unlimited 1998) or bones (cover art, *The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997, Plate 4.2). Humorous and horrific images of what bandages conceal divulge their producers' abhorrence of death and pollution, themes to which I will return.

Since bandages are popularly regarded as mummies' diagnostic feature, any wrapped or bandaged thing is, *ipso facto*, a mummy. Comics have spawned killer insect mummies (*Blackhawk* #199 1964), giant alien mummies (*Tales to Astonish* #31 1962) and zombies wrapped in duct tape (*Necropolis* 1995). Mummies are monsters, not corpses *per se*, so wrapping any type of creature creates a monster.

Young children describe unfamiliar things with reference to the limited range of objects with which they are familiar, drawing analogies between mummies' wrappings and visually similar articles such as toilet paper. A few cartoons feature the toilet paper analogy, such as *The Far Side*: a mummy and man sit in adjacent lavatory cubicles, with the mummy's bandage trailing into the man's cubicle. 'It was an innocent mistake, but nevertheless, a moment later Maurice found himself receiving the full brunt



Plate 4.2 Cover art, *The SpineChiller Collection* #4, 1997, © Eaglemoss Publications (author's collection).

of the mummy's wrath' (Larson 2003b, © Universal Press Syndicate). The *Mighty Beanz Ancient Egyptian Super Pro Team* mummy clutches a toilet roll (© Moose Enterprise P/L 2003, series 2). A boy wears an improvised toilet paper Halloween outfit in an Australian television commercial (Connolly dir. 2004).

A little girl says she thought mummies were wrapped in toilet paper!
But her grandparents laugh.

FMNH fieldnote 1996

Q: What does a typical mummy look like?

A: Toilet paper wrapped around them. [But I know it's not really toilet paper.]

Female, 12 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Q: List the things that ancient Egyptian human mummies remind you of most.

A: toilet paper

Female, 6–9 years, TBM questionnaire 1996

Comparisons have occasionally been drawn between mummy wrappings and sticky tape, such as a tape dispenser moulded in the shape of a mummy who is 'unwrapped' as he spins when the tape is pulled (*School Squad: Mummy King of Wrap*, © Creative Plastics Industries 1993). Bandages are also read as gift wrap, an analogy originating in the Victorian belief in mummies' obligation to yield to their unwrappers the treasures and mysteries that they contained. 'Why is it fun to give mummies as gifts? Because they're already wrapped!' (Smith 1994:43). Bandages can become clothing; the lower legs of *The Groovie Goolies'* Mummy resemble 1970s flared pants and the *Mummies Alive!* wear bandage crop tops, arm warmers and knee-high boots. To horrify audiences with their decaying bodies, the monsters in *The Mummy* (Sommers dir. 1999) are naked save for bandage 'shorts'.

In addition to sight gags there are verbal bandage jokes.

Freddy: Well gang, I guess that wraps up the mystery – and the mummy too!

Scooby-Doo and a Mummy Too (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969)

Presley: Why can't he give it a rest?

Rath: Sometimes it's hard for a mummy to unwind.

Mummies Alive! (Kearsley dir. 1997, ep.28)

Q: What kind of music do mummies like most?

A: Wrap music.

Q: Why don't mummies have hobbies?

A: They are too wrapped up in their work.

Bob Brier, *The Encyclopedia of Mummies* (1998:156–7)

The attribution of mummy identity to anyone who winds up in bandages demonstrates the ongoing, cyclic exchange of ideas between the media and their consumers. When audiences mocked horror films, the media shifted to a new humorous paradigm by appropriating and embellishing the very jokes with which the public heckled the films. Everyday mummy humour is therefore both the source and the product of mass culture. Jokes gain currency once they have circulated through both the media and everyday practices, and retain popularity so long as this circulation continues. Mummies' bandages have sufficient power of analogy to keep the wheel of cultural production in motion.

Messy mummies

Fictional mummies embody uncleanness. They have mouldering green skin (cover art, Stone 1997), brown grime on their bandages or cobwebs, flies, clouds of dust (Bradman and Chatterton 1997:8–9) or stinking green vapour (cover art, Stine 1994) surrounding them. Some ooze blood (*Holiday Taper Candles*, © Russ Berrie 1996). The most frightening mummies have gaps between their bandages that expose their bones (cover art, *The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997, Plate 4.2) or partly fleshed faces that combine the features of skulls (grimacing teeth, empty eye sockets, loss of nose cartilage) and corpses (one eyeball, threadbare hair), evoking decomposition. Visceral imagery generally postdates stereotypes that deny the presence of a corpse, such as the spinning top analogy. Explicit images of decay are accepted in popular culture today, but I sense that this expresses a hidden anxiety.

The repulsive physical traits of Classic mummies, once used simply to signify their evilness, have been amplified and elaborated. Abjection is no longer a means to convey an idea, but constitutes the idea itself. The mummy is covered in, or composed of, substances regarded as pollutants in industrialized societies, in which bodily decomposition threatens strict regimes of hygiene and represents death. Philippe Aries argues that modern European and American funerals avoid explicit representations of death (1981:559–601), but which aspect of death is most feared? Symbols of decay have appeared at funerals in many cultures in which mourners handle the corpse (Bloch and Parry 1982:22–7), while in the West today, medical and funeral professionals sequester the dead. I think that corpse imagery in Western popular culture reveals pollution – the decay of the body rather than death *per se* – to be the ultimate object of fear. Like the horror genre (Hutchings 1993:187), contemporary children's mass culture derived from

horror films operates at the margins of adult-oriented popular culture, daring to expose what mainstream culture stifles. 'Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins', and as the universal microcosm of society, the human body is weakest at its orifices, so that the 'marginal stuff' that bodies exude (whether blood, waste or the products of decay) has been regarded as polluting in many cultures (Douglas 1969:121). Today, Western peoples' unfamiliarity with touching and looking at corpses magnifies the horror of their visions of the dead; repression causes 'violent . . . erupt[ion] back into consciousness' (Horrocks 1995:109). In the collective imagination of a death-repressed society, mummies become spectacularly repulsive.

Although mummies kept in dry storage remain preserved, they are often assumed to be decomposing. Some people are unaware that mummies are fleshed remains and children may not yet differentiate between skeletons and mummies. Classic mummies were portrayed as putrefying bodies and as early as 1901 (Booth dir.), a movie mummy 'not only came to life but also decayed before your very eyes' (Campbell 1977:v). When real mummies stored in damp conditions have decayed, newspapers have exploited these incidents for shock value. While cinema's portrayal of mummies as 'all earth mould and dirty bandages' (Halliwell 1986:191) emphasizes pollution, contrasting stereotypes that deny the presence of a corpse also deny pollution – but both approaches hint at a reluctance to think about preserved human flesh. European-based traditions cannot conceive of dead flesh that does not rot, let alone understand why anyone would want to preserve it.

The ancient being lopes forward . . . [D]ecayed cloth falls from its body . . . leaving a grey trail of bandages on the dusty floor. (1983:58)

Closer, closer it comes . . . reaching to envelop you in the stench of its mouldy wrappings. (1983:67)

R. L. Stine, *Horrors of the Haunted Museum* (1983)

A Mouldy Mummy Gets Fired!

{A mummy} succumbed to . . . green mould accompanied by a nasty pong.

The sudden decay of the mummified girl was so dramatic that the curator of a museum at Ilfracombe, Devon, decided to cremate her.

Sunday People (1976)

Mummy's a Mouldy Oldie

A mouldy mummy . . . has been the favourite pin-up boy at the South Australian Museum since 1916.

Di Cox . . . made the alarming discovery – a spot of mould the size of a 20-cent piece . . .

Woman's Day (1983)

The [mummy's name, Ginger] is meant to come from the colour of his hair, but frankly, the few tufts he has left seem . . . green . . . Or, as one American tourist [at the British Museum] put it . . . 'Say, is that hair? I thought it was mould.'

Roger Tagholm, *Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* (1992:8)

Q: How do you feel about Egyptian mummies being displayed in museums?

A: It's fine as long as they're not out in the open.

Q: What would happen if they were out in the open?

A: Rot, smell. It's gross . . . sickness and that.

Male, 13 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

A: Decaying yet comparatively well preserved (considering age)

Male, 13–17 years, WAM questionnaire 1995

Q: What did you expect to see inside an unwrapped mummy?

A: I thought the body would just be . . . decayed . . . dried out. (Female A, 12 years)

Q: But mummies are preserved.

A: [But surely after] thousands and thousands of years [they would rot away.] (Female B, 12 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

Q: Why are some mummies in fragments?

A: Maybe the rest of it decayed too much.

Male, 18–24 years, MM interviews 1996

[Looking at an unwrapped mummy.]

Jasmine: This is Asru . . .

Child: A skeleton.

MM 1996

A skeleton – a real skeleton.

Male, about 6 years, MM 1996

Q: What does a typical mummy look like?

A: I see them as unwrapped skeletons. There's a typical film thing with shrouds of cotton . . . but . . . it's just a skeleton, a preserved skeleton albeit.

Male, 35–44 years, MM interviews 1996

Pollution fascinates children because it eludes the rules of hygiene imposed upon them by adults. I have heard youngsters draw attention to unpleasant

details of exhibited bodies or attempt to nauseate family members with graphic descriptions of mummification techniques. Some children enjoy being 'grossed out' (repulsed); freedom to revel in decay is the privilege of those who have not yet experienced bereavement.

Ew, skeleton! [To another child] Skeleton in there . . .

Child, about 7 years, MM 1996

Ugh, look at that, his feet's sticking out.

Boy, MM 1996

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

A: gross and cool (Female, 10–12 years, SAM 1995)

A: Gross, cool (Male, 10–12 years, SAM 1995)

A: Grosse cool (Female, 10–12 years, SAM 1995)

A: cool, gross (Female, 10–12 years, TBM 1996)

A: disgusting and cool & scary (Female, 10–12 years, TBM 1996)

Questionnaires

Q: Free comment section

A: Pretty cool and a bit grose (Male, 6–12 years)

A: The mummies were descusting, but cool, you should have a huge big tomb, and way more mummies (Female, 13–17 years)

WAM questionnaire 1995

Young museum visitors' descriptions of mummification emphasized gory brain and organ removal, often neglecting the natron application that preserves bodies and the religious motivations of the process. Taken out of context, mummification seems an irrational or barbaric practice that ridicules adults' insistence that ancient history is a wholesome topic for children to learn about. *Young Indiana Jones* repulses seasick people with his stomach-churning description of mummification during dinner (Schultz dir. 1992).

You ought to see what they did to my mummy

Pulled his organs out of his tummy

Put 'em in spice, whacked 'em in a jar

Painted him up with sticky tar

Wrapped him with linen from his head to his toes

Pulled his brains out of his nose . . .

Colin Buchanan, *The Mummy Song* (1993)

I watched several adults explain mummification to young children who

could not read labels. Rather than reading the labels themselves – which is difficult while supervising energetic infants – they relied upon their existing knowledge. They often omitted reference to natron, implying that bandaging alone preserved the bodies. Why did adults, like children, emphasize evisceration and wrapping? These steps probably leave a greater impression upon children's minds than other aspects of mummification that are either difficult to comprehend, namely religious concepts, or unfamiliar, such as the use of natron. Selective memory could persist into adulthood, affecting the knowledge that generations of parents pass on to their children, reinforcing children's fixation upon bandages and gore.

Children fantasize about rejecting adult values of hygiene, good taste, discipline and education. In these fantasies, as in horror films, filth represents not only itself but also values that oppose socially accepted ones. Julia Kristeva observes that infants first come into contact with authority when their mothers teach them to keep their own bodies clean. Self-consciousness is suddenly imposed upon resentful children, who long to return to a dirty, carefree state (1982:71–2). Media attacks upon hygiene appeal to children's spirit of defiance, but this apparent endorsement of antisocial behaviour is calculated to achieve the opposite effect. Representations of rule-breaking underscore the importance of acceptable behaviour; the exception, the Other, proves the rule. Well-meaning Rath attempts to clean car windshields with his grotty bandages, only to smear the glass (Kearsley dir. 1997, ep.7). In the preschoolers' book *The Magnificent Mummies*, Tut and Sis soil their clean bandages at breakfast (Bradman and Chatterton 1997:12–13). A mummy in an Australian television commercial, distressed by his body odour, goes to the shower in his pyramid, only to find it occupied by his wife: 'You've been in there for centuries!' (Meredith dir. 1996a). Who better to teach children hygiene than the mummy, who is always dirty?

The anthropologist Victor Turner describes alternatives to the status quo that are envisaged by agitators for political, social or moral change as symbolic inversions (1978:281). I think that in industrialized societies, however, some symbolic inversions actually sustain the status quo, alluding to it by way of contrast during temporary suspensions of normality. Turner thinks that rituals in tribal and agrarian societies that mock sacred images and encourage licentious behaviour work in this way (1978:281). Occasional breaches of the rules serve to highlight them, maintaining the power of the establishment that sanctions the infringements. So imaginary encounters with filth express a loathing for it held by the adult producers of subversive children's books and programmes. Abject things are represented only in order to define their opposite, namely an ideal social order, before being dispensed with (Bloch 1982:224; Bloch and Parry 1982:24, 26; Creed 1993:8). This can be achieved via the process of hegemony. To recap Antonio Gramsci's concept, people's ideas are appropriated by the powers-that-be,

their anti-establishment elements edited out and the sanitized ideas presented back to the people as their own authentic culture in an attempt to win their favour. The media exploit children's delight in filth and gore, encouraging juvenile consumerism by fostering an appealing illusion of power over adults. Chaos is allowed to flourish for a moment in the mind if this concession prevents it from taking hold in the real world.

The imagery of rot is appropriate to aging so pollution, like dilapidation, signifies age. Unlike restored and cleaned museum exhibits, film and television props that represent artefacts and mummies look dusty, grimy or broken. I asked museum visitors whether they thought that the mummies on display were real.

Some of them are realistic. The older ones ... that weren't as perfect ... (Female, 13–17 years)

[These mummies must be fake because real ones are] so fragile they'd be disintegrating with all the vibrations in a museum display.
(Female, 35–44 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

[The mummies must be real because] the paint are coming off the coffins.

Male, 9 years, MM interviews 1996

Age is popularly associated with dilapidation and obsolescence; jokes about elderly people typecast them as physically decrepit with antiquated ideologies. In a 1970s American commercial for *Vanish Stain Stick* (© Reckitt Benckiser Ltd. c.1975), a clean mummy introduces the wonders of bleaching technology to a mummy with soiled bandages (cited by Towers and Wallace dirs 1992, ep.3). Fictional mummies' wrinkled skin and shuffling gait are exaggerated symptoms of old age, since mummies are the most senior of citizens – an idea dating back to the Preclassic Period. The semi-detached jawbone of the action figure in *Todd McFarlane's Monsters: The Mummy Playset* (© and TM Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc. 1998, series 1) is a wicked smile and a wry allusion to old age: this pharaoh is so old that he is falling apart. The king is dead – long live the king.

Professor: Anka is over three thousand years old.

Shaggy: That's funny – he doesn't look a day over two thousand to me!

Scooby-Doo and a Mummy Too (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969)

Just as mummies are likened to elderly people, the reverse also occurs. Homer Simpson admonishes the ancient Mr Burns, 'You are a senile,

buck-toothed old mummy' (Silverman dir. 1991). Ageism complements the mother pun:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Girl 1: | There's a real mummy. |
| Boy 1 [teasing]: | There's your mum. |
| Boy 2 [indignant]: | It is <i>not</i> my mum. |
| Girl 2: | It's not my mummy either. |
| Boy 3 [joking]: | There's my dad! |

NWM 1996

Fictional mummies' present appearances imply that they were always dishvelled, even wrapped since birth. The application of clean bandages during embalming and the deterioration effected over the time elapsed since antiquity is seldom depicted. We see nothing of the mummies' past lives, as if they never died, or were born 'dead' and lived as mummies. Like the mummification of the living Im-Ho-Tep (Freund dir. 1932), embalming becomes an ordeal that renders its ever-living – or never-living – victim 'half the mummy he used to be' (Buchanan 1993). Mummy tales are abstracted from their Preclassic and Classic forebears, simplified for children or designed to tell a story within a single-frame cartoon or thirty-second commercial. They omit the flashback sequences of Victorian romances and some Classic films, in which a mummy's tragic former life is portrayed. Without this sympathetic retrospection, the mummy becomes subhuman; we never see the person whom the monster used to be.

Denied a glimpse of the past, we piece it together from the evidence before us, but this retrospective extrapolation produces some bizarre conclusions. The mummy's features, grossly deformed in death, imply a similar appearance in life, so the hologram in the *SuperNaturals* action figure Rags transforms from a tattered mummy with an evil grin into a wrinkled pharaoh with the same expression (© Tonka 1986). Taken to extremes, retrospective extrapolation suggests that the Egyptians wore bandages from cradle to grave. 'Ancient Egypt was inhabited by mummies,' wrote a child in an American history exam. 'I wonder how the mummies walked, with all those bandages on,' Mark Twain joked in 1872 (1962:180). If ambulatory mummies can invade our world, they can cavort with pharaohs and queens in ancient Egypt (Sharratt 1996). The *Great Adventures* preschool toy range (© Fisher-Price 2001), including a treasure-filled tomb and figurines representing archaeologists, Arabs, a pharaoh and several living mummies, establishes an ahistorical space in which modern and ancient Egypt are collapsed together. This Egypt has never changed, nor amounted to anything more than a place where greedy natives fight over treasure, seeing as every figurine is armed to the teeth. This is a variant upon the myth of the 'ethnographic present' that bedeviled anthropology in its formative years (Fabian 1983:80–7), the belief that a culture can remain static, so that ancient people can be studied by

observing their modern descendants and non-European peoples can be said to have never progressed. Retrospective extrapolations concerning mummies thus perpetuate a form of bigotry that was abandoned by anthropology long ago, in which European societies are the model with which all other cultures are unfavourably compared.

Retrospective extrapolations that determine the character of a fictional ancient Egyptian according to the appearance of his or her mummy probably derive from a similar Preclassic practice applied to real mummies. The face of Rameses II, interpreted as that of an arrogant man, supposedly proved his responsibility for the enslavement of the Israelites.

'[T]he mummy . . . [is] the homeliest and most dried-up thing you ever set eyes on. . . . [I]t is the embalmed body of an Egyptian king, the one who made slaves of the Hebrews, like it tells about in the Bible.'

Leo Edwards, *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy* (1923:12)

Professor: This is the mummy of Anka, once the most feared ruler of ancient Egypt.

Daphne: Wow! He could still scare me, Professor!

Scooby-Doo and a Mummy Too (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969)

The mummy was the dark colour of swamp mud. Bits of rotted cloth hung from it, and a few wiry tufts of hair were plastered to the skull. . . .

. . . 'It says here that [the mummy] was an Egyptian prince and a nasty character. A lot of people disappeared during his reign . . . He was accused of draining blood from others.'

Q. Pearce, *Flesh and Blood*, 1995 (*The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997:2)

European and American societies usually avoid overt representations of death (Aries 1981:559–601; May 1996:3), so for them, mummies are outlets for an unconscious expression of anxieties about death. What is most feared is pollution's threat to a hygiene-obsessed, antiseptic society – and the ugliness with which old age makes a travesty of Western ideals of youthful beauty.

The monster mash

The media amplify Classic films' monsterization of mummies, occasionally depicting them with reptilian green skin or claws (cardboard poseable 41" *Mummy*, © The Beistle Company 1995). Like Im-Ho-Tep (Glut 1978:167), some mummies have supernatural glowing eyes that are red in allusion to

anger (battery-operated *Clip-on Monster* pin, © Soma International 1994), or yellow (cardboard poseable 41" *Mummy*) or green (Captain Company 1965) like nocturnal creatures' glowing eyes. Many plastic mummy toys glow in the dark.

Mummies appear in settings associated with death, night and the supernatural. They reside in modern coffins and hearses (*Road Champs Horror Hearse: Mummy Dearest*, © Road Champs 1996) or prowl in Christian graveyards (as in Disneyland's *Haunted Mansion*, © Disney 1969), castles (on the packaging of the *Mummy Troll*) and dungeons. The dungeon mummy in a Backstreet Boys musicvideo even has an iron maiden torture device for a coffin (1997). Mummies frequent the company of witches, ghosts, werewolves, vampires and Frankenstein's monster (Bridwell 1974; Wood and Forsey 1998), a combination of European folkloric figures and monsters popularized by Hollywood films based upon famous novels. Amongst a monster ensemble in generic haunted settings, mummies' link with curses is severed; a curse story cannot be told in its entirety by the static images that decorate Halloween products, so mummies may not be shown taking victims. Consequently, they lose their evil potency. So a malevolent Halloween mummy is more likely a humorous mock-horror, emasculated mummy of the type described below than a deadly one, unlikely to avenge sacrilege while cavorting with other nasties in the graveyard.

An open and shut case

Humour has converted Egyptian coffins from magical protective devices into props in a comedy of confusion that exploits their capacity to conceal or reveal a body. The Preclassic comic and erotic use of coffins as veils (Bernard 1890; Capper 1868) was elaborated with the addition of ambulatory mummies. Like the gauze disguise, coffins usually imply to the audience, but not necessarily to characters, that a sentient person resides within. They often unexpectedly disclose a living impostor (Scieszka 1996:61–3) or nobody at all. A difference between the expected and actual contents of a coffin constitutes a joke. It plays upon confusion between living and dead bodies and uncertainty about their presence or absence. This proverbial 'mystery of the missing mummy' is epitomized by magic tricks in which model mummies appear and disappear or seem to move, as if alive (for instance, *King Tut Mysterious Mummy*, © Franco-American Novelty Company 1973).

Many fictional coffins have lids hinged to their bases (Goodwins dir. 1944), but Egyptian coffins were sealed with mortice and tenon joints. The mythical hinge, while suggested by modern coffin design, is a product of ambulation: it allows the lid of an upright coffin to swing open like a door as the mummy steps out (cover art, *Ghost Stories* #16 1966) and consequently permits impostors to hide inside coffins quickly (Lamont dir. 1955). Hinges on a reclining coffin allow a mummy to push its lid up like a hefty bedsheet

(dir. 1955). The former owner of a coffin now in the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum hinged its lid and base together so that he could hide inside and leap from the upright coffin to startle his friends at parties (Shar 1996)!

Reclining coffins or sarcophagi usually appear in humorous productions because they are like beds in which a mummy can sleep, ready to awaken. Mummies may yawn, like Klaris, or awaken to find that their bandages have mildewed (*Vanish Stain Stick* commercial). European tradition draws analogies between death and sleep; the Greek gods Thanatos (Death) and Hypnos (Sleep) were brothers. How apt that the archetypal mummy, plodding along with arms extended to strangle victims, reminded a Brooklyn Museum questionnaire respondent (male, 10–12 years) of a sleepwalker.

Although Classic films presented standing coffins as static objects, ambulatory coffins – representing mummies, with which they were often conflated – were occasionally depicted in the Preclassic era. A cranky-faced coffin smokes a cigarette (cover art, Hewitt et al. 1907), another leers at a pretty girl who tickles his chin with a feather (cover art, Carle and Bowers 1904, illustrated by Brier 1998:172) and Jimmy Swinnerton's cartoon tiger Mr Jack winks at a female coffin who returns his gaze, implying a very old love affair: 'Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot?' (1906). Animated coffins feature in the political cartoons of Thomas Nast (Chapter 2). Mummies' sentience infected their containers, assisted by the human appearance of these coffins and its production of the Argus effect: a museum visitor's sense that the exhibits are watching him or her. The Egyptian coffin seems to stare accusingly at us, challenging our intrusion into its tomb or acquiescence to its removal to a museum. Yet ambulatory coffins only began to articulate this Argus effect after the advent of ambulatory mummies in cinema had reduced the frequency with which moving coffins were depicted. My earliest recollection of mummies is of a coffin suspiciously watching characters pass by in the title sequence of a *Scooby-Doo* cartoon (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1976–9).

Humorous ambulatory coffins, while rare, do survive. They smile, wink or look at friends (cover art, Rosen 1979) and occasionally talk and jump (Ward dir. 1983). Coffins that herald a living mummy stop moving once the occupant emerges, but if the tenant is friendly, its coffin acquires full subject status, continuing to move even after the mummy appears (cover art, Sharratt 1996).

Postclassic curses

Types of mummies and curses

The adaptation of mummymania to humorous contexts and juvenile audiences has changed the plots of mummy stories. Mummies have consequently developed two extremes of personality – evil monsters versus friendly clowns

– but these coexist because both represent mummies as foils to the viewer or reader.

Popular culture now presents three kinds of mummies. There is the evil baddie who kills people, typically found in children's horror tales (*The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997). There is the friendly clown, including Harold in *Under Wraps*, *The Magnificent Mummies* and the *Mummies Alive!* superheroes. The third type is an evil but ineffectual creature, a malevolent oaf who fails to take a victim, such as Klaris (Lamont dir. 1955) and Prince Khor-Ru in *Return of the Mummy* (Bell dir. 1995) based on R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps*® books. Sometimes this third type is a disguised impostor (Edwards dir. 1983; Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969). In failing to take a victim, the emasculated mummy censors violence for juvenile audiences and comedy productions without sacrificing suspense. Contrasting evil with friendly mummies demonstrates that the way in which a curse is represented determines a mummy's personality type. A pure hubris/nemesis plot requires an evil monster for its enactment; a reworking of this plot creates an emasculated mummy and the absence or extreme abstraction of the Classic curse formula produces a friendly mummy. The three character types with their corresponding curse structures demonstrate the transition of mummymania's dominant paradigm from horror to humour during the twentieth century. Baddies, with their traditional hubris/nemesis curse, featured in Classic films and their derivatives from the 1930s onwards. Oafs, whose curses were not consistently motivated by sacrilege and failed to punish the guilty, were a mid- to late century transitional form. Clowns, who lacked hubris/nemesis curses, appeared around the 1960s and later became more prominent. Each type was dominant for a time, but all three remain current.

Baddies: evil mummies and the Classic curse

Some scenarios appear to preserve the moral basis of the curse, emphasizing the foolishness of entering a tomb – or a mummy exhibit, since exhibits act as mummies' adopted tombs (Chapter 3). Like Classic films, these stories include a Cassandra figure who warns of impending doom but is ignored.

'Maybe [staying in the museum overnight] wasn't such a good idea,' Sean muttered. Suddenly he froze. 'What's that?' . . . (1997:3)

'Look out!' [Charlie] screamed. But it was too late. The mummy had gripped Gordon round the neck and lifted him off his feet. (1997:5)

Q. Pearce, *Flesh and Blood*, 1995 (*The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997)

I doubt that this perpetuation of old moral themes results from concerns about ethics or belief in curses. Here we see the media recycling their own

earlier products to minimize costs and maximize profits. Children's horror fiction is a burgeoning industry that adapts adult horror for new audiences. It preserves the hubris/nemesis plot, but only by transforming it from a moral parable into a basis for dramatic action and a pretext for book covers featuring a terrifying mummy with arms outstretched towards the viewer (cover art, Stine 1983). This pose alludes to strangulation, established by Kharis as the mummy's preferred method of killing.

In preserving the Classic plotline, children's fiction and toys incorporate environments into the fabric of which the principle of nemesis is woven. In previous chapters, I introduced Barbara Creed's idea of the *vagina dentata* (1993:119–21), men's ancient fear that women will seek revenge for loss of virginity (and, I contend, for rape). Things of similar appearance are imagined to have similar capacities, so the vagina becomes a mouth with hidden teeth inside that can bite off the penis. Many images of the penetration of forbidden spaces connote the *vagina dentata*; explorers in Egyptian tombs are metaphorically bitten (struck down by hazards within) or swallowed (trapped inside the tomb). The curse is therefore a *vagina dentata* myth that interprets the disturbance of the dead as a sin by drawing an analogy with rape, and warns that this sacrilege will be punished. The *vagina dentata* settings in Classic films have been elaborated in Postclassic children's culture.

Book illustrators interpret the corridors and chambers of pyramids and rock-cut tombs as mazes in which characters get lost (Goscinnny and Uderzo 1985:24). A man lost in the Field Museum mummy gallery in 1996 made a spooky 'Oooo' noise and joked, 'Looks like we're stuck in here forever. This is gonna be our burial chamber.' The pits in Theban royal tombs, designed to divert water from flash floods, become mechanically operated booby traps. Lou Costello was confronted by corpses and chased by a giant lizard through Klaris' circuitous tomb-cum-temple-cum-dungeon; Sam Bubblesquirt evades crocodiles, sharks and a spike-lined pit in a tomb (Bates and Magerl 1995:56); Lego *Adventurers* run the gauntlet of snakes, scorpions, an axe and falling rocks among temple ruins (© LEGO Group 1998, set #5988). In the absence of an ambulatory mummy, the trap-tomb defends itself, cautioning trespassers not with Cassandra figures but with the corpses of previous intruders. Entrapment is most spectacularly deployed in the Indiana Jones films, as Indy dodges darts and rolling rocks (Spielberg dir. 1981) and escapes from collapsing rooms (Spielberg dir. 1984) and burning catacombs (Spielberg dir. 1989). An ethical ambivalence is writ into the tomb itself. It displays its treasures like a museum, beckoning visitors with open-lidded chests of jewels (Stine 1983:83; Williams dir. 1996), yet threatening death to those who seek them – just as the unwrapping of Preclassic fictional mummies, which promised to satiate scientific or sexual interest, only induced guilt. The *vagina dentata* tomb promises consummation but bites or swallows the supplicant. The Lego temple's entrance is a fanged canine mouth!

Q: Could you tell me what the 'Curse of the Pharaohs' is?

A: You're not supposed to go into . . . the mummy's tomb because . . . the bricks come down on you . . . and you're trapped inside. (Male, 18–24 years)

A: There's traps there . . . you go into a pit or . . . there's boulders chases you. (Male, 9 years)

MM interviews 1996

A: [I]f you go into their tombs . . . the penalty . . . [is] death . . . by fire . . . And they have . . . traps inside there . . . [T]here was many different passageways . . . some of them . . . filled . . . up with scorpions . . .

Male, 13 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Mummies' incorporation into generalized horror settings has blended their tombs with other types of eerie environs, such as caves and dungeons. All these settings are *vaginae dentatae* with their sharp hazards, traps, torture devices, tooth-like stalactites and stalagmites and skeletons of previous victims. The base of *Todd McFarlane's Monsters: the Mummy Playset* resembles a tomb, but its stalagmites also evoke a cave.

The perpetuation of hubris/nemesis curses is easily explained, as is their simplification in formats that demand concise storytelling. What remains to be explained are the effects of these abbreviations upon mummies' personalities and the public reception of real mummies.

