

Akhenaten Goes to Paris

a short story by
Louis Greenberg

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WORDWORKS 

Ancient mummy Akhenaten has an important message for his father. To pass it on, he needs to navigate not only French border control, but the seductions and the politics of modern-day Paris.

"I was particularly tickled by the long-lost mummy of Akhenaten trying to get through French passport control"

– *Fantasy Reads*

"A signature piece [featuring] a gleefully macabre cabal of mummies"

– Nerine Dorman, *This is My World*

"I just adored Louis Greenberg's Akhenaten Goes to Paris"

– *A Fantastical Librarian*

"By far the funniest of the whole bunch"

– Niall Alexander, *Tor.com*

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Akhenaten Goes to Paris

Louis Greenberg

Uncle Menny assured me that there wouldn't be a problem getting onto the plane. "Just smile and act normal and they'll wave you through," he said. I don't think Uncle Menny's travelled for a long time.

I stood in the queue, shifting my eyes to the reflective steel on the escalators, and I thought I might make it. My djellaba covered most of my body and, as far as I could see, I looked like several other of the men lining up to board. The sight of the guards bristling with bored rage and weaponry dotted along the queue, spot-checking passports and scrutinising faces, was enough to raise a sweat and tingle the nerves of anyone with a beating heart. For my part, I concentrated on not flaking too much.

As they made a show of examining the other passengers, I shifted my weight from foot to foot, easing my muscles gently. It's not good for me to stand too still in one place without sufficient strapping. I was wearing one of the elasticised cotton

body stockings Tadu's maids had prepared for me; they make travelling a lot easier, but they're not as supportive as full funereal binding. I took a small sip of honey infusion to keep my vocal chords moist in case I needed to talk, but not enough to get my insides too dank.

You might think I'd be used to waiting. You'd think, since I'm over three thousand years old, that forty-five minutes in a boarding queue would be as the blink of an eye. No. You reach a saturation point. I was speaking to Kiya about this the other day. She said she thinks humans have a finite amount of patience, a certain number of hours that they can put their lives on hold for the whims of others. I agreed. So many of you entirely lose your patience well before your allotted eighty-odd years, so you can imagine what it's like for us. Or maybe you can't. Anyhow. It's of no consequence.

By the time I got to the head of the queue, I had passed two spot checks. I was already looking forward to sitting back and pressing my face to the window, watching the land and the delta reel away from us. There was only the final guard remaining, one with unnaturally pale eyes and a moustache in a style that has never, to my knowledge, been fashionable. His glare was enough to send a tic through my thigh muscle.

I'd gone through this. I'd prepared. I thought I looked fine. I had on a wig of natural hair and had slathered my face with bees' wax to make it look less ... dead.

"Passport," the man said.

I fished inside the robe and, allowing only my gloved fingertips to protrude from the sleeve, handed the booklet to the guard, praying that the scribes had forged the appropriate document.

The man looked at the picture, then up at me, several times.

I should have held my nerve – well, my sinew – but just

as the man was about to hand back my passport and wave me through, Uncle Menny's words ran through my head: *Smile and act normal.*

It was the smile that did it.

I parted my lips and hoped the man wouldn't hear the crackling, but as I did, the honey infusion chose that moment to equalise itself with a bubble of gas from my interior.

The guard jerked his head away as if struck. He covered his face with his hands and staggered backwards. Eyes watering, he crossed to his colleague, fanning his face and histrionically clutching at his throat, darting me looks of revulsion. I knew I had spoiled my chances of boarding, but I couldn't just turn and leave, knowing that in this climate I might be shot in the back if I tried. I had to wait through the humiliation of being formally interrogated and rejected before I could simply return to the terminal and call for a lift home.

To cut a long story short, I was shipped to Paris in a crate.



I was unloaded at Charles de Gaulle airport's cargo wing in the middle of the night and, once I heard the porters move away, I uncrated myself, dusted off my djellaba and pulled myself into a truck bound for a gallery in the 4th arrondissement.

There are some critics among my people, especially from the older families, who think that the modern world has descended into an underworld of teeming incivility. They sit cloistered in the deepest, driest chambers, huddled around their dingy fires, muttering their complaints to Osiris and Anubis, Nephthys and Neith, whomever might assist them to erase the vermin from the face of the land and usher in the next age, but of course it doesn't happen. In my opinion, the elders would be

less disgruntled if, instead of complaining about the awfulness of contemporary society, they had a double scoop at *Chercher la Crème* on the rue Vieille du Temple.

