

# Why WEIRD TALES?

UP TO THE day the first issue of WEIRD TALES was placed on the stands, stories of the sort you read between these covers each month were taboo in the publishing world. Each magazine had its fixed policy. Some catered to mixed classes of readers, most specialized on certain types of stories, but all agreed in excluding the genuinely weird stories. The greatest weird story and one of the greatest short stories ever written, "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," would not have stood the ghost of a show in any modern editorial office previous to the launching of WEIRD TALES. Had Edgar Allan Poe produced that masterpiece in this generation he would have searched in vain for a publisher before the advent of this magazine.

And so every issue of this magazine fulfills its mission, printing the kind of stories you like to read—stories which you have no opportunity of reading in other periodicals because of their orthodox editorial policies.

We make no pretension of publishing, or even trying to publish a magazine that will please everybody. What we have done, and will continue to do, is to gather around us an ever increasing body of readers who appreciate the weird, the bizarre, the unusual—who recognize true art in fiction.

The writing of the common run of stories today has, unfortunately for American literature, taken on the character of an exact science. Such stories are entirely mechanical, conforming to fixed rules. A good analogy might be found in the music of the electric piano. It is technically perfect, mechanically true, but lacking in expression. As is the case with any art when mechanics are permitted to dominate, the soul of the story is crushed—suffocated beneath a weight of technique. True art—the expression of the soul—is lacking.

The types of stories we have published, and will continue to publish may be placed under two classifications. The first of these is the story of psychic phenomena or the occult story. These stories are written from three viewpoints: The viewpoint of the spiritualist who believes that such phenomena are produced by spirits of the departed, the scientist, who believes they are either the result of fraud, or may be explained by known, little known, or perhaps unknown phases of natural law, and the neutral investigator, who simply records the facts, lets them speak for themselves, and holds no brief for either side.

The second classification might be termed "Highly Imaginative Stories." These are stories of advancement in the sciences and the arts to which the generation of the writer who creates them has not attained. All writers of such stories are prophets, and in the years to come, many of their prophecies will come true.

There are a few people who sniff at such stories. They

delude themselves with the statement that they are too practical to read such stuff. We cannot, nor do we aim to please such readers. A man for whom this generation has found no equal in his particular field of investigation, none other than the illustrious Huxley, wrote a suitable answer for them long ago. He said: "Those who refuse to go beyond fact rarely get as far as fact."

Writers of highly imaginative fiction have, in times past, drawn back the veil of centuries, allowing their readers to look at the wonders of the present. True, these visions were often distorted, as by a mirror with a curved surface, but just as truly were they actual reflections of the present. It is the mission of WEIRD TALES to find present day writers who have this faculty, that our readers may glimpse the future—may be vouchsafed visions of the wonders that are to come.

Looking back over the vast sea of literature that has been produced since man began to record his thoughts, we find two types predominating—two types that have lived up to the present and will live on into the future: The weird story and the highly imaginative story. The greatest writers of history have been at their best when producing such stories; Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Verne, Dickens, Maeterlinck, Doyle, Wells, and scores of other lesser lights. Their weird and highly imaginative stories will live forever.

Shakespeare gave forceful expression to the creed of writers of the weird and highly imaginative, when he wrote the oft-quoted saying: "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

The writer of the highly imaginative story intuitively knows of the existence of these things, and endeavors to search them out. He has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. He is at once, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet. He evolves fancies from known facts, and new and startling facts are in turn evolved from the fancies. For him, in truth, as for no others less gifted "Stone walls do not a prison make." His ship of imagination will carry him the four thousand miles to the center of the earth, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," on a journey to another planet millions of miles distant, or on a trip through the Universe, measured only in millions of light years, with equal facility. Material obstacles cannot stay his progress. He laughs at those two bogies which have plagued mankind from time immemorial, time and space. Things without beginning and without end, which man is vainly trying to measure. Things that have neither length, breadth nor thickness, yet to which men would ascribe definite limits.

To the imaginative writer, the upper reaches of the ether, the outer limits of the palactic ring, the great void that gaps

beyond, and the infinity of Universes that may, for all we know, lie still further on, are as accessible as his own garden. He flies to them in the ship of his imagination in less time than it takes a bee to flit from one flower to another on the same spike of a delphinium.

Some of the stories now being published in WEIRD TALES will live forever. Men, in the progressive ages to come, will wonder how it was possible that writers of the crude and uncivilized age known as the twentieth century could have had foreknowledge of the things that will have, by that time, come to pass. They will marvel, as they marvel even now, at the writings of Poe and Verne.

It has always been the human desire to experience new emotions and sensations without actual danger. A tale of horror is told for its own sake, and becomes an end in itself. It is appreciated most by those who are secure from peril.

