REHeapa Autumnal Equinox 2017

THE NEMEDIAN
CHRONICLERS #24

THE RISE OF THE NEW HYBORIAN LEGION, PART TWO

By Lee A. Breakiron

As we saw last time, the Robert E. Howard United Press Association (REHupa) was the first amateur press association (apa) dedicated to that author. Its founder, Tim C. Marion, started it in 1972 when he was 13 and edited it through the first 19 of its bimonthly Mailings, but left afterward since he was ultimately more interested in fan activities than Howard as a literary figure. Before that, discontent with his leadership and with the real dearth of worthwhile essays and critiques during the early years led to future literary critic Don Herron and others to leave and create The Hyperborian League (THL) apa in October, 1975. Its official editor (OE) was Herron and it was “devoted to the creative discussion of authors Clark Ashton Smith and Robert E. Howard and their works,” though material on other fantasy writers and poets was welcomed. Herron said he spelled the name of the apa “Hyperborian” rather than “Hyperborean” because he wanted to emphasize the fact that it was devoted to both CAS (whence Hyperborean) and REH (whence Hyborian). It would still be occasionally misspelled, even on covers.

Its official organ document was titled “Skull & Sandalwood,” suggested by REH’s “Skull-Face” and CAS’s Sandalwood. The fanzines composing the quarterly Mailings were at first stapled by the contributors and left so by the OE, who collected them and mailed them out to the current individual members. He also distributed some copies to libraries, sent “speculative” (“spec”) copies to recruit prospective members, and sold remaining ones to defray postage costs. He also collected the $2 annual dues to cover postage. The minimum page requirement from each member (“minimum activity” or “minac”) was initially 15 “mostly original” pages a year related to fantasy and never before published elsewhere. Initially, thirty copies of each fanzine (“zine”) were required from each member. The contents were about half mimeographed and half offset-printed or xeroxed. The paper stock was often heavy and even colored.

THL Mailing #1, dated October 1975, contained zines from 11 members who included Herron; collector, dealer, and limited-edition publisher Gerry de la Ree; pulp-writer scholar R. Alain “Randy” Everts; future Sword and Sorcery (S & S) writer and pasticheur David C. Smith; and Glenn Lord. Lord was the world’s preeminent Howard collector, was agent for the Howard heirs from 1965 to 1997, published the first comprehensive REH bibliography (The Last Celt: A Bio-Bibliography of Robert Ervin Howard (Grant, 1976)), received the World Fantasy Convention Award in 1978, was a corporate director for Conan Properties, Inc., and would be awarded the 2005 Cimmerian (“Black Circle”) Award for...
Lifetime Achievement [1]. All these and three other fans were, had been, or (in Smith’s case) would later be members of REHupa. Mailing #1 is among the rarest of all apa mailings, especially in complete form. I only possess the official organ, three of the zines, and a reprint of another one, but it is clear from this and later Mailings that THL started with and maintained a high standard of meritorious content. Still, as with most apa’s, much content involved such things as lists or short reviews of books, comics, or zines the member had acquired or read, the most recent fan activity one had engaged in, one’s personal life, or one’s own fan fiction or poetry. The most frequent items were Mailing Comments on other’s contributions. As with the REHupa Mailings, we will be spotlighting only the best of these contributions, especially those relating to Howard or Smith.

In #1 (October, 1975), de la Ree focuses on the artistic phase of CAS’s career, which, in view of his inexperience and lack of success with it, could best be termed an occasional hobby. Fellow pulp writer and correspondent H. P. Lovecraft had been impressed by Smith’s primitive-style art, though, and de la Ree ended up purchasing some 350 letters from CAS, more than 200 of his poems, and more than 400 pieces of his artwork. De la Ree reproduces several examples of the latter in his zine. Everts reproduces REH’s birth and death records in his own zine. David C. Smith superficially appraises REH’s fiction, saying “Howard had great talent and his own brand of genius; but he was not a great writer,” but more of a craftsman and entertainer, incapable of creating more than two-dimensional characters or work relevant to human concerns.

It is not enough that Howard created heroes and vistas which are archetypal in their appeal – this accounts for their success in such a simplistic medium as comic books, for example, and their appeal to a wide variety of readers. It is not enough that Howard so keenly portrayed the tragedy of the lone man – which he presents with such facility that there can be no doubt, that, as Lovecraft noted, “he himself is in every one” of his stories. Howard’s fictional worlds and figures are simplistic and direct without taking into account the vast layers of complexity of the human drama which that directness should be built upon. If he had been able to fuse a keener perception of common human details with his imagination of such scope and wonder, he might today be regarded differently, and more importantly. (p. 3)

In his zine in THL #2, Herron challenges this assessment, saying that Smith’s criteria for great literature was too limited, excluding as it did the cosmicism of Lovecraft and Howard, as well as art for art’s sake. Glenn Lord reprints his contribution from #18 of Nils Hardin’s long-running literary and ad zine Xenophile. It relates the history of REH’s planned short-story collection that was rejected by UK publisher Denis Archer and of Howard’s novel The Hour of the Dragon, whose publication was aborted when Archer went bankrupt.