Now, when your entrails have been removed and placed in jars and your orifices sewn shut, you need to be careful about what you eat, knowing that you will have to clean yourself out later, tamp yourself dry, then pack your innards with dry natural fibres, natron and the right sort of sawdust. You shouldn't really have anything that will spoil before you are able to perform these ablutions. Nefertiti reminds me of this regularly, but sometimes I can't resist. I was on an adventure, and would treat myself to ice cream.



Ah, Paris!

I hadn't visited in a long time, and much had changed. I know Baron Haussmann had his detractors but the broad boulevards he cut through the clutter appealed to me. When I was in charge of commissioning buildings back in the day, I was all for grand-scale monumentalism, even if my erections were somewhat subtler than those of certain families that came before. The citizens of Paris are able to see the sky. They can plant deciduous trees in great rows along the streets. Just marvellous.

But standing there on the pavement, finishing my cherry-rose and orange ice cream under the turning plane trees on the Place Baudoyer, fine spring rain filtering onto my retardant face, I knew I was avoiding the real purpose of my visit. Mother had sent me here for an important reason. Signs up the rue de Rivoli towards the Louvre, the Tuileries and beyond

kept drawing my eye, and I forced my gaze away, feeling that familiar melange of guilt and irritation. I didn't have to see him until tonight. Why shouldn't I take in the sights, I thought, and have some fun while I'm here?

I shook off the guilt and strolled on. One thing I'd been very keen to do was try the metro. I'd been on the London underground back when it was newly built, and of course the Cairo metro, convenient as it was, hardly compared. Once in your veins, the speed and whoosh of the tunnelling machines becomes addictive. I made my way to the closest stop and looked at the map. While I was tracing the longest of the lines, I was shoved in the back and my face hit the plasticised covering of the map. Happily nothing fell off. I turned to see three youngsters in puffed-up jackets and large trousers skipping down the stairway into the station, chortling mirthlessly.

"Reviens à l'Arabie, vieillard!" one of them shouted out as they descended.

Only the smallest boy, one with pink skin and short-cropped yellow hair, looked back, and his face changed somewhat as he glanced at my visage under my cowl. Was it a look of pity? Despite myself, I thought back to when I had reigned. Children had looked at me in an altogether different way back then. I remembered how the plains would roll endlessly ahead of me, submitting below my pleasantly coloured feet. How industrious the children had been back then; how respectful.

I was starting to sound like the elders, but my job here was to communicate a more tolerant attitude. I regarded the map. At the end of the line was La Defense, which suited me perfectly. I had read about the swathe of modern monoliths Pharaoh Mitterrand had built on the outskirts of the city, and I was interested to see if his Grande Arche and his monumental concourse would live up to the hype it had fleetingly inspired

among my family some years ago. “See!” Uncle Menny said at the time, trying to win over the elders. “There is still grandeur in the world.” They wanted none of it, muttered back at him, called it “a playground for plague-bearing rat-babies” or something similar in their degraded archaic vocabulary. But I thought it would be worth a look, and besides, I thought, tapping the terminal yellow dot on the metro map, the further the trip took me from where I had to go, the better. I could mute the call of the ages by immersing myself in a brash and modern place, if only for an hour or two.

I bought a ticket from a woman in the booth. She didn’t look up from her magazine as she pushed my change back at me through the slot. I descended deeper into the tunnel and was caught by an unexpected panic. I have come all this way, I thought, only to be buried again. I had an urge to escape up the stairs, to feel the rain and see the grey sky and smell the trees and the fug of the thick air, but the promise of Pharaoh Mitterrand’s broad concourse kept me where I was, waiting with the throng of citizens for the next train.

A wind rose out of the tunnel to our right and the train, liveried in soothing marine hues and informal hieroglyphs, pulled up at the platform. Hurried as they were, most of the passengers kept a respectful distance from me as I pulled myself into the carriage. The doors were already closing as I found purchase on the steel pole. I felt something crackle as the train jerked off and I splayed to keep upright. A young woman with headphones smiled up at me and stood, gesturing me into the seat. I was about to decline her offer when the carriage swung about a bumpy turn and I ended up sprawling into the space she had just vacated.

I suppose I *am* old, but it still hurts to admit it.

The commuter next to me, talking on his phone, shifted

away from me as I straightened myself.

