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REVIEWS**

**Basil Glynn, *The Mummy on Screen. Orientalism and Monstrosity in Horror Cinema*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 216 pp, cloth. \$115.00.**

The volume under review studies Mummy movies in English-language cinema, with primary reference to their ways of figuring the monster as a non-Western Other. The focus of the volume is on the early twentieth century, with a structure predictably centering on the “classic” Universal film *The Mummy* (1932) and its much-derided sequels of the 1940s. Glynn brings to this research an extensive knowledge of early twentieth-century films featuring mummies, and in early chapters he convincingly charts a progression from using mummies as comedic bit players to depicting them as uncanny threats. Later chapters show how the Mummy of early and mid-century cinema develops into a racialized villain whose menace often manifests as category-crossing romance. In what follows, I adhere to Glynn’s practice of using capitalized “Mummy” for the horror monster and lowercase “mummy” for the historical artifact.

The book is composed of an extended Introduction followed by eight chapters. The Introduction (1–22) lays out the reasons for critical neglect of Mummy movies. The chief causes that Glynn identifies for this neglect are two pervasive perceptions. First, the Mummy character is stereotypically a mute and shuffling lummoX, so that he therefore appears semantically impoverished. Second, the Mummy is claimed to experience repetitive film deployments, so that he seems semantically static. Throughout the volume, Glynn conclusively shows that both of these are unfair assessments. In Chapter 3, “On the page and stage: The Mummy movie’s literary and theoretical influences” (41–59), Glynn contests another discourse potentially contributing to the Mummy’s neglect: the notion that this figure has no founding literary myth like those of Dracula or Frankenstein’s monster. As Glynn perceptively observes, this incomplete view ignores an extensive Mummy literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century but has nevertheless reinforced the impression that the Mummy is a less prestigious and cultured figure. In between these two arguments are a chapter framing what follows as an analysis of Mummy movie Orientalism (Chapter 1, “The creature’s features: Moulding the Mummy and the Mummy movie”) and a cursory sketch of Egyptian mummies and Western encounters with these (Chapter 2, “The Mutating Mummy: From ancient artefact to modern attraction”; 32–38).

Chapter 4, “Preserved on film: The silent Mummy of early cinema” (60–93), supplements Glynn’s excavation of influential Mummy literature with an investigation of silent Mummy films from the twentieth century’s first three decades. Primary attention is given to their film historical and Egyptological context. Glynn ably documents how films featuring mummies in this time frame participate in period tendencies towards slapstick and mix-up plots; humans dressed up as mummies, especially for criminal or romantic purposes, prove far more common than actual mummies or threatening Mummies. It is convincingly argued that the shift towards horror framings is likely prompted at least in part by the well-publicized excavation of Tutankahmun’s tomb (1923)

and the subsequent rise in media narratives attributing the deaths of certain prominent participants, especially Lord Carnarvon (1866–1923), to a putative “mummy’s curse.” One strange fact, noted repeatedly but also acknowledged to remain unexplained, is that this shift did *not* take place immediately but manifested after a downshift in Mummy movie production during the mid- to late-1920s.

Chapter 5, “*The Mummy* (1932): Overcoming the silent treatment” (98–118) is a detailed study of that Universal film’s context, narrative, and characterizations, some aspects of which are discussed below. Despite its title, Chapter 6, “The 1940s Mummy film: A decade of decay” (119–39) is in fact largely a *defense* of these movies against critics who would deny their significance for understanding the genre. As will be suggested below, this aesthetic dispute often overshadows other lights in which these films might have been explored. The final two chapters bring the Mummy film’s story up to the present day in concise and compelling fashion. Chapter 7, “Hammer’s resurrection of the Mummy: Sex and digs and wrap and roll,” discusses the most significant revival of Universal’s franchise, Hammer’s 1959 *The Mummy* and its sequels; for this chapter’s core hypothesis on the relevance of the Suez crisis to interpretation of these films, see immediately below. The concluding Chapter 8, “Wrapping up the Mummy: The last sixty years,” is extremely brief, part catalogue of Mummy films since ca. 1980 and part summarizing conclusion. The most significant new observation is that the most recent Mummy films, especially Universal’s 1999 and 2017 movies, both titled *The Mummy*, often depict the antagonist as a climatological “millennial menace” (160), in line with turn-of-the-century apocalyptic thinking and heightened anxiety around American Middle East imperialism.