Oafs: emasculated mummies and the contagion-curse

The most common alterations made to curse plots affect hubris and nemesis events. If the mummy is allowed to threaten but not to kill, nemesis cannot be fulfilled. Therefore, hubris in the form of entry into a tomb may not occur. Such stories typically unfold in a museum; the mere presence of the young protagonists, innocent of tomb-robbery, is sufficient to warrant attack by a mummy (Hanna and Barbera dirs 1969; *The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997). Why do mummies attack museumgoers?

The synonymy of museums with mummies and their importation of a magical Little Egypt into the West culminate in tales of youngsters into whose humdrum lives a museum excursion injects excitement. Classic films portray museums as institutions that objectify mummies and so bear the brunt of their wrath but here, museums are aligned with mummies. Old buildings filled with the paraphernalia of death, in which attendants or schoolteachers give 'boring' lectures about the past (Schultz dir. 1992), museums are fitting accommodations for mummies and inherit their supernaturalism. Ever since scare gifts of 'cursed' Egyptian objects to the British Museum made it 'a

godsend to the superstitious . . . a means of shifting the liability to expert shoulders' (*Daily Express* 1923), museums have been seen as lightning rods for otherworldly evils. So the unwary visitor faces the *Horrors of the Haunted Museum* (Stine 1983): ghosts, animated dinosaur skeletons and living mummies. Whether or not every department is haunted, the Egyptian gallery has invariably become the mummy's new tomb. Like their counterparts in the real world, fictional exhibits often contain real tombs (ibid.:11) or replica tombs (Stone 1997:40–1; Woodruff 1994:40). Few fictional accounts reinterpret themed mummy rooms as hyperreal settings (*Champion of the Worms* #1 1997:12). Instead, they represent a display of a single tomb's contents as an exhibit so true to life that it comes to life. This suggests a popular awareness that museum arrangements of objects by type are contrived, unrepresentative of assemblages of objects *in situ*. While Classic museums' occupation by living mummies is unintentional, Postclassic museums' inclusion of virtual tombs seems to invite ancient powers consciously. One wonders what curator would devise such a diabolic display; as in cinema, the exhibits remain unauthored. Most real museum displays do not name their makers or reveal these curators' motivations (Beard and Henderson 1994:21). This neglect gives rise to the fantasy that displays invent themselves by supernatural means and, hence, for supernatural purposes.

To enter the enchanted museum–tomb is to commit the same hubris as the despoiler of a tomb, hence the inclusion of a scene in which a Cassandra figure attempts to discourage others from committing sacrilege. Mummies dare not attack visitors during opening hours, targeting instead those who commit the hubris of declaring the curse a fraud and hiding in the museum overnight as a dare. Hubris is not eradicated by abstraction of the curse, but adopts another form in response to a shift of public attention away from Egypt, towards Western museums. Ancient Egypt exists today in Anglo-American space and imagination, removed from modern Egypt, its Islamic religion and political troubles that many Europeans find threatening (Towers and Wallace dirs 1992, ep.5).

'You're not serious about spending the night in this place . . . are you?' your friend Mike asks.

'Of course I'm serious,' you reply . . . 'Kelly and Derek both dared us . . .'

'But you don't believe all that garbage . . . about the mummy coming to life every night. . . . I'm going home,' Mike says.

'Maybe you're a little scared, after all,' you suggest.

R. L. Stine, *Horrors of the Haunted Museum* (1983:2)

Entry into a museum–tomb constitutes sacrilege, which explains why the mummy revives. However, this moral lesson might be lost on young readers or viewers, to whom the mummy's attacks could seem ominously random if

they do not recognize museum entry as the equivalent of the absent tomb-breaching scene. Consider a mummy action figure: its space is not invaded, but instead it invades the child's world, angered without provocation, gesturing and glaring through its plastic bubble. The actual or perceived omission of hubris removes revenge as the reason for mummies' animation and violence, which therefore becomes natural and requires no justification. Chasing people becomes something mummies 'just do'. Klaris chases Abbott and Costello simply because they are in Dr Zoomer's house, making no distinction between them and the thieves. The unpredictability and unfairness of mummies' apparently random attacks augments their abjection. Now that mummies can think independently and are activated by mere human presence rather than tana leaves, the High Priest has been dispensed with. Capacity for independent thought could offset the mummy's dehumanizing attributes, but a calculating corpse makes a more baleful enemy than a drone, and will not be distracted from executing a curse by a priest who steals the mummy's beloved princess. She too has disappeared from most contemporary stories.

The trouble with these abstracted curses, with mummies who attack as a matter of course, is their apparent connection to lived experience from a child's point of view. Juveniles identify with the young characters and suburban settings of horror fiction and animated cartoons, so may anticipate strife during their own museum visits.

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

A: I was scared, And I thought they was alive (Male, 10–12 years)

A: Can they come alive again (Male, 6–9 years)

TBM questionnaire 1996

Q: What did you think of when you saw the mummies here?

A: I thought they had bones inside the body. It makes it scary because it thinks they'll come to life.

Q: Do you think that's real? [Respondent shakes her head.] But you still feel scared though. [She nods.]

Female, 8 years, MM interviews 1996

In contrast, some children were excited at the prospect of mummies' revival, inspired by an idea I call the revolution paradigm. This paradigm sympathizes with children who find conventional education boring; the introductory scenes in some narratives portray museum excursions as dull (Schultz dir. 1992; *The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997:1). The young protagonists desert their class to seek adventure (Sampson and Dupasquier 1989:13–15; Stone 1997:49–51; Woodruff 1994:42–3). Egyptologists' expertise is undermined when juvenile characters revive a mummy: adults' dry reconstructions of

the past are no match for the past-come-alive. This critique of adults' power is also the fundamental motivation of children's dirt and gore fixation. 'Be sure to see the mummies. Your parents might think they're creepy, but you'll like them' (Nadira, 7 years old, cited by Levine 1994:3).

These symbolic challenges to the rule of adults may have developed from past popular portrayals of archaeologists as blind and insensitive. If so, they turn the punishing moral power of Preclassic curses towards children's more selfish ends. Friendly mummies awakened by children are themselves like naughty children, dirty and disruptive. In Kristeva's terms (1982:71–2), they embody a child's desired return to the mother: to filth and abjection, to misbehaviour with impunity, to a time before social rules and self-consciousness snatched away the absolute freedom of earliest childhood. In this sense the mummy of juvenile fiction, whether male or female, is a literal mummy, a mother-figure. This lends tremendous resonance to infants' confusion between the two types of mummies, and might further explain it. It could be that abjections of the mummy begin when a child comes to understand not only homonyms in particular, but language in general. According to Kristeva, a growing comprehension of language allows children to distinguish themselves from their mothers for the first time, as they start to recognize themselves as independent social beings (pp. 13, 61). This individuation is also achieved on a broader social level. The symbols and rituals of a culture abject the mother, associating her with the pre-cultural, disordered world of nature to force her away from the world of culture into which the child is about to enter (pp. 63–4). The mother becomes a symbolic figure sacrificed in order to pass cultural traditions on to a new generation. So this could be the source of all forms of abjection of the mummy, the rejection of the mummy's pollution and disorder being tantamount to rejection of the mother. This may be the point at which children cease to identify with mummies as chaotic kindred spirits and outgrow mummy fiction. Ultimately, most children desire to become part of society and are prepared to subject themselves to its fundamental standards to avoid being cast out like mummies of both sorts.

The abjection that now inheres in the revolution paradigm's mummy no longer defeats the character as it did in Classic films, but is turned instead upon adults. In its punishment of those who oppose the mummy, this resembles a Preclassic curse, but in effect it is a reworked version of the Classic nutshell device (Figure 2.1b) via which the mummy's threat is ultimately defeated: as mother-figures representing threats to culture, naughty mummies teach children how *not* to behave. Once children's struggle for a chaotic autonomy is reduced to images and stories by adults, its power to effect real change is neutralized in the manner described by Gramsci.

If the revolution paradigm is children's attempt to invert the Classic nutshell device, the nutshell survives in its pure form when evil mummies threaten youngsters and are vanquished. A Preclassic-style curse, in which the mummy is the victor, persists where evil mummies kill all of the

protagonists (*The SpineChiller Collection* #4 1997:5–7). Given children's exposure to multiple, inconsistent interpretations of the curse, a variety of juvenile responses – including confusion – can be expected. Just as some children identify with mummies' victims, others also identify with mummies, viewing them as subversive anti-heroes as well as fearful creatures in a case of 'multiple identification' (Horrocks 1995:177). 'If, as in dreams, every character in a story represents an aspect of the self, then we are the chaser and the chased, pursuing ourselves through danger into adulthood' (Johnson 1991:112).

Boy [excited]:	I wish one of the mummies came jumping up!
Jasmine:	You wish it would come up? How come?
Teacher [baffled]:	What do you want it to come up for?
Boy:	Have a chase!
Teacher:	Chase you?
Boy:	Yeah!

MM 1996

Mummies in museums remain inert, hence children's suspicion that they revive in the absence of the living, presumably at night. A museum excursion can thus be anticipated with trepidation or delight. Like people who dispose of cursed artefacts, children subconsciously desire to own their own curses, to will the fantastic into being and to master it. Similarities between actual and fictional museums blur the distinction between the realms of experience and representation, delaying their complete resolution into two distinct categories in a child's developing worldview. This deferral of certainty can be liberating, but it can also be disturbing if the threat of attack by a mummy hovers at the edge of consciousness. If fairies and wizards are real, so must evil mummies be; fear is the price that children pay for postponing the sad realization that magic can never happen.

In a cave in Egypt there was 80 mummies . . . [T]here was six human beings named Paul, Nick, Carl, Steven, Stuart and Matthew . . . one of the mummies came back to life and . . . killed [Paul] and . . . ate his kidneys . . . brain . . . liver, eyes, heart and drunk his blood. He used [Paul's] bones to sharpen his teeth and used [Paul's] hair for string to kill other people . . . Stuart . . . was scared he wanted to come home to Leicester because he knew he would get eaten by the mummys . . . They caught Matthew and pulled his eyes out . . . Carl and Nick fell in a swamp and died . . . [Steven and Stuart] was near Leicester . . . They thought about home and their mums and dads . . . and the mummys got nearer and nearer . . . The mummys was on Bow Bridge and Steven and Stuart was on Winstanley Drive and they darted to 118 and they were home. The mummies went to

Egypt and . . . died out and after that no one went looking for mummys again.

Steven 'X', primary school student, Leicester, UK, *The Mummys That Came to Live Again* (1976)

Freaks: clown mummies and the absent curse

Humorous mummies are friendly. Nobody has committed sacrilege against them, so their ambulation does not occur to facilitate revenge. Instead, it can be their intrinsic ability, as in the case of *The Magnificent Mummies*, or can occur fortuitously, as when a shaft of light awakens Harold in *Under Wraps*. A 'curse' is recited in *There's a Pharaoh In Our Bath!* (Strong and Sharratt 1997) only to introduce a living mummy into the story. The *Mummies Alive!* revive to protect a child. Without hubris and nemesis, most contemporary ambulation is intrinsic, which frees mummies from curses, evil and museums at last.

This transformation of plot formula has a curious side effect: the creation of female ambulatory mummies. By obviating the need for violent revenge, the departure of hubris generates gentle, feminine mummies. Equally though, female characters have recently adopted the formerly masculine qualities of physical strength and aggression, even bodily abjection, a precedent established by revisionist horror cinema (Creed 1993). Female mummies are not ghosts like their Preclassic counterparts, but corpses. Whether a mummy needs to be aggressive or passive, ugly or alluring, frightening or funny, this character can now be female.

Female mummies who combine feminine qualities with monstrous ones create the ultimate abjection. The abject obliterates the boundaries that maintain order (Kristeva 1982:4). The tape-wrapped zombie cannibal Kali in *Necropolis* has a lithe, curvaceous body but a face eaten away by rats. Imhotep's beautiful lover Anck-su-namun is resurrected as a screeching, eyeless, dagger-wielding cadaver (Sommers dir. 1999). Of the non-abject mummy women, few have fully developed personalities like the athletic whip-wielding Nefertina in *Mummies Alive!*, the girl Cleo in the Australian puppet show *Li'l Horrors* (Langman dir. 2000) and motorcar-racing feminist Violet (Allard and Suares 1977). Most of their kin are sex objects with unravelling bandages in soft-porn comics (illustrated by Pollès 2001:247, 254-6). The Preclassic shed-the-bandages trick has been resurrected, along with suspiciously well-preserved bodies beneath the wrappings. Most female mummies, whether passive sex objects or action superheroes, are bound to be beautiful – eye candy for men, with a removable wrapper.

Now that ambulation is an intrinsic quality, mummies can speak, have independent cognition and express emotion. While the restoration of their nineteenth-century romantic attributes – sentience and a past life lived as a human being, often with a love interest – is a by-product of mummies'

recent recontextualization, it is also necessitated by their new role as focal characters. Mummies must initiate action, not simply respond to persecution, and communicate directly to build rapport with audiences. The mummy's persona has run full circle, from sympathetic protagonist to subhuman villain and back, but recent developments are not an attempt to redress character assassination. Mummies' restored humanity results merely from incremental modifications made to the curse plot to adapt it for new audiences and genres. The humanity of the person under the wrappings has only become important because it makes the mummy a more versatile and marketable character.

[Harold the mummy makes muffled noises.]

Gilbert: He talks!

Amy [cynical]: That was a grunt.

Marshall: . . . He understands me.

Amy: How do you know?

Marshall: I just know.

Under Wraps (Beeman dir. 1997)

Ja-Kal: Must my duties always come first? I've given up so much for my pharaoh already! . . . [M]y family, my *life*. [Takes out a cloth stowed amongst his bandages that bears the handprint of his baby son.] What would my own son have been like [when he grew up]? Would I have been a good role model for him, or would he hate me for leaving to serve the prince?

Mummies Alive! (Kearsley dir. 1997, ep.39)

New Age mummies are not exempted from the Other-role shared by evil mummies. They remain foreign nuts trapped within a shell of Western culture to which they act as foils: 'the action of the [*Mummies Alive!*] warriors in battle is matched by the hilarious hijinks of four ancient Egyptians trying to figure out today's fashions' (Buena Vista Home Entertainment 1998). However amiable or heroic, friendly mummies are clowns. If they can talk, bandages may comically muffle their speech (Beeman dir. 1997; Meredith dir. 1996a, 1996b). Their attempts to adjust to modern lifestyles and technologies reflect an inescapable Otherness. The *Magnificent Mummies*' pyramid-house has a lounge room with a television set, sofa and birdcage, but cobwebs envelop the furniture, the children watch Egyptian football on television, Mummy Mummy's footrest is a skull, a caged pet bird is bandaged and Daddy Mummy presents a rotting chicken for dinner (Bradman and Chatterton 1997:10–11). The family members sleep upright in their coffins (ibid.:46–7), as do the *Mummies Alive!* (Kearsley dir. 1997, ep.4) who also possess a lounge room inside their pyramid, complete with stone sofa, hieroglyphic wall

inscriptions and a television they use as a 'magic box' to observe the world (ibid., ep.9). Another pyramid is equipped with a shower and bath and its occupant sleeps in a sarcophagus (Meredith dir. 1996a, 1996b).

The Other is incomprehensible if portrayed entirely in unfamiliar terms. 'Negative imagery needs positive associations to make it work,' which are necessarily drawn from one's own culture (Karp 1991b:374). Others resemble us just enough to highlight the extent of their overall difference from us, and since they possess both familiar and strange traits, they need not be juxtaposed with us in order to draw attention to this difference. A mummy in some Australian *Scratch'n'Win* lottery television commercial campaigns (Woods dir. 2003a, 2003b), having won the jackpot, indulges in some jewellery shopping, skydiving, water-skiing and golf – a figure who is at once an ancient Egyptian and a modern consumer. A little similarity underscores difference, so the unfamiliar seems somewhat familiar and vice versa. While lounge rooms are Egyptianized, Egypt gets lounge-roomed.

The partial similarity of some indigenous peoples' practices to colonial European practices convinced the Europeans that the Others were imitating imperfectly the culture of their conquerors (Karp 1991b:375–6). Difference and error are stock themes of comedy. A mummy builds a pyramid-shaped sandcastle and meets his mummy mommy on Mother's Day (Bridwell 1974:55, 60). Pharaoh Sennapod tries to order roast hippopotamus at an ice-cream van (Strong and Sharratt 1997:23–4). Mummies drive cars emblazoned with Egyptian motifs (*Monster Rods: Mummy Machine*, © MPC–Fundimensions 1974 and © AMT–Ertl 1996) or built from bones and tattered wrappings that look like mummies on wheels (*Creature Crawlers Mummy 4x4*, © Nylint 1999).

Recent developments, future directions

I had almost completed the doctoral thesis upon which this book is based when Universal Pictures released a special effects-laden adventure extravaganza, *The Mummy* (Sommers dir. 1999), based partly upon the studio's famous Karloff film. Its commercial success warranted a sequel, *The Mummy Returns* (Sommers dir. 2001). These two films seemed likely to determine the future direction of mummymania; they present a striking interpretation of their namesake as a monster with fluid form and movement. This villain, Imhotep, commands legions of other mummies, the most ghastly examples of their kind ever seen.

Concerned that Im-Ho-Tep and Kharis could no longer frighten audiences accustomed to graphic gore, *The Mummy's* designers developed acutely abject mummies, consciously representing them as decomposing corpses (Fordham 1999:22, 25). Using computer animations unavailable to earlier filmmakers, the designers were able to simulate ogres whose scant tattered wrappings exposed their disintegrating flesh. My prediction that *The Mummy* would

have to accentuate the abjection of its star to terrify viewers and vary a hackneyed formula proved correct. I was not surprised to see its creators contrive some novel devices to induce revulsion. Imhotep is a rotting cadaver 'still juicy' after millennia, infested with ravenous carrion beetles that attack the living, crawling beneath their skin to devour their brains. Mummyness itself has become infectious like a disease, as Preclassic contagion curses once were.

The Mummy is a conglomerate of characters, situations and images from the Classic films. Competing teams of treasure-hunters vie for the spoils of a lost city, and a horde of mummies are defeated by a heroic adventurer who escapes with some treasure. This plot combines the Classic curse with the escapist thrills of the Indiana Jones movies (Fordham 1999:22; Montserrat 1999b). I have suggested that Classic and Indiana Jones films share a common foundation in the Dragon Principle (Campbell 1988:184), asserting that the dead must cede wealth and knowledge to the living and are churlish if they refuse to do so. This theme is popular at present, so despite transformation into Postclassic forms, the Classic curse survives. It can operate in tandem with *vagina dentata* tombs in lieu of living mummies, as in the Indy films. Similarly, mummies can exist without Classic-style hubris/nemesis curse plots in children's mass culture. Abjection and the Dragon Principle – the mummy and the treasure-hunter – no longer collaborate upon every occasion, but as Universal's new films demonstrate, the two are profoundly effective when combined.

A millennial surge in Egyptomania at the end of the twentieth century (Rice and MacDonald 2003:8) included a wave of mummymania sparked by Universal's 1999 film and by CT-scan and DNA studies of mummies publicized in documentaries and popular books (Lupton 2003:42–3). *The Mummy* seemed likely to reinforce mummies' evil reputation, but Imhotep's most prominent progeny have reverted to being funny and friendly. Cleo, a girl mummy at a boarding school for infant monsters in *Li'l Horrors*, is a loveable airhead. Her breathless rambles about vibes lampoon New Age visions of ancient Egyptian spirituality, but her desire for harmony pacifies the other quarrelling monsters. Nuff in the sitcom *I Love Mummy* is a spoilt prince denied entry into the Egyptian underworld for misbehaviour, who deigns to accept the protection of a suburban family (Harvey dir. 2002). The boy king Tut-ankh-en-set-amun, dubbed *Tutenstein*² by his young friend Cleo (LaDuca dir. 2003), derives from the Victorian recollection of the pompous, arrogant pharaohs of the Bible and *The Histories* of Herodotus (Chapter 2).³ Convinced that he still rules the earth, Tut prances about his museum–tomb only to suffer a thousand shocks when he ventures into the modern world outside. His meddlings in magic accidentally conjure demons from the Egyptian underworld. Cleo acclimatizes Tut to American culture, helps him to defeat the demons and teaches him some manners. To her, he is simply a petulant kid and, like modern youngsters, revels in everything 'gross'. Realizing

that he is now mummified, Tut notes that this 'would explain the rotting bandages, the decaying flesh, the hollow, vacant eyes. Gruesome, but impressive. I like it!' (ibid., series 1, ep.1).

Despite ongoing abjections, a new subparadigm is budding. The fully developed personalities and proactive roles of *Tutenstein*, *Li'l Horrors*' Cleo and their predecessors in *Mummies Alive!* offset their abject qualities. Tut and Cleo seem to have evolved from sympathetic creatures of the 1990s, such as Tim Burton's tragicomic Mummy Boy who is beaten to death when some children mistake his hollow head for a piñata (1997). Burton converts the mummy's abjection from a source of horror into one of pathos. Conversely, Tut and Cleo win empathy through strength of character and despite, not because of, their abjection. The sympathetic trend might have been instigated by Anne Rice's bestselling novel *The Mummy or Ramses the Damned* (1989), with its hero inspired by Preclassic romances who contrasts sharply with Universal's millennial villain. While earlier Postclassic mummies were often clowns, the latest ones are juvenile role models. *Tutenstein* improves his attitude in every episode of a series produced for an educational channel. The didacticism of mummies marketed to children continues, but in a reversal of the revolution paradigm: mummies are exemplary figures, no longer solely cautionary examples. Could this be the beginning of the end of mummies' function as foils to our own culture? Are they to become its very champions, returning to the role once played by Loudon's Cheops? If so, this would necessitate total assimilation into our lifestyles; *Tutenstein* has already mastered the skateboard. Yet complete assimilation is unlikely. Mummies ain't mummies if they cease to be fundamentally different to us. As a perpetual reminder of mummies' insurmountable Otherness, Tut's arm keeps falling off.

Conclusion

The power to instantly signify age, decay, pollution, death and difference accounts for mummies' abundant deployment in various media and their integrity as symbols beyond Egyptian or curse contexts. This power accrued through the continuous circulation of images and stories within the mass media and between the media and its consumers. Public mockery of cinema villains and their playful adaptation as analogies for everyday scenarios or the stuff of puns has been absorbed by the media. Small wonder, then, that mummy jokes are hackneyed: it is impossible to make them without referring to stereotypes that have been monopolized by mass culture. While the media enhance the usefulness and relevance – the cultural currency – of ideas adopted from everyday life, they also become the ideas' authoritative and normalizing voice. They insist that we interpret mummies as clowns or villains and cultivate our reliance upon these images as our preferred means of referring to concepts of dirt and evil. This discourages other possible

interpretations of mummies and turns the individual into the media's mouthpiece; museum visitors refer constantly, if not always consciously, to books and films. By providing a framework of reference into which encounters with real mummies can be set, media discourses challenge the authority of museums, drowning dry labels with fantasies about haunted museums.

Like their Preclassic and Classic ancestors, Postclassic mummies are Others, playing the role of foils to Anglo-American culture in order to reinforce its values. This explains why such varied and contradictory interpretations of the mummy character now coexist and why elements of all previous paradigms have survived. Classic films conferred upon mummies a foil-function so intrinsic to their appearances and roles that they have now come to perform it in contexts beyond the curse. Mummies' abjection derives in part from the age-old project of acculturating children by divorcing them psychologically from their mothers; mummies teach children how to behave by providing a cautionary example. Their abject traits have also acquired the power to represent objects of fear. Furthermore, these traits can substitute for the punishment of sacrilege as the source and sign of mummies' antithetical role. Mummies need not be second place getters in a moral contest with archaeologists if they can be inherently evil, incompetent or incongruous. They need not be human either, now that their conversion into monsters that was initiated by cinema has run its course. Even the recent reversal of this trend cannot completely erase their Otherness, because the need to represent what we revile never goes away.

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

Mummies in museums

Mummies are scary. Mummies are gruesome. Nevertheless, the mummy room of any museum is one of its most popular spots. Museum visitors . . . often comment out loud . . .

'I'm not afraid!'

'Hey, lookit his face.'

'Wow! Lemme out of here!'

'Very interesting.'

'Hey, mister! Is that a real dead person?'

'Aw, I've seen lots worse things than that.'

'Bet you wouldn't stay here alone at night for a million dollars.'

'Yecch!'

Georgess McHargue, *Mummies* (1972:13, 15)

Introduction

Popular lore has transformed mummies from mortal remains into mythological creatures. What influences do media stereotypes have upon museum visitors' interpretations of mummies? Do exhibits address these stereotypes and the ethical issues raised by the legend of the curse? Do visitors think about ethical issues pertaining to mummies' display? Little research had been conducted into visitors' responses to mummies prior to my project (see Appendix).¹ A 1973 Brooklyn Museum Visitors' Book (Wedge ed. 1976) chronicled reactions to a display of Egyptian art, including a few references to mummies. More recently, the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology at London's University College commissioned several focus group discussions about ancient Egypt (Fisher 2000a, 2000b cited by MacDonald 2003) and mounted a travelling exhibition in 2000–1, *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams*, in which thousands of visitors were invited to record their thoughts about mummies' display (MacDonald 2002:105). My 1995–6 surveys, which canvassed the responses of 790 individuals across three

countries, yielded some remarks about mummies virtually identical to those collected in Brooklyn over twenty years earlier. Since popular views about this subject have been so slow to change, they probably remain fundamentally similar today. Unlike the other studies' data, mine are supplemented by an extensive collection of museum visitors' candid remarks about mummies – quotations that reveal the reasoning behind the types of responses collected in formal surveys and prove that the media influence personal beliefs.

Museums often fail to address visitors' media-influenced preconceptions (MacDonald 2003:91) and sometimes even support them. By forcing museums to generate their own proceeds, government funding cuts have obliged their shops to stock lucrative products that represent curses, while tour guides exploit the image of museums as frightening places. Advertising campaigns often feature mummies as icons of ancient Egypt, perpetuating a misconception that the Egyptians were obsessed with death (an assumption resulting from the preservation of many artefacts in tombs, and from a current media and past academic focus upon funerary archaeology). The appeal of fictional mummies' knavish behaviour and vile attributes to children has been exploited by some educational texts and harnessed by parents and teachers to persuade children to visit museums. Besides errors of commission are those of omission. Museums can obscure the reasons for mummification, its methodology and modern events that have affected mummies' appearances. In the absence of this information, visitors draw upon media-derived ideas to improvise their own explanations.

Popular stereotypes: museums versus the visitor

Problems with displays

'Get more mummies'

No longer regarded by museums as *de rigueur*, mummies remain mandatory exhibits in the opinions of many visitors. Some expect to see them even in exhibitions devoted to non-funerary aspects of Egyptian culture (Bothmer 1976:156).

{W}here are the mummys & caskets? (child, p.61)

Very interesting, but I wish you had some mummies. (child, p.62)

Where are the Egyptian mummies? (child, p.64)

I would like to see mummies & tombs. (adult, p.110)

TBM Visitors' Book, 1973 (Wedge ed. 1976)

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

- A: Disappointed there were no whole bodies (Gender unknown, 25–34 years)
- A: [E]xample of whole bodies would have been more accurate (Male, 25–34 years)
- Q: Free comment section
- A: I want to see the whole mummified body not just a head. (Female, 18–24 years)
- A: I'd of thought that there would have been more . . . mummies in coffins with their whole bodies (Female, 6–12 years)
- A: The mummy section was quite disappointing. I came with great [expectation]. There were few exhibits only. (Male, 45–54 years)
- A: You should have a huge big tomb, and way more mummies (Female, 13–17 years)

WAM questionnaire 1995

- Q: Free comment section
- A: Please display more mummies (Female, 35–44 years)
- A: Get more mummies . . . (Female, 13–17 years)

SAM questionnaire 1995

Museums established an association with mummies that lingers in popular thought. Visitors may criticize museums that display only mummy fragments, or no mummies at all. While Brooklyn Museum questionnaire respondents could see several complete, wrapped mummies, their Western Australian Museum counterparts were disappointed with four fragments. South Australian Museum respondents, presented with two whole mummies and several fragments, demanded that the museum exhibit even more! Celebrations of large Egyptian collections, such as the British Museum display, in popular culture have represented them as typical or ideal exhibits. Australians who have seen them have expressed to me resentment that their country lacks comparable displays.

Visitors' comments indicate widespread ignorance of current bans upon exporting mummies from Egypt. Faith in their ubiquity survives from a time when mummies were more common. Demands that curators '[g]et more mummies' reflect a consumer mentality and a neo-imperialistic assumption that we may help ourselves to the material heritage of other countries. Yet museums are also culpable; labels seldom explain the circumstances under which mummies were obtained, the effects of these circumstances upon mummies' present appearances and how the antiquities trade has since changed. This is demonstrated by visitors' uncertainty as to why some mummies are fragmented (the actual reasons being damage by tomb robbers or souveniring by collectors). I asked interviewees to guess a reason.² The Adelaide sample provides the widest range of responses (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Reasons given by S. A. Museum interviewees for mummies' fragmentation, <18 and ≥18 years (question 4)

<i>Theme and reason</i>	<i>No. responses</i>	<i><18</i>	<i>≥18</i>
<i>Archaeology is unethical</i>			
Careless archaeologists	6	0	6
Mummy divided between museums	4	0	4
Scientific dissection	2	0	2
<i>Total</i>	12	0	12
<i>Ancient Egyptians' cruelty, peculiarity or incompetence</i>			
Fragmentation included in mummification	3	0	3
Embalming of parts, e.g. to reduce expense	3	0	3
Body would not fit in coffin/wraps	1	1	0
Ineffectiveness of mummification	3	1	2
Parts severed before/after death as criminal punishment/ revenge upon enemies	5	3	2
Deliberate severing in ancient times, reason unspecified	4	2	2
<i>Total</i>	19	7	12
Loss of body via accidental death	1	0	1
<i>Human greed/modern society is corrupt</i>			
Souvenirs stolen for antiquities market	3	0	3
Souvenirs broken for transportability	4	4	0
Broken by thieves seeking valuables	4	0	4
Deliberate severing in modern times, reason unspecified	3	1	2
Destruction during building works	1	0	1
<i>Total</i>	15	5	10
Deliberate severing, reason and period unspecified	5	5	0
<i>The ravages of time</i>			
Decay	5	3	2
Fragile when unwrapped	3	2	1
Destruction by animals	2	0	2
<i>Total</i>	10	5	5
Don't know how fragmentation occurred	7	6	1

Note: Multiple responses by some interviewees are counted.

