

# TOT'S TOMB

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## *References:*

*References:* Ellis, A. Caswell and G. Stanley Hall, "A Study of Dolls." *Pedagogical Seminary* 4 (December 1896): 129-175.

Children have never been around for very long. The child did not really begin to exist - and to exit with equal rights to commemoration - until literacy was established as unconditional requirement for socialization. Inside the new holding patterns of schooling, a longer attention span had to be inscribed letter by letter upon each new candidate for society membership. This little one who was now in training, in transition, came to be known as the child. Pre literacy the rapid turnover of infant and child mortalities could still pass without mention, go without saying or commemoration. The next born received the vacated name and the parental couple kept on breeding ahead on their assignment in the face of the matter of fact of life of small chances for survival for little ones. The pupil was focused first. But now, already in the beginning, with earliest infancy, in the zoning, the measure, of what language animates in the speaking and non-speaking alike, there was the I, old enough to live, to be called by first name, old enough to die, to be buried with the name call, the role that was now personalized, stationary, even or especially for the littlest corpse.

Childhood mortality rates didn't start their decline until well into the era of childhood's invention. The inevitable pileup of dead babies and children who now had to be commemorated but who, it turned out, were unmournable, introduced a death cult right in the type face of our first techno culture. But the dead babe isn't always a real doll. The incorporation of the dead child inside dolls could only emerge in the setting of scenes, in the relationship between figures marked by the little placeholders of everyday life. Toys are these accessories after the fact of life. Only where the toys are, that's where whole scenes of relationship with the dead or alive can be set on loss and on the retention of loss. Toys had just one available model at the time of childhood's invention: only in mortuary palaces and necropolises had there been a simulation industry that recycled all the functional parts of the household or economy of life, always also reduced in scale and durability, for exclusive use by the dead alone. Behind the lines of doll accessories and all the other props of childhood's all-out miniaturization of adult life (always in the flimsy material of make-believe) the small underworld after all of toys emerged.

Stanley Hall, famous for hosting Freud's first trip to the United States and for devoting the first major psychological study to the subject of adolescence (in two volumes), had in 1896 joined in authorship with A. Caswell Ellis for "A Study of Dolls." Thus right before Adolescence, in which Hall preempted or repeated Freud's move to group psychology by issuing a decoder that translates the modern group by any other name as the in-group of teenagers, the scholar of the psychology of teen spirits did his time share inside the earlier subject of childhood.

In "A Study of Dolls," which appeared in one current context with Dracula and The War of the Worlds, the couple of authors considered the legion of dolls, not unlike the scores of vampires or Martians settling down within science fiction, as providing a first range of diversification of boldface distinctions between life and death. "In 21 cases there was death but no burial; in 10, funerals but no burials; in 8, funerals but no deaths" (146). Following the shift in models of representation (and repression) of death, the shift from mummies to dolls, the funerary connection was still coming on strong, if not life-size, then, even more forcefully if enigmatically, life-like. One child in the 1896 study had been "given a doll so lifelike that she feared it, believing it a dead baby" (147). Smallness makes itself more available to the pupil's range of vision. But it also intensifies the relationship. "A large part of the world's terms of endearment, are diminutives, and to its reduced scale the doll world owes much of its charm" (160). Diminutives are sweeteners that smack of the cannibalism that comes bite size. According to the study, countless children sized up their baby siblings as belonging to the genre of "'meat doll'" (136). Undeath and unmourning work their magic of active unfulfillment of the terms of substitution in the care we take with dolls. One survivor of childhood and doll play had last say: "'When brother set the dog on my doll, it was so badly torn that I put it in a box and had a funeral. We cried real tears, but at night it pained me so that I went alone and dug her up, kissed, hugged her and said I was sorry'" (139). Among the list of doll accomplishments ("Dolls are ... fed without eating, bathed without water") the first place goes to the ritual of their burial "without dying" (162).

Hall and Ellis set a trend for study of children in the open book of their doll and toy play. Add a few more decades to this inside view and we have child analysts and therapists observing through the seeing eye of the transference their little patients at play. But if toys r therapy that's because the savings that can be drawn from play's observance pile up alongside the same danger zone of loss retention and secret burial that holds the primal place of first contact with the small worlds and words of childhood. "One child had tried all her life to keep her doll from knowing she was not alive" (162).

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