At the next station, three men with accordions and a loudspeaker squeezed on and entertained the citizens with jolly music. It wasn't much to my taste, but I admired the men's civic spirit. When we arrived at the La Defense stop, it took some effort to stand and make my way out of the carriage. The passengers jostled past as I hauled myself up the stairs by pulling on the banister. Gradually I started warming up again and the going was easier. Near the top of the final flight, I felt a hand on my arm. I wanted to pull away but the grip was firm and I was wary of disconnecting a joint. I turned to look at my assailant. It was the same woman who had ceded her seat.

"Are you all right, sir?" she said in English. And then, "I'm sorry, I don't speak much French."

I speak several languages. "Thank you. I am," I said, trying to suggest with subtle motions that she let go of my arm.

"Let me help you."

"That's not necessary," I said. But still she held onto me, and she didn't let go until I was out of the station. When I looked around, I had to gasp. If we'd had pliable steel and glass and copious water, this grand clearing might have sprung from the imaginations of several of the pharaohs. I stared upwards at the gargantuan columns, gleaming blue and silver even in the subdued light.

"Where are you from?" the woman asked.

"Egypt," I said.

"Have you come on holiday?" she asked.

"Uh, yes. Some sightseeing. I also have a meeting."

She eyed me. "Well, good luck."

"Thank you for your help," I said, rubbing my arm where she had grasped it. "It was gallant."

"Any time. Enjoy your trip."

I watched the young woman walk away, considering how things have changed over time, and also how they are much the same as they've ever been. I remembered the kindness of my maids when I was small, those who didn't make it, those who weren't so well preserved. I strolled on, up the stairs of the Grande Arche, a hollow cube, lopsided but monumental. Towards the top, I thought about sitting on the steps but they were littered with cigarette filters and discs of ground-in chewing gum. I wanted to keep my garments clean for the meeting. I turned and looked along the avenue all the way to Napoleon's Arc de Triomphe, whose splendour Mitterrand's mimicked and mocked, and beyond, to my real destination. I had to face him today, and time was running out.

I hobbled back down towards the metro entrance but something kept me walking, down the great, light-grey paradesway, hundreds of cubits long, past a phalanx of dancing fountains which mesmerised me for a moment before I was drawn on by the weight of history; that permanently etched avenue, built for armies and invaders, drawing power unhindered into the centre of the city, amplifying it and radiating it outwards again like a great amulet, magnetised me. Before I knew it, I had crossed the river and the périphérique and was stumbling as mortally as possible past boulangeries and florists and banks in the 17th arrondissement. Eventually, past the Arc de Triomphe, the unwavering road became the Avenue des Champs-Élysées and multi-story franchise fashion outlets and jewelleries and cafés took over the walls of the road.

Some of the citizens in the thick mid-afternoon crowd glanced at me then flinched away, others stared more openly. I felt my face to check that nothing had come off. It felt fine to me, but when I glanced into the reflective shop windows to

check, I realised why they were staring. Some time during the walk, perhaps when I had bent to rub my calf muscles warm, my djellaba had ridden up and my leggings were showing. I shuffled the robe down again, embarrassed, and tottered on. But someone called out behind me, “Ce sont les bas chouettes, grampa!”

I turned to see a young couple beaming at me. It appeared that they were genuinely complimenting me on my underwear. The young woman, her hair hennaed and her face chalk-painted in a most becoming style, thrust her thumb up and nodded. “Génial!” I couldn’t help a slight swagger as I moved off. I’d be sure to tell Tadu and her girls when I got home. The encounter had come at a good time, injecting me with bonhomie and confidence before my assignation.

Now I was walking past the broad pavement outside the Grand Palais. I was nearly there; the Petit Palais, the place I had been trying not to think about all day. Now was my last chance to fulfil Mother’s request. My only chance, rather, since the exhibition was closing tonight. I crossed the road to the bleat of car horns and faced the entrance of the modest building. A sizeable poster draped down a column: “Exposition: trésors de l’Egypte ancienne”, it announced, a bold red sticker pasted halfway across the title, advertising “Dernière jour aujourd’hui!” Beside that was a photograph of the head of his sarcophagus. The gold and azure looked too bright. I wasn’t sure whether they had restored the paintwork too fancifully, too gaudily, or whether my memory had faded with time.

