The Howard Collector

Spring 1968

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

R.E.H. copyright 1936 by Popular Fiction Publishing Company for *Weird Tales*, October 1936.

Heritage, from *The Junto*, August 1929.

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Spring 1968
Volume 2, Number 4
Whole Number 10

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Robert E. Howard

THE HOWARD COLLECTOR is edited and published by Glenn Lord, P. O. Box 775, Pasadena, Texas 77501. Single copy 60 cents.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The Celtic Conan, or Conaire ardri na Eireann to Gaelicize the name, alluded to in Harold Preece's memoir is not to be confused with the Cimmerian Conan so familiar to Howard fans; rather, the Celtic Conan is to be found in the Fenian, or Ossianic, Cycle of Irish Heroic Sagas. Preece, however, infers, probably quite correctly, that the Hyborian Conan was a literary descendent of the Ossianic Conan. Incidentally, while never used in print, Howard did sign several verse manuscripts with the name Patrick Mac Conaire Howard, while one unpublished story bears the by-line Patrick Mac Conaire.

"Musings of a Moron" was written for The Junto (see Harold Preece's memoir), but probably never appeared therein. The characters were all friends of Howard: Clyde (Smith), Truett (Vinson), and Harold (Preece).

Included in this issue are two fragmentary pieces. It is impossible to definitely ascertain whether "Death's Black Riders" was simply unfinished or whether it was once complete. My personal opinion is that more of the story once existed, though it may never have been complete. Four excerpts from "The Dust Dance" -- all that were then known to exist -- were published in the 7th issue of THE HOWARD COLLECTOR. However, among the Howard papers uncovered in 1966 was a letter to an unknown correspondent containing a much lengthier, somewhat differently arranged version of the first excerpt. Lines 1-4, 5-8, 9-12 and 13-16 of the shorter version are identical to lines 9-12, 29-32, 49-52, and 45-48 respectively, of the version published herein.

New and reprint stories and poems by Howard are appearing semi-regularly in the Magazine of Horror (Health Knowledge, Inc., 119 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York, 10003; six issues for $2.50)... Five volumes in the Lancer Books Conan series have thus far appeared: CONAN THE ADVENTURER, CONAN THE WARRIOR, CONAN THE CONQUEROR, CONAN THE USURPER, and CONAN. In addition, Lancer has published KING KULL, which contains some ten stories never before published. Three of the stories were completed, and one edited, by Lin Carter... The Summit County Journal, the weekly newspaper of Breckenridge, Colorado, is serializing the Breckinridge Elkins stories. This will include the stories in the two Bear Creek volumes, plus those stories never before collected, including two previously unpublished. The series began in the June 9, 1967 issue, and back issues are available at twenty-five (25) cents each... RED SHADOWS, the collected Solomon Kane stories, nears completion. The contents will be: "Skulls in the Stars," "The Right Hand of Doom," "Red Shadows," "Rattle of Bones," "The Castle of the Devil," "The Moon of Skulls," "The One Black Stain" (poem), "Blades of the Brotherhood," "The Hills of the Dead," "Hawk of Basti," "The Return of Sir Richard Grenville" (poem), "Wings in the Night," "The Footfalls Within," "The Children of Asshur," and "Solomon Kane's Homecoming" (poem). The publisher (Donald M. Grant, West Kingston, Rhode Island 02892) informs me that the book will have a full color jacket and four full color interiors by Jeff Jones. Tentative plans have been made for a full size (about 16 x 20) reproduction of this artwork on a fine grade paper, suitable for framing. Interested persons should contact Grant... A few copies of the Gnome Press hardbound edition of the Howard-de Camp TALES OF CONAN and the Nyberg-de Camp THE RETURN OF CONAN

(Continued on Page 44.)

THE LAST CELT

BY HAROLD PREECE

He was the only professional writer I knew during years when my output consisted of articles in the little amateur publications of the long-since defunct Lone Scout organization. Many other authors, from geniuses to vapid dilettantes, I've known these long years away from Texas, the Dear Land.

This land we shared along with its own monumental legendry, though I don't ever recall the two of us talking about it. In our very blood ran those epics of the lariat as well as the Alamo story which so shadows the mass psyche of Texans. But during those years when I knew Bob Howard, our minds were fixed on the hills of Wicklow we had never seen, rather than those peaks of Callahan County we both knew. We wrote to each other about Brian Boru and Bob's alter ego, Conan, rather than Bill Travis or that bumbling, if Irish-descended Quixote, Jim Callahan, who had been my grandfather's Ranger commander and for whom the county was named.

Yet, conversely, Bob Howard is the hardest to interpret of all the authors I have met. Nelson Algren emerges in some complex simplicity, not only for his magnificent talent but for his nasty temper. Maxwell Bodenheim shows up as a pathetic wreck of a poet mooching and whoring around Greenwich Village. Homer Croy was someone with whom I could chew the rag about Jesse James and Emmett Dalton. Richard Wright was too moody, too self-

centered, too morbidly black. Langston Hughes remains one of my most cherished friends.

Of all these and others I might reminisce with some immediate grace and facility. With them there are not all those elusive factors to pinpoint, to reduce to passable metaphor. But it has taken two years for that patient Texan, Glenn Lord, sided by my sister, Lenore Preece, to pull out of my resistant mind this still inadequate recollection of someone so long dead, yet my earliest colleague as well as one of the first close companions of my adult years.

Through what mounting interflow of connections did I get to know Robert Ervin Howard? Or Raibeard Eiarbhin hui Howard as he often Gaelicized his name when the Celtic spell fell over him. These thirty years since his untimely death, I have searched for the answers. And even more for meanings.

Let it be said, with warm memories of a great lady, that the first connection was through a close kinswoman of Bob's: close by blood if not by temperament and values. During 1927, while I was enrolled at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, I was introduced by a fellow student to a visiting Dallas girl named Maxine Ervin.

Maxine was employed as a clerk by a Dallas newspaper, though she shared my then very incipient literary ambitions. She was a remarkably intelligent woman, and a friendship of some years would follow. Simultaneously, I was still writing for the small Lone Scout journals, with one of my consequent correspondents being brilliant Herbert Klatt, who would live to be just twenty-one on his family farm in Hamilton County, Texas.

One of Herbert's pen partners was Truett Vinson of Brownwood. Truett was trying to establish a mail order book service and shared our iconoclastic viewpoint toward the then Great Society of Calvin Coolidge. On a morning in 1927, I received in my mail a copy of a pamphlet by Upton Sinclair, entitled LETTERS TO JUDD. It had come from

Truett at Herbert's suggestion.

Upton Sinclair was then my idol: literarily and politically.

I hadn't as yet heard of a young Texas author named Robert E. Howard, though it would turn out later that I had read some of his pieces in Weird Tales without recalling the by-line.

But I was so happy to find any other non-conformists in Texas, shrouded by the fundamentalist Christian mantle, that I began corresponding with Truett. Came the summer of 1927, when blood and spirit sang with the rebellious litanies of Shelley and Swinburne, when the long expected apocalypse of the downtrodden seemed imminent, and with Upton Sinclair being the Gabriel destined to blow the trumpet.

It was the apropos season to be excited by a poem, by the turn of a girl's thigh, or by this and that proclamation of the New Jerusalem delivered by Upton Sinclair in California or Norman Thomas in New York. Fittingly, that year when I was twenty-one, it was a good time to meet, in the flesh, people like Truett Vinson and Bob Howard.