Using the term in a wide sense, horror stories probably began with the magnificent story of the *Writing on the Wall at Belshazzar's Feast*. Following this were the *Book of Job*, the legends of the *Deluge* and the *Tower of Babel*, and *Saul's Visit to the Woman of Endor*. Byron once said the latter was the best ghost story ever written.

The ancient Hebrews used the element of fear in their writings to spur their heroes to superhuman power or to instill a moral truth. The sun stands still in the heavens that Joshua may prevail over his enemies.

The beginning of the English novel during the middle of the eighteenth century brought to light Fielding, Smollett, Sterne and several others. Since this time terror has never ceased to be used as a motive in fiction. This period marked the end of the Gothic Romance whose primary appeal was to women readers. Situations fraught with terror are frequent in *Jane Eyre*. The Brontes, however, never used the supernatural element to increase tension. Theirs are the terrors of actual life. Wilkie Collins wove elaborate plots of hair-raising events. Bram Stoker, Richard Marsh and Sax Rohmer do likewise. Conan Doyle realized that darkness and loneliness place us at the mercy of terror and he worked artfully on our fear of the unknown. The works of Rider Haggard combine strangeness, wonder, mystery and horror, as do those of Verne, Hitchens, Blackwood, Conrad, and others.

Charles Brockden Brown was the first American novelist to introduce supernatural occurrences and then trace them to natural causes. Like Mrs. Radcliffe, he was at the mercy of a conscience which forbade him to introduce spectres which he himself did not believe. Brown was deeply interested in morbid psychology and he took delight in tracing the working of the brain in times of emotional distress. His best works are *Edgar Huntly*, *Wieland* and *Ormond*.

The group of "Strange Stories by a Nervous Gentleman" in *Tales of a Traveler*, prove that Washington Irving was well versed in ghostly lore. He was wont to summon ghosts and spirits at will but could not refrain from receiving them in a jocose, irreverent mood. However, in the *Story of the German Student* he strikes a note of real horror.

Hawthorne was not a man of morose and gloomy temper. An irresistible impulse drove him toward the sombre and gloomy. In his *Notebook* he says: "I used to think that I could imagine all the passions, all the feelings and states of

the heart and mind, but how little did I know! Indeed, we are but shadows, we are not endowed with real life, but all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest shadow of a dream—till the heart be touched."

The weird story of *The Hollow of the Three Hills*, the gloomy legend of *Ethan Brand* and the ghostly *White Old Maid* are typical of Hawthorne's mastery of the bizarre. His introduction of witches into *The Scarlet Letter*, and of mesmerism into *The Blithedale Romance* show that he was pre-occupied with the terrors of magic and of the invisible world.

Hawthorne was concerned with mournful reflections, not frightful events. The mystery of death, not its terror, fascinated him. He never startled you with physical horror save possibly in *The House of the Seven Gables*. In the chapter, Judge Jaffery Pyncheon, Hawthorne, with grim and bitter irony, mocks and taunts the dead body of the judge until the ghostly pageantry of the dead Pyncheons—including at last Judge Jaffery himself with the fatal crimson stain on his neckcloth—fades away with the coming of daylight.

Edgar Allan Poe was penetrating the trackless regions of terror while Hawthorne was toying with spectral forms and "dark ideas." Where Hawthorne would have shrunk back, repelled and disgusted, Poe, wildly exhilarated by the anticipation of a new and excruciating thrill, forced his way onward. Both Poe and Hawthorne were fascinated by the thought of death. The hemlock and cypress overshadowed Poe night and day and he describes death accompanied by its direst physical and mental agonies. Hawthorne wrote with finished perfection, unerringly choosing the right word; Poe experimented with language, painfully acquiring a studied form of expression which was remarkably effective at times. In his *Masque of the Red Death* we are forcibly impressed with the skilful arrangement of words, the alternation of long and short sentences, the use of repetition, and the deliberate choice of epithets.

But enough of Poe. His works are immortal and stand today as the most widely read of any American author. The publishers of WEIRD TALES hope they will be instrumental in discovering or uncovering some American writer who will leave to posterity what Poe and Hawthorne have bequeathed to the present generation. Perhaps in the last year we have been instrumental in furnishing an outlet to writers whose works would not find a ready market in the usual channels. The reception accorded us has been cordial and we feel that we will survive. We dislike to predict the future of the horror story. We believe its powers are not yet exhausted. The advance of science proves this. It will lead us into unexplored labyrinths of terror and the human desire to experience new emotions will always be with us.

Dr. Frank Crane says: "What I write is my tombstone." And again—"As for me, let my bones and flesh be burned, and the ashes dropped in the moving waters, and if my name shall live at all, let it be found among Books, the only garden of forget-me-nots, the only human device for perpetuating this personality."

So WEIRD TALES has, from its inception, and will in the future, endeavor to find and publish those stories that will make their writers immortal. It will play its humble but necessary part in perpetuating those personalities that are worthy to be crowned as immortals.

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