In Mailing #2 (January 1976), de la Ree reproduces 25 unpublished poems by CAS from his own collection. Ben Indick discusses REH’s fiction, praising his westerns. Everts discusses CAS’s life, runs CAS’s obituary and several of his own CAS-related photographs, and ends with “Further Notes on the Death of Robert Ervine [sic] Howard,” which he reprints in REHupa Mailing #20. Bryant discusses the future of REHupa and other apa’s, opining that REHupa is seriously hampered by the structure of its Rules (mainly the rotating editorship) and the personality of its founder, Tim Marion. All this, he says, has caused several of its best members to resign, and suggests that the situation be alleviated by absorbing REHupa into THL, since the latter was now producing better Mailings. (And in REHupa #19, Everts says that REHupa is in such sad shape that it should be merged with THL.) But the reverse was what actually happened, as we will see, and the content of the REHupa Mailings was soon to improve. Bryant then makes perceptive comparisons between the characters and styles of CAS and Jack Vance.
By Mailing #3 (April 1976), Herron is having to staple all the zines together REHupa-style because otherwise the postal costs for mailing them would have been significantly higher (it actually mattered then whether fourth-class package content was stapled more than once). Chapbook and fanzine publisher George T. Hamilton announces that one Fred Cook of Wadsworth, Ohio, was printing and selling forged copies of Lord’s *Etchings in Ivory* chapbook (on the cover of which “Robert E. Howard” was in mixed case rather than in all caps) and Lord’s *The Howard Collector* journal (on which the cover title lettering was in black instead of red ink). Herron discusses the state of CAS literary criticism, distinguishing incompetent critics like Robert Weinberg, Brian Aldiss, Lin Carter, and Isaac Asimov from first-rate ones like Donald Sidney-Fryer, Charles K. Wolfe, and Marvin R. Heimstra. Indick covers the history of CAS’s involvement translating the French poet Baudelaire and gives a Baudelaire poem as translated by poet and REH scholar and pasticheur Richard L. Tierney. Lord reproduces eight of Howard’s story-rejection letters.

In Mailing #4 (July 1976), Herron increases the required copy count to 40, the roster having reached 29 members (the maximum would be 30 in #6). Jonathan P. “Jon” Bacon, then OE of REHupa, joins THL. He is now at the peak of his amazing fan activity and productivity, participating in panel discussions on Howard and fan editing at a Des Moines comic convention, putting out virtually monthly
issues of either his *Fantasy Crossroads* zine or another of his REH- or fantasy-related publications like the chapbook *The Grim Land and Others* (1976) of unpublished Howard poetry, *Runes of Ahr Eih Eche*

**TABLE OF THE HYPERBORIAN LEAGUE MAILING MEMBERS (IN JOINING ORDER) & PAGES**

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(1976), the first collection of Howard letters, and *Omniumgathum* (1976) consisting of fantasy verse, and even lecturing on Howard, on fantasy as literature, and on comics as American mythmaking, all in his job at Graceland College, Iowa. [2] His THL and REHupa zines often list entries in a worldwide bibliography of Howard publications that he is working on. Lord’s zine describes the unsuccessful offer of REH heir agent Oscar J. Friend to buy the estate from the heir, Dr. P. M. Kuykendall. Lawson Hill presents a fine, succinct appreciation of Clark Ashton Smith (reproduced later herein). Dr. Dirk W. Mosig, a psychology professor at Georgia Southwestern State College (and, later, Kearney State College, Nebraska), introduces himself, noting that his main interest is in Lovecraft (he is a member of the HPL apa, the Esoteric Order of Dagon, or EOD), but says he thinks that CAS was a genius (though erratic) at poetry, though he wasn’t good at fiction. He has a similar opinion of Howard, regarding him as an entertainer. Mosig is now considered a Lovecraft scholar and still lives in Kearney, aged 73. Scott Connors declares that CAS deserves greater recognition, being a better writer than REH (Connors would become a CAS scholar, as well as a REHupan).

In October, 1976, Herron issues a separate, 20-page index of the first yearly volume of THL Mailings.

