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The Riddles of the Sphinx

Egyptomania

In 2006 the Seoul theme park Lotte World displayed an exhibition of Egyptian artefacts in its Adventure section. The *Korean Times* reported, ‘A crowded theme park is not usually a place for getting in touch with ancient Egyptian culture’ (*Korean Times*, ‘Seoul Theme Park Displays Egyptian Artefacts’, 19 March 2006). There is, in fact, a long history of association between ancient Egyptian culture and popular entertainment, and it is not so surprising that a theme park should be a site for ‘getting in touch with ancient Egyptian culture’. Lotte World is not alone as an entertainment space with a fascination for Egyptiana.

The Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, built in 1993, is another testament to the conjunction between the worlds of entertainment and ancient Egyptian culture. The main building of the Luxor Casino is shaped as a pyramid, the frontage features a Sphinx and an obelisk bears the name of the hotel in a

Figure 6.1 Bullock's Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, London, 1812

script that evokes ancient hieroglyphics. The Luxor Hotel here recycles the key signifiers of Egyptiana that are repeatedly found in fairgrounds and carnival sites. The theming of the Luxor is one of the many Las Vegas spectacles that in their architecture and theming are in a direct line of descent from nineteenth-century popular entertainments. The invariable signifiers of exotic exploration into unknown territory are the figures and pyramids of 'ancient Egypt', which established tropes of Egyptiana that have continued over three centuries. The architecture and design of the Luxor Hotel replicates a fascination with the exoticism of the 'East' and a set of imagery that dates back to the period of European expansionism and to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798.

A contemporary fascination with the Egyptian extends throughout European and American carnival and fairground sites. In Britain, Chessington World of Adventures offers the Mystic East and the Forbidden Kingdom, two spaces in the park that reference archaeological expeditions to Egypt, with the attractions of Rameses' Revenge and the Terror Tomb. At Alton Towers there is an Egyptian-themed Forbidden Valley. In Italy, the theme park Gardaland has 'La Valle dei Re', which promises 'a great adventure into the mysterious Valley of the Kings: a reproduction of the temple of Abu Simbel'.

Egypt is recurrently deployed in the European and American theme park as a signifier of mystery, ancient history, adventure and exploration. Edward Said has argued that 'Egypt' carries connotations of 'long ago and far away' for Western audiences, and that it represents an Orientalist fairy tale quality of the exotic and unknown:

Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as 'long ago' or 'the beginning' or 'at the end of time' is poetic – made up. For a historian of Middle Kingdom Egypt, 'long ago' will have a very clear sort of meaning, but even this meaning does not totally dissipate the imaginative, quasi-fictional quality one senses lurking in a time very different and distant from our own. For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away. (Said 1978: 55)

The imaginative geography of Egypt to be found in the theme park emerges from a curious combination of 'historical' accounts, news stories and tales of superstition and legend. A mixture of the 'quasi-fictional', imaginative and historical has combined to create a set of potent cultural myths of Egypt. 'Ancient Egypt' is a construction that has claims to historical authenticity, which evokes geographical and historical knowledges, but simultaneously allows for imaginative speculation and fantasy. Like Robin Hood or King Arthur, the Egyptian sphinx and mummy are figures that have a basis in fact, but have become shrouded in the mist of 'Ancient History', myth and legend inextricable from any known history. The European adventurers who uncovered these archaeological artefacts were prone themselves to perpetuate mythological heroic tales of their exploits. The figures of 'Ancient Egypt'

therefore become signs that can be deployed in a variety of different contexts and made to fit into any number of different narratives, as they were to do throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

'Egyptomania' is a phrase coined by the French archaeologist Humbert (1989) to describe the phenomenon that followed Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798. The Battle of the Pyramids was regularly illustrated and Egyptian landscapes, the Sphinx and the pyramid became images of French imperial triumph. Napoleon took a commission of academics with him on his imperial campaign, including artists and printers to illustrate his endeavours. It was this commission of scholars who produced the first key texts and images, which served to promote an academic and popular fascination with 'Ancient Egypt' in France and to introduce the West to the artefacts and designs of Egypt. These texts were published as lavishly illustrated accounts; the most popular was Dominique Vivant Denon's 1802 *Voyages dans la Basse et la Haut Égypte*. This was followed from 1809 to 1829 by Denon's *Description de l'Égypte*, which was issued with eleven volumes of illustrations. Said has described Denon's volumes as a 'great collective monument of erudition ... [which] provided a scene or setting for Orientalism' (Said 1978: 42–3). Vivant Denon's status as Director General of the Museums of France and as the first director of the Louvre Museum put him in a strong position to promote Egyptology in France. Denon's volumes were hugely successful, and prompted a fashion for all things Egyptian in France. His work was translated and published in England and Italy, and had a wide readership in Britain, which had its own imperial eye on Egypt.

In London, The African Association (originally titled the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa) had been founded in 1788, with a mission to promote Egypt as a source of geographical and historical knowledge. The African Association was the patron for the traveller Mungo Park, who published *Travel in the Interior Districts of Africa* in 1799 under the auspices of the association. The Scots-born independent traveller James Bruce was another explorer and enthusiastic self-promoter, whose adventures in Egypt included the disinterring of the Tomb of Rameses III. In 1790 Bruce published five illustrated volumes of his adventures, titled, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1772 and 1773*. Bruce's travelogues cast himself as an intrepid hero exploring unknown and dangerous territories; his narrative has been described as 'a confusion of voices. ... It combines *Boy's Own* adventure story with erotic fantasy, geological survey with military history' (Whale 1994: 183). An 1874 encyclopaedia entry implies that Bruce's traveller's tales are overstated; it describes his claims as written in 'magniloquent language ... His exultation was extreme, and he records it with singular strength of expression' (*Popular Encyclopaedia* 1874: 795).