I approached the door and one of the two uniformed guards stationed at a metal detector shook her head and said, “Monsieur, dix minutes jusqu’à fermeture.” I made an excuse about forgetting something at the baggage check earlier. I wouldn’t be more than ten minutes; I was just going to pop

in and collect my item and come straight out. She waved me through.

I entered a storeroom, stripped off my clothes, removed the wig and propped myself in the corner. Some time later, the security guards made a final sweep of the gallery. There was nothing more than a cursory scan of torchlight through my store room; evidently, I appeared in place alongside a clutter of other artefacts. I waited a few more minutes for the lights to go off and the quiet to settle, then clothed myself. I had considered meeting him *au naturel*, to show my deference, but something stopped me. I wanted to be at an advantage.

He lay in a glass case in the centre of an honourably large corner room. The lid of the sarcophagus had been sawn through and opened to reveal his chest and face, a few original items of gravewealth scattered around artfully, bright skeins padding him in the box. He was clearly a highlight of this exhibition and I felt a little burp of pride. You know, we've stuck around for a lot longer than most. I come from a good family.

Amenhotep III looked like he was sleeping.

I tapped on the glass in the secret rhythm our family had held for millennia.

My father's face stirred and his body gradually warmed to life. He sat up, grimaced and stretched.

"It took you long enough, didn't it?"

I wanted to be the adult here, to behave rationally, but something about this man provoked the basest of reactions. I regressed to a three-year-old whenever I saw him. "I'm here now," I said.

"I'm being packed up and shipped off somewhere tomorrow. You know this? Probably stay in storage for decades."

"Yes."

"You come on the last day. Why bother?"

“My mother sent me. To send the respects of the family. That’s the way things are done traditionally, aren’t they?” I wish I could keep the petulance out of my voice. My inability to control my tone, to prove to him that I grown, beyond him, despite him, made me feel more naked than any number of layers could hide.

“Open this thing, boy,” he said. “I can barely hear you.”

I located the lock of the glass case and picked it. You learn several skills when you get to my age. I opened the door. Amenhotep gestured me inside. I sat on the edge of the sarcophagus around his waist level.

“What’s that smell?” he asked.

“What sm— Oh. Ice cream. I had some earlier and then a long, warm walk. I didn’t manage to ablute properly before I came.”

He shook his head, rolled his eyes with a crackle.

“How is Tiye?”

“She misses you. In fact, I have not come only to send the family’s regards. I am here as a formal emissary from Mother, Uncle Amenemopet, and several of your consorts and their houses. They would like you to consider coming back.”

“Back? To what? Our kingdom is gone. Millennia ago! Does your mother want me to come back to live like you, hiding in the dark like a snivelling rat?”

“Father, I don’t—”

“*They* are the rats, these creatures we were cursed to spawn, teeming without order or respect across the face of the ...” He seemed to tire of his rant. He knew I’d heard it before.

“You should give them a chance, Father. Get out into the world a little. You’ll see it’s not so bad. You should see them as our legitimate children. They still love grandeur, they love their past, the love the future. They love change. That is something

we were never much good at.”

“Humpf.”

“Just today I saw some brand new buildings, right here in Paris. They reminded me so much of home. There’s still the drive to build, to make their mark, that speaks of an unwavering pride and mastery.”

“You always liked your monomania, didn’t you, boy? How’s monotheism treating you these days?”

“You can’t let that go, can you, Father?” When I reigned, I saw sense in my mother’s growing conviction that we should worship a single god, the Aten, above others. It didn’t go down so well with the conservatives, and the elders shunned me for a long time after that. “Despite what you think of it, you know full well that monotheism was the way of the future. The entire world adopted it. It led to great things.”

“Yes, great. Absolutely. I read the news the news, boy. I don’t sleep all day. Your world of the future is a bastion of order, light, labour, tolerance and advance, isn’t it?”

“It is! It’s exactly that, Father!”

“Let’s retain our differences.” Father turned and sighed, and I could sense something different in him, something frail.

“Of course. I didn’t come to annoy you, Father. I came bearing the deep respect of your family; Mother’s, and my own.”

He faced me again. “Thank you,” he said, brittly.

“Mother misses you; the young ones miss you. Think of coming home, or at least of leaving this confinement.”

“Why? At least here, on display, most of the ogling spawn come out of some debased form of regard. They pay homage. The descendants out there ... they’re disrespectful.”

I thought of the children on the metro steps; but also of

the young woman who helped me up the other side. I didn't know what to argue, so I didn't. "There are marvels out there, Father," I said. "You'd like them."