These responses reflect a view of Egyptian practices as bizarre or cruel and of archaeologists as unfeeling defilers. Themes of greed and the ravages of time were also raised. I have grouped the responses under these four paradigms to determine the extent to which human rather than natural agency was suspected and to which the ancient Egyptians, rather than later people, were thought to be responsible. Human agency was suspected far more often than other causes, although interviewees might have felt that my question implied a human cause. Adults aged eighteen and over seemed more suspicious of human agency (thirty-four of forty comments) than children and teenagers (seventeen of twenty-eight comments) and were more

critical of archaeologists, accounting for all references to their supposed clumsiness and insensitivity. Some people suggested that mummies were carved up and their pieces distributed to several museums to maximize revenue!

Children most frequently held the ancient Egyptians responsible for fragmentation, probably because they knew less about mummies' despoliation. Many adults also displaced recent damage into the distant past. Suggestions that some Egyptians could only afford to have parts of their bodies mummified may have referenced the cutting of the corpse during evisceration. Recalling the alleged severing of thieves' hands in the Middle East, several respondents proposed that criminals' extremities were severed before or after embalming. A 7-year-old boy told me that since pharaohs could sentence people to death, 'King Tut' must have been empowered to cut off people's extremities. Museums are failing to communicate to visitors the Egyptians' aversion to cutting the corpse more than was necessary, and their intention that embalming should prevent bodily disintegration. Movies have insisted that despite having body parts severed and being put to death, criminals were nevertheless accorded the privilege of embalming (Fisher dir. 1959; Holt dir. 1971; Sommers dir. 1999).

Chicago and Manchester interviewees suggested causes of fragmentation similar to those suggested by Adelaide respondents. Only five in Chicago and one in Manchester identified the causes correctly. Instead of reading labels, many people draw inferences just by looking at exhibits (Frayling 1992:42). Displays should therefore address common queries rather than forcing visitors to create their own analogies between mummification and other, unrelated or fictitious practices. At the Field Museum, several large signs titled 'FAQs' (Frequently Asked Questions) suspended near mummies explained how and why they were preserved. There was also a miniature diorama depicting the mummification process (Levin 1989a; Nelson and Levin 1989:20), labels about tomb robbery and a case containing burial goods overlooked by thieves (Levin 1989b:19 plate E). Visitors even entered the exhibit via a replica robbers' tunnel. However, some Chicago interviewees assumed that Egyptian embalmers or vigilantes broke mummies because no explanation of despoliation accompanied the exhibited fragments. These had been used to fill gaps in replica catacomb niches alongside whole mummies, which implied that fragments were originally interred in this manner.

Only the New Walk and Milwaukee Public Museums discussed despoliation. One of the Milwaukee mummies lay in a tomb-robbery tableau alongside a dummy thief. In another case, broken artefacts and a mummy's foot exemplified souveniring. New Walk presented panels about Victorian mummy collecting and the acquisition of its mummies and coffins near each of its two entrances. Its gallery opened dramatically with the mounted head of a mummy who addressed the visitor via the text:

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS

Do you find me frightening?

Funny?

Mysterious?

Once I was a living person like you.

Because of my beliefs,

my body was preserved in Egypt.

Because of your curiosity I am here in Leicester,
a nameless woman.

Here you will find many wonderful things
made by my people.

Enjoy them, and imagine what my life was like
as an ancient Egyptian.

New Walk's 'talking' head could be condemned as curators' use of a silenced object as a mouthpiece for their own ideas (Innes 1997:13, 15), but I see it differently. This display exploited the idea of a living mummy, but humanized its subject by liberating her from the malevolence with which she would normally be associated. New Walk's display was co-designed by Jill Bourn, a teacher, and Pam Drinkall, a former teacher with anthropological training. Unlike many of the Egyptologists, archaeologists and historians who designed other displays (Ellis 1993:57), Jill and Pam were familiar with visitors' – especially children's – responses to mummies and able to anticipate their preconceptions (Kennedy 1996).

Some British Egyptology exhibits have arranged objects by function, enabling the juxtapositioning of artefacts from different periods but creating an illusion that ancient Egypt was a static society (Ellis 1993:39, 54). Unable to represent change, functionalism has limited the presentation of the history of collecting and of Egyptology. At the 1973 Brooklyn Museum *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* art exhibit, 'Some people . . . asked where all [the] objects came from originally and how they eventually reached museums . . . That there has been for well over one hundred years an art market dealing in Egyptian antiquities, and that excavations in Egypt have furnished antiquities to European and American museums for nearly a century, was not known to many visitors' (Bothmer 1976:153). Museums could respond by acknowledging plundering and the former practice of archaeology under colonial regimes, although this could backfire if it prompted objections to mummies' display (Alport 1995).

The Ripley's Believe It Or Not! Museums, an international franchise originating from the collections of the American traveller Robert Ripley, display ethnological specimens, the preserved bodies of deformed animals and anything else they consider freakish or macabre. They take a popular approach to presenting their exhibits, although this does not exclude educational endeavour. As Ripley's Vice President of Exhibits, Edward Meyer,

told me (1996), his corporation's museums attract people who might not visit more conventional museums and encourage them to patronize the latter. I first visited Ripley's San Francisco branch as an 11-year-old in 1984, where I saw a mummy's hand eerily spotlit against a black background, labelled as having once worn a cursed golden disc that caused the death of the hand's owner, Walter Ingram. This label supplied the hand with a history, albeit fanciful, which its counterparts in conventional museums frequently lack. Ripley's enterprises emphasize any entertaining aspects of the history of an exhibit, such as previous ownership by famous people and even instances of forgery (Copperthwaite 1976:44–5).

Arguably, labels should impart not only information that curators deem significant but also the answers to visitors' most common questions, even if these depart from an exhibit's theme. A display of sculpture, for instance, is bound to make children wonder why so many objects are broken: 'nothing was hole' (cited by Wedge ed. 1976:62). *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* was so determined to cultivate artistic taste that it neglected visitors' tendency to interpret Amarna sculpture in political, cultural, racial, religious and personal terms. The ideas that inform visitors' interpretations deserve a response. Brooklyn's *Temples, Tombs and the Egyptian Universe* presented funerary and religious art, including coffins with wrapped mummies inside, within a broader discussion of Egyptian cosmology. Nearby, free information sheets about mummification and religion were available. I do not agree that 'cultural–historical presentation' need interfere with the presentation of Egyptian objects as art (Bothmer 1976:159); the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian wing is filled with beautiful things that are chronologically arranged and accompanied by accounts of their excavation.

Another process obscured by some exhibits was mummification itself. The Field, Milwaukee and New Walk Museums contained mummification sections accompanied by models, large illustrations and mummies; Brooklyn provided information sheets while Manchester explained aspects of mummification throughout its display. At the Rosicrucian and Metropolitan Museums, however, mummification information was buried among small labels. Surprisingly, the British Museum's mummy room lacked an explanation of mummification, although by the time of my next visit in 2004, a complete refurbishment of the Egyptian galleries had rectified this problem with a series of large illustrated panels that received constant attention from visitors.

At the South Australian Museum I overheard a man explaining mummification to a child as merely the bandaging of a corpse. At the London Science Museum, a woman told a child, 'If you were a very important person in those days, they used to wrap you up and put you in a box.' Supervision of young children prevents adults from reading labels, forcing their reliance upon previous, often imperfect knowledge. If the significance of natron is unknown, it appears that bandages – mummies' diagnostic feature in popular culture – preserve bodies. Modifications to the embalming process

made by movies to admit reanimation of the body usually excise references to natron. In 1999, a mother visiting the South Australian Museum was astonished when I described natron's role; her teacher at school had not mentioned it. At the Manchester Museum, a man told a girl that the skin of a mummy 'goes like leather over a period of time', as if ordinary air or the passage of time itself could cure a body.

If unknown, the reasons for mummification tend to be deduced with reference to a view that the ancient Egyptians were misguided pagans or strange, illogical people. This attitude has persisted since ancient Greeks first recorded Egyptian practices (Trigger 1995:23). Some Adelaide interviewees regarded fragmentation as a weird part of the mummification ritual. With a sense of moral superiority, other visitors assumed that the Egyptians naïvely believed that mummies would physically revive. At a travelling exhibit in the Western Australian Museum in 1998, several people remarked that the presence of mummies proved that the Egyptians' belief in eternal life was misguided. At the Manchester Museum, a woman told several young children that the Egyptians made mummies in anticipation of their physical revival, but that this idea was wrong.

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

A: They are dead, it didn't work

Male, 25–34 years, SAM questionnaire 1995

Victorian poets supposed that mummies' souls would live eternally, albeit in a Christian heaven, but nowadays, Egyptian tombs and museums are often seen as melancholy monuments to a fruitless quest for immortality. This reading of exhibits as *memento mori* questions the existence of life after death, but a sense of futility need not preclude empathy. The ancient dead in their multitude attest to *vanitas* and the tragedy of mortality. Their funerary provisions are '[a]ll that the anguished mind / Most nobly could invent, / To one devotion bent, / That death seem less unkind' (Lewis 1942).

*'That ain't real'*³

Survey respondents often questioned mummies' authenticity. While this is partly explained by the overrepresentation of children in the samples, some adults expressed similar views. Scepticism could arise from unfamiliarity with corpses or an anxious denial of their presence. Perhaps some people are uncertain whether a body lies within the wrappings, or perhaps the failure of the body to ambulate reveals a difference between real and fictional mummies that disappoints children. 'A mummy is, after all, a living corpse (I'm referring only to movie mummies, of course, not those rather boring things that lie around in museums)' (Brosnan 1978:43). Might mummies' degree of

resemblance to their fictional counterparts affect perceptions of authenticity? The Western Australian Museum displayed only unwrapped fragments; before – or despite – seeing them, a boy (6–12 years) and girl (13–17 years) described them as bandaged bodies (questionnaire question 5). Visitors' most common expectations of stereotypical whole wrapped bodies with or without coffins (70.48 per cent of responses)⁴ were bound to be disappointed.

Questionnaire respondents, unlike interviewees, were not asked to comment about authenticity but a few chose to do so, suggesting that the interviewees' doubts about it were not prompted by my broaching of the subject. The frequency with which Field Museum interviewees doubted authenticity suggests that many more questionnaire respondents shared such doubts but did not express them. I asked Chicago interviewees to specify which mummies they thought were fake. This produced a surprising result. While most sceptics did not regard all of the Field Museum mummies as fakes, those who believed that one, some or all were replicas (thirty people, 53.57 per cent) outnumbered those who believed that all of the mummies were genuine (twenty-three people, 41.07 per cent)!⁵

Why are so many people sceptical about mummies' authenticity? In Chicago, children under twelve were more inclined to doubt the authenticity of some or all mummies (thirteen of twenty-one children, 61.90 per cent); as many 13–17-year-olds rejected universal authenticity as embraced it (two people in each case) and no 18–24-year-olds believed all the mummies to be genuine. Older age groups reversed the trend. The very oldest respondents resumed scepticism, but this may be misleading since few interviewees were aged 55 or over. Young people are unfamiliar with corpses but well acquainted with realistic special effects in the media, although the Chicago results indicate that scepticism affects adults as well as children. Clearly, not all causes of scepticism are age-specific. Most Manchester Museum interviewees believed all the mummies to be genuine (fourteen people, 70.00 per cent) and here, more children under twelve believed the mummies to be authentic than fake (six of nine children, 66.66 per cent).⁶ Might these trends have reversed had my Manchester sample of only twenty interviewees been larger, or can other factors influence visitors' views?

Most interviewees specified which mummies appeared fake. Rejection of wrapped remains was infrequent, perhaps because bandaging is the diagnostic trait of fictional mummies, although one Chicago girl (12 years) thought that wrapped bodies looked like paper models. Two women aged 25–34, one of whom had never seen mummies before, stated that only exposed ones looked real. A social scientist (35–44 years) pointed out that the wrappings popularly associated with mummies nevertheless obscure their contents, inclining viewers to suspect forgeries. Bandages are expected but also suspected. Unwrapping thus serves as a sort of authentication, and any damage to wrappings that has exposed parts of bodies serves as a proxy unwrapping. One Manchester interviewee (male, 12 years) cited exposed feet

as evidence of mummies' authenticity. Harwa, a Field Museum mummy whose head has been unwrapped, was regarded as both authentic because of this exposure (male, 25–34 years) and as fake, with reference to his wrapped body (female, 18–24 years).

Q: Do you think that the mummies on display here are all real?

A: I did see a gold toe sticking out of a child.

Male, 25–34 years, FMNH interviews 1996

[Three instances of people looking a mummy whose toes are exposed.]

Man: Thousands and thousands of years old.

Boy: Is it real?

Man: Yes.

Boy: Is there a person in there?

Man: Yes . . . See the toes?

Girl: His toe's sticking out! [Laughs].

Child: You can see its black feet!

MM 1996

[People look at a wrapped mummy whose open mouth is exposed.]

Girl: Oh, his tongue. Oh no, look!

[Other children comment on the teeth.]

NWM 1996

The exposure of the contents of wrappings, like the revelation of the contents of a coffin, may fascinate children as a demonstration of the way that space works. Hollow objects can swallow other objects without occupying more space; opening the swallowing objects explains this mystery. Children's apparent concern with authentication-via-unwrapping may therefore actually express spatial fascination in some cases. Among the objects presented on a table at the Manchester Museum for visiting 8–9-year-old students to handle was a pair of papier-mâché models of the outer box-shaped and inner anthropoid coffins of Khnum-Nakht and Nekht-Ankh, displayed in the gallery upstairs. The children initially ignored the models in favour of the artefacts available for inspection, so I opened one box and removed the anthropoid coffin from within, alerting nearby students. Several boys rushed towards me and spent most of the remainder of the session playing with the models. Exhorting them to get some work done, a teacher propped up the models for the boys to draw. After his departure, one boy continued to pack and unpack the coffins repeatedly.

Few people have opportunities to witness or perform the opening and closing of coffins and mummies, which teaches children to distinguish between the two. As a result, their shared capacity to hide and disclose their contents causes their conflation. A preschool toy mummy fits inside a shell of bandages that opens like a coffin with a lid and base (*Playmobil Special: The Mummy*, © Playmobil 1998). Looking at an anthropomorphic coffin at the Manchester Museum, a boy asked, 'Is that a lid or is there a body in there?' Some museums store mummies inside closed coffins, frustrating visitors' desire for revelation. A Metropolitan Museum of Art children's pamphlet advises readers to exploit the warp in one closed coffin by peeking through the gap between its lid and base to see the mummy inside (1996). Displays could incorporate some hands-on means of 'wrapping' and 'unwrapping' to distinguish between mummies and coffins, show how they fit together and convince visitors of their authenticity. I favour an interactive computer programme with a reversible animated sequence depicting a mummy being wrapped and placed in a nested inner and outer coffin set. The Bristol Museum once displayed a sequence of photographs of a mummy's unwrapping, presented in reverse to reconstruct the stages of its wrapping (Ellis 1993:48).

Arie Jan Toet of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (1996) told me that some visitors touch or write graffiti on exhibits because they dismiss them as replicas. Might not such behaviours be attempts to test this assumption? Few interviewees were certain that their attributions of authenticity and inauthenticity were correct, and justified their views in vague terms: things 'looked' real or fake. Encounters with mummies are opportunities to discover whether they are bodies or models. 'At first I didn't think [that the mummies were real], but looking at them closely and according to the [labels], my mind has been changed' (female, 25–34 years, Field Museum interviews 1996). Mummies cannot withstand frequent handling and are best stored in low-oxygen microenvironments inside sealed cases to prevent moisture-induced decay. However, this frustrates visitors' authentication impulse. Inability to touch exhibits is a common visitor's complaint (Beard and Henderson 1994:15). Additionally, since modern Anglo-American funeral practices prevent physical contact between mourners and the deceased, visitors may be curious about the tactile qualities of corpses. Several asked me what mummies felt and smelt like. Queries about exhibits' materials of manufacture also attempt to determine authenticity. Students visiting the New Walk Museum repeatedly touched a model ambulatory mummy in a display about media stereotypes, discussing whether it was real or not and asking what it was made from (Plate 5.1). A 9-year-old male Manchester Museum interviewee thought that bones protruding from one mummy looked like plastic, so the body must be a model. Adults at the Western Australian Museum (1995) wondered whether some mummified heads were carved from wood.



Plate 5.1

Plaster model of an ambulatory mummy in the Egyptomania corner of an Egyptology exhibit. (a) Film canisters mounted on the wall were later deemed ineffective and replaced with panels listing mummy movies. (b) The model from a child's perspective. New Walk Museum, Leicester. Photos: © J. Day 1996. Images by permission of Leicester City Museums Service.

Q: Free comment section

A: You should make the display . . . more hands on eg: Guides in room explaining things and being allowed to touch them
Female, 13–17 years, SAM questionnaire 1996

[A girl is jokingly posing beneath the arms of the ambulatory mummy model as its cowering victim. The children look at it.]

Boy: I thought [that man] said it was real. . . .

Jasmine [indicating mummies in a case]: *Those* are real mummies. . . .

Girl 1: Do we get to touch them?

Jasmine: . . . No . . . earlier today I was touching that hand [mounted in a wall case] because it fell off the wall and I had to put it back on again.

Girls [together]: What's it feel like?

Jasmine: . . . [I]t just feels . . . very hard, [not] soft like someone's hand. It feels quite hard and quite heavy.

Girl 2: Does it feel like [this model]?

Jasmine: No . . . 'cos this is just made from bandages dipped in some plaster. . . . [L]ike papier-mâché.

Girl 3: Oh *we've* done that – . . .

Girl 4: – and we wrapped our arm in it.

NWM 1996

Like wrapped remains, unwrapped bodies may seem to resemble other materials.

Q: Do you think that the mummies on display here are all real?

A: They look real to me, all except for the ones that were unwrapped. I wasn't sure if they were just some kind of statues . . . (Male, 25–34 years)

A: You can kind of tell with the skeletons [*sic*] that they're not real. (Male, 12 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

In contrast, Manchester interviewees did not question the authenticity of the unwrapped body of the priestess Asru. Her status as an artificially preserved, full-sized adult and her display inside a coffin base might satisfy any media-influenced visitor expectations. The Field Museum, in contrast, has no embalmed, fully exposed adults on display. Its child mummies, including a pair of wrapped siblings and a wrapped child with a coffin as well as an unwrapped boy, prompted most interviewees who referred to them to regard them as authentic because they found it shocking or sad to see a dead child –

a rare sight today, now that infant mortality in industrialized countries has been significantly reduced.

Fictional mummies have seldom been based upon Fayum portrait mummies, which several visitors regarded as fakes. One Chicago interviewee (25–34 years) stated that mummies from later periods of Egyptian history appeared fake because she was unfamiliar with their appearance.

Q: Do you think that the mummies on display here are all real?

A: No.

Q: Which seem fake?

A: The ones what have pictures of faces on.

Male, 6 years, MM interviews 1996

Visitors must determine authenticity with reference to visible traits because they are unable to touch, smell or unwrap mummies. The visual media of film and television, which have elaborated fictional mummies' appearances, precondition visitors to scan real mummies' flesh, wrappings and coffins for signs of authenticity. In particular, visitors seek out evidence of antiquity, but they are influenced by stereotypes of mummies and artefacts as rotten, dilapidated things. Like the sculptures mentioned in the Brooklyn Museum Visitors' Book, mummies that look 'too perfect' may be rejected as fakes. The same schema may be evoked across a range of contexts (Strauss and Quinn 1994:291), so fictional means of portraying antiquity become yardsticks for measuring it in the real world.

[Teachers, their students and I look at a mummy's hand.]

Teacher: You know when they find mummies, do they smell at all?

[I explain that some smell bad after lengthy museum storage.]

Teacher: . . . Do they rot at all, the rotting bandages?

Jasmine: [Poor storage does this but sealed, dry cases prevent decay.] It's not true that mummies are . . . mouldy and falling apart. That's more like what a corpse would be like.

Teacher: Yes, you imagine that, in a way, because it's so old.

NWM 1996

Q: Do you think that the mummies on display here are all real?

A: They look real. . . .

Q: How do you decide what's authentic?

A: I just look at it and say 'That looks real' or 'That looks fake' . . . it's just in detail. If it looks old, it must be old.

Male, 18–24 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Q: What made you think that some exhibits weren't real?

A: They were so ornate . . . the paint and the drawings [on the coffins]. (Female, 25–34 years)

A: It's the nicest wrapped, it's the least decayed. (Male, 35–44 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

Was coloring in exhibits original or retouched? Can such colors last so long? (p.103)

How did they get the colors to last 3000 or so years and still remain vivid: Incredible. (p.104)

Sirs, you have a magnificent collection here, considering the fact that it's falling apart. (p.119)

TBM Visitors' Book, 1973 (Wedge ed. 1976)

Visitors like to determine the authenticity of exhibits for themselves. Members of the public tested the miraculous powers attributed to medieval relics to verify the objects' authenticity (Geary 1986:178, 181). There are 'folk criteria of authenticity'; '[a]uthenticity here is not the province of experts and esoteric criteria, but of popular and public kinds of verification and confirmation' (Appadurai 1986:46). The need for what I call autoauthentication deserves recognition in museums, but mummies' inclusion in hands-on sessions would only result in damage to the fragile remains and distress to visitors. Human skeletons have occasionally been presented to visitors to touch, because they differ in appearance from living people and can thus more easily be presented as scientific specimens (Innes 1997:20). However, the task of humanizing mummies is not served by attempts to diminish death.

Perhaps museum tours could instead incorporate hands-on sessions with artefacts in order to encourage visitors' faith in the authenticity of other displayed items, including mummies. The Manchester and New Walk Museums already allow visiting students to handle selected artefacts. Since the unwrapping of mummies convinces some people of their authenticity, prints or videos of x-rays or CT-scans of wrapped mummies' contents could be shown. This was already the case at the Rosicrucian, Field, Milwaukee, Manchester, New Walk and British Museums, although sceptics of authenticity at some of these locations either missed or were not influenced by such exhibits. Art museums, such as Brooklyn and the Metropolitan, avoid visual reference to the contents of mummies' wrappings because they do not regard human remains as art objects (Fazzini 1993:80, 1996). However, there is evidently a need to divulge this information in every type of museum. A label accompanying the Milwaukee Public Museum mummy Djed-Hor began by stating that the mummy was real, in response to visitors' questions overheard by the curator, Carter Lupton (1996). A visual response could be

even more effective, such as interactive computers displaying three-dimensional animated CT-scans that could be 'unwrapped' and 'rewrapped' at the click of a button. The University of Hamburg has posted several such films on the Internet (IMDM 1998).

Better known as a means of scientific analysis of mummies, CT-scanning has the greatest potential of all media for educating the public about mummies' creation and authenticity. This was demonstrated by the British Museum's temporary exhibition *Mummy: the Inside Story* (Taylor 2004), which I visited in 2004. It began with a short video outlining the history, methods and cultural significance of mummification. The second section consisted of a 3-D movie featuring animated CT-scans of the mummy of Nesperennub. Viewers 'flew' inside the mummy's body as the narrator interpreted its various features. The mummy's face was reconstructed digitally and an actor portrayed Nesperennub performing his duties as a temple priest. The final section exhibited the mummy of Nesperennub. *Mummy: the Inside Story* positioned visitors to appreciate Nesperennub as a living human being and to apply to his mummy the information they had just learned about it.

*'Can they come alive again'?*⁷

Many juvenile questionnaire respondents feared that mummies could revive in museums. Various museum display elements encourage belief in the ambulation or sentience of mummies: rooms full of coffins that seem to watch the visitor; displays crowded with funerary materials that feel like real tombs; the confusing layout of some displays that resembles the maze design of fictional tombs that trap unwary intruders. Some displays refer consciously to tombs, but even 'glass box' exhibits can acquire a pseudo-hyperreality (Chapter 3). Few visitors realize that the low lighting that gives museums a tomblike atmosphere is actually meant to preserve the organic materials on display; this point should be explained on labels (Bothmer 1976:155). If mummies must be exhibited in pseudotombs, then curators must strip these settings of their ominous popular connotations.

In a sample of British Egyptology exhibits, 'only death [was] reconstructed . . . in the form of tombs' (Ellis 1993:55). While Roman and Viking daily life is routinely depicted in museums, comparable Egyptian reconstructions have flourished mostly in cyberspace (MacDonald 2003:96). Since many of the artefacts recovered from tombs were used in daily life, any decision to emphasize deathways over lifeways is premeditated (Ellis 1993:56). Unlike most exhibits about specific societies, Egyptology displays often foreground corpses and funerary artefacts, as if Egyptian culture is regarded as too foreign for these items to distress visitors (Pearce 1995:348). Displays like these have given rise to a popular belief that the Egyptians were morbid. The Field Museum deconstructed this assumption:

The Mummy's Life in the Afterlife

Many of us think the Egyptians were obsessed by death. That's because most of what we know about ancient Egyptians, and most of the objects in museums, come from burials. We may feel that funeral objects are morbid, but for the Egyptians, the whole point was to create a life after death that was very much like life on earth. Our burial scenes will show you the many steps Egyptians took to assure a comfortable and joyful eternal life for their loved ones.

The Field Museum presented full-scale reconstructions of a marketplace, cult shrine, agricultural area and pyramid construction site (Nelson 1989:14 map, 16–17), although these followed the funerary material, as did the kitchen setting in the far corner of New Walk's display. Some tomb reconstructions, such as those at Milwaukee, Chicago and Leicester, contained mummies; others did not, including the full-scale replica at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum and the rebuilt *mastabas*⁸ at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tombs are often reconstructed as they were found, denuded by thieves. The Field Museum presented carved panels from the interior passages of the *mastaba* of Unis-Ankh mounted in a walk-through replica of the tomb superstructure on the first floor of the museum. The mummy of a person unable to afford a tomb, which was intrusively buried beneath the *mastaba* courtyard centuries after Unis-Ankh's interment, was exhibited in the museum basement at the bottom of a shaft cut through the floor of the museum, and visible through a perspex panel in the *mastaba* courtyard floor. The theft in antiquity of Unis-Ankh's mummy from his sarcophagus at the bottom of the subterranean tomb shaft – accessible via a stairwell leading into the museum's basement – was explained on a label. In 2004, I saw several coffins lying in a replica tomb at the Bristol Museum, but these represented a Dynasty 25 reuse of a New Kingdom tomb. Few replica tomb settings represented original interments of mummies and assemblages of funerary goods *in situ*. The British Museum's newly installed Egyptian galleries have overcome this problem in part. They group coffins, mummies and funerary objects into assemblages representative of particular periods (including the complete contents of several tombs), turning giant vitrines into transparent-walled tomb chambers, although not all of the coffins are displayed lying down.

Popular culture reads 'glass box' displays as *de facto* tombs, and museum devices, notably the upright positioning of coffins and mummies, are transposed onto fictional tombs. At the Field Museum, perspex panels and labels were inserted into catacombs and a *mastaba*. A tomb reconstruction at New Walk and another at Milwaukee (1966–86) each included a prone coffin containing a mummy; instead of lying atop the coffin base, the lid was propped against the wall to reveal the coffin's contents. Where does the museum end and the tomb begin, and vice versa? Exhibits can be

unintentionally hyperreal – a possibility unforeseen by Umberto Eco (1987) – when visitors decide that even ‘glass box’ formats appear authentic, just as they decide which mummies are authentic. This decision is apparently informed by the conflation of Egyptian and museum settings in the media. Travel documentaries have described Egypt as an open-air museum, so an exhibit of Egyptian sculpture can make the visitor ‘really feel like you’re in ancient Egypt!’ (cited by Wedge ed. 1976:93), as if Egyptian daily life had focused upon statues. Any display of Egyptian artefacts could therefore be read as an authentic tomb. The upright coffin formerly atop the Petrie Museum’s staircase reminded many visitors of a tomb entrance (MacDonald 2003:93); 28.47 per cent of questionnaire respondents in Chicago, 38.64 per cent in Adelaide and 38.01 per cent in Perth believed that coffins were entombed upright.⁹

Questionnaire respondents under 12 years of age were most likely to believe in the upright placement of coffins (Figure 5.1), although this may have resulted from their overrepresentation in the surveys as much as from a greater inclination to believe that mummies could walk out of standing coffins. Brooklyn children favoured prone positioning; either the upright coffins on display (that were not visible from the survey table) did not influence them, or they had already formed their view before their visit. The media had obviously influenced many Perth children before their visit, as they argued for upright coffins, even though coffins were not displayed.

Mutual reinforcement between museums and popular culture is not exclusively responsible for juvenile belief in ambulation. Adults sometimes invoke ambulation to control children’s behaviour. At the Brooklyn Museum, a security officer told me that he threatened some naughty children that a nearby mummy might awaken and attack them. He did not think that they would believe his empty threat, but one child was frightened. A girl visiting New Walk told me that her teacher had made a similar remark to discipline her class.

At New Walk, a life-sized plaster model of a menacing ambulatory mummy was accompanied by a panel that explained the curse as a myth. Curators Jill Bourn, Pam Drinkall and Brian Kennedy intended that the model should raise visitors’ consciousness of differences between popular imagery and the mummies on exhibit, but many children thought it was more ‘realistic’ than the mummies. Some pretended to cower in front of the model, and many spent more time looking at it than at the mummies. Few children read the wall panel. I conducted fieldwork at New Walk during school excursions, so I was obliged to teach as well as observe visiting students. My observations were therefore not sufficiently objective because much of what I recorded was students’ responses to my own ideas instead of their preconceptions, but their remarks demonstrate the resilience of stereotypes.