The published successes of Bruce and Denon are evidence of the late eighteenth-century fascination with 'Egyptian' style and objects. The fashion for the 'Egyptian' put Egypt on the itinerary of the Grand Tour and made

archaeological souvenirs objects of desire for private collectors. This taste for the exotic often had little to do with the consumers' interest in specific colonial or archaeological missions, but was more a matter of style and conspicuous consumption. The vogue for *exotisme égyptienne*, however, extended beyond French and British archaeologists and the literati to become part of the popular and public domain, literally so in the streets of Paris where 'Egyptianised architecture' and the *style égyptienne* became popular architectural motifs in Paris buildings in the 1820s (see Humbert 1998); the Place du Caire in Paris features friezes of 'Egyptian' masks produced in 1828. The irresistible combination of romantic locations, exotic travels, imperial expeditions and showmanship established Egyptian architecture and style as markers of both entertainment and imperial authority.

The Battle of the Nile in 1798 and the defeat of the French army in Egypt in 1801 became widely circulated images of imperial triumph, regularly illustrated for the British press, as Egyptian campaigns had once been for Napoleon. These battles were to be re-enacted in British panoramas and dioramas throughout the nineteenth century. The French commission members were allowed to keep their plans and notes from the campaign, but the British laid claim to their major archaeological finds. The Rosetta Stone, uncovered by French troops in 1799, was transported to the British Museum along with other artefacts (where they remain) in a display of triumph over the French and provided the basis for the British Museum's current splendid collection of Egyptian relics. The arrival of the head of Rameses in the Egyptian collection was a much-illustrated news story, and prompted Shelley's 1817 poem 'Ozymandias'.

The traveller and showman William Bullock mounted a touring exhibition of Egyptian artefacts, and cannily included Napoleon's travelling carriage, which had been seized by the British. In the context of the British defeat of the French, this was a display of triumphalism over Napoleon; the show was an enormous popular success and became a *cause célèbre* for the British press. The success of the touring display allowed Bullock to build an 'Egyptian Hall' in London's Piccadilly. Designed by the man responsible for Brighton Pavilion, Peter Robinson (who had never seen Egypt), the Egyptian Hall was no more authentic than the chinoiserie of the Brighton Pavilion. The design for the hall was 'freely' based on Denon's drawings and featured all the tropes of Egyptiana to be found in illustrated accounts of European expeditions, including hieroglyphs, statues and sphinxes. The show that opened the Egyptian Hall in 1812 displayed Bullock's collection of 'upwards of Fifteen Thousand Natural and Foreign Curiosities, Antiquities and Productions of the Fine Arts' (see Altick 1978: 237) and was hugely popular. Galleries around the hall displayed similar exhibitions and sold Egyptiana souvenirs and prints,¹ while the hall and its visitors became a regular subject for contemporary cartoonists.

In 1821 the Egyptian Hall housed an exhibition of Egyptian art and artefacts collected by the Italian Giovanni Battista Belzoni, who had been a

fairground giant, magician and strong man in England, and the first European to find the Valley of the Kings. Belzoni opened the exhibition with the flourish of public unwrappings of a human and a monkey mummy. Belzoni was an adventurer in the Bruce mould, and he was a showman who had appeared with the clown Joseph Grimaldi in Harlequinades, at circuses and fairgrounds. Belzoni had trained in hydraulics, which he turned into an entertainment: a 'curious exhibition of Hydraulicks'. It was the opportunity to market a waterwheel that led him to Egypt; there, with his wife Sarah, according to his memoirs, 'we remained from 1815–1819. Here I had the good fortune to be the discoverer of many remains of antiquity of that primitive nation' (Belzoni 1820: viii). With the approval of the British consul, Belzoni uncovered and excavated the Abu Simbel temple, along with the tomb of Rameses II in the Valley of the Kings (sites that are recreated in the Italian theme park, so reclaiming Belzoni for Italy), sending the spoils back to England and the British Museum; one sarcophagus eventually ended up in Sir John Soane's collection of curiosities. In 1820 Belzoni published his *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs and Excavations in Egypt and Nubia ...* (Belzoni 1820), adorned with a noble portrait of Belzoni in a turban. Belzoni's wife's rather interesting account of her encounters with local women – 'Mrs Belzoni's Trifling Account of the Women of Egypt, Nubia, and Syria' – is appended as an afterword to what Belzoni clearly sees as the main story of his adventures in rifling tombs. Belzoni's account is that of the showman, with flamboyant descriptions of mummies, scarabs, statuary, the tombs, their colours and decoration. A description of a site at Karnak, like Bruce's account of his travels in Egypt, is written in 'magniloquent' and vividly pictorial language:

... the towering prophylaea, high portals, and obelisks which project above the various groups of lofty palm-trees, and even at a distance announce magnificence. On approaching the avenue of sphinxes, which leads to the great temple, the visitor is inspired with devotion and piety: their enormous size strikes him with wonder and respect. (Belzoni 1820: 152)