In Mailing #5 (October 1976), Lord tabulates all known payments to Howard for individual stories. Then Herron presents his classic polemic “Conan vs. Conantics” [3], condemning Conan pastiches by L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter, as well as their “posthumous collaborations,” in which they completed tales REH had left unfinished, and “Conamifications,” in which the protagonist and setting of Howard stories were converted to Conan and Hyborian locales respectively. Fanzine editor Byron Roark was the first to raise the hue and cry against these controversial practices [4], but Herron provided documentation to buttress the criticisms. While de Camp’s editing and marketing of REH’s stories in Lancer paperbacks were critical contributions to the popularization of the writer during the so-called Howard Boom of the late 1960s and the 1970s, his and Carter’s other REH-related fiction was criticized as being dilutions that detracted more than advanced Howard’s literary reputation. Fortunately, the subsequent publications of pure, definitive REH texts by Wandering Star, Del Rey, and the Robert E. Howard Foundation, as well as
the disappearance of de Camp and Carter reprints, have finally rectified the situation. Herron’s article is reprinted herein later. In THL #5, Everts gives four more photos relating to CAS and reproduces a then-unpublished letter from REH to Emil Petaja.

In Mailing #6 (January 1977), Indick temporarily substitutes for Herron as OE. As he generally does, Bacon reviews recent REH-related publications, this time including the semi-prozine Starwind #2, declaring that Gary Hoppenstand’s article “Broadwords and Cardboard Barbarians: The Heroic Fantasy of Robert E. Howard” [5] smacks of “Advanced Fan[n]ish Snobbery.” (p. 2) Ironically, Hoppenstand would come around to being a champion of REH (e.g., [6]). Hamilton talks about the chapbooks of Roy Squires, who operates his own printing press. Marty Ketchum mentions a Locus magazine article [7] that reveals that Lord and Kirby McCauley had negotiated a sale of reprint rights of 15 Howard tomes to Berkley Books for $300,000. Crispin Burnham announces the launching of his literary journal Eldritch Tales.

In Mailing #7 (April 1977), OE Herron raises the annual dues to $3. Bacon divulges that Graceland College, at which he is director of the Memorial Student Center, is laying him off as part of a downsizing, so he will be forced to curtail his publishing. Hamilton runs two unpublished photos of CAS and notes that dealer Chuck Miller is selling REH’s typescript of “The Blue Flame of Vengeance” page by page.

Art by Jerry Lawler in Dennis McHaney’s zine in The Hyperborian League Mailing #7
together with a xerox of the rest of the typescript (an execrable practice, in my opinion). Everts reproduces a letter from E. Hoffmann Price to Arkham publisher August Derleth that talks about Howard and his legendary Trunk containing unpublished typescripts and letters. These contents were later purchased by Lord and published, advancing REH studies and helping to fuel the Howard Boom. They were part of the 14,000 pages he was to donate to the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas, having been valued at about 23.6 million dollars. The letter is reproduced later herein. Dennis McHaney’s contribution contained art by Frazetta, Krenkel, and Fabian.

In Mailing #8 (July 1977), Bacon has a Mailing Comment to Barry Hunter breaking down the costs of publishing fanzines. Then he shows a draft Chapter III of Harold Preece’s biography of Howard that was never finished beyond that point. Everts reproduces two more letters from Price to Derleth. Lord runs five more REH rejection letters and some addenda updating The Last Celt, since it was only up to date through 1973, but took three more years to be published.

By Mailing #9 (October 1977), Burnham has been elected OE. Herron had changed the minac requirement to six pages every two Mailings in order to spur more consistent activity. Also, the required number of copies was raised to 50 in order to distribute more speculation copies (15) to garner more members. The declining page count of the Mailings was now down to 65 from seven members, the smallest yet and dangerously weak. Herron and Hamilton had resigned for lack of time, though Herron would rejoin later. (Hamilton later lost interest in fandom and publishing, but remained a collector and avid reader, and is living in Placentia, Cal., aged 79.) A further problem was the partial credit assigned by the OE to non-original and off-topic pages. Paul Allen surveys Michael Moorcock’s S & S fiction. Everts’s zines start being missing from many individual Mailings because he doesn’t submit enough copies. Burnham ends the Mailing with the second annual Index.
By Mailing #10 (January 1978), several more members had dropped for lack of minac, leaving only 15. Bacon had left Graceland College to become coordinator of student activities at Johnson County Community College (JCCC) in Overland Park, Kan. He is concentrating on publishing his _Fantasy Crossroads_. Burnham shows a letter from de Camp offering to sell 24 postcards from HPL to REH on behalf of some living relative of Howard’s. Chet Williamson has a script of C. L. Moore’s speech as guest of honor at the Second World Fantasy Convention, in which she describes the writing methods she and her husband Henry Kuttner employed. Lord has one more REH rejection letter and more addenda to _The Last Celt’s_ bibliography. Connors has a photo of CAS, a list of all CAS’s contributions to _The Auburn Journal_ newspaper, some unpublished CAS poetry, a story by R. H. Barlow, and a list of all of Barlