The Dark Man

The Journal of Robert E. Howard Studies

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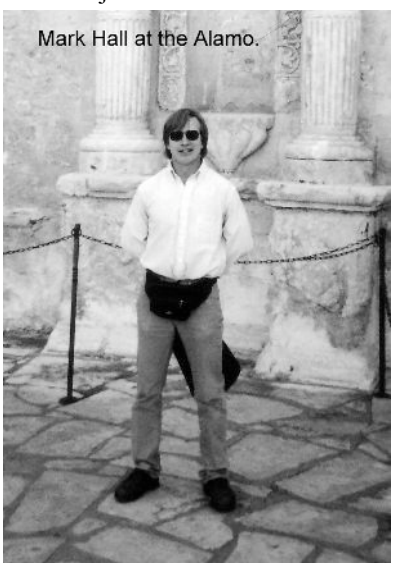
Editorial Comments

Welcome to Volume 2, Issues 1 and 2 of *The Dark Man*. Hunh, you say? Where is issue number 9, you ask? Well, this is it!

If you are curious as to why we are doing this, there are a couple of reasons. First, the majority of academic journals use the volume and number system. The volume reflects the year the issue appeared, and the number reflects the particular issue. The volume system has developed primarily as a way of helping index journals for libraries and as a short-hand for citations. Now that *The Dark Man* is indexed by the MLA and showing up in World Cat at a couple of libraries in North America, we need to get it to conform to the standards of the academic world.


Mark Hall at the Alamo.

As the above implies, another reason for adopting the volume numbering system is that we will be appearing bi-annually with approximately 40-50 pages per issue, or like this issue, at least once a year with 80-100 pages. We are starting to get a good flow of quality submissions, and feel the submissions will continue so that *The Dark Man* can appear bi-annually.

This is a double-sized issue due to an emergency coming up at home this past spring. I intended to get an issue out by summer, but my hopes of doing this faded away as the situation at home quieted, and I began teaching summer school. By the time I was able to focus on *The Dark Man*, there was enough material for two issues. So, it was either two issues back to back, or a double-sized issue.

Okay, enough excuses—on to the issue in hand. Thanks are in order to Larry Richter for creating this issue's cover art. I and the rest of the Editorial Board have enjoyed it immensely, and we hope you like it too.

As to the contents of this issue, we have three more papers from the Robert E. Howard sessions that occurred at the 2004 Popular Culture Association meetings in San Antonio. Frank Coffman opens this issue with a wonderful overview and analysis of Howard's poetry. This is a technical article which makes a strong case for Howard

writing poetry within a narrative tradition influenced by such others as Chesterton, Stevenson and Tennyson.

Rusty Burke's spirited talk from the sessions also appears here. Following Steve Trout's earlier foray into Howard's political views, Rusty examines how New Deal ideology springs up in Howard's fiction. While determining an author's political beliefs from his writings can be a tricky venture; I think Rusty provides a strong case for Howard being a supporter of Roosevelt's New Deal policies.

The papers from the PCA/ACA meeting are rounded out with my "Crash Go the Civilizations: Some Notes on Robert E. Howard's Use of History and Anthropology." This articles attempts to put Howard's "The Hyborian Age" into context with the state of anthropology and historiography in the 1920s and 1930s. This was fun for me to write since I ended up re-reading a variety of classics in anthropology and history that I had forgotten about.

Whether from circumstance, or intention, Patrick Burger's "'Red Shadows' Through the Lens of Northrop Frye's Archetypal Criticism" was composed while he was living in Botswana. I'll leave it for you to decide whether this provided any additional insights or not, but I am sure you will find this an interesting and thought-provoking article.

As expected, Joshi's review of *The Barbarian Triumph* generated a few letters of comment both pro and con. Mark Finn and Steve Trout also raise some other relevant concerns on other issues in the letters column. (And in case you were wondering, we like to get letters by email or regular mail, and if we print your letter, a free copy of *The Dark Man* comes your way.)

With the latest Howard publishing ventures, we have a host of reviews. Terry Allen provides us with a review of the early issues of the new Conan comic, while Morgan Holmes reviews Wildside's *Adventure Tales*, and Charles Gramlich covers the early issues of *The Cimmerian*. Jeffrey Kahan, Professor of English at the University of La Verne, provides critical reviews of *Boxing Stories* and *The Bloody Crown of Conan*. Our own Charles Hoffman weighs in on *Bran Mak Morn: The Last King*, and Ben Szumskyj, editor of *Studies in Fantasy Literature*, gives us an overview of *Glenn Lord's Ultima Thule.*

And before I forget, before ending this section, a few brief messages. First, if you did not know it, or somehow forgot about it, 2006 is the centenary of Robert E. Howard's birth. While I write this, formal plans have yet to be announced, but details for the June 2006 Howard Days will be available at http://www.rehupa.com. Word has it that Roy Thomas will be one of the guests of honor for the event.

Later in 2006, but with ties to the Howard centenary is the 2006 World Fantasy Convention in Austin, Texas. Registration and information on this convention can be found at

http://www.fact.org/wfc2006/new/index.htm. Glenn Lord will be a guest of honor with David Duncan and Glen Cook.

And finally, check out Leonard and Cearley's *Conversations With Texas Writers*.[1] While they were not able to interview Robert E. Howard for this volume, there is an interview conducted by Mark Finn with Rusty Burke on Howard's life and works. To dedicated Howard aficionados, the interview on Howard's life is probably old news—but for people just discovering Howard, this is a very useful, short biography.

The Barbaric Horde at the 2004 Popular Culture Association Meetings. Front row, left to right: Charles Gramlich, Mark Finn, Mark Hall. Back row, left to right: Rusty Burke, Frank Coffman, Paul Herman. (Photo courtesy of Rusty and Shelly Burke.)

[1] Leonard, Frances and Ramona Cearley, eds. *Conversations With Texas Writers*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. ISBN: 0-292-70614-6.

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Robert E. Howard and Poetic Narrative:
The Bardic Tradition and "Popular Modernities"

by Frank Coffman

"Author *and Poet*"
epitaph selected by Robert E. Howard
(emphases added)

"...he was certainly, at the very first,
primarily a poet."
T. C. Smith, "Introduction," *The Grim Land*.
Lamoni, IA: Stygian Isle, 1976.

"My soul is a blaze
Of passionate desire
My soul is a blaze
That sets my pen on fire."
unpublished verse, from a letter to T. C. Smith 23 June 1926
(REH age 20)

Robert E. Howard: Singer in the Shadows

Robert E. Howard's gifts as a poet have been eclipsed by his well-deserved fame as a teller of tales. Indeed, the poems, numbering around 700 (many as yet unpublished), have been so overshadowed by the prose narratives that it is accurate to say that they have largely remained in obscurity, save for the interest of a small—but growing—number of Howard enthusiasts and scholars. A great number of Howard's readers and admirers do not know him as a poet at all—let alone a poet of surpassing skill and intensity.

But Howard was such a poet, one who would study and master several traditional forms—especially the ballad and the sonnet—and who showed remarkable skill (if limited output) in blank verse. He was the eager adopter of these and other poetic modes, but he moved beyond that to become the innovative adapter of tradition to his own purposes and vision.

Howard was beckoned by traditional mythic, folkloric, and legendary content as well as by traditional forms. His short poem "Roads" speaks to that and to the modern-age bardic roads his typewriter would travel:

I too have strode those white-paved roads that run
Through dreamy woodlands to the Roman Wall,
Have seen the white towns gleaming in the sun,
And heard afar the elf-like trumpet call.
(*Howard Collector #17*, Autumn 1972)

Sadly, both then and now, the market for poetry was not a lucrative one. Howard was, by his own definition, a professional writer—one who would "splash the field" of popular and pulp fiction across several genres and make a good living during those years of the Great Depression. He made poetry when he could—and much more of it than most realize—but the hectic demands of creating and marketing his fiction, combined with the meager market for poetry, had their effect. As his friend and frequent correspondent Tevis Clyde Smith noted, "[...] it is interesting to speculate on what would have happened if Bob had confined himself to verse, though it must be admitted that the true appreciation of poetry by a vast audience was probably all ready [sic] on the decline [...]". (unnumbered page, "Introduction," *The Grim Land*).

But beyond making the assertion that Robert E. Howard was not only a poet but a fine one, I maintain that he should also be recognized as one of the scant number of true *narrative* poets of his time. And I will try to confine my comments here to his skill with narrative poetry—although his lyrical and more personal poetic output is worthy of study in its own right.[2]

I will argue that Howard as narrative poet ought rightly to be seen as a poet in the true bardic tradition. He should be seen as a *balladeer* or *wandering minstrel* of his time. I'll attempt to defend the use of that word "wandering" more fully a bit later—with regard to this man who seldom physically wandered far from his native Texas or the greater Southwest. We may view him as the equivalent—at least the parallel in the Age of Print—to his predecessors from the many ages of oral poetry and folk culture.

Sunset of the Age of Song

Those bards and skalds and scops and chanters of epic song from the unknowable ages of the oral story and "Oral Culture" eventually came face to face with what Walter Ong has termed "Scribal Culture" and eventually the "Print Culture" that in turn supplanted it (231). The word-of-mouth singers, tellers, and bards began to encounter, first, collectors of the oral tale and song, later, the creative story presented as something that was written rather than spoken, something to be read rather than heard.

Gradually, the Oral mode was pushed aside, marginalized by the rise of literacy, the mass distribution of the printed book, the beginnings of lending libraries, and serial publication for the masses. This, of course, was not a sudden shock but a long and gradual

[2] Jim Keegan is working on a collection of *The Complete Poems* , which is scheduled for release in 2006.

diminishing—a complete vanishing in many areas and across many cultures and an eclipsing in others.

Robert E. Howard was living and writing at the beginning of just such a time of transition. He wrote at the beginning of the great cusp of change between the Age of Print and the Age of Multimedia/Hypermedia which was to build to a crescendo over the remainder of his century, the "finale" of which is still ahead of us.

But the ever-accelerating pace of change would make this new communications revolution more of a shock than those that had gone before: Oral to Scribal, Scribal to Print. The Age of Print and most certainly the lingering vestiges of the Age of Orality into which Howard was born were already being challenged and impacted on several fronts by the telephone, cinema, and radio.

The early 20th century saw the last truly "Readerly" (Barthes) generations that America and much of the "modern world" would know. This readership, this devout group of lovers of the book, was already being lured away by new modes of story delivery. The necessarily "readerly" practice of *effortfully engaging* the text of a narrative—of opening the mind's eye and bringing one's imagination to bear— was being eroded. If one's family wasn't the "last on the block" to own a radio, or unless one lacked the few pennies it cost to go to the picture show (either silent or the amazing new "talkies"), it was now possible to have one's entertainment *comparatively effortlessly* delivered through the unfolding of a story "before one's eyes" and/or ears. Instead of the activity of reading the narrative, more and more people were becoming satisfied with the relative passivity of listening or watching these new modes of dramatic story presentation.

And if reading was being challenged and possibly even beginning its decline in those changing times, the reading of poetry was even more in decline. Poetry appreciation clubs that had formed in the late 19th century that had lingered into the early 20th saw declines in membership.

Also, if poetry in general was in decline, narrative poetry was even more so. Where the Victorian Age, both in England and America, had heard the great swelling of narrative poetry from the pens of masters such as Browning and Tennyson and Morris and Longfellow, that millennia-old tradition was rapidly set aside in the early 20th century. This was partly due to the advent and growing strength of the free verse movement and the accompanying urge to break traditional content as well as form,[3] and partly, I suspect, due to the general lure of

[3] It is difficult to imagine a "modern" free verse *Odyssey* or recounting of Robin Hood's adventures or Arthurian legend in *vers libre* — although Charles Williams, in the little-known and under-appreciated *Taliesin Through Logres*

the emerging media and the whole societal attitude for change and rebellion against tradition following the Great War.

This beginning of a decline in readership in general, poetry in particular, and narrative poetry even more so was held somewhat in check by the emergence of the pulp magazines and their more fantastic and often socially "taboo" content and illustrations and those kinds of fiction for the masses that were their great allure. These magazines offered poetry as well as prose. But, while the 19th century had seen a great flowering of narrative verse, in Robert E. Howard's era at least the beginning of the end was apparent.

The magnificent masters and narrative masterpieces of the previous two or three generations, of the New American and Victorian and Edwardian and Great War Epochs lingered on and had their effect on a few early 20th century poets. Some were influenced by William Morris's *Sigurd, by* Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and "Ulysses," by Robert Browning's "Childe Roland" and *The Ring and the Book,* and by Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and "Paul Revere's Ride" among others.

Certainly with Tennyson, for example, we see example of definite influence upon Howard. A few scholars, including noted Howardians Rusty Burke and Patrice Louinet, have seen some clear influences upon Howard from Tennyson's Arthurian material. I have also noted elsewhere some interesting parallels with Tennyson's "The Passing of Arthur" and Howard's longest published narrative poem, "The Ballad of King Geraint."

Poetic Influences: Service and Chesterton

Robert E. Howard was one of those who were influenced by that last great Golden Age of Narrative Verse. If it was tarnishing in his day, he refused to see it. In fact, he acted as if he believed he could and would add to the tradition. And there were others from the generation immediately preceding Howard who would produce story poems in the epic and ballad traditions which would have a great influence upon the young Texan.

Prominent among Howard's poetic antecedents were Gilbert Keith Chesterton, that illustrious English intellect and superb stylist, and Canada's Robert E. Service, the Klondike balladeer.

Service's ballads and other narrative poems of the 1890s Alaskan-Yukon gold rush days influenced Howard as a poet every bit as much as the work of another writer of the same era and experience,

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and *The Region of the Summer Stars* [combined known as *Arthurian Torso*, left unfinished at Williams death] comes close to realizing the potential, although many "traditionalities" still obtain in his work.

Jack London, likely influenced his prose. Service helped Howard to see—evident in many of Howard's poems—that plain diction, pace of plot, and action synopsized were important.

Chesterton's impact upon the young poet is clear and well attested and evidenced. In a letter to his friend, Tevis Clyde Smith, circa September 1927, the 21-year-old Howard writes:

> Several books I purchased on my trip, among them G. K. Chesterton's "The Ballad of the White Horse." Ever read it? It's great. Listen: (*Selected Letters: 1923-1930*, 6).

After which, he quotes various passages from that poem.

Certainly, if one judges by the number of quoted passages from Chesterton's *White Horse* as epigraphs to various chapters and stories of Howard's prose and to "The Ballad of King Geraint" and some others with likely Chestertonian influence, one might easily single out GKC as Howard's chief poetic inspirational voice.

After the Victorian masterpiece by William Morris, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, which can be defended as the last true "epic" poem in the English language (in epic traditions, topic, scope, number of lines, and heroic meter), Chesterton's *The Ballad of the White Horse* stands arguably as the last great extended heroic poem in the language. It is an "Alfrediad," recounting the victory of the unified ninth century Angles and Saxons and their Christian King Alfred (the only English monarch to be given the appellation "the Great") over the pagan Danes at the Battle of Ethandune (878 A.D). In several places in his prose, Howard uses a stanza or two from Chesterton's *White Horse* as an epigraph to a story or chapter. Howard will also write whole poems, in particular "The Ballad of King Geraint" and, especially, "The Harp of Alfred" which clearly demonstrate Chesterton's influence upon the maturing poet.

But let's return to that fragment of a letter from Howard to T. C. Smith. Of special significance is that last passage. Howard writes, *"Ever read it? It's great. Listen:..."* (emphasis added). It is interesting and important and, I believe, indicative that Howard should use the word "listen" in reference to the poetry he is asking his friend to read. It is evidence that Robert E. Howard—from early in his poetic life—had a developed sense that poetry was something to be heard, or, if read, read out loud. It is an important element of his own extension of the bardic tradition—this belief in the importance of the oral/aural quality of poetry, this belief that poetic language should be musical as well as meaningful and make sound as well as sense. Howard was a

man who still appreciated the folk and preliterate culture of the past, even as the dusk of the great Age of Print culture was nearing.

Getting to a discussion of specific poetic modes, Howard clearly liked the long-established potential of the ballad stanza with its relatively open rhyme scheme and short line cadences. He also admired its latitude for rhythmic variation, especially influenced by the way Chesterton had extended (some might say "exploded") the traditional standard ballad stanza (four lines of 4343 accents, rhymed ABCB respectively) to make five and six-line variations of the pattern. Howard would use this extended ballad stanza for several of his own narrative poems, playing artfully with the possibilities of the form.

A few brief examples will serve to illustrate this Chestertonian influence. In the opening epigraph to Howard's short story "The Dark Man" we find a fragment from *White Horse*:

> For this is the night of the drawing of swords,
> And the painted tower of the heathen hordes
> Leans to our hammers, fires, and cords,
> Leans a little and falls.
> (Chesterton, *Collected Poems* 251)

But that quartet of lines is preceded in the original stanza by the two lines below, hence making the expanded "ballad" stanza variant, 434443/ABCCCB, a frequent pattern in Chesterton's long narrative: "Up on the old white road, brothers,/ Up on the Roman walls!" (251)

Another example, also from the end of Book IV, "The Woman in the Forest," *The Ballad of the White Horse*:

> Follow the star that lives and leaps,
> Follow the sword that sings,
> For we go gathering heathen men,
> A terrible harvest, ten by ten,
> As the wrath of the last red autumn — then
> When Christ reaps down the kings. (251)

In comparison, we may examine Robert E. Howard's poem "The Harp of Alfred," published in *Weird Tales* in September of 1928 — a year following his letter to T. C. Smith praising Chesterton's poem:

> *The Harp of Alfred*
> I heard the harp of Alfred
> As I went o'er the downs,
> When thorn trees stood at even
> Like monks in dusky gowns;
> I heard the music Guthrum heard
> Beside the wasted towns.

When Alfred, like a peasant,
   Came harping down the hill,
And the drunken Danes made merry
   With the man they sought to kill,
And the Saxon king laughed in their beards
   And bent them to his will.

I heard the harp of Alfred
   As twilight waned to night;
I heard ghost armies tramping
   As the dim stars flamed white;
And Guthrum walked at my left hand,
   And Alfred at my right.

Howard has used, like Chesterton, an extended six-line stanza, but he demonstrates his own virtuosity and inventiveness. The rhyme is only on the even numbered lines, but extended from the ABCB of the traditional ballad to the ABCBDB of Howard's six-liner. Beyond that, he's using something more like the traditional "short ballad" (accented 3343, occasionally all 3s) in his expanded stanza which has four accents only in the fifth line of each group (333343). Perhaps to approximate more an expansion upon the standard ballad, he does use feminine rhyme (final unaccented syllable) in the first and third lines of each stanza to lengthen them slightly toward a semblance of the 4-beat norm.

This demonstrates Howard's ability at and urge toward *innovation* as well as his abilities at *inspired imitation* of an influential poem and poet.

Clearly there were other poets who inspired and influenced Robert E. Howard, and the mention of Tennyson, Service, and Chesterton is most definitely not meant to be all inclusive. Howard appreciated the power of poetry in general, and he admired powerful poets from Homer and Sappho through many masters up to and including such immediate predecessors as Rudyard Kipling and his contemporaries like Robert Frost. The poetic inspirations and antecedents for Howard's own work could easily be a book length study. The man simply loved the power of language and he read—and wrote —broadly and with a passion.

Howard's Use of the Sonnet as Narrative

Perhaps Howard's most creative poetic achievement was his adaptation of the sonnet as a narrative poem. This was by no means a new exercise in some ways. Percy Shelley's famous sonnet, "Ozymandias" from a century before exemplifies the sonnet as narrative rather than traditional lyric on romantic love. In fact, the

earliest reference to the sonnet form in Howard that I'm aware of is in an unpublished letter to T. C. Smith, dated 6 August 1926 (REH was 20 at the time). It specifically mentions "Ozymandias" and praises one of Smith's sonnets, so it seems likely that Howard was well aware of the form for some time before this letter.[4]

According to another unpublished letter to T. C. Smith, dated only a couple weeks later (21 August 1926), Howard writes: "I have attempted a sonnet, my first. And extremely worthless." That sonnet, "Twilight on Stonehenge" (*Shadows of Dreams* 62) is far from being worthless. Rather, it is an admirable achievement — an Italian or Petrarchan sonnet (the more difficult type in English) with a variant sestet. That poem is not narrative but descriptive in nature, with some comment on the dim Celtic past. But, if truly his first attempt at the form, as Howard maintins, it is a fine one, exhibiting flowing cadences and virtuosity with rhyme and sound effects.

A possible influence upon Howard as an inspiration toward the narrative sonnet might have been H. P. Lovecraft's *Fungi from Yuggoth* sonnet sequence (appearing in *Weird Tales* and elsewhere) but Howard's work in the narrative sonnet might indeed have worked the other way around—perhaps inspiring Lovecraft's narrative sequence. Howard's earliest narrative sonnets precede the publication of the earliest Yuggoth poems. We may see the 14-liner early draft of "Flight" (unpublished, in the same letter in which Howard enthuses to Smith about Chesterton: ca September 1927) as an early—perhaps the first—foray by Howard into the narrative sonnet mode:

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[FLIGHT]
(preliminary lines)
(Untitled in this version)

A jackal laughed from a thicket still; the stars
were haggard pale.
Cain wiped the sweat from his pallid brow and
hurried down the trail.

No footfall harried the forest ways, no sound
save his own quick breath,
But he clutched his spear and his own red fear
rose in his soul like death.
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[4] "Say, Weird Tales is publishing some fine poetry, reprints, you know. This last issue they published 'Ozymandias' by Shelley, and 'Barnacles' by Lanier. They also published poems of Poe and others." (REH to TCS, 6 August 1926, unpublished letter). Other poets mentioned by Howard in the same letter: Chesterton, H. H. Knibbs, Langdon Smith, and Alan Seeger.

Till he came at last to an unknown way that no man's foot had trod
But now he fled from the silent dead and the wrathful face of God.

He halted, listened; naught was there save the Silence at his back
And a grey sea and a red moon and the shadows rising black.

Till out of the ocean rose a Shape, a monstrous thing of gloom;
And his knees were loosed and the naked Cain cowered before his doom.
"Come not to my red empire Cain; there's blood upon your hand;
"The foremost killer of the earth comes not into my land."

The stars were dim and the moon was red and leaves stirred on the bough.
Cain stood alone by the nameless sea and the mark was on his brow.

This poem or draft is interesting because it combines the two traditions, sonnet and ballad, in an innovative way. The seven-beat "couplet" lines can each be broken into a four-beat and a three-beat sequence, thus keeping the 4343/ABCB of the ballad stanza spread over two lines rather than four ["A jackal laughed from a thicket still;{half lines could be broken here} the stars were haggard pale. . ."(emphasis of accented syllables underlined)]. The fact that this poem is 14 lines makes it a variant sonnet, usually called a "couplet sonnet," after the end rhymes of the lines: AA BB CC etc.

In another poem, "The Mysteries," (unpublished, REH to TCS, ca February 1929) Howard not only tells a brief narrative with explicit sexual content on the ravishing of a mortal girl by the god Baal, but is *subdivided* over its fourteen lines into three sections: "Invokation [sic]," "Chorus and Chant," and "Sacrifice!" I believe that this narrative sonnet owes much to William Butler Yeats's justly famous sonnet, "Leda and the Swan,"—but that is a discussion for another time.

Other fine narrative sonnets like "The Last Day" (*Echoes from an Iron Harp* 50) are by no means rare. Some, as yet unpublished, are light narrative verse, even verging to the off color versifying that Howard was wont to do in his personal letters to Smith—which were clearly not meant for broad publication.

Howard's best narrative sonnets exhibit to an amazing degree the compression of narrative detail and the pace needed to allow such a brief narrative to succeed. Such compression is, of course, a mark of the ballad of tradition as well. On top of this, Howard seemed to prefer the more difficult Italian form of sonnet to the more easily rhymed English form. All in all, his experimentation with variations on "the fourteener," the "magic square" of text that is the sonnet form, demonstrated both his virtuosity whiles working within tradition form and innovative ability to break new ground—to extend and expand upon tradition.

One of the finest examples of these talents is Howard's narrative sonnet, "Miser's Gold" (*New Howard Reader #3*, Nov 1998, 6):

Miser's Gold

"Nay, have no fear. The man was blind," said she.
"How could he see 'twas we that took his gold?
"The devil, man! I thought you were bold!"
"This is a chancy business!" muttered he,
"And we'll be lucky if we get to sea.
"The fellow deals with demons, I've been told."
"Let's open the chest, shut up and take a hold."
Then silence as they knocked the hinges free.

A glint of silver and a sheen of jade —
Two strange gems gleaming from a silken fold —
Rare plunder — gods, was that a hidden blade?
A scream, a curse, two bodies stark and cold.
With jewel eyes above them crawled and swayed
The serpent left to watch the miser's gold.

This poem tells a complete brief narrative with insinuated surrounding plot and wonderfully compressed content. This is, perhaps, the truest to purpose and most successful of Howard's narrative sonnets. The wonderful achievement of Howard's poetic and image-laden prose fiction is here distilled and encapsulated and seen in its essence. Great writers leave some work for the reader, and the sin of most novices at the craft of fiction is to overwrite, both in language and in content, giving too much verbiage and too much detail and too little credit to the reader's intellect. Much of the delight in reading is filling in the intentional gaps that the skilled fictioneer has provided.

We see many Howardian tendencies in this micro-story.

First, we see Howard's decided preference for the omission of introductory exposition (no room for it in the sonnet of course, but Howard almost always omits it in his prose narratives as well). We

leap into the narrative *in medias res*, in the good old epic plan of Homer; the blind miser has already been robbed.

Second, the suggestion of setting and specifics of the theft are done through the use of dialogue: "[...] we'll be lucky if we get to sea" suggesting both setting and the concept of sea + theft = pirates; the fact that the theft is a "chest" gives both specificity of the crime and enhancement to the pirate conjecture. The fact that the cautious "he" of the poem has heard that "the fellow deals with demons" adds that supernatural aura consistent with Howard's adventures. That the "she" seems more bold and daring–even if reckless and foolhardy–is interesting, especially in light of Howard's frequent depiction of strong female characters (something his few feminist critics often fail to appreciate).

Third, the luscious imagery and descriptive power of Howard's language is exhibited in the opening of the sestet with the wonderful sound devices. We find *assonance* ("glInt," "sIlver," "sIlken" and in "shEEn" and "glEAming"), splendid *alliteration* ("GLint," "GLeam" [double alliteration], "Gods" and "Gold", and also with the Ss of "Silver," "Sheen," "Strange," and "Silken"), and *consonance* on the letter L" ("gLint," "siLver," "gLeaming," and "silken").

Fourth, wonderful economy of detail—necessary of course for the compressed narrative sonnet, but also a distinctive marker of Howard's prose fiction—is seen in the two central lines of the sestet. Howard achieves the economy of the ballad of tradition. Just enough words are given to suggest the initial elation of the robbers/pirates in forcing open the chest [mythic allusion here to Pandora's Box?], the painful surprise of what is first supposed to be a concealed blade, and the lovely economy of "A scream, a curse, two bodies stark and cold." No ballad of tradition exhibits better concision of detail. Enough is provided for the reader to see clearly what has happened, the details are sufficient to establish atmosphere and setting in the mind's eye, and the poem swings through the final two lines to reveal the jewel-eyed serpent [Biblical allusion to Eden?], the guardian of the treasure and bane of the thieves.

None of the narrative sonnets of Lovecraft's *Fungi From Yuggoth*, one of the few other groups of poems to make use of the sonnet as a narrative rather than lyric, are handled as skillfully or achieve such a full narrative completeness and compactness.

The poem is also most interesting in rhyme economy as it moves on only three rhymes, the sestet being in one of the two traditional patterns this time, but including the B rhymes from the octave: ABBAABBA | CBCBCB. Here Howard sets himself an even more difficult task than in the normally difficult Italian form. Seemingly simple on the surface, "Miser's Gold" reveals both Howard's poetic

virtuosity and his consummate narrative skill, exhibiting its own "silken folds," offering a narrative poetic gem sparkling like the jade-green eyes of the serpent.

Howard's Use of Blank Verse

Howard dabbled only minimally in the traditional epic-heroic meter of English—blank verse. But his magnificent excursion into that mode, the poem "Cimmeria," shows amazing dexterity with the form. I have noted elsewhere its use of subtle metrical variations and *enjambment* [the use of run-on lines, not end-stopped by punctuation].[5]

Howard as a "Singer of Tales" for the Modern Age

Returning to Howard's use of and extension of tradition and traditional forms, we may conclude with some general observations. In Chesterton's "Prefactory Note" to *The Ballad of the White Horse* he offers the following important basis for his work: "I only seek to write upon hearsay, as the old popular balladists did (internet)."

And this, I contend, is precisely what Howard did. The young Robert E. Howard steeped himself in the narrative traditions. He combined these with a voracious appetite for story and narrative verse and an equally strong interest in history and the ages of legend and fable. Upon this base he created, not only some of the most stirring prose tales in the language, but some of the most interesting verse in the late age of narrative poetry.

Howard too, in his narrative poetry and in many of his prose tales, was writing "upon hearsay." We may go further and translate that metaphor to Howard's early Modern Age and say that he was also chanting or singing upon "readsay." His accumulation of narrative repertoire and motifs and poetic art was gained chiefly through reading and not hearing (although the oral narratives heard in his youth are well-attested to have had significant impact). We should likely extend "readsay" one more degree to coin "readwrite" if we want to be completely truthful about Howard's own modes of both gathering of repertoire and delivery.

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[5] See my essay, "The Poem ' Cimmeria' and Howard's Use of Blank Verse," *The Shadow Singer* Issue 5, Vernal Equinox 2002. <http://www.robert-e-howard.org/ShadowSinger5ve02.html>. Member journal of the *Robert-E-Howard: Electronic Amateur Press Association* http://www.robert-e-howard.org

And that is exactly the point. The age of the wandering balladeer and bard — the "singer of tales"—was over.[6] Robert E. Howard realized that the paradigm had shifted. Nonetheless, there were distinct parallels and connections to that age when poets traveled among the people and enthralled them with song. This shift, from singer and song and enchanted listeners to singer and song and enchanted readers opening their "mind's ears" to his music was very clear to Howard. All that had changed was the mode of *trans*mission. The *mission* remained the same.

We may briefly examine this paradigm shift—this movement from told tale to written story—a bit more closely.

In 1846, William Thoms suggested the term "folklore" to replace the old term "popular antiquities." This suggestion caught on relatively quickly. This study of societal and cultural tradition and the transmission of both is still the particular focus of many scholars. But we might go back to that older and replaced term for folklore study and *revive it* and then *revise it* to suggest that we are concerned, not with "popular antiquities" but, rather with "*popular modernities*" when we study these works of popular literature. They can—and ought rightly—be viewed as extensions of myth, epic, romance, legend, folktale, and folksong into the Age of Print [and, apparently, soon beyond that to the emerging Age of Hypermedia].

With the works of Robert E. Howard in his narrative prose and poetry for the pulps, we are in the realm, not of folklore but of folk literature. Nonetheless, they are stories by and for and often of the people—the folk.

In "the Pulps" we have the early 20th century triumphs of Romance and the High Imagination and bardic storytelling over the brief incursions of literary Realism and *vers libre*. Robert E. Howard (among others in the important literary circle of the pulp magazine) both craved and created works of Adventure, Detection and Mystery, Horror and the Supernatural, and genre-defining Fantasy.

He wrote stories and narrative poems—not for the few pedagogues of some "high criticism"—but for the masses of people who simply wanted a captivating story, well told, that would be sure not to "lose the name of action," nor sacrifice entertainment on the altars of purported "enlightenment" or claimed importance.

And here we find Howard who loved and transmuted the malleable and ductile gold of tradition, who wrote stories and narrative poems inspired by and derived from a wealth of varied traditional

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[6] See Alfred B. Lord (protégé of Milman Parry), *The Singer of Tales* , for his classic discussion of the epic-bardic tradition and the modes of oral-poetic storytelling lingering into the 20th century.

material. We find an inspired teller of tales, a young man who, like his folk-oral predecessors, succeeded in growing his "word-hoard" and a wealth of narrative motifs and poetic modes through ever-eager listening and reading. We find a writer who understood that the pulp magazine was the new way for the storyteller to *travel* out to and among the people.

Instead of stringing his lute or harp and traveling the land on "shanks pony" and voicing his song to eager audiences, Robert E. Howard threaded the typewriter ribbon into his Underwood Model 5 and let his fingers do the walking—summoning forth prose and poetry of power and sending it forth to the eager readership of the pulps. At heart, he was that wandering singer.

He became a traveling minstrel for his time. While physically seldom traveling far from his native home, he found most of the mentors and companions of his art by reading and through extensive correspondence, but with vivid boyhood memories of the power of the oral tale. He heard the great voices of the earlier ages of song chiefly through the printed page. While confined by circumstances he found the way to walk out among the "folk" and reach the people who would throng — virtually — through pages of pulp to hear his voice resound.

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Robert E. Howard:
New Deal Heroic Fantasist[7]

by Rusty Burke

The professional writing career of Robert E. Howard spanned a period of a dozen years, from the sale of his first story to *Weird Tales* in the fall of 1924 until his suicide in June 1936. This was a period of great upheaval in American life, and in fact Howard's career is very nearly bisected by one of the most catastrophic events of the 20th century, the October 1929 collapse of the stock market that plunged the country into the Great Depression.

Howard's career almost exactly coincided with that of another important pulp author, Dashiell Hammett, arguably the most important of the creators of the "hard-boiled" school of detective writing. George Knight, in the seminal essay "Robert E. Howard: Hard-Boiled Heroic Fantasist," persuasively argued that Howard belongs to this school, rather than to the school of fantasy writing exemplified by such writers as Cabell, Dunsany, and Tolkien (Knight 117-133). Like the hard-boiled school, Howard preferred direct, straightforward language over flowery or "elevated" prose; if occasionally his natural predilection to poetry found its way into his prose, the same might also be said for Hammett's successor, Raymond Chandler. Of Hammett, Chandler said "He wrote [...] for people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street" (Chandler 190). Certainly these are also the readers for whom Howard was writing. The violence in his stories is definitely not for the squeamish.

But the similarities between Howard and Hammett are deeper than just the language and the violent action. They arise from similar populist world-views.

Richard Slotkin has identified two competing "schools of American ideology" that found expression through popular media in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the "progressive" and the "populist." The "progressive" school, he said, "uses the Frontier Myth in ways that buttress the ideological assumptions and political aims of a corporate economy and a managerial politics" (Slotkin 22). The progressives saw America's westward expansion as the working out of a Social Darwinian evolution, "explaining the emergence of a new managerial ruling class and justifying its right to subordinate lesser classes to its purposes" (Slotkin 22). With the closing of the western frontier, they believed that America's progress could continue through

[7] While not cited directly in this paper, the author is indebted to Steve Trout's "King Conan and the Aquilonian Dream," *The Dark Man*, No. 1, 1990.

the expansion of Business and Empire. It was this ideology that lay behind the increasingly monopolistic practices of Big Business, and behind America's imperialistic ambitions as the 20th century began.

"Populists," on the other hand, measured progress "by the degree to which […] society facilitates a broad diffusion of property, of the opportunity to 'rise in the world,' and of political power. Where the progressive idealizes centralization and efficiency and sees these as the basis for America's assumption of a Great Power role in world affairs, the populist values decentralization, idealizes the small farmer-artisan-financier, and either devalues (or opposes) the assumption of a Great Power role or asserts that the nation derives both moral and political power from its populist character. [...] The classic populist vision defines the crisis of modernization as a loss of the democratic social organization, the equitable distribution of wealth and political power of the agrarian past." [Slotkin, 22-23] The populist views progress, then, as the maintaining and expanding of the conditions that existed on the western frontiers.

Formulated into a systematic doctrine by Theodore Roosevelt, the progressive ideology was clearly the dominant force in American political and cultural life during the last decades of the 19th and the first three decades of the 20th century. The country took on an expanded role in world affairs, asserted itself against foreign powers, and acquired colonial possessions. It fought a World War on idealistic grounds: not because the United States itself was threatened, but "to make the world safe for Democracy." And of course it saw the growth of Big Businesses: railroads, steel, oil, banking, utilities. By the 1920s, however, the darker side of the progressive ideology had become clearer. The move for centralization had resulted in a monopolistic capitalism that used its economic power to control government institutions, and could bring against its own workers the power of the law enforcement apparatus. The rich got richer and richer: in 1929 the top 2.3% of Americans had incomes more than 10 times that of the bottom 20%, and a staggering 60% of families lived below what we would now identify as the "poverty line" (Allen 127). In 1930, nearly half of the non-banking corporate wealth of the country was under the interlocking control of just 2000 executives and financiers (Phillips 16).

The masses who did not share in the wealth, who could barely afford the necessities of life, were the audience for cheap literature represented by the pulp magazine. Into this world came a new kind of populist hero, the hard-boiled detective. This type of character, first appearing in the stories of Carroll John Daly and Dashiell Hammett appearing in *Black Mask* in 1923, combined two stock characters from the dime novels, the detective, a progressive upholder of order and "civilization," and the outlaw, a populist resister of social "injustices

perpetrated by corrupt officials acting at the behest of powerful moneyed interests" (Slotkin 127-128). "In the hard-boiled detective, the characters and roles of dime-novel outlaw and detective [...] are fully combined, and their ideological opposition reconciled. The hard-boiled detective is both an agent of law and an outlaw who acts outside the structures of legal authority for the sake of a personal definition of justice" (Slotkin 219).

This brings us, at last, to Robert E. Howard. Howard was a thorough-going populist. In his ongoing debate with his friend and fellow Weird Tales author HP Lovecraft, he wrote:

> "What I want is impossible, as I've told you before; I want, in a word, the frontier - which [is] compassed in the phrase, new land, open land, free land - land rich and unbroken and virgin, swarming with game and laden with fresh forests and sweet cold streams, where a man could live by the sweat of his hands unharried by taxes, crowds, noise, unemployment, bank-failures, gang-extortions, laws, and all the other wearisome things of civilization" (Howard, July 1933, 5).

> "I'd rather have lived under the comparative freedom of the old frontier than under present conditions. I'd gladly trade all the "enrichment" of modern civilization for that existence. I realize the object of "good government" is not to fulfill what you call the catch slogan of liberty. No; its object is to emasculate all men, and make good little rabbits and guinea pigs out of them that will fit into the nooks designed for them, and stay there contentedly nibbling their fodder until they die of inanition. Liberty of action, is of course, impossible under these ideal conditions" (Howard, March 1933, 7).

Howard's letters, particularly those to Lovecraft, are full of his populist ideals. In fact, while that correspondence is best known among students of the two writers for its "barbarism vs. civilization" theme, it might better be categorized as a "populism vs. progressivism" debate. But our purpose in this paper is not to examine Howard's populism, but to show how it found expression through his fantasy stories.

In 1926, Howard began a story called "The Shadow Kingdom,"

featuring a character named Kull, a barbarian who has ascended to the kingship of the greatest nation in his world. He had first written a shorter tale, a vignette, really, called "Exile of Atlantis," not published during Howard's lifetime, in which Kull had violated tribal custom and been forced to flee from Atlantis. Thus, Howard had melded, not the outlaw and the detective, but the outlaw and the king. A constant theme of the Kull series is the confining nature of customs, taboos, and laws. Time and again Kull must act in accordance with his own ideas of justice or propriety in spite of the dictates of law or custom. To governance he brings the populist ideology of the outlaw. Nowhere is this more explicit than in the story "By This Axe I Rule!" A young nobleman and a slave girl are prevented by centuries-old Valusian law from marrying, and Kull feels helpless to aid them:

> Kingship was another form of slavery, it seemed to him [...]. How could he prevail against solicitous and respectful friends who bowed and flattered and were adamant against anything new; who barricaded themselves and their customs with tradition and antiquity and quietly defied him to change anything?" (Howard, "Axe," 99).

When the two young lovers come to his aid against a band of conspirators, saving his life, Kull decrees that they will be allowed to marry. His chief councilor screams, "But the law!"

> "I am the law!" roared Kull, swinging up his axe; it flashed downward and the stone tablet flew into a hundred pieces [...].
>
> "I am king, state, and law!"....
>
> "By this axe I rule! This is my sceptre! I have struggled and sweated to be the puppet king you wished me to be -- to rule your way. Now I use mine own way. [...] Laws that are just shall stand, laws that have outlived their times I shall shatter as I shattered that one. *I am king!*" (Howard, "Axe", 110).

In Kull we have a king who has, like the progressive hero, risen to his position by virtue of his innate ability. However, rather than buttressing the ideological assumptions of the ruling class and justifying its right to subordinate lesser classes, he instead overturns those assumptions, declares that henceforth "laws that are just"—laws

that serve the needs of the people will stand, but no longer will mere entrenched tradition or custom dictate his actions. He is, like the hard-boiled detective, "both an agent of law and an outlaw who acts outside the structures of legal authority for the sake of a personal definition of justice."

Howard was unable to sell "By This Axe I Rule!" A few years later, a new character suddenly came to him, and to introduce the character he decided to revise the unsold Kull tale. Conan the Cimmerian would first be introduced to the world as king of Aquilonia, "the proudest kingdom of the world." And in the fragment from the fictitious "Nemedian Chronicles" that introduced Conan and his "Age undreamed of" to the readers of Weird Tales, the Cimmerian was identified as "a thief, a reaver, a slayer [...]" (Howard, "Phoenix," 7). In subsequent stories Conan's outlaw identity is made even more explicit: he is a thief, a pirate, leader of outlaw gangs or rag-tag armies bent on looting. As an outlaw, he is not entirely the "social bandit" driven to crime by the injustice of those in power: sometimes it is simply a way to use his skills to gain his livelihood. His victims are usually from the power elite, wealthy merchants, priests, and nobles, and thus he is still "of the people." His ascent to the kingship, like Kull's, is itself an act of thievery: he is a usurper, taking the crown by murdering the "lawful" king. That he was supported in this by "the people," who hailed him as a "liberator" for freeing them from a "tyrant," does not change the fact that the act of usurpation is unlawful.

Conan is a king in only 3 of the 21 stories written by Howard, and in two of those he is in fact a deposed king—an outlaw. In these two stories we can see Howard's populist ideas quite clearly.

In "The Scarlet Citadel," Conan is defeated by a combination of treachery and sorcery, and is brought before his captors in chains.

> "Our desires are quickly spoken, king of Aquilonia," said Tsotha. "It is our wish to extend our empire."
>
> "And so you want to swine my kingdom," rasped Conan.
>
> "What are you but an adventurer, seizing a crown to which you had no more claim than any other wandering barbarian?" parried Amalrus. "We are prepared to offer you a suitable compensation-- "
>
> "Compensation!" It was a gust of deep laughter from Conan's mighty chest.

"The price of infamy and treachery! I am a barbarian, so I shall sell my kingdom and its people for life and your filthy gold? Ha! How did you come to your crown, you and that black-faced pig beside you? Your fathers did the fighting and the suffering, and handed their crowns to you on golden platters. What you inherited without lifting a finger—except to poison a few brothers—I fought for.

"You sit on satin and guzzle wine the people sweat for, and talk of divine rights of sovereignty—bah! I climbed out of the abyss of naked barbarism to the throne and in that climb I spilt my blood as freely as I spilt that of others. If either of us has the right to rule men, by Crom, it is I! How have you proved yourselves my superiors?

"I found Aquilonia in the grip of a pig like you—one who traced his genealogy for a thousand years. The land was torn with the wars of the barons, and the people cried out under oppression and taxation. Today no Aquilonian noble dares maltreat the humblest of my subjects, and the taxes of the people are lighter than anywhere else in the world....

"The people of both your kingdoms are crushed into the earth by tyrannous taxes and levies. And you would loot mine -- ha! Free my hands and I'll varnish this floor with your brains!" (Howard, "Citadel," 90-91).

Here are classic populist themes: contempt for the wealthy and powerful, particularly for those who gained their positions by birth rather than merit, opportunity for upward mobility even for those of lowly origin, freedom from oppression and taxation by the authorities. Here, too, is one of Howard's favorite themes from his letters to Lovecraft: the exploitation of his beloved Texas by outside interests bent on looting the state. A letter from Howard was not complete without some fulmination against "Eastern capital."

In *The Hour of the Dragon*, a band of conspirators have raised an eons-dead sorcerer who has enabled one of them to become the new king of Nemedia, neighboring kingdom to Conan's Aquilonia. Upon his ascension to the throne, the new king, Tarascus, declares the former

truce with Aquilonia void, and prepares to invade:

> "His reason was candid; his motives, loudly proclaimed, gilded his actions with something of the glamor of a crusade. He espoused the cause of Valerius, 'rightful heir to the throne'; he came, he proclaimed, not as an enemy of Aquilonia, but as a friend, to free the people from the tyranny of a usurper and a foreigner.
>
> "If there were cynical smiles in certain quarters, and whispers concerning the king's good friend Amalric, whose vast personal wealth seemed to be flowing into the rather depleted royal treasury, they were unheeded in the general wave of fervor and zeal of Tarascus' popularity" (Howard, *Hour*, 92).

Howard's distrust of moneyed interests was profound. "As for war," he wrote in 1934, "that will come when international capital is ready. I do not believe, and have never believed, that Mussolini, Hitler and the other European strong-arm, he-man dictators are anything but figure-heads and tools for international capitalism. The same crowd that recently approached Smedley Butler with a proposition to overthrow the government and set up a Fascist dictatorship; the same gang that would have made Hoover dictator if they had dared. The same gang that is now opposing everything Roosevelt tries to accomplish" (Howard, December 1934, 10).

Compare this with Conan's musing about why he was brought to the Nemedian capital in chains, secretly, rather than being killed outright: "It's well known that the baron of Tor is behind this move to seat Valerius on my throne. And if I know Amalric, he doesn't intend that Valerius shall be anything more than a figurehead, as Tarascus is now" (Howard, *Hour*, 108).

A telling moment occurs early in the story, when Conan, unable to lead his troops into battle due to a sorcery-induced paralysis, confronts the victors. His squire is dismayed that the king wants to fight to the end:

> "But Your Majesty!" cried the squire in great perturbation. "The battle is lost! It were the part of majesty to yield with the dignity becoming one of royal blood!"

> "I have no royal blood," ground Conan. "I am a barbarian and the son of a blacksmith" (Howard, *Hour*, 102).

Conan may have fought his way to the top of the society's hierarchy, but unlike the progressive hero, he does not seek to buttress their ideological assumptions. Yielding with dignity may become one of royal blood, but it does *not* become the barbarian.

On the eve of the climactic battle, a "gaunt figure in tattered rags" is brought before Valerius, and offers to lead him through a secret pass in the hills to attack Conan's forces from the rear. Amalric and Valerius agree to this plan, and the man leads Valerius into a trap, surrounded by thousands of men who had been driven into the hills during Valerius' reign of terror.

> "A trick of Conan's!" raged Valerius.
>
> "Conan knows nothing of it," laughed Tiberius. "It was the plot of broken men, of men you ruined and turned to beasts....We are the rabble who followed him, the wolves who skulked in these hills, the homeless men, the hopeless men" (Howard, *Hour*, 244).

Conan is beloved by "the people" because under his rule all could prosper. It is tempting to see in this rabble the Bonus Marchers of 1932, routed from their encampments by the army at the direction (as they thought) of President Hoover, a "figurehead" for the Big Business interests. Or perhaps these are the millions of unemployed and homeless during the first years of the Depression.

The New Deal administration, says Slotkin, explicitly rejected the progressive ideology which looked to new frontiers of imperial conquest or unlimited industrial growth to replace the lost Frontier. As FDR himself declared in a 1932 address:

> "...Our task is not the discovery or exploitation of natural resources.... It is the less dramatic business of administering resources and plants already in hand...of distributing wealth and products equitably" (Slotkin 256-257).

When Conan tells a loyal subject who urges him to forget about retaking his throne, and embark on other conquests, "Let others dream imperial dreams. I but wish to hold what is mine," or in another story,

which is actually set on the frontier, says "This colonization business is mad, anyway. There's plenty of good land east of the Bossonian marches. If the Aquilonians would cut up some of the big estates of their barons, and plant wheat where now only deer are hunted, they wouldn't have to cross the border and take the land of the Picts away from them" (Howard, "Beyond," 20), we can see that he was indeed a New Deal heroic fantasist.

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Crash Go the Civilizations:

Some Notes on Robert E. Howard's Use of History and Anthropology

by Mark Hall

Introduction

"The Hyborian Age" is Robert E. Howard's essay outlining the fictional history, anthropology and geography of his Hyborian world. This is the world inhabited by Conan, Howard's most popular and well-known character. As to why Howard wrote this essay, he noted in the introduction of "The Hyborian Age":

> When I began writing the Conan stories a few years ago, I prepared this "history" of his age and the peoples of that age, in order to lend him and his sagas a greater aspect of realness. And I found that by adhering to the "facts" and spirit of that history, in writing the stories, it was easier to visualize (and therefore to present) him as a real flesh-and-blood character rather than a ready-made product. In writing about him and his adventures in the various kingdoms of his Age, I have never violated the "facts" or spirit of the "history" here set down, but have followed the lines of that history as closely as the writer of actual historical-fiction follows the lines of actual history. (381)

While Howard's quest for historical realism may seem odd to some, it must be kept in mind that he had a strong personal interest in anthropology and history. His personal library contained several books in these subject areas, by such authors as Sydney Herbert, Stanley Lane-Poole, Patrick Weston Joyce, and H. G. Wells.[8] This interest is expressed at length in comments from many of his letters to Tevis Clyde Smith and Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Furthermore, for those unfamiliar with Howard and his works, it should be noted that he wrote several historical adventure stories before starting on the Conan saga. While historians may flinch when the adjective "historical" is used to describe some of Howard's adventure stories,[9] the Crusader stories are

[8] An early version of the list of books in Robert E. Howard's library can be found in Eng (1982). A lengthier, online version has been compiled by Rusty Burke.

[9] "Historical" has been used to describe Howard's Crusader stories by both Blosser (10) and Louinet (vii-xii).

highly considered by critics (Dickson ix-xi, Louinet "Hyborian Genesis" 434, Louinet "Introduction" vii) and considered to form part of his best work.[10]

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to examine "The Hyborian Age" as a historical narrative. While Frye (52-66) and White ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," 15-33) have argued that non-fiction historical narratives can be analyzed like fictional ones, I would suggest that pseudo-histories and imaginary world creation stories, like Howard's "Hyborian Age," or some of Tolkien's *Lost Tales*, can be beneficially examined as historical narratives. The advantage of this approach is that it allows us to see how well each imaginary world was created, and gain insights into possible intellectual models the author used for the imaginary world.

A second goal is to examine some of the historical and anthropological ideas and themes present in "The Hyborian Age." While this is a work of fiction, it was nonetheless shaped by Howard's reading, his personal ideas and beliefs, and the social milieu of the 1920s and early 1930s. This examination is to see whether Howard

[10] While Howard did do some research into the historical periods he was writing about, he often relied on secondary works of varying quality. As demonstrated by Irwin, particularly for the works on the Third Crusade and Saladin, the secondary works often depend on clichés and stereotypes that are inaccurate. Add to this, the anachronisms appearing in some of the stories—such as firearms in "Lord of Samarcand," and Irish crusaders in the Cormac FitzGeoffrey tales—and one can understand why historians would object to using the adjective "historical."

While not unanimous in their attitudes, historians over the decades have written on what constitutes good historical fiction. Contemporary to Howard, the historians Butterfield and Sheppard both stressed that good historical fiction must maintain the historicity of events and the unique mindset of the past age must be faithfully conveyed. A little more than a generation later, Nye stressed "[...] the artist tries to find in his treatment of the past, as Proust did, is the relation of the individual to his present experience, in the context of his relation to the past experience of others" (147). More recently, Munz has downplayed anachronisms and stressed the importance of using generalizations from the period being covered in the novel (865-866). Irwin, in the same volume, though takes a more traditional stance by arguing against anachronisms, and stressing fidelity to the mindset of the time in question. He also is against artistic license in both secondary works and historical fiction—for example he is critical of both non-fiction and fiction writers who present a physical description of Saladin since there is no contemporary account describing Saladin's appearance.

incorporated mainstream ideas, or took a subversive approach and utilized more unorthodox ideas.[11]

As we look at the anthropological and historical ideas present in "The Hyborian Age" though, we need to be careful to avoid presentism. The 1920s and 1930s were a time when anthropology, archaeology and history were still developing theories and methodologies that we take for granted today. Furthermore, the mindset of the American public and scholars was different than ours today—the Civil Rights movement had yet to occur; women had only recently been allowed to vote; and not everyone lived with electricity or the telephone.[12]

"The Hyborian Age" as Historical Narrative

"The Hyborian Age" is a fictional narrative describing the creation, rise and fall of the Hyborian continent and its cultures. The narrative opens in the Pre-Cataclysmic Age, in a world inhabited by Atlanteans, Lemurians, Picts and others.[13] The Hyborian world rises from the continents and cultures left after a cataclysm. While Howard does not go into detail as to its nature or cause, one can surmise he envisioned a single, massive event since he capitalized the catastrophe throughout "The Hyborian Age."

The bulk of the narrative focuses on the achievements, battles, evolution, and migrations of the various "races" inhabiting the Hyborian world. Not only is the rise of Hyborian civilizations chronicled, so is their decline and destruction. The scope and scale of this pseudo-history spans thousands of years, and at times is reminiscent of Lovecraft's cosmicism in such stories as "At the Mountains of Madness" and "The Shadow out of Time." "The Hyborian Age" does miss the cosmic sweep of Lovecraft's works since it stays focused on humanity's struggles with itself and against nature.[14] The focus on humanity should not be considered as a shortcoming, but should be seen as adding a realistic touch.

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[11] Stowe (646-663) has suggested that popular fiction is one arena where authors, consciously or unconsciously, can expose readers to critiques of cultural norms and values.

[12] While not relevant to Howard *per se*, Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* is an engrossing read looking at individuals, ideas, politics, technology and social change in the United States from the 1860s to 1920. A wonderful, introductory overview of life in the 1920s in the United States is Downe and Huber's *The 1920s*.

[13] By including this section on Atlantis, Howard tied together the Kull and Conan stories.

[14] Herron (161-3) notes that Howard was far too interested in humanity and individuals to make a concerted effort at emulating the cosmicism of Lovecraft and Smith.

Compared to the Conan stories, some readers and critics may feel that "The Hyborian Age" lacks adventure and dynamism. It must be kept in mind, though, that Howard was not writing a fictional story, but was attempting to write a history as a historian would. As such, "The Hyborian Age" needs to be critically examined less as a fictional story, and more as a historical narrative.

Frye (52-66) provides one way of looking at historical narratives.[15] As he notes, once historians have finished their research, their writing can be guided by a *mythos* or plot. Frye sees four myths that are incorporated by historians into their narratives. Romantic historical myths are those based on a quest or pilgrimage to a classless society; comic historical myths are based on the idea of progress via evolution or revolution; tragic historical myths look at the decline and fall of civilizations and cultures; and ironic historical myths are based on re-occurring or casual catastrophe.[16] Historical works exemplifying these myths are considered to be meta-histories (Frye 54). Historical writing, as seen by Frye (54), is an inductive process, while the writing of meta-history and poetics is deductive.

While meta-histories are usually large tomes, the brief "The Hyborian Age" can be classed as a meta-history also. "The Hyborian Age" exemplifies the tragic historical myth due to its focus on the rise and fall of the Hyborian kingdoms.[17] Despite the two cataclysms, "The Hyborian Age" does not exemplify the ironic historical myth since these two cataclysms are used only as framing devices to begin and end the story. Furthermore, human agency is the primary cause for the destruction of most of the Hyborian kingdoms.

This stress on human agency adds further realism to Howard's narrative. Despite being set in an imaginary world, the magic and

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[15] This approach has also been espoused by the historian Hayden White in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact."

[16] Frye provides little explanation of his schema in *Fables of Identity* . Other than stating that Gibbon and Spengler are historians employing the tragic historical myth (54), Frye gives no examples. Hayden White, while also employing this schema, also provides minimal examples. For myself, I would see works detailing the search for such legendary lands as El Dorado or Shangri-La as exemplifying the romantic myth; E. H. Carr's or George Kennan's work on the Russian Revolution would exemplify the comic historical myth; and works looking at economic "boom and bust" cycles as exemplifying the ironic historical myth.

[17] The tragic historical myth is one that goes back to the Greek authors and is a very pervasive one in the writing of history (Herman 15-20). Polybius noted the decay of political systems, while Plato theorized a developmental cycle for the rise and fall of the city-states. For the modern reader though, Spengler's and Toynbee's works come to mind.

sorcery that is present in the Conan and Kull stories is noticeably absent here. Humans are the ones who create the action and then respond to it.

When looking at human agency in meta-histories, one must distinguish between individual and group actions. Romanticist historical thought sees the individual as being the sole casual agent in the historical process (White, *Metahistory* 80). Works by Parkman, Prescott and Wells all stressed individuals who created the conditions of change. In contrast to this, the "New History" which emerged at the turn of the century, tried to make the discipline more scientific by focusing on evolutionary development, and social movements, with the downplaying of the Romantic view of individual actions (Kelley 285-303, 310-317).

Howard takes a fairly scientific, impersonal view in his account of the Hyborian Age. His essay focuses on the tribes and cultural groups in the Hyborian continent, and for the most part neglects individuals. Change is primarily provoked through migrations and warfare between the various population groups.[18] While Howard is silent in most cases on why people migrated or went to war with one another, this silence is typical of the archaeological and culture historical works, and meta-histories of its day.

One example, particularly relevant to Howard, is Wells' *Outline of History* (167-182). This secondary history was part of Howard's personal library (see Burke). Wells provides a short account of the Indo-European migrations but neglects to explain why the Indo-Europeans began migrating in the first instance.[19] Other accounts of migration and diffusion in Wells (136-149) are used to account for the distribution of "races" throughout the world.

Another example, though we have no evidence that Howard ever read it, is V. Gordon Childe's *The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins.* This academic monograph by a leading prehistorian of the

[18] Trigger (96-108) notes that the diffusionist and migrationist schools of thought developed in the 1880s as a reaction to the evolutionary approaches. Essentially these two intellectual schools espoused that cultures were static and conservative, with change occurring only when encountering new cultural groups. The leading proponents of these schools were Franz Boas at Columbia, Fritz Graebner at the Vienna School, W. H. R. Rivers and Grafton Elliot Smith in Britain. With time, each intellectual tradition borrowed freely from the other and ultimately incorporated elements of evolutionary thinking. The later works of the archaeologist V. Gordon Childe exemplify this fusion of ideas (Trigger 110-113).

[19] This is also a case where Wells does not attribute the migration being due to an individual's actions. Individuals take a more prominent role in Wells' history when he is dealing with states or proto-states.

1920s and 1930s, details the Indo-European migrations throughout Europe and Western Asia. Throughout this volume, Childe gives no substantive reason on why the migrations occurred in the first place.

Despite the heavy emphasis on tribes and cultural groups, "The Hyborian Age" is not totally devoid of individuals. Howard's barbarian heroes Conan and Kull do not appear; instead it is the Pictish chieftain Gorm and the Nemedian priest Arus. Arus' religious mission, instead of converting the Picts, only inspires their greed. The result is that the Picts, led by their ambitious chief Gorm, ride westwards against the Hyborian nations. In this particular episode, Howard does provide us with causation as to the origins of a war and migration.[20]

This idea of barbarians destroying a decadent civilization is an old and popular idea in anthropology and historiography (Trigger 104). The source of it is rooted in the Germanic and Hunnic invasions of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, and has been used by such historians as Gibbon, Spengler, Toynbee and Wells. Unlike historians though, Howard championed the barbarians.[21] While they too have their cultural zenith and collapse, Howard did not see them as falling into decadence or loosing their "virility" (Howard 395-397).

Some Notes on Race and Ethnicity in "The Hyborian Age"

Before making a few brief notes on Howard's use of race and ethnic identity in "The Hyborian Age,"[22] a few words need to be said on race and ethnicity in the USA during the early 20th century. The word "race" was used in similar fashion then, as "ethnic group" is colloquially used today.[23] For example, Coon in *The Races of Europe*

[20] This is also done for the later Æsir migrations southwards (Howard 395).

[21] In a letter to Lovecraft, received on November 2nd, 1932, Howard explains he champions the barbarians due to their freedom and physical ability (Howard *Selected Letters: 1931-1936* 35). He also makes it clear that he in no way sees their life as an idyllic one. Herron (151), in reference to all of Howard's barbarian heroes, notes that none of them exemplify Rousseau's Noble Savage.

[22] Howard's use of race and ethnicity in his stories is a topic that deserves a detailed examination. Ditommaso in "Robert E. Howard's Hyborian Tales and the Question of Race in Fantastic Literature" has tried to address whether Howard was a racist or not by looking at the Conan stories. In addition to only being limited to the Conan series, the article suffers from a lack of defining what constitutes racist versus racialist ideas, does not incorporate Howard's letters, and does not discuss the socio-political climate of Texas in the late 1920s and 1930s.

[23] It also bears noting, that most anthropologists today would define an ethnic group as a sub-group in a culture that possesses a common identity and name, a common origin (fictive or actual), and is recognized as such by both insiders and outsiders. Most anthropologists see them as fluid entities and individuals

(241-665) made a case for eighteen different "races" in early 20th century Europe.[24]

Also prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s, though in decline, was an essentialist view of race, religion and nation which often resulted in equating the three together (Gerstle 14-139; Guterl 307-352; Slotkin 472-476; Smedley 264-265). For example, Bolshevism was equated with Judaism and the Slavic ethnic groups (Gerstle 101).

Eugenics was also popular in both the United States and Britain at this time (Black 16-85; Cuddy and Roche 9-59; Gerstle 105-7; Jones 717-728; Smedley 285-287). Eugenicists essentially saw human personality traits being inherited; thus, given the racial essentialism that existed at the time, deleterious traits were seen as arising from breeding with other racial groups. Degeneracy and criminality were two commonly cited deleterious traits arising from miscegenation. While we may view these ideas as laughable today, eugenics was a major intellectual trend in the United States and Britain, with hundreds of universities offering courses in it, and tens of thousands of students enrolled in course work (Black 75).

The results of this racialist and racist thinking were a variety of federal and state laws limiting immigration from Europe, Africa, and Asia, codifying segregation between whites and African-Americans, and barring miscegenation.[25] Racialist thinking permeated the works of many authors, including Mary Austin (Richards 148-163), Erskine Caldwell (Holmes 240-258), and Jack London (Hopkins 89-101).

The racial schema presented in "The Hyborian Age" echoes some of the ideas and attitudes prevalent in the United States at that time. Racial groups are distinguished by a variety of physical traits, and occasionally cultural features. For example:

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can belong to multiple ethnic groups. In colloquial American usage, ethnic groups are denoted usually on the basis of physical features.

[24] While some may consider Coon extreme, A. C. Haddon, who noted race was a social and mental construct (1), proposed a classification system with eleven racial groups living in Europe (25-31).

[25] "Racialist" and "racialism" can have a variety of meanings depending on the author and the author's intellectual tradition (see for example Murji and Solomos *Racialization*). The definition used here is drawn from the work of Appiah and Fredrickson (153-156). They argue that racialism is when an individual (or society) believes there are heritable characteristics that exist in human populations that allow one to divide the populations into sub-groups based on the absence or presence of the characteristics. Racialist thought does not rate these characteristics good or bad, nor does it create a social hierarchy. Racism in their view is when racialist thought is then coupled with laws and social power that elevates one group above the other.

> [...] the Cimmerians are tall and powerful, with dark hair and blue or grey eyes. The people of Nordheim are of similar build, but with white skins, blue eyes and golden or red hair. The Picts are of the same type as they always were—short, very dark, with black eyes and hair (Howard 387).

And later in the text:

> The Bossonians are of medium height and complection [*sic*], their eyes brown or grey, and they are mesocephalic. They live mainly by agriculture, in large walled villages, and are part of the Aquilonian kingdom (Howard 387).

These are just two examples of Howard employing the racialist thinking of his time in "The Hyborian Age."

Despite the popularity of eugenics and anti-miscegenation laws during the 1930s, many of the races inhabiting the Hyborian world are of "mixed blood." The Bossonians (Howard 387), Hyperboreans (Howard 386), and Zhemri (Howard 384) are but a few examples. And while some of the mixed race groups like the Bossonians fell short in their accomplishments, others, like the Aquilonians, are not weakened by mixing (Howard 386). Miscegenation is not seen as being responsible for the decline of the Hyborian kingdoms since Howard writes:

> Five hundred years later the Hyborian civilization was swept away. Its fall was unique in that it was not brought about by internal decay, but by the growing power of the barbarian nations, and the Hykranians. The Hyborian people were overthrown while their vigorous culture was in its prime (Howard 387).

Conclusions

While it is a fictional account, "The Hyborian Age" is written like a meta-history employing the tragic historical myth. Even though it is a fantasy world, it is practically devoid of the supernatural or fantastic. The reader does not encounter any sorcerers, wizards or fantastic beasts in this account, despite their appearance in the Conan and Kull stories. This absence of the fantastic lends the "The Hyborian Age" a sense of realism.

Human agency is the primary source of causation for events in "The Hyborian Age." For the bulk of the narrative, Howard focused on group action. He does present two individuals though, Gorm and Arus, when he details the how and why of the Pictish campaigns which led to the downfall of the Hyborian kingdoms. While Howard expressed his belief in "great men" as a driving force in history in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith in 1934 (Howard, *Selected Letters: 1931-1936*: 61), this belief is only weakly evidenced in "The Hyborian Age."

While Howard's handling of race and ethnicity reflects both the public and scientific views prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s, "The Hyborian Age" possibly contains a critique of eugenics and anti-miscegenation laws. As noted above, many of the Hyborian kingdoms are of mixed ancestry and yet, they are not lacking in vitality or vigor, nor are they degenerate. Whether this was conscious or unconscious on the part of Howard requires further examination.

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"Red Shadows" Through the Lens of Northrop Frye's Archetypal Criticism

by Patrick R. Burger

Introduction

With the publication of *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957, Northrop Frye established himself as one of the most significant modern literary critics. His ground-breaking psycho-analytical approach was based on psychologist Carl G. Jung's theories of archetypes. Jung rejected his teacher Sigmund Freud's overwhelmingly sexual theory of the human psyche and developed a model in which the psyche was divided into the personal conscious, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. Jung argued that not all human actions were based on sex but that many were influenced by racial memories of humanity's past that lay deep in our collective unconsious. "These memories exist in the form of *archetypes*: patterns or images of repeated human experiences such as birth, death, rebirth, the four seasons, and motherhood, to name a few, that express themselves in our stories, dreams, religions, and fantasies" (Bressler 154). Basing himself on this idea, in *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye attempts to create broad archetypal categories of literature, and then to sketch out the parameters of each of these categories. While Frye names these categories "mythos," Fredric Jameson, in his equally ground-breaking 1983 work *The Political Unconscious*, argues that what Frye had achieved in his categories of mythos was essentially a new and more comprehensive theory of literary genres. Frye, in establishing this new genre framework for all literary texts along the lines of the archetypal racial memories in our collective unconscious, argues that literature fulfills a psychological need in humanity, and that literature (unconsciously or consciously) follows these deeply ingrained mythic structures of narrative and symbolic patterns. In fact, Robert E. Howard's adventure tale "Red Shadows"—the first appearance of his Puritan swashbuckler Solomon Kane, most of which plays out, significantly for author and character alike, in Africa—contains a sub-plot that demonstrates Howard's agreement with the concept of racial memories and archetypes: the Englishman Kane displays an instinctive understanding of the language of the drums that he hears, and he responds explicitly to the drums' awakening of deeply-rooted racial memories.

This essay will take its cues from direct quotations of Frye—who most likely never read any Robert E. Howard—and apply them directly to Howard's "Red Shadows".

Genre, Phase, Stage:
The Terminology of Frye's Archetypal Criticism

While, as noted, Frye uses the term "mythos" for the categories he created, Jameson—acknowledging the seminal nature of Frye's work by incorporating it into his own—re-labeling Frye's "mythos" as genres (Jameson 106), thus updating the outworn Aristotelian genre categories. In doing this, Jameson follows a cue given by Frye himself: "Are there narrative categories of literature broader than, or logically prior to, the ordinary [i.e. Aristotelian] literary genres? There are four such categories: the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric" (Frye 162). These categories--henceforth "genres"—Frye bases on the archetypal experience of the seasons: spring symbolizes a comic narrative structure, autumn symbolizes a tragic structure, winter a satiric/ironic one—and summer, because of its high-energy nature, symbolizes a romantic narrative structure.[26]

Each of these four genres, Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, and Satire, because they must—in Frye's theory—account for all human literary production, of necessity contain within themselves a great number of variations on their basic structure. Frye names these variations "Phases," and for each genre supposes 6 phases: e.g. a Phase 1 tragedy is a different expression of the basic tragic narrative structure from a phase 6 tragedy, etc. Of course, 6 phases of 4 genres would only allow for 24 basic narrative possibilities, which again does not reflect the near infinite variation of story-telling; therefore Frye makes clear that his phases are not pigeonholes with solid borders, but parts of a spectrum that not only blend into neighbouring genres (e.g. spring/comedy blends into summer/romance as either a romantic comedy, a phase of comedy tending towards the romance, or a comic romance, a phase of romance tending towards the comic), but blend into each other within a particular genre. For example, although phase 3 of each genre in Frye's schema is considered the pure form of the genre in question, a phase 3 romance, for example, could, in fact, contain aspects of any of the other five phases of the romance genre—which is the case with Howard's "Red Shadows". This blending of the phases within a genre brings us beyond a limited schema of 24 narrative possibilites and allows for the near infinite variabilities of story-telling that we know.

Regardless of which phase or phases of a particular genre we are dealing with, each genre has a basic narrative structure common to all

[26] The origin of the term "romance" has to do with Rome, is linked to the French and German word for novel, 'roman', and gets its identification with adventure from medieval romances like Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parsifal* and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, among others.

its phases. This structure can be called a formula (Frye 163), and the structure is made up of stages. Comedy, for example (its formula, if you will), has three stages: "[…] [1] a young man wants a young woman, [2] […] his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and [3] […] near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will" (Frye 163). Of course this basic formula of three stages leaves much room for variation.

In what follows, Howard's "Red Shadows" will be analyzed according to Frye's theory. The first thing that will be established is its genre; then the story will be analyzed according both to the stages of that genre and where in the spectrum of that genre the story oscillates—that is, what phase or phases it expresses.

Romance: Definition and Example

"Red Shadows"—and most of Howard's work—is a romance, for, as Frye notes, "The essential element of plot in romance is adventure […]" (Frye 186); and romance's structure is "[…] a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climactic adventure, usually announced from the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story. We may call this major adventure, the element that gives literary form to the romance, the quest" (Frye 186-187). In "Red Shadows" Solomon Kane's quest appears on the first page of the story: on a midnight road in France he comes upon a dying girl raped by bandit leader Le Loup, and swears to take vengeance. To avenge this raped and murdered girl is Kane's major adventure, and he undertakes a sequence of minor adventures—nailing Jean, "the most desperate bandit unhung" (Howard 22), to a tree, striking down the Spaniard Juan, dueling La Costa, executing the hermit's hut gambit, assaulting Le Loup's lair, pursuing Le Loup through Italy and Spain, sailing to Africa, meeting N'Longa, being captured by Gulka, getting tied to a stake and witnessing a zombie's attack—until he is able to complete the major adventure during his climactic duel with Le Loup in the jungle.

While "Red Shadows" is essentially a phase 3 romance, a pure Quest romance, the beginning of the story shows aspects of phase 1 (The Birth of the Hero) and phase 2 (Innocent Youth), and the conclusion of the story shows aspects of phase 4 (The Assault of Experience), phase 5 (The View of Experience from Above) and phase 6 (The Hermit).

The Four Main Stages of Romance

Frye identifies four main stages in all works in the romance genre, and uses terminology originally supplied by Aristotle: the *agon* (conflict), the *pathos* (death struggle), the *sparagmos* (tearing to pieces)

and the *anagnorisis* (discovery, or, recognition of the hero). The agon stage is that "[…] of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures" (Frye 187). The pathos stage is "[…] the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die" (Frye 187). The sparagmos stage is "[…] the disappearance of the hero, a theme which often takes the form of sparagmos or tearing to pieces" (Frye 192). And the concluding stage, the anagnorisis, is "[…] the exaltation of the hero" (Frye 187). The agon and pathos stages of "Red Shadows" have briefly been sketched out above, while both the sparagmos and the anagnorisis will be discussed in depth below.

The Characters of Romance

Frye writes, "The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. The conflict, however, takes place in, or at any rate primarily concerns, *our* world, which is in the middle, and which is characterized by the cyclical movement of nature" (Frye 187). As readers of "Red Shadows," our values are those of Kane, who heroically chooses to avenge a raped girl (and her whole village and the friar hung by Le Loup's men), and we do not sympathize with Le Loup, despite the temptation of succumbing to his obvious charisma, and Howard's skill at evoking this character.