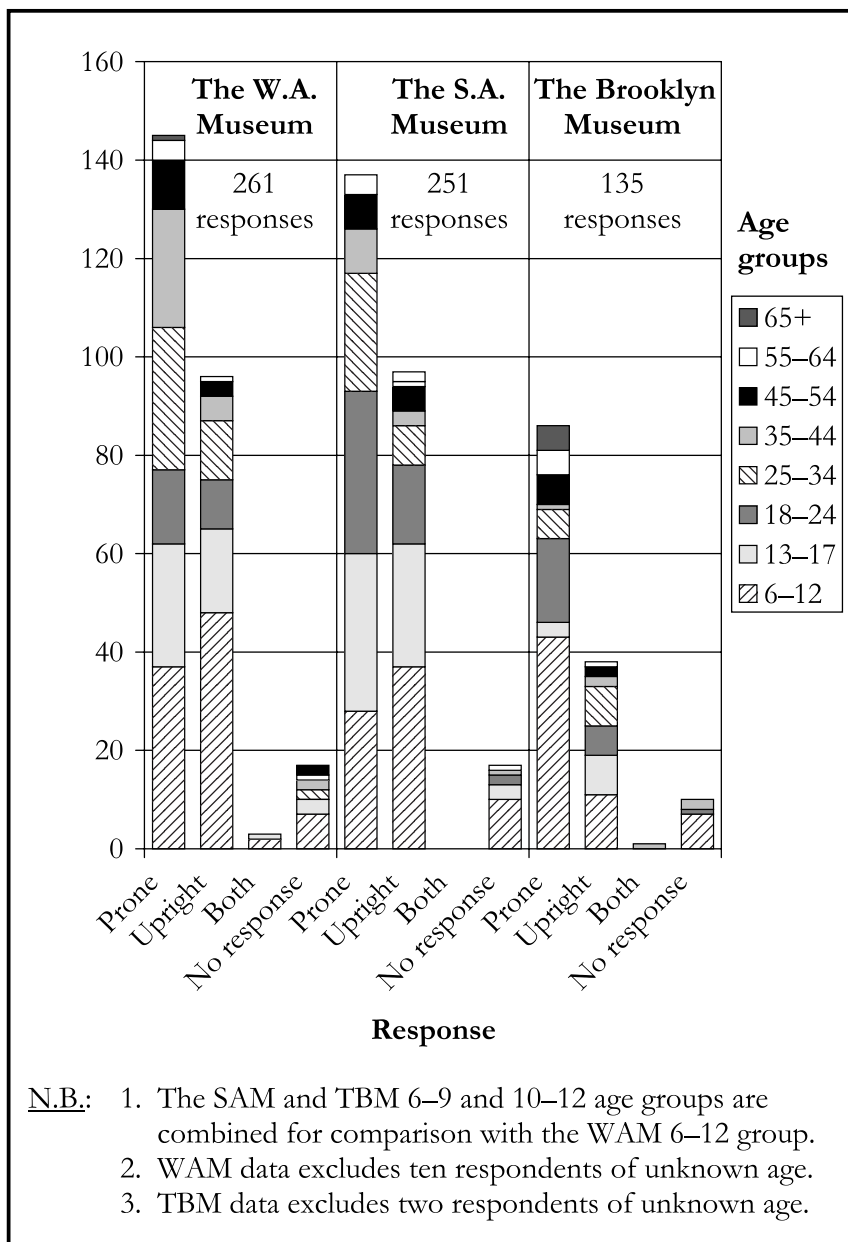


Figure 5.1 Positions in which questionnaire respondents thought coffins were entombed (question 9).

THE MUMMY'S CURSE

- Girl 1 [looking at the mummy model]: It's really realistic.
- Jasmine: Realistic? [The children are touching the model. I explain how it must have been made].
- Girl 1: And then it looks real, and it looks like it's coming out of the wall. Going 'nnnng' [imitates mummy groan]. [. . .] It looks pretty real.
- Boy [looking at film canisters mounted on the wall, which represent horror films]: What is this?
- Girl 2: They're films.
- Jasmine: . . . See they're trying to show the difference between the way that you see them on TV and in movies and the way it is in real life. [Pointing to a mummy] See, real mummies look quite different, don't they?
- Boy: Yes.
- Jasmine: How do they look different to the one you were seeing there?
- Girl 1: They look more decayed [. . .].
- Jasmine: Yes; what about all the arms and legs?
- Children: They're wrapped up! All wrapped in!
- Boy: And mummies they can't go like that [imitates mummy's attack gesture, his arms forward].
- Girl 1: They can't wake up.
- [A crowd of children surrounding the mummy model scream.]
- Jasmine: . . . Are you scared of it? . . .
- Child: I'm scared!
- Boy 1 [excited]: It can come here!
- Boy 2: She said that if we touch it, it can come here! We're going, 'nnngh!' [makes a frightened, excited noise].
- Jasmine: Do you *really* think that? . . .
- Boy 3: Yeah, well sometimes it happens, really.
- Jasmine: . . . Is that a real mummy? . . . [A child shrieks at seeing the model.]
- Boy 3: No.
- Jasmine: . . . It's just a statue that somebody made, okay? . . .
- Boy 3: It's not real?
- Jasmine: No . . . Does everybody know why this statue is here?
- Boy 4: Because it's Egyptian.
- Jasmine: . . . This is something that someone here made just a couple of years ago.
- Boy 5: [There could be someone] behind [the statue].
- Jasmine: . . . Does anybody know why this is here?
- Children: No.

Jasmine: Have you ever seen mummies on TV going 'Ooorrrgh' like this?

Children: Yes.

Jasmine: Do you think that's real?

Children: No.

Jasmine: . . . [W]hat they're trying to show you is that this [indicating the model] is . . . all just a story . . . and that this [indicating the mummies] is the way that mummies really are. . . .

[Suddenly a sea of children, probably asked by their teacher to return to the centre of the room, and making spooky noises and mummy gestures, rush towards Jasmine and the model.]

Teacher: Come on, let's go and sit down again.

NWM 1996

During another visit to New Walk in 2004, I phrased my questions more tactfully to find out what children meant by 'real' in relation to the model and the mummies.

Children head mostly to mummies. I see a mummy, says a girl, pointing, to teacher. They touch fake model and tug its loose bandage. Ask if it's real. I ask, What do you mean? Girl says, Is it alive? Another girl repeats this question. I say, You're alive, is it? No, says a boy. Is there anyone under model's bandages? ask several children. References to it 'moving'.

Author's fieldnotes

[The museum's teacher asks me to answer the children's mummy questions.]

Boy: Are mummies dead?

Me: What do you mean by dead?

Boy: Are they killed?

NWM 2004

'Real' often means 'alive'.¹⁰ The children judged authenticity according to whether a body-shaped thing moved. While New Walk's mummies were prone and inert, its model was striding upright, posed in frozen motion. It had acquired much damage since 1996 from tugging of its bandages – clear evidence of attempts at autoauthentication. To juveniles, movement delineates living things from dead ones. Only later will they recognize immobile bodies as having once been alive. Fictional mummies convince children that actual mummies *should* be alive, so if museum mummies show no signs of life, then they cannot be real. Children's rejection of

mummies' authenticity has as much to do with their incomplete understandings of death as with popular culture's insistence that mummies are not dead. Poet Jeff Guess recalls a childhood visit to the South Australian Museum's Egyptian Room: 'it was the closest / we had ever come to death / knowing little then of even pain' (1986).

As in the case of confusion between mummies and mothers, young children make references to ambulation credulously, then jokingly once their conceptions of death become resolved. Some Leicester students grasped the differences between the model and the mummies and jokingly feigned belief in ambulation, while others stood upon the cusp between naïveté and understanding. A museum visit provided an opportunity for the latter students to test the veracity of their infantile assumptions. As the curators prepared to host a class, a boy raised his hand and asked whether the mummies would talk to his classmates. The students roared with laughter and another boy sarcastically set the matter aright: 'They're *dead*.' After realizing that some x-rays of mummies revealed bodies inside the wrappings, a boy asked me, 'Would they get alive at night?' A Metropolitan Museum of Art family guide developed in consultation with several children anticipated visitors' responses: 'Egyptians wanted to preserve their bodies for the afterlife. They didn't believe the actual body would walk around again – they were making a resting place for the spirit' (Levine 1994:18). The museum's inaugural *Kids* pamphlet (1996) responded to FAQs: 'Are there *really* bodies inside the bandages? . . . Yes'; 'Do the bodies ever come alive? . . . No'.

Children's understandings of death develop incrementally. This learning is sequenced – beginning with a belief that death is impermanent and avoidable, and culminating with acceptance of its irreversibility and inevitability – but it appears that the ages at which stages of understanding are reached is variable (deSpelder and Strickland 1987:75–7). The Leicester students were aged around 6 to 8 years, yet other research suggests that most children attain knowledge of death's permanency between the ages of 5 and 7 (ibid.:77); media stereotypes may delay the application of this knowledge to mummies. Once children finally realize that mummies will not wake up, the idea becomes a joke.

Children [to a mummy, in humorous high-pitched voices]: Hello, mummy. Hello!

NWM 1996

Perhaps it is at this stage that the mummy becomes an ally, whether a friendly clown or filthy rebel against adult regimes. Yet for some people, unconscious childhood fears persist. In the 1940s, a Field Museum Egyptologist, sitting out of sight behind a display case near a coffin, greeted some women as they entered the room. Assuming that the coffin had spoken, the women screamed (Cantu 1996)!

'The mummy will see you'

In Perth, 27.3 per cent of respondents and in Adelaide, 33.9 per cent of respondents to questionnaire question 7 believed that Egyptian curses exist or probably exist, and 32.1 per cent of Brooklyn respondents claimed that curses exist as physical, psychosomatic or supernatural forces. Some people claimed not to believe in curses because, in their view, curses are scientifically explicable – but they too were really believers, having presumed that curses are discernible phenomena rather than ideological discourses. The extent to which the media and ethical concerns influenced my respondents is evident in their definitions of 'the curse'.

When asked to describe curses, whether they believed in them or not, some interviewees mentioned revenge worked through objects. This nineteenth-century theme was perpetuated by twentieth-century media and appended with ambulatory mummies.

[S]omeone will stumble over an artefact from a tomb . . . and then . . . the spirit of that artefact . . . or . . . of that person whose tomb was looted will follow them. Until they get rid of the object, there's this crazy mummy chasing them around . . . (Female, 18–24 years)

Anybody connected with taking stuff out of the tomb was supposed to be put in with the curse. (Male, 45–54 years)

[Someone] picks up something and gets cursed. (Female, 17 years)

If you try and steal anything out of their . . . pyramid then the . . . eyes that they put on the side of coffin – the mummy will see you . . . and . . . something bad would happen. (Female, 8 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

Of the fifty-six Chicago interviewees asked to define the curse, ten referred specifically to Tutankhamun's curse, six of whom did not believe in curses. One of these sceptics was a 12-year-old girl; the others were adults. Those who believed in Tutankhamun's curse were all aged 12 years or under, except for a woman aged 35–44 years who professed disbelief in curses but whose subsequent remarks suggested a degree of belief. The sample of interviewees who cited Tutankhamun's curse is small, but raises the question of whether children are more inclined to take this legend seriously.

Q: Could you tell me what the curse is?

A: When . . . Carter opened the tomb, he said he shouldn't of because he'll get cursed and 250 people died . . . and then he

died of old age and . . . they say he's gonna have his death sentence in his other life in heaven.

Male, 9 years, MM interviews 1996

Only one Manchester interviewee (male, 45–54 years) stated that Tutankhamun's curse was 'made up by the newspapers'. Other sceptics attributed it to coincidence or explicable phenomena. Ignorance of its fabrication might lend this curse credibility, especially to children. Six juvenile Chicago interviewees and an adult (25–34 years) in Manchester had learned about curses at school; the adult had heard other students discussing the subject, while the children were informed by teachers and had seen videos and read textbooks about the Tutankhamun excavation that mentioned the curse. The children claimed that their sources had presented this curse as legend, not fact, but the possibility of its interpretation as fact remains; one child was unsure whether or not his teacher believed in curses. As explained in Chapter 3, films and books contain signs that suggest to audiences which of several possible interpretations they should make. Curses tend to be presented in documentaries and children's literature in an investigative tone: 'Might curses exist?' This prompt has long been part of curse lore; Arthur Weigall, an early contributor to the Tutankhamun curse (Frayling 1992:54–5), claimed to be a sceptic yet 'teasingly recounted seemingly supernatural occurrences' (Lupton 2003:32).

Of the questionnaire respondents who believed in curses, 66.2 per cent in Perth, 55.3 per cent in Adelaide and 70.4 per cent in Brooklyn were aged under 18, and respectively, 41.9 per cent, 29.4 per cent and 56.8 per cent were 12 years or under. The factors that promote belief amongst young people probably differ from those that shape older believers' views. Juvenile interviewee believers tended to fear ambulatory mummies, booby-trapped tombs or evil spirits, and to be persuaded by fiction books and the frequency with which curses are mentioned.

Some young males in the Petrie Museum focus groups viewed the burial of grave goods as a game in which they had been dared to find treasures (MacDonald 2003:90). Do all juvenile ideas about curses neglect their original ethical role? Do children recognize that the management of human remains can be contentious? Proto-ethical children's views are simplistic applications of the Biblical principle 'thou shalt not steal' that make no distinction between archaeologists and thieves.

Q: Could you tell me what the curse is?

A: That later on that they would come back alive.

[Interviewee's mother, prompting] You know what happens if you go in the tomb and take things that aren't yours? It comes back and gets you.

Q: Do you believe in the curse?

- A: Yes and no.
 Q: What part don't you believe?
 A: That they'd come back and get you.
 Q: And what part do you believe?
 A: That you shouldn't take their things.

Female, 11 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Asked to define curses, many Brooklyn questionnaire respondents attributed them to 'invisible powers'. Most were aged under 18, while the few older respondents tended to argue that curses operated psychosomatically or as explicable physical phenomena. The Chicago interviews yielded broadly similar results: adults who believed in curses gave rational explanations for them, while respondents under 18 gave supernatural explanations.¹¹

- Q: Could you tell me what the curse is?

- A: The . . . curse was that anybody violating the pyramids would come to an early end. . . . [Supposedly this] was caused . . . by . . . poisonous fumes that were inhaled. . . . [W]hen the Egyptians entombed the pharaohs, they . . . wittingly or unwittingly also entombed diseases that weren't known to modern man. Now whether that's correct . . . I don't know. . . . There's the superstitious school of thought and . . . the scientific [one]. I prefer to think of myself as being a member of the [latter].

Male, 35–44 years, MM interviews 1996

- A: Well supposedly there's an evil curse that anybody breaks when they enter those tombs . . . the people died from certain different strange reasons. . . . I think they might have caught a disease, or bad air . . . (Male, 35–44 years)
 A: [I]t . . . turned out to be just the air . . . having some bacteria from three thousand years ago. (Male, 25–34 years)
 A: They thought it was a gas that was included in the tomb . . . (Male, 65+ years)

FMNH interviews 1996

One female Manchester interviewee (25–34 years) had recently seen a television programme that claimed that noxious gases accumulated inside sealed tombs. She stated that all information about the curse should be released so that people can decide for themselves whether the curse is real. The belief that archaeologists are withholding knowledge from the public (Hiscock 1996:152) expresses popular resentment of the perceived exclusivity of Egyptology (Frayling 1992:46). Curse legends once mobilized this protest. Nowadays, the subjective and unqualified use of concepts and methods

appropriated from scientific disciplines, termed pseudoscience by its critics (Hiscock 1996:153),¹² attempts to dominate popular understandings of ancient Egypt. Interpretations of curses as results of noxious gases, radioactive mummies, Egyptians' psychic powers or the concealment of poisons inside tombs (Vandenberg 1976) are part of a broader system of popular-scientific explanations for supernatural events. Attempts to rationalize curses presuppose their existence as physical phenomena, despite evidence that they are ideological concepts. Thus 'scientific explanations' of curses have themselves become part of the curse legend (Day 2002) as its supporters attempt to defend its credibility in order to sell documentaries and books. Curses need a hi-tech makeover to survive in the postmodern era.

Both people who believed in curses and those who did not tended to focus upon their physical causes and effects rather than their moral import; people concerned about the ethics of mummies' excavation and display did not invoke curses (see below). Museums could seize the opportunity to play a vital role in alleviating children's fears and debunking pseudoscientific 'proof' of curses, following the lead of the Birmingham (Ellis 1993:45) and New Walk Museums.

Selling out

No child is born with a natural interest in mummification; adults, primarily teachers, are their informants. The emphasis on this kind of information has colored the outlook of generation after generation, to the detriment of their ability to recognize many other achievements of the ancient Egyptians . . .

Bernard Bothmer, Postscript to *Nefertiti Graffiti* (1976:159)

While children's interest in mummies is indeed acquired, it stems not only from a coincidence between their 'natural interest' in filth and chaos and the abject themes of Postclassic mummymania, but also from museums' emphasis upon mummies as 'must-see' exhibits. Government funding cut-backs have forced many museums to seek corporate sponsorship and appeal to public Egyptophilia. Beholden to sponsors and visitors, and struggling to maintain relevance to a public easily diverted by new forms of entertainment, museums organize exhibits and children's activities and sell products that reflect popular tastes (Raven 1996). The result is an incorporation of ideas such as the haunted museum and the horrific living mummy – stereotypes that conflict with museums' responsibility to humanize the ancient Egyptians and promote an understanding of their culture. So far I have discussed museums' inadvertent production of stereotypes, but there are also deliberate inclusions.

'“This way to the mummies” proudly proclaims a sign in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston' (Bianchi 1982:18). As symbols of ancient Egypt,

mummies advertise museums to the public. The beautiful cartonnage of Nespanetjerenpere was used by the Brooklyn Museum as its 'poster boy' (Fazzini 1996), but in the museum's Wilbour Library, a staff member had dryly added the ears of the corporate icon Mickey Mouse to a picture of it. Once sold bodily, mummies are now sold in effigy. Yet advertising tends not to represent them explicitly, only to allude to them via their coffins (Plate 5.2), which probably contributes to children's aforementioned confusion between coffins and mummies. During the past twenty years, as marketing professionals have taken over curators' former task of selecting objects with which to publicize museums, they have invested the faces of coffins and statues with ideas of splendour, timelessness and authority – qualities with which museums desire to be associated (MacDonald 2003:94–5). Anthropomorphic coffin advertisements, however, appeal to a public fixation upon human-shaped coffins and cartonnages of the middle and later pharaonic periods as archetypal Egyptian burial equipment. Earlier types of coffins and Greco-Roman funerary ornamentation are overlooked, as if they were not authentically Egyptian. The resulting illusion that all coffins were anthropomorphic perpetuates a common view that Egyptian society and material culture remained static for millennia. Museum displays themselves have often separated Islamic, even Roman Period artefacts from pharaonic ones, failing to convey the full scope of Egyptian history so that today, many visitors are ignorant of Egyptian chronology and disinterested in the post-pharaonic era (ibid.:96–7).

Coffin-themed promotions have another, more disquieting motive. By masking their contents, coffins allow museums and visitors to refer to mummies while disregarding the fact that they are human remains. All their negative connotations are thereby disavowed, from their imputed pollution and allusion to the viewer's own mortality to the potential controversy of their exhibition. Proof of coffins' use as truth-proof shields is supplied by the contrasting case of European bog bodies, the uncoffined remains of Celts mummified naturally in peat bogs. A travelling exhibition of these bodies was promoted with outdoor banners and products, such as coffee mugs, emblazoned with images of the distorted, naked corpses of people executed with violence. A reconstruction of the living face of Yde Girl, who was strangled, was printed on a necktie. Archaeologist Wijnand van der Sanden (2004) argues that the commercialization of these images is unethical and distasteful, and occurs because curators have little jurisdiction over the design of museums' products and promotions.

Some advertisers yoke educational values to 'yucksploitation' in an attempt to offset their use of human remains as titillating subject matter. A promotional leaflet for the *Unravel the Mysteries of the Mummies* exhibition (Museum of Man, San Diego 1998) swings from abjection to education and back again. It begins with a prediction that visitors could be 'frightened' when confronted by mummified bodies from various cultures with their



Plate 5.2 Mummies, synonymous with Egypt, often advertise museums in the guise of coffins. British Museum posters in the Holborn station of the London Underground. Photo: © J. Day 1996.

darkened, shrivelled skin and 'eyes missing', but once visitors remember that they are safe within a museum, '[f]ascination soon replaces fear'. They will learn how and why mummies were made, yet the display remains a 'macabre exhibit of the dead.' In the view of some advertisers, death has become the new sex in museums, a guaranteed crowd-pleaser and, in its potential for controversy, a means to attract the entry fees of the curious.

In recent years, educational texts for children and teaching instructions for adults have exploited what I call the repulsion ruse, a reversal of the revolution paradigm discussed in Chapter 4. Children resent adults' disruption of their infantile reverie (Kristeva 1982:71–2), so they fantasize about overturning adult rule by rejecting values of hygiene, good behaviour and education. They are therefore responsive to fictional stories in which characters such as mummies celebrate filth and chaos. Adults can exploit fictional mummies' embodiment of the abject not only to teach children how to behave, but also to raise children's interest in museums.

'That's really neat!' exclaimed a 13-year-old girl as she gazed, fascinated, into the case . . . [at] the freeze-dried corpse of a man brutally murdered in Ludlow 2000 years ago. This is the sort of thing children like. A museum outing can smell suspiciously like homework and is shunned accordingly. [One] way of luring [children] into a Museum is by promising something strange and grisly and then springing the educational element on them later. . . . [One] well-loved stiff is 'Ginger' the man mummified in sand whose leathern skinned skeleton lies . . . in the [British Museum.] . . . Most . . . museums have something grim or peculiar with which to bait the trap.

Louise Levene, *Entertaining Little Horrors* (1989)

Juvenile culture can be appropriated, reworked and re-presented to children to gain their co-operation – a neutralizing strategy like that described by Gramsci. The repulsion ruse is becoming standard fare in children's educational texts, creating a need to abject mummies and refer to fictional stereotypes that conflict with the books' task of familiarizing young readers with ancient Egyptian culture. *What They Don't Tell You About Ancient Egyptians* advises, 'Any history book will give you the boring facts THEY think you should know, but only this one will tell you just how weird life in Ancient Egypt REALLY was' (Jay 1996: back cover). Humorous, slightly gory illustrations accompany its account of mummification (ibid.: 107, 111–12). *Egyptians: Pyramids and Mouldy Mummies* is 'real history . . . with all the boring bits taken out [and] just the tasty bits' (Border 1995:2), including a gruesome mummification cartoon (ibid.:22–3). *Horrible Histories: the Awesome Egyptians* claims that 'Teachers think you're too young to learn about . . . the way Egyptians took the brains out of their mummies! . . .

[T]his book will tell you the things teachers daren't. And by the time you're finished you will be able to teach your teacher' (Deary and Hepplewhite 1994:5–6). Mummification becomes a children's game: 'WARNING: This is very messy! Do not try this in your kitchen! Not even in your school-dinners kitchen!' (p.52). Disgusting cartoons accompany the text (pp.48–9, 53, 55). Mummies' histories of despoliation are described for amusement as much as edification (pp.60–2, 64–5). This provides another opportunity for ghastly jokes: 'What would you use a mummy for?' (p.63). These textual and visual treatments portray people from other cultures as strange and perverse – an attitude that could impede young readers' ability to interact with people from different cultures in later life (and that is regarded as racist when applied in other contexts). Yet books like these, along with others that purport to be educational but portray ambulatory mummies (Ransford and Farris 1998) or mention curses credulously (Deary and Hepplewhite 1994:70–1; Gold and Rabinowitz 1990:45), were on sale in many of the museums I visited.

The child's media-inspired fantasy of staying overnight in a haunted museum was realized in torchlight and Halloween tours and children's sleepovers in museums. These events may have been inspired by past museum stowaways, whose antics probably originated legends of haunted museums (Chapters 2 and 4). After-hours torchlight tours, such as those at the South Australian Museum's Egyptian Room and the Rosicrucian Museum, surely reinforced preconceptions of mummies and museums as frightening or ominous. Daytime tours of the Rosicrucians' subterranean replica of the tomb of a Middle Kingdom official were conducted by torchlight with the electric lights switched off to recreate the original atmosphere of the tomb, but given the sinister portrayal of such environments in popular culture, hyperreal tomb exhibits were bound to be interpreted as malevolent. Grant Shar (1996), a tour guide, jokingly made a spooky 'oooohhh' sound as he led visitors into the tomb. On previous occasions he had worn a mummy costume to promote the museum and, in this disguise, had hidden inside the replica tomb to jump out and scare visitors!

Curators' presentations to the public require an active engagement with popular culture. It does not follow, though, that visitors must be introduced to museums with haunted tombs and walking mummies, then expected to divorce these ideas from archaeological information. This is too much to ask of young children. Instead, the use of popular culture as visitors' touchstone could encourage them to reflect upon the accuracy and purposes of stereotypes. *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* explored the commercialization and typecasting of its subject and the role of the media in the promotion of Egyptology. Visitors viewed a mixture of authentic and replica artefacts by torchlight, making their own discoveries (MacDonald 2002:104). Most were pleased with this approach (ibid.:106, 2003:91–2), but by striving to appeal to a lay audience, the exhibit failed to impress some Egyptologists

(2002:106) who did not recognize how urgently their profession needs to address media portrayals of ancient Egypt. Museum visitors should be co-opted into the critical examination of popular culture. 'The challenge is to exploit [Egyptology's] popularity while questioning some of the assumptions on which that popularity is based' (2003:99).

Ethics: the great debate

To display, or not to display?

While the excavated bodies of Europeans have often been reburied, the remains of other peoples have usually been retained in storage or displayed in museums (Southworth 1994:24). In recent years, indigenous peoples have become increasingly involved in the representation of their own cultures in museums. Many have requested that their ancestral human remains be repatriated, some of which were acquired by museums during the colonial era (ibid.:31), while others were excavated from prehistoric sites. Claimants are offended not only by the appropriation of ancestral remains, which many of them regard as theft (McKie 1995), but also by the harm they feel is done to the spirits of the deceased when bodies or bones are removed from their home territories or denied a traditional funeral (Nail 1994:32). Some curators view repatriation as a means of reconciling minority groups or formerly colonized peoples with the wider community, but others argue that valuable data are lost when human remains are reburied (ibid.:33).

Repatriation frequently involves Australian Aborigines, Native Americans and the Maori of New Zealand (Simpson 1994:28), but remains of other peoples, especially those excavated from sites that are thousands or millions of years old, raise varying degrees of controversy. When promoted as controversial by the media (Daley 1991), exhibitions of human remains can offend even people who do not claim kinship with the deceased. The 1995 British Museum exhibition of Lindow Man (c.200BC–AD100), a Celtic sacrificial victim preserved in a peat bog, raised some public indignation; unaware that he had been a pagan, one woman demanded that he be given a Christian burial (McKie 1995). Such protests may use indigenous claims as a precedent but they have personal, emotive bases. 'We seem to be in the presence of faith rather than empirical knowledge' (Nail 1994:33). Fleshed remains, which appear more lifelike than skeletons, are more likely to prompt emotional responses (Southworth 1994:24). These include mummies.

'[M]useums . . . attempt to distance the visitor from death-related objects, spatially, temporally, intellectually or emotionally' (Innes 1997:19). The image of mummies reviving in museums exposes this suppression and the dangerous knowledge it hides – the knowledge that visitors look upon their own fate and may pity the deceased exposed to public view. My research shows that the views of visitors who disapprove of mummies' display are

based upon emotions and personal attributions of meaning. Visitors who cannot claim ancient Egyptians as ancestors imagine that they share some other kind of relationship with them; should their criticisms be taken as seriously as those of indigenous claimants?

Repulsive attraction

Q: How do you feel about Egyptian mummies being displayed in museums?

A: It's interesting . . . that's . . . what attracts me to it but repels me too . . . because . . . it feels like it's not supposed to be here.

Female, 25–34 years, FMNH interviews 1996

Visitors to *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* were somewhat evenly divided between support for, and opposition to, the exhibition of human remains (MacDonald 2002:105–6). Ethical stances, however, cannot always be so easily classified as polar opposites; my respondents' feelings were often ambivalent, which raises the question of whether they constitute legitimate ethical critiques.

One statement from the Manchester Museum Visitor Comments Board typifies critical views:

[W]hy are skeletons, bodies + skulls on display. These are not curios but actual people . . . [A]fter being studied these remains should be reburied. Even if you don't believe in any sort of afterlife . . . the wishes + beliefs + grief of these peoples families should be respected – it doesn't matter that they died thousands of years ago.

There were 8.1 per cent of Perth questionnaire respondents (question 6) and 3.9 per cent in Adelaide (question 6) who thought that most or all mummies should not be displayed; 21.2 per cent of Brooklyn respondents (question 7a) disapproved of the exhibition of all mummies, of mummies they considered ugly, or of fragments. While most respondents approved of mummy displays conditionally or unconditionally, objections were made in every survey.

Desecration of the dead is unlikely to be fully understood by children, whose comprehension of death is still in formation (deSpelder and Strickland 1987:73–106). Some children thought that interference with a mummy would harm its soul, but others understood offences against the dead as simple theft rather than sacrilege.

Q: Could you tell me what the curse is?

A: [The mummy] got the guy.

Q: How come . . . ?

A: He was gonna try to steal the jewels. (Female, 8 years)

A: If you . . . take any of their money or stuff the mummy's . . . gonna come back alive and haunt you . . . (Female, 11 years)

FMNH Interviews 1996

Q: How do you feel about Egyptian human mummies on display in museums?

A: [S]houldn't be disturbed and shouldn't be able to take [jewels].

Female, 10–12 years, TBM questionnaire 1996

Children did not draw parallels with the destruction or archaeological study of Native American or Australian Aboriginal burials as some adult informants did (see below). This analogy is imperfect, since all practitioners of ancient Egyptian culture are deceased and cannot be culturally dispossessed in the manner that living indigenous peoples have been. Yet the analogy is a true ethical criticism of mummies' excavation and exhibition because it discounts the extinction of ancient Egyptian civilization – which elsewhere permits its abjection and lampooning – as an excuse for treating mummies with disrespect.

Manchester interviewees did not draw comparisons with the dispossession of indigenous peoples, which suggests that other factors can also motivate ethical criticisms.

Q: How do you feel about Egyptian human mummies on display in museums?

A: They shouldn't be putting them on display because they probably don't like people looking at them. (Male, 9 years)

A: [I]f it was a relative of mine, I don't think I'd like it much. (Male, 35–44 years)

A: I don't like to see them displayed [as skeletons] when they took so much care to . . . present themselves in a dignified way . . . and somebody . . . strips them not only naked but . . . down to the bone . . . (Female, 45–54 years)

In the Preclassic era, mummies' sympathizers imagined themselves suffering in the victims' place. This logic persists today, especially now that the curse – which movies branded as evil and associated with the implausible notion of animated corpses – is no longer an appropriate vehicle for ethical criticism.

Q: How do you feel about Egyptian mummies being displayed in museums?

A: I don't think I would want to be put on display! (Female, 35–44 years)

A: It's strange to reflect on the idea of looking at your own dead body. (Male, 25–34 years)

A: I wouldn't like my friends being put up in a museum. (Female, 12 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

Q: Please explain the reasons for your feelings about Egyptian human mummies on display in museums.

A: Would you like someone digging you up and put you on display. (Female, 10–12 years)

A: Because if [ugly mummies are removed from display] then they will not be teased in there death by people [who] think there ugly. (Male, 10–12 years)

TBM questionnaire 1996

If so many ethical stances derive from personal, subjective criteria, should curators regard them as valid arguments for removing mummies from exhibition? Of eighteen visitors interviewed by Katherine Innes (1997:22) at the Jewry Wall Museum in Leicester, sixteen objected to the exhibition of human skeletons less than a century old, and nine preferred the exhibition of skeletons over five hundred years old. If museumgoers identify most closely with the remains of the more recently deceased, it is interesting that the ancient bodies of strangers can elicit sympathetic responses. Mummies may prompt empathy because they appear more lifelike than most other human remains. Perhaps museums should treat as legitimate only those requests for mummies' removal from exhibition that are based upon sympathetic sentiments. These establish the closest affiliation with modern people that Egyptian mummies are likely to have, since no religious or ethnic group has laid claim to them.

