

About This Volume

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Much has been published over the past several decades about both the pulp-magazine fiction of the 1920s and 1930s and *Weird Tales*, one of the most famous and influential pulps to have been published during this two-decade period. The difficulty of editing a volume that both briefly outlines the height of the pulp-magazine era and specifically examines an important title of this era was in deciding what to exclude, rather than what to include.

My solution to the dilemma was to provide a timeline of popular fiction following the Industrial Revolution and leading up to the pulps. I wanted to discuss the cultural and social dynamics of the invention and evolution of popular fiction over a period of approximately 150 years in both England and the United States, being sure to cover such topics as social class, education, the rise of the city, and printing technology as important elements of the discussion.

I also wanted to cover the historical sequence of working-class venues for popular fiction that led to the creation of the pulp magazines in general and *Weird Tales* specifically. It is important for the contemporary reader to understand that historical sequence and to realize that publications such as *Weird Tales* did not spring fully grown onto the newsstand without an extended lineage. Beginning with the story papers and penny dreadfuls and leading up to the dime novels and early decades of the pulps, each iteration of working-class popular fiction was essential in leading to the conception of the next iteration. It is important to understand that without the story papers and the attendant development of mass printing technologies and distribution techniques in the early years of the nineteenth century, there would have been no dime novels in the second half of the century, because there would have been no process in place for the mass production of mass-consumed fiction, which was what allowed the dime novels to thrive at a cost of only a nickel or dime per issue. And without the dime novels

and their establishment of central formulaic genres such as the western and the detective story, the pulp magazines of the early twentieth century might have looked very different or might not have come into being at all. It is also important to identify those mass-market venues that followed the pulp magazines, such as the present-day paperback novel and comic book, which were also greatly influenced by the pulps.

Within the context of the survey of popular fiction and the explicit discussion of the pulp magazine, the editorial decision was made to focus on one specific pulp title: *Weird Tales*. This volume could have easily selected one of any number of major pulps for this discussion, including *Black Mask*, *Adventure*, and even *Argosy*. *Weird Tales* and its most important contributors were chosen because of that magazine's commanding, almost mythical stature in the history of twentieth-century fantasy and horror fiction; arguably, only *Black Mask*, with its invention and development of hard-boiled detective fiction, equaled *Weird Tales* in importance. It can be reasonably claimed that no other pulp magazine was more important to the history of pulp fiction, or to the temperament of contemporary science fiction and fantasy, than *Weird Tales*.

Once the decision was made to feature a review of *Weird Tales*, the next task was to decide how to discuss this pulp and its historical context in the book's introduction. Because *Weird Tales* spanned such a long period of time—some three decades during its initial publication run—and because it published so many significant authors of fantasy, horror, and science fiction, I decided to use the major editors of the pulp as a centerpiece of the introduction. The subsequent collection of essays presents a detailed analysis of the most significant contributors to *Weird Tales*, along with an examination that helps to define the unique identity of not only *Weird Tales* but also the pulp-magazine fiction market of the 1920s and 1930s.

We begin with Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft, certainly the two most famous authors to have emerged from the *Weird Tales* literary circle. Robert E. Howard (January 22, 1906–June 11, 1936) was a

prolific and multitalented writer of pulp fiction. Though perhaps best known for his iconic character Conan the Barbarian, Howard published a wide range of genre stories during his brief life, including westerns, boxing stories, adventure stories, and horror stories. An important member of the Lovecraft circle, which also included Clark Ashton Smith and August Derleth, Howard's greatest legacy as a *Weird Tales* contributor was his creation of such classic sword-and-sorcery fantasy heroes as King Kull and Solomon Kane, two notable precursors to Conan, who also was featured in *Weird Tales*. Jeffrey H. Shanks's essay explores Howard's impact as a major writer of pulp-fiction horror and heroic fantasy.