Howard also makes quite certain that associations with the divine and the satanic are front and centre throughout the tale, highlighting this through the initial confusion as to who really embodies satanic forces. Kane is identified as Satan twice by Le Loup's men (Howard 23), and as in some way satanic and Mephistophelean by the narrator/Howard himself (Howard 25). Epithets applied to Kane include 'demon' and 'fiend' (Howard 22), and the first words he speaks are, "The fires of Hades!" (Howard 20). Le Loup himself also consistently uses satanic curses: "Hell's devils!", "Satan's curses," and "Saints and devils!" (Howard 23). However, the divine/demonic association issue seems to be resolved when Kane confronts Le Loup and asks, "[…] are you prepared to meet your master, the Devil?" to which Le Loup replies, "I must say that I can at present render a most satisfactory account to his Horned Excellency" (Howard 26). Kane is also mocked by Le Loup as 'Galahad' (Howard 28), and Kane later thinks of himself as an instrument of God's vengeance (Howard 34). While it would seem that that settles the issue, Howard does offer another moment of doubt—when Kane finally

slays Le Loup, Le Loup's death is compared to the crucifixion (Howard 47).

Along with an association with demonic forces, Frye gives a list of attributes of the romance antagonist, among them confusion and sterility. These fit Le Loup, particularly confusion, for Howard hints several times that Le Loup is mad, particularly in this exchange between Le Loup and Kane:

> *Kane*: Why have you fled from me across the world? You do not really fear me.
>
> *Le Loup*: No, you are right. Really I do not know; perhaps flight is a habit which is difficult to break. […]—a whim of mine, a mere whim. Then—mon Dieu!—mayhap I have enjoyed a new sensation […]" (Howard 36).

Sterility also fits Le Loup, for his sexuality results in death.

Besides the association with the divine, the other attributes Frye lists for the protagonist of romance—"spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth" (Frye 188)—do not, at first glance, seem to fit Kane particularly well. Kane's dark appearance and the fact that most of the story takes place at night don't lend themselves to spring or dawn. Kane's mission to right a wrong does, however, fit with a sense of order, and he is certainly vigourous in pursuing his quest. Fertility is a paradoxical fit (more on this later), and Kane does not seem to be particularly young. Howard, as we shall see, has reasons to blur the lines but, on the whole, the protagonist and antagonist of "Red Shadows" follow the romance paradigm.

Frye notes: "The characterization of romance follows its general dialectic structure [...]. Hence every typical character in romance tends to have his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game" (Frye 195). We see this already in Kane (Galahad/the white knight) opposing Le Loup (the black knight), and it seems evident in N'Longa opposing Songa, and the gorilla opposing Gulka.

Frye, however, posits a deeper level of complexity to these basic character oppositions, and begins by noting that, "Romance has a counterpart to the benevolent retreating eiron of comedy in its figure of the 'old wise man', as Jung calls him, like Prospero, Merlin, or the palmer of Spenser's second quest, often a magician who affects the action he watches over" (Frye 195). We can choose N'Longa for this role, or, rather, he explicitly chooses himself, both by his agèd appearance—"He was lean, withered and wrinkled. The only thing that seemed alive about him were his eyes […]" (Howard 32)—and his own words: "Me, N'Longa, ju-ju man, me, great fetish. […] Me pow'rful ju-

ju man […]" (Howard 32). This identification of N'Longa with a Prospero-like wise old magician, will offer a surprising insight into Howard when we consider the counterpart of this figure.

But first Frye notes that this 'old wise man', "[…] has a feminine counterpart in the sibylline wise mother-figure, often a potential bride like Solveig in *Peer Gynt*, who sits quietly at home waiting for the hero to finish his wanderings and come back to her. This latter figure is often the lady for whose sake or at whose bidding the quest is performed […]" (Frye 195). The lady for whose sake Kane's quest is performed is the raped and dying girl—the 'white rose' Kane comes across at the beginning of the story. One could argue that she has sibylline qualities in that she is an indicator of Kane's future, for it is she who propels Kane to pursue Le Loup all the way to Africa. That she also represents a bride-figure will be argued below, and the fact that this potential bride waiting at 'home'—as Frye puts it—is dead before Kane even leaves on the quest is further proof that Howard belongs firmly in the Weird Fiction tradition, as Howard scholar Rick McCollum argued so well in the pages of *Oh! Acheron*, and that he should also be reckoned as a major author in the Gothic canon, as Charles Gramlich argues in "REH in the Gothic Tradition."

The psychological and literary complexity of Howard's work becomes apparent when, given that N'Longa and 'the white rose' "[…] are the king and queen of the white pieces […]" (Frye 195), when we consider the opposing pieces in the tale: "The evil magician and the witch […] are the black king and queen" (Frye 196). Kane comes face to face with the black king in N'Longa's village: "There in front of him loomed a shape hideous and obscene—a black, formless thing, a grotesque parody of a human. Still, brooding, blood-stained, like the formless soul of Africa, the horror, the Black God" (Howard 33). That the Black God acts very much in the nature of a game-deciding chess piece is made apparent when he acts through, and controls, Le Loup, Songa and Gulka. Howard makes this connection clear on several occasions, one being when Gulka comes across the helpless Kane: "The Black God had been kind to his neophyte; had led him upon his victim helpless and unarmed" (Howard 48). Interestingly, and here is where Howard's *Weltanschauung* shows through, N'Longa's triumph over Le Loup, Songa and Gulka (and it is N'Longa's triumph as Kane does not remain to share the spoils) is paradoxically also in the Black God's interest for he will then simply act through N'Longa instead:

> "Kane glanced at the Black God looming back in the shadows, at N'Longa, who now flung out his arms toward the idol as if in invocation.

> "I am everlasting (Kane thought the Black God said); I drink, no matter who rules; chiefs, slayers, wizards, they pass like the ghosts of dead men through the gray jungle; I stand, I rule; I am the soul of the jungle (said the Black God)" (Howard 42-43).

The white king as a pawn of the black king strongly suggests an ultimately pessimistic view of humanity on Howard's part.

As to the 'witch', Frye stipulates that, "The latter is appropriately called by Jung the 'terrible mother', and he associates her with the fear of incest […]" (Frye 196). Besides the dead 'white rose' and the dead female gorilla, we seem to have no other female characters in "Red Shadows" to assign this role to, but it is Kane himself who gives us a clue as to the presence of the black queen through his cryptic, drum-related comment: "Lies […] jungle lies like jungle women that lure a man to his doom" (Howard 33). Given that the text then speaks no more about any specific "jungle woman," a.k.a. black queen, this very absence inexorably leads us to search for her outside the text, in the metatext of Howard's life. While one might want to consider Howard's interest in evolution, and the idea of Africa as the mother of humanity in this context, a source that also might shed some light on the extra-textual forbidden black queen who so cryptically intrudes into "Red Shadows" is Howard's startling, sexually-powerful and extremely violent "Etched in Ebony." Originally it appeared in *The Junto* and was reprinted in Glenn Lord's *The Trumpet* dated May 1968 and again in a special sample mailing of REHupa #156. This story begins with a white man beating a black woman but the violence is sexually charged. When sex is combined with violence there is often a deep, psychological aspect involved, especially in the racially-charged atmosphere of the South in the 1920s and '30s, where inter-racial relationships were a taboo as absolute as incest (i.e. the American version of the Nazi concept of "Rassenschande," race-shaming). The story begins thusly: "Tell me man," the black woman says,"—don't you like me bettuh'n any white gal you evah knew!" This enrages the white male (or excites him) and he continues beating the woman but thinks, "Each blow was a mad caress. She knew – she laughed." The brief piece concludes with the words, "White women are marble and ice; black women are supple steel and blasting fire" (Burger 3).

Frye adds to our veritable banquet for thought with a character type outside of the usual dialectical structure of romance: "The characters who elude the moral antithesis of heroism and villainy

generally are, or suggest, spirits of nature. They represent partly the moral neutrality of the intermediate world of nature and partly a world of mystery which is glimpsed but never seen, and which retreats when approached" (Frye 196). The intermediate world of nature in "Red Shadows" is the objectively and rationally neutral world of jungle plants, jungle insects and jungle animals of Africa; the world of mystery, on the other hand, is the mysterious, somehow sentient and supernatural soul of Africa expressed by the drums; the non-dialectical character who inhabits this binary world. Other characters in literature like him, are described by Frye as follows: "Such characters are, more or less, children of nature, who can be brought to serve the hero, like Crusoe's Friday, but retain the inscrutability of their origin. As servants or friends of the hero, they impart the mysterious rapport with nature that so often marks the central figure of romance" (Frye 196-197). This character in "Red Shadows" is the gorilla, and he is, in fact, a spirit/child of nature and can be conceived of as being morally neutral.[27] He does, however, come to serve Kane in that he rescues him from certain death at Gulka's hands—but he does *not* intervene out of a moral interest in their contest; he intervenes because he is manifesting the mystery of the jungle of the Slave Coast, a mystery that transcends rational ideas about 'dumb nature' in that the spiritual bond between male and female, between mates, is so powerful that it enables the male gorilla to track and kill the slayer of his mate—and even to take a symbolic vengeance in addition to blood vengeance.

Despite—or because of—the the serendipity of this event, the gorilla's arrival does reveal Kane's mysterious rapport with the binary nature of Africa, which the reader suspects when Kane hears the message of the voice of the jungle, the drums, and acknowledges the validity of the message:

> "All this and more the drums roared and bellowed to Kane as he worked his way through the forest. Somewhere in his soul a responsive chord was smitten and answered. You too are of the night (sang the drums); there is the strength of darkness, the strength of the primitive in you; come back down the ages; let us teach you, let us teach you (chanted the drums)" (Howard 31);
>
> "Again, somewhere in his soul, dim primal deeps were stirring, age-old thought memories,

[27] As gorillas are in fact classed in *The Monster Manual* of 1st Edition *Dungeons and Dragons*.

> veiled in the fogs of lost eons. He had been here before, thought Kane; he knew all this of old […]. All this have I known, somewhere, sometime, thought Kane; now I am the main actor--" (Howard 39).

Kane further proves his rapport with this binary nature of Africa by both surviving its conditions (not a given for a white man in the 17th century) and by heeding the injunction of its myserious soul to "Flee if you would live" (Howard 52).

The Christian Connection

One of the weaknesses of Frye's theory is that his view of Western literature is based on Judeo-Christian and Classical Greek and Roman foundations, and thus the parameters of his genres are established, or suggested, by those cultures. While the influence of Judeo-Christian and Graeco-Roman culture on Western literature is undeniable, Frye's downplaying of Germanic, Celtic, Slavic and Finno-Ugric spiritualities as defining features will necessarily leave large black holes in his spectrum of literature. That said, seeing as Howard was surrounded by, and heavily influenced by his Christian background, delving into the Christian aspects of romance with Frye is apropos. However, considering Howard's fascination with his Celtic heritage and the Germanic connection therewith, we must remember that there is yet a deeper layer, a layer that, when Howard abandons his explicitly Christian character Solomon Kane, comes even more to the fore, particularly in Conan the Cimmerian.

The basic Christian aspect of Solomon Kane and "Red Shadows" comes out when we consider the first phase of romance, The Birth of the Hero: "The first phase is the myth of the birth of the hero […]. This myth is often associated with a flood, the regular symbol of the beginning and the end of a cycle" (Frye 198). The flood Frye refers to in this first phase of romance is an archetype with many actual manifestations, and in the case of Solomon Kane in "Red Shadows" we *do* have a flood reference that indicates the "birth" of this Howard hero and which also fulfills the criteria for the beginning and ending of a cycle. Kane, in thinking of his own motivations for his heroic actions, that is, the origin of himself as a hero, "[…] considered himself a fulfiller of God's judgement, a vessel of wrath to be emptied upon the souls of the unrighteous" (Howard 34-35). One can take it for granted that the vessel of God's wrath is larger than a shot glass and contains within it a veritable flood of power, in this case Kane's vitality, strength and skill, and that there are plenty of "unrighteous" souls that need to be swept away. Howard thus presents Kane essentially as a

manifestation of the divine. Thus is Kane's "birth" linked to a divine flood, and the above quotation not only serves as the origin of the Kane stories, but can also be used to conclude the Kane cycle of stories, for Kane—in the same way that Conan irked Robert Bloch[28] --is, in the end, still that self-same vessel of God's wrathful judgement (despite, or perhaps through, his rapprochement with ju-ju/voodoo/black magic).

To return to our context of the third phase, the Quest proper, Frye relates the central dragon-killing theme of romance to the Biblical monster, the Leviathan. The Leviathan represents social sterility, and the natural sterility of the fallen world of sin, death and tyranny. The Messiah then comes and kills the Leviathan, releasing the people (Frye 189). Even though, in "Red Shadows," the Black God retains ultimate control, in a sense Kane does destroy the Leviathan, a.k.a. the tyrannous society, by challenging the evil triumvirate ruling N'Longa's village on the Slave Coast, Le Loup, Songa and Gulka. What makes what is implied by the Black God to be a replaceable, revolving-door leadership into a Leviathan in Frye's sense is the anomaly in the current leadership of N'Longa's village, namely the influence and power of the European outsider, Le Loup. That this indicates that the prerequisites for the Leviathan are present is strengthened by Frye's insistence that the Leviathan is a sea monster, in fact, the sea itself. If the sea represented anything to coastal Africans (which is what the people in N'Longa's village are), it represented the monster that thrust itself upon them from the sea, in other words, European slavery and colonization.[29] Read from this perspective, "Red Shadows" reads as a commentary on

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[28] Robert Bloch, later to gain fame as the author of *Psycho* and other tales of horror and suspense, lambasted Howard's Conan in a letter to *Weird Tales.* Not appreciating the mythic aspect of Howard's work, Bloch complained of a lack of character development both within the individual Conan stories and from one story to the next.

[29] That this identification is still alive and well in the descendants of the slaves shipped out from the African coast is evident in the continuing popularity of the music of Bob Marley. Marley thematized the issue of ship-borne slavery both lyrically (his most famous song, "Redemption Song", features the following opening lyrics: "Old pirates yes they rob I/Sold I to the merchant ships…") and visually (one of his album covers is the reproduction of a slaver's drawing demonstrating how best to pack African blacks into the hold of a slave ship). Drawing attention to the fact that coastal African tribes were middle-men in the slave trade merely parallels the fact that Jewish police in the Nazi-controlled ghettos were often brutal toward their own people in the hope of currying favour with their genocidal masters. This fact does not diminish the horror of the Holocaust, but in reality serves to heighten it, just as the parallel of Africans selling other Africans into European slavery does not diminish the horror of the European Leviathan that thrust itself upon them from the sea.

European colonization; no less than four European nations are represented on the coast of Africa where our story takes place: the Spanish, in the form of the ship that brings Le Loup; the French, through Le Loup; the Portuguese, in the form of the ship that brings Kane; and the English, through Kane. Kane, as messianic deliverer, destroys the Leviathan by removing the European colonial presence, Le Loup, from N'Longa's Village but he does not challenge the Black God's legitimacy and obeys the "voice" of Africa, the drums, and leaves Africa as well—thereby completing the destruction of the Leviathan by also removing *himself* as a European colonial presence.

Frye's conclusion about the Leviathan: "Lastly, if the leviathan is death, and the hero has to enter the body of death, the hero has to die, and if his quest is completed the final stage of it is, cyclically, rebirth, and, dialectically, resurrection" (Frye 192)—leads us to complete our look at the four-stage structure of romance by identifying how Kane 'dies' and is reborn or resurrected in "Red Shadows". While one could argue for several different points in the story as being Kane's ritual and metaphoric death, since we've identified the Leviathan of "Red Shadows" as being connected to European colonialism, it would have to be a scene involving Le Loup, in fact, the pathos stage mentioned earlier: the climactic duel with Le Loup. Kane's ritual death manifests in one of Howard's great shock and suspense moments (during which the reader is clearly meant to momentarily, but intensely, wonder if Kane has just been killed): "[…] Solomon Kane reeled for the first time as he felt cold steel tear through his body" (Howard 47).

Of course, this death struggle of the Europeans ends with Kane's victory, and we then move to the third stage of romance, "Sparagmos, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredooomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world" (Frye 192). Kane, a.k.a. the hero, a.k.a. Galahad, the white knight, does in a sense disappear after slaying Le Loup. Not only does he feel a strange sense of non-heroic futility afterwards, but he makes a mistake in depriving himself of his weapon (i.e. the focus of his heroic power), and when the gorilla arrives Kane is invisible for all intents and purposes. The mutilation or physical handicap associated with both the term sparagmos and ritual death occurs here in the form of Kane's wounds, particularly the last, fatal-seeming cut by Le Loup. Kane proceeds to perform a classic purification and ritual rebirth by washing himself in the stream; Frye notes, "Mutilation or physical handicap, which combines the themes of sparagmos and ritual death, is often the price of unusual wisdom or power […]" (Frye 193). The great wisdom or power Kane gains from having slain Le Loup comes through his rescue by the gorilla. The fact that the gorilla, a force of Nature, does not see him indicates that Kane is innocent of the initial sin that

disrupted the community and turned it into the Leviathan (i.e. the sinful European Le Loup usurping the balance of power): Kane's subsequent messianic heroism is underlined by the fact that he has gained the wisdom to understand the drums—and to heed them.

These revelations are explained in more depth if we see this sparagmos stage of "Red Shadows" as actually oscillating between the pure third phase of romance, the Quest, and the fourth phase, The Assault of Experience. Frye defines the Assault of Experience phase as follows: "In romance the central theme of this phase is that of the maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience" (Frye 201). This theme is, in fact, present throughout "Red Shadows" as it is Kane's (and Howard's) motivation for pursuing Le Loup: Kane seeks to kill Le Loup and by doing so symbolically restore the initial innocence that Le Loup violated by raping and murdering the 'white rose'. However, at the beginning of the sparagmos stage, that is, after killing Le Loup, Kane comes to realize the impossibility of actually maintaining the innocent world: "The trail ended here, and Kane was conscious of a strange feeling of futility. He always felt that, after he had killed a foe. Somehow it always seemed that no real good had been wrought; as if the foe had, after all, escaped his just vengeance" (Howard 47). Frye also writes of "the difficult theme of consolidating heroic innocence in this world after the first great quest has been completed" (Frye 201), and Kane, in a real sense, attempts to regain this innocence in two ways.

First, during the sparagmos stage, "[…] he laid down his rapier and crossed, weaponless, to the stream. There he laved his wounds […]" (Howard 47-48). As mentioned earlier, this is a classic purification ritual and the return to water is a symbol of rebirth. Kane's recovery, through this act, of his innocence is verified when the gorilla arrives on the scene shortly after and does not attack him, but instead saves him from Gulka. Interestingly, Howard, in a bit of authorial comment, sheds doubt on the desirability of regaining this innocence (or at least regaining it this way) by stating of the action that initiated Kane's recovery of innocence, the dropping of his rapier, that, "Here he made the only mistake of that kind that he ever made in his entire life" (Howard 47).

The second way Kane attempts to regain his innocence occurs during the fourth stage of his quest, the anagnorisis, and is coloured by the social aspect of the fourth phase of romance in that, "The integrated body to be defended may be individual or social or both" (Frye 201). Kane's leaving the Slave Coast is both a way of preserving his own innocence and of defending N'Longa's village from further corruption by the European Leviathan. However, Howard strips Kane of both these regainings of innocence by declaring Kane's first method a

mistake, and by undoing Kane's gesture of leaving Africa by having him return in subsequent stories[30]--in one of which, "Moon of Skulls" he is again faced with an imperial temptation.

The Reward of the Quest

Frye, in referring to the age-old pattern of the classic Quest romance, notes, "Again, the reward of the quest usually is or includes a bride" (Frye 193). As alluded to earlier, the 'white rose', the young woman raped and murdered by Le Loup, actually takes on the role of the white queen in Frye's archetypal character breakdown in "Red Shadows". The fact that she is dead before Kane even departs on his quest does not invalidate the romance schema it simply confirms that Howard is writing a romance in the traditions of Weird Fiction and Gothic Fiction. Frye characterizes this bride-figure as follows: "She is often to be found in a perilous, forbidden, or tabooed place, like Brunnhilde's wall of fire or the sleeping beauty's wall of thorns, and she is, of course, often rescued from the unwelcome embraces of another and generally older male, or from giants or bandits or other usurpers. The removal of some stigma from the heroine figures prominently in romance […]" (Frye 193). What more perilous, forbidden or tabooed place is there than the realm of the dead? Kane, in a sense, dares to challenge the grip of death, and posthumously rescue the 'white rose' from the 'unwelcome embrace' of Le Loup, a bandit no less, and a later usurper of power in N'Longa's village. This posthumous rescue is intended to remove the stigma of rape from the 'white rose', and that this rescue has aspects of a consummation, a marriage, is suggested by the sexual undertones in the initial scene where Kane meets the dying girl, particularly when he touches her breast; when Kane vows, "Men shall die for this," the reader knows that Kane's obsessive fury derives as much from the rape of the girl as her murder. In avenging her, Kane clears her of her stigma (which would have been present to the minds of most 1920s readers[31]), in that way posthumously claiming her. This calculus of sexuality, with its complicated equations of violence, death, stigma, frustration, and metaphoric union beyond death, may have been an expression (however problematic) of Howard's own youthful desire.

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[30] Although Howard *tries* to keep Kane out of Africa – in England in "Skulls in the Stars", and in Germany in "Rattle of Bones" – before succumbing to the call….

[31] Especially when one considers a typical John Wayne western movie several decades *later*, wherein Wayne's character matter-of-factly declares that white women raped by Indians 'weren't human anymore'.

Frye hits close to the mark when he notes, "Translated into dream terms, the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality" (Frye 193). If Howard's writing has a similar wellspring to that of William Morris's fantasy works—labeled "therapeutic dreaming" by critic Roderick Marshall—then, in this dream, Howard *is* Kane and Howard's libido, desirous of women but perhaps fearful of taking that step, does not permit Howard/Howard's avatar Kane sexual fulfillment, but does strive to re-instate—symbolically at least—pre-sexual innocence, by purifying the 'white rose' (Howard 20). Thus Howard can temporarily deliver himself from the anxieties of sex, but still confront them at their darkest and, through Kane, try to deal with them.

This last point about dark sex and Frye's insistence that "[...] the quest-romance is the victory of fertility over the waste land" (Frye 193), brings up a possible reason why Howard did not follow the standard Quest romance paradigm to this stage of completion, and instead could only approach it through the possibilites offered by Weird Fiction and Gothic Fiction. If the only way that Howard could approximate the union of male and female (not just in terms of Kane and the girl, but also in the parallel reality of the male gorilla and his mate) is to have the dead and violated female avenged by the male (i.e. a metaphoric union), then the initial confusion over whether Kane is satanic or divine could point to a rape fantasy on Howard's part and the writing of "Red Shadows" as his attempt, through his avatar, to right that wrong (Howard's perspective here deriving from the Christian precept that sinning in one's mind is as if to sin in reality).

In this vein, Frye's comment that, "The precious objects brought back from the quest, or seen or obtained as a result of it, sometimes combine the ritual and psychological associations" (Frye 193-194), is revealing in that all that Kane brings back from his quest is his rapier—which he cleansed after killing Le Loup. The sword—the symbol of male sexuality—is all Howard allows Kane to take back from this quest—but one purified of a sexual crime (i.e. the blood of a sexual criminal). The winning *back* of this precious object (thanks to the gorilla) is the anagnorisis, the recognition of the hero: through this the reader recognizes Kane as the hero in that he has avenged the 'white rose' by slaying her rapist, and thereby has also destroyed the Leviathan that this rapist called forth through his violation and his attempt to escape punishment.

In stark contrast to Bloch-like critiques of Howard's work, subsequent Kane stories will show steady development precisely in the psycho-sexual area of the Reward of the Quest. Not only is the bride-figure/white queen alive in Kane's next African adventure "The Moon

of Skulls," but Kane actually walks hand-in-hand with Marilyn Taferal into the dawn at its conclusion; an even more radical development in the following stories, "The Hills of the Dead" and "The Footfalls Within," consists of the fact that the women embodying the romance genre archetypal role of the white queen are (living) black women.

The Point of Epiphany

Frye notes: "One important detail in poetic symbolism remains to be considered. This is the symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment, and which we propose to call the point of epiphany. Its most common settings are the mountain-top, the island, the tower, the lighthouse, and the ladder or staircase" (Frye 203). The point of epiphany, to chart it on Frye's schema of the four stages of the romance, is the point dividing sparagmos from anagnorisis. The point of epiphany in "Red Shadows"—where the apocalyptic world (i.e. of the Leviathan, of rape, murder and European colonialism) and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment is in the *treetop* where the gorilla hurls Gulka's body in a Copernican era echo of Frye's statement that, "As long as poets accepted the Ptolemaic universe, the natural place for the point of epiphany was a mountain-top just under the moon, the lowest heavenly body" (Frye 204). The significance of the gorilla's act comes out if we see the point of epiphany in "Red Shadows" as continuing the story's spectral shift within the romance genre: from pure phase 3 Quest romance to phase 4 Assault of Experience romance in the sparagmos stage, and, here, at the point of epiphany, shifting toward phase 5, The View of Experience from Above.

However, to fully understand the implications of the point of epiphany embodying major aspects of the fifth phase of romance, we need first to take a look back at the second phase of romance, Innocent Youth, which further explains the origin of Solomon Kane and which briefly appears in the opening pages of the story before the story settles into phase 3. The relevance of phase two, Innocent Youth, to the opening of "Red Shadows" becomes apparent when one considers that Kane was a product of Howard's youth, a fact Howard himself confirmed: "Solomon Kane I created when I was in high school, at the age of about sixteen, but […] several years passed before I put him on paper" (Campbell xi). Frye's definition of this phase—"In literature this phase presents a pastoral and Arcadian world, generally a pleasant wooded landscape, full of glades, shaded valleys, murmuring brooks, the moon, and other images closely linked with the female or maternal aspect of sexual imagery" (Frye 200). This is embodied in Chapter 1, 'The Coming of Solomon': "The moonlight shimmered hazily, making

silvery mists of illusion among the shadowy trees. A faint breeze whispered down the valley, bearing a shadow that was not of the moon mist" (Howard 20). The trajectory and perspective of this pastoral passage suggests that Kane emerges from the maternal moon, although Howard takes pains to quickly establish his Kane avatar as his own man; yet the story will conclude, at the point of epiphany, under the light—that that is, under the aegis of the maternal aspect—of a "clear moon" (Howard 52).

More to the point, Frye goes on to say, "The theme of the sexual barrier in this phase takes many forms […]" (Frye 200), and he gives many examples of such barriers from classics of literature, including, "The dividing river recurs in William Morris's curious story *The Sundering Flood*, where an arrow shot over it has to do for the symbol of sexual contact" (Frye 200). There is, in the opening pages of "Red Shadows," a far more imposing sexual barrier: the death of the 'white rose' and the only forms of "sexual" contact Kane has with her is the touching of her breast as she dies and the symbolic contact of running through her killer and rapist at the end.

This hearkening back to the brief, but important, manifestation of the second phase of romance in the opening pages of the story is necessary to understand the equally brief, but just as important shift to the fifth phase at the story's end. Frye writes that the fifth phase "[…] is a reflective, idyllic view of experience from above, in which the movement of the natural cycle has usually a prominent place. It deals with a world very similar to that of the second phase except that the mood is a contemplative withdrawal from or sequel to action […]" (Frye 202). The literally reflective moment that is a sequel to all the action of the story belongs to the gorilla, and only through observation of the gorilla's reflection, to Kane. The moment when this child of nature, representative of the romance hero's connection to nature, reflects on the moonlit body of Gulka is a moment in which the natural cycle is prominent: in this case, the *natural* connection of male and female. It is also symbolically a view from above in that Howard explictly ties the gorilla to the moon in the sky: Howard is here connecting the maternal (i.e. the moon) with the natural, and positing them as the source of reflective wisdom to the observing Kane: "A moment the clear moon limned the great ape in its glimmer, as he stood silently gazing up at his victim; then like a dark shadow he melted noiselessly into the jungle" (Howard 52). This moment is one of psychological insight into Howard, especially when one considers Frye's statement about this fifth phase that "It is, like the second phase, an erotic world, but it presents experience as comprehended and not as a mystery" (Frye 202). What seems to be comprehended here, by the gorilla and possibly by the watching Kane, is the deep, though tragic

union of male and female in the light of the maternal. Significantly, after this moment Kane retrieves his rapier, his symbol of male sexuality: will he (and Howard) now pursue this vision of erotic "reality"? Is this an understanding that offers no living union in life, and leaves only darkness when the light of the maternal is extinguished?

After the point of epiphany, romance stories move into their final stage, the anagnorisis, The Recognition of the Hero. As was argued above, the anagnorisis of "Red Shadows" begins with Kane reclaiming his rapier and cleansing it. But it does not end there, and the finale of the story continues its spectral shift into phase 6 romance, the 'penseroso' phase or The Hermit, which "marks the end of a movement from active to contemplative adventure" (Frye 202). Frye notes, "A central image of this phase, a favourite of Yeats, is that of the old man in the tower, the lonely hermit absorbed in occult or magical studies" (Frye 202). While we have no tower, nor even a hermit, Howard does explicitly provide a contemplative finish to the tale and the anagnorisis by offering an African equivalent of the tower and the hermit: the drums. It is they who provide the tale's final wisdom: "'The wisdom of our land is ancient; the wisdom of our land is dark; whom we serve, we destroy. Flee if you would live, but you will never forget our chant. Never, never,' sang the drums" (Howard 52). Kane confirms himself the hero by heeding this aggressive anti-colonial wisdom, and we recognize in his decision to return to the ship with nothing more than his purified rapier, the final defeat (for now, at least) of the European Leviathan.

In keeping with his announced theme of the cyclical (e.g. seasons) as opposed to the linear, Frye closes the circle of the six phases of the romance by noting, "From Wagner's *Ring* to science fiction, we may notice an increasing popularity of the flood archetype" (Frye 203). This consideration of "Red Shadows" in the lens of Frye's six phases of romance also began with the consideration of Kane, the vessel of God's wrath, as a manifestation of the flood and now, aptly, concludes with Frye's statement, "[…] and it brings us around again to the image of the mysterious newborn infant floating on the sea" (Frye 203). Indeed, "Red Shadows" ends with a Kane who has, as shown above, recaptured his innocence and who returns as mysteriously as he came (as far as N'Longa's village is concerned), to his ship floating on the sea. This completion of the romance cycle (or, in the language of spectrums, moving so far to the right that you emerge on the extreme left) will allow Kane to reappear in the next story beginning from phase 1 again, and demonstrates how Howard steadfastly continued to develop his fictions in the romance genre. Instead of ever allowing Kane to fall tragically after experiencing a point of epiphany like a

tragic hero, Kane will reappear in the context of another romance, and then another after that, replaying the romance paradigm time and again until Howard had expressed all he could through his restless Puritan adventurer.

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[32] Note: Howard scholars consider this edition of Solomon Kane stories suspect for several reasons, not the least being J. Ramsey Campbell's uninspired pastiche-conclusions to fragments of Kane stories Howard left behind. However, this was the only edition the author had available as this essay was being prepared and this was thus the edition quoted. Those serious about the works of Robert E. Howard and interested in reading the most authentic versions of his Solomon Kane stories are directed to the editions released by Wandering Star and Del Rey. The author would appreciate having any discrepancies in quoted text between the more authentic editions and the 1978 Bantam edition pointed out to him.

Letters to the Editor

[Editor's Note: As can be expected, Joshi's review of *The Barbaric Triumph* prompted several readers to respond. Their responses—and others on different topics—are published here in alphabetical order. We welcome letters to the editor; even ones in response to other letters.]

But is adventure really a triumph?

Dear Editors,

The inclusion of both reviews by Blosser and Joshi on *The Barbaric Triumph* provides some interesting contrasts. Yes, Mr. Blosser has written extensively on Howard and his characters, but is he too close to the subject and the folks contributing to the volume to be truly objective? While it is good to see a positive review of a book, one can be equally suspicious when nothing negative is said about the book—and given Joshi's litany of complaints—one really has to wonder if there isn't an "old boy's network" in Howard studies.

There seems to have been a litany of complaints on the various Howard e-mail lists against Joshi and what he has written about Howard. The irate rabble needs to realize though, that in this review, Joshi looks more at how Howard studies are being done and less at Howard himself. When was it standard practice to kill the messenger for past messages, and not the current one?

Furthermore, Joshi views *The Barbaric Triumph* from an academic viewpoint, which is fair if that is how the work is intended. One can make this assumption keeping in mind Herron's old complaints over the academic world's neglect of *The Dark Barbarian*. But one is forced to ask, if Herron and company have contempt for the academic world and academic standards, why should the academic world care about what they are producing? Then there is also a certain irony—or is it hypocrisy—when Herron leads the mob screaming "plagiarism," and edits a book with very opaque references at best.

While Joshi's review may be harsh, he does bring up some valid points. A variety of Howard "scholars" bring more attitude and pomposity to their writing than substantive scholarship or criticism. Opinions are often stated as fact. His criticism of the literary credentials of the current crowd is also valid.

Mark Hall's review of Phillip's *Mapping Men and Adventure* is readable, but he needs to be taken to task on a variety of fronts. First, he should be chided for trying to force Howard's fiction into the adventure genre. Yes, many of the *El Borak* and Kirby O'Donnell stories could be subsumed in the realistic adventure genre, but what

about Howard's better known characters such as Conan, Kull and Solomon Kane? Plus, what about "The Lost Valley of Iskander"? They are hardly realistic, and while adventure may be an element in many of the stories, they are chock full of weird and horror elements.

Which leads me to ask, what is wrong with promoting Howard as a fantasy writer who created the sword and sorcery genre? His contributions to the fantasy/weird fiction field were original and pioneered a sub-genre that is uniquely different from the works of Joshi's hero Lovecraft, the myth-maker Tolkien, and the verbose Stephen King. Critics and fans should give the man his due honors where deserved and quit trying to shoe-horn his output into every other genre.

One also has to wonder if cramming Howard into the "adventure" genre is really any better too. Sure he could be compared to Kipling or London, but these and other classic adventure authors are often seen as being only for children. Is Howard really a children's writer?

Hall should also be faulted for trying to "liberalize" Howard. As the Necronomicon collection of letters shows, Howard's *habitus* arose from being a white man in a small town in the South during the 1920s and 1930s. From his published letters there does not seem to be anything subversive, progressive or liberal in his views concerning non-white ethnic groups and women. The two examples given by Hall in the review (Yasmeena in the *El Borak* story, and Yasmina in a Conan story) are only gussied-up damsels-in-distress—nothing liberated about them. So, let's also quit white-washing a man who was clearly a man of his times.

Sincerely,
Maeve Edwards

How to be a Howard Guerrilla

Now that there are a quantity of Robert E. Howard books coming out, and more on the way, I'm drafting this document to help increase the general public's exposure to the books. Del Rey isn't doing much by way of promotion, so if we want people to notice and appreciate Robert E. Howard, we're going to have to do it ourselves.

These techniques apply mainly to big box retail chain stores like Barnes & Noble, Borders, Hastings, and any other large, faceless corporation with the usual gaggle of uncaring employees. However, they will also work for local independent bookstores, although you may have to modify a tactic or two.

The books are there. Howard is on the shelves. The problem is these books are competing with hundreds of other, bigger books. Howard and Jordan are pretty close together on the bookshelves. Robert Jordan's series of phone books eat up a lot of shelf space. At most stores, all that the employees care about is putting the books out. Displays are never an option. So, what can you do?

Well, for starters, you can do their job for them.

Face Outs

You see this tactic all the time; stacks of books are stacked, face out in front, rather than shelved with the spines facing out on the shelves. This is done for two reasons. Three or more books stacked out take up less space on the shelf than if they were spined out. Also, faced out books *sell* better. People can see the cover art. If they can see the cover, they will be more inclined to pick the book up and thumb through it.

Next time you're in a big box bookstore, check the science fiction & fantasy shelves. If Howard isn't faced out, then face him out. Make it a nice display, with spined books on either side of the faced out books. If there's no room to face out Howard books because of other face outs, then adjust the shelves so that the Howard books are faced out and the other books are not.

Unless the store has a science fiction person actively working the shelves, it will take a long time before they notice. More customers will see the Howard books by sheer accident.

Order Some Books

On a corporate level, special orders are only noticed by people in the middle of the chain. That doesn't mean you shouldn't order from them. It means that you really should. If Borders sees that on a given week, they received over two hundred orders for a book from Bison Press, all across the country, *someone* will snap to the fact that they need to have that book in their store. It's a little bit more robotic and impersonal with Barnes & Noble, but it does still work.

Hey, I understand, your funds are limited. Feel free to order the Wildside Press books from Amazon (or directly) since it's a POD book and never likely to show up in a retail space except by some sort of Christmas miracle. However, if you don't see the Del Rey books or the Bison Books, in your local big retail bookstore, make them bring the books in. Many times, those stores will keep special orders in their system, particularly after several repeat special orders on the same book.

Write a Recommendation

You can't really do this at the chain stores (can you?) but at many independent stores across the country, it is possible for customers to write a book recommendation, usually in the form of a small tent-fold card. Well, go for it! Use your best handwriting (or type it up) and make it look really nice. Keep it simple and catchy. Most independent bookstores are grateful for any feedback they get. If they don't have a system in place, ask them politely if you can write a recommendation anyway. The worst they can say is no.

Optionally, see if your local indy bookstore has an online website, or better yet, a newsletter that they print and distribute. Ask them if you can write a short essay on Robert E. Howard, his books, or anything of that nature. In essence, you're just writing a big staff selection.

At the chain stores, even if you can't write a recommendation, you can let them know that you really like these books and you want to see more of them. Play dumb! "This guy is the, like, first Dean of American Fantasy! Surely there's GOT to be more books available? Can you get them? If anyone is going to carry them, it should be YOU guys! I mean, you carry everything!" A little smoke can go a long way.

Do Some Decorating

Do you know what a shelf talker is? It's what retail calls those spiffy little cards that have the picture of the book and maybe a quote about how great it is, usually right under the faced-out section of books on the shelf (see, we're starting to sound like booksellers). Shelf talkers draw attention to the book because (a) not every book gets a shelf talker, and (b) the books that usually do are the books that a publisher is trying to promote.

There's more to being a Howard Guerrilla than just hitting the local big box retailers, though. You should also try to drum up interest whenever you can. I'm not talking about a soapbox pitch in the store or even to your friends, but you can do several things to ensure that your favorite author gets the attention he deserves. The right kind of attention, that is...

Spread the Books Around

When *The Coming of Conan* hit the shelves, everyone did a great job of buying copies to give away as presents. On the off-chance that you find yourself in the possession of one brand-new Howard book too many, here are your choices:

1. Keep it! (sigh)
2. Take it to the most popular Half-Price or used bookstore in the city (not bad)
3. Sneak it back into a bookstore that doesn't carry the books and LEAVE IT on their shelves (now you're talking!)

Doing this puts a book into their system that they do not have. When the book is sold, it generates a report. That report becomes a reorder. Viola! You've just done Barnes & Noble's job for them! Sometimes robots can come in really handy.

Start a Book Group

With the above idea in mind, you can start a book group. These are all the rage—if Oprah is doing it again, there must be something to it! Try putting a flyer up at the local college or bookstore for a Classic Adventure Book Group, or a Sword and Sorcery Book Group, and see who bites. You won't be able to read Howard every month, but you can certainly go through the few books that are out there and readily available. The essays are great points of discussion, too. I've tried this, and it worked really well.

Go to the Library

Does your local library have copies of the current Robert E. Howard titles on their shelves? Why not? Believe me, most public libraries are too happy to take requests and listen to suggestions, and this is a very easy, no-cost suggestion that will expose Howard's work to many hungry readers. If you live in a city with any kind of medium- or large-sized college or university, cruise their selections and make similar recommendations when you see a deficiency.

Take Howard to Places He Hasn't Been Before

Are you a college student? Do you have to write papers for your English/American Lit/Post-Modern Studies programs? Why the hell AREN'T you writing about ol' Bob Howard? His stuff is ripe for po-mo studies, gender studies, lit crit, masculinities, and all manner of major themes. Look at what Steve Trout has done by comparing Howard's Conan stories with Richard Slotkin's work on the Frontier Myth. Everyone pretty much agrees that is some of the most important work done on Howard's fiction in the last ten years.

Howard was into a lot of things, most of which found their way into his work. A lot of people who would have no interest reading about Conan might find Howard's James Allison stories of interest, particularly if you mention them in a paper on Howard's use of reincarnation and past lives in a paper for your Religious Studies class.

This brings someone to REH that never would have gotten there through traditional (read: the Fantasy section of the bookstore) means.

Talk to the Press

David Burton recently got in his local paper because of his artwork. While it was more of a piece on David, he certainly managed to work Howard and Conan into the mix. How many of you have legendary pulp collections? Rooms full of collectibles? Man, I was once interviewed in Waco, Texas, during a slow news day, because I was a pulp enthusiast—not a collector—just an enthusiast. We looked at some of the books that I had ABOUT pulps and I pulled out the few examples that I had. That ended up being a feature, for crying out loud. It doesn't take much to get local TV and newspapers interested in those human interest type stories. Odds are you are the local expert on Robert E. Howard. Surely with his Centennial on the horizon, you can find a way to write a press release and maybe discuss Howard's cultural importance?

Correct Errors as They Appear

Let me say this up front: please don't be a smart-ass about it. Remember, the person writing the entry in the Encyclopedia of Fantasy or whatever is not out to get you, me, or the fans of Robert E. Howard (I hope!) with his parroting of the conventional wisdom about Howard and his life. If there was an omission, chances are, they are operating off of twenty year old data. Feel free to contact them and tell them, politely, that you enjoyed or appreciated whatever it was they were trying to do. Then ask them if they were aware of, say, Rusty's short biography, or the two trade collections of critical essays edited by Don Herron, or that now most scholars in the field seem to think that Howard didn't have an Oedipal obsession? Point them to the proper sources, and thank them for their time. Attach an essay if it's appropriate. But don't, under any circumstances, attack them or take them to task for getting the facts wrong. That just reinforces all of the negative stereotypes about fandom in general and makes it appear that their conclusions were more accurate than not.

For those of you who want to place orders at a bookstore, chain or otherwise, here's some quick and dirty info for you. Another tip: use the ISBN numbers whenever you can. It's like a fingerprint for the book you want. It also makes you look clever in bookstores. This list is current as of May 2005.

Del Rey
Savage Tales of Solomon Kane
ISBN: 0345461509
Coming of Conan
ISBN: 0345461517
Bloody Crown of Conan
ISBN: 0345461525
Bran Mac Morn: The Last King
ISBN: 0345461541

The Works of Robert E. Howard (Bison Books)
Boxing Stories
ISBN : 0803273525 (PB)
ISBN : 0803224230 (HC)
The Black Stranger & Other American Tales
ISBN : 0803273533 (PB)
ISBN : 0803224214 (HC)
The Riot at Bucksnort & Other Western Tales
ISBN : 0803273541 (HC)
ISBN : 0803224257 (PB)
The End of the Trail: Western Stories
ISBN : 0803273568 (PB)
ISBN : 0803224249 (HC)
Lord of Samarcand & Other Adventure Tales
ISBN : 080327355X (HC)
ISBN : 0803224222 (PB)

Wildside Press
Waterfront Fists and Others
ISBN: 1592241360 (HC)
ISBN: 080951124X (SC)
Graveyard Rats and Others
ISBN: 159224159X (HC)
ISBN: 159224145X (SC)
The Complete Action Stories
ISBN: 0809533421 (HC)
Gates of Empire and Other Tales of the Crusades ISBN: 0809515504 (HC)
Treasures of Tartary and Other Heroic Tales ISBN: 0809511096 (HC)
Shadow Kingdoms (HC)
ISBN: 0809511266 (HC)
The Moon of Skulls
ISBN: 0809510847 (HC)
The Dark Barbarian, Don Herron ed.
ISBN: 1587152037 (SC)
The Barbaric Triumph, Don Herron ed.
ISBN: 0809515660 (HC)
ISBN: 0809515679 (SC)

Chaosium
Nameless Cults: The Complete Cthulhu Mythos Tales of Robert E. Howard
ISBN: 1568821301

Sincerely, Mark Finn

Howard Studies:
An Argument for a Non-Lovecraftian Model

In the last issue of this journal, S.T. Joshi, the patriarch of current Lovecraft Studies, suggested that Howard Studies:

1. clean up its grammar and adopt standardized citational procedures,
2. ignore Howard's book sales as a measure of literary worth and

3. jettison displays of enthusiasm.

The tone was polite, even, at times, apologetic, but few could read his essay without cringing. According to Joshi, Howard Studies, at least in comparison with present Lovecraft Studies, is academically deficient. I'd like to reply to Joshi's suggestions and make some of my own. Howard Studies is certainly on the cusp of great things, but its evolution does not have to be based on Joshi's admittedly successful model.

On the first point we agree, at least superficially. There is certainly no excuse for repeated grammatical errors, which suggest a lack of discipline. Imagine reading a math journal and coming across a factual error—i.e. 2+2=7. I doubt most readers would get beyond such flaws. It's difficult to accept complex theoretical arguments when the mechanics are inept. Further, we agree that all criticism should be documented. But the formalities of a citational procedure should not be confused with the form and function of criticism itself. Citations do not, as Joshi suggests, allow "readers to gauge the validity of the critic's argument." Citing from a humanities-based text, whether it is a critique of *Macbeth* or a direction quotation from *Mein Kampf* does not make the arguments in those texts correct or beyond refutation. The confusion here is with scientific notation, which records the facts and findings of a test. Literary citation can have this function as well, particularly for bibliographical studies, but, for the most part, it is merely a way of demonstrating how a current argument agrees or disagrees with the work that has come before. The fact, however, that criticism appropriates some of the documentational standards of science does not mean that criticism can function scientifically. Instead, literary citations demonstrate a judicious knowledge of an ongoing conversation; they suggest our cultural concerns and ideological formations. While it true that every essay submitted to a REH journal or any journal must be vetted for obvious factual errors and leaps of logic, we should be always wary that any disputed topic has a "right" answer. The history of criticism suggests that one response breeds yet other responses.

While differing on underlying justifications, I embrace Joshi's call for greater documentation. We clash, however, on the value and utility of Howard's popularity. To my mind, full-fledged Howard Studies might model itself on present Shakespeare Studies, which ranges over many issues that, strictly speaking, have little or nothing to do with the man or the plays as performed in his era. What did Johnson or Coleridge think of Shakespeare and how did their perceptions affect contemporaneous readings, writings, and stagings of his works? What of the numerous Shakespeare adaptations, imitations, and forgeries that have been written and staged since his death? What of present stage

performance or film productions? How is Shakespeare used in pop culture or politics? Howard Studies have enough materials to at least consider similar critical explorations, particularly on the topics of adaptations and posthumous collaborations. For example, scholars might look at L. Sprague de Camp/Carter *Conan* novels, the Andrew J. Offutt *Cormac Mac Art* books, or the other writers and artists who have added to the Howard mythos, including the long running Marvel and Dark Horse *Conan* comics, various graphic novels, and the *Conan*, *Kull* and *Red Sonja* movies. Should these works be considered as part of Howard Studies, or should they be shunned as apocrypha?

Even if Howard Studies were to adopt the latter conservative approach, those works can still be read as tacit literary criticism. It is obvious to any who have read or watched these sequels and prequels that they are heavily invested with Howard's literary stock and store, but it's equally evident that these stories discard aspects of the original tales. Thus, when de Camp, or any other imitator, departs from Howard's literary motifs, we can read such divergences as a criticism of the original models. Howard's imitators might honour the brand name of his characters, but in creating new Conans, Kulls, et al, they tacitly suggested that Howard's characters, no matter how celebrated, are flawed or out-of-date. The point of New Howard is not to imitate Howard, but rewrite the very nature of the Howardian.

Turnabout is fair play. Many of Howard's tales may well be imitations themselves. For example, Cormac is clearly a Celtic hero, one that reads like an anagram of "Madoc," a hero who, according to legend, left Briton sometime in the medieval period to found a colony in America. In Robert Southey's *Madoc* (1805, revised 1812 and 1837) the hero is thrown pell-mell into a proto-*Conan* tale of battle, sinister demons, and lost or forgotten civilizations. There is even a blood sacrifice to giant Snake God. After Madoc cuts its poison-fanged head off, he becomes king of the Aztecs. Did Howard know of and borrow from Southey? Rusty Burke has found no edition of Southey mentioned in Howard's letters or stocked on the shelves of Howard's library, but this is far from categorical evidence that he did not know of this poet laureate and his popular poem.[1]

Cultural critics might look at magazine racks, and what they tell us about the pulps and Howard's fiction. What titles were placed next to *Adventure* and *Weird Tales*? Were these pulps discretely placed, out of the reach of children? What do the positionings of these magazines suggest about the "adult" nature of the materials? How do these stories

[1] See Rusty Burke, ed., *The Robert E. Howard Bookshelf.* http://www.rehupa.com/bookshelf.htm.

relate to issues of decency, and the formulation of what is today the porn industry and the American obsession with sexuality and beauty? What about those manly Frazetta paintings, or the homoerotics of the *Conan* movies? What do they say about masculinity and the evolving social sanctions by which boys and men can look at male bodies?

How did Howard's writing practices fit in with the cultural industrialization of America? Is there any connection between this industrious writer, pumping out stories, and the arcadian worlds he created? Cyberspace offers yet more subjects: while trawling Ebay, I found a complete Russian *Conan* set published in the mid 1960s. How did the Soviets see the *Conan* series? Clearly not as an example of Western decadence, since it, unlike so many other books, was not only published but distributed throughout the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block. Did they see *Conan* as a sword and fire Communist Manifesto manifest—one man, symbolic of predatory capitalism, slicing up competition, until he monopolistically rules all, to the detriment and heart-ache of the under-classes?

Recently, I was in Austin, Texas, and came across *Conan's Pizza*, a joint decorated with Boris Vallejo and Frank Frazetta artwork. There's nothing like eating anchovies while staring at a Boris Vallejo of a woman busting out of a chain mail bustier. The owner told me that the Howard estate sued, arguing that the pizza parlour had no right to the Conan images. *Conan's Pizza* was willing to pay for the legal right to use Conan to sell its pizza, but the Howard Estate rebuffed the offer.[2] Here, we might look at the ways in which Howard's cultural legacy is up for dispute. The restaurateur uses Howard as a sensuous Pavlovian trigger: drool over the women, hunger for the pizza; the Howard estate wants us to see Howard as an intellectual icon: read the book, discuss and debate his literature.

What about Howard's political influence? Howard certainly contributed to the formation of Arnold Schwarzenegger's present fame and political power. Can we really say that the California governor's desire to cut through administrative red tape, his inflammatory actions and language—pinching women's bottoms, calling his enemies "girlie-men"—are utterly unrelated to his first major film role, the swinish and laconic luddite, Conan the Barbarian? The energies of legitimization travel both ways: Arnold's cultural and political power help to legitimate Howard's characters. If we accept that this is the case, then

[2] Details of their legal wranglings were not released, but "Mike," the day manager, told me that the parties eventually settled out of court. I phoned the corporate office to confirm the story, but, as of this writing, they have not responded. Conan's Pizza, 603 West 29th St., Austin, Texas. Tel.: 512-478-5712. Corporate Office: 512-478-5914.

we must also accept that Howard's merits or demerits are not longer found entirely in our readings of his texts.

What of Howard's boxing tales? Might Howard scholars not be able to relate these stories to actual boxing matches that took place in the same era? I'm thinking here particularly of the matches of Jack Johnson, was the first black and first Texan to win the heavyweight boxing championship of the world. Johnson might even be the model for Howard's heroes; a man who lived by his fists, openly ignored convention and freely indulged in wine, women, and song. The fact Johnson's wife was white only added to the racial and cultural anxieties of his celebrity. Considering that Lovecraft and others had such strong views on race, was Howard here suggesting a combative counterargument?

Lastly, in a list that is meant to be in no way exhaustive, we might look at explanations of Howard's genius and even his death. In the 1996 movie, *The Whole Wide World,* we meet a Norman Bates-like Robert Howard. If the suggestion is that writers of weird tales must be weird, we might note that Robert Bloch, creator of Norman Bates, was often thought to be a deviant.[3] This brings up an interesting question: just how does the average Howard biographer interlink Howard's work with his life? In *The Miscast Barbarian* (1975), de Camp suggests that an understanding of Howard is inseparable from an understanding of his creations:

> In fact, Howard's immersion in his world of make-believe perhaps contributed to the vividness of his fiction. Lovecraft was on the right track when wrote:
> … No author can excel unless he takes his work very seriously & puts himself whole-heartedly into it-- and Two-Gun did just that, even when he claimed and consciously believed that he didn't.

[3] Bloch writes: "The truth of the matter was that the tale [*Psycho*] was written in a period of euphoria rather than depression…" *Once Around the Bloch: An Unauthorized Autobiography* (New York: Tor/ Tom Doherty Associates, 1993), 234. On attempts to label Bloch as a psycho, see Randall D. Larson, *Robert Bloch. Starmont Reader's Guide* No. 37 (Mercer Island, Washington: Starmont House, 1986), 5-8. On the afterlife of Norman Bates, see Stephano Rebello, *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (New York: Harper Perennial/ Harper Collins, 1991), 181-94.

> Howard's preoccupation with and absorption in his fantasy life, however, had a fearful price.[4]

So, according to de Camp, we should dismiss Howard's own pronouncements on the relationship between his life and his work because Lovecraft, who never even met the man, says so.

If such logic is dubious, it is engendered by a variety of lyrical, though intellectually vapid, statements, such as:

> Howard's life is like a fable illustrating the sad consequences of this situation. Living in the never-never land of Conan and King Kull, he slaughtered enemies by the dozen. He was fearless, inscrutable [*sic*], desired by all women. Single-handed [*sic*] he toppled rulers from their thrones and built empires of oriental splendor. Even the menace of the supernatural was vanquished by the magic that he alone was able to control. In the real world, however, he had no resources. When he was faced with the loss of maternal protection [*sic*] he took the way of self-destruction.[5]

Never mind that a "fable" is a tale in which animals, such as pigs or dogs, speak and act like humans, or that the passage contains a misspelling and an open disregard for the mechanics of the dependent clause. It's the loopy logic that concerns us here. If I am reading this right, H.R. Hays is arguing that Howard's life was just like his fiction, except when it came to his life.

The truth is that we know little of what motivated Howard. Even his so-called suicide is open to question. True, in his letters to Tevis Clyde Smith and to others, he discussed suicide, not living to an old age, etc. That being said, before his death, he told his despondent father to "Buck up!"[6] This hardly sounds like someone who was going

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[4] L. Sprague de Camp, *Miscast Barbarian* (Saddle River, N.J.: Gerry de la Ree, 1975), 37.

[5] H.R. Hays, *The New York Times Book Review*, 29 Sept. 1946, 34. The passage is reused, without quotation, but with citation, in L. Sprague de Camp, Catherine Cook de Camp, Jane Whittington Griffin, *Dark Valley Destiny: The Life of Robert E. Howard*. 10th Edition (New York: Bluejay Books, 1883), 351.

[6] L. Sprague de Camp, et al, *Dark Valley Destiny: The Life of Robert E. Howard*, 347.

to kill himself. The note on his typewriter, derived, as de Camp notes, from a poem by Ernest Christopher Dowson, hardly seems like the personal explanation one leaves for friends and family.[7] Perhaps that stanza he typed wasn't a suicide note at all? Perhaps it was a note for a story? And might the gunshot that killed him be an accident? Guns do go off while their owners clean them. Yes, his mother was dying, and the timing couldn't be worse, but, then again, when is a good time to be shot? Aren't all accidents a result of bad luck and bad timing? I don't dispute that depressed people often kill themselves. What I am arguing is that without a clear suicide note, we can't rule out the possibility of accident. What we can say is that his biographers, family, and friends have used the circumstances of his death to write another Howard story, this one concerning a hero who, cribbed, cabined, and confined by life's pressures, strikes out with the prime weapon of his imaginative universe: violence.

Turning from possible topics of scholarship, I'd like to close by reconsidering Joshi's statement concerning the tone and prose of Howard criticism. If Howard Studies is about to "evolve"—how Lovecraftian is the term!— it might be worth commenting upon Joshi's call for Howardians to suppress their exuberance. Criticism is a matter of style as well as of form and content. In most instances, critical practitioners probably do— at least we hope they do— no lasting harm to the texts they critique. Lovecraft Studies has evolved the way it has because of Lovecraft, not criticism in general. Collectively, Lovecraft's writings encourage an abstract and seeming dispassionate critique because Lovecraft's protagonists—hero seems too proactive for many of them— are similarly introspective. After all, confronted with a demon from a transdimensional hell, the average Lovecraftian protagonist responds by:

A) cutting off its head.
B) reminding himself that we live in a pluralistic society, and that transdimensional beings have feelings too.
C) reasoning with the creature.
D) going to the library, reading up on the matter, and shuddering in unutterable horror.

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[7] L. Sprague de Camp, *Miscast Barbarian,* 37. Rusty Burke traces the same poem to a work by Viola Garvin, "The House of Caesar." He further notes that the poem was in a collection_ *Songs of Adventure*, ed. Robert Frothingham (Houghton Mifflin, 1926)_ that Howard had repeatedly culled for writing materials. Inexplicably, Burke then states that this poem "puts a new slant on Howard's mood at the time of his suicide." See his note, "All fled, All Done." http://www.rehupa.com/all_fled.htm

We all know what Conan's response would be. Howard criticism should model itself on its subject, and its prose should reflect that intellectual excitement and proactive vigor. That many academics have forgotten or never experienced the exhilaration and passion still enjoyed by Howard readers is, I think, a fact and an opportunity. I am sure that Joshi would agree that we, as academics, have much to teach traditional fans about looking at texts, just as they have plenty to teach academics about enjoying them.

Jeffrey Kahan, University of La Verne

COLD CUTS

"It's like some sick joke!" -- Dr. McKenna

Back in *Beltric Writes* 48 [*REHupa* 99], I wrote that I questioned "[...] the Freudian interpretation of the father-son clash as primarily sexual, the so-called Oedipus complex."

I continued:

> For this, and many other of Freud's theories, to finally become accepted by the medical establishment, the modifying and corrective theories of Freud's onetime disciple, Alfred Adler, have generally been adopted. Though considered another of the great Viennese psychologists, Adler is less well known to the general public; but to those interested in Howard and "Oedipalism" he is well worth looking into. Adler [1870-1937] suggested that the son strove not for mama's sex but for "the laurels, the possibilities, the strength of his father." He also suggested that this conflict was universal, based on the inferiority a baby inherits upon the realization that all other humans in his immediate environment are not helpless like him, but god-like beings of massive size and strength, with uncanny powers of food production, movement, etc. The development of character begins with how the child reacts to this weakness. On the one end, a child may remain convinced of his weakness, and demonstrate it to gain control through sympathy, and on the other side, the child may

> determine to become as powerful as the father (the dominant figure in the family) and thus begin the rivalry. It is not the mother that is at stake so much as the world; a blind striving for power that Adler calls the "masculine rebellion". Adler says the infant "learns to overvalue the size and stature which enables one to open a door, or the ability to move heavy objects, or the right of other to give commands and claim obedience to them. A desire to grow, to become as strong or even stronger than all others, arises in his soul."

This is much easier to swallow than Freud's sex-based theory—Freud was obsessed with sex, anyway. One might speculate that at the ultimate extreme, the infantile urge is wanting to kill God and rule the cosmos; that should sound at least vaguely familiar to any of you longtime fans of Karl Edward Wagner and Kane. I think if you read Adler you can get a handle on why Howard valued strength, power and freedom, saw the world, perhaps, as an adversary, and get away from the notion that that means he wanted to sleep with his mother. My own browsing included his selection in *Psychologies of 1930*, his *Understanding Human Nature*, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* and a couple of edited "revivals" of his work published recently, whose titles I have no notes of.

By all accounts, Dr. Howard was a man who projected power such as would seem daunting, and would make a great impression on a small boy growing up in his household. In the next mailing I followed up with some comments on infantile rage being somewhat (in my view) justified, and similar to the precepts of thought I was currently reading in Forrest McDonald's *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*. I also noted—thanks to Vern Clark—that Howard had used the idea of toppling God, or at least come close to it, in his portion of "The Challenge from Beyond." Of course, gods (with a small "g") like Atali's brothers, various Lovecraftian monsters worshipped in isolated citadels, and Khosatrel Khel ("he stalked through the world like a god [...] and the city of Dagon [...] worshipped him") lie spread like litter across the paths of Conan, Esau Cairn, and Niord. In a related note, I spoke of the Alpha Male concept and how the Adler discussion was very close to the idea that all males are born instinctively desiring to be Alpha. I suggested that the source of Conan's appeal was that we were seeing through the eyes of the ultimate Alpha Male, living vicariously the royal life we've felt our birthright since infancy—and make no mistake, even though Conan is

only king in the later stories, in all stories he is the dominant character, powerful and aggressive.

The other day in the bookstore, I saw a new coffee-table book on *The Art of Sin City*. I poked through it, and read the R.C. Harvey introduction. Miller had told him how *Ronin* had been an artistic turning point, and for some reason, I decided to go home and re-read *Ronin*. I'm not going to go into the plot too much, but the lead character, Billy Challas, is a freak. Born without limbs, he also possesses a "mind over matter" telekinetic power. Until he brings this power out, he is an exaggerated infant—limbless, helpless, dependent. He is repressing the bulk of this power because of an incident where he turned a neighbor kid who was tormenting him into a nasty spot on the wall, at which point his mother went postal and institutionalized him. But now, this cybernetic computer at the industrial complex he somehow ended up in is trying to unlock Billy's telekinesis—through some kind of mental link, thecomputer-hive mind known as Virgo has him locked into a fantasy world where he has arms, legsand power—a masterless samurai, or Ronin, facing a demonic enemy and his minions. This fantasy somehow extends to envelope the people around him. And it is a violent fantasy, with the Ronin bearing a very sharp sword that, well...here's how Dr. McKenna and his shrink work it out:

Dr. M: The power still exists [despite being repressed]... and Billy -- he'd be unhappy. Armless and legless -- he'd have to be unhappy. So what would he do?

Psych: Who knows? He's not my patient. There's no way I can talk about somebody I've never met. Still... he'd probably have a rich fantasy life...

Dr. M: Yes. Yes. And these fantasies -- where would they come from?

Psych: Wherever. Fairy tales. TV. Movies. Like that.

Dr. M: And they might be violent?

Psych: Could be. Especially if he was angry.

Dr. M: Angry? He'd be raging! What else? He'd hate everybody! Everybody with all their arms and legs... he'd want to take their arms and legs and [...] and he'd want to chop [...].

> It's like some sick joke! (laughs, a bit hysterically)

In the end, the multi-layered *Ronin* plot is, like Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream*, a kind of satiric, psychological criticism of the sword and sorcery genre. But instead of the sexual overtones of the latter, *Ronin* is using the Adlerian themes of infantile helplessness transformed into rage. Remember this: helplessness means rage. Envy. Powerlessness can then easily turn to hate. Examples of Howard characters using a sword to dismember, behead, and otherwise carve up people are rampant in his works. In my earlier essay "Superman with Teeth" (*Beltric Writes* 41) I said "when you get Conan mad and give him a sword or axe, what happens to his enemies? Meat. And Howard gleefully paints each butchering stroke, to leave no doubt." Conan was, according to Fritz Leiber, the character into whom Howard "was best able to inject his furious dreams of danger and power and unending adventure [...]." Furious. Gleeful. And this takes us back to Rusty Burke's "Bob Howard and the Bullies." Despite disproving the previous "biographer's" fanciful picture of a frail, perpetually terrified young Howard, Rusty leaves us with no reason to doubt the fundamental story we get from Doc Howard, Tevis Clyde Smith, and Novalyne. Howard was, for a time, made miserable by a few bullies who were larger than him, and more numerous. And this had a profound effect on him. ("unforgettable hatred", "today crush his damned head the way I would a cantaloupe"), left its mark on Bob until the end, and was responsible for much of his bitterness. Of course Howard didn't speak of this period much, or write of it to correspondents. It was a time of shame for him. Most hateful of all, I would think, was the fact that he was helpless. Like a baby, in the grip of the stronger, bigger kids. He entered into building his body up because of it.

In BW 54, I printed some comments from another guy who built himself up, like Howard, devising his own low-budget body development plan:

> "It came from deep-rooted insecurity. You kind of create a muscular shell to protect that soft inside. You try to build yourself into the image that you think people will respect, and it tends to get a little extreme. It's like playing God, rebuilding your body in your own image." -- Sylvester Stallone.

Playing God—the opposite of helplessness. Insecurity, protecting the softness inside, seeking respect (or at least to be left alone)—and

getting a little extreme. These all seem to describe Howard very well. Conan, the mighty swordsman and most successful projection of furious dreams of power, is someone we seldom think of as helpless—yet hung on a cross, dead vulture at his feet; this is how Olgerd Vladislav finds him in "A Witch Shall Be Born." We are told that Conan looks with revulsion on Khauran, the city that had betrayed him, and left him here "like a hare nailed to a tree". Once his hands are freed, Conan is quick to demonstrate he is no longer helpless—he pushes his helper Djebel away, grabs the pincers with his swollen hands and pulls the nails from his feet himself. A stunningly improbably feat of toughness, but imperative to Conan's way of being—and he knows the desert men are judging him to see if he's fit to live, so it is not just pride or self-image, but survival, that drives the act. Once he has usurped the Zaparovan's leadership within the horde, Conan has to deal with Olgerd. Practicality would suggest he be killed—yet he did save the Cimmerian's life (however rudely and unkindly), so Conan would violate his code, I think, by killing him. Yet Olgerd has done a sinful thing in that he witnessed Conan in his helpless state, so before banishing him, Conan renders Olgerd helpless by breaking his sword-arm. Like the *Ronin* character, who avenges his limbless helplessness by rendering his enemies limbless, Conan erases his former helplessness by inflicting it on Olgerd. And with Constantius, the true author of it—well, what else is there to do but nail him up on a cross of his own?

Finally, one can surmise that hating helplessness, watching his mother struggle and fade in her lengthy, debilitating illness, Howard's desire to go out "quickly and suddenly, in the full tide of my strength and health" is his final trumping of the possibility of his ever being helpless again, and should be considered a factor in his plans to suicide.

Sincerely, Steve Trout

To the Editor,

I was overjoyed to hear that S. T. Joshi would be writing a review of *The Barbaric Triumph,* a critical anthology on Howard's life and work, and that it would appear in *The Dark Man.* Needless to say, Joshi's measurable achievements in the fields of literary criticism and philosophy far outweigh my own. He has no less than three books on philosophy currently in print (all surrounding atheism), and he has earned a reputation as the foremost H. P. Lovecraft scholar in the world. With such credentials, imagine how pleased I was that Joshi was to offer up his comments on my essay "The Shadow of a Soul on Fire: Robert E. Howard and Irrationalism." Regrettably, his remarks

were ultimately disappointing due to what appear to be unfortunate gaps or blind spots in the study Joshi has made of irrationalism.

In his review, Joshi concludes that this writer's "grasp of the history and conceptions of philosophy are not sufficiently adept to write a proper article on the subject." As support for this claim, he declares that this writer seems unaware of the historical role that empiricism played in subverting rationalism. Obviously Joshi overlooked the paragraph on Immanuel Kant and *empiricism* at the bottom of page thirty-nine of *The Barbaric Triumph* which should have clearly indicated that this writer *was* aware of the antagonistic relationship between empiricism and rationalism, as well as its importance. Although one might consider empiricism's contradiction of rationalism to be "irrationalistic" in nature, the major thrust of empiricism originated prior to the 19th-century and therefore is not considered part of irrationalism or the greater Romantic movement.

Joshi goes on to commit a greater error when he argues that "the true counterpoise to rationalism is not 'irrationalism' but empiricism." The subject of my essay is *irrationalism* and Robert E. Howard, not rationalism. That Joshi feels empiricism is the best notion to contrast with rationalism completely misses the fact that the essay's topic is not rationalism. If he had suggested a better choice to contrast against irrationalism, he might have had a point or at least been on topic. As it stands, however, Joshi's criticism is… dare I say it… irrational.

What I found most puzzling (and most revealing), however, was Joshi's statement that "there really is no coherent school or even philosophical method called irrationalism." It appears that Joshi does not believe that irrationalism is a notion whose existence is generally acknowledged by academia. The earnest discussions of the philosophical school of irrationalism in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (2003 – under the entries for both "Irrationalism" and "Philosophy, History of"), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995), *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society* by Marvin Perry (6th ed., 2000), "Irrationalism in the History of Philosophy" found in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas* edited by Philip P. Wiener (Vol. 2, 1973), and numerous other standard, generally accepted reference sources should suffice to contradict any such statement. If not, more detailed information on irrationalism can be obtained from *Classic, Romantic, and Modern* by Jacques Barzun (1975), a text I highly recommend; "The Metaphysics of the Irrational," *A History of Philosophy* by Wilhelm Windelband (vol. 2, 1958); *Philosophical Trends in the Contemporary World* by Michele Federico Scaicca (1964); *A History of Philosophy* by Wallace I. Matson (1968); *Philosophy and the Modern World* by Albert William Levi (1959); *Modern European Thought* by Franklin L. Baumer

(1977); *The Religious Revolt Against Reason* by L. Harold DeWolf (1949); *Irrationalism: Lukácas and the Marxist View of Reason* by Tom Rockmore (1992), and *Irrational Man* by William Barrett (1962). Perhaps it would be helpful to point out that "irrationalism" is sometimes dealt with in varying degrees of thoroughness, detail and quality under different names in some philosophical histories… "Romanticism" or "19th Century Thought."

Irrationalism, as I used it, is "a 19th- and early 20th-century philosophical trend that claimed to enrich man's apprehension of life by expanding it beyond the rational to its fuller dimensions" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica,* 2003), and is not a philosophy in and of itself. A trend is a general or prevailing direction in which something tends to move (*The American Heritage Dictionary,* 1992), in this case the predominant direction of philosophical thought during the age of Romanticism. The difference between a trend of thought and a philosophical doctrine is the difference between a common characteristic shared among many philosophies and a philosophy. Perhaps this is what Joshi meant? But if so, it merely indicates that Joshi entirely misunderstood the point and scope of the essay. The purpose was not to establish that Howard adhered to or lived according to a specific philosophical doctrine (I think Joshi referred to this as a "coherent or well-rounded philosophy"), but rather to identify the more general *trend* and temper of Robert E. Howard's philosophical thinking.

The non-rationalistic (or Romantic) character of irrationalism identifies the essence of how Howard thought about art, life, and the world—not necessarily in specific terms, but more generally by identifying Howard's attitude and disposition toward (and away from) fundamental philosophic ideas. In my opinion the insight that Howard's trend of thought shares much in common with a trend of thought characteristic to the era directly preceding his own represents a fairly significant leap in Howard studies, and is a first step toward the goal of grasping the whole of Howard's philosophy in both his life and work. Although it is possible that Mr. Joshi and I will never reach agreement on this point, perhaps we can both agree that the mere fact that we are debating Howard's philosophical underpinnings in the pages of a Howard journal marks a significant advance for Howard studies.

Sincerest regards,
Edward A. Waterman

Rusty Burke (left), Frank Coffman (center), and Charles Gramlich in the Menger Bar. Despite (or maybe due to) the collection of beer bottles at the table, one of the many evenings at the 2004 PCA meeting spent discussing Robert E. Howard, sword and sorcery fiction, and other *Weird Tales* writers.

Reviews

Conan: The Legend Returns: An Overview of the First Story Arc of the Dark Horse Conan Comic Series

Conan. Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics.

Review by Terry Allen

It was with mixed feelings of surprise, excitement and trepidation that I heard, around 2 1/2 years ago, that Conan would be returning to do battle in the comic book version of Howard's Hyborian Age. Surprise, that Dark House Comics, who had dabbled with a handful of Howard titles, unsuccessfully, in the mid 90's, had decided to pick up the license given up by Marvel Comics. Excitement that even after Joe Quesada, Marvel's editor-in-chief, had seemingly consigned our battling Cimmerian into comic book limbo that Dark Horse had decided to rise to the challenge of restoring respect to the character. Trepidation that after a successful career of around 25 years Marvel had sadly let the character degenerate in a number of poor quality series hardly befitting the Conan name, and if Marvel couldn't breathe new life into Conan would anyone else be able to? After all, his story had already been told, from birth to setting sail to the New World— what else was there to tell?

Dark Horse took time building their team. Writer's names started to be banded around the news boards, usually those associated with the Marvel version. Roy Thomas would probably have been the "easy" option. The premier Conan comic writer, supposedly at one time having written more words about Conan than all the other writers associated with the character in books or comics combined. Dixon, Lightle and Robert Weinberg, now breaking into writing comics, were also mentioned.

When Kurt Busiek's name was finally announced, it was met with surprise. Kurt, a well-respected writer within the super-hero genre on both *The Avengers* and the *JLA*, as well as his own Astro City stories, did not immediately spring to most fans minds as someone to write Conan. However, his writing has been praised for keeping faithful to established history, as exemplified in his superb re-telling of the birth of the Marvel Universe in the Marvels Limited Series.

Kurt admitted that Roy Thomas' Conan stories were his introduction to the character but he soon delved into research basing his interpretation purely on Howard's stories as mentioned in, among other places, a Newsarama interview in March 2003. Busiek said, "We're

starting over, going back to the beginning. My directive from Dark Horse is that we are taking the original Robert E. Howard stories as our foundation, and nothing else–and I'm delighted. For all that plenty of creators have done good work, in the books and in the comics, it's the Howard stuff that it all comes back to, and it's the Howard stuff that truly matters. So much as I love what Roy and Barry and John and Gil did, we're not going to be incorporating the Marvel stuff (though I hope Dark Horse reprints big TPBs of it, like they've been doing the Marvel *Star Wars*)—we're going to start out clean, following Conan's career as he first leaves Cimmeria to venture out into other lands in search of adventure and fortune. We'll adapt the Howard stories, and we'll tell our own in the gaps between, and build a new, modern Conan legend on rock-solid roots. Call it ULTIMATE CONAN, I guess—it fits, in a lot of ways." This news was well received within Howard fandom, that although he would write his own linking stories, he would not fall back on pastiches, adapting non-Conan Howard stories or the Marvel version that meant, much to the chagrin of many comic fan-boys, no Red Sonja either.

Many of the artists best known for the Marvel Conan were no longer involved in comic work or had sadly passed away. The announcement of Cary Nord as penciller, however, was possibly an even bigger shock. Cary, with limited experience, best known for a stint on Daredevil, wasn't even Dark Horse's first or second choice. However, his art, un-inked, but beautifully colored by Dave Stewart in the '0' prequel issue won the fans over. Some of the panels evoke more of a Frazetta feel to the art than the usual comic book style, a bold, raw and powerful depiction very much in line with the character it represents. Cary *has* come in for criticism over lack of detail in some panels, but the addition of Thomas Yates on background pencils and flashbacks has improved the overall look of the book. Completing the team on lettering is Richard Starkings with some of the narrative panels using a typewriter font—a nod to Howard's original stories.

Possibly the main disappointment with the book, on the art side, has been the lack of covers by Cary, apart from the '0' issue and a later alternative # 1. The first arc's covers by Michael Linsner have received a lukewarm reception at best. They are fairly bland and static. In addition, it would probably be best to forget the Campbell alternative cover altogether—a throwback to the Image company art of the 90's.

After introducing Conan in battle with the Vanir, and his team up with the Aesir in issue 1, it's straight into the first Howard adaptation, "The Frost-Giant's Daughter." So, how does the adaptation compare with Howard's original? Very well, in my opinion. Re-reading it for this review I was struck by how simply the story is structured. Just following Conan from start to finish in a number of

battles and chases before his rescue at the end. I imagine that makes it fairly easy to adapt, apart from having to condense it into just 21 pages. Therefore, I think final judgement will have to wait on whether the creative team can keep to this standard on a non-linear story that might necessitate making changes for the comic book version from the original texts.

What they do, they certainly do well. Nord and Stewart paint a desolate wasteland without the need to try to squeeze in too many descriptive passages as the visuals give us all we need to know. Although personally, I still prefer Smith's art in the Marvel Comics version, Nord's re-visualisation of the Frost-Giant's is awesome, certainly quite a few steps away from Frazetta's, on which Smith based his. Busiek's narration is clear and crisp and he puts just enough words in the characters mouths to help keep the story flowing along. Using mostly Howard's own words with a few tweaks along the way to slightly update and translate better to the comic book page. If the team can keep as much faith with Howard's vision in the future, as they have with this adaptation, I doubt many Howard fan will have much cause for complaint.

The story acts as a springboard for the rest of the arc. A tale of betrayal and revenge that helps the reader understand Conan's loathing for wizardry during his imprisonment by the Hyperboreans. Conan then embarks on the quest to track down his betrayers and at the end exact his vengeance as only Conan could. Cary's art also shines in the final scenes of slaughter. Whereas the Marvel Conan comic book, for all its great stories, had to conform to the Comic Book Code, the new Dark Horse version, as faithfully as possible, transplants Howard's Conan to the comic book page.

The ongoing comic continues to sell well, around 40k per month, and is hovering just outside the Top 40 each month so its future looks assured. There has already been a one shot not written by Busiek, which was, however, not as well received. While there are also a number of limited series in the works including one by fan favourite P. Craig Russell adapting Howard's "Jewels of Gwahler." Busiek is also writing a series of fill in issues illustrated by Greg Ruth, tracing Conan's birth on the battlefield up to his participation in the battle at Venarium, which are being used between the story arcs. Another fill in featuring art by *Batman: The Animated Series* creator Bruce Timm and comic book legend John Severin, is scheduled to appear soon. Oh, and for any comic book fan-boys, a new Red Sonja series has been announced from Dynamite Entertainment. Whether this will be faithful, at least to Howard's Hyborian Age, or will be just a "tits and ass" book for the boys, remains to be seen.

Should you buy the Conan comic book? If you are a Howard comics fan most certainly. If you are a Howard fan who hates the idea of any type of pastiche, well at least try the adaptation of the Frost Giants-Daughter in issue 2, you may be pleasantly surprised.

The first story arc, now collected in both hardcover and paperback, contains the introductory '0' issue. A clever re-telling of Conan's life based on *The Nemedian Chronicles.* The book also collects issues 1 – 7 of the ongoing series, actually the second part of issue 7 does not appear, as its a prequel to the next arc—this will feature in the second collection.

Whatever your thoughts may be on a comic book version of Conan, Dark Horse, and Kurt Busiek especially, deserve much praise for their attempt to breathe new life into what was a moribund character during the last few years of the Marvel licence, keeping close to the spirit and vision of Howard's character.

Adventure Tales. John Gregory Betancourt, editor; Darrell Schweitzer and Sean Wallace, Associate editors. Wildside Press. No ISSN/ISBN listed. $7.50

Review by Morgan Holmes

Wildside Press has been getting into the magazine business in partnership with DNA publications and embarking on an ambitious publishing roster with magazines as *Weird Tales,* the newly revived *Strange Tales,* and *H. P. Lovecraft's Magazine of Horror. Adventure Tales* is part of this crop of new magazines from Wildside. The idea of a magazine with the focus on adventure fiction is a good one. The audience for reading pulp magazine era reprints is out there and more than a few developed a taste for this sort of fiction by way of Robert E. Howard.

The magazine itself is 8 _" by 11" and 66 pages. The cover suitably makes use of an old pulp magazine painting, probably *Short Stories* from the big solid red circle that was present in every cover of that publication. The contents are divided into features, fiction, and verse. The editorial page is called "The Blotter" and here is the first mistake. The logo has a 1920s-30s rocket ship, a Flash Gordon looking character, scientific machinery, and a lab bench with chemistry glassware. I thought this was an adventure magazine and not science fiction? The editorial is an introduction by John Betancourt. The other features includes Mike Resnick discussing Edgar Rice Burroughs as the recorder who presents the stories of John Carter, Tarzan etc. "The Pulp

Reprints of Hugh B. Cave" by Michael Chomko is a scholarly look at book and chapbook reprints of Hugh Cave fiction. There is also an interview with Hugh B. Cave on his career in the pulp magazines. The letter column is entitled "The Morgue" with mystery/detective illustrations at the top of the page and fake, humorous letters written by Darrell Schweitzer.

Inclusion of poetry is a wise decision by *Adventure Tales*. Never thought you would see poetry by H. P. Lovecraft in an adventure magazine did you? The Lovecraft selection, "Britannia Victura," works as an appropriate poem. Three Robert E. Howard poems: "The Skull in the Clouds," "The Singer in the Mist" and "And Open Window" make their appearance, the first poem fits with the magazine, the latter two could have been in a weird fiction publication. The fantastic tinge continues with Clark Ashton Smith and George Sterling poetry. Verses by less known poets are also included.

The general fiction pulp magazine, *Short Stories*, provided more stories than any other in *Adventure Tales,* which is strange as *Short Stories* is generally considered a lesser pulp compared to *Argosy*, *Adventure*, and even *Blue Book.* The first reprint is "Skulls" by H. Bedford-Jones; it is a short little macabre story set in Assam. Another *Short Stories* reprint is "The Make-Weight" by Harold Lamb, a tale of a love-triangle in the North West Frontier in British India. The two Hugh Cave stories ("Island Feud" and "The Man Who Couldn't Die") are both taken from *Argosy* and adventure stories set in the South Seas. Both are competent and typical of adventure stories during the pulp era. "Rats Ashore" by James C. Young is an example of adventure fiction dealing with animal menace, in this case a big boa constrictor hiding in a cargo ship. The rest of the stories in *Adventure Tales* are mystery stories with (and in one case without) exotic settings. "Under the Flame Trees" by H. de Vere Stacpoole (from *Short Stories*) has a twist at the end about an escaped convict from the French penal colony of New Caledonia. Vincent Starrett's "The Evil Eye" is a straight mystery story and there is nothing really adventurous about it. The mystery stories continue with a Sherlock Holmes pastiche, "Watson!" by Captain A. E. Dingle.

Finishing *Adventure Tales*, the reader is left feeling he or she has not read an adventure magazine. A more appropriate title for this magazine would be *Exotic Mystery Stories* or *Tropical Mystery Stories*. Short macabre stories or tales of irony were frequent fillers for adventure pulps, but a whole issue of yarns of that type falls flat. Balance is needed, cutting the total number of stories in order to run a couple of longer adventure stories or novelettes would be an improvement. Conspicuously missing from this magazine was historical adventure. If *Adventure Tales* is mainly running public

domain fiction, there are plenty of good stories by Arthur D. Howden Smith, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur and Farnham Bishop, and F. R. Buckley etc. Listed in the coming next issue box are contents including Zane Gray, Robert E. Howard, Murray Leinster, and Vincent Starrett. The idea of a reprint magazine of adventure fiction is a great one but the first issue of *Adventure Tales* leaves the reader with an unfulfilled promise. The impression is confusion on just what this magazine is supposed to be. Science fiction and mystery art, weird poetry, and mystery stories all suggest disconnect between contents and title of the magazine. The Howard, Smith, and Lovecraft poetry is guaranteed to sell some copies to fans of those writers. The lack of adventure fiction has the potential to permanently drive away fans of adventure fiction. There are fans of pulp adventure fiction, they are not as conspicuous as science fiction fans, fans of *Black Mask*, and hero pulps but they are out there. The success of the Indiana Jones movies has demonstrated an appetite for adventure and *Adventure Tales* needs to realize that.

The Cimmerian. Leo Grin, Editor. Available from: *The Cimmerian*, P. O. Box 5572, Playa del Rey, CA 90296, http://www.thecimmerian.com/

Review by Charles Gramlich

A number of issues of Leo Grin's "Robert E. Howard" magazine, *The Cimmerian* (TC), are available as of this writing, but this review looks at the first four, all from Volume 1. These were published at approximately two month intervals, and four issues in eight months is certainly a respectable number. But what about the contents? Are they equally respectable? Let's have a look.

The Cimmerian runs about forty pages per issue and comes in two packages, the "Deluxe" (black covers with dark red lettering), and the "Limited" (blood-red covers with black lettering). The Deluxe are $15 each, the Limited $10. The black covers are definitely the more attractive item, although whether they're worth an extra $5 is debatable. The Deluxe has a smaller print run (75 versus 150 copies), which *will* make the issues worth more should TC become a collectible. Between the covers, both versions are printed on parchment-colored paper that combines good looks and great feel.

The Cimmerian, Number 1: Contains articles by Don Herron, Darrell Schweitzer, Gary Romeo, and Leo Grin, and poetry by Richard L. Tierney, who is also known for his fiction.

It's common for new magazines to incite controversy right out

of the gate as a way to attract readers. As the reality TV craze demonstrates, people love to see others being emotionally assaulted. The first issue of TC certainly takes this tack, and it may well work, although this reviewer found it distasteful. (But then, I don't watch reality TV either.)

The articles by Herron, the editor of two critical collections on Howard, and by Romeo engage in a thorough bashing of *Wandering Star*—the specialty Howard publisher—and its editors, Rusty Burke and, particularly, Patrice Louinet. The opening of Herron's "Conan the Expensive" has some good historical stuff in it, but it begins to read like a conspiracy theorist's rant toward the end. Romeo's "Napoleon's Triumph" also starts well, but quickly begins to emulate Herron's attack style. I felt as if I were reading another, uncredited, Herron essay. Both pieces accuse Louinet, a French scholar who did his *dissertation* on Howard, of plagiarism based upon evidence that no court or critically trained researcher would accept, and both make their arguments in such similar fashion that it looks as if they are written by the same author.

Refreshingly, Darrell Schweitzer's "The One and Authentic Cimmerian," and Leo Grin's "Hell Needs a New Devil," take less biased approaches. Schweitzer, an editor for the modern *Weird Tales* magazine, offers legitimate criticisms of *Wandering Star's* editorial slant in clear, straightforward language without stooping to name calling. Schweitzer's points can certainly be debated, and have been, but he apparently realizes that there is no need to burn an entire crop in order to eliminate a few weeds. Grin's article covers much the same ground in more impassioned form.

TC #1 also boasts an excellent "Announcements" section, a reprint of a short letter written by a man who claims to have seen Robert E. Howard on his death bed, and the poem, "The Stain of Victory," by Richard Tierney. Regarding the poem, few modern writers attempt dramatic rhyming schemes, but heroic fantasy poetry would almost seem to demand it. Tierney's piece delivers the goods.

The Cimmerian, Number 2: Articles by David Hardy and Mark Finn, reviews by Richard Lupoff and Robert Weinberg, and poetry by Darrell Schweitzer.

The title of Hardy's piece, "The Great Game," references a time when Great Britain and Russia strove against each other for ascendancy in Central Asia, particularly in Afghanistan. Robert Howard wrote a number of stories set within the milieu of the Great Game. Most featured the character Francis Xavier Gordon. Hardy looks at the "realism" in Howard's Gordon stories, and makes an interesting connection between Gordon's exploits and those of real-life adventurer Alexander Gardner.

Finn's offering is "The Runyonesque Raconteur," in which he compares and contrasts the humorous stories of Damon Runyon and Robert Howard. I'm not familiar with Runyon's work so I can't speak to the success of the article. It *is* well written.

Both Lupoff and Weinberg review *The Barbaric Triumph*, a recent collection of essays on Howard edited by Don Herron. Lupoff, a professional writer for nearly forty years with several important critical works to his name, gives us a piece called "Dog in the Manger," which is far more than a review and contains trenchant comments on Howard and *Weird Tales*, as well as asides on H. P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith. It is the best offering in the issue. "Small Poets Sing," Weinberg's piece, is actually two reviews printed back to back. Although the author makes some interesting points, the first review is generally positive while the second is almost wholly negative. The contradictions make the twin reviews of little use to readers looking for guidelines.

Schweitzer's poem is called "Near the End of the Epic." It has a much more modern tone than did Tierney's piece in issue #1. Although I like the poem's point, that the truly great ones in a battle are often the unsung heroes, the tone doesn't work for me. Phrases like "regular guys" and "also-rans" tend to throw me out of the Heroic Fantasy mood.

There is, again, a fine "Announcements" section, and an added touch are two short excerpts from Richard Tierney's journal, which he recorded on a Texas trip where he visited Howard's hometown and grave. This issue also marks the opening of TC's letters column, "The Lion's Den."

The Cimmerian, Number 3: A Cross Plains report by Leo Grin, and essays from Robert Weinberg and Don Herron. Frank Coffman provides a poem.

The first article is "Cross Plains Memories" by Grin, an extensive (seventeen pages) trip report of Grin's 2004 journey to Howard Days in Cross Plains. It begins with a quote from Howard showing his ambivalence about his home town. The piece then discusses the history of Howard Days, and concludes with information about 2004 attendance and the literary panels that were held. Quotes from attendees are strewn throughout, which is a nice touch, and the deaths of Howard Days stalwarts Billie Ruth Loving and Frank Murray are briefly mentioned. The photographs are excellent.

The concept of Howard Days "Trip Reports" seems to have originated in REHupa (the Robert E. Howard United Press Association), of which Grin is a member. REHupa is limited at any one time to thirty members, who collectively self publish a group of fanzines concerning Howard every two months. Grin's TC report is

more extensive than most REHupan offerings, and is appropriately directed to a more general readership.

The best part of TC #3 is a transcript of the keynote address by 2004's Howard Days guest of honor—Robert Weinberg. Weinberg, a freelance journalist for over thirty-five years who also served a stint as a college professor of mathematics, is perhaps best known for his extensive editorial and critical work in SF, fantasy, and horror. His keynote address, entitled "Sacred Ground," was both informative and humorous. Weinberg spoke of his introduction to Howard and of his days as a Howard collector.

A short piece by Herron, "He Was Deadly," concludes this issue's articles. This records a meeting that Herron, Grin, and Weinberg had with Robert C "Bob" Baker, who was eleven years old when Robert Howard shot himself and who says he saw the writer as Howard lay dying. There are many interesting tidbits in the piece, but it has an unfinished feel. Herron closes by suggesting that someone else do a more extensive interview with Baker.

This issue also includes a short "Announcements" section, and the letters column, which features contributions from Darrel Schweitzer, Gary Romeo, James Reasoner, Frank Coffman, and Charles Hoffman. The letters may turn out to be the highlight of many TC issues since they evince a rough and tumble argumentative style without the name calling that takes place too often in less controlled venues.

Frank Coffman, who teaches English at Rock Valley College and has been analyzing Howard's poetry (see this issue for example), has a long poem in this issue called "A Spirit on the Wind, 11 June 1936." Requiem poems are difficult to pull off, especially in metered rhyme, but this one works fairly well.

The Cimmerian, Number 4: an interview with Robert Price and a reprinted essay from him. Plus, two articles by Leo Grin, and a poem from Richard Tierney.

The opening editorial by Leo Grin is called "Honoring the Past," and it deserves mention. It makes a natural, but important point, that as Howard scholarship and publication moves into the new century we need to remember the pioneers in the field.

The first article is an interview with Robert M. Price by Ben Szumskyj. Price, a Professor of Biblical Criticism at the Center for Inquiry Institute, has a PhD in theology and is the editor of *The Journal of Higher Criticism*. He has also maintained a long term interest in the works of H. P. Lovecraft and the Lovecraft circle, including Robert Howard. Price created the magazine *Crypt of Cthulhu* and has edited numerous volumes of fiction from Lovecraft and his circle, and from later writers influenced by them.

The interview published here is an expanded version of a piece that appeared originally in REHupa #166. The interview itself is very good. It doesn't shy away from tough questions, including questions about L. Sprague de Camp and the pastiches, and about Price's controversial "Introduction" in *Robert E. Howard: Selected Letters 1931-1936*.

Prices's comments on Howard's writing talents are very positive in the interview, but their power is diminished when he describes Lin Carter in much the same terms, going as far as to say that Carter could "ape Howard's headlong drive and careening action," and that he rates Carter's "writing ability quite highly."

A negative of the piece is Price's repetition of an old gem about how creative types are generally "crazy." People seem to want to believe this, but psychological research shows clearly that it isn't true. Another problem is Price's unabashed statement that: "it is too bad Howard was a racist." Such a label has been applied so frequently and widely to American writers of the early 1900s that it's meaningless unless one specifies what is meant by "racist" (i.e., racist behaviors, verbal statements, or both).

Following the interview is a reprint of Price's "The Last Temptation of Conan." This essay is fun, but definitely "over the top" at times. It compares the movie *The Whole Wide World* to the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*, with Howard as the Christ figure and Novalyne Price Ellis (Howard's only major girlfriend) as Howard's Mary Magdalene. Ideas and comparisons fly fast and furious, and many are stretches indeed. But it is interesting.

Except for "The Lion's Den"—with letters from Glenn Lord, Don Herron, Jack Jones, Era Lee Hanke, Bob Baker and Darrell Schweitzer—a very nice requiem for Joe Howser (another Project Pride stalwart), and a fine poem by Richard Tierney, the rest of this issue features pieces by the editor himself. The first is called "Heart's Blood," an impassioned piece with an elegiac tone. There isn't much new information here, but it is nicely written.

The second piece by Grin is "The Ghosts of Fort McKavett." This is the most detailed (to date) examination of Howard's interest in this historic Texas fort, the ruins of which Howard visited, and photographed, in 1933. This is the kind of article Grin used to run in REHupa.

Conclusions

It appears that Leo Grin (with some editorial assistance from Don Herron) wants *The Cimmerian* to be considered a prozine, or at least a semi-prozine. It *is* a paying market. The physical qualities of the product are certainly at the appropriate level already, although the

cost per issue is substantially more than the typical prozine. The contents lag somewhat behind the physical production values, but they are certainly of interest to a general readership who already has some knowledge of Robert E. Howard. The first issue started with an unfortunate, and certainly non-professional tone, but the next three issues were a redemption of sorts.

For those who know about REHupa, of which I am also a member, TC offers familiar fare, although the package is prettier and the contributions are drawn from a somewhat broader community. TC is, of course, free for purchase to anyone with the bucks to buy it.

In closing, this is Grin's first attempt at producing a magazine. Although not everything works perfectly, he is to be commended for his efforts and his attention to detail.

Robert E. Howard, *Boxing Stories*. Ed. Chris Gruber. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2005. xvi+313 pp. ISBN: 0-8032-7352-5. Price: $14.95.

Review by Jeffrey Kahan

University of Nebraska's edition of *Boxing Stories* will be useful to a coming generation of Howard scholars. Many of the stories have been long out of print, and one story, "Iron Mike," is here reconstituted in full, some 10,000 words longer than the version printed by *Fight Stories* in 1930. There are no notes to speak of, no attempts to connect these stories to Howard's westerns or Hyborian tales—regrettable since this is from a university press.

The introduction is short and animated. It's obvious that the editor Chris Gruber enjoys these works, but too often we digress into meaningless sidebars. Do we really care that our editor likes to box, or that he named his dog "Kull"? Aside from the aforementioned useful bibliographical information, Gruber's only real insight is that the boxing tales seem to piece out a world as detailed as Conan's. But what motivates the fighters in this world, why is there so much violence, and what of any purpose does it serve? What, if anything, do these tales tell us about Howard himself? These queries remain unasked and unexplored. However, the stories themselves yield suggestive clues.

In every culture, men are expected to prove their kinship to the tribe, but the ways in which men are expected to do so vary from one culture to another. What remains constant across these differences, however, is the fact that masculinity must be achieved. It is not a natural given. Hence, each culture has a ritual/test to mark manhood.

For many males in our society, it's drinking a beer, driving a car, sleeping with a woman. Other aspects of our society suggest a more martial approach. Hence, the need for a fraternity such as the army or navy to "Make a man of you."

By inference, we can also say that Steve Costigan, the hero of most of Howard's boxing yarns, was not always a man, but had been *made* one. Boxing, however, does not make Steve. Boxing is merely the manifestation of mental "maleness" that has been inculcated being with other men aboard the *Sea Girl*, a name itself which suggests that the ship is part of an all-male rebirthing process, a rite of passage not simply from port to port but through the social processes of life whereby sailors are pounded into men by other men, their flesh reworked into a masculinized ideal—hard as rock, tough as nails, iron jawed. Thus, in "Iron Man" Mike Breenan remolds Van Heeren punch by punch:

> At the end of the first round, Van Heeren's face was a gory wreck. At the end of the second, his features had lost all human semblance, and his body was a battered mass of bruised and reddened flesh. … Van Heeren lurched up, a hideous and inhuman sight, and tried to fight back, but the sting had gone from his weakening punches. A blood-and sweat-soaked glove crashed against his jaw and he dropped face down on the red-stained canvas and lay motionless, four ribs broken and his features permanently ruined. (214-5)

That being said, Howard's man-made heroes are, in instances, surprisingly engaged in assessments not only of other men's bodies, but even their aesthetic beauty. "In the Bull Dog Breed" our hero, Steve Costigan, meets the exotic Francois, a well-dressed Frenchman, who does not walk so much as prances. Steve guffaws as this girlie-man in his fancy pants and silk shorts, wants to step into the ring with him. He expects no challenge in this test of "manly art" (23). But then Steve has a good look at his opponent: "When Francois threw off his silk embroidered bathrobe I saw I was in for a rough session…. He was one of these fellows that *look* like a fighting man, even if they've never seen a glove before" (24).

After Francois disrobes, Steve looks him over which language charged with sensuous nuance:

> …a limber steel body tapered to a girlish slender waist. His legs was slim, strong and shapely, perfectly modeled….
>
> And the face—his sleek black hair was combed straight back and lay smooth on his head, adding to his sinister good looks. From under narrow black brows them eyes burned at me, and now they wasn't a duelist's eyes—they was tiger eyes. And when he gripped the ropes and dipped a couple of times, flexing his muscles, them muscles rippled under his satiny skin most beautiful…. (24-5)

Even when Francois is disrobed, Steve notes his girlish waist and the beauty of his body. Likewise, in "The Champion of the Forecastle"—in which Sven fights Olaf for the love of Segrida—Steve, who has trained Sven, looks at Olaf and suggests that he'd love to be in Segrida's shoes:

> There was a man for you! He was fully as tall as Sven, though not as heavy. Tall, lithe, and powerful he was, like a big, blond tiger. He was so hand-some I couldst easily see why Segrida hesitated between him and Sven-- or rather I couldn't see why she hesitated at all! (38)

In short, these stories in part explore what does it mean to "*look* like" and *at* a man. Clearly, boxing allows men to do one thing that they would not normally do, look at each other's bodies, size each other up, and define their own masculinity in relation to others. After his fight with Francois, Steve can no longer be sure that all men dress like men.

This separation of gender from gender appropriate dress is also explored in "Cultured Cauliflowers," wherein Steve is dressed in a suit and tux for a trip to the Athenaeum, and remarks that "I look like any pansy couldst slap me on the wrist and break my neck" (120). At the end of the story, he's happy to leave "Those snooty sissies of the Athenian" (129). If clothes no longer suggest appropriate societal definitions, Steve's own regard for Francois suggests that we're entering into yet another stage of gay theory, one in which what you look like has nothing to do with how you feel. Indeed, if we require an acknowledged identity or engagement in a gay lifestyle before accepting that "real" homosexuality is present, then we can say that Steve's affirming inspection of Francois is borderline gay.

But to create these kinds of tests suggests that we can monitor "gayness." In fact, that is just what these characters do. These boxers

are hyper-aware of the possible feminization of the fighter, otherwise known as "the looser." After all, if you can gain masculinity, it likewise follows that all of these fighters, having become men, might loose his masculinity. In "They Always Come Back" we meet Jack Maloney, who lost his heart in the ring with Iron Mike Brennon. Giving up boxing, Jack becomes soft, out of shape, weak, effete. Thus the need for constant fighting: Steve, or any of these fighters can never become the sea girl of the *Sea Girl*.

The complexity of male friendships in these tales is also significant. Men can only have relationships with one girl, but many men. And these male relationships vary in nature: father/son, as in "Hard-Fisted Sentiment," wherein Steve fights on behalf of the "Old Man"; older brother/younger rival, as in "The Champion of the Forecastle," or a war among equals, as in fights involving Bats or Snoots or Slade. As for women in these stories, they are uniformly young and attractive. There are no mothers or sisters, no female friends. In terms of personality, they are duplicitous (Kate) or inconstant (Segridga, Rachel, Joan) or both (Katherine Flynn). A seeming exception would be the sweet Miss Joan in "Texas Fists," but when Steve and Snoots stop fighting each other long enough to defeat the evil Lopez, she kisses them both, innocuous in itself but a sign that even Miss Joan cannot be constant to any one man. No wonder men in Howard's stories prefer each other's steady, if violent attentions. As Steve explains to Snoots, "I gets more enjoyment outa fightin' you than anybody" (81); likewise D'Arcy ("The Fightin'est Pair") tells Steve that he's a "square shooter" (96)—so unlike the women they encounter. Thus, men in these stories have nowhere to turn for comfort but to other men. Thus, when Kate of "Waterfront Law," cheats Steve out of his purse, Steve takes solace in drinking beer in company of men (62); when Rachel rejects both Steve and Bat in "The Pit and the Serpent" they take solace in the notion of "brotherly affection and square dealin'" and resolve that "no woman ever come between us again (18).

To some extent, all this dances around a question many readers may have asked. Why did Howard write so many stories about boys who need to be turned into men? Does this suggest, as some have argued, that Howard's relationship with his mother was so intense that it stifled his normal bonding with his father, which in turn was compensated by pounding the keys of his typewriter? Certainly, Howard is troubled by the gender specific roles of his characters and the craft whereby he creates them. In "A New Game for Costigan," Steve is hired to make a man out of Horace, who has been turned by too much schooling into an "effeminate sap" (131). Horace's father urges Steve to "Make him forget such junk as books and music. Make a man out of him like his father was at his age." If Horace really is an

effeminate sap because he writes books, books must be feminine and so too their authors. If so, there is a sense of defeat in these works. For if books make you a "pansy," then reading Howard's masculine stories undoes the lessons of manhood they supposedly instruct.

Lord, Glenn. *Glenn Lord's Ultima Thule*. Ed. Joseph W. Marek. Omaha, NE: self published, 2000. 52 pp.

Review by Benjamin Szumskyj

Of those collectors who have been lucky enough to purchase copies of the *Hyperborean League*, most have commented that Glenn Lord's contribution entitled "Ultima Thule" was one of the most impressive of contributions from this now defunct amateur press association. Now don't get me wrong—the *Hyperborean League* had some great contributors ranging from the entertaining and informative, to the interesting and unique. Some of the essays that appeared in the a.p.a. have been reprinted since in magazines and books (e.g. Don Herron's excellent essay "Conan vs Conantics"). I was lucky enough to obtain several early mailings of the *Hyperborean League* a while ago and it was most enjoyable to read "Ultima Thule" alongside fanzines by essayists whom we are familiar with today, such as Connors, Herron, Indick, and Mosig. Yet when push comes to shove and for the true Robert E. Howard fan, Lord's contribution is by far the best.

Move to the present day and we have Joseph W. Marek, editor of *The New Howard Reader, The Robert E. Howard Companion*, and member of the review board for *The Dark Man: The Journal of Robert E. Howard Studies*. In 2000, Marek came up with the idea of collecting all of Glenn Lord's contributions to the *Hyperborean League* since they contained primary source material that has not been reprinted, save a few of the letters in the rare collection *A Bicentennial Tribute to Robert E. Howard*.

The first issue of "Ultima Thule" deals with a correspondence between Robert E. Howard and H. G. Schonfield (of *Denis-Archer Publisher*), where Howard proposes a collection of his most favorite stories. Even though his initial request is declined, there are still hopes as the publisher states they would be interested in a novel length story. Howard submits his Conan masterpiece, *The Hour of the Dragon* but to no avail. A last minute change of internal business workings derailed the project from ever becoming what could have been the first original and most desired of Howard volumes in to the collector of Howard

firsts. Whether it was the editor or the financial climate of the 1930's, another one of Howard's dreams had been crushed.

The second issue focuses on some of the rejection slips Howard received in his lifetime. All are equally interesting, especially the comments regarding some of the stories and why the editors deemed them unfit for publication. For example, "The People of the Dark", a noteworthy yarn, contained "too much fighting and chasing and manoeuvring", while "Gunman's Debt" was presumably "overworded" and had too much "coincidental material". The response from Editor John F. Bryne to Howard's "The Peaceful Pilgrim" alone is worth finding out for one's self – it would seem that Howard's characters already had a pastiche appeal.

The third issue contains what may be, one of the most pivotal events that *could have* occurred in Howard's legacy. Oscar J. Friend and Dr. P.M. Kuykendall were the two men dealing with what could have been one of the most incredible transactions in the genre of fantasy; the purchase of all Howard's works of prose and poetry for $3000! As for what it would have done to the course of Howard publishing, fans can only hazard a guess.

Issue four has an extremely interesting list of how much Howard was paid for his stories. From $1 for the poem "An Open Window" to $200 for the boxing yarn, "The Iron Man." Priceless information for the Howard scholar.

Issue five has some more rejection letters, once again, commenting on the reasons why they were not accepted for publication. "The Devils of Dark Lake" was "crammed with too much horror", while "Guests of the Hoodoo Room" is considered "far-fetched [and] holding no mystery or surprise for the reader". The infamous Farnsworth Wright's letter concerning Howard's "The Lion of Tiberias" is also of high interest.

Robert E. Howard's library is most interesting, as it gives us an idea as to some of the author's literary sources, whilst conducting research and seeking inspiration for a new story. The *Addenda* to Lord's priceless and brilliant volume *The Last Celt* is just as appreciated and it would be nice to see that, if a third edition were ever to see the light of day, that these would be added to the bibliography.

This booklet is a worthy and invaluable addition to any Howard fans library, for it shows the development of an author and the business behind the art. I for one would also like to see a collection of Lord's contributions to the *Robert E. Howard United Press Association*, the *Esoteric Order of Dagon* (E*O*D) and the *Pulp Era Amateur Press Society* (P.E.A.P.S.) No doubt these would be just as enticing and insightful, and shed light on those events which occurred behind the scenes in the lives of the pulp era.

My hat goes off to Joseph W. Marek for assembling this facsimile collection. Glenn Lord is, and will continue to be, one of the chief figures in the movement of preserving Howard's legacy; furthermore, his editorial, scholarly and business related workings have paved a bright future for Howard studies.

Howard, Robert E. *Bran Mak Morn: The Last King*. New York: Del Rey/Ballantine, 2005. 400 pp. ISBN: 0-345-46154-1. $15.95.

Review by Charles Hoffman

A few years back I was interested in getting a tattoo of some sort of Celtic design to encircle my upper arm. The local tattoo parlor had a sourcebook of patterns, complete with annotations indicating which part of the Celtic world each of the patterns came from. Leafing through it, I spotted a design labeled "Pictish." "That's the one!" I told the tattoo artist.

Naturally enough, then, it gladdens my heart to see Bran Mak Morn back in print. The definitive edition of Bran from Wandering Star now joins those of Conan and Solomon Kane in an affordable, readily available trade paperback from Del Rey. In keeping with Wandering Star's standards, *Bran Mak Morn: The Last King* is jam-packed with extras—related fiction, early drafts, informative essays, and biographical material. So comprehensive is this collection of peripheral material that the primary fiction comprises only half the book.

Kicking off the primary fiction section is "Men of the Shadows," the earliest complete extant tale of Bran Mak Morn. Howard himself felt that it was "rightly rejected" by *Weird Tales* in early 1926, and elements of the story are indeed amateurish. However, as Rusty Burke so astutely points out in his introduction, in "Men of the Shadows" we find "our earliest example of what will become a Howard trademark: the idea of a vastly ancient, cyclic history of mankind, in which whole peoples undertake long migrations, surviving world-shattering cataclysms that destroy their hard-won cultures and hurl them back into savagery, whence they slowly, steadily make the upward climb until the next cataclysm." Rereading the story proved to be a more enjoyable experience viewed in the light of this insight.

Next up is "Kings of the Night." As a lad, I thrilled to this "team-up" of Bran Mak Morn and King Kull. After taking a four-year hiatus from Bran, Howard returned in early 1930 with a solid, well-wrought adventure featuring a touch of eerie mysticism. Here we also find a large-scale epic battle sequence of the sort that would play so

large a part in the Crusader tales REH would soon be writing for *Oriental Stories.* This time around, "Kings of the Night" seemed like a bittersweet farewell to Kull as he vanished into the sunset to make room for the various Cormacs of Howard's histories.

However, the most significant thing about any Bran Mak Morn collection is that it is where "Worms of the Earth" is to be found. "Worms of the Earth" is arguably Robert E. Howard's finest story and, I dare say, as good as any story written. It would not be out of place in an anthology of the world's greatest short fiction, alongside "To Build a Fire" and "The Fall of the House of Usher." "Worms of the Earth" can be read as both a timely allegory about the evils of terrorism, or as a timeless tale of ends used to justify the means. Moreover, given its tragic hero, haughty antagonist, oracle-like wizard, grotesque witch and demonic troglodytes, one can with little effort imagine this tale unfolding on the Greek or Elizabethan stage. It just happened to appear in a pulp magazine called *Weird Tales.*

Immediately following "Worms of the Earth" is "The Dark Man." Here is another story that merits a place in any "top ten" list of Howard's prose. It is a dark, moody tale of human passions—hate, lust, aggression and vengeance, but also love, loyalty and self-sacrifice. Piety and religious devotion, of both the Christian priest and the Picts who worship the spirit of Bran Mak Morn, are portrayed as well. The actual protagonist of "The Dark Man," the feared Gaelic warrior Turlogh O'Brien, is like Bran in the sense that he appears in only a handful of tales, yet makes a strong lasting impression. Presented back-to-back, "Worms of the Earth" and "The Dark Man" pack a powerful one-two punch with the potential to transform a Conan reader into a Howard reader.

It is also worth noting that the version of "The Dark Man" that appears in this edition is the complete version, as originally published in *Weird Tales* in December 1931. "The Dark Man" was reprinted in a slightly abridged version in the very last issue of *Weird Tales,* September 1954. It was this abridgement that came to be subsequently collected, more often than not, for book publication—even in such notable editions as the Dell paperback *Bran Mak Morn* and Donald M. Grant's *Worms of the Earth.* Until now, only the Arkham House collection *The Dark Man and Others,* and its paperback reprint from Lancer, have presented the unabridged version in book form.

Howard's first published story of the Picts, "The Lost Race," and a brief poem complete the primary section of *Bran Mak Morn: The Last King.* Rounding out the book is a potpourri of related writings by Howard and several informative appendices. Featured in the Miscellanea section of REH material are poems, stories and fragments, including an aborted play about Bran Mak Morn and an early draft of

"Worms of the Earth." It remains to be seen how new readers will respond to so much peripheral material in a mass market trade paperback. They may feel cheated by what they regard as too much padding or filler. Then again, the Miscellanea and Appendices could be seen as DVD-style "extras." Who knows? Howard publishing could start a new trend in the print medium.

To me, one of the highlights of the second section is "The Children of the Night," a story of reincarnation with the framing narrative set in modern times. Though not a masterpiece, it is a pretty good story and a personal favorite. I've always wanted a huge study full of rare occult books and curious artifacts, like the one in which the story's scholars gather. I'm also rather fond of the other stories in which Conrad and Kirowan appear, and have fun imagining them portrayed by Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. Bran Mak Morn, the Picts, the Dark Man, the little people, Von Junzt and *Nameless Cults*, as well as Lovecraft's Cthulhu and *Necronomicon,* are all mentioned in the course of the story, making "The Children of the Night" a rousing good read. As a much-appreciated bonus for this edition, Gary Gianni has provided a very nice full-page illustration of Conrad, Kirowan and their colleagues.

Each of the stories in *Bran Mak Morn: The Last King* makes its own singular impression, but read back to back they can also be viewed as fragments of a loosely connected saga, a dizzying journey through vast gulfs of time. "Men of the Shadows" is a history of the Picts spiraling back into the mists of remotest antiquity. Everything about the story smacks of the primitive, from the raw writing of a youthful REH at the dawn of his career, to the way in which half the story is told in the form of poems, chants and a rambling narrative from the lips of a tribal shaman. In "Kings of the Night," the legendary king of a time-lost mythical empire, contemporary with Atlantis, aids Bran Mak Morn in forging a new kingdom in a recognizable historical era. "Worms of the Earth" is the woeful tragedy of that kingdom, haunted by the demons of its past. It is followed by yet another tragedy, "The Dark Man," set eight centuries later, just a mere millennium ago. By this time, Bran himself has passed into the realm of myth.

Surprisingly, "The Children of the Night" forms a fitting epilogue to the saga. Six modern men, each "a Briton or an American of British descent" representing "various strains of English and Celtic blood," gather in a library belonging to one. Educated, well read and artistic, they debate matters of race, heredity and anthropology in a dry, academic manner, possibly over brandy and cigars. The once-vigorous Anglo-American civilization seems to have dead-ended in the stultifying atmosphere of a musty study crowded with obscure tomes and curious bric-a-brac. Not only Bran Mak Morn, but even the Dark

Man statue itself, have long-since passed into legend. Mention of them can now be found only in the yellowing pages of crumbling, dusty books. They are of interest solely to a man such as Conrad, who "pursues the obscure and the mystic as some men pursue romance."

To these scholars, humanity's past seems as dry and dead as old Xaltotun's mummy. Of course, appearances can be deceiving. An accidental blow to the head causes the story's narrator, O'Donnel, to relive the death of a previous incarnation at the hands of the loathsome Children of the Night many centuries earlier in ancient Britain. When O'Donnel returns to his present-day persona, he is a changed man. Race, tribe and heredity are no longer esoteric subjects to be bandied about in academic discussion; they are vital, immediate matters to kill and die for. The past can slumber unheeded –like the dormant taint in the bloodline of O'Donnel's nemesis Ketrick— then suddenly erupt volcano-like into the present.

Howard reminds us that the past is never dead. In some meaningful sense, the past is never even really past.

Robert E. Howard, *The Bloody Crown of Conan*, eds. Rusty Burke and Patrice Louinet, illustrations by Gary Gianni. xiv+366 pp. New York: Del Rey/Ballantine, 2004. ISBN: 0345461525. Price: $15.95.

Review by Jeffrey Kahan

In *TDM* #8, S.T. Joshi argued that Howard's popularity should be a non-factor in our study of the writer:

> But by these arguments, Erle Stanley Gardner and Agatha Christie would be the leading authors in world literature—or have they been eclipsed by Stephen King, Danielle Steel, or John Grisham? And the collectability of a book, as is well known, has almost no bearing on its literary quality: entirely other criteria are used.

In my reply (this issue), I argued that Howard's pop status should be a cornerstone of our criticism. The attendant dangers of this approach, however, are well illustrated in Del Rey's recent edition of *The Bloody Crown of Conan*. Rather than promoting the editorial work of Rusty Burke and Patrice Louinet, Del Rey prefers to promote the drawings of Gary Gianni, who hopes that, in looking at his Conan drawings, his audience will experience the same "thrill" when, as a

boy, he watched a muscular man destroy a ramshackle home. The prose screams for a gay-theory critique: a man with "broad shoulders" wielding a large and obviously phallic sledgehammer destroys a traditional symbol of female power. Gianni was and remains utterly seduced by the virile exhibition: "the thrill came rushing over me," "How could I resist?"

Gianni's adolescent homoerotics and his association with Conan are not utterly unsurprising. After all, Gianni is a visual artist, and Conan is known to many through the Schwarzenegger film (Dir. John Milius, Universal Studios, 1982)—"a gay cult favorite," according to Rachel Konrad of Associated Press.[8] I'm not about to argue whether sexual identity can be molded or not by watching sweaty men, simply that Gianni suggests Conan can play a role in adolescent fantasies of power.[9] All well and good. For an edition aimed at young readers, this is perhaps a shrewd tactic, but I wonder if this is the best way to present what is otherwise a fairly complex academic edition?

Problems of another sort plague Rusty Burke's Introduction, which is cramped with detail, but has no footnotes. The essay does a good job in setting out some of the tensions in Howard's writing, particularly his attempt to write history "in the guise of fiction" (XIII), a paradigm which suggests that Howard used storytelling as a means of exploring the changing dynamics of historical appropriation, representation, and recollection.[10] Burke also explores Howard's Puckish uses of Shakespeare, as well as contemporaries such as G.K. Chesterton (XIV). This groundwork will doubtless allow for further textual studies concerning Howard's retention of foreign and, hence, traceable materials. Howard didn't just research his stories; he wanted his more literate readers to trace his own readings, interests, and pursuits. Burke mentions in passing that scholars have tackled at least

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[8] See "EBay halts gay-themed 'Schwarzenegger Shrine' auction," Sat., Oct. 04, 2003. http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/local/6928510.htm?template=contentModules/printstory.jsp&1c. No doubt, Gianni was also influenced by Conan artists such as John Buscema, Boris Vallejo, and Frank Frazetta.

[9] Howard scholars might compare Gianni's thinking to Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Rinehart, 1954). In the seventh chapter, entitled, "I want to Be a Sex Maniac!", Wertham presents case after case in which "normal" children become "deviants" because of theirs exposures to comic book superheroes.

[10] Hayden White has argued that even stolid history adopts "a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it … as a story." See his *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 2.

aspects of this issue already, but his essay does not contain any citation for the working scholar.

I'm sure Burke understands my frustration here, and I certainly understand the constraints he worked under. I've written these sorts of introductions before, albeit for a radically different audience. Popular presses don't like long introductions, and they certainly frown upon footnotes. Apparently, they frighten readers.[11] That being said, a scrupulous copy-editor might have at least offset long quotations, as is standard in academic writing.

Other irritants plague Patrice Louinet's "Hyborian Genesis Part II." As useful and skillfully as the essay is, there is no mention of where the accompanying "Part I" was or will be published, nor whether "Part II" is or is not the final installment of the study.[12] In dealing with Louinet's essay, the copy-editor might have also italicized *Weird Tales* and *Adventure*, etc. This may seem like nit-picking, but let's remember that scholars will in time quote from this essay and having to note the lack of italics with "[*sic*]"— used to indicate that a quoted passage containing an error— undermines the scholarly validity of the edition.

There is also some historic confusion. Arguing that Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon* is constructed upon a Malory base, Louinet goes on to mix up *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which Howard may or may not have read, with a film he could not possibly have seen:

This image of the country returning to life with the riding back of the holders of the Grail irresistibly calls to mind a similar scene in John Boorman's *Excalibur* [Warner Studios, 1981]. Xaltotun's defeat is now but a matter of time. The conspirators are divided, while Conan's forces unite again. The restoration of the king and the land is now inevitable. (356)[13]

Having seen Boorman's film, I follow Louinet's association, even if it in no way tells us about what Howard was thinking when he

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[11] Why readers raised on Conan would find footnotes more frightful that glittering swords remains a mystery.

[12] Part I is in *The Coming of Conan the Cimmerian* (New York: Del Rey/ Ballantine Books, 2003), but a note saying so might help the reader, and, presumably, serve as a cross-promotion.

[13] Louinet might have also looked at some of Boorman's own comments concerning the historical nature of the film, which in many ways, corresponds to Howard's Hyborian Age. Said Boorman: "I wasn't really interested in period. This is a mythic story. I wasn't interested in specifying a period." See Lance Bailey, "John Boorman's Excalibur: An Exercise in Cinematic Vision-Keeping the Historians at Bay." http://clioseye.sfasu.edu/chronicles/excaliburchron.htm.

penned *The Hour of the Dragon*.[14] Nonetheless, the passage succinctly demonstrates that Howard's writing, and our reading of that writing, is structured by an ongoing exchange of cultures and personal experiences. Boorman has done more than rewrite Malory, from Louinet's perspective, he has also reshaped Howard.[15]

The collection groups "The People of the Black Circle" (published 1934), the aforementioned *The Hour of the Dragon* (published 1936), and "A Witch Shall be Born" (published 1934), alongside various untitled synopses, notes and early drafts. Just who selected the materials is an important point, for reasons that will soon become clear. The inclusion of notes and drafts suggests that Rusty Burke and/or Patrice Louinet is/are using the materials as a form of implicit textual and biographical critique. Louinet, for example, ask us to look at how Howard grew as a writer and how these Conan tales evolved from a particular set of short, straight-forward tales into long, complex works. However, the argument is soon after undermined by Louinet's offhand dismissal of "A Witch Shall be Born": "Reading the story, one gets the impression that Howard *was simply borrowing* from that year's production to craft the tale" (358; stress my own). Why are repetitions within various drafts of one story a sign of artist complexity, but borrowings by the same author from—and for—other tales dismissed as worn hack work? Further, Louinet limits the discussion to just Conan tales, a tidy and expeditious strategy for a short essay, but one that, nevertheless, suggests that Howard's Conan stories were intellectually and creatively unrelated to his other writings.[16]

A fuller critique of Howard's writing practices, as well as an ongoing cultural evaluation of his work, is obviously within Burke's

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[14] Rusty Burke does not list Malory among Howard's books. See "The Robert E. Howard Bookshelf." http://www.rehupa.com/bookshelf.htm. In the Introduction to *The Bloody Crown of Conan*, Burke only suggests similarities between Howard and the older Malory text (XIV). Howard surely knew of King Arthur but may have drawn on more contemporary versions, among them Tennyson, "Morte d'Arthur" (1842) and *Idylls of the King* (1859; rev. 1869, 1885), Howard Pyle, *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* (1903), *The Story of The Champions of the Round Table* (1905), *The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions* (1907), *The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur* (1910). T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* was published in 1938, too late to be of use for Howard.

[15] We might extend this thinking and argue that Louinet is lensing Boorman's film through the later John Milius *Conan* film.

[16] Rusty Burke's useful chronology suggests that the Conan stories of 1934-6 were penned at the same time Howard was writing and selling boxing, adventure, and western yarns. See "Robert E. Howard Fiction and Verse Timeline." http://www.rehupa.com/fiction_timeline.htm#1934.

and Louinet's capabilities, and I suggest that many of the above cited problems stem from publishing with a popular commercial press, which neither values nor allows space for full-blown scholarship. (The trumping of Gianni over Burke and Louinet, I think, proves the point.) We can only hope that Burke and Louinet will add further commentary and documentation and attempt, at some later date, to re-launch this collection with an academic press. With slight revamping, this edition has the potential to become a cornerstone in Howard Studies.