Some reactions to mummies express a fear of pollution or ugliness influenced by popular abject imagery, and are therefore arguably less valid reasons for mummies' removal from exhibition. A South Australian Museum interviewee (female, 35–44 years) thought that the display of loose heads, hands and feet was acceptable in comparison to that of whole limbs because the latter seemed more disgusting. Adults visiting a hands-on display of skeletal human remains more than one thousand years old at the Jewry Wall Museum refrained from touching the bones, while children who touched them were chastized by their parents (Innes 1997:19–20). This pattern arises from adults' disbelief at the lifting of the museum taboo 'thou shalt not touch', from the sobriety of adults' behaviour towards the dead, and from a directly proportional relationship between age and sensibility to hygiene.

Q: What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?

- A: Yuk Scary (Female, 35–44 years)
 A: Horrible! (Female, 35–44 years)
 A: Disgust horror (Female, 45–54 years)
 A: Ugly spud! (Male, 25–34 years)

WAM questionnaire 1995

- Q: Please explain the reasons for your feelings about Egyptian human mummies on display in museums.
 A: If you [saw] the heart or ripped off arm of St Theresa d'Avila on display in a church in Spain, you would understand. It's disgusting.

Male, 45–54 years, TBM questionnaire 1996

Revulsion may not always imply disapproval of mummies' display. Children revel in pollution, so 'yuck!', a common children's questionnaire response, can express perverse delight: 'add more human parts, their yuck but interesting!' (female, 12 years, Western Australian Museum questionnaire 1995). Visitors surveyed by the Ripley's Believe It Or Not! Museum frequently stated that they enjoyed gory exhibits (Ambrosia 1996).

Exposure and fragmentation of mummies are some of the main causes of revulsion. They shatter the idealization of mummies in which museums and their visitors collude by substituting coffins for corpses. Some naturally mummified Egyptian heads were kept away from the public during their scientific examination in the dental department of Manchester University 'in order to avoid shock and distress in our present patient population! . . . [S]ome of the crania with well preserved skin, muscles and hair look more like horror masks' (Asher-McDade 1989:2). Mummies are regarded as 'non-art objects' in art museums (Fazzini 1993:80, 1996), where those chosen for display are whole and completely wrapped.

Many museums in my study exhibited several fragments, but not always to their best advantage. Hands and feet at the Field Museum were used to fill alcoves unoccupied by mummies in a replica catacomb. Fragments displayed with meagre labelling such as 'MUMMIFIED HAND' at the South Australian Museum seemed like trophies. Fragments at the Rosicrucian, Petrie and Ashmolean Museums were displayed like objects amongst miscellaneous artefacts, reflecting the age of the installations. The Petrie Museum presented its exhibits as a research collection to a mainly academic audience, so it lacked labels explaining the broader cultural and historical background of its fragments. Many of them were completely or partially skeletonized, so to inexperienced observers their appearance must have been shocking.¹³ An ineffectual attempt had been made to lend the Rosicrucian Museum's mummified hands a degree of context, with the provision of a small label explaining the amulets affixed to them. It is difficult to put human remains to use in museums that can only display, not research, them (Southworth

1994:24). Solutions included the juxtapositioning of a mummy's foot with several artefacts at the Milwaukee Public Museum to explain souveniring, a Manchester Museum discussion of the rehydration of mummy tissue for microscopic analysis using a rehydrated hand, the presentation of a mummy's head at the New Walk Museum as the 'host' of its exhibit and the medical examination of several skeletal fragments at the London Science Museum.

The manner in which human remains are exhibited can have a significant effect upon viewers' responses. The question of whether or not to display the dead is still valid, but if curators decide to proceed with display, the question of how best to present human remains must take into account the influence of personal experience, media exposure and age upon visitors. Unwrapping and fragmentation must be explained as consequences of despoliation or previous study. Fragments must be put to use, if not in explanations of paleopathological research, then as starting points for acknowledgement of acquisition history. If this strategy were thought to validate the exhibition of human remains, then fragments in storage could be returned to display, although it might be best to have curators or teaching staff present them in educational sessions. In a vitrine, a fragment is an object, but if shown and discussed by a person, it could become humanized. In Leicester, I presented a hand to some students who leaned forward, eager to take a closer look. I had already explained that the hand they were about to see was real and was not gory, cursed or diseased. While showing it to them I asked them to guess the deceased's age at death on the basis of the size of the hand, comparing it to their own. Interactive exhibits and personal supervision by tour guides or museum-based teachers could humanize mummies more than static labels and silent galleries. Removing mummies from display, disappointing those who want to see them, seems an extreme measure when more sensitive means of presentation are possible. *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* gave visitors a choice about viewing some mummy fragments, which were displayed behind a moveable textile covering decorated with motifs copied from Egyptian shrouds (Montserrat 2000:25–6).

How sincere are criticisms that address ethics directly, rather than via abjection? I asked interviewees, 'According to curse stories, what's wrong with opening a tomb, taking objects and touching the mummy?' I then asked whether archaeological practices should be assessed in moral terms. Some respondents possessed ambiguous views, condemning disturbance of tombs by archaeologists yet, in response to a later question, praising mummy exhibits.

Q: Do you think it's *really* wrong for archaeologists to enter tombs and examine mummies, or is this untrue?

A: [I]t's kind of a violation to have them here unwrapped, taken out of their sacred . . . place.

Q: You objected to things being taken.

A: Well, yeah, which is kind of hypocritical 'cos I'm here looking at it. . . . I know that these people didn't put them there for other people to take and . . . exhibit; [yet] it's a good way of preserving the culture and making it open to more people . . .

Female, 18–24 years, FMNH interviews 1996

A: I dunno . . . the archaeologists are . . . like tomb robbers . . . just because it's going into a museum doesn't mean they're not robbing a tomb. And . . . since the Egyptians believed in all this afterlife stuff it's not really right to . . . rob them of that.

Q: But if they didn't take things from tombs . . . then there wouldn't be museum displays.

A: Right . . . but I dunno . . . I guess it's good for . . . studying . . . I hear that from my history teachers a lot.

Female, 12 years, FMNH interviews 1996

This ambivalence is not tantamount to hypocrisy; it is the exploration of an issue from more than one point of view. Carter Lupton (1996) described his impression of visitors' attitudes to me: 'It's a paradox – a love-hate relationship . . . a lot of them might say, "I do have some ambivalent feelings about excavating dead bodies and exhibiting them," but on the other hand, it's one of the first things they ask for when they come to a museum.' The human mind is splintered (Horrocks 1995:35); people may be oblivious to inconsistencies between ideas they store in separate mental compartments that are infrequently raised in the same context (Strauss and Quinn 1994:294). Few people consider human remains ethics and their own museum experiences simultaneously, or spend enough time thinking about mummies to develop a conscious ethical position regarding their treatments. Furthermore, not everyone may deem opposition to archaeology and support for exhibitions to be incompatible. Some people might regard archaeologists as elitists who try to block public access to the treasures of the past, and think of museum visits as a means to regain this access. The accessibility of ancient things also offers a stake in the determination of their meanings. In a subversive celebration of the humanity and magical potency of mummies, the curse stories concocted by museums' own security personnel revolt against curators' authority over exhibits.

Some of my critical respondents could have been unconsciously motivated by resentment of academic exclusivity. Archaeology gains greater acceptance when laypeople feel empowered to participate in it. Regardless of whether contemporary exhibits' placement of mummies or coffins in a central or final position deliberately encourages visitors to picture themselves as archaeologists or tomb robbers (MacDonald 2003:89–90), visitors often position themselves in these roles anyway by interpreting museums as

tombs. Children in the Petrie Museum focus groups regarded Egypt as their personal adventure playground (ibid.:90–1). Dreams of participation are more likely to come true closer to home. The excavation of a late eighteenth-century church crypt in Spitalfields, London (Adams and Reeve 1987), was expected to upset the descendants of the individuals interred there. Yet all but one of the descendants gave permission for the excavation to proceed. The doubter, George Courtauld, relented after reflecting upon his past studies in archaeology (Paterson prod. 1989). If his views were indicative of the other descendants' attitudes, then these people must have felt responsible to make a contribution towards knowledge of the past. While critics of mummies' display believe that the ancient Egyptians would disapprove of the practice, Courtauld believed that his ancestor, familiar to him through family anecdotes and her surviving correspondences, would approve of her excavation. Speculations about the reactions of people of the past to the excavation or display of their own remains are subject to the speculators' own values.

In recent decades, television documentaries and books have popularized archaeology, and cinema has made Indiana Jones the most famous of all archaeologists (Spielberg dir. 1981, 1984, 1989). Indy is portrayed as a lovable rogue whose appropriations of relics are daring, not foolish like the actions of Classic movie archaeologists. Petrie Museum survey participants viewed archaeology positively because they saw it as a type of Indiana Jones adventure; '[t]he idea of the curse in western popular fiction rests on thrilling concepts of discovery and trespass' (MacDonald 2003:90). Hollywood converted mummies from victims into villains who could no longer represent with sympathy the notion of archaeology as sacrilege. This created a division between popular ethics and their fictional representations that has since widened so much that the two need no longer reference each other. Ethical objections are rarely made to fictional archaeologists whose acquisitiveness satisfies the materialistic cravings of capitalists (and misrepresents archaeology as a treasure hunt). Ancient sites continue to be pillaged around the world while Lara Croft glamorizes the role of a *Tomb Raider* (© Eidos Interactive 1995–9; West dir. 2001). The viewer is encouraged to identify with Indy and Lara as they act out a penetrative fantasy, dodging falling rocks and missiles inside subterranean chambers (*vaginae dentatae*) to obtain treasures. The Indiana Jones films, set in the 1930s, indulge nostalgia for a time before European control of foreign antiquities was volubly challenged. Their *Tomb Raider* progeny brazenly promote this attitude in a present-day setting. Colonial ideology survives in postcolonial representations (Spurr 1993).

Popular archaeology's promise of empowerment to its audiences can thus become implicated in a regressive imperialistic fantasy. The 'Humanity Ownership Argument' (Warren 1999:5–6), frequently invoked in debates about control of cultural property, holds that a body of material culture should not be possessed solely by a single ethnic group. This resembles the

demand of the Dragon Principle that valuables be ceded to those who can best utilize them. Like some archaeologists, a few of my visitor informants believed that indigenous peoples' requests for repatriation of their former possessions threatens archaeology. They spoke as if their own property were threatened, because they identified with archaeologists.

Q: Do you think there's anybody who would complain about the mummies being on display?

A: There's always somebody who has a problem with everything.
(Male, 65+ years)

A: There's always somebody who it's against their religion to dig up stuff . . . Really it's probably against everybody's religion but you gotta know somehow . . . (Male, 13 years)

A: You can't please everyone. But I think the masses want to learn.
(Female, 35–44 years)

FMNH interviews 1996

Not all objections to mummies' display derive solely from empathy with them; abjection of mummies and a frustrated longing to share archaeologists' power can also influence complaints. Measures to explain mummies' appearances and actively engage visitors may reduce the incidence of these kinds of complaints. However, sympathetic responses should not be discouraged. Displays must reflect visitors' humanization of mummies, like New Walk's 'talking' mummy head and the reconstructions of mummies' faces as living individuals at Manchester. Signs at the Field Museum and *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* (Bryan 2004:15) encouraged visitors to recite an Egyptian prayer for the souls of the resident mummies. No other museums in my study had attempted such overt humanizations, and in 1996 only Manchester provided visitors with a comments board via which they could communicate their concerns directly to staff. *Digging for Dreams'* invitation to visitors to express their feelings about mummies' display will hopefully catch on. People who like to visit museums should not be made to feel that they cannot effect change in them.

Conclusion

Visitors' comments reflect limited awareness of the methods of mummification, the composition and durability of its products, its religious motivations and intent to preserve bodies rather than animate them. Whether as a result of ignoring labels or of the inadequate provision of information by museums, many visitors suffer gaps in the basic knowledge necessary to appreciate the 'hows and whys' of mummification and to recognize the visible impact of despoliation upon mummies. They attempt to fill these gaps by referring to media stereotypes or pseudoscience, by drawing analogies with foreign

cultural practices, or by attributing the effects of despoliation to ancient Egyptians' actions. When people sense limitations in their knowledge, their existing mental networks of associated ideas attempt to supply the missing information (Strauss and Quinn 1994:289). Museumgoers' improvisations about mummies can produce explanations that demonize or patronize the Egyptians.

Visitors' improvisations may also contribute to the formation of stereotypes. The polluting qualities of fictional mummies might result from mummies' confusion with rotting corpses when bodies are hidden beneath bandages or unable to be touched and smelt in museums. The ancient Egyptians may be blamed for causing fragmentation if displays conceal modern despoliation. To prevent the abjection of mummies and Egyptians in popular culture from spilling over into museums, Egyptology exhibits – regardless of their specific themes – could supply information about the 'hows and whys' of mummification and the effects of despoliation upon mummies' appearances. It could be difficult to convince young children that mummies do not walk, but this belief should not be reinforced by museums' sale of books about living mummies and security members' references to curses. Museums' own educational materials could challenge the stereotypes prevalent in some other educational texts.

Some visitors' 'ethical' critiques may actually express 'expert envy' or result from naïve understandings of death. A lack of envy and a mature conception of death, including emotional identification with the dead, is a prerequisite for a less ambivalent, more resolved ethical view, as is an understanding that sacrilege incorporates abstract concepts of sin, not simply theft. Such a view constitutes the most genuine type of ethical criticism regarding Egyptian mummies, to which museums should respond. Since genuine criticisms accuse museums of objectifying mummies, and since other criticisms are motivated not so much by sympathy as by the fears that media stereotypes cultivate, the ultimate justification for displaying mummies would be to condemn stereotypes by humanizing mummies through more sensitive methods of presentation.

WRAPPING IT UP

Egypt was in the way; I'll strike it out
 With my ways curious and unusual.
 Isaac Rosenberg, *Moses, a Play* (1916:17)

Introduction

European visions of ancient Egypt allow the peoples and politics of modern Egypt to be overlooked in favour of its more familiar and controllable colonial past (Towers and Wallace dirs 1992, ep.5). We silence the voices of Others by supplanting them with our own (Said 1991:208–9). The Orientalizing stereotypes that displace authentic ancient and modern Egyptian voices are not created solely to shield Westerners from cultures they find unnervingly strange, or because popular culture refuses to let the facts get in the way of a good story. Cultural values have to be represented somehow, so when foreign objects – especially those with traits that coincide with established systems of allegories or puns – parade through collective Western experience, they are culled for conversion into powerful Western symbols. Capitalist culture has additional financial incentive to harness passing images in this way. The meanings of symbols snatched from Other times and places may outlast the availability of the material sources of their inspiration. Thus, while mummies are seldom traded today, the *idea* of mummies remains efficacious cultural currency because it has come to reflect the West's vacillation between economic and altruistic values and its paranoia about pollution, death and difference.

Changes in the meanings of mummies have resulted mainly from responses by the mass media and consumers to each other's ideas, more so than from changes in professionals' treatments of mummies. A major exception was an increase in the physical abjection of fictional mummies as their material counterparts were withdrawn from public circulation into museum cases. The loss of tactile and olfactory encounters with mummies left people to imagine and eventually fear this contact as they were forced to draw analogies with

decaying corpses. Generally, though, changes in mummies' meanings have been driven by market forces, such as the rise and fall of demand for romance literature and horror films and the advent of children's mass culture. Constant recycling of old motifs through new paradigms, minimizing the cost of invention while presenting apparently new material to the public, demonstrates that popular culture constantly feeds upon its own earlier creations. This perpetual motion machine requires little further input to work, discouraging a return to its source that might otherwise see more comparisons made between fictional and real mummies in museums or on television, and the differences between them impressed upon a public accustomed to fanciful, often derogatory depictions.

Museums, like films or books, are ideological battlefields upon which popular and specialist discourses vie for dominance, yet also blend as they appropriate each other's ideas in an attempt to cultivate a more edgy public image. Yet avoidance of controversy (Innes 1997:23) and a preference for making affirmative, not negative, statements (Ames 1992:109) usually discourages museums from criticizing popular culture. After summarizing my major findings, I will outline solutions to two problems: whether a preference for mummies' display could be reconciled with ethical concerns about the exhibition of human remains, and whether museums should refute the historical inaccuracies and derisive import of stereotypes. I believe that these two issues are allied. In the case of Egyptian mummies – exceptional amongst human remains as those most frequently represented in popular culture and least controversially exhibited – museums' responses to stereotypes could become the key to presenting mummies ethically.

A short history of mummymania

Two extremes of Self-projection characterized Victorian fantasies. The mummy was subjectified – pitiful or vengeful – yet also objectified, the compliant object of one's affections. The latter ultimately prevailed in the nineteenth century, when mummies were subjected to intense scientific and public scrutiny. Only once they retreated into museums was the Self more frequently projected onto the Other; mummies' decommmodification created opportunities to regret their destruction. Sympathy often comes too late.

As opposing moral assessments of mummies' objectification, curse and romance paradigms are structurally related. The fictional seduction of a mummy was reinterpreted as rape with astonishing explicitness by Bram Stoker in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* in 1903, and later by critics of the excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb. Having become a pivotal element of the curse myth, this rape analogy was then incorporated into Classic films. Universal's 1932 film *The Mummy* can be interpreted as a reflection of juvenile female fears of intercourse (Johnson 1991:111–12). However, since defloration may cause a woman to experience fear, at a conceptual level it is potentially

analogous to rape. Jane Austin's 1868 *After Three Thousand Years* and Louisa May Alcott's 1869 *Lost in a Pyramid; or, the Mummy's Curse* – some of the earliest known curse stories – and the first major English language curse film, Universal's *The Mummy*, based upon a story by Nina Wilcox Putnam, were written by women; the anonymously authored story *The Mummy's Soul* of 1862 is very similar to *Lost* and possibly a woman's work.¹ However, these texts do not reflect an exclusively feminine perspective. Employing a sexual metaphor that combines defloration and rape, they conjure both female and male perspectives upon intercourse: the woman's terror and vengefulness, and the man's guilt and fear of retaliation. Horror films invite audiences to explore both perspectives, and given the analogy between rape and the political and archaeological exploitation of the Orient, audiences are encouraged to experience both support for, and rejection of, colonialism.

While the power of the Classic curse lies in this moral promiscuity with its gender dualism, it may still be claimed that female writers, whose contribution to the formation of curse lore has been overlooked (Montserrat 1998:75), might have been more conscious of the Orientalist use of woman as a metaphor, and of analogies between economic or political exploitation and rape. They brought a body-consciousness and sexual morality to the curse. Seeing their own objectification by patriarchy mirrored in the abuse of mummies, they shifted the focus of curses from the capriciousness of an infernal Orient to the outrages committed against the bodies of its mummy-Others and, by extension, against their own bodies. They stamped a sympathy upon fictional mummies that increased the intensity with which later attempts to suppress this sympathy had to work. The rape metaphor and its view of curses as poetic justice were ultimately defeated by the patriarchal romance and Classic curse paradigms. Given that so much of the imagery deployed both for and against curses was feminized, this victory of patriarchy over proto-feminism was a defence not only of colonialism, but also of the penetrative sexual metaphor that represented it and made it seem natural and acceptable. The male authors of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century curse tales capitalized upon a genre established by women, earning a more lasting fame and seizing for themselves a story and a sensitive voice that had once expressed, however obliquely, women's resentment at their own oppression by patriarchy.

Following the empathetic vision of the mummy's revenge came its inverse: revenge as misbehaviour, as a threat to the passivity demanded of the things that capitalists and colonialists treated as objects. We might feel empathy with foreigners with whom we imagine we share common experiences, but this is a simplistic popular antidote to racism that collapses in the face of conflict (Lutz and Collins 1993:282); pity for Tutankhamun was abandoned when his fabulous treasures beckoned. The elaboration of mummies' abject traits suppressed the idea that vengeful mummies might be justified by making them appear evil. The powers-that-be purge the subversiveness

from everyday ideas before presenting them back to the public (Gramsci 1985:35–6); Classic films critique archaeology and sympathize with mummies as Preclassic curses did, only to truncate viewers' sympathy for mummies and reconfirm conservative values.

My comparison of museum visitors' statements with popular themes shows that ambiguity underlies the status of mummies: are they sentient or not? Classic films portray the dilemma with plots that oscillate between support for archaeology and for the sanctity of the dead; some visitors cannot decide whether education and research justify the excavation of tombs. Filmmakers and visitors take a practical approach to ethical issues, aligning themselves with dominant values or privileging their own interests. Therefore, fictional archaeologists are victorious and visitors, while troubled by the exhibition of human remains, retain their curiosity. However idealistic in conception, moral codes flex to accommodate political agendas, economic imperatives, personal advantage and the constraints of circumstance.

By incorporating Joseph Campbell's *Dragon Principle* (1988:184), cinema converted the mummy from a symbol of audiences' values into a threat to them. A corpse hoarding treasure prompts revulsion of waste, thereby appealing to consumerism and the valuing of archaeological knowledge. In offering consumers an Egypt amenable to possession, such satisfaction of avarice by proxy suggests that mummy films have a neocolonial, as well as consumerist, function: materialism substitutes for an archaic, acquisitive colonialism. Like romances that recalled obsolete economic relations (Daly 1994:46), the fantasy of wresting spoils from mummies is regressive. It pines for times when appropriation was unopposed by Egyptians and caused Europeans no regret. Since the West no longer possesses Egypt, it must create its own Little Egypt to feed to citizens it raises with an appetite for consumption.

Recent popular culture has converted the antithetical roles and abject qualities of cinematic mummies into more generalized signifiers of difference. Mummies can represent any form of disorder through the specific image of filth, which suggests that pollution is unconsciously regarded as a major threat in industrialized societies. Mummies' exaggerated abjection may result from unfamiliarity with seeing and handling human remains; today, interventions by funeral and medical professionals and demographic changes, such as lower infant mortality rates amongst privileged groups, often mask death and decay.

As mummies were reconfigured as pollutants, many became separated from curse contexts. This increased their versatility – they could now represent concepts pertinent to Halloween and children's jokes – but mockery and isolation from a moral milieu also reduced their power to provoke ethical debate. Excision of the hubris stage of the curse from juvenile narratives made mummies' violence seem unprovoked, further abjecting them so that some children now fear being attacked by mummies in museums. Since many museum visitors regard exhibited mummies as ugly or dirty, or refer to

stereotypes to determine their authenticity, the Postclassic paradigm has superseded Classic films as the principal influence upon public perceptions. In dehumanizing mummies, it can predispose some visitors to accept their exhibition without question. Other factors also account for this acceptance, such as visitors' enjoyment of exhibits, their scepticism about mummies' authenticity and their unfamiliarity with the corporeal aspects of death. Nevertheless, the coincidence of current popular abjection of Egyptian mummies with widespread public tolerance of their display is striking.

Mummymania and museums

Visitors invest mummies' visible traits with meaning since these, unlike tactile and olfactory qualities, are readily accessible and seem explicable in terms of the abject imagery associated with fictional mummies. This is the latest manifestation of a Victorian belief that mummies' appearances reveal their personalities. The use of repugnant characteristics to signify evil characters, along with the frequency of popular references to ambulatory mummies, causes some children to interpret exhibited mummies as ugly and fear them as monsters.

Exhibits with complex layouts and low lighting resemble stereotypical haunted tombs. A hyperreal effect can be created not only by deliberate imitation of historical settings (Eco 1987), but also by the unintentional resemblance of exhibits to fictional settings. Visitors might mistake these resemblances for historical recreations, or treat them as fantasies-come-true. If museums fail to explain the appearances of displays and mummies, visitors may seek explanations in stereotypes.

More detailed explanations of the 'hows and whys' of mummification are required in museums. However, their provision would not necessarily displace conflicting ideas; people may absorb information from a variety of sources without being aware that discrepancies exist between them. Museums could therefore raise visitors' awareness of their own unconscious associations between fictional and actual mummies, deprogramming visitors before presenting Egyptological data. Museum curatorial and security divisions could cooperate to reduce references to stereotypes by security personnel. It may be more difficult to eradicate shop products that depict stereotypes, since museums depend upon sales of such goods and some shops are managed externally – but here too, there is incentive for curators to establish greater communication with other museum employees.

Visitors' beliefs about the origins of mummy fragments demonstrate a need for their circumstances of acquisition to be divulged. '[T]he history of its own collection and display should be a visible aspect of any exhibition' (Clifford 1988:229). Museums have often obscured mummies' removal from their original contexts and their relocation in new ones. Their hyperreal Little Egypts have been represented as vainglorious in popular narratives

in which mummies destroy or appropriate their museum environments. Although displays are periodically updated, problematic elements that might be excluded or explained, such as tomblike settings and upright coffins, are still incorporated. Instead, museums could present mummies in contemporary and historical, as well as ancient, contexts as people who have travelled through time and space, not simply appeared out of nowhere to join us.

Mummymania and politics

Given the popularity of *The Mummy* and its sequel *The Mummy Returns* (Sommers dir. 1999, 2001) – films that accentuate the abjection and villainy of mummies – it seems that public debates about archaeological ethics have been largely resolved in favour of a glamourized, materialistic (mis)interpretation of archaeology. The disabling of public opposition to archaeology may have been unplanned at its inception. However, this does not rule out deliberation, since media products may consciously isolate and amplify themes from the earlier works they imitate, albeit with concern for profit rather than morality. Audiences must have embraced Classic films' upbeat endorsement of Western values. The ongoing popularity of the Classic curse, which endures despite the emergence of Postclassic scenarios in which mummies win or curses are absent, reflects the fundamentally conservative role of the mummy genre. This suggests that the neutralization of resistance to dominant practices need not occur as an organized project undertaken at a given moment in time, or as a function of government, but that it is a perpetual task of mass culture that can be highly compatible with its role of procuring profit. Hegemony does not always consist of politicians' conspiracies to quash threats to their power; an unconscious conservatism, obscured by a profit incentive and superficial innovations of imagery, is a function of the media. Mass culture may simply advocate paths of least resistance to the status quo by identifying practical, rather than moral, values as the most workable determinants of solutions to controversial issues. Ethical debates about mummies might never be resolved, were archaeological research, education and entertainment not favoured by governments, citizens and the media alike.

Mummymania and ethics

Mummies are routinely exempted from the ethical considerations that prompt the removal of some other types of human remains from display (Young 1997:21). Their lack of immediate cultural connection with living groups, the long tradition of displaying them and their dehumanization as products of a civilization regarded as alien (Pearce 1995:348), has established widespread curatorial and public support for their display. One could argue that mummies' reburial in Egypt would solve ethical dilemmas (Young 1997:40–1),

but since many stereotypes derive from unfamiliarity with mummies, their removal from exhibition would only exacerbate the problem. Some complaints about mummies' display should not be deemed legitimate ethical protests because they are grounded in an abhorrence of mummies' appearances that seems to have been conditioned by abject popular imagery, and even some critics of mummy exhibits nevertheless enjoy them.

Attitudes towards mummies are exceptional not only with regard to ethical issues but also to mass culture; no other ancient human remains have inspired so much modern mythmaking. The most responsible way to treat mummies, in my view, is to combat the prejudices that cause museum visitors to laugh or cringe at them – and this necessitates their continued display, at least for the time being. The refutation of stereotypes could potentially legitimate mummies' display. However, the exhibition of fragments, given the likelihood of their objectification by viewers or display formats, can only be justified by their use to demonstrate means of studying human remains or to explain despoliation. The validity of displaying mummies and fragments is not determined solely by their status as human remains but also by the intentions of their exhibitors and viewers. What is really at stake is not *whether* human remains should be displayed, but *why* or *why not*. Their exhibition in some other contexts, such as saints' bodies displayed in churches, is largely uncontroversial, which goes to show that it is not the fact of display but visitors' attitudes towards what is displayed that matters most. Religion teaches pilgrims to regard saints' relics with awe, but the media's preparation of museum visitors for encounters with mummies is abysmal. Greater understanding and acceptance of death, along with a repudiation of abjection, could transform public perceptions of mummies. Museums themselves could effect this change.

If curators consider whether to remove mummies from exhibition in the more distant future, visitors ought to be consulted. Despite routine liaisons with indigenous and ethnic communities, museums seldom consult the public with regard to Egyptian mummies. Provision for feedback at the Manchester Museum and *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams*, the Brooklyn Museum Visitors' Book and the Petrie Museum's discussion groups took the first steps towards standard recruitment of visitors as active participants in Egyptological exhibits' design. In the absence of indigenous peoples' claims upon mummies, individuals whose ethical protests against their exhibition are based upon sympathetic identification with them could be treated as consultants. Equally though, other sympathizers may favour retaining mummy displays because for them (and for me), coming face to face with an ancient Egyptian is an intensely spiritual, uplifting experience (Plate 6.1). Some recognition should be given to those who have inherited a stake in the management of ancient Egypt's legacy simply through historical contingency.

Museums must utilize their unique role as places in which people can



Plate 6.1 Encountering mummies in museums has become a tradition. Unwrapped mummy of an unknown man, Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, San José. Photo: © J. Day 1996. Used with permission of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, San José, California.

contemplate issues of identity and culture, and as vessels for authentic things from the distant past, including human remains, which they are capable of displaying with sensitivity (Innes 1997:23–4). They are the sole institutions positioned to compare fictional with actual mummies – if only curators would preface exhibits with forays into popular culture. Museums helped give rise to stereotypes and they continue to both create and satisfy the public's fascination with mummies; the least they can do is to provide visitors with alternatives to stereotypes as terms in which to think about ancient Egypt.

The mummy, our mother

In Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed the abjection of mummies as polluted characters. In Chapter 4, I explained the role of mummies' abjection in children's growing sense of self, their initial identification with mummies' disobedience to social norms that gives way to identification with those norms and separation of the Self from one's mother. These ideas, based upon the work of Julia Kristeva, bring new insight into some Classic films' use of an incest motif. In Chapter 3, I argued that all Classic films are based upon a rape metaphor, whereas only several also refer to incest, so that incest is not part of the Classic formula. Yet together with rape and abjection, it reveals the ultimate purpose of all mummymania: the creation of the Self, whether an individual or an entire society.