The subtitle of *The Mummy on Screen*, its first chapter, and many formulations throughout promise a focus on the ways in which Mummy movies have participated in Orientalist tropes and structures. Such work is occasionally accomplished, but more rarely than the rich source material might have allowed. Successful analyses along these lines include viewing *The Mummy*’s (Universal, 1932) duality of Kharis and the Nubian as a sort of bifurcated Other corporeality (see esp. 114–17), in which each half encapsulates the threat and shortcomings White Europeans attributed to supposed “races” they encountered in colonial contexts. Arab “Easterners” like Kharis are imagined to be duplicitous, mysterious, and seductive of White women, but ultimately avoidant of physical confrontation with White men. The Black Nubian, on the other hand, is understood to be mute but brutal, a quintessential “savage” who is easily conquered and exploited. Similarly, Glynn’s reading (esp. 151–57) of Hammer’s *The Mummy* (1959) and its sequels as, in the wake of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s 1956 reclamation of the Suez Canal, grappling with the failures of British colonial domination. In this context, it becomes possible for the film to figure its archaeologists, Stephen Banning and his son John, not as noble empiricists but as obsessives illegitimately preoccupied with stripping Egypt of its possessions and sacrality.

Plenty of other images and scenes could have sparked similar analysis and contributed to a more coherent focus for the volume. As noted above, Chapter 6, on the 1940s Universal Mummy films, is curiously preoccupied with rescuing these sequels from critical neglect and even hostility. Once this argument has been made, though, one expects a further step that deploys the redeemed

films towards Glynn's ostensible aim, of analysis with attention to cinematic Orientalism. For example, a fascinating aspect of *The Mummy's Curse* (1944) is its setting in a backwoods Louisiana bayou and—though this goes strangely unnoted by Glynn—its featuring several highly racialized African American characters, particularly Napoleon Simpson's superstitious and subservient Goobie. Especially because this location shift represents a huge continuity break from the previous film, *The Mummy's Ghost* (also 1944; see p. 136), further study might explore how such locations and characters compensate for the Mummy's otherwise domesticizing move to American environs; to the present reviewer, they seem to provide an accessible "Orient" in the imagined filmgoer's backyard, complete with local "savages" against whom the dispassionate White archaeologist can be more effectively contrasted.

The volume occasionally veers into contextual information that also has the potential to contribute to such overall arguments but is more often utilized as mere trivia. For example, approximately three pages (128–31) are devoted to documenting Lon Chaney, Jr.'s (1906–73) dislike for the mummy character he played in *The Mummy's Tomb*, *The Mummy's Ghost*, and *The Mummy's Curse*, as well as the physical hardships he suffered by remaining in the uncomfortable mask and costume for long periods of time. This short section is preoccupied with reports—including from the actor himself—that Chaney was perpetually drinking from "a container (presumably a hip flask) of vodka tucked away somewhere in his mummy costume, with a long straw" (130). In the present context of the book, it is hardly clear why this anecdote is highlighted. But much could have been made of how Chaney's discourse recursively contributes to the "Orientalist" figurations on which the volume promises reflection. It is interesting to me, for example, that Chaney describes blazing heat (see the quote on p. 129) and intoxication as dominating his "Oriental" experience. This section, in other words, seems like a missed opportunity to reflect on ways in which actors, even in their seemingly naïve and grumbling press encounters, add fortifying dimensions to the Orientalist lenses adopted by the films in which they appear.

With these possibilities for further exploration in mind, one should stress that *The Mummy on Screen* is an exciting introduction to the potential for studies of Mummy cinema to contribute to both studies of Orientalism and studies of horror and monstrosity. Further research into this genre now has a strong foundation in Glynn's pioneering analyses and exhaustive collection of Mummy representations in film, theater, and beyond.

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