"You should get home, boy."

He turned his back again and I thought he was dismissing me. I started to walk away.

"Wait," he said. He was holding a red and azure scarab, one of the trinkets he'd been displayed with. "Your mother was looking for this some time back."

"Do you want me to take it back to her?" I didn't come closer.

"Let me hang onto it for now."



At dawn, when the guard changed, I snuck out of the service door and made my way along the avenue to the Place de la Concorde. The obelisk seemed perverse planted there, stuck like a thorn in an ants' nest, the cars milling mindless and officious around its base, heedless of the power of Aten that the rock was drenched in, the lifefuls of blood that had charged it. I couldn't get that pale boy's face out of my head. Maybe my father and the huddled elders were right. Maybe the golden days had passed.

I was about to step into the road when I heard someone calling behind me. "Monsieur! Monsieur!"

I checked my garments, wondering if my body stocking was showing again, but it was not.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" the voice repeated. I was tired. I didn't want to turn. The man could be calling anyone. But the other pedestrians waiting at the crossing were angling looks in my direction and I knew the voice was hailing me.

Still the call came, and now in a different tone. At length, I turned to see a red-faced police officer striding up behind me.

Was he in trouble? And how might I help him?

I had no intention of shouting back to him to ask what he wanted, so I shrugged and turned my hands. This seemed to irritate him and he broke into a lazy trot, his face blooming with colour.

“Je m’excuse,” I started. “Je ne—”

“Vous devez retirer la capuche, monsieur.”

His words were polite, but his bearing was not. Take off my hood? But why? He was still advancing, that wary outrage colouring his face. I was afraid he would try to grab me or even strike me, and I did not want to disintegrate. I took a step away from him and as carefully and respectfully as I could, I removed the hood of my djellaba. Aware of how I must look: an emaciated old man with greasy, wrinkled skin and an unnatural wig, I raised my hands. Perhaps he would sympathise with me, think I was the victim of a disease.

“You are not to wear headdress in this country,” he said in English, that mongrel, common-denominator patois they all default to these days. “Perhaps where you come from,” he added. “Here, we are in France. You respect our customs.” At last he was close enough to me to stop approaching. He may have been myopic, because it was only when he glanced at my face from this range that his cheeks paled. He nodded once, then turned on his heel with a mutter. A French man wearing a peaked cap shook his head as he passed; whether in sympathy or antipathy, I was unsure.



I was playing backgammon with Kiya when Mother came over and showed me a news article on her tablet. “Priceless Egyptian Artefacts Missing from French Museum. Lax Security Blamed.”

We both smiled, our tendons popping. I wondered what flavour he’d like when he came home.

Afterword: A Mummy in a Modern City

Transcript of a presentation Louis made about "Akhenaten Goes to Paris" to the Monstrous Antiquities: Archaeology and the Uncanny in Popular Culture conference, University College London,

1–3 November 2013

So ...

I promised to discuss why I took my fictional mummy into Paris, bringing the ancient, marginalised monster into the thick of contemporary Western society and imagining some aspects of the culture, both strange and familiar, he'd encounter there.

I have handled all these ideas much more thoroughly in formal work that you can link to from my website. I've written essays on sex and gender in modern vampire fic-

tion and on apocalypse and post-religion in some books by Douglas Coupland.

Let's start with some wisdom from Julia Kristeva:

On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its socio-historical conditions might be, on the fragile border [...] where identities [...] do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*

For me, this sums up the functions of any fictional monster. Literary monsters are a way of processing our fears of liminality and the uncanny.

As you've been hearing at this conference and as you can see in *The Book of the Dead* and any number of mummy movies and books, the themes the mummy figure evokes are extremely wide-ranging and could fill a library. So I'll focus on some of the more personal interests I drew on while writing "Akhenaten Goes to Paris".

I was born and raised and still live in Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa. There are 11 official languages in South Africa and dozens of unofficial and foreign and migrant languages. In this regard, the city is a lot like London or Paris.

Johannesburg also suffers its fair share of hatred, fear and xenophobia. In 2010, around the time of a particularly malicious spate of xenophobic violence, I compiled a collection of short stories called *Home Away*. Twenty-four writers chose one hour each in a single global day and told stories about being South African in the world... The writers were a mix of expats and immigrants, born locally or

far away. I wanted to confuse and dissolve the neat categories we put ourselves in.

Why Paris?