According to Kristeva, the development of self-awareness and independent identity begins by divorcing oneself from one's mother. Individuals achieve this separation by turning from the filthy infantile world towards civilized values, learning language and hygiene (1982:13, 61, 71–2). Societies may assist this separation by abjecting an archetypal mother figure to discourage any desire to return to her and to one's infantile state (pp.63–4). To return to that state would be to return to both pollution and a lack of consciousness of oneself as an individual – to a state in which the Self has not been separated from the Other. Thus the collapse of Self and Other is a condition of filth; the loss of one's sense of identity is a thing to be feared that involves both pollution and a metaphoric union with one's mother: 'Defilement . . . amounts to tampering with the mother. Defilement is incest considered as transgression of the boundaries of what is clean and proper' (p.85). The Classic mummy has become abject by attempting the unnatural act of reviving a dead lover (Im-Ho-Tep, Kharis) or attaining immortality (Tera). Those who violate the mummy's tomb repeat the mummy's error of sacrilege and pollute themselves too, through the metaphoric rape of a sacred precinct, if not also a metaphoric incestuous relationship with a dead princess–mother whose partner, the mummy–father, they attempt to supplant (Del Vecchio and Johnson 1992:124–5; Hutchings 1993:71–6). Whether one interprets the tomb violators' hubris as rape or incest, in both cases the

mummy's abjection is a visible warning to those who would repeat the mummy's crime. The mummy's filth and abnormal undead state mark this character as a figurative mother, the entity that tomb violators should not interfere with. Interference (read: incest), which brings infectious pollution in the form of a curse, is tantamount to the collapse of the violator's Self with the mummy-Other. Get too close to the mummy and you too will experience his or her excruciating death or death-in-life. The mummy's defeat is the mother's defeat, a successful struggle to wrest oneself away from her. It is also the conquest of the East by the West, the West's establishment of itself as an independent identity. Many societies studied by pioneering anthropologists raised physical filth into the sacred plane as ritual defilement, using the threat of abjection – a pollution taboo – to segregate their members by sex or other factors (Kristeva 1982:65). The abject is therefore not merely symbolic, but actively creates both individuals and social groups (*ibid.*:65, 68); here, it creates the West. It also serves male power. In her submission, the mother figure serves the patriarchy that stifles her (Creed 1993:165), so when cinema converted female authors' mummy into an abject, defeatable monstrosity, patriarchy crushed feminism in one corner of the Western imagination.

Freudian readings cast the mummy as a father figure in an Oedipal struggle, but this need not contradict mummies' mother-role. Insofar as the subtext of some films is incest, mummies play fathers. Yet fictional mummies' abjection seems designed to typecast them in the collective imaginary as our mother-opposites, so that the core subject of Classic films is the constitution and defence of the Self and the West, not incest, rape or even the ethics of human remains management. Sexual motifs and ethical debates, inherited from a Victorian popular culture steeped in death and brimming with repressed sexuality, simply provide structural frameworks upon which relationships between characters can be built in order to express broader themes. Most Postclassic images of mummies, designed for children, make no use of sexual metaphors and do not debate ethical issues, but perpetuate the theme of 'them and us' established by these motifs earlier on. Postclassic stereotypes still emphasize the importance of differentiating oneself from one's mother by portraying mummies as our polluting foils to promote hygiene. For two centuries, then, the mummy has been a glyph for difference, warning the Self to resist the forces that could collapse it back into its Other, whether on a social level – we must not become barbarians – or a personal level: we must remain independent, individual, ourSelves.

The mummy in the mirror

The ambulatory mummy is 'an almost oneiric figure, the embodied conscience of his victims' (Barnes and Rigby 1995:31). It follows that this character combines opposites, Self and Other, personifying conflict and contradiction,

but mummies do more than externalize an internal moral dilemma. They have been invested with another duality of tremendous psychological resonance. The wrapping of mummies and their placement in coffins articulates a principle of visibility/invisibility that can be adapted to themes of sex and death. The unwrapping of mummified bodies can be erotic or horrific. Children, fascinated by death as an unfamiliar thing (save for seeing dead pets or the deaths of people depicted by the news media), are excited or wary at the prospect of seeing a mummy exposed. The identities of fictional wrapped people are obscured, and they may not necessarily be dead. The concealment of a mummy within its coffin raises the question of whether it is there at all. Expect the unexpected: expect a corpse and find a beautiful sleeping woman; expect a disguised friend and find a monster; expect to catch a mummy resting in his coffin and find it empty – and the creature creeping up behind you, poised to strike. Like the ethical conundrum embodied by mummies, this ‘peekaboo’ device attracts and repulses a desire to objectify the mummy. Classic films oscillate between directing audience sympathy towards the mummy and towards archaeologists, and fictional tombs both invite and punish penetration. Similarly, the act or thought of looking upon a mummy can both attract and repulse the museum visitor or the character about to unswathe a body too beautiful or horrible to imagine. Popular culture has never reached consensus as to whether mummies are people or objects, so that the paradoxes of their status as living or dead, absent or present, friend or foe colour their representations. The hallmark of the curse is contradiction and uncertainty – an inability to decide whether knowledge or sanctity is more valuable where one must prevail at the expense of the other. Curses and fictional mummies are grand artefacts of Westerners’ indecisiveness and fear in an age of overwhelming change.

It is ironic that the ambulatory mummy, now synonymous with Egyptian curses, was the means by which their critical bases were subverted. As the abject embodied, this character became a useful means of referencing and symbolically containing some major threats to society: pollution, death, difference and opposition from outsiders. It was not government conspiracies to suppress opposition to archaeology, but mass culture’s production of useful cultural currency in a quest for markets that disabled the curse’s ethical critique. Culture so desperately requires ways to depict objects of fear that it exploits the abject potential of mere happenstance: an actor’s arthritic walk or inflexible mask, aesthetic considerations and restrictions of space in museums that cause coffins to be displayed upright. Stereotyping flourishes because it establishes representational conventions (Said 1991:14). I have suggested that museums could dissuade visitors from referencing stereotypes but, admittedly, this would require visitors to disregard a system of representing the abject that is useful to them outside of museums, and to restrain their imaginations even though creative interpretation of exhibits generates pleasure and personal meaning. The restoration of ancient Egyptians’ dignity

necessitates what could be viewed as an attack upon modern cultures. However, it is the responsibility of the living to revise their behaviours in order to manage and represent the remains of the dead with greater sensitivity.

Only insofar as mass culture has a conservative function was the curse's radical ethical argument deliberately suppressed. In my view, the neutralization of resistance to archaeology was the by-product of a popular impulse to broaden the field of contest between lay and professional understandings of ancient Egypt by shifting the emphasis from ethical debates, which could never be resolved, to the production of dominant images of mummies, which the combined public and media possessed the resources to achieve. Desire for discursive rule more so than for ethical behaviour seems to have motivated popular ideologies, as if professionals' domination of Egyptology irked the public more than professional treatments of mummies did. Many laypeople 'need to touch the past and to translate it into a language that [they] can understand' (Innes 1997:22). Given that fictional mummies have retained their original animation or sentience despite acquiring a legion of ghastly attributes, this language is evidently emotive and sympathetic. It was for allegedly failing to treat the subjects of their study with sympathy that archaeologists were lambasted in newspapers and cursed in myth. Yet as vicarious participation in archaeology became desirable and possible, sympathy for mummies was repudiated. The mummy therefore became useless for ethical debate, fit only as the butt of jokes and fount of horror. 'The mummy's curse', indeed: the *mummy* is cursed.

APPENDIX

Questionnaires, interviews and participant observation

Notes

- 1 All surveys were voluntary. Interviews were tape recorded with interviewees' permission.
- 2 Many Manchester Museum interviewees had not yet seen the mummy exhibit, so their responses reflect preconceptions only, except where interviewees chose to leave the survey desk, look at mummy fragments on display and return to the desk to answer questions.
- 3 To improve surveys, successive alterations were made to the number of options in some questions or their phrasing or sequence. Square bracketed text indicates changes made to the first survey run questions in subsequent runs or questions or options deleted in subsequent runs.

1 Public questionnaire

Runs

- 1 *Through the Eye of Horus* exhibition, Western Australian Museum, Perth, Australia (30 September–22 October 1995), 271 respondents [WAM].
- 2 The Egyptian Room, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, Australia (20 November–12 December 1995), 251 respondents [SAM].
- 3 Egyptian art galleries, Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA (1–13 October 1996), 137 respondents [TBM].

Schedule with options

- i* *Place of residence {TBM: Where do you live?}*
- Metropolitan area
 - Elsewhere in this state
 - Interstate
 - Overseas

- ii *Country of birth {TBM: Where were you born?}*
 - This country
 - Overseas
- iii *Highest completed level of education*
 - Primary school [SAM/TBM]
 - Some secondary school
 - Completed secondary school (year 12)
 - [WAM/SAM: Some technical college or equivalent]
 - [WAM/SAM: Completed technical college, trade qualification or diploma]
 - Some tertiary (college of advanced education or university)
 - Completed tertiary [TBM: Completed bachelor's degree]
 - Postgraduate studies [TBM: Graduate studies]
- iv *Your age group*
 6–12 {SAM/TBM: 6–9; 10–12}; 13–17; 18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; 55–64; 65+}
- v *Gender*
 Male; Female
- 1 *How much did you already know about ancient Egypt before you attended the exhibition? {TBM: . . . before you saw the Egyptian display here?}*
 1 Nothing at all . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 A great deal [SAM/TBM: A lot]
- 2 *What has been your main source of information about ancient Egypt?*
 - Movies or fiction programmes on television
 - Novels, adult fiction books, or children's fiction books [SAM/TBM: Novels or adult fiction books]
 - [SAM/TBM: Children's fiction books]
 - Cartoons on television, in comics or in newspapers
 - [SAM/TBM: School]
 - [SAM/TBM: Museums]
 - News reports in newspapers or on television
 - Television documentaries
 - Non-fiction books or non-fiction magazines
 - [SAM/TBM: The Bible]
 - [SAM/TBM: Holiday in Egypt]
 - Other
- 3 *What did you expect the human mummies to look like?*
 - Whole body, bandaged, in coffin
 - Whole body, bandaged
 - Whole body, unwrapped
 - Piece of body, bandaged
 - Piece of body, unwrapped

- None of the above
- {SAM/TBM: 3. *Have you ever been to a display of Egyptian human mummies before?*} {SAM: Yes; No} {TBM: Yes, the one at this museum; Yes, at another museum; No}
- 4 *Did the human mummies on display look like you expected?*
 1 They looked just as expected . . . 2 . . . 3 They looked more or less as expected . . . 4 . . . 5 They looked nothing like what I expected
 {SAM/TBM: 4. *What did you expect the human mummies to look like?*}
- {Whole body, bandaged, in coffin}
 - {Whole body, bandaged}
 - {Whole body, unwrapped}
 - {Piece of body, bandaged}
 - {Piece of body, unwrapped}
 - {None of the above}
- 5 *What one or two words best describe your first reaction when you saw the human mummies on display?* {Written response}
- 6 {TBM: 7a.} *How do you feel about ancient Egyptian human mummies on display in museums?*
- They should all be displayed
 - {TBM: Mummies should be displayed because they are educational}
 - {TBM: Mummies should be displayed because it's good to see them for real}
 - {TBM: Mummies should be displayed if the Egyptians don't mind}
 - {TBM: Mummies attract people to museums}
 - {TBM: Ugly mummies should not be displayed}
 - {TBM: Pieces of mummies, e.g. heads and hands, should not be displayed}
 - {WAM/SAM} Most of them should be displayed
 - {SAM: Some of them should be displayed}
 - Undecided {TBM: I can't decide}
 - Most of them should not be displayed
 - None of them should be displayed {SAM/TBM: Mummies should never be displayed}
 - {SAM/TBM: Mummies should be displayed if it will not damage their preservation}
 - I haven't thought about it
- {TBM: 7b. *Please explain why you feel this way.*} {Written response}
- 7 {TBM: 8.} *Do you believe that the 'Curse of the Pharaohs' or 'King Tut's Curse' can affect people today?* {SAM/TBM: *Some people talk about 'The Curse of the Pharaohs' or 'King Tut's Curse'. Do you believe that these 'curses' can affect people today?*}

- [WAM/SAM] Yes
 - [TBM: Yes, if you believe in the curse, you could be affected]
 - [TBM: Yes, there could be invisible powers unknown to science]
 - [TBM: Yes, there could be a scientific explanation, e.g. tomb germs]
 - [WAM/SAM] They probably can
 - Undecided [TBM: I'm not sure]
 - [WAM/SAM] I doubt it
 - No
 - I don't know what the 'Curses' are [SAM/TBM: I've never heard of these 'Curses']
- 8 *{TBM: 6.} Which THREE of the following things do you most closely associate with ancient Egyptian human mummies? {SAM/TBM: List the things that ancient Egyptian human mummies remind you of most.}*
- Pyramids
 - Archaeologists
 - Museums
 - Gold
 - Jewels
 - 'The Curse of the Pharaohs' or 'King Tut's Curse'
 - King Tut (Tutankhamun)
 - Death
 - Horror movies
 - Mummies coming back to life
- 9 *Which of the two pictures below best represents the way mummies were entombed by the ancient Egyptians?*
Picture A (prone coffin); Picture B (upright coffin)
- 10 *How well do you think modern fiction books, cartoons, movies and toys depict the realities of mummies?*
1 Very badly . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 Very well
{SAM/TBM: 10. Do you think that movies tell the truth about mummies?}
[1 Yes . . . 2 . . . 3 Undecided . . . 4 . . . 5 No; 6 I haven't seen any of these movies]
- 11 *Did the exhibition {SAM: The Egyptian Room; TBM: the Egyptian display here} change your views about mummies?*
1 No . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 5 Yes
{WAM/SAM} Optional free comment section {Written response}

2 Public interview

Runs

- 1 The Egyptian Room, South Australian Museum, Adelaide, Australia (18–19 and 2–3 December 1995), 55 respondents [SAM].

- 2 Ancient Egypt galleries, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA (14–15 and 21–22 September 1996), 56 respondents [FMNH].
- 3 Ancient Egypt galleries, Manchester Museum, Manchester, UK (26 October 1996), 20 respondents [MM].

Schedule with options

- i *Place of residence*
 - Metropolitan area
 - Elsewhere in this state
 - Interstate
 - Overseas
 - ii *Age*
6–12 [exact age recorded]; 13–17 [exact age recorded]; 18–24; 25–34; 35–44; 45–54; 55–64; 65+
 - iii *Gender*
Male/female
- 1 *When I say 'Egyptian mummies', what comes into your mind?*
{FMNH/MM: 1a. What did you think of when you saw the mummies here, i.e. what do you associate with mummies, or what do they remind you of? 1b. What does a typical or proper mummy look like?}
 - 2 *Have you heard of the 'curse of the pharaohs' or 'the curse of King Tut's tomb'?*
(Yes/no) *Could you tell me what it is?*
{FMNH/MM: 2b. According to curse stories, what's wrong with opening a tomb, taking objects and touching the mummy? Do you think it's really wrong for archaeologists to enter tombs and examine mummies, or is this untrue? 2c. Do you believe in the curse? If so, do you think it is an invisible force unknown to science, a physical phenomenon (e.g. tomb germs), or a case of mind over matter ('if you believe in the curse, it can affect you')? Could people who don't believe in the curse be affected by it? 2d. Who created curses/the idea of curses – the ancient Egyptians or somebody else? 2e. Where did you hear about the curse?}
 - 3 *How do you feel about Egyptian mummies being put on display in museums?*
{FMNH/MM: 3b. What's good about their display? Are they educational, and if so, what did you learn? Or are they just 'drawcards'? Is it just good to see mummies for real? 3c. Are there any ethical or other problems with their display? Does anyone object to their display?}
{FMNH/MM: 4a. Do you think that the mummies on display here are all real? (If not) Why do you think they are replicas? (I explain that they are real.) Do the mummies look different to what you expected, or is it just hard to believe that they are real dead bodies? Have you seen a real mummy before?}

- 4 {FMNH/MM: 5.} {Time permitting} Have you seen the mummified human head and feet {FMNH/MM: pieces of mummies} on display? (Yes/no) What do you think happened to them? {FMNH/MM: 5b. Did you wonder how they came to be just pieces? (I explain why they are fragmented.) 5c. Should museums explain how they got their mummies, and why some of them are in pieces?}

3 Participant observation

LT = long-term installation; TE = temporary exhibition; TR = travelling exhibition

- Western Australian Museum, Perth, Australia (30 September–22 October 1995), *Through the Eye of Horus* (TE).
- South Australian Museum, Adelaide, Australia (15 November–12 December 1995), *The Egyptian Room* (LT).
- Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, San José, USA (6–9 September 1996), *Mummy Gallery* (Gallery B) (LT).
- Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA (12–16 and 21–2 September 1996), *Inside Ancient Egypt: Burial Scenes* (LT).
- Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, USA (18–19 September 1996), *Temples, Tells and Tombs* (LT).
- Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, USA (25–30 September and 13 October 1996), *Temples, Tombs and the Egyptian Universe* (LT).
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA (1–11 and 18 October 1996), *Egyptian Art* (LT).
- Manchester Museum, Manchester, UK (23–9 October 1996), *Ancient Egypt: Mummification* (LT).
- New Walk Museum, Leicester, UK (5–7 November 1996), *Ancient Egypt* (LT).
- British Museum, London, UK (9–19 November 1996), *Mummies* (Room 61) (LT).
- Western Australian Museum, Perth, Australia (April–May 1998), *Life and Death Under the Pharaohs* (TR).
- South Australian Museum, Adelaide, Australia (25–9 January 1999), *The Egyptian Room* (LT).
- New Walk Museum, Leicester, UK (20 September 2004), *Ancient Egypt* (LT).
- Manchester Museum, Manchester, UK (22 September 2004), *Ancient Egypt: Mummification* (LT).

NOTES

1 UNRAVELLING THE MUMMY

- 1 The term 'mummy', while popularly associated with Egyptian remains, has been applied to bodies preserved by various artificial or natural means (Brier 1998; Quigley 1998). I use Pace's (1974:156) restricted definition of mummies as fleshed ancient Egyptian human remains artificially preserved via desiccation, although I will also mention naturally desiccated Egyptian bodies.
- 2 Brier (1996:299–322); Frayling (1992); Green (1992); Humbert et al. (1994); Merrillees et al. (1990); Towers and Wallace (dirs 1992); Trigger (1995).
- 3 An exception is Renan Pollès' book (2001), available only in French. It contains the most extensive collection of photographs of mummy-themed objects and lists of mummy films and literature yet published, to which I have referred.
- 4 Rice and MacDonald (2003:3–4) argue that meaning does inhere in ancient Egyptian motifs, insofar as the Egyptians were probably the first to represent some fundamental, universal concepts in concrete form. Consequently, these motifs were borrowed by many later cultures, accumulating further meaning along the way, and can be regarded as archetypes in the Jungian sense. In contrast, I use the British Cultural Studies idea that an image or narrative contains clues – archetypes, perhaps – that indicate its preferred interpretation. The Western fictional ambulatory mummy is a modern invention, so can only incorporate pre-existing archetypes, such as those embodying decay, death and disorder. The changing attributes of fictional mummies (from romantic to horrific to humorous traits) support this view.
- 5 The mainstream interpretations of curses I discuss are not the only ones. Some Black people regard curses as proof of the efficacy of African magic and its punishment of Western colonialists. Conversely, some Jewish Americans, like many Christians, viewed the ancient Egyptians as slave-whipping despots and misguided polytheists; a song about Tutankhamun's tomb, *Der Meleks Keiver (The King's Tomb)*, mocked the idea that dead pagans could take magical revenge. Montserrat (2003) planned to discuss these texts in his unfinished book *The Masks of Tutankhamun*.
- 6 Fagan (1992); Hope (2000); Humbert et al. (1994); Merrillees (1995); Merrillees et al. (1990); Montserrat (1999a); Trigger (1995); Ucko (2003).
- 7 While Armayor (1978) and others dispute Herodotus' claim to have visited Egypt in the fifth century BC (Spencer 1991:112), citing errors in his account, the accuracy of his description of embalming has recently become apparent (Wood dir. 1995).
- 8 de Sélincourt interprets Herodotus' phrase as 'flint knife'. Brier's 'sharp Ethiopian

stone' translation makes more sense given the efficacy of obsidian, a black volcanic glass imported by the Egyptians from Ethiopia, in Brier's experimental mummification of a human cadaver (Wood dir. 1995).

- 9 Although some Egyptological texts maintain that the brain could be removed in pieces, a mummification experiment (Wood dir. 1995) has shown that the pieces cannot fit through a nostril. To diffuse unpleasant odours, embalmers worked outdoors. In a laboratory heated to simulate these conditions, researchers discovered that stirring the brain with the metal rod used to punch through the ethmoid bone caused it to liquefy; heat accelerates decay.

2 SEX AND DEATH

- 1 Shortly after their first publication in French, Théophile Gautier's stories were published in English, so are included here.
- 2 This passage appropriates Edwards' description of Saqqara (1877:75–6), but Fletcher probably encountered a similar scene.
- 3 Cartonnage, a kind of papier-mâché made from plaster and scraps of cloth or papyrus, was used in the Middle Kingdom to make funerary masks (Spencer 1991:173) but became a more affordable substance from which to make coffins during and after the New Kingdom (ibid.:178).
- 4 Aboriginal remains in Australia, their antiquity unknown, were rejected as 'primitive' in favour of the ancient Egyptian and Classical civilizations from which modern Europe traced its roots. Aboriginal rock art is now known to have been produced tens of thousands of years ago.
- 5 The mummy's cartonnage mask and lack of jewellery (Fletcher 1892:51) suggest a middle-class burial.
- 6 Pringle (2001:190–1) questions whether mummy wrappings were processed in American paper mills, but there were many contemporary allusions to it (for example, *Punch* 1847). A new study has uncovered proof of the conversion of mummy rags into paper, including sheets for the printing press (Wolfe et al. 2003; Wolfe and Singerman forthcoming), such as a Chelsea Manufacturing Company broadside that declares the source of its material (1859). Oral retellings of the Stanwood story may thus have embellished actual events (Reeder 2003) in order to make the cholera incident look like an Egyptian curse. Ignorance of the real causes of cholera probably contributed to this view.
- 7 Corroborating evidence for this phenomenon is limited to several reports of questionable credibility that predate Twain's account (Wolfe et al. 2003). Mummies' flammability was common knowledge before and around the time of the publication of Twain's story (see allusions to it by Alcott 1998:75; Anonymous 1838:376; Anonymous 1855:61) and could have inspired or lent impetus to the locomotive fuel idea.
- 8 Although some religious texts made provision for unummified people to enter the afterlife, mummification was preferred as a means of attaining immortality (Hornung 1992:105); freedom of movement and restoration of bodily faculties in the afterlife depended upon the corpse's physical integrity (ibid.:169).
- 9 The first ellipsis in this quotation is part of the original text.
- 10 A ceremony performed at the door of a tomb. The human-shaped coffin was placed upright and an adze touched upon its lips to magically reanimate the deceased's body in the afterlife (Ikram and Dodson 1998:16).
- 11 Louis Penicher (1699:70–4) recounts a similar story told by Prince Nikolaj Radziwill (1601:189; Pollès 2001:77–8), in which the ghosts of two mummies appear to a priest aboard a ship until their bodies are jettisoned. Green (1992:35)

describes this story as the first European account of a curse but Bodin's manuscript is older. The mariners' superstition must predate these stories, considering the antiquity of the *mumia* trade. The question is whether pre-Western curse beliefs stem from Arabic lore or whether the Arabs adopted their rudiments from native Egyptian traditions that evolved from ancient ideas; consider the living mummy and sin and punishment theme in *The Tale of Khamuas and Neneferkaptab* (Griffith trans. 1900).

- 12 Even the mariners' belief must have originated in a taboo against disturbing the dead, albeit one that may not initially have applied exclusively to Egyptian bodies. Coronaeus suggests that not only mummies could be cursed, for 'the same thing would happen to other corpses if the tomb had been violated' (Bodin 1975:14). Fridericus remarks that only unburied bodies may be safely transported, while exhumed ones are jinxed; he gives an example of a curse upon an exhumed Pythagorean (p.85). The discussants' consensus seems to be that it is the greater frequency with which Egyptian bodies are profaned – not any power unique to mummies – that makes them so dangerous, although Octavius suggests that the 'demons' who guard their tombs envy the people who enjoy the curative benefits of *mumia* (p.85).
- 13 In 1934, E. A. Wallis Budge stated that published accounts by his correspondent Douglas Murray, an occultist (Taylor 1994:1), and by William Stead, a Spiritualist and journalist, who both believed that the face of the coffin represented 'a living soul in torment', caused the public to conflate the newly acquired EA22542 with an earlier mummy poltergeist story (cited by the British Museum 1995). The belief that EA22542 sank the *Titanic* probably arose because Stead perished in the disaster. Furthermore, survivors recalled that he told a mummy story during the last dinner on board; perhaps he retold one of the stories published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* that he edited (Montserrat 2003). Some authors, including Budge (1920:392, footnote 1), deny that there was a mummy on the *Titanic*. However, according to Montserrat (2003), some of the first-class passengers had just returned from Egypt with antiquities, including souvenirs and larger items bound for museums. Insurance claims were made for unspecified lost antiquities, which could have included a coffin and/or mummy.
- 14 Freud does mention women as castrators (1957:205, 207), but attributes their motivation primarily to penis envy and only partly to 'hostile bitterness against the man' (ibid.:205), missing an opportunity to identify the vagina as the castrating implement (Creed 1993:120).
- 15 Copperthwaite (1976:14) cites a London *Times* article (1888) that reports only that Ingram was killed by an elephant and does not mention a mummy's hand. Ingram, a veteran of military campaigns in Africa, might have owned a hand but its 'disc' – possibly a garbled reference to an inscribed bracelet – which is claimed to belong to the British Museum (ibid.:14) does not exist, according to a member of its Egyptian Antiquities Department to whom I spoke in 1996.
- 16 This was, perhaps, a reworking of the poltergeist story that had earlier been incorporated into the Unlucky Mummy story.
- 17 Compare this passage to the narrator's flight from a demon in *How I Became an Egyptian* (Waller 1856:97–9). 'I hear it breathing! Short and hurried respirations come from over my shoulders, at but a few yards' distance' (ibid.:98). This forgotten story from the *Dublin University Magazine* was apparently plagiarized by Doyle, inspiring his athletic cadaver and, thence, Hollywood's ambulatory mummies.
- 18 This double entendre likens a man deprived of alcohol to a soulless mummy. Just as *elixir vitae* revive the mummy, brandy puts spirit into the man – so to speak.

- 19 Corelli might have recalled Stoker's use of this phrase (1978:84); was her anticipation of Tutankhamun's revenge influenced by Tera's vengeance?

3 FEAR AND LOATHING

- 1 Many lesser films inspired by the Classic series were made during and after the 1930s to early 1970s era, including Italian, Spanish and Mexican as well as American and British productions (see Cowie and Johnson 2002: 82–4, 109–40; Frank 1982:188; Lupton 2003:46, footnote 5; Pollès 2001:314–18).
- 2 Classic plot synopses (including Cowie and Johnson 2002:60–108; Feramisco 2003) and some scripts (Mank 2000; Riley ed. 1989) have been published, but I provide my own dialogue transcriptions because actors' and scripts' phrasings can differ.
- 3 Dr Muller may be named after the demotic translator W. Max Müller, mentioned by Griffith (trans. 1900:v).
- 4 Although assigned character names in the credits, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello refer to each other by their real names.
- 5 *Blood* does not specify which woman survives. The director, Seth Holt, altered the planned ending but died without divulging his new plot. Replacement director Michael Carreras created an ambiguous ending, unsure whom Holt intended to win (Brier 1998:17). *The Jewel of Seven Stars* is itself nebulous, depicting (in its 1903 version) a victory of Tera over the protagonists, but also of the Christian God over Tera.
- 6 Although the appearance of Hashmi – suit, fez, moustache – and his worship of a mummy typify a High Priest, Beauchamp performs the role of mummy controller, so that Hashmi's misidentification as the killer forms a subplot. This generates some originality while retaining a staple component of the Classic formula.
- 7 In Homer's *Iliad*, the Trojan prophetess Cassandra foresees the Greeks' attack, but is not believed, so the Trojans are defeated.
- 8 There are overnight museum interlopers in Classic films too, including Youssef Bey and Kharis in *Ghost* and Im-Ho-Tep.
- 9 According to some Classical accounts (including Herodotus II.86–7, de Sélin-court trans. 1996:115), Greco-Roman mummies were placed upright in household ancestral shrines. Misapplied to coffins from earlier periods that were actually interred prone (for instance, Anonymous 1824), Classical accounts may have originated museums' tradition of displaying coffins in a presumed 'authentic' upright position of interment. Limited exhibition space and the need to make coffins' decorations visible also necessitate upright display.
- 10 *Shroud* reconciles the need for separately wrapped limbs with a quest for historical accuracy. Photographic contact sheets from the Hammer archives (illustrated by Kinsey 1997:313) show that Prem's costume was based upon EA6704, a Roman period mummy in the British Museum. Prem, who is said to have lived in 2000BC, predates this mummy by nearly two millennia; Hammer researchers were probably preoccupied with exploiting the Roman mummy's unique, separately wrapped limbs.
- 11 *The Mummy's* novelization explains that Muller has unwrapped Im-Ho-Tep's head (Dreadstone 1977:3).
- 12 Balderston was working on a script adaptation of *She* while writing *The Mummy* and, despite his familiarity with Egyptology, grafted Haggard's un-Egyptian reincarnation motif onto the latter. There is nothing uniquely Egyptian about *The Mummy's* characters and events (Lupton 2003:34), but subsequent Classic filmmakers adopted them anyway.

4 GIGGLES AND GOOSEBUMPS

- 1 Rice's 1835 American play spoofed Bernard's 1833 British play (1890), and was in turn arranged and partly rewritten by others, notably by White (1876) in the 1840s.
- 2 Cleo likens Tut's revival to the awakening of Dr Frankenstein's monster composed of pieces of cadavers. A popular misnomer lends the monster his creator's name.
- 3 This trend might also derive from pompous pharaohs in earlier children's fiction (for instance, Sampson and Dupasquier 1989 and Strong and Sharratt 1997).

5 ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

- 1 The surveys and observations conducted for this study (1995–2004) are listed in the Appendix. For a full record of responses to the 1995–6 surveys, see Appendices 2–8 in Day (2001).
- 2 All fifty-five Adelaide respondents were asked but with limited time to spare, only fifteen of fifty-six Chicago respondents and eleven of nineteen Manchester respondents were asked.
- 3 Male, 18–24 years, question 5, SAM questionnaire 1995.
- 4 Respondents were asked to choose one multiple-choice response, but twenty-four gave two or more types of response, adding twenty-nine extra responses to question 3, 'What did you expect the human mummies to look like?' Results: 'whole body, bandaged, in coffin' 118 (43.54 per cent); 'whole body, bandaged' 73 (26.94 per cent); 'whole body, unwrapped' 27 (9.96 per cent); 'piece of body, bandaged' 27 (9.96 per cent); 'piece of body, unwrapped' 28 (10.33 per cent); 'none of the above' 15 (5.54 per cent); no response 10 (3.69 per cent).
- 5 I identified seven types of response to my open-ended question, 'Do you think that the mummies on display here are all real?' Results: 'one or more whole wrapped bodies are fake' 5 (8.93 per cent); 'one or more unwrapped or partly exposed bodies or fragments are fake' 7 (12.5 per cent); 'one or more unspecified mummies are fake' 11 (19.64 per cent); 'all fake' 7 (12.5 per cent); 'all authentic' 23 (41.07 per cent); 'unsure' 2 (3.57 per cent); no response 1 (1.79 per cent).
- 6 Results: 'one or more whole wrapped bodies are fake' 0 (0 per cent); 'one or more unwrapped or partly exposed bodies or fragments are fake' 2 (10 per cent); 'one or more unspecified mummies are fake' 2 (10 per cent); 'all fake' 1 (5 per cent); 'all authentic' 14 (70 per cent); 'unsure' 0 (0 per cent); no response 1 (5 per cent).
- 7 Male, 6–9 years, question 5, TBM questionnaire 1996.
- 8 *Mastaba* tombs of nobles, dating to the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom, consisted of a rectangular mud-brick or stone superstructure atop a deep vertical shaft leading to a burial chamber. The superstructure contained courtyards and chapels in which food offerings to the dead could be made (Spencer 1991:219–27).
- 9 This includes respondents who thought that some coffins stood upright while others lay prone.
- 10 'Real' can also have other meanings. Edie Watts from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Education Division has heard children looking at wrapped mummies complain, 'Why can't I see a real mummy?' (1996). In her experience, this view reflects children's desire to see a preserved body revealed, to enjoy the thrill of a scary unwrapping or to ascertain whether a body alone constitutes a mummy (2005).
- 11 The Manchester interview sample is too small to quantify. Perth and Adelaide questionnaire respondents were asked whether they believed in curses, but not

about their curse definitions. The Chicago interview results have been adapted for comparison with the Brooklyn questionnaire results by grouping in terms of the categories available in Brooklyn's question 8: psychosomatic (belief in curses brings about their effects), physical phenomena ('scientific' explanations) and invisible powers (supernatural phenomena). Brooklyn questionnaire responses in these categories totalled 19, 8 and 17 respectively and corresponding Chicago responses totalled 7, 7 and 9 (with another 6 respondents failing to specify a cause and two respondents giving two responses each). In Chicago, 6 of 9 invisible powers responses were from people aged under 18; in Brooklyn it was 15 of 17, although another 14 of 19 under-18s stipulated psychosomatic causes.

- 12 Popular appropriations of science (notably von Däniken 1969) have accounted for the technological achievements of ancient civilizations, including Egypt, with reference to extraterrestrial and psychic phenomena. Pseudoscientific theories appropriate the authority and methodology of academic disciplines on behalf of political, racial or spiritual causes, manipulating selectively culled data to 'vindicate' hypotheses (Hiscock 1996). Pseudoscience can act as a religion-of-sorts phrased in a modern scientific idiom (Wedge ed. 1976:113).
- 13 Labels and human remains policies may change when the Petrie Museum moves to Bloomsbury's Panopticon in 2008. The reinstallation will orient the exhibit towards a more general audience, while maintaining support for academic research (Bryan 2004).

6 WRAPPING IT UP

- 1 Many anonymously authored early to mid-nineteenth-century mummy stories were probably written by women, since authorship of 'sensational' literature could have been injurious to a woman's reputation.

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INDEX

Museums and children's non-fiction texts mentioned in this book, along with cited creative works including advertisements, antiques, comics, cartoons, fiction, films, music, posters, television programmes and commercials, toys and video games, are listed by title in separate sub-indices following the main index. Any two identically numbered endnotes that appear on the same page of the endnotes section are each followed in the index by a bracketed chapter number.

- Abbott, Bud 71, 101, 120, 191n4; *see also* *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* (Film sub-index); Costello, Lou
- abjection: alienation from mother-figure 121, 128, 177–8 *see also* mother pun; Classic film developments 60, 65, 81–3, 84, 85, 86–93, 171, 174, 177–9; definition of 55–6; Postclassic elaboration 104, 106–13, 120–1, 123, 125–8, 154, 172, 174, 179; Preclassic origins 56–8, 169; relationships with museum visitors' experiences 155, 157, 161, 164, 167–8, 172–3, 175, 179; *see also* death; Kristeva, Julia; pollution; yucksploitation
- Abrams, Leon 65, 79, 87
- Adelaide Register* 28, 35
- 'A.D.S.' (*New York Times*, 1933) 64
- Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) 15, 35
- Akhenaten and Nefertiti* exhibition 134–5
- Albion* 40–1
- Alcott, Louisa May 28, 46–7, 54–5, 171, 189n7
- Alexander the Great 15
- Ali, Mohammed 20–1
- Alma-Tadema, Lawrence 36
- Alport, Kate 134
- ambulatory coffins 115; *see also* coffins: in fiction and popular lore; talking coffins
- ambulatory mummies 4–5, 5, 46, 56, 64, 67, 72, 81–2, 84, 85, 87–8, 101–2, 104, 112, 114–15, 117, 140, 151, 158, 178–9, 188n4, 190n17; ambulation as intrinsic capacity 123; children's belief in 136–8, 141, 144, 146, 148–50, 152, 173; sleepwalker analogy 115
- Amenhotep IV *see* Akhenaten
- amulets 17, 22, 27, 29, 39, 163; popular references to 46, 66–7
- Amun-Her-Kepesh-Ef: mummy of 36
- analogies: of bandages with clothing 105; of bandages with gift wrap 30, 105; of bandages with sticky tape 105; of bandages with toilet paper 103, 105; hospital analogy 100–1; of mummies with obsolescence 58, 59, 100, 111; of mummies with old age 58, 81, 111–12; spinning top analogy 103, 106; *see also* humour; jokes, puns and riddles; mother pun
- Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* exhibition 129, 158, 160, 164, 167, 175
- anonymity of mummies 31; *see also* nicknaming of mummies
- Anonymous (*The Egyptian Mummy*, 1823) 19
- Anonymous (*The Mummy's Soul*, 1862) 28, 46–7, 54–6, 171
- anthropology 4, 7; field research methods 13–14; fieldwork sites 13; study of popular culture 4; *see also* ethnographic present
- Arabs: arrival in Egypt 15, 20; in fiction 112; *see also* *Book of Buried Pearls*; curses: Middle Ages origins; Islam; *mumia*
- 'Arafekh': mummy of 34
- archaeologists: stereotypes of 5, 9–10, 19, 45, 68–9, 74, 121, 132, 132–3, 152–3,

- 164–6, 180; *see also* Carter, Howard:
characters based upon; Croft, Lara;
Egyptologists; Egyptology; Jones, Indiana
'Arek' (Pypy): mummy of 34
Argus effect 36, 37, 38, 49, 115, 144; *see also*
haunted museums; ubiquity of mummies
Aries, Philippe 106
Asru: mummy of 108, 141
Austin, Jane 46–7, 54–5, 171
authenticity: museum visitors' opinions and
uncertainties about 11, 28, 111, 136–9,
141–4, 148–9, 155, 173, 192n5, 192n6,
192n10; scientific verification of 28–9;
see also autoauthentication; forgery of
mummies; hyperreality
autoauthentication 137–9, 143, 146, 148–9,
158; *see also* authenticity; forgery of
mummies; hyperreality

Bak-Ran: mummy of 27, 30
Balderston, John 67, 87
bandages *see* analogies; unwrapping;
wrapping
Beard, Mary 36
Belzoni, Giovanni Battista 20, 28, 30, 46;
see also *Address to the Mummy*, at Belzoni's
Exhibition (Poetry sub-index)
Bergman, Franz 41, 42
Bernard, William Bayle 39, 57, 60, 72, 95,
102, 114, 192n1
Bey, Turhan 92
Bible: portrayal of Egypt 20, 32, 34–5, 113,
126, 188n5; references to mummification
25, 57; tales and ideas from 52, 55, 57, 83,
152
bitumen 17, 24–5, 35; *see also* *mumia*;
mummification: methods of
Blavatsky, Madame Helena Petrovna 49, 51
Bodin, Jean 45, 189–90n11, 190n12; *see also*
Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of the
Sublime; *mumia*; Penicher, Louis; Radziwill,
Prince Nikolaj
bodysnatching 52
bog mummies 155, 157, 159
Bohemian Club (San Francisco) 33
Book of Buried Pearls 45
Booth, Walter 29, 102, 107
Bothmer, Bernard 154
Bourn, Jill 134, 146
brain removal 16–17, 109–10, 157, 189n9;
see also ethmoid bone; mummification
(methods of; stereotypes of)
Brier, Bob 29, 96, 105–6; mummification
experiment 188–9n8, 189n9

Browne, Sir Thomas 24
Brugsch, Heinrich 26, 30, 40
Buchanan, Colin 94, 109, 112
Budge, Sir E. A. Wallis 23–4, 190n13
Burne-Jones, Edward 36

Campbell, Joseph 29–30, 87, 172; *see also*
Dragon Principle
canopic jars 16, 109; *see also* mummification:
methods of
Carnarvon, Fifth Earl of (George Herbert)
50–1, 54, 60, 75; characters based upon
see films: role of Carnarvon figure
carnivals *see* sideshows
Carter, Howard 50, 75–6, 151; characters
based upon 75
cartonnage 22, 97, 189n3, 189n5; of
Nespanetjerenpere 155
Champollion, Jean-François 46
Chaney Jr, Lon 3, 67, 71, 83, 84, 89; *see also*
Kharis (Universal Pictures character)
Chaney Sr, Lon 87
Cheops *see* Khufu
children: educational texts for 157–8;
juvenile popular culture 91, 94–8, 99,
100–3, 104, 105–28, 137–9, 152, 157–8,
166, 172–3, 178; remarks and behaviour
in museums 12, 14, 77–8, 97–8, 103,
105, 108–9, 111–12, 115, 118, 120–2,
130–1, 132, 133–4, 136–9, 141–2, 144,
146, 148–53, 160–5, 167–8, 172–3,
192n10; *see also* ambulatory mummies:
children's belief in; coffins: children's
spatial fascination with; death: children's
conceptions of; fiction: juvenile; haunted
museums: children's belief in; pollution;
revolution paradigm; stereotypes: effects
upon juvenile understandings of death;
Toy and object sub-index
Christianity 15, 20, 30, 53, 57, 163, 166,
114; popular beliefs and values 6, 21,
27–30, 35–6, 39, 51–2, 57, 60, 62, 86,
136, 159, 175, 188n5, 191n5; *see also*
Bible; Coptic Church; mummification:
early Christian practice of
Christie, Agatha 102; *see also* 'whodunit'
mystery genre
cinema *see* films
circuses *see* sideshows
Classic Period 8–9, 64–83, 84, 85,
86–93; *see also* curses: versions (Classic
version)
Cleopatra VII 6, 15, 20; eponymous
characters 123, 126–7, 192n2 (4)

- coffins 21, 24, 26, 29, 31, 33–4, 36, 38, 48–9, 134–5, 139, 141–2, 145, 189n3; children's spatial fascination with 138; conflation with mummies 48–9, 139, 155; as euphemism for mummies in advertising 155, 156, 163; in fiction and popular lore 2, 27, 33, 38, 41, 42, 48–9, 57, 72, 74, 101–2, 111, 114–15, 131, 137, 143–4, 150–1, 155, 165, 179, 190n13, 192n4; mythical hinges on 114–15; standing upright 17, 33, 37, 49, 79, 81–2, 97, 114–15, 124, 145–6, 147, 174, 179, 189n10, 191n9, 192n9; *see also* ambulatory coffins; Argus effect; talking coffins
- Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of the Sublime* 45, 190n11, 190n12; *see also* Bodin, Jean; *mumia*; Penicher, Louis; Radziwill, Prince Nikolaj
- Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur *see* Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan
- Conway, Martin 52
- Cook, Thomas 22
- Coptic Church 15, 17
- Corelli, Marie 51, 60, 191n19
- corpse-and-treasure paradox 30, 41; *see also* Dragon Principle
- Costello, Lou 71, 117, 101, 120, 191n4; *see also* *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* (Film sub-index); Abbott, Bud
- Creed, Barbara 53, 117; *see also* *vagina dentata*
- Croft, Lara (Paramount Pictures and Eidos Interactive character) 166
- CT-scans 126, 143–4
- curses: ancient Egyptian beliefs about 17; change in meanings over time 8–9, 169–70; core definition of 4; ethical and eschatological origins 39–41, 43–58, 60, 62; as expression of displaced sexual anxiety 43; extent of abstraction from hubris/nemesis type determines Postclassic mummies' personalities 116; incompatibility with romance genre 72, 81, 86–7, 89–90, 93; loss of ethical power 6, 10, 39, 56, 60, 63, 65–6, 92–3, 161, 172, 179–80; Middle Ages origins 45, 189–90n11, 190n12; museum security staff contributions to curse lore 33–4, 38, 49–50, 146, 165, 168; museum visitors' interpretations of 44, 77–8, 118, 151–4, 160–1; personal 'own your own' curses 54, 122; pseudoscientific explanations of 153–4, 167, 193n12; subaltern curse beliefs 188n5; types (contagion 47, 50, 55–6, 87, 118, 126, 178; hubris/nemesis 52, 65, 72–3, 75, 77, 116–18, 126; intergenerational 55, 69, 74–5; random 75); versions (Classic 5, 45, 47–8, 61, 62–3, 65, 72–8, 81, 116, 126, 171–2, 174; Postclassic 115–25, 174; Preclassic 8, 44–58, 60, 61, 62, 76–7, 81, 93, 121); *see also* Argus effect; British Museum: role in curse lore (Museum sub-index); Brooklyn Museum of Art: role in curse lore (Museum sub-index); Field Museum of Natural History: role in curse lore (Museum sub-index); haunted museums; Ingram, Walter: curse; *jinn* spirits; Metropolitan Museum of Art: role in curse lore (Museum sub-index); New Walk Museum: role in curse lore (Museum sub-index); nutshell device; Rowntree, John: curse; Screaming Mummy; Seton, Sir Alexander: curse; Tutankhamun: curse of; Unlucky Mummy; *vagina dentata*
- Daly, Nicholas 39; *see also* romance: genre themes and motifs
- Davies, Norman de Garis 23
- de rigueur* inclusion of mummies in museums 21–4, 130–1
- death: children's conceptions of 149–50, 160, 168, 179; modern Western unfamiliarity and unease with 106–7, 113, 136, 139, 141–2, 162, 169–70, 172–3; Victorian familiarity with 28
- defloration 41, 53, 117, 170–1; *see also* rape; *vagina dentata*; virginity
- Deir-el-Bahari 1881 royal mummies cache 21, 27, 34; *see also* Rameses II; Seti I
- Del Vecchio, Deborah 69
- Description de l'Égypte* 46
- desiccation *see* mummification: methods of; natron
- Diodorus Siculus 14
- divine universe device 62
- Djed-Hor: mummy of 143
- documentaries: roles in popular culture 126, 146, 152, 154, 166
- dominant reading 8–9, 91–2, 152; *see also* Horrocks, Roger; meaning; schema
- Douglas, Mary 82
- Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan 40, 51, 56–7, 60, 67, 70, 86, 190n17
- Dragon Principle 29–30, 51, 70, 72, 79, 87, 126, 167, 172; *see also* Campbell, Joseph
- Drinkall, Pam 134, 146

- Edwards, Amelia 47–8, 189n2
 Edwards, Leo 31, 113
 Egyptologists 2–3, 23–4, 27, 28, 33–4, 53,
 121, 134, 150, 158; fictional characters
 and stereotypes of 47, 66, 68; *see also*
 archaeologists; Carter, Howard: characters
 based upon; Croft, Lara; Egyptology;
 Jones, Indiana
 Egyptology 2–3, 10–11, 19–20, 26–7, 46,
 50, 53, 65, 67, 76, 82, 134, 144, 153,
 158–9, 168, 173, 175, 180, 191n12;
see also archaeologists; Egyptologists
 Egyptomania 2–4, 6–7, 11, 20, 64, 126,
 158–9; *see also* Orientalism; Tutmania
Empress of Ireland 49
 erotica 41, 42, 123
 ethics: consideration in *The Mummy*
 (Hammer Films 1959) 68, 89–90;
 museum visitors' ambivalence about 91,
 164–5; popular values 48, 51–2, 92–3,
 117–18, 132, 152–3, 159–67, 172–5,
 180; *see also* Christianity: popular beliefs
 and values; curses (ethical and
 eschatological origins; loss of ethical
 power); museums (human bones in
 hands-on sessions; human remains
 collection and display ethics; human
 remains repatriation); yucksploitation
 ethmoid bone 16, 189n9; *see also* brain
 removal
 ethnographic present 112–13
 evisceration 16–17, 109–10, 133; *see also*
 mummification (methods of; stereotypes
 of)
Famous Monsters of Filmland 94
 Fayum portraits 17, 142
 female ambulatory mummies 42, 56, 123; *see*
also ambulatory mummies
 fiction: female authorship 46–7, 171, 193n1;
 juvenile 31, 80–1, 94, 100–1, 106, 110,
 113–25, 127, 157, 192n3; *see also* Adult
 fiction sub-index; Children's fiction
 sub-index
 Field, Henry 33
 figurative mummification 98, 99, 101; *see also*
 wrapping: stereotypes and popular
 meanings of
 films 64–83, 84, 85, 86–93; character types
 and their roles 72–7; derivation of Indiana
 Jones films from Classic films 166; devices
 borrowed from plays 72; incest themes
 69–70, 177–8; original audiences 90–2;
 role of Carnarvon figure 75; role of
 Cassandra figure 72–5, 90, 116–17, 119,
 191n7; role of Hero 74–7; role of High
 Priest 66, 70–1, 73, 75, 77, 80–1, 86,
 88–90, 92, 120; role of Principal Violator
 74–6; sources of costume and makeup
 designs 82, 191n10; structural
 discrepancies 72, 81, 87 *see also* curses:
 incompatibility with romance genre;
 typical plot structure 67, 72–7; *see also*
 Carter, Howard: characters based upon;
 Chaney Jr, Lon; Croft, Lara; Film
 sub-index; Hammer Studios; Im-Ho-Tep;
 Jones, Indiana; Karloff, Boris; Kharis
 (Hammer Films character); Kharis
 (Universal Pictures character); Lee,
 Christopher; Pierce, Jack; Tera, Queen;
 Universal Pictures
 Flaubert, Gustave 22
 Fletcher, Reverend William Roby 22–3,
 189n2
 football: Australian Rules 100
 forgery of mummies 23–4, 28; *see also* Nelson
 Supply House; Tate Curiosity Shop
 fragments of mummies 22–4; in curse lore
 55; fictional representations of 22, 87;
 museum displays of 24, 133–5, 137, 160,
 162–4, 175; museum visitors'
 interpretations of 108, 131–2, 132, 133,
 136–7, 160, 162–4, 168, 173, 175,
 192n5, 192n6; stereotypes and popular
 meanings of 22–4, 29, 34
 French conquest of Egypt 3, 20; *see also*
 Napoleon
 Freud, Sigmund: fear of the dead 6; 'Little
 Hans' 97; Oedipus complex *see* films:
 incest themes; virginity taboo 53, 190n14
 Gautier, Théophile 22, 29, 39–41, 43, 53,
 189n1
 gauze disguise 101–3, 114; *see also* wrapping:
 stereotypes and popular meanings of
 Géramb, Father 21
 'Ginger': mummy of 34, 49, 108, 157
 'Gingerella': mummy of 34
 Goorkrodger, Timothy 57
Goosebumps®: books 106–7, 116–19;
 television programmes 116; *see also*
 relevant entries in sub-indices; Stine, R.
 Gramsci, Antonio 9–10, 49, 65, 110, 121,
 157; *see also* hegemony
 Granville, Dr Augustus 41
 Greco-Roman mummies and funerary
 culture 17, 48, 191n9, 191n10; museum
 visitors' interpretations of 155; *see also*

- Greeks: mummification and burial practices of; Romans: mummification and burial practices of
- Greek mythology 52, 115, 191n7; *see also* Argus effect; films: role of Cassandra figure; hubris; nemesis
- Greeks: in *mumia* trade 45; mummification and burial practices of 17, 191n9; stereotyping of Egyptians by 6, 136; *see also* Diodorus Siculus; Greco-Roman mummies and funerary culture; Greek mythology; Herodotus
- Green, L. 1, 189–90n11
- Greenhill, Thomas 21
- Guess, Jeff 150
- Haggard, Sir Henry Rider 28, 30, 39, 43, 52, 60, 86, 191n12
- Halloween 11, 14, 95, 100, 102, 105, 114, 158, 172; *see also* relevant entries in Toy and object sub-index
- Hammer Studios 4, 8, 64, 67–9, 71, 73, 75–7, 79–80, 83, 85, 86, 88–91, 191n10; *see also* Kharis (Hammer Films); Lee, Christopher; relevant titles in Film sub-index
- Hamrick, Graham 53
- Harpist's Song, The* 18
- Harwa: mummy of 33, 138
- haunted museums: children's belief in 78, 119–20, 122, 144, 146, 148–50; exploitation and production of the legend by museums 12, 38, 146, 154, 158; in fiction and popular lore 33–4, 48–50, 67, 78–81, 107, 118–21, 128, 150, 174, 191n8; *see also* ambulatory mummies: children's belief in; Argus effect; museums: torchlight tours; Screaming Mummy; Unlucky Mummy
- hegemony 49, 65, 110–11, 121, 157, 171–2, 174; definition of 9–10; *see also* Gramsci, Antonio
- Henderson, John 35
- Herodotus: account of mummification 14, 16–17, 188n7, 191n9; tales from *The Histories* 46, 126
- homophones *see* jokes, puns and riddles; mother pun
- Horrocks, Roger 43, 76, 92; *see also* dominant reading
- horror: cathartic function of 4; failure of patriarchy, masculinity and logic as genre theme 4, 68–70, 73–4, 76–7, 88 *see also* Hutchings, Peter; oscillation of audiences' allegiances between characters 91–3, 171, 179; *see also* abjection; Argus effect; curses; haunted museums; patriarchy; relevant titles in sub-indices
- hubris 52, 54, 60, 62, 65, 72–5, 77, 80, 116–20, 123, 126, 172, 177; *see also* nemesis
- human remains *see* curses: ethical and eschatological origins; fragments of mummies; museums (human remains collection and display ethics; human remains repatriation)
- Humanity Ownership Argument 166
- humour 11, 14, 26–7, 30, 32, 39, 42, 49, 57–8, 59, 60, 71–2, 81, 88–9, 91, 94–8, 99, 100–3, 105–6, 109–12, 114–17, 123–7, 150, 157–8, 172, 180; *see also* analogies; jokes, puns and riddles; mother pun
- Hutchings, Peter 69, 88; *see also* horror: failure of patriarchy, masculinity and logic as genre theme
- Hutchins, Pat and Laurence 100
- hygiene 9, 55, 57, 82–3, 86, 106, 109–10, 113, 157, 162, 177–8; *see also* pollution
- hyperreality: definition of 38; in fictional museums 78–81, 119, 126, 144–5, 174; in museums 38, 78, 173; pseudo-hyperreality of exhibits that resemble fictional settings 144, 146, 158, 165–6, 173; pseudo-hyperreality of 'glass box' exhibits 78, 144–6
- Illustrated London News* 55
- Illustrated Mail* 25
- Im-Ho-Tep (Universal Pictures character) 7, 66, 69–70, 74, 79, 81–3, 86–90, 112–13, 125, 177; *see also* Karloff, Boris; *Mummy, The* (1932, Film sub-index)
- industrial uses of mummies: alleged locomotive fuel 25, 189n7; fertilizer 25; paint 25, 36; paper manufacture 25, 58, 189n6
- Ingram, Walter: curse 55, 135, 190n15
- Innes, Katherine 162
- Islam 15, 20, 70–1, 119, 155
- jinn* spirits 45, 190n12
- Johnson, Carol Siri 70, 79
- Johnson, Tom 69
- jokes, puns and riddles 11, 14, 39, 49, 57–8, 91, 95–8, 102–3, 105–6, 111–12, 117, 127, 150, 157–8, 172, 180, 190n18; *see also* analogies; humour; mother pun

- Jones, Indiana (Paramount Pictures/Lucasfilm character) 117, 126, 166; *Young Indiana Jones* 109
- Karloff, Boris 64, 81–2, 87, 89, 91, 125; *see also* Im-Ho-Tep
- Karp, Ivan 100
- Kennedy, Brian 146
- Ketten, Maurice 58
- Kharis (Hammer Films character) 7, 67, 69, 73, 80, 86, 88–9, 177; *see also* Lee, Christopher; *Mummy, The* (1959, Film sub-index)
- Kharis (Universal Pictures character) 7, 67–71, 74, 79–80, 83, 84, 86–9, 91, 93, 117, 125, 177; *see also* Chaney Jr, Lon; *Mummy's Curse, The* (Film sub-index); *Mummy's Ghost, The* (Film sub-index); *Mummy's Hand, The* (Film sub-index); *Mummy's Tomb, The* (Film sub-index)
- Khnum-Nakht: coffin of 138
- Khufu (Cheops) 32, 46; stereotypes of, and eponymous characters 33, 46, 56, 127
- Kids* pamphlet (Metropolitan Museum of Art) 150
- Kristeva, Julia 55, 82, 110, 121, 177; *see also* abjection
- Lady Isis: mummy of 33
- Larson, Gary 103, 105
- Lee, Christopher 67, 83, 88; *see also* Kharis (Hammer Films character)
- Levene, Louise 157
- Literary and Philosophical Society of Leicester 21
- 'Little Hans' *see* Freud, Sigmund; 'Little Hans'
- Loudon, Jane Webb 33, 46, 56, 127
- Lowe, E. E. 58
- Lupton, Carter 80, 143, 165
- Lynch, Jeremiah 33
- McHargue, Georgess 129
- magic: in fiction 102; shows 102; trick sets 114; *see also* Booth, Walter; Méliès, Georges
- Manchester University 163
- Marquis, Don 32
- masculinity *see* horror: failure of patriarchy, masculinity and logic as genre theme; patriarchy
- Maspero, Gaston 34–5
- mass media *see* media
- mastabas* 192n8; of Unis-Ankh 145; museum replicas of 145; *see also* tombs
- Mead, George 36
- meaning 2, 6–9, 11–12, 90–1, 160, 165, 169–70, 173, 179, 188n4, 192n10; *see also* dominant reading; schema
- media *see* museums: shop products; relevant sub-indices; stereotypes
- Méliès, Georges 102
- Meyer, Edward 134
- Middle Ages 3, 20, 24, 45, 189–90n11, 190n12; *see also* curses: Middle Ages origins
- Milwaukee Journal* 28, 32
- modern mummies 23
- monster mummies 103, 113–14
- Montserrat, Dominic 46, 188n5, 190n13
- mother pun 95–8, 112, 121; American 'mommy' adaptation 96; *see also* abjection: alienation from mother-figure; analogies; humour; jokes, puns and riddles
- movies *see* films
- mumia* 24, 45, 190n11, 190n12; *see also* bitumen; Bodin, Jean; *Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of the Sublime*; Greeks: in *mumia* trade; Penicher, Louis; Radziwill, Prince Nikolaj
- mummification: definition of 188n1; demise of 17, 57; early Christian practice of 17, 57; methods of 15–17; museum representations of 135, 144, 168; museum visitors' misunderstandings of 57, 110, 130, 133, 135–6, 167–8, 173; natural sand mummification 15–16, 163; religious basis of 15–16, 189n8; stereotypes of 57–8, 78–9, 86, 109–10, 112, 132, 133, 136, 154, 157–8, 168; *see also* Bible: references to mummification; Brier, Bob: mummification experiment; Greco-Roman mummies and funerary culture; Greeks: mummification and burial practices of; Herodotus: account of mummification; Romans: mummification and burial practices of; wrapping
- Mummy: the Inside Story* exhibition 144
- Murray, Margaret 48
- museum visitors: responses and surveys of 13, 132, 147; *see also* authenticity: museum visitors' opinions and uncertainties about; children: remarks and behaviour in museums; ethics (museum visitors' ambivalence about; popular values); mummification: museum visitors' misunderstandings of; relevant titles in Museum sub-index; stereotypes: evident in

- museum visitors' ideas; tomb robbery:
 museum visitors' ideas about
 museums: cultural-historical display
 problems 14, 24, 38, 78, 134, 144;
 funerary emphasis in Egyptian exhibits 78,
 130, 144–5; human bones in hands-on
 sessions 143, 162; human remains
 collection and display ethics 80, 129,
 159–67, 170, 174–5, 176, 177; human
 remains repatriation 159; loss of influence
 to the media 12; neglect of post-pharaonic
 culture 155; security staff 33–4, 38,
 49–50, 146, 165, 168, 173; shop products
 12, 130, 155, 158, 173; torchlight tours
 158; *see also* children: remarks and
 behaviour in museums; haunted museums;
 Museum sub-index; museum visitors
- Napoleon 20, 46; *see also* French conquest
 of Egypt
 Nast, Thomas 57
 natron 16, 109–10, 135–6; *see also*
 mummification: methods of
 Nefertiti 35
 Nekht-Ankh: coffin of 138
 Nelson Supply House 23
 nemesis 52, 54, 60, 65, 72–3, 75, 77, 80, 90,
 116–18, 123, 126; *see also* hubris
 neocolonialism 8–9, 92, 131, 166–7, 172
 Nespanetjerenpere *see* cartonage: of
 Nespanetjerenpere
 Nesperennub, mummy of 144
New York Times 26–8, 48, 51, 60, 64
 nicknaming of mummies 34; *see also*
 anonymity of mummies
 nutshell device 60, 61, 81, 121; *see also*
 curses: versions (Classic); films: typical
 plot structure
- Opening of the Mouth ceremony 45,
 189n10
 Orientalism 11, 30, 39–41, 53, 63, 70, 169,
 171; Classical origins of 6, 20, 57;
 definition of 6; *see also* Egyptomania;
 Other; Said, Edward; stereotypes;
 Tutmania
 'Ossipumphnoferu': mummy of 34
 Other 6–7, 55–6, 77, 79, 100, 110, 124–5,
 127–8, 169–71, 177–8
- Padihershef: coffins of 31, 34; mummy of 29,
 31, 34
 participant observation 14; *see also*
 anthropology: field research methods
- patriarchy 43, 68, 77, 79, 82, 92, 171,
 178; *see also* horror: failure of
 patriarchy, masculinity and logic as genre
 theme
 Pearce, Q. 113, 116, 118, 120, 122
 Penicher, Louis 189–90n11; *see also* Bodin,
 Jean; *Colloquium of the Seven About Secrets of
 the Sublime*; *mumia*; Radziwill, Prince
 Nikolaj
 personality types of Postclassic mummies:
 baddies 116–18; clowns 115–16, 123–5;
 oafs 116, 118–23
 Petrie, Sir William Matthew Flinders 26
 Pettigrew, Thomas 21, 28
 physiognomy 34–5, 113, 173
 Pierce, Jack 81
 Poe, Edgar Allen 32–3, 39, 67
 Pollès, Renan 188n3
 pollution 28, 55–7, 65, 82–3, 87, 103, 104,
 105–11, 113, 128, 155, 162–3, 168–9,
 172, 177–9; children's fascination with
 108–11, 121, 127, 154, 157, 163; use to
 teach children about hygiene 110–11;
see also abjection; death; hygiene
 popular culture: conflict with academia 53–4,
 153–4, 165, 167, 179; conflict with elite
 culture 3; definition of 3; neglect by
 academics 3–4, 65, 95; self-perpetuation
 170; *see also* children: juvenile popular
 culture
 Postclassic Period 8–9, 94–8, 99, 100–3,
 104, 105–32, 132, 133–9, 140, 141–6,
 147, 148–55, 156, 157–68; *see also* curses:
 versions (Postclassic); personality types of
 Postclassic mummies
 Powell, Eddie 83, 89
 Preclassic Period 8–9, 19–36, 37, 38–41, 42,
 43–58, 59, 60, 61, 62–3; *see also* curses:
 versions (Preclassic)
 Prince of Wales 1869 mummy cache hoax 22
 pseudoscience *see* curses: pseudoscientific
 explanations of
 Ptolemy I 15
Punch 58
 Putnam, Nina Wilcox 87, 171
 pyramids 117; in fiction and popular lore 32,
 46, 54–5, 101, 110, 117, 124–5, 151,
 153, 157, 171; museum replicas of 145;
see also tombs
- racial evolutionary theory 23
 Radziwill, Prince Nikolaj 189n11; *see also*
 Bodin, Jean; *Colloquium of the Seven About
 Secrets of the Sublime*; *mumia*; Penicher, Louis

- Rameses II 15, 51; mummy of 34–5, 113;
stereotypes of, and characters based upon
113, 127
- Rameses III: mummy of 35, 82; stereotypes
of, and characters based upon 82
- rape: as literary analogy and mythological
symbol 9, 43, 46–7, 62–3, 70, 78–9,
117, 170–1, 177–8; psychology of 52–3,
70, 117; *see also* defloration; *vagina dentata*;
virginity
- Raunsley, H. D. 35
- Reisner, Reverend Dr Christian F. 60
- repulsion ruse 157–8; *see also* pollution: use to
teach children about hygiene;
yucksploitation
- retrospective extrapolation 112–13
- revolution paradigm 121, 127, 157
- Rice, Anne 127
- Rice, Thomas 101–2, 192n1
- Rider Haggard, Sir Henry *see* Haggard,
Sir Henry Rider
- Ripley, Robert 134
- Rohmer, Sax 72, 102
- romance: genre themes and motifs 8–9, 19,
39–41, 42, 43–4, 56, 60, 63–4, 70, 124,
170–2 *see also* Daly, Nicholas; Postclassic
degeneration of romantic motifs 112, 120,
123; *see also* curses: incompatibility with
romance genre
- Romans: conquest of Egypt by 15, 20;
conversion to Christianity 15; fall of
Roman empire 20; mummification and
burial practices of 17, 48, 191n9, 191n10;
museum exhibits about 144, 155;
stereotyping of Egyptians by 6; *see also*
Greco-Roman mummies and funerary
culture
- Rosenberg, Isaac 169
- Rossetti, Christina 35–6
- Rowntree, John: curse 54
- Said, Edward 6; *see also* Orientalism
- San Diego Union* 51
- schema 7, 11, 142; *see also* dominant reading;
meaning
- Scieszka, Jon 101, 114
- Screaming Mummy 33–4
- sensory encounters with mummies: smelling
mummies 28; stereotypes of odour 106–8;
stereotypes of touching 46, 83, 164;
touching mummies 28; touching mummy
model 139, 140, 148–9; unfamiliarity
with odour 28, 139, 142, 168–9, 173;
unfamiliarity with touching 28, 107,
138–9, 141–2, 148, 168–9, 173; *see also*
autoauthentication; death: modern
Western unfamiliarity and unease with;
museums: human bones in hands-on
sessions; unwrapping
- ‘Septhnestp’: mummy of 35
- Seti I: mummy of 35, 82; stereotypes of, and
characters based upon 35, 82
- Seton, Sir Alexander: curse 55
- Shakespeare, William vi, 60
- Shar, Grant 158
- Sheldon, Henry 36
- Shillaber, Benjamin 43, 58
- sideshow 21, 23, 29; in fiction 79
- Smith, Horace 31–2
- Smith, Joseph 53
- soirées 21, 27
- SpineChiller Collection, The* 103, 104, 106,
113, 116–18, 121–2
- Spiritualism 49, 51, 53, 72, 190n13
- Stead, William 190n13
- stereotypes: cultural functions 2, 128, 168–9,
179; effects upon juvenile understandings
of death 149–50; evident in museum
visitors’ ideas 12, 14, 130–2, 132, 133–9,
141–6, 147, 148–55, 157–9, 142, 168,
173; form of discrimination 2, 6, 92, 154,
157–8, 170, 175; origins and promotion
in museums 14, 154, 173, 177 *see also*
museums (cultural-historical display
problems; funerary emphasis in Egyptian
exhibits; neglect of post-pharaonic culture;
security staff; shop products; torchlight
tours); perpetuation of colonial ideologies
by 2, 8–9, 40, 62–3, 68, 81, 92, 166, 169,
171–2; Postclassic typology of 95–8,
100–3, 105–15; promotion by media
2–12, 127–8, 158; *see also* museums;
Orientalism; Other
- Stine, R. 106–7, 116–17, 119; *see also*
Goosebumps®
- Stoddard, Charles 33
- Stoker, Bram 28–9, 38, 41, 43–4, 60, 62–3,
68, 170, 191n5, 191n19
- Sunday People* 107
- symbolic inversions 110
- Tagholm, Roger 108
- Tale of Khamuas and Neneferkaptah, The* 67,
190n11
- talking coffins 115, 150; *see also* ambulatory
coffins; coffins: in fiction and popular lore
- talking mummies 31–3, 39, 124, 134,
150, 164, 167; loss of speech in films 89

- Tate Curiosity Shop 23
Temples, Tombs and the Egyptian Universe exhibit 135
 Tera, Queen (B. Stoker & Hammer Films character): in film 68, 74–5, 79, 87–8, 177, 191n5; in literature 44, 62, 68, 191n19, 191n5; *see also* *Blood From the Mummy's Tomb* (Film sub-index); *Jewel of Seven Stars, The* (Adult fiction sub-index); Stoker, Bram
 Theosophy *see* Spiritualism
 Three Stooges, The 101
 Tilden, Samuel 57
Times, The (London) 43, 52
Titanic 49, 190n13
 Toet, Arie Jan 139
 tomb robbery 15–20, 38, 48, 145, 159; effects on mummies' appearances 82, 98, 132; in fiction and popular lore 4, 10, 45–7, 50, 53–4, 62, 70–1, 166; museum visitors' ideas about 151–3, 160–1, 165, 168; representation in museums 133, 145
 tombs 14–19, 22, 28, 45, 130; in fiction and popular lore 4, 10, 19, 39, 43–6, 51, 53, 62, 65–7, 71–5, 78–81, 83, 89–90, 93–4, 96, 100, 109, 112, 115–20, 126, 130–1, 136, 144–6, 151, 153–4, 158, 172–4, 177–9; maze tomb stereotype 117; trap-tomb stereotype 117–18, 152; *see also* *mastabas*; hyperreality; pyramids; tomb robbery; Tutankhamun: tomb of; *vagina dentata*
 Turner, Victor 110
 Tutankhamun 15, 51; curse of 4, 9, 48, 50–1, 54–6, 60, 63–4, 72, 151–2, 191n19; mummy of 43; stereotypes of, and eponymous characters 2, 23, 54, 63, 94, 100–1, 110, 114, 126–7, 133, 192n2 (4); tomb of 3, 11, 21, 26, 45, 50–1, 54, 64, 67, 72, 79, 170; *see also* Tutmania
 Tutmania 2–3, 6, 10, 26, 50, 54, 71, 171; *see also* Egyptomania; Orientalism; Tutankhamun
 Twain, Mark 25, 27, 112, 189n7
 Tyler, Tom 83, 89
 ubiquity of mummies 24–7, 34, 36, 38, 131; *see also* Argus effect
 Universal Pictures 4, 8, 64–5, 67, 69–72, 75, 78–9, 81, 83, 84, 86, 88–91, 125–7, 170–1; *see also* Chaney Jr, Lon; Im-Ho-Tep; Karloff, Boris; Kharis (Universal Pictures); relevant titles in Film sub-index
 University of Hamburg 144
 Unlucky Mummy 48–50, 54, 56, 60, 190n13, 190n16
Unravel the Mysteries of the Mummies exhibition pamphlet (Museum of Man, San Diego) 155, 157
 unwrapping 19, 21–2, 25, 27–30, 164; stereotypes and popular meanings of 28–30, 40–1, 42, 43–4, 46–7, 98, 103, 105, 123, 137–9, 179; *see also* analogies (of bandages with gift wrap; spinning top analogy); wrapping
 'Usermontu': mummy of 34, 176
vagina dentata 53, 78, 80, 117–18, 126, 166, 190n14; films' augmentation of *vagina dentata* through mummies 78, 80; *see also* Creed, Barbara; defloration; rape; virginity
 van der Sanden, Wijnand 155
 virginity 41, 53, 79, 117; *see also* defloration; rape; *vagina dentata*
 viscera *see* evisceration
 Wadi Natrun 16; *see also* natron
 Wallis Budge, Sir E. A. *see* Budge, Sir E. A. Wallis
 Warren, Dr John 29
 Watts, Edie 192n10
 Webb, Jane *see* Loudon, Jane Webb
 Weigall, Arthur 152
 White, Charles 96, 102, 192n1
 'whodunit' mystery genre 102–3; *see also* Christie, Agatha
 Wilbour Library (Brooklyn Museum of Art) 155
Woman's Day 97–8, 107
 wrapping 16–17, 98; as diagnostic feature of fictional mummies 103, 135, 137; stereotypes and popular meanings of 1, 41, 58, 66, 72, 76, 81–3, 86, 96, 98, 99, 100–3, 105–7, 110–12, 115, 124–5, 127, 131, 136–9, 141–3, 149, 163, 168, 179, 191n10, 192n4, 192n5, 192n6, 192n10; *see also* analogies; figurative mummification; gauze disguise; industrial uses of mummies: paper manufacture; jokes, puns and riddles; mummification: methods; unwrapping
 'X', Steven 122–3
 yucksploitation 155, 157; *see also* repulsion ruse
 Yurco, Frank 33

MUSEUMS

- Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) 13; exhibits 163
- Birmingham Museum: exhibits 154
- Boston Museum of Fine Arts: exhibits 154
- Boulak Museum (Cairo) 26; collection acquisition 26
- Bristol City Museum 13; exhibits 139, 145
- British Museum (London) 13; advertising 156; collections acquisition 20, 48; exhibits 24, 135, 143–5; fictional representations of 39, 66, 68, 131; mummies in storage 29; role in curse lore 48–50, 54, 118–19, 190n15, 191n10; visitor responses 27, 34–6, 108, 157, 159; *see also* *Mummy: the Inside Story* exhibition (Main index)
- Brooklyn Museum of Art (New York) 13, 14; advertising 155; *Akbenaten and Nefertiti* Visitors' Book 129–30, 134–5, 142–3, 175; exhibits 131, 135, 143; role in curse lore 146; visitor and survey responses 12, 105, 109, 115, 120, 135, 146, 151–3, 160–3; *see also* *Akbenaten and Nefertiti* exhibition (Main index); Willbour Library (Main index)
- Cairo Museum 26, 82; collections acquisition 21; fictional representations of 66, 78; visitor responses 43, 52
- Exhibition Buildings (Melbourne): exhibits 38
- Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago) 13, 14; collections acquisition 23, 37; exhibits 133, 135, 138, 141, 143–5, 163, 167; role in curse lore 33–4, 150; visitor and survey responses 30, 44, 77–8, 98, 103, 105, 108, 111, 117–18, 133, 137–9, 141–3, 146, 151–3, 160–2, 164–5, 167
- Jewry Wall Museum (Leicester): survey responses 162
- Leeds Museum: collections acquisition 29; visitor responses 57
- London Science Museum 13; exhibits 164; visitor responses 135
- Manchester Museum 13, 14; artefact handling 143; exhibits 135, 164, 167; Visitor Comments Board 160, 167, 175; visitor and survey responses 78, 97, 108–9, 111, 118, 120, 122, 133, 136–9, 141–3, 151–3, 161, 192n2 (5), 192n11
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) 13; exhibits 135, 143, 145; fictional representations of 32; role in curse lore 50; visitor responses 38, 97, 139, 150, 192n10
- Milwaukee Public Museum (*Wisconsin*) 13; exhibits 133, 135, 143, 145, 164; fictional representations of 32; visitor responses 143, 165
- Museum of Man (San Diego): advertising 155, 157; *see also* *Unravel the Mysteries of the Mummies* exhibition pamphlet (Main index)
- National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne): exhibits 38
- New Walk Museum (Leicester) 13; artefact handling 143; exhibits 133–5, 140, 143, 145, 154, 164, 167; role in curse lore 145; visitor responses 58, 97, 112, 138–9, 141–2, 146, 148–50, 164
- Niagara Falls Museum: exhibits 34–5
- Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (London) 13; exhibits 163–4, 193n13; visitor and survey responses 129, 146, 152, 166, 175; *see also* *Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams* exhibition (Main index)
- Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Leiden) 13; visitor responses 139
- Ripley's Believe It Or Not! Museum (San Francisco) 13; exhibits 134–5; visitor responses 163
- Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum (San José) 13; collections acquisition 34; exhibits 115, 135, 143, 145, 163, 176; tours 158
- Sheldon Museum (Middlebury, *Vermont*): collections acquisition 36
- South Australian Museum (Adelaide) 13, 14; collections acquisition 22; exhibits 38, 163; tours 158; visitor and survey responses 97–8; 107, 109, 131–2, 132, 133, 135–6, 141, 146, 149–52, 160, 162
- Western Australian Museum (Perth) 13, 14; visitor and survey responses 97, 108–9, 130–1, 136–7, 139, 146, 151–2, 160, 162–3

INDEX

FILMS

- Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* (Universal Pictures 1955) 4, 8, 64, 67, 71–2, 86, 88–9, 96, 101–3, 114–17, 120, 191n4
- Agatha Christie's Death on the Nile* (Paramount/EMI 1978) 102
- Blood From the Mummy's Tomb* (Hammer Films 1971) 4, 8, 64, 67–8, 73, 75, 86, 133, 191n5
- Cléopâtre* (Georges Méliès 1899) 102
- Curse of the Mummy's Tomb, The* (Hammer Films 1964) 4, 8, 64, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 79, 83, 85, 86, 88–9, 191n6
- Haunted Curiosity Shop, The* (Walter Booth 1901) 29, 102, 107
- Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Paramount Pictures/Lucasfilm 1989) 117, 126, 166
- Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Paramount Pictures/Lucasfilm 1984) 117, 126, 166
- Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Paramount Pictures 2001) 166
- Mummy, The* (Universal Pictures 1932) 4, 7–8, 64, 66–70, 72–4, 78–83, 86–91, 112–13, 125, 170–1, 177, 191n3, 191n8, 191n11, 191n12
- Mummy, The* (Hammer Films 1959) 4, 7–8, 64, 67–71, 73, 76–7, 79–80, 83, 86, 88–90, 177
- Mummy, The* (Universal Pictures 1999) 82, 105, 123, 125–7, 133, 174
- Mummy Returns, The* (Universal Pictures 2001) 125, 174
- Mummy's Curse, The* (Universal Pictures 1944) 3–4, 7–8, 64–5, 67–71, 75, 83, 84, 86–91, 93, 114, 117, 125, 177
- Mummy's Dummies (The Three Stooges)* (Columbia Pictures 1948) 103
- Mummy's Ghost, The* (Universal Pictures 1944) 3–4, 7–8, 64, 67–71, 74, 76, 79, 83, 84, 86–91, 93, 117, 125, 177, 191n8
- Mummy's Hand, The* (Universal Pictures 1940) 4, 7–8, 64, 67, 69–71, 73–5, 83, 86, 88–91, 93, 117, 125, 177
- Mummy's Return, The* (treatment for *The Mummy's Curse*, Universal Pictures 1944) 65, 79, 87
- Mummy's Shroud, The* (Hammer Films 1966) 4, 8, 64, 67, 69, 71, 73, 75, 79–80, 83, 86, 88–9, 91, 191n10
- Mummy's Tomb, The* (Universal Pictures 1942) 3–4, 7–8, 64, 67, 69–71, 73–4, 80, 83, 86, 88–93, 117, 125, 177
- Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Paramount Pictures/Lucasfilm 1981) 92, 117, 126, 166
- Under Wraps* (The Disney Channel 1997) 102, 116, 123–4
- We Want Our Mummy (The Three Stooges)* (Columbia Pictures 1939) 101
- Young Indiana Jones and the Curse of the Jackal (The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles)* (Paramount Pictures/Lucasfilm 1992) 109, 118, 120

FILM POSTERS AND LOBBY CARDS

- Curse of the Mummy's Tomb, The*, US one-sheet (© Columbia Pictures 1964) 83, 85
- Mummy's Curse, The*, US lobby card (© Universal Pictures 1944) 83, 84
- Mummy's Ghost, The*, US lobby card (© Universal Pictures 1944) 83, 84

TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

- Agatha Christie's Poirot*: 'The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb' (London Weekend Television 1993) 102
- Amazing Stories*: 'Mummy Daddy' (Universal Pictures/Amblin Entertainment 1987) 97, 100
- Doctor Who*: 'Pyramids of Mars' (BBC-TV 1975) 88, 101
- Goosebumps®*: 'Return of the Mummy' (Protocol Entertainment/Scholastic Productions 1995) 116

INDEX

Hercules: the Legendary Journeys: 'Mummy Dearest' (MCA Television 1996) 96, 117
I Love Mummy (BBC-TV/YTV 2002) 126

Li'l Horrors (Medienbeteiligungs und Produktionsgesellschaft, Beyond Properties and December Films 2000) 123, 126–7

TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Reckitt Benckiser Ltd., *Vanish Stain Stick* (1970s) 111, 115
 Scratch'n'Win: *Pyramids: The Mummy* campaign (2003) 125; *Pyramids Gold: The Mummy Returns* campaign (2003) 125

Solahart, *Mummy* campaign (1996) 110, 124, 125
 Sorbent, *Extra Thick* campaign (2004–5): 'Old Lady' (2004) 105

ANIMATED CARTOONS

Bananaman: 'The Mummy's Curse' (101 Productions/Bananaman Productions 1983) 115
Groovie Goolies, The (Filamation Productions): (1970–1); (1971–2) 94, 105
Mummies Alive! (DIC Productions, LP and Northern Lights Entertainment 1997) 100, 103, 105, 110, 116, 123–5, 127
Scooby-Doo (Hanna-Barbera Productions 1976–9) 94, 101, 115

Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!: 'Scooby-Doo and a Mummy Too' (Hanna-Barbera Productions 1969) 94, 101–3, 105, 111, 113, 116, 118
Simpsons, The: 'Blood Feud' (Twentieth Century Fox 1990) 111–12
SuperTed: 'SuperTed and the City of the Dead' (S4C Enterprises 1982) 116
Tutenstein (Discovery Kids/Jetix 2003) 126–7, 192n2 (4)

PRINT CARTOONS

Can You Beat It! (M. Ketten 1923) 58
Far Side, The (G. Larson): 'Saturday night at the crypt' (1984) 103; 'It was an innocent mistake . . .' (1993) 103, 105
Happy Mummy's Day greeting card (F. Katauskas 1999) 97
Harper's Weekly (T. Nast): 'Embalmed . . .'

(1877) 57, 115; 'Cipher mumm(er)y . . .'
 (1878) 57, 115; '"It is whispered . . ."' (1880) 57, 115; 'Boom!!! . . .' (1880) 57, 115
Mr Jack (J. Swinnerton): 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?' postcard (1906) 115

PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS

Captain Company, *Masks to Make You 'Die' Laughing* (1965) 114
 Palmolive Company, *Palmolive: Re-incarnation of Beauty* (1918) 41

Solahart, *You'll Be Wrapped with \$300 Off a Solahart* (1997) 96

COMICS

Asterix: Asterix and Cleopatra (R. Goscinny and A. Uderzo 1965) 103, 117
Blackhawk #199: 'The attack of the mummy insects' (DC Comics 1964) 103

Deadworld: Necropolis (Caliber Comics 1995) 103, 123
Forbidden Worlds #11: 'The mummy's treasure' (American Comics Group 1952) 5

INDEX

Ghost Stories #16: 'The king of the dead'
(Dell Publishing Company 1966) 114
Tales to Astonish #31: 'When the mummy
walks!' (Marvel Comics Group 1962) 103

Zombie World: Champion of the Worms #1 (Dark
Horse Comics 1997) 119

ADULT FICTION

After Three Thousand Years (J. Austin 1868)
46–7, 54–5, 171
How I Became an Egyptian (J. Waller 1856) 43,
190n17
Jewel of Seven Stars, The (B. Stoker): first
version (1903) 28–9, 38, 41, 43–4, 60,
62–3, 68, 170, 191n5, 191n19; 'Happy
Ending' version (1912) 62
Lost in a Pyramid; or, the Mummy's Curse (L.
Alcott 1869) 28, 46–7, 54–5, 171, 189n7
Lot No. 249 (A. Doyle 1892) 56–7, 60, 67, 70,
86, 190n17
Mr. Grubbe's Night with Memnon
(Anonymous 1857) 39
Mummy, The (C. Dreadstone 1977) 191n11
Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-second Century, The
(J. Loudon *nee* Webb 1827) 33, 46, 56, 127
Mummy or Ramses the Damned, The (A. Rice
1989) 127

Mummy That Walked, The (S. Rohmer 1938)
102
Mummy's Foot, The (T. Gautier 1840) 22, 29,
39, 189n1
Mummy's Soul, The (Anonymous 1862) 28,
46–7, 54–6, 171
Ring of Tboth, The (A. Doyle 1890) 40,
67
Romance of the Mummy, The (T. Gautier
1858) 40–1, 43, 53, 189n1
She Who Sleeps (S. Rohmer 1928) 72, 102
Smith and the Pharaohs (H. Haggard
1912–13) 39
Some Words with a Mummy (E. Poe 1845)
32–3, 39, 67
*Was Joseph's Rival for Favor of Pharaoh: an
Imaginary Interview with Mummy of Ancient
Egyptian Priest in Milwaukee Public Museum*
(*Milwaukee Journal* 1930) 28, 32

CHILDREN'S FICTION

*Alfred Hitchcock and the Three Investigators in
The Mystery of the Whispering Mummy* a.k.a.
*Just For Boys: The Three Investigators in The
Mystery of the Whispering Mummy*
(R. Arthur 1965) 31
Blue Bananas: The Magnificent Mummies
(T. Bradman and M. Chatterton 1997):
illustrations 101, 106, 110, 116, 123–4
British Museum Fun Book: Ancient Egypt
(S. Ransford and D. Farris 1998):
illustrations 158
Crash Helmet (H. Allard and J. Soares 1977)
123
Curse of the Egyptian Mummy, The
(P. and L. Hutchins 1983) 100
Curse of King Nefertrustme, The (D. Bates and
C. Magerl 1995): illustrations 117
Follow That Pharaoh (D. Sampson and
P. Dupasquier 1988) 120, 192n3 (4)
*G.I. Joe: The Secret of the Mummy's Tomb Book
and Record* (K. Sobol 1973) 102
Goosebumps® #23: *Return of the Mummy*
(R. Stine 1994) 116; cover art 106

Graveyard School #16: *Don't Tell Mummy*
(T. Stone 1997) 119–20; cover art
106
*Jerry Todd Books, The: Jerry Todd and the
Whispering Mummy* (L. Edwards 1923) 31,
113
Magic Mummy Puzzle Book, The (N. Sharratt
1996): cover art 115; illustrations 112
Magnificent Mummy Maker, The (E. Woodruff
1994) 119–20
Monster Holidays (N. Bridwell 1974) 114;
illustrations 125
Mummy Jokes and Puzzles (H. Rosen 1979):
cover art 115
Mummies That Came to Live Again, The
(Steven 'X' 1976) 122–3
Shock Shots Collector's Book #6: *Mummies*
(D. Smith 1994) 105
SpineChiller Collection, The: Flesh and Blood
(1997; first published in *Super Scary Stories
for Sleep-overs*, Q. Pearce 1995) 113, 116,
118, 120, 122; *SpineChiller* cover art 103,
104, 106

INDEX

Spooky Tales: Creepy Castle (A. Wood and C. Forsey 1998): illustrations 114
There's a Pharaoh In Our Bath! (J. Strong and N. Sharratt 1995) 123, 125, 192n3 (4)
Time Warp Trio, The: Tut, Tut (J. Scieszka 1996) 101, 114

Twistaplot #9: Horrors of the Haunted Museum (R. Stine 1983) 107, 119; cover art 117; illustrations 117
Universal Studios Monsters: The Mummy (P. Smith 1992) 79

CHILDREN'S NON-FICTION

Horrible Histories: The Awesome Egyptians (T. Deary and P. Hepplewhite 1994) 157–8
Incredible Histories: The Pharaohs' Curse (S. Gold and S. Rabinowitz 1990) 158

Sticky History Books: Egyptians: Pyramids and Mouldy Mummies (R. Border 1995) 157
What They Don't Tell You About Ancient Egyptians (D. Jay 1996) 157

PLAYS

Moses. A Play (I. Rosenberg 1916) 169
Mummy: a Farce, in One Act, The a.k.a. *The Mummy, or the Elixir of Life* (W. Bernard 1833) 39, 57, 60, 72, 95, 102, 114, 192n1
Mummy Monarch: a Musical Comedy, The (J. Hewitt et al. 1907) 115

Mummy-Makers of Egypt; a Comedy, in Five Acts, The (R. Capper 1868) 41, 72, 114
Virginia Mummy, The (T. Rice 1835) 101–2, 192n1
Virginia Mummy, The a.k.a. *The Virginy Mummy* (C. White, c.1840–9) 96, 102, 192n1

POETRY

Address to the Mummy, at Belzoni's Exhibition (H. Smith 1821) 31–2
archy interviews a pharaoh (D. Marquis 1922) 32
Daughter of Pharaoh to Bohemia, The (C. Stoddard 1894) 33
Egyptian Room – The South Australian Museum, The (J. Guess 1986) 150
In the Egyptian Museum (J. Lewis, 1942) 136
Mummy Boy (T. Burton 1997) 127

Mummy of Sesostris, The (H. Raunsley 1886) 35
Mummy's Complaint, The (W. Skey 1889) 36
Musings on Mummy-paper (*Punch* 1847) 58
Opening the Mummy (B. Shillaber 1853) 43, 58
Speech of the Mummy, The (Anonymous 1838) 33, 189n7
To Mummy W'heat (Anonymous 1855) 30, 189n7

SONGS

Der Meleks Keiver (The King's Tomb) (Unknown, 1920s) 188n5
Maid and the Mummy, The (R. Carle and R. Bowers 1904) 115
Mummy, The (B. McFadden and Dor 1959) 88–9

Mummy Mine (R. Coburn and V. Rose 1918) 43
Mummy Song, The (C. Buchanan 1993) 94, 109, 112

MUSICVIDEOS

Everybody (Backstreet's Back) (Backstreet Boys
1997) 114

VIDEO GAMES

Tomb Raider (© Eidos Interactive 1995–9)
166

TOYS AND OBJECTS

- 7" 'Mummy' Kid Halloween doll (© Annalee
Mobilitee Dolls® Inc., 1998) 99
- 41" Mummy cardboard poseable Halloween
decoration (© The Beistle Company 1995)
113–14
- Brass statuette, nude in Egyptian coffin
(Franz Bergman c.1905–10) 41, 42
- Calico Kittens®: Mummy Mischief* Halloween
cat figurine (© Enesco Corporation 1997)
99
- Celluloid letter opener, nude in Egyptian
coffin-shaped handle (Germany 1920s)
41
- Clip-on Monster* battery-operated pin (© Soma
International 1994) 114
- Creature Crawlers Mummy 4x4* battery-
operated model car (© Nylint 1999) 125
- Folding souvenir card, Sweet Caporal
cigarettes (Kinney Brothers c.1885–95)
58, 59
- Great Adventures* preschool toy range
(© Fisher–Price 2001) 112
- Hallmark Merry Miniatures* Halloween rabbit
figurine (© Hallmark Cards Inc. 1991) 99
- Haunted Mansion* ride, Disneyland, Anaheim,
California: mummy drinking tea in
graveyard scene (© Disney 1969, designed
by K. Anderson, R. Crump, M. Davis,
H. Goff, Y. Gracey, et al.) 114
- Holiday Taper Candles* pack of two Halloween
candles (© Russ Berrie 1996) 106
- King Tut Mysterious Mummy* magic trick
(© Franco–American Novelty Company
1973) 114
- Lego Adventurers: Temple of Anubis* playset
(© LEGO Group 1998, set #5988) 117
- Mighty Beanz: Ancient Egyptian Super Pro Team*
mummy bean (© Moose Enterprise P/L
2003, series 2) 105
- Monster Rods: Mummy Machine* model car kit
(© MPC–Fundimensions 1974 and
© AMT–Ertl 1996) 125
- Monster Trolls: Mummy Troll* Halloween doll
(© The Toy Boys/Galoob 1993) 99, 100,
114
- Mummy Troll* Halloween doll (© Russ 1994)
99
- Playmobil Special: The Mummy* preschool toy
set (© Playmobil 1998) 139
- Real Ghostbusters: the Mummy Monster, The*
action figure (© Columbia
Pictures/Kenner Toys 1989) 101
- Road Champs Horror Hearse: Mummy Dearest*
model car (© Road Champs 1996)
114
- Rubber Halloween mask (© Distortions
Unlimited 1998) 103
- School Squad: Mummy King of Wrap* sticky tape
dispenser (© Creative Plastics Industries
1993) 105
- Spooky, Kooky Beartown™ Collectible: Mummy
Dearest, A* Halloween teddy bear
(© The Judith G. Collection 2001; bear
The Boyds Collection Ltd.® 1990–8)
99
- SuperNaturals: Rags* hologram action figure
(© Tonka 1986) 112
- Todd McFarlane's Monsters: The Mummy* action
figure (© and ™ Todd McFarlane
Productions, Inc. 2002, series 2) *cover*
- Todd McFarlane's Monsters: The Mummy Playset*
with action figures (© and ™ Todd
McFarlane Productions, Inc. 1998,
series 1) 111, 118