The combination of Belzoni's showmanship and the context of the Egyptian Hall introduced an established 'Egyptian' iconography into British popular culture. In 1822, 'one of the fabled grand caverns under the Pyramids of Egypt' (Broadbent 1901: 174) featured as a pantomime set. Following the enormous success of the exhibition of Belzoni's findings, Bullock travelled to Mexico and brought back a collection of Mexican archaeological artefacts. In 1824 'Ancient and Modern Mexico' was another of his successful and popular exhibitions, which was put on display in the 'Great Egyptian Room' of the Egyptian Hall. The exhibition was fronted by a panorama of Mexico City, and the catalogue compared the 'ancient culture' of the Aztecs with that of the Egyptians. Bullock was an exponent of a far-fetched and now discredited 'diffusionist' theory of

archaeology, arguing that Egypt was the origin and source of Aztec culture. Nonetheless, the theory had its adherents at the British Museum and University of London and was to continue throughout the nineteenth century, not least because the British Museum acquired the bulk of Bullock's Mexican collections. The British Museum, like Bullock, displayed their collection of Mexican artefacts in an Egyptian Room and so implicitly endorsed Bullock's confused archaeology and misplaced alliance of Egyptian and Mexican styles. Bullock thus established a conflation of 'Ancient' Egypt and Mexico in popular displays of their artefacts, and compounded a confusion between their architecture and monuments that continues to survive in popular representations of the foreign and exotic. This generalised conflation of 'ancient cultures' is perpetuated in contemporary constructions of Egyptology and archaeology; Mexican and Egyptian sets have been used interchangeably in Hollywood films since the beginnings of cinema. Indiana Jones, George Lucas' star adventurer hero, is also an archaeologist, but his expertise lurches between Egyptian and South American archaeological knowledge and travels; Disney's Magic Kingdom Parks feature a 'race through the ruins of the Lost City', a geographically and historically unspecified archaeological site.

William Bullock promoted an association of showmanship and the archaeological; the success of his Egyptian Hall was to be an influence on the design of theatres and later cinemas. Bullock went to America;² on his retirement, the Hall became a venue for magicians and other vaudeville acts, willing to display anything that would draw a crowd. As Altick puts it, '[n]othing that appeared on the London exhibition scene in the nineteenth century was alien to it ... the Egyptian Hall served in effect as a cluster of speculative showcases for the miscellaneous entertainers that worked the London circuit' (Altick 1978: 250). The Egyptian Hall confirmed a long-standing (and continuing) association between Egyptiana and popular entertainments. As Helen Stoddart has pointed out, circus and spectacle were central to the development of Western Orientalism:

The role of the circus in the consolidation of Orientalist discourses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century has rarely been mentioned, and yet the circus's involvement, not only in the representation and dramatisation of so-called oriental cultures, but also in the accumulation of (human and animal) performers from the East is extensive and complex. (Stoddart 2000: 102)

European museums were also central to the construction of an Orientalised Egypt; both the Louvre and British Museum sent expeditions to catalogue Egyptian antiquities. As the market and Western desire for Egyptian 'curios' expanded, the Egyptian Service moved to issue licences for excavations and permission to take findings out of Egypt. An assistant at the Egyptian Department of the Louvre, Auguste Mariette, uncovered an avenue of Sphinxes and the burial site of the sacred bulls; on the back of these findings he became the Director of an Egyptian Service of Antiquities and was responsible for

the establishment of the museum in Cairo. The resurgence of the French in Egyptology saw a revival of Egyptiana in French culture.

Egypt held a fascination for French Romanticism, as it had for Shelley. The novelist Flaubert visited the pyramids, and Theophile Gautier's 'The Mummy's Foot' was published in 1832, with his 'Romance of a Mummy' in 1856. These tales were responses to the fashion for the public and private acquisition of Egyptian antiquities; 'The Mummy's Foot' concerned the importing of an archaeological relic from Egypt back to France. These were tales that had an influence on the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Louisa M. Alcott, both of whom wrote American versions of the imported mummy tale. 'Some Words with a Mummy', Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 spoof of the mummy horror story, is an indication of the prevalence of the mummy myth in American popular culture. Poe's story demonstrates some unease with the importing of Egyptian artefacts – it deals with the arrival of a mummy in a Baltimore museum who, rising from the dead, convinces the assembled academicians of the superiority of Egyptian culture.³

The popular success of the Egyptian Hall and the collections of the British Museum reinvigorated the fashion for the Egyptian in Britain. As more and more tombs were uncovered by museum expeditions, the figure of the mummy became a focus of Egyptiana. In 1833, the surgeon Thomas Joseph Pettigrew published an illustrated *History of Egyptian Mummies*, its popular success compounded by Pettigrew's public performances of unfurling a mummy from its shroud, a trick learned from Belzoni. The fascination with sarcophagi and their contents straddled the cultural gap between museums and wealthy private collectors, on one hand, and popular theatre and entertainments, on the other; *The Mummy* was a farce produced on the London stage in 1833. Robert Hay's 1834 Egyptian expedition gave rise to a set of drawings that became the basis for a Panorama entertainment displayed in Leicester Square between 1835 and 1836 and which went on to tour American cities.

If museums and private collectors were fast acquiring mummies, statues and antiquities, the obelisks that flanked the temples in which they were found were huge objects that were to become part of the cityscapes of London, Paris and eventually New York. Their journey and arrival were big news stories in the European and American press. Paris had acquired their first obelisk in 1831, when the Viceroy of Egypt presented France with two granite obelisks. The perilous journey of the Luxor obelisk to the Place de la Concorde in Paris was a long-running news story, and the arrival of the 'needle' in 1836 was front-page news. London's obelisk, Cleopatra's Needle, came to the city transported by the Crystal Palace Company, and was originally intended for the Great Exhibition. The hazardous journey of the needle from Alexandria was a regular news story for *The Illustrated London News*, and its final arrival in 1878 at a ceremony featuring Queen Victoria, the Khedive of Egypt and cheering crowds was a newsworthy story for the front page. Stripped of any historical or religious significance (Cleopatra's Needle had no connection at

all with Cleopatra), the spoils of Egyptian tombs and temples had become a popular public spectacle that made little reference to their source of origin. Decorated with hieroglyphics that were incomprehensible but intriguing to a Western audience, Egyptian obelisks were status symbols for a city, signalling not so much 'Egyptianness' as the wealth and international influence of a Western city. In 1881, *The New York Herald* asserted that every city with any claim to world status should have its own obelisk:

[I]t would be absurd for the people of any great city to hope to be happy without an Egyptian obelisk. Rome has had them this great while and so has Constantinople. Paris has one. London has one. If New York was without one, all those great cities might point the finger of scorn at us and intimate that we could never rise to any real moral grandeur until we had our obelisk. (Quoted in Hassan 2003: 64)

Egypt was by now officially on the European and American tourist trail, no longer a journey restricted to the adventurous traveller. The Prince and Princess of Wales had travelled to Egypt in 1862, and Thomas Cook organised the first tourist trip down the Nile in 1869; Egyptian souvenirs were objects of desire for nations and collectors. Mark Twain (who figures large at Disneyland) was among those who went on the first American organised grand tour of 'Europe, the Near East and the Holy Land' in 1867, writing reports for the American press. These reports were collected in 1869 as *The Innocents Abroad*; by 1879 the book had sold over 125,000 copies. Twain quotes the excursion advertisement, which makes archaeology its central attraction: 'The ruins of Caesar's Palace, Pompey's Pillar, Cleopatra's Needle, the Catacombs and ruins of ancient Alexandria, will be found worth the visit' (Twain 2002: 8). Twain's description of the pyramids in *The Innocents Abroad* has the same awe that Belzoni expressed, and is one that is evoked in the mountains and pyramids of the theme park's Forbidden Valleys and Kingdoms:

Above the date-plumes in the middle distance, swelled a domed and pinnacled mass, glimmering through a tinted, exquisite mist; away toward the horizon a dozen shapely pyramids watched over ruined Memphis; and at our feet the bland impassive Sphynx looked out upon the picture from her throne in the sands as placidly and pensively as she had looked upon its like full fifty lagging centuries ago. (Twain 2002: 475)

In the context of Britain, the dynasties and kingdoms of the Pharaohs offered an attractive and authenticating model for the Victorians of their own monarchy and Empire; Egypt featured large at Prince Albert's celebration of Victorian Empire and commerce, the Great Exhibition of 1851 (see Philips 2004). The Crystal Palace built to house the exhibition was decorated with Egyptian statuary and sphinxes, by then fashionable accoutrements for the gardens of country house estates.⁴ The Crystal Palace floor plan included an Egyptian Avenue, which led to the Egyptian Court, and Victoria and Albert

appeared as icons over the three entrances to the Egyptian Court, which displayed replicas of Egyptian statuary. The monumentalism of these replicas proved a good background for illustrated magazine reports of the exhibition, as in *The Illustrated London News*. Magazines promoted popular lithographs of the exhibition; the visually dramatic sphinx, obelisk and pyramid were recurrently used as image of the 'exoticism' promised by the exhibition, and so became firmly established in the British popular imagination.

While Egyptian souvenirs had long been desirable for wealthy collectors, the Crystal Palace saw a trade in reproduction artefacts and in 'Egyptianized products' (Rice and MacDonald 2003: 8), which brought decorative and household objects embellished with 'Egyptian' designs into the everyday domestic life of the thousands of visitors. The widespread popular fashion for Egyptiana in Victorian Britain was not only associated with the mysteries of an ancient past but also had connotations of a brave new world of engineering and transportation. The scale and the skills required for building the pyramids were a source of fascination; in 1859, John Taylor published *The Great Pyramid: Why Was It Built and Who Built It?* This was followed in 1866 by the best-seller *The Great Pyramid: Its Secrets and Mysteries Revealed* and by *Life and Work at the Great Pyramid* in 1867, both by Charles Piazzi Smyth, the Astronomer Royal for Scotland. Smyth's theory that the pyramids had been built by a lost race under a divine influence did much to fuel an association of Egyptian artefacts with religious superstition (Tyldesley 2005: 116). The fascination with Egyptian architecture extended beyond Britain; the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris featured an Egyptian Pavilion, with a temple that was hailed as 'an example of the essence of archaeology' (quoted in Delamaire 2003: 128). The pavilion housed a display of plans for the Suez Canal project.

The conjunction of Egypt and engineering centred in 1869 on the completion of the Suez Canal, an undertaking that Napoleon had once planned, and which was, in the event, largely financed and engineered by the French. The ten-year process of construction was regularly reported and illustrated in the press in Europe and America. The 1869 first edition of *The Graphic*, 'An Illustrated Weekly Newspaper' in Britain, demonstrates the ubiquity of references to 'Egypt': the title page has an engraving titled 'Egyptian Girl', and the main features include a series of images of the newly constructed Suez Canal and of the Khedive of Egypt. The opening, with a 'Procession of Ships in the Canal', was a major story; H.M. Stanley, a reporter for *The New York Herald*, was sent to cover the opening of the Suez Canal for American readers; he was instructed by his editor to travel the Nile and to report back on 'Whatever is worth seeing' in Egypt (de Vries 1973: 54). *The Illustrated London News* reported the event as a marker of contemporary progress and technology:

It is impossible not to contemplate this magnificent achievement without emotion. Not only does it excite our sense of admiration, but it suggests thoughts and stirs

feelings, and awakens hopes all of which carry us into the far future, and connect themselves with the progressive development of the human race. (Quoted in de Vries 1973: 23)