Our first session was held in the Stephen F. Austin Hotel at Austin, my home town. Those two were returning home from a vacation, I believe, in Mexico. July should have been the month, 1927 was the year. I remember that the evening was the first one set for the execution of those poor heretics, Sacco and Vanzetti, though Massachusetts would extend a few weeks more of its granite-ribbed clemency before burning its latest witches.

Bob took over the three-way conversation as I recall, but by some easy, natural right of knowledge. Truett, I suppose, was used to being his willing auditor. I found myself eagerly listening.

I remember that Bob had bought several books during the trip, and that they were in sight. One was a collection of verse by a talented child named Natalie Crane, then

making a sizable splash in the American literary world. I had heard of Miss Crane, but not of Olive Schreiner, whose STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM was also among Bob's purchases.

Because of the obtuse Boer sex chauvinism, Miss Schreiner had been originally obliged to write under the male pseudonym, Ralph Iron. Not until much later would I learn of Bob's impassioned chivalry toward woman despite his proto-Nietzschean views toward most anything else that bore social implications.

But that evening, some forty years ago, a third woman -- a Texan -- became a personal link between us.

During the conversation, I casually mentioned Miss Maxine Ervin and my enjoyable correspondence with her. Bob responded:

"Maxine Ervin is my cousin. My middle name is Ervin."

So much for all those chance mutual relationships which bind Texans. How many times, these years in exile, have I encountered someone from "back home," only to realize through comparisons of association that I'd known somewhere one of his uncles or aunts or cousins. Naturally, after that session in Austin, I wrote Maxine, expressing my pride in having met such a remarkable member of her family.

Maxine replied, characterizing Bob as a "Tristan." I made no particular ethnic connection about it, at the time. But be it remembered, however, that the Tristan-Isolde story is the great romantic legend of the Celtic tradition. Versions of it have been found in all the Celtic lands: Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Brittany, Cornwall, and, as some cultural residue, in Spain, once called Celtiberia.

As some incarnated Tristan I can remember Bob Howard, though that Isolde who might have been a needed substitute for his mother never appeared. But he had other Celtic individualities, too; individualities transmitted,

perhaps, through those genetic inheritances that Jung talks about, shaped and developed both as escape and reality in that ordinary little town of Cross Plains where he lived.

He was Raftery of Ireland or Lwllarlch Hen of Wales or any of the Celtic bards whose verse and song survive today in anthologies read only by university people. He was John L. Sullivan and Jack Dempsey and the other Irish-American boxers whom he would have liked to emulate, for he was no puling aesthete of a literary man; but I doubt if he could have been an Irish cop. Supremely, perhaps, "within spirit which lies outside time," he was Conan, from whom he believed himself literally descended and whom certain scholars of pre-history say actually existed.

I had to know Truett Vinson's friend and Maxine Ervin's cousin better as Bob Howard before I could appreciate him as that composite Celt: Conan.

More than a year passed. Friendships kept converging and, through letters, kept broadening. Bob began writing also to my sister, Lenore, who was winning poetry prizes at the University of Texas, and to Booth Mooney, a Lone Scout and son of an old grassroots Baptist rebel in that Bible-tamed cowtown of Decatur. In Dallas, Maxine Ervin and her sister, Lesta, were teaching me bridge, a game that I soon forgot and never relearned after the girls vanished from my world. A scattered little circle of mavericks began developing; Bob, the one professional among us, was its star.

He published verse -- probably some of his best -- in a little typewritten journal of one copy passed through the mails, and called The Junto after Benjamin Franklin's coterie in Philadelphia. Booth Mooney initiated the publication after a session of us two on a cold rainy day in Decatur. Lenore afterwards inherited it from Booth. Its flavor was semi-Menckenese, back there in that era when Mencken was the antidote to Coolidge for all young intellectuals; and post-Lone Scout because so many of our

postal-operated fraternity had come out of that unique organization. Later -- and because of Bob -- it became Celtic-tinged.

No issue of The Junto was complete without some declaration of war on the Sassenach by Robert Ervin Howard. During this same period, our own Fenian began publishing, in an Oklahoma magazine, Celtic-slanted verse under the name of Patrick Howard. By contrast, Maxine Ervin, also on the Junto list, would maintain to me privately that the family was of English descent, and express great admiration for the English society of fixed social classes which Bob so thoroughly despised.

It was not my place to judge the genealogies of kinfolk. Maxine wrote me beautiful, encouraging letters during a period of spiritual gestation, when I needed them. Today, as I look back on long years and wide ranges of living, I can feel fortunate to have had two such friends from the same remarkable genes, though Bob, Maxine, and I never gathered for a threesome.

Of those two, Bob was the more understanding of my heterodox social views. Our correspondence and our personal sessions continued after the active friendship between the Ervin girls and myself withered away. Maxine's impact upon me was probably one of some qualified propriety. Her own strong levels of personal rebellion still fell within the norms of what Dallas and Big Spring, her birth town, would have called good taste.

By contrast, Bob carried for me the charisma of Conan, whose saga he spun endlessly in Weird Tales. Not until years after his death would I publish anything in the Celtic vein, nor much of anything else except satirical and social protest pieces. Yet I could believe that during our three years of correspondence, whatever its sometimes mythocentrism, we reached some parallel of identities and just possibly helped ourselves define each other.

Bob's interest in Celtica magnified and gave personal

meaning to all those derived Scottish, Irish, and Welsh traditions which my family has retained during these aeons in America. But for all my earlier reading in Celtica, he was the teacher and I the almost uncritical pupil -- that swashbuckling boy of twenty who was Robert Howard and that still rather priggish lad, a year or so older, who was myself.

Far away and long ago it all seems now. As far away as Texas whose rhythms yet run in my veins. As long ago as those legends of Ireland recounted by Bob when he, Truett Vinson, Clyde Smith, and myself gathered for night talk sessions in the woods around Pecan Bayou, near Brownwood. All four of us probably required, during those years of impatient early youth, some feeling of belonging to something that might be beyond those gargantuan, often smothering dimensions of our native state. For Bob and myself, that extra entity became Ireland, which we believed to have been the apex of a great Celtic domain once extending across most of Europe.

However, some months passed after our initial meeting before that affinity became a conscious one between us two. And that second phase of our relationship would begin in Brownwood where Truett and Clyde lived.

Cross Plains, where Bob lived, was not many miles away. By now, I had also come to know Clyde through still another session in Austin. The time was Christmas week of 1928; the locale, a wooded ravine in Brown County. The central personage of that reunion was also Bob Howard, metamorphozing through a haze of booze and talk into Conan.

Bob was in extra fine fettle on that mild night in an Ireland created ephemerally from Texas. His tongue had been whetted by the bottle of liquor he'd been able to pick up from a drugstore as a "medical prescription" during that hypocritical era of the Eighteenth Amendment. I can remember his bawling at the top of his voice a verse from an

Irish revolutionary song, "The Rising of the Moon," but which he rendered to the tune of that sentimental popular ballad, "Where the River Shannon Flows":

"Oh tell me, Sean O'Farrell,
Where the gathering is to be.
At the old house by the river,
Sure 'tis known to you and me."

During that night, too, the talk turned to fairies and leprechauns and all those diminutive humanoids of Celtic legend. From Bob Howard, I heard the first time some plausible explanation of the stories.

The Little People, he said, were remnants of Europe's original inhabitants, forced to retreat into caves and other subterranean hideaways after the advent of those tall conquerors who would come to be known as the Indo-Europeans. From his account, the small, dark aborigines ventured forth only by night to stretch their limbs by dancing, and to forage by shooting their neighbors' cattle with stone-tipped arrows. Superstitious peasants would chance upon the fairy gatherings at night and imagine them to be convocations of supernatural beings, hence all the feyish mythology found throughout rural Europe, particularly in the Celtic countries.

From all his readings of obscure old books, Bob would assert that the underground dwellings of these gnomish early settlers had been found throughout Scotland and Ireland, along with crude furniture that included midget sized tables, seats, and primitive cooking facilities. Now and then, he declared, some normal-sized personage would stumble into one of these dwellings, sometimes to return and tell a fearful story of the visit. I recalled, as I listened to Bob, that the first piece of his I had ever read in Weird Tales, long before we had met, had been based precisely upon this theme.

That my friend was doing more than repeat droll old tales seems now to be rather evident. Centuries before Bob Howard's time, a Scottish clergyman, Robert Kirk, had published a curious volume entitled THE SECRET COMMONWEALTH, detailing, from supposed personal observation, the economy and the habits of the Little People. Kirk had been considered a madman both by his neighbors and the embarrassed presbyters of his rigid sect, the Church of England. He had died scorned. For generations the only known extant copy of his work lay in the rare book section of the British Museum at London.

Robert Howard would come along, in some puzzling, yet believable, succession to reaffirm Robert Kirk. If there did happen to be a stray copy of THE SECRET COMMONWEALTH buried in some Texas library stack, the Howard I knew would have found it. For Truett Vinson bears witness to the fact that Bob could go into any library, pull book after book from the shelves and, in one three or four hour session, absorb the essences of all.

A strange man, this burly-looking Texan who so often liked to look and talk tough, yet who had that endless talent of an artist combined with that dedicated fact finding of the scholar. Since Bob's death, a distinguished English anthropologist, Dr. Elizabeth Murray, has proven through extensive research all that I heard about the Little People that night in a patch of Brown County woods.

Through extensive records and deductions based upon collation, Dr. Murray has shown that these smallish aborigines did exist side by side with their conquerors for centuries. She dug up old court archives of people tried and prosecuted for consorting with the fairies. The Little People, as such, she said, finally disappeared through blood-mixing, through being dug out of their dwellings like so many foxes and slain for the threat that their weirdish culture represented to church and state.

I could have wished that Bob Howard might have lived

so that I might have sent him two presents that would have been highly apropos: the collected writings of Elizabeth Murray and a record album of Irish revolutionary ballads. As it was, Bob's friendship became my baptism -- more accurately -- my confirmation in Celtica.

For possibly -- as Jung intimates -- there may be more to ancestry than the incestuous chauvinisms of ridiculous societies or the pestering of librarians by pinch-faced little old ladies reconstructing family trees. I can justify that ancestral surge which came from knowing Bob Howard because it didn't turn me into ancestor worshipper or ethnic xenophobe.

My own people came from many places: one, by family legend, was a Cherokee chieftain who married a Scottish noblewoman fleeing her own country because of one or another political turbulence revolving around the Stuarts. Out of Wales migrated my patronymic ancestor to settle on a grant of land conferred by an English king. My great-grandfather, David Shannon, had been one of the Scotch-Irish volunteers who helped Andrew Jackson of the same breed whip the British at New Orleans. Anything to get a whack at the red-coats.

During the same period, if in different sections of Texas, Bob Howard and I had evidently developed comparable Celtic mystiques. In our conversations, oral or written, I could remember how I'd dug into my high school library for Irish poetry in the pages of published collections or the dusty files of the Literary Digest. Invariably my redheaded, florid-faced father pinned on the shamrock each St. Patrick's Day, and expected all of his children to wear some corresponding greenery.

During my childhood, I had been a passionate supporter of the last, and successful, Irish independence struggle, initiated by the poet-president, Padriac Pearse, that bloody Easter Week of 1916, carried to its finale, several years later, by the Brooklyn-born mathematician,

Eamon de Valera, still surviving as I write this. Scotch-Irish Preeces, we usually call ourselves when asked our descent. Anglo-Irish, Bob probably was -- judging from the number of places bearing some variant of the Howard name in Ireland - this assertion, stemming from one of Bob's letters, being made with all due respect for Maxine Ervin.

Yet whatever the chromosomes, Bob Howard was the very first person with whom I could discuss intelligibly my avid interest in Celtica. I can feel, without self-flattery, that I may have served a comparable purpose for him, with each having been the specialized audience of the other.

Our active relation would not last many months after that session at Brownwood. Yet it would be -- and intensely -- in all these cumulative definitions, that period of parallel identity. With the immediate after-period marking those first long steps of my young years.

Through Bob I first learned of that Celtic complex which once stretched from Western Europe into Central Asia Minor. "The Celtic Empire" it is called by some scholars, though at no time constituting a political unit. It included Gaul, that is now France; the two Galicias of Poland and Spain; Helvetia, which became Switzerland; Britain, named for that legendary figure, Prydhon; Galatia, its Asian extremity renamed Ankara by occupying Turks; and Ireland, its most celebrated component, growing gods like stud horses and poets thick as shamrocks.

Shrunken now that great domain of the peerless tribes. Reduced to a few final outposts on the fringes of Western Europe, its last extant languages perishing like heather bowed by the beatings of too many storms. But with its lingering efflorescence of song and saga attesting to the grandeur that was Eireann and the glory that was Gaul.

Even yet I find myself sometimes suffused by that spell laid upon my youth. Even after I began working in the

Western metier, through some reclaiming of Texas, I found myself in one period publishing pieces about ancient Druidism, of possible pre-Columbian voyages to America by Irish mariners, of legends of Little People found in the cultures of many Indian tribes.

Then in some downright uncanny sense I always felt the presence of Bob Howard. I could remember something he once wrote in a letter: that, to the Celt, the fall of a leaf can have more significance than the fall of an empire. Perhaps because the leaves continue and the empires die.

All this and all that Bob was, I can appreciate intellectually and artistically, within some meanings found and others formless. He was my Ossian and my Conan, if not quite my Padriac Pearse. Above the baying hounds of time I can remember almost verbatim our conversations and correspondence. Recall them today as clearly as I do Yeats' Irish cantos, Synges' "Riders to the Sea," or Bob's own fiery denunciation of the Sassenach:

> "Gods, hurl the haughty deathwards and shake the iron thrones
> That my kin shall ride in Devon above the Saxon's bones."

He, of all American poets, deserved both a longer life and a more eloquent death. He should have survived to have received both from America, the land of his birth, and Ireland, the country of his heart, the many kudos that would not be his till long after he had been laid in the sandy loam of Brown County.

He should have gone out to the skirl of pipes and the glitter of shields, rather than in that mediocre manner of the suicidal shot that he fired into his magnificent brain. Over him should have been intoned the Druidic prayers for the slain of the Fianna. Then what was left of him should have been placed on a birlinn (barge) bound for Hy-Brasil.

Yet he was buried ordinarily in Brownwood, whose only entombed warriors were those dying with their boots on from fights with Comanches or fellow range riders.

Within that Texas area, Truett Vinson and Clyde Smith remember and appreciate him exactly as he was. I suspect that there are no others. My recollections cannot compare with theirs because they knew him lastingly in all his facts, where I knew him transiently in but a few.

I can say that he made of Brownwood and Cross Plains some useful re-creation of the Celtic Empire which he needed as a stage for the epic of Conan. Thus, Richard Wagner created from Berlin the ancient Germany he required as a rostrum for Siegfried. To Siegfried and Roland and Beowulf and the world's other towering folk heroes, Bob Howard added that Celtic world wanderer, Conan na Eireann. I am glad that Conan found his bard.

Yet I feel that I remember Bob supremely for one of those intimately mutual personal expressions sometimes arising spontaneously between writers.

We were walking, and talking, across a grassy Brown County plain on a moonlit night during that last period of knowing each other well. I can recall his answer better than my words which prompted it.

But I think I remarked that this was a night when our Old Folk might have gathered for some festivity or some battle, and of how I felt permeated by some mood emanating from some far-off age of theirs.

Bob stopped still. I knew by his face that he was sharing the mood.

"Yes," he said solemnly, "the last Celt should have died a thousand years ago."

HERITAGE

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

My people came from Munster and the cold north Nevis side.
Their hearts were black with ancient wrongs and hate and
bitter pride.
Their souls were wild and restless with swift and changing moods;
They knew red border forays and dark unholy feuds.
And first within my cradle on the day that I was born
I heard the songs the rebels sang to give the gallows scorn.

But when the springtime standards march in a great green
waving host,
I never dream of Inverness or the rugged Kerry coast.
I never dream of a barren shore where the sea wind keens
and shrills;
My dreams are all of Devon downs and the good green
southern hills.
I never see the surging Lorne or the sullen Kenmare's flow,
But I have walked through Dartmoor nights with all the winds
that blow.

I know the quaint ale houses beneath the oaks whose shade
Was flung when lost Lundinium fell before the Roman raid.
I know the croon of sleepy streams, and the brown time-carven
towns,
But best of all the fall of night across the dreaming downs.
I have not walked there waking, but dream roads I have trod,
And Devon is my heritage by tree and hill and sod.

Beyond the years of yearning, and lust and blood and flame,
My people rode in Devon before the Saxon came.
Oh, wattle hut and barley, oh, feast and song and tale!
Oh, land of dreamy legend and the good brown British ale.
My heritage is barren, my feet are doomed to roam;
I may not drink from Devon springs or break the Devon loam.

But when the kings are fallen and when the empires pass
And when the gleaming cities are wasted stone and grass;
When the younger peoples totter and break their gods in vain,
They who were first of all the earth may get them home again.
Gods, hurl the haughty deathwards and shake the iron thrones
That my kin shall ride in Devon above the Saxon's bones.

MUSINGS OF A MORON

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

On the library lawn, four pinpoints of light twinkled. Four of us sat there smoking. Clyde was smoking a Turkish cigarette, Truett was smoking a water pipe, Harold was smoking a meerschaum. I was smoking a herring.

The stars gleamed. Somewhere in the vast gulf of darkness there sounded a dreary drip-drip; some low-lived modernistic louse had left his vile bathtub faucet running. I shivered with repulsion.

"Damn!" said Clyde suddenly. I started.

"Shh!" I reproved. "Think of the readers of The Junto! What would those critics think?"

"I forgot," he blushed. "But to tell you the truth, I think they -- "

"I shook my head. "No."

He nodded and spit on the grass, which instantly took fire.

I nibbled grass roots and wept for the woes of Ireland.

"Would that I could walk among the clouds," murmured Clyde.

"Applesauce," said Harold. "I wish I was a millionaire."

Truett frowned. "As if the beautiful things in life could be bought by money."

Harold stood his ground. "If I was rich, I could be

happy. I would live in the South Seas, stay drunk all the time, and woo the beautiful sirens of the warm ocean islands."

"You are doomed to success," said Clyde, shaking his head. "With your practical materialism, you will be a second Sir Phillip Gibbs."

Truett puffed on his pipe.

I recited the seventy-five lost books of the TAIN BO CUALNGE in a dreary voice without a single stop.

"What is there to life?" mused Clyde.

"Wine, women, and song," said Harold.

"Hist," hissed Truett. "Do not move for your lives!"

A great shadowy bulk glided out of the shrubs and stood sniffing the air.

"Not a word as you value your lives," muttered Clyde, cold sweat standing out on his forehead. "It is a barnswoggle!"

I took out my rosary and counted my beads; forgot how many there were and counted them again to make sure. The barnswoggle followed a trail away.

"Damn Joseph Hergersheimer," said Harold, taking a drink and lighting a cheroot. "Forever yapping about futility; if I had his money -- "

Truett nodded; his eyes gleamed with a feral light.

Clyde said, "There was a girl in El Paso -- "

There was a dreary glug-glug as Harold, Truett, and Clyde sated their savage thirst on elixer. I shuddered, thinking of the critics of The Junto, to whose kindly advice I look as to a guiding star; they are --

"The backbone of the nation," finished Clyde.

"Listen," said Harold, "and take this to mind, 'A Heap o' Livin' -- " He recited seven Eddie Guest poems.

"Too pessimistic," said Truett.

"And you are an ascetic," said Harold. "When I rewrite the dictionary I will leave out that word."

"And I will leave out pagan," snarled Clyde.

"The fools!" said Truett suddenly.

"Who are fools?" we asked.

"Whoever read this article!" he howled with horrible laughter.

I dangled from a tree limb and wept for the woes of Bulgaria.

THE GHOST

BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

A phantom has resolved, myself to haunt.
It is a modern ghost, adroit and sly -
No thing of gauzy mist, or rattling bones,
Or clanking chains, or marrow-freezing moans.
It's futile to gesticulate and cry:
"Begone, accursed spectre! Out, avaunt!"
To no such antics is this ghost inclined;
It occupies a corner of my mind.

The memory of one I never knew,
Who left, while in his prime, his life and work,
Has taken up its dwelling in my brain;
And there, however fiercely I complain,
It forces me to labor as its clerk -
The ghost of a ghost! - At times, forsooth, I rue
My meeting with this man's seductive tales -
His bloody yarns of swords and spells and sails.

The ghost says: "You shall edit and conclude
The fragments Howard left." I wish this shade
Would mind its own affairs and leave to me
My own. I cannot read a book or see
A show that it does not my mind invade
With thoughts of what would be the attitude
Of R. E. H. to this? When I, some day,
Have done its bidding, will it go away?

--May 3, 1967

DEATH'S BLACK RIDERS

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The hangman asked of the carrion crow, but the raven made reply:
"Black ride the men who ride with Death beneath the midnight sky,
"And black each steed and grey each skull and strange each deathly eye.
"They have given their breath to grey old Death and yet they cannot die."

Solomon Kane reined his steed to a halt. No sound broke the death-like stillness of the dark forest which reared starkly about him; yet he sensed that Something was coming down the shadowy trail. It was a strange and ghastly place. The huge trees shouldered each other like taciturn giants, and their intertwining branches shut out the light; so that the white moonlight turned grey as it filtered through, and the trail which meandered among the trees seemed like a dim road through ghostland.

And down this trail, as Solomon Kane halted and drew his pistol, a horseman came flying. A great black horse, incredibly gigantic in the grey light, and on his back a giant of a rider, crouched close over the bow, a shapeless hat drawn low, a great black cloak flying from his shoulders.

Solomon Kane sought to rein aside to let this wild rider go past, but the trail was so narrow and the trees

grew so thickly on either side, that he saw it was impossible unless the horseman stopped and gave him time to find an open space. And this the stranger seemed to have no intention of doing.