H. P. Lovecraft (August 20, 1890–March 15, 1937) is represented by two essays in this volume, one by S. T. Joshi and the other by Daniel Müller, which reflects his status as arguably the most important author to have emerged from the *Weird Tales* circle. Lovecraft's invention of the Cthulhu Mythos cycle alone guarantees his place in the history of the weird tale, and his exploration of dark fantasy themes in his work ranks him as not only one of the greatest authors of horror fiction in the early decades of the twentieth century but also one of the greatest authors of modern American fiction.

Lovecraft's colleague Clark Ashton Smith (January 13, 1893–August 14, 1961) has earned the distinction of having two essays in this volume as well, contributions by Andrew J. Wilson and Richard Bleiler. Smith possessed a strong poetical bent in his writing, having published several volumes of poetry early in his literary career, and his lyrical skill with language revealed itself in his prose, as demonstrated by his ornate narratives of exotic fantasy settings such as Zothique, Hyperborea, and Averogne. He frequently utilized a highly elaborate vocabulary in his fiction, and his sumptuous literary style was decidedly unique among his *Weird Tales* peers. His storytelling was both decadent and hypnotic, though perhaps for some readers his tales were an acquired taste.

Hugo and World Fantasy Award–winning writer Robert Bloch (April 5, 1917–September 23, 1994) is best remembered today for his novel *Psycho* (1959), which became the basis for the famous 1960 Alfred Hitchcock film, but during the 1930s he was a young reader of *Weird Tales* and a fan of Lovecraft. He became a contributor to *Weird Tales* himself as a teenager, and much of his early weird fiction was influenced by Lovecraft’s work. During his long and prolific career, the best of Bloch’s suspense and horror fiction was distinguished by a wry, macabre sense of humor and a masterful use of narrative irony. Garyn G. Roberts’s contribution on this important *Weird Tales* writer reveals Bloch’s great storytelling ability.

The most famous woman writer to have been part of the *Weird Tales* stable of contributors was Catherine Lucille Moore (January 24, 1911–April 4, 1987). She is today arguably best remembered for her Northwest Smith science-fiction series and her Jirel of Joiry stories, which featured one of the earliest female sword-and-sorcery protagonists. Both of these popular series characters appeared in *Weird Tales*. C. L. Moore’s weird fiction is notable for its deft plotting and highly imagined concepts. She met fellow horror and science-fiction author Henry Kuttner in 1936, married him in 1940, and in due course worked collaboratively with him, publishing stories under various pseudonyms, including Lewis Padgett. Andrew J. Wilson’s essay provides an examination of this talented *Weird Tales* contributor.

Henry Kuttner (April 7, 1915–February 4, 1958), as noted in Garyn G. Roberts’s essay, was one of the more underappreciated contributors to *Weird Tales*. He certainly was not any less talented for this apparent lack of recognition. Like Smith, Howard, and Bloch, Kuttner also was a contributor to the Lovecraftian Cthulhu Mythos cycle. His story “The Graveyard Rats,” which initially appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1936, went on to become one of the most frequently reprinted stories from the pulp. It still retains its brilliant use of suspense and claustrophobic terror. After meeting fellow writer and soon-to-be wife C. L. Moore, much of his work in the 1940s and

1950s was done in collaboration with her. Today, Kuttner's fiction is being rediscovered by a new generation of readers, thanks to a number of recent collectible reprint editions that have been publishing some of his best pulp work.

August Derleth (February 24, 1909–July 4, 1971) is best remembered today as editor and cofounder, along with Donald Wandrei, of Arkham House. A small specialty press in Sauk City, Wisconsin, Arkham House was initially devoted to preserving H. P. Lovecraft's weird fiction in hardcover but ultimately expanded its repertoire to reprinting stories from a number of *Weird Tales* contributors, including Howard, Smith, and others. However, during his long career as a writer, Derleth published a range of escapist fiction, from his Cthulhu Mythos stories to his Solar Pons tales, which were a pastiche of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. Some critics today see Derleth's body of work as being perhaps too derivative, but in addition to writing for *Weird Tales*, he was also an accomplished regionalist author and a fine poet as well. Wythe Marschall's essay on Derleth provides a discussion of this author, editor, and publisher.

Another important but lesser-known contributor to *Weird Tales* was Frank Belknap Long (April 27, 1901–January 3, 1994). As Richard Bleiler points out in his essay, Long was a skilled pulp-fiction writer. He sold his first story to *Weird Tales* and was a solid contributor to that magazine, though he eventually went on to publish science fiction in such pulps as *Astounding Science Fiction*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, and *Startling Stories*, as well as horror fiction and fantasy in the pulp *Unknown* (later retitled *Unknown Worlds*). His serialized story *The Horror from the Hills*, which first appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1931, is possibly his most famous tale.

And last, but certainly not least, is Seabury Quinn (December 1889–December 24, 1969). Though he is arguably the least known *Weird Tales* contributor to today's readers, during his long tenure writing for the magazine, he was commonly regarded as its most popular author. His Jules de Grandin series, which had a very long run in the pulp,

was a successful combination of the detective story and the supernatural tale. The de Grandin stories fell into the highly specialized literary category of the supernatural sleuth, also called the occult detective or the ghost hunter, which had been popularized in the late Victorian and the Edwardian periods. Quinn perfected the telling of this type of story with his distinctive protagonist, Jules de Grandin, and *Weird Tales* readers loved the result. The question remains, however, as to why the most popular author of *Weird Tales* is so relatively unknown now. The answer might reside in the fact that in his Jules de Grandin tales, Quinn wrote to a fairly rigid formula that did not really change or evolve over time, and thus his fiction does not hold up as well as the more inventive efforts of Lovecraft or Howard.

The purpose of this volume is to expose the contemporary reader to some of the best writers of one of the most famous pulp-fiction magazines of the 1920s and 1930s. Even though these authors published weird fiction that paid modestly, the originality and power of their storytelling ability transcended the crumbling pulpwood pages of the physical magazine itself. Because of their efforts, the spirit of *Weird Tales* lives on today in much of our contemporary best-selling horror and fantasy fiction, even as the memory of *Weird Tales* for many of today's readers has faded into the past. The era of the great pulps may be long gone, but their literary heritage continues on.

The Last Musketeer: Clark Ashton Smith and the Weird Marriage of Poetry and Pulp_____

Andrew J. Wilson

A crownless king who reigns alone,
I live within this ashen land,
Where winds rebuild from wandering sand
My columns and my crumbled throne.
(Clark Ashton Smith, “The Kingdom of Shadows”)

Author and editor L. Sprague de Camp dedicated his 1975 biography of H. P. Lovecraft “to the memory of the Three Musketeers of Weird Tales” (ix). He then named them in order: Robert E. Howard, the creator of Conan the Barbarian; the subject of his book, of course; and, last but by no means least, Clark Ashton Smith. If musketeers they were, then the realm they served was weird fiction, and their battles were fought to protect it from being conquered by the perceived enemies of Lovecraft and his circle. Among the forces that they opposed were, on the one hand, what they regarded as the shameful commercialism of the pulp-fiction industry and, on the other, literary modernism. As the old man of Providence explained in a 1930 letter to Smith that, even in its spelling, characterized his position: “My conception of phantasy, as a genuine art-form, is *an extension rather than a negation of reality*. Ordinary tales about a castle ghost or old-fashioned werewolf are merely so much junk” (Lovecraft 213; ital. in orig.).

Lovecraft was well aware that he was preaching to the converted. Smith’s notebook of ideas, which was eventually published as *The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith* (1979), contains the following call to arms:

The weird tale is an adumbration or foreshadowing of man's relationship—past, present, and future—to the unknown and infinite, and also an implication of his mental and sensory evolution. Further insight into basic mysteries is only possible through future development of higher faculties than the known senses. Interest in the weird, unknown, and supernormal is a signpost of such development and not merely a psychic residuum from the age of superstition. (*Planets* 66)

In his essay “Clark Ashton Smith: A Note on the Aesthetics of Fantasy,” Charles K. Wolfe suggests that as one of the preeminent American fantasy writers of the first half of the twentieth century, Smith understood precisely what he was writing and was wholly conscious of his reasons for doing so. Even if the majority of Smith's peers regarded themselves as entertainers rather than practitioners of a genuine art form, the so-called bard of Auburn was determined to be a serious writer. From the start of his literary career, Smith believed that his work embodied a coherent and well-rounded artistic principle:

It seems to me that the real validity and value of weird, imaginative literature has never been sufficiently affirmed. In these days, when the burden of critical so-called authority is cast almost wholly on the side of the so-called “realism,” it might be especially pertinent to point out one or two considerations. Weird, fantastic writing, by its emphasis of the environing cosmic wonder and mystery of things, may actually be truer to the spirit of life than the work which merely concerns itself with literalities, as most modern fiction does. (*Planets* 23)

Continuing his manifesto, Smith rejected what he saw as the lazy idea that fantasy was trivial or escapist. He believed that it was what he called “the grossly external and factitious realism” of the modernists that was superficial, and as we shall see, he had good reason to regard this movement as an opposing force. Fantasy, he argued, allows writers to address the existential mysteries of life that science

and psychoanalysis cannot engage with: “In spite of those who would limit literature to psychographs and genre studies, it will always afford a fascinating and inexhaustible field for the human imagination” (23).

Born in January 1893, on Friday the thirteenth, no less, Clark Ashton Smith lived for most of his life in or near Auburn, California, which had been founded in the foothills of the Sierras during the gold rush. His parents bought a forty-four-acre plot of land on a ridge above the American River, and his father dug a well and built a small, four-room cabin. Smith helped with some of the construction and would live there for nearly half a century.

A childhood bout of scarlet fever seriously affected his health for many years. Smith went to the local grammar school for eight years and registered for entry into high school, but he did not attend because of psychological problems, including what was probably social anxiety, a form of agoraphobia. Instead, with the approval of his parents, he educated himself at home, reading an entire unabridged dictionary (variously described as the *Oxford Unabridged Dictionary* or *Webster’s*) and absorbing the etymological information about the origins of the words. It has also been claimed by Alan Gulette, among others, that he read the complete *Encyclopædia Britannica* more than once.

Nevertheless, in a 1952 letter to L. Sprague de Camp, Smith stated, “My real education began with the reading of *Robinson Crusoe* (unabridged), *Gulliver’s Travels*, the fairy tales of Andersen and the Countess d’Aulnoy, *The Arabian Nights* and (at the age of 13) Poe’s *Poems*. Poe seems to have confirmed me in a more or less permanent slant, which led later to Baudelaire and the French Romantic School. Beckford’s *Vathek*, read at the age of 15, was another early influence” (“Letter”). Having written fiction since the age of eleven, Smith had a pair of short stories printed in the *Overland Monthly* in 1910, and two more appeared in the *Black Cat* magazine the following year. Nevertheless, he would dedicate the next fifteen years to poetry. After publishing his verse in the local newspaper, the *Auburn Journal*, he was invited to read his work at a ladies’ poetry society. Smith’s social anxiety

did not prevent him from attending the Auburn Monday Night Club, where his performance was enthusiastically received. This led to his introduction to leading bohemian poet George Sterling, who became the younger man's mentor. Sterling, like Smith, was influenced by Poe, and his old-fashioned, profoundly romantic verse, typified by "A Wine of Wizardry," often dealt with horrific, cosmic and apocalyptic themes.

Their association led to the publication of Smith's first collection in 1912, when he was only eighteen years old. *The Star-Treader and Other Poems* was an immediate sensation. Front-page reviews in the San Francisco papers proclaimed Smith to be "the Keats of the Pacific Coast." Sterling's own mentor, Ambrose Bierce, praised the poems, and Smith made a strong impression on other, equally famous writers. Don Herron has convincingly argued that the title poem was the inspiration for Jack London's *The Star Rover*, a 1915 novel of interstellar travel and reincarnation.

Illness and a mental breakdown meant that Smith took several years to complete his next collection, but in 1918, the influential Book Club of California issued *Odes and Sonnets*, which contained a prescient introduction by Sterling that contrasted the book's contents with the work of the modernists: "Those devotees of austerity will find little to appeal to them in the rich and spacious poems here presented. In fact, an even partial use of the intelligence that is their one asset will cause them to shrink from the stern conclusions involved in some of the passages of this book—to turn from its terrible vistas. Clark Ashton Smith is unlikely to be afflicted with present-day popularity" (iii).

For better or worse, Sterling was right: in the aftermath of World War I, neither his own work nor that of his protégé were fashionable any longer. Smith would have to self-publish his next two collections, *Ebony and Crystal* (1922) and *Sandalwood* (1925). The decline of interest in his poetry would mean that he would have to work as a night editor and columnist for the *Auburn Journal* in order to pay off the printing costs that he had incurred. Nevertheless, these neglected publications contain some of Smith's finest work.

“The Hashish-Eater; or, The Apocalypse of Evil,” which was written in a concentrated burst in 1920 and included in *Ebony and Crystal*, was described by H. P. Lovecraft as “the greatest imaginative orgy in English literature” (qtd. in Smith, *Black* 137). One of Smith’s longest poems, this decadent blank-verse epic, written in iambic pentameter, is a nightmarishly sustained vision of cosmic vistas and transcendent evil. Rejecting any semblance of the then-current modernist approach, “The Hashish-Eater” is stubbornly old-fashioned in form, while paradoxically anticipating the psychedelic visions of the 1960s:

Bow down: I am the emperor of dreams;
I crown me with the million-coloured sun
Of secret worlds incredible, and take
Their trailing skies for vestment, when I soar,
Throned on the mounting zenith, and illumine
The spaceward-flown horizons infinite. (*Miscellaneous* 203)

After focusing mainly on poetry during his twenties, Smith was drawn back to fiction again. He had produced a small body of notable prose poetry between 1913 and 1929, and this work sowed the seeds of the next stage of his career. One of a series of vignettes published in *Ebony and Crystal*, “The Eyes of Circe,” can be quoted in its entirety: “Thine eyes are green and still as the lakes of the desert. They awake in me the thirst for strange and bitter mysteries, the desire of secrets that are deadly and sterile” (*Nostalgia* 5).

Influenced by Lovecraft, with whom he had begun a voluminous ongoing correspondence three years previously that would continue until Lovecraft’s death, Smith wrote his first true weird tale in 1925. After being rejected by *Weird Tales* for being too much like a prose poem, “The Abominations of Yondo” was published by the leading literary journal the *Overland Monthly* in 1926, “evoking, I was told, many protests from the readers,” as a gleeful Smith told L. Sprague de Camp in his 1952 letter. The story is a remarkable piece of work that showcases

Smith's greatest strengths and evokes a macabre vision equal to that of "The Hashish-Eater." Abandoned by inquisitors, the nameless narrator finds himself in the desert of Yondo at the edge of the world. This wasteland is composed of the dust of crumbling planets and the ashes of dead stars. The rounded mountains rising from the plain are, in fact, fallen asteroids, while meteorites have punched chasms in the surface. Worse still, monstrous creatures from outer space and hellish netherworlds have invaded the desert. The narrator recounts a nightmarish travelogue in which each grotesque he meets is followed by a more terrible monstrosity. Ultimately, he can stand no more and flees Yondo, racing back into the clutches of inquisitors, who have been waiting for him all the time. The whole episode is revealed to be simply another in their ongoing series of tortures.

The rejection of "The Abominations of Yondo" by *Weird Tales* editor Farnsworth Wright was curiously followed by his acceptance of three other prose poems and then the publication of "The Ninth Skeleton." This story was inspired by a camping trip to the Sierra Nevada and the peculiar rock formations around Crater Lake. Significantly, the expedition was made with Smith's long-term friend Genevieve K. Sully and her daughters. Around this time, Sully would encourage him to write for the pulps in order to supplement his income, echoing earlier encouragement from Lovecraft.

A number of factors would persuade Smith to listen to his friends. His family had always been impoverished, and the ground that they had bought proved to be poor farmland and useless for gold mining. As he had begun to recover his health, Smith worked for other farmers apart from his father, doing jobs such as fruit picking, wood cutting, and other forms of hard manual labour. These included mining, although he disliked working underground. Happily, this work further improved his health and built up his strength, but his aging parents were ailing, and he needed to support them as well as himself.

The burgeoning pulp-magazine markets promised Smith the possibility of earning a living from his writing, as Lovecraft and Sully had

proposed. The one voice raised in opposition was that of his old friend and mentor George Sterling, who had praised the imaginative vision of “The Abominations of Yondo” but warned Smith not to waste his talent on trifles in this way. However, Sterling committed suicide in the year that the story was published, and Smith chose to go his own way.

Over a period of less than a decade, Smith wrote more than one hundred stories, enough material to fill the five volumes of the complete retrospective of his weird fiction, *The Collected Fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith* (2006–10). All his tales are united by his morbid themes, ornate prose, and love of irony. Whether setting his stories in the lost lands of Hyperborea and Poseidonis, the medieval France of Averaigne, the far future of Zothique, or the far reaches of interstellar space, he combined the morbidity of Edgar Allan Poe, the decadent imagery of Charles Baudelaire, and the sly wit of James Branch Cabell.

Much of his fiction would be published in *Weird Tales*, which would serve as a bastion against modernism for its Three Musketeers. It would also help to launch the careers of many other writers, such as Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, and, surprisingly, Tennessee Williams. For all his quibbles over the magazine’s rates of payment and the time it took to receive his checks, Smith would earn far more from his pulp writing than he had ever done for his poetry. Nevertheless, he regarded his stories as uneven in quality and was often his own most serious critic. These lines from his 1952 letter to de Camp are telling: “I write slowly and painstakingly, with much recasting and revision. Much of my old work strikes me as being hasty, over-verbose and sometimes hackish.”

Nevertheless, he rapidly established himself as one of the leading contributors to *Weird Tales* with stories such as “The Monster of the Prophecy,” which begins with “the disappearance of an unknown and presumably minor poet” (*Collected* 1: 87). In this satire, a suicidal young writer is transported to another planet by an alien scientist to fulfill an ancient prophesy. Smith uses his descriptions of the hallucinatory landscape and architecture to emphasize the dreamlike rather than science-fictional qualities of his narrative. The poet accedes to

the alien's plan to spark an insurgency, but he soon becomes the victim of a counterrevolution. Smith saves his hero from the torture chamber by striking down the poet's inquisitors with a convenient meteorite, the impact of which suggests that the alien gods have chosen no sides after all. Finally, the hero makes his way to another part of the planet, where he is welcomed by an empress. The two fall in love and live happily ever after. The dream world has become a fairy tale, albeit a particularly peculiar one that resembles a hybrid of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ugly Duckling" and Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars* (1912).

While a casual reader might think that Farnsworth Wright could not get enough of his new author, Smith often had to agree to cuts to or revisions of his work. Some stories were submitted several times before the mercurial editor decided they were right for *Weird Tales*. Understandably, Smith began to contribute to other publications, such as *Wonder Stories* and *Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror*, in the hope of a quicker sale or a better word rate. One consequence of this was that some of his best weird fiction did not appear in its natural home.

"The Return of the Sorcerer" is a full-blown horror story that taps the vein of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. Reclusive scholar John Carnaby hires the unemployed narrator to translate the *Necronomicon* from the original Arabic. The first passage he converts into English hints at a mystery that Carnaby explains away as an infestation of rats: "It is verily known by few, but is nevertheless an attestable fact, that the will of a dead sorcerer hath power upon his own body and can raise it up from the tomb and perform therewith whatever action was unfulfilled in life" (*Collected 2*: 148). In true Lovecraftian style, the narrator dismisses this as gibberish, but his occultist employer is shaken by the words, and little wonder. Carnaby has murdered and dismembered his brother, the appropriately named Helman, a sorcerer with greater power than John ever had:

“It is more than a week—it is ten days since I did the deed. But Helman—or some part of him—has returned every night. . . . God! his accursed hands crawling on the floor! . . . his feet, his arms, the segments of his legs, climbing the stairs in some unmentionable way to haunt me! . . . Christ! his awful, bloody torso lying in wait! . . . I tell you, his hands have come even by day to tap and fumble at my door . . . and I have stumbled over his arms in the dark.” (153; ellipses in orig.)

As the narrator tries to leave, he witnesses the reassembled corpse of Helman come to complete his revenge on his brother—and reclaim his severed head. “The Return of the Sorcerer” derives as much of its DNA from Poe as from Lovecraft, of course, but Smith’s black humor and morbid relish are ever-present between the lines of his deadpan narration.

Smith moved easily back to fantasy with his next tale, “The City of the Singing Flame,” which is one of his most celebrated works. Indeed, this was one of two tales—the other was “Master of the Asteroid,” also by Smith—of which Ray Bradbury said in his introduction to *A Rendezvous in Averoigne* (1988), “These stories more than any others I can remember had everything to do with my decision, while in the seventh grade, to become a writer” (ix).

In “The City of the Singing Flame,” fantasy writer Giles Angarth discovers an interdimensional doorway in the Sierras. Once again, as with “The Monster of the Prophecy” and “The Return of the Sorcerer,” Smith’s narrator is loosely based on himself, in situation if not character. The journey that beckons will take him behind the curtain of consensus reality, through passing strangeness, and ultimately lead to the kind of nihilistic revelation that characterizes “The Hashish-Eater.” Magically transported to another world, Angarth follows a path through an alien landscape that leads to a gigantic city. He finds his way back to the portal and returns to Earth to record the events in his journal, writing, “It has unsettled me more than any previous experience in my whole life, and the world about me seems hardly any less

improbable and nightmarish than the one I have penetrated in a fashion so fortuitous” (*Collected 2*: 161). Returning to the other world, he sees shining giants being drawn to the city by beautiful but unearthly music, and although he wants to follow, he resists for a time. He finally enters the city during his third expedition and witnesses a host of alien beings from many other worlds drawn by the melody to a temple built around the singing flame of the title. Having dampened the effects of the siren song with cotton wool, he watches the creatures prostrate themselves before the burning column before sacrificing themselves in its fires:

The music mounted with the flame; and I understood now its recurrent ebb and flow. As I looked and listened, a mad thought was born in my mind—the thought of how marvellous and ecstatic it would be to run forward and leap headlong into the singing fire. The music seemed to tell me that I should find in that moment of flaring dissolution all the delight and triumph, all the splendor and exaltation it had promised from afar. It besought me; it pleaded with tones of supernal melody; and despite the wadding in my ears, the seduction was well-nigh irresistible. (166)

Angarth does resist the temptation, but only for a time. Life and literature no longer hold any meaning for him. His last words are simply, “Tomorrow I shall return to the city” (170).

What does this story mean? If it had been written as science fiction, there would have to have been a rationale for the flame and the self-destructive devotion of its acolytes. Nor can it be classed as horror, because Angarth is at pains to point out that however odd the alien creatures are, they are not threatening, and even the idea of immolation becomes as attractive as the music. “The City of the Singing Flame” must be regarded as pure fantasy, but of that troubling subset defined as the weird tale. Ultimately in such stories, the dream trumps reality, and perhaps the singing flame represents artistic inspiration itself. As Smith was well aware, this could lead as often to destruction as to creation, but it could never be denied.

Introduction

This section of archived material comprises six articles culled from a trio of Salem Press reference books—*Survey of Modern Fantasy Literature* (1983), *Magill's Guide to Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature* (1996), and *Masterplots II: Short Story Series*, revised edition (2004)—that have critically charted the most significant works of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. The works covered in this section belong to the “big three” of *Weird Tales*—Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, and Clark Ashton Smith—as well as preeminent contributors C. L. Moore and Seabury Quinn.

Included in this section of archived material are a plot summary and analysis of Howard's Conan stories, most of which were originally published in *Weird Tales* between 1929 and 1936; a critical analysis of one of Lovecraft's most famous stories, “The Dunwich Horror,” which was first published in the April 1929 issue of *Weird Tales*; critical overviews of two short-story collections from Smith, *Zothique* (1970) and *Hyperborea* (1971), the bulk of which first appeared between the covers of *Weird Tales*; critical analysis of five collected stories featuring C. L. Moore's heroine Jirel of Joiry that first ran in *Weird Tales* between 1934 and 1939; and a critical analysis of a collection of Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin stories, which ran for ninety-three adventures, from 1925 through 1951, in *Weird Tales*.

In reference-ready fashion, these articles all contain a quick-reference section offering basic information such as the author's name and dates of birth and death, the type of work, where the stories take place, and the date of first publication of the collections being analyzed or summarized—not, except in the case of “The Dunwich Horror,” the first publication date of the individual stories. Contributors include British scholar and well-known novelist Brian Stableford, noted pulp-fiction historian Robert Weinberg, and author Anne K. Kaler.

Additional Works on Pulp Fiction

Robert Bloch

Psycho, 1959.

Blood Runs Cold, 1961.

Atoms and Evil, 1962.

Dragons and Nightmares, 1969.

Night-World, 1972.

American Gothic, 1974.

The Best of Robert Bloch, 1977.

The Night of the Ripper, 1984.

Psycho House, 1990.

August Derleth

Someone in the Dark, 1941.

Three Problems for Solar Pons, 1952.

The Mask of Cthulhu, 1958.

The Casebook of Solar Pons, 1965.

Colonel Markesan and Less Pleasant People, 1966.

The Adventure of the Unique Dickensians, 1968.

Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey, 1968.

The Chronicles of Solar Pons, 1973.

Robert E. Howard

Skull-Face and Others, 1946.

The Coming of Conan, 1953.

The Dark Man and Others, 1963.

Almuric, 1964.

Bran Mak Morn, 1969.

King Kull, with Lin Carter, 1969.

The Iron Man and Other Tales of the Ring, 1976.

Pigeons from Hell, 1976.

Conan: The Hour of the Dragon, 1977.

Conan: The People of the Black Circle, 1977.

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About the Editor

Gary Hoppenstand is a professor of English and the associate dean of undergraduate academic affairs in the College of Arts and Letters at Michigan State University. He has published fifteen books, seven scholarly reprint editions of classic novels for Signet Classics and Penguin Classics, and over fifty scholarly articles on a wide range of topics, including popular culture studies, literary studies, and media studies. His early work as editor of the periodical *Midnight Sun* was twice nominated for the World Fantasy Award, one of the nation's top literary awards, and his *Popular Fiction: An Anthology* (1997) won the Popular Culture Association's Ray and Pat Browne National Book Award for best reference work of the year. As the series editor of the six-volume *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Popular Culture* (2007), he was again the recipient of the Ray and Pat Browne Award for a reference work. He is a former area chair, vice president, and president of the national Popular Culture Association, and since 2002 he has served as the editor of the *Journal of Popular Culture*. He won the top scholarly honor of the national Popular Culture Association, the Governing Board Award, in 2008 ("for his contributions to popular culture studies and the Popular Culture Association"). At Michigan State University, he has won the College of Arts and Letters 2008 Paul Varg Award for Faculty ("in recognition of outstanding teaching and scholarly achievement") and the university's 2008 Distinguished Faculty Award ("in recognition of outstanding contributions to the intellectual development of the University").