The Khedive of Egypt set out to capitalise on such ‘admiration’ and so commissioned an Egyptian-themed opera to mark the opening of the Suez Canal. Although it was commissioned from Cairo and apparently authenticated by Egyptologists, the designs and libretto owed much more to French tastes than to any Egyptian style. The original synopsis was written by a French Egyptologist, who also supervised the costumes and sets, which were designed in Paris, while the music was by Giuseppe Verdi, who dismissively referred to ‘Egyptian business’ (Osborne 1971: 155). Despite the Viceroy’s concern that the opera should be ‘authentic’, *Aïda*’s Egyptian setting has proved to be less significant than its status as an embodiment of European grand opera. One opera critic assesses its place in operatic tradition as entirely European: ‘*Aïda* is, indeed, the very type of grand opera. It is the last and greatest example of that species created by the reaction of the Parisian taste of the Second Empire upon the romantic drama of the nineteenth century’ (Hussey 1973: 184–5). Significantly, it was the Siege of Paris rather than any delays from Egypt that postponed the production’s premiere in Cairo in 1871, two years late. *Aïda* was very much a product of a set of European imaginations constructing their own Egypt, but the opera established a long-standing sound and setting for grand Egyptiana.⁵

Aïda established a set of conventions for the theatrical display of monumental Egyptian architecture, but itself drew on established European images of Egypt; Egyptiana was now regularly referenced across high art and popular culture. Jules Verne’s hugely popular novel *Around the World in 80 Days* was published in 1872, the year *Aïda* premiered in Europe, and is a response to the new possibilities for travel. Phileas Fogg begins his journey by travelling from London to Suez, and takes the P&O steamer through the Suez Canal. A backdrop of the canal was designed for a toy theatre version of Verne’s novel. Egyptology now had a conventionalised iconography in both scholarship and popular entertainments, and was an international phenomenon.

While Egypt was a site of struggle for British and French colonial exploits, it does not have quite the same resonance for American popular memory. There was nonetheless a prevalence of Egyptian mummy stories in nineteenth-century American popular culture, which, like Gauthier’s story, centre on archaeological artefacts transported from Egypt to Britain and America. Popular interest in archaeology was fuelled by international news stories, and later by the expeditions and acquisitions of Egyptian artefacts by American museums. Louisa May Alcott’s ‘Lost in a Pyramid; or the Mummy’s Curse’ appeared in the popular *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Magazine* in 1869, the year the Suez Canal opened.⁶

In 1881, New York City finally acquired its own obelisk, which was placed in Central Park with great pomp and publicity. A huge number of tickets were

sold for the opening ceremony, at which the first president of the Metropolitan Museum urged the city to enlarge its collection of Egyptian artefacts. The ceremony for the siting of the needle was a media event, which extended beyond the news pages to become part of the iconography of everyday life. Images of the American obelisk regularly appeared in advertisements for all manner of commodities; one brand of cotton claimed itself as strong enough to pull the newly acquired needle (Hassan 2003: 65). The same year, an American tourist to Luxor was involved in uncovering the mummies of Seti and Rameses II. An American team of Egyptologists, led by George Reisner,⁷ was given permission to work on one of the pyramids at Giza. America now had its own acquisitions, and American archaeologists were now significant players in the Egyptology market.

The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, the first international exhibition held in America, had featured an Egyptian Court, largely in homage to the one at the Great Exhibition. By 1893, the Chicago University Museum could show off its own Egyptian holdings at the Chicago World Columbian Exhibition. Egyptiana also featured at the exhibition as popular entertainment; the midway was designed as the Streets of Cairo, where the attractions included Little Egypt (a dancer performing a belly dance) and a Syrian troupe performing a 'Wild East' show, a variation on the Wild West display of Buffalo Bill and his troupe. Little Egypt, with its combination of the salacious and the exotic, was to become an established attraction for travelling carnivals and state fairs. Luna Park in Coney Island later borrowed the Streets of Cairo from the Chicago Fair. Its creator, Frederick Thompson, designed it as an 'electric Baghdad' of spires and domes, neatly combining the modernity of electricity with a mythology of the ancient East.

In 1909, Luna Park in Paris followed suit with an attraction named 'La Crypte des Pharaons', a ride lavishly decorated with Egyptian sphinxes. Egyptiana appeared on the London stage, in dramas and farces, such as the 1904 *The Maid and the Mummy*. Blackpool, Britain's seaside resort, also rushed to embrace the Egyptian:

Oriental motifs, evoking imperial otherness, were prevalent everywhere in Blackpool's pleasure palaces in the decades either side of the turn of the century, with minarets and onion domes in glorious profusion on the North Pier pavilion. (Cross and Walton 2005: 76)

The Battle of Tel-el-Kebir in 1882 provided a potent set of news images of 'imperial otherness' for the British. Popularly known as the 'War in Egypt', the battle was a repression of an uprising against Anglo-French rule in Egypt. The battle became a popular and long-lived icon of British military triumph (not least because it excluded the French from the Nile valley), which was reproduced in news images, in paintings and as entertainment. Melton Prior, 'Special War Artist' of *The Illustrated London News*, presented a lecture that

included panoramas of the naval and military operations; the lecture was reviewed as 'a most entertaining soirée' (quoted in de Vries 1973: 95) and transferred to the Crystal Palace. Prior's lecture was the first of a series of commercial dioramas and panoramas that travelled across the country. Poole's Grand Pictorial Tours poster advertised its central attraction in 1885:

A Grand Entirely New Mastodon Diorama. ... A Great Myriorama of the EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN. ... JUST ADDED ANOTHER SPLENDID NEW SCENE OF THE NILE EXPEDITION AT THE SECOND CATARACT OR RAPIDS OF THE NILE. (Evanion Collection, British Library)

The popular novelists of the British Empire were inevitably drawn to Egypt, with its potential for stories of adventure, the occult and British triumph. Following the success of *She*, Rudyard Kipling suggested a mummy story plot to Sir Henry Rider Haggard. Haggard was fascinated by Egyptology; his first visit (of four) was in 1887.⁸ He was clearly uneasy about the excavation and public display of mummy figures, and in 1904 wrote an article for the *Daily Mail* arguing against what he called 'The Trade in the Dead'. Haggard's 1912 story 'Smith and the Pharaohs' was another 'plea on behalf of the long-deceased Egyptians to be left in peace' (Lupton 2003: 30).