They swept on, horse and rider a single formless black object like some fabulous monster; now they were only a few strides from the puzzled Kane, and he caught the glint of two burning eyes shadowed by the hat drawn low and the cape held high about the rider's face. Then as he saw the gleam of a sword, he fired pointblank into that face. Then a blast of icy air engulfed him like the surge of a cold river, horse and man went down together, and the black horse and its rider swept over them.

Kane scrambled up, unhurt but wrathful, and examined his snorting, quivering steed, which had risen and stood with dilated nostrils. The horse, too, was unharmed. Kane could not understand it.

* * * *

AN ANALYSIS OF HOWARD'S VAMPIRE

BY WADE WELLMAN

Robert Ervin Howard's short-story masterpiece, "The Horror from the Mound," first appeared in Weird Tales for May, 1932, and was later reprinted in the Arkham House collection, SKULL-FACE AND OTHERS (1946). It is one of the best vampire stories ever written, with an atmosphere of tension and excitement which in this field has never been surpassed and very rarely equaled. Weaving through it, sometimes with blatant emphasis, is the author's great love of the Anglo-Saxon breed, for Steve Brill is a descendant of Solomon Kane, and this accounts for his extraordinary courage, resolution, and physical strength -- traits so pronounced that they evoke the reader's profoundest admiration and excited partisanship.

In the characterization of his villain, Howard rejects several conventions of vampire lore. One of these is the commonplace that a vampire cannot walk about in daylight, or -- as in Bram Stoker's DRACULA -- can only do so at the expense of any special powers given him by the darkness. It is true that de Valdez escapes from the mound after twilight, destroys Lopez shortly afterward, and is himself destroyed by Brill on the same night. Yet this is because Brill happens to open the improvised grave in the early evening -- and, of course, because Howard knows that a nighttime encounter is more disturbing to us than a daytime one. De Valdez can walk about in full daylight, as we learn from the written narrative of Lopez, and he does

so with the loss of no special powers, for in the nocturnal encounter with Brill he does not reveal any command of magic.

It is uncertain whether de Valdez has the superhuman strength which is attributed to vampires in Bram Stoker's DRACULA and Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla." On the one hand, we have the record of the Spanish priest who manages to fight him off temporarily, and the climactic scene in which Brill overcomes him. But Brill is fighting with the strength of a man half maddened with fear, and we must not overlook the vampire's extraordinarily swift, loping run, nor his ability to smash through a bolted door with some ease. He seems to have more than the power of a strong, athletic man, but not the invincible strength of Count Dracula. His long, black fingernails seem to be taken from Thomas Preskett Prest's VARNEY THE VAMPIRE, of which the first chapter is given by Montague Summers in THE VAMPIRE IN EUROPE. Obviously he is not weakened, much less confined, by daylight hours; Howard rejects this convention for the sake of the story. A vampire who was enervated or limited to his grave by the sun would be unable to travel with the Spanish expedition, as is so vitally important to the background of the story.

Two points emerge from Howard's silence upon them. First, that de Valdez eats and drinks ordinary fare, like a living man; if he did not, his fellow travelers would quickly have guessed, from his unnatural abstinence, that he was the vampire. Second, that his victims do not return undead from the grave; if they did, it would surely have been part of the record passed down by Lopez' ancestors. This seems to be contradicted when we read that Brill faced an enemy "that sought his life and his soul," -- either a slight verbal discrepancy in the story, or a metaphor which I fail to appreciate correctly. A small point rejected by Howard is the double puncture always found on the throat of a vampire victim. Brill finds "three or four tiny punctures in Lopez's

throat," contradicting a standard item which vampire lore has faithfully maintained for generations. Lopez is slain and his blood drawn in record time; Brill hears the victim's scream from a hill above the hut, and when he reaches the door he hears "a curious muffled worrying sound" as Lopez' blood is drawn forth. The pickax crashing into the door sends de Valdez running for safety; he does not want to encounter this particular weapon, which would be more effective against him than a gun.

Howard's vampire seems to have the traditional power of perfect night vision, for he turns out the light while attacking Lopez, and runs quite easily among the trees in the darkness. His terrorization of the horses is also conventional; animals are said to have a fear of the supernatural, a viewpoint upheld in Coleridge's CHRISTABEL and in Emily Bronte's WUTHERING HEIGHTS. He has the power of speech, for he told his rescuers that his shipmates had died of plague. He has normal human powers of reason, as shown by the deliberate stampeding of the horses, and the studied postponement of the assault on Brill. His struggle with the priest suggests either that he does not fear a crucifix, or that the priest was unarmed to this extent. De Valdez' status as a nobleman shows the influence of Stoker.

In certain ways this vampire is conventional. When fully gorged with blood, he falls into a heavy sleep. The suggested means of disposal -- severing the head and driving a stake through the heart -- is conventional, as is the prediction that the body when thus treated, with appropriate prayers, would crumble into dust. In the thrilling account of the climactic battle, one point is strangely unmentioned -- the point that Brill would gradually fatigue whereas the vampire would not. We are left to infer that, if he had not succeeded in breaking the vampire's spine, Brill would eventually have collapsed in exhaustion to share the fate of Lopez. The vampire seems immune to pain, as he shows

no sign of suffering when his back is broken.

The strangely hard flesh of the vampire is not traditional, but an interesting detail which Howard has added to the tradition. Brill's ferocious death-struggle with the monster is probably the most exciting and compelling episode in all vampire literature. It is hardly possible to give adequate praise to this splendidly written tale. If we started to cite examples of particularly fine writing, it would be difficult to find a stopping point. Howard reaches unsurpassed heights of expression in the sentence recapitulating the story: "Aghast he shrank from the black visions -- an undead monster stirring in the gloom of his tomb, thrusting from within to push aside the stone loosened by the pick of ignorance -- a shadowy shape loping over the hill toward a light that betokened a human prey -- a frightful long arm that crossed a dim-lighted window."

Howard disregards the sexual element in vampirism. Many authors -- indeed the majority -- have shown the vampire as a sexually motivated revenant, seeking victims of the opposite sex whenever possible; but Howard omits this, and his story is quite complete without it. Howard's purpose in this story is to give the reader a terrific scare, and he omits any extraneous detail which does not serve this purpose.

His technique, in presenting the vampire to his readers, is pure skill. The presentation begins with Brill's curiosity about the mound and about Lopez' manifest fear of the knoll, or of something that it contains. The Mexican's reluctance to discuss this subject, and his shocked dismay at the suggestion that the mound be opened, are all brought home to us forcefully. The reader is always a step ahead of Brill, always aware that he underestimates Lopez' seriousness of meaning. Howard realizes that terrors from the dim past are more credible than terrors from the present, and he lulls away our skepticism by constantly empha-

sizing the sixteenth-century atmosphere that lingers in this territory. Indeed this impression has been strongly reinforced before Brill sits down to read Lopez' account (presumably written in English) of the fiend that plagued de Estrada. This narrative flashback -- actually a story within a story, linking the present with the remote past -- is a tour de force, so convincingly written that we never question a single detail of it. Howard uses it to give us, and Brill too, the full facts about the menace that Brill has unleashed.

We are not told exactly why Lopez and his forebears have been sworn to silence. He can scarcely believe that it would cost him his soul to speak of the danger of a vampire -- the only obvious danger lies in breaking his oath. Why, then, did he take the oath of secrecy? It is necessary for Howard's purposes; the author doesn't want us to know this Spanish tragedy until late in the story. If we heard it at an early point it would be far less effective; this legend is the grim confirmation of all the icy suspicions which have made us shudder as we read, and have made us admire Brill who obviously suspects the same but refuses to be cowed.