I think people often forget – in their romanticised imaginations – that Egyptians – and Egyptian mummies – are African, and they would suffer the same post-colonial stresses as foreigners in South Africa and Africans in Europe. I could have sent Akhenaten to London just as easily, I suppose – or any first-world city where a great conglomeration of people battle for space and resources – but France’s recent banning of religious headgear seemed to present the best possible dramatic conflict for my proto-Muslim mummy.

More than this, though, Paris is the ideal mirror for ancient Egypt – its monumentalist architectural swathes – wide avenues, arches and monoliths, its proud insularity would have been very familiar to this pharaoh.

But most of all, I set the story in Paris because I love the city. It’s as welcoming and beautiful and inspiring as it is complicated.

The Monstrous Body

In a lot of my work I’ve been interested in body politics. There is an intriguing overlap between the presentation of women’s bodies and monsters’ bodies in fiction. And there are some fascinating literary theories around the body and the deployment of sexuality that combine psychology, politics and cultural studies.

The “Queer”, as described by Sue-Ellen Case, is “the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny”. The queer

figure exists in the space between polarities, in an indefinable limbo state. The mummy is a queer figure – both living and dead – whose existence challenges the polarities on which rational – hegemonic, dominant – constructions of order rest. To protect our sense of order, we define anything or anyone that challenges our sense of moral stability as monster, then shun it and try to make it invisible.

Jonathan Dollimore uses the term “proximate” for this uncanny figure. The “proximate” is the figure which cannot be classified into polarities and places itself in the dangerous indefinable area between them, and threatens to show up the false simplicity of the binary oppositions on which dominant discourses base themselves. Queers, mummies and troublesome women are all proximate figures.

Simply put, we define monsters so that we are able to quarantine them safely, keep their threat away from our certainty. But the problem is that monsters keep coming back. What we repress and find uncanny keeps returning. More than this, they show us how their monstrosity is intimately part of our order.

Stories of mummies and vampires and zombies are most terrifying when we are made to see that the monsters are ourselves, and that we cannot escape our own abjection.

Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection shows in psychoanalytical terms how we are constantly haunted by a fear that the horrifying things we have repressed – in the process of being socialised – will come back and shatter our certainty and stability.

This is precisely what happens when a mummy emerges from the crypt. It reminds us of all those pre-Oedipal, infantile urges we quashed. The emerging mummy shows

us just what it looks like when our socialisation collapses and these id-driven urges return. This is a fundamental function of horror fiction – it allows us to face the return of the abject in a safe, controlled space.

God is Dead

A final regular interest of mine is religion, particularly how religion changes after the notion of God is dead. I've studied the psychological and social functions of religion once the trappings of power have been stripped away. If we lose religion we are left with unmet psychological and social needs. We have to find something else to meet our needs for a meaningful sense of community and transcendence of our individuality.

Julia Kristeva seems to agree. In *Powers of Horror* she suggests that

literature is [abjection's] privileged signifier [...] far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it [... literature] represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and serious apocalypses [...] Hence [...] its being seen as taking the place of the sacred. [... The fiction writer] is an undoer of narcissism and of all imaginary identity as well.

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*

I think that fiction has taken the place of religion in serving our social and cathartic needs, and in keeping our horror at bay. The novel rises in societies as traditional religion falls. When we read stories, we don't want certainties applied sternly from above; we want conflict and

complexity and discovery and amazement. And this is why mummies make such good fiction.

But when writing fiction, you need to put the philosophical ideas behind a story far in the background. The story still has to be engaging, concrete, human. Sending my mummy to Paris, and eventually making him shuffle along the most fashionable, body-conscious boulevards, allowed me to play with ideas of the monstrous body, xenophobia and belief, in a light, human way.

Now – I was planning to tell you what research I did for the story. I did study undergraduate archaeology and went to Paris to scout for locations, but I was still very worried that our hosts from the Egypt Exploration Society would find it riddled with historical holes and inaccuracies. So I undertook exhaustive studies to fill in the blanks of the story ... Oh, hang on. How did those get in here? Remember: Wikipedia is not a legitimate source for academic essays.

Let me leave you with words of solace from one of our esteemed hosts:

Mummy fiction, whether literary or cinematic, has a long and dishonourable tradition of getting certain of its facts wrong; it's part of the fun and facts should never be allowed to interfere with the telling of a good tale.

John J. Johnston,
Vice-chair of the Egypt Exploration Society