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, like Haggard a regular contributor to the widely read *Boy's Own Paper*, travelled up the Nile in 1895. His interest in Egypt came from his position as both a writer of adventure and as a serious advocate of the occult. Conan Doyle's 1892 story 'Lot No. 249' makes claims to 'authentic' academic Egyptology and, like Haggard's story, has distinct echoes of Gauthier, Poe and Alcott in its Gothic tale of a mummy restored by an Oxford student's knowledge of Egyptology. Bram Stoker published a similar conjunction of Egyptology and horror in 1903, *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, which would provide the scenario for a number of later films. Such stories were republished and regularly imitated in the boy's illustrated weeklies of Britain and America. The imperial tone of the magazine stories invariably represents the figure of the archaeologist as a scholar removing the artefacts of Egypt for the benefit of Western knowledge, a benign image of the adventurer as rational and benevolent. Nonetheless, the frequency with which mummies and other archaeological figures turn nasty when transported suggests, as in the tales of Poe, Alcott, Haggard and Doyle, more than a little disquiet at the appropriation of archaeological excavations.

The prevalence of Egyptiana in Edwardian fiction and architecture is indicated in Edith Nesbit's 1904 children's novel *The Phoenix and the Carpet*; the Phoenix, uncovered by a family of contemporary children, repeatedly references 'Ancient Egypt'; he approvingly recognises the contemporary architecture of the Phoenix Fire Insurance Office and takes it for his own temple. The ubiquity of small Egyptian souvenirs is evident in Nesbit's 1906 *The Story of the Amulet*, in which the children of the story are easily able to

acquire an ancient amulet through whose magical powers they are transported to the lost city of Atlantis and get to meet a Pharaoh.

By the early twentieth century, Egyptiana was an established field for pulp fiction and had joined fantasy and Gothic fiction as a genre for illustrated short stories in popular magazines for adults. These stories had a prolonged life in paperback anthologies of mystery stories, which came with luridly illustrated covers. A historian of Egyptomania explains,

Dozens, if not hundreds, of mummy stories were featured in many of these pulps, particularly those dedicated to fantasy, science fiction, mystery and the occult. ... Modern paperback books have continued the trends of the pulps with anthologies of mummy stories collecting both older and newly written tales. (Lupton 2003: 39)

Among the most prolific and enduring writers of these popular stories was 'Sax Rohmer',⁹ author of the Fu Manchu series, the first of which appeared in 1911. These stories, later adapted for a long-running film series, regularly used Egyptian settings and characters; the oriental criminal mastermind Fu Manchu is himself described as having features like those of a mummy. For over forty years Rohmer contributed versions of the 'mummy' supernatural tale to illustrated popular magazines across Britain and America. These stories appeared with illustrations that themselves drew on conventions established in popular imagery, and confirmed a set of signs that still obtains for representations of the dangerous exotic in illustration and film.¹⁰

The Fu Manchu franchise began in silent film in the 1920s, and ran in British and American productions until 1970. Early cinema had long made use of Egyptiana; silent film pioneer George Méliès had included 'La Resurrection de Cleopatre' as an illusion in his magic shows. *Aïda* was an early Edison film in 1911, and Edison produced a travelogue, *Ancient Temples of Egypt*, in 1912. On the same trip to Egypt and Palestine the Edison company filmed *From the Manger to the Cross*, one of the first feature-length films. The mummy was a favourite subject for early silent films, the monumental size of Egyptian statuary and architecture proving very appropriate to the new cinema industry.

Just as it had for tourists in the nineteenth century, Egypt offered both biblical settings and exoticism for film productions. Directors were concerned to underline respectability for the new medium, and Egypt could supply piety along with the spectacle. D.W. Griffiths' 1916 *Intolerance* featured enormous sets of temples – complete with sphinxes, lions and eagles, Babylonian dancing girls and elephants. Film stars themselves were inflected by Egyptiana; Theda Bara's early parts included Cleopatra and Salome. Her persona as screen 'vamp' was bound up with Arab and Egyptian connotations; her screen name was reputed to be an anagram of 'Arab death', and her film biography gave her an Egyptian mother and a French father, although she was actually Jewish. Cinemas themselves were often themed as Egyptian, with 'Egyptian' friezes and architectural flourishes.¹¹

The opening of the Tutankhamun tomb and the surrounding fictional and news stories it engendered provoked a new wave of Egyptomania. The discovery of the tomb in 1922 by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon, funded by the American Theodore Monroe Davis, was a huge and long-running news story. While the 'official' story of the excavation and its findings was exclusive to the London *Times*, other newspapers had to find their own way into the story, and without the official sanction of the excavation, were happy to tie the archaeological dig into the sensationalist associations of the now well-established myths of Egyptiana. The superstition was fuelled by the death of the excavator and sponsor Lord Carnarvon, and the story of the archaeological dig began much more of a news event than it otherwise might have been. The expedition compounded a construction of the archaeologist as 'hero' and confirmed the association of Egyptian excavations with the occult. Journalism's fascination with the apparent 'curse' of the tomb, and the death of the few ill-fated archaeologists, gave the vogue for all things 'Egyptian' a supernatural and mystical edge. The popular romance novelist Marie Corelli was among the many occultists happy to fan the flames of the rumour of an ancient curse, as was Conan Doyle, whose earlier fears seemed to be confirmed.