Every touch counts in this story. Brill at his work sees the twilight fall and hears the whippoorwill, sometimes thought of as a dead bird's ghost. The very first hint is the faint rustling from behind the stone. A reader has, unlike Brill, the advantage of time to analyze what is happening, and as soon as Brill returns to the mound and sees the "black gaping aperture," we know that a deadly inhabitant has issued forth. We are quick to equate this with the shadowy figure which Brill sees running over the hill, darting with a "slinking lope" which, we know, could not belong to the old Mexican despite Brill's effort to convince himself. The frightened silence of the birds does not escape us. Lopez' terrible scream makes us wonder if a vampire is at large, and the fang-marks on his throat certainly

fortify this impression. Perhaps Howard avoids the customary two marks in order to keep us wondering a little. But by the time we read the description of those marks, any doubts that we have are negligible; we feel grateful that the vampire will soon confront a highly formidable opponent.

Howard keeps reinforcing our impression by heaping one indication upon another. Brill, seeing clearly that Lopez had been writing here for hours, belatedly realizes that he could not have opened the mound. Howard keeps repeating that there was something abnormal or inhuman about the speed and gait of the shadowy thing that Brill has seen two times, faintly glimpsed in the darkness. Next we hear "the sudden soul-shaking scream of a horse in deadly terror," and the familiar noise of a stampede. One thing after another is introduced to strengthen our conviction, to make the incredible seem terribly real and close at hand. Finally comes the written narrative, telling a story which seems far more believable as a historical record than it would as a present-day experience, and finishing: ".... so you see, Senor Brill, why you must not open the mound and wake the fiend." Now Brill knows all the details, and as he fights vainly against belief, the thing from forgotten ages stands outside, gazing through the window. Everything has built up superbly to this hair-raising climax.

"The Horror from the Mound" is a work of genius, and I use the hackneyed word advisedly: it's a story that makes one regret that the noun "genius" has lost so much meaning in our day.

LETTER: ROBERT E. HOWARD to HAROLD PREECE, no date

Go manee jeea git,

You're in Kansas now, eh? Well, I imagine how you feel. I've never been to Kansas and I don't intend to be. To my mind it's the lousiest of all Hell's backyards. Ah well, it's a great life.

I saw The Virginian not long ago and liked it fairly well. But Judas, it was full of hokum, though rather realistic. Why must people be such damned hypocrites? Sure, they hung cattle thieves -- that is, those who stole them on small scale. But the big swine got by just as they're doing in business now. I know; I spent a good deal of my early childhood on ranches and in cow country. How many of the cattle kings didn't get their start by stealing cattle? Bah! They were all thieves. They hanged men for stealing cattle that they themselves stole from somebody else. Then they squalled about law, order, protecting honest business. A couple of bahs. Why didn't they admit that they were committing murder for their own interests? But hypocrisy is so burned into the grain that even primitively inclined people can't get away from it. I care nothing about the cattle thieves, large or small, but the ingrained hypocrisy nauseates me. "The poor naturally hate the rich" -Webster.

So you've been reading MacPherson? Well, don't take him too seriously. He's a damned fraud. I like his stuff because of their beauty and imagery - "The oaks of the

mountains fall. The mountains themselves decay with years. The ocean shrinks and grows again. * * * Age is dark and unlovely. It is like the glimmering light of the moon, when it shines through broken clouds, and the mist is on the hills." " 'Who comes so dark from ocean's roar, like autumn's shadowy cloud? * * * The people fall! see! how he strides like the sullen ghost of Morven!' "

Well, read him for his beauty but realize his junk's a hoax. It was the style then to "discover" new unpublished manuscripts. As for him denying the origin of his race, damn him for a red shanked gilley. Also, it was the custom to deny, in those days, all Celtic legends. Smart little English historians! Bah! Research has since proved many of those myths had a basis of truth. Gibbons, than whom no more despicable pseudo-chronicler ever lived, pulled the same stuff. That the Irish came from Scotland. Why, that swine didn't even have guts enough to marry the woman he wanted, because it would mean losing his inheritance.

If the Irish stole Finn Mac Cumhail from the Scotch, why is it that it's rare you find a legend of Finn - or Fingal - in Scotland, while the most ignorant plough-boy in Ireland can spin tales of the Mac Cool? That is, they could until they got so damned civilized and Anglicized. Bah. History shows - proves - that the Gaels - Scots - Milesians - landed in Ireland and spread over the isles from that starting point. Listen, if the Irish originated in Scotland, why was it, that toward the last days of the British-Roman Empire, there were only a few Gaelic tribes in Scotland, while Ireland was full of them? And a few years later, the Picts have been subordinated, the people - Cymry - of Strath-Clyde and Cumberland are paying tribute to an ever growing Gaelic power known as the Dalriadian kingdom, which dynasty culminated in Malcolm Canmore, shortly before the Norman invasion of England. Did they all go to Ireland and then come back? Bah.

And if MacPherson says that Conaire ardri na Eireann

was a Scotchman, he lies in his teeth. Conaire came out of the sea, naked, and with a sling in his hand, to rule Ireland and he lived and died in Leinster.

Welsh bowmen broke the charges of the gallowglasses and won Ireland for Norman Henry. The Fitzgeralds were half Welsh. Maybe that's why they took up Irish customs so quickly. I don't blame the Welsh; if I'd been a Welsh soldier then I'd have probably taken service under de Clare myself. The Welsh owed nothing to the Irish. The nations had never been friendly. When the Cymry were fighting for their life against the Saxons, the Gaels were harrying them from the sea and carrying them off into slavery. It took the Germanic races hundreds of years to subdue Wales, whereas Welsh and Normans beat the Irish down in a comparatively short time. (However, of course, they didn't stay down.) But the reason for that was treachery. Out of any five Irishmen you can select, one's an active traitor and two of them are potential traitors. They fight much better for other races than their own.

By the way, the word Welsh in its present usage is not Celtic but Germanic. The German tribes first came into contact with a Celtic tribe named Walii, or Wealli, on the Danube - I think the word Volga came from them originally, though I may be wrong. The Teutonic tribes called all non-Germanic peoples, Wealli, Weallas, or Welsh. But the word lost its significance everywhere but in the Isles.

The Irish-Gaelic alphabet has only seventeen letters -- formerly sixteen. The alphabet is called aibghitir, or formerly Beith-luis-nion, when it began with B rather than A as it now does, due to the introduction of Latin. The letters are named after trees or Feadha.

Raibeard Eiarbhin hui Howard

R. E. H.
Died June 11, 1936

BY R. H. BARLOW

Conan, the warrior king, lies stricken dead
Beneath a sky of cryptic stars; the lute
That was his laughter stilled, and sadly mute
Upon the chilling earth his youthful head.
There sounds for him no more the clamorous fray,
But dirges now, where once the trumpet loud:
About him press old memories for shroud,
And ended is the conflict of the day.

Death spilled the blood of him who loved the fight
As men love mistresses, and fought it well--
His fair young flesh is marble where he fell
With broken sword that vanquished all but Night;
And as of mythic kings our words must speak
Of Conan now, who roves where dreamers seek.

THE DUST DANCE

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

The sin and jest of the times am I
Since destiny's dance began,
When the weary gods from the dews and sods
Made me and named me man.

Ah, it's little they knew when they molded me
For a pawn of their cosmic chess,
What a mummer wild, what an insane child
They fashioned from nothingness!

For I with the shape of my kin the ape
And the soul of a soaring hawk,
I fought my way from the jungles grey
Where the hunting creatures stalk.

I champ my tusks o'er beetles and husks,
I tear red meat for my feast;
The pulse of the earth is in my mirth
And the roar of the primal beast.

By a freak of fate through the whirling spate
Of the uncouth roaring years,
Red taloned I came from the tribal flame
And the trails beside the meres.

Back of my eyes a tiger lies,
Savage of claw and tooth;
Close at my heels the baboon steal
Barren of pity and ruth.

And, ah, I know as I bellow so
With my foolish bloody mirth,
That the soul of the tree is the soul of me
And things of the physical earth.

For I was made from the dust and the dew,
The dawns, the dusk and the rain,
The snow and the grass and when I pass
I'll fade to the dust again.

For I know that all of the platitudes
That we hear from birth to youth
Slink from the backs of the brazen facts,
The reign of talon and tooth.

From the ghostly gleam of a vagrant dream,
From the shade of a wheeling bat,
From a passion-haunted vision told
In the huts where the women sat,

I wove the skein of a Hell aflame -
And it passed from breath to breath -
And paradise beyond the skies
Against the day of my death.

I roared my glee to the sullen sea
When Abel's blood was shed;
My jeer was loud in the gory crowd
That stoned St. Stephen dead.

I laughed when Nero's minions sent
Fire-tortured souls to the sky;
Without the walls of Pilate's halls
I shouted "Crucify!"

Sin of Adam was brother to me,
My zeal is passion shod,
Bearing red brands in the heathen lands
To teach them the word of God.

Sages speak of my brother love,
No love, in truth, I lack
As I hang them free from the gallows tree
And shatter them on the rack.

Seek me not in the drawing rooms
For music and lights are there,
And I cloak the lusts of my blood-red soul
With culture's gossamer.

Look for me by the gibbet tree
Where a saintly hero dies,
And the jeer of each knave that he sought to save
Goes up to the naked skies.

Seek my face in a shadowy place
Where the evil torches gleam
And flesh with flesh in Satan's mesh
Mingles in lurid dream.

Let sages speak, I know the reek
Of the battlefields of earth,
The musk of the jungle is in my breath,
The tiger roar in my mirth.

The brazen realities are mine
And I laugh at dreams and rime,
For I am a man of the primal years
And a laughing slave of Time.

REVIEW

CONAN THE ADVENTURER, by Robert E. Howard and L. Sprague de Camp, Lancer Books, 185 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y., 10016, 224 pages, 60 cents.

Howard's Conan stories have proven themselves his most lastingly popular and also most frequently criticized fantasies. To my mind, they contain the very best and also some of the most stereotyped of his creations -- most likely because there are so many of them and he wrote with such a furious and uncritical compulsion during the decade and a half of his auctorial career.

Certainly the Hyborian Age is the most fully realized of Howard's fantasy worlds: mapped, economically plausible, provided with a history and prehistory covering many cultures, and peopled by peasants and poets, hags and queens and lusty girls, as well as by warriors and warlocks. While Conan is the superman into whom Howard was best able to pour his daydreams of power and unending adventure, of combative and sexual prowess, of hot impulses instantly followed, yet a fighting man's code never broken: a true hero of Valhalla, battling and suffering great wounds each day, feasting and carousing and wenching by night, and miraculously restored on the morrow.

"The People of the Black Circle," originally a three-part serial in Weird Tales, here the lead-off novel, is the best of the Conan stories and perhaps the pinnacle of Howard's writing. Tightly plotted, pithily poetic, gorgeously ornamented, manned by grand heroes and villains and

also by characters torn between good and evil, and above all brimming with glamor and glory, it can be compared without over-praise to the plays of Christopher Marlowe and John Webster.

Effective use is made in this novel of the history-variant virtues of the Hyborian-Age background. We soon realize that Vendhya, Iranistan, Afghulistan, the Zhaibar Pass, and the Himelians are Hyborian-Age variants of Mogul India, Persia, Afghanistan, the Khyber Pass, and the Himalayas, but they are stepped-up versions, painted with simpler, starker, lusher, more vibrant colors than reality -- "a dream-dust sparkle," as Damon Knight puts it in IN SEARCH OF WONDER.

Conan dominates the story in the end, but not until he has surmounted vast difficulties (in many of the stories , alas, Conan is too obviously the winner from the start) and not without the essential help of the dying admonitions of Khemsa, the apprentice sorcerer who has turned on his masters, and also the needful aid of the fatalistic Irakzais and Turanian bow "that killed at five hundred paces" of Kerim Shah, the valiant spy of King Yezdigerd.

These in-between characters or villains presented sympathetically (another is Yar Afzal, chief of the Wazulis) give the novel outstanding strength and interest. Khemsa, the ascetic student-wizard who rebels against the Black Seers of Yimsha for the love of the ambitious Gitara, is a Conan of black magic, "flinging his (sorcerous) strength about as a young giant exercises his thews with unnecessary vigor in the exultant pride of his prowess." The scene in which he almost kills Conan with a wizardly kerate in a never-decided battle to the death, fights an hypnotic duel with the four black seers for his own life and that of his paramour, is shattered in a sorcery-triggered avalanche, but holds life in his mangled body long enough to give Conan crucial information on destroying the seers, is a very high point in the Conan saga.

Powerfully motivated by a desire to avenge her sorcery-slain brother and seeking to use Conan to implement that desire even after falling in love with his virile strength, Yasmina, Devi of Vendhya, is more spirited and more of an individual than most of Conan's women. Especially memorable are the ringing, yet respectful and still-enamoured challenges they fling at each other when they finally part.

The many magical devices in the story are particularly effective. It is hard to forget the gleaming black jewel which turns to a deadly spider inside Yar Afzal's fist, the arrow that changes to a poisonous serpent and back to an arrow again, the great horn blown to cause earthquakes, the thick crystal globe in which four golden pomegranites float in smoke (in a scene rivaling Eddison's THE WORM OUROBOROS in dark impressiveness), Khemsa's off-handed "I have no more use for you. Kill yourself!" (whereupon a warrior slowly falls on his spear so that it remains "jutting above him its full length, like a horrible stalk growing out of his back."), or the Master of Yimsha's "I think I will take your heart, Kerim Shah!" (at which the Turanian's rib-cage bursts outward and "something red and dripping shot through the air into the Master's outstretched hand, as a bit of steel leaps to the magnet.") All of the black magicians in this story are formidable, as witness even Conan's startled "Wipe out wizards with swords?" -- perhaps the earliest source in Howard for the phrase "swords and sorcery," which has become descriptive of the genre.

A few final quotes to demonstrate the tale's poetic, wildly romantic, yet measured prose: "Outside, the moan of the tortured thousands shuddered up to the stars which crusted the sweating Vendhyan night, and the conches bellowed like oxen in pain." "... thirty ragged phantoms in the starlight." "She glanced at the stark outlines of the mountains all about them and shuddered. Her soul shrank

from their gaunt brutality." "It was a war of souls, of frightful brains steeped in lore forbidden to men for a million years, of mentalities which had plumbed the abysses and explored the dark stars where spawn the shadows."

By the way, Hugh Rankin's three impressive black-and-white illustrations for this novel can be found in the Jan. 1967 Fantastic, where it was also reprinted.