The publicity engendered by the Carter expedition extended into all aspects of popular imagery, particularly advertising. Tobacco, as an 'exotic' product, derived from outside Europe, was particularly associated with images of Egypt. One of the most enduring images of 1920s Egyptiana in London is the Arcadia Works cigarette factory, originally built in 1928 for the manufacture of Craven 'A' cigarettes, then one of the most popular brands, packaged with a logo of an 'Egyptian' cat figure. The factory was opened with a lavish ceremony, which involved laying sand to turn Mornington Crescent into a desert and the cast of *Aïda* performing alongside chariot races.¹² In France, the logo for 'Laurens' cigarettes used a sphinx as an advertising logo, while another brand was named 'Nefertiti and Cleopatra'. Throughout the 1920s, images of sphinxes, obelisks and pyramids were used in European advertisements to signify the endurance, luxury and style of an enormously wide range of products. In 1928, a French perfume was bottled in a scale model of the obelisk in Place de la Concorde (see Schnitzler 2003: 168).

Ten years after the initial expedition, Howard Carter's completion of the excavation of the tomb in 1932 revived a public discourse and popular interest in Egypt and archaeology. The 1933 Chicago Exposition once again featured the Streets of Cairo. The Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques appliqués à la Vie Moderne held in Paris in 1937 was full of Egyptian-inflected art deco designs, and boasted an Egyptian pavilion complete with ancient Egyptian artefacts. With art deco as the fashionable architectural style of the period, new theatres and cinemas almost inevitably quoted Egypt in some aspect of their decoration: in Paris, the Luxor Palais du Cinema was Egyptian-themed; in London, another Luxor was celebrated as 'Twickenham's

Egyptian Palace' (Elliott *et al.* 2003: 111), and Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood rapidly relocated from Morocco in response to the overriding fashion for Egyptiana.

The first sound feature film version of the mummy tales, *The Mummy*,¹³ was released in the same year as Howard Carter's final excavation. The film has been described as 'the horror classic that spawned a genre' (Lupton 2003: 37), although the genre was already firmly established in popular theatre and fiction. The illustrations for pulp magazines had established a clear popular iconography for the 'Egyptian', which shaped the *mise en scène* of film versions. *The Mummy* capitalised on the popular success of mummy horror tales and engendered a series of film sequels. In a confirmation of the collapse of the boundary between Egyptology and the occult, the screenwriter responsible for Universal's hit versions of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* was redeployed to write the screenplay.¹⁴ Gothic comic book series such as *Tales from the Crypt* reproduced versions of the mummy tale from earlier illustrated magazines, and gave them a wide circulation among new generations of young people.

Film producers, like theatrical producers and magazine publishers, were more concerned with cost than with historical or geographical accuracy in the representation of the 'Egyptian', and would use the same set for any film that required an exoticised location. The confusion between the Aztec and Egyptian that Bullock had promoted was confirmed in backdrops and props that were used interchangeably to stand for Egypt, South America or 'Darkest Africa'. British company Hammer was not known for the lavishness of its production values or for the historical accuracy and copyright of its film scenarios. Hammer found the 'Egyptian' horror genre fitted its requirements neatly and made variants until 1972. Its own version of *The Mummy*, made in 1959, featured replicas of objects found in Tutankhamun's tomb and a mummy based on one held in the British Museum. Throughout the 1950s, Universal horror films were broadcast on American television as 'Shock Theatre', and were responsible for 'a major wave of "Mummymania" aimed at juveniles' (Lupton 2003: 40), producing 'Egyptian'-themed merchandise to accompany the series.

The 'Egyptian' had become such a familiar set of conventions that it could be lampooned; it now easily slid between the genres of exotic horror and the comic. Egyptiana had been regularly used as a setting for music hall and pantomime in the nineteenth century; the comedy troupe Wilson, Keppel and Betty kept the music hall tradition going with their long-lived act purportedly based on an Egyptian sand dance. The Three Stooges were featured in mummy films in 1939 and 1948, and Abbot and Costello made a series of comedies with Egyptian themes, ending with *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy* in 1955.

Contemporary theme park versions of Egyptiana continue to work within this combination of horror and comedy. At Chessington, the Terror Tomb has an uneasily comic ghost train in which a greedy Arab figure is subjected to a series of grizzly punitive revenges for his trespass into a mummy's tomb (a variant of the stereotypical Arab grave robber that dates back to published reports of the first European excavations in Egypt).

The threat of the television screen prompted film producers to look for lavish and spectacular sets. As it had for their silent cinema predecessors, the monumentalism of 'Egyptian' architecture provided the exotic and impressive, while also supplying an edge of educational ancient history. The 1950s saw a number of 'epic' Egyptian-based movies, of which the 1954 *The Egyptian* and Howard Hawks's 1956 *Land of the Pharaohs* were among the most elaborate. The 1963 *Cleopatra* featuring the media couple Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton was the most expensive film ever produced at the time, but its critical failure made it the last of its kind. The film came out as the 1960s exhibition of artefacts from the Tutankhamun tomb toured the world. Popularly known as the 'Tutankhamun' exhibition, the showcase of the Cairo Museum's holdings was a global event, which toured America, Russian, Canada, Japan, France and England over the course of eighteen years, until 1979.

While twentieth-century Western popular culture embraced Egyptiana, 'academic' Egyptology and museum collections strove to distance themselves from all forms of occult and showmanship, conveniently erasing showmen such as Bullock and Belzoni who had first promoted popular interest in the Egyptian.¹⁵ While the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston were enormously proud of their collections of Egyptian artefacts, their provenance and how they came to America are conspicuously absent in the museum records (see Stevenson Smith 1942; Hayes 1953). The Department of Egyptian Art was created at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1906 when the Metropolitan acquired a collection of jewellery excavated by the British archaeologist William Petrie, first offered to the British Museum but turned down by them.

William Hayes, curator of the collections, used the 1953 Metropolitan Museum's Egyptian guide to berate

barnstorming, archaeological charlatans, members of various 'oriental' cults and journalists with a flair for sensationalism – to attribute to the farmer people of ancient Egypt mysterious and sinister funds of hidden lore and all manner of supernatural powers has led to the growth of a series of absurd superstitions regarding them, their possessions and the excavators of their tombs and temples. (Hayes 1953: vi)

Here Hayes is repudiating the history of Egyptology and its long alliance with showmanship and sensationalism; world museums were originally

reliant on ‘barnstorming, archaeological charlatans’ (like Belzoni) for their collections. This scholarly silence allowed ‘absurd superstitions’ to flourish and contributed to the ‘imaginative quasi-fictional quality’ that Said describes in the Orientalising of the Egyptian.

While the museum scholars distanced themselves from the more burlesque aspects of Egyptology, Egyptiana was firmly ensconced in popular culture. As a significant presence in cinema, television and the World’s Fairs, it was inevitable that Disney would embrace the Egyptian in his theme parks. Disney had learned his craft at World’s Fairs, and would have been familiar with the Streets of Cairo and Little Egypt. It has been claimed that at Disneyland there are

no Little Egypt girlie shows at Disneyland. Middle-class discomfort at the sight of gypsies, Egyptian Fakirs and Indian snake charmers, and other ‘exotic’ show people finally had won the day. (Cross and Walton 2005: 171)

If there are no explicit ‘girlie shows’, the costumes for *Aladdin* referenced in Adventureland do evoke the dancing women of Little Egypt. A version of the Streets of Cairo is in place in Adventureland’s bazaars, bedecked with Egyptian motifs. At Disney World, the Jungle Cruise includes the Nile, and shares its river with the Mark Twain paddle steamer. Egyptian motifs and architecture exist throughout the Disney parks in a geographical confusion that offers the same association of the Egyptian with the Aztec that Bullock and the British Museum had promoted.

Indiana Jones is the most visible contemporary fiction of the archaeologist. In a knowing postmodern collage of a hero, he is the inheritor of a set of myths of the adventurer Egyptologist. The adventurers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had presented themselves in their own accounts as both adventurers and scholars. The European and American archaeologist hero persists in contemporary popular accounts of archaeological excavation. A popular book published in French and English is titled *The Search for Ancient Egypt* (Vercoutter 1992) and includes a chapter ‘Archaeologists to the Rescue’, in which the expeditions and grand tours to Egyptian sites are promoted as heroic operations.

Indiana Jones is a generic ‘archaeologist’ who clearly belongs to academia, but he is also a heroic action man. Like the ‘symbolist’ hero of *The Da Vinci Code*, his scholarship encompasses a wild range of ‘ancient’ arts. The settings for Indiana Jones are Aztec rather than Egyptian – a site more resonant for an American audience.¹⁶ The Temple of Peril, which features in the attractions at the Disney parks, is deliberately vague in its geographical locations, as the Disneyland guide puts it: ‘Archaeologists combing the site of Indiana Jones™ are said to be stumped by the origin of the unusual idols that mark this exceptional discovery’ (Walt Disney Company 1994: 31).

The Luxor Casino in Las Vegas reiterates the confusion between Aztec and Egyptian archaeology. Although the Egyptian dominates, a pre-Columbian

temple is offered as among the remains of a fictional 'Luxor Archaeological Site'. As Fazzini and McKercher have identified, the Luxor knowingly draws on a range of largely nineteenth-century sources for its version of the Egyptian:

On one level, the Luxor Hotel/Casino can be viewed as 'Egyptland'. ... While some areas blend carefully rendered scenes from monuments such as the tomb of Nakht at Thebes or a painting from the Theban tomb of Nebamun now in the British Museum, other areas reveal the influence of nineteenth century paintings. The entrance to 'Pharaoh's Pheast' ... incorporates three-dimensional versions of elements from paintings by David Roberts and Elihu Vedder. The cafeteria itself imitates an archaeological site, with half-excavated coffins, tomb entrances. (Fazzini and McKercher 2003: 155)

'Egyptland' has been a perpetual source of academic and popular interest in Europe and America since the eighteenth century; it is as comfortable in Las Vegas and the Egyptian Hall as it is in the British, the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museums. The vogue for Egyptiana was fuelled by imperial campaigns that had little to do with any interest in Egyptian history and cultures. It was imperial interests that prompted the expeditions of figures such as Bruce and Belzoni, and they were showmen who promoted themselves as travellers to a dangerous and exoticised Orient. The exoticism of the Egyptian is not a fixed category, however, and the connotations of Egyptiana shift in different historical contexts: Egypt has been variously constructed as threatening and

Figure 6.2 Terror Tomb, Alton Towers, 2005

as seductively attractive, as a Christian holy land and as a dangerously pagan world. The metonyms of Egyptomania that have come to signify mystery and 'exoticism' are there not because, as MacDonald and Rice have suggested, the Egyptians were 'the first to give expression to' Jungian archetypes (Rice and MacDonald 2003: 4) but because there is a long history of ideological frames into which the 'Egyptian' was made to fit.

Egyptology has three dominant narrative strands: the ancient stories of the Pharaohs, a history of imperial campaigns (subsequently taken up in museum acquisition of Egyptian artefacts) and the self-promoting tales of the adventurer archaeologists. These stories have been mixed in with the occult (an association promoted by Conan Doyle and others), with patriotic pride (particularly from Britain, France, America and Italy) and with fable. Egyptiana offers an irresistible mix of nationalism, myth, heroic adventure and superstition, which has persisted from the eighteenth century to become an inevitable element in the iconography of contemporary carnival.