"The Slithering Shadow" -- Howard's more poetic but unused title was "Xuthal of the Dusk" -- is the first of the three novelets rounding out this book and a good (or bad!) example of a run-of-the-mill Conan story. The scene is the lost city of Xuthal in a desert, whereby Howard throws away most of the advantages of his detailed Hyborian-Age background. The villains are sadistically evil, unceasingly lustful, genius-level drug addicts, who confuse dream with reality, yet can synthesize food and fabricate radium light fixtures -- hereabouts the echoes of Sax Rohmer and Edgar Rice Burroughs are strong. Conan's girlfriend Natala is a cute, soft, puppyish Brythunian, who whimpers and wails easily, at least for the Hyborian Age. She wears a tunic. Her rival is the nymphomaniac Stygian princess Thalis, sophisticated, hard as nails, sadistic, catlike, and schooled in every vice. She is topless. The lost city is terrorized by the beast-god Thog, who dwells in a deep well which strikes me as a symbol (unconscious? probably) of female sexuality, and who is an amorphous and ravening Lovecraftian monster with the addition of an unlikely sexual hunger.

Inevitably, Conan cuts up and down a besworded bunch of the "ridiculously slow and clumsy" drug addicts in a battle described with butcher-shop thoroughness. Inevitably he bests Thog in a tussle which leaves him frightfully bruised and scratched, but the Xuthalians have an elixer which heals wounds almost instantaneously. And inevitably there is a scene in which Thalis strips Natala and whips her with hard-woven silk cords. "Their caress was more

exquisitely painful than any birch twigs or leather thongs." Whereupon Thog kills Thalis and at least attempts the rape of Natala. "A dark tentacle-like member slid about her body." "All the obscenity and salacious infamy spawned in the muck of the abysmal pits of Life seemed to drown her in seas of cosmic filth." This scene is remarkably rough for an above-the-counter magazine in 1933 and may have been one of the items responsible for the later purchasers of Weird Tales seeking to purge it of "perverse" sex, if one accepts Frank Gruber's recollections.

Despite its purple excesses, the story has enough violence, haunted-house atmosphere, and erotic zing! to keep it moving, while Conan's humorous and matter-of-fact, happy acceptance of the two girls' rivalry for him is refreshing.

"The Pool of the Black One" is a more imaginative and colorful example of the same basic story. Instead of a lost city, there is an eerie, labyrinthine shrine on a desert island far west of the Barachan Isles and occupied by cosmically alien tall black giants with taloned fingers and leading lives of "cosmic vileness." The girl Sancha is another of the cute, kittenish types, though more enterprising than Natala, and manages to stay undressed through most of the story. The human villain, the Freebooter Zaporavo, is impressive -- a moody and bitter Zingaran Columbus -- but he is early knocked off by Conan with one of those volcanic, barbaric sword-thrusts that overcome in an instant all of civilization's swordsmanship. There is another delirious butcher-shop brawl, this one between the black giants and Conan aided by a gang of drunken pirates. "She saw a Zingaran sailor, blinded by a great flap of scalp torn loose and hanging over his eyes, brace his straddling legs and drive his sword to the hilt in a black belly... blood and entrails gushed out over the driven blade." Climactically and with a vivid phallic-orgasmic effect, a green pool in the shrine rears up and becomes "a great unstable pillar

that towered momentarily nearer the blue vault of the sky. Its green trunk was laced with white; its foaming crown was thrice the circumference of its base. Momentarily it threatened to burst and fall in an engulfing torrent, yet it continued to jet skyward." The pillar soon does burst and in a thrilling sequence its deadly waters pursue Conan, Sancha, and his pirates across the isle and out to their ship. Whereupon Conan, blood-clotted but unquenchably exhuberant, catches up Sancha for a resounding kiss, briefly hymns the pirate life, and steers the Wastrel off to new adventures.

"The Drums of Tombalku" is an interesting hybrid consisting of two linked novelets, the first rough-drafted by Howard and completed by L. Sprague de Camp, the second written entirely by de Camp from Howard's notes. The first is set chiefly in Gazal, another desert-girded lost city, this one of gentle dreamers, wise yet spineless. The hero is Conan's comrade, the young Aquilonian Amalric, who seems closer to Howard himself in his powers and behavior. He slays three Negroid Ghanatas, but only aided by surprise and luck, rescues from them the Gazalian girl Lissa, a childlike type, and finally gets to bed with her, but only after a tender, halting, courteous wooing. Later he must rescue her again, from the hypnotic, ghostly man-and-woman-eater Ollam-onga, who preys on Gazal from his lair in the Red Tower -- once more it is hard not to see a phallic symbol.

In the second novelet Conan turns up opportunely and involves Amalric and Lissa in a war between the two rival kings of Tombalku, another desert city or settlement. A typical de Camp note is struck when Conan and Amalric teach disciplined cavalry tactics to the wild horsemen of Sakumbe, a genial Negro, one of the rival kings. However, de Camp also achieves some truly Howardian effects, as when Sakumbe is melted alive by magic, when his rival is shredded down to bloody bones by invisible knives or teeth,

when Conan slays an evil magician by a mighty spear-cast, and -- milder but authentic note -- when Conan and Sakumbe philosophize humorously about the life of adventure and kingdom reaving.

It seems possible that Howard completed the Amalric in Gazal story, had it rejected by Farnsworth Wright, or else himself decided it lacked punch, and planned to add in the popular Conan to make it more salable, but never got around to the rewrite. *

The cover by Frank Frazetta advised by Roy Krenkel is a broodingly effective painting of Conan in subtle browns, even if it does make him look to me more like a Pict than a Cimmerian. The cover labels the book Volume One of the Complete Conan, but in his introduction de Camp says, "Lancer Books will publish the entire Conan saga in chronological order. When this project is completed, CONAN THE ADVENTURER will be the fourth of eight volumes."

-- Fritz Leiber

Footnote to the Review:

"An interesting conjecture; however, it is my opinion that Howard, for some reason, simply did not complete the story. There are many such unfinished stories, dating from Howard's earliest period (the early 1920's) up through his final year. It is easy to understand why he may not have completed some of his latter stories, but his reasons for not completing stories begun years before are conjectural. Incidentally, the de Camp portion of "Drums of Tombalku" begins with the paragraph beginning " 'You saved our lives just now, ..." (Page 170, CONAN THE ADVENTURER, Page 66, THE FANTASTIC SWORDSMEN).

are still available at $3.00 each (Gnome Press, 279 Birchwood Park Drive, Jericho, New York 11753).

Two recent, handsomely bound, and recommended volumes of verse, Wade Wellman's NOVEMBER WIND (Golden Quill Press, Francestown, New Hampshire 03043; $4.00) and Tevis Clyde Smith's IMAGES OUT OF THE SKY (Smith, 1415 Durham Street, Brownwood, Texas 76801; $3.00), contain several poems dedicated to Howard.

A reprint of the 9th issue of THE HOWARD COLLECTOR is contemplated; interested persons should contact me, either placing an order, or indicating that they wish part of their credit applied to that issue.

Late word has just reached me that the Jeff Jones' oil paintings for the book RED SHADOWS will be reproduced in full color, same size (approximately 16 x 20) on a fine paper suitable for framing. Three of the oils were on display at the World Science Fiction Convention (a fourth has since been completed) and impressed so many spectators that the publisher definitely plans to reproduce a set of the four paintings.

Apparently this is a costly and highly technical process, and a very limited number will be issued. The reproductions are expected around the end of January, and the published price will be $30.00 per set.

Do not order this item from THE HOWARD COLLECTOR. Orders should be addressed directly to the publisher:

Donald M. Grant
West Kingston, R. I. 02892

All fled — all done, so lift me on the pyre;
The Feast is over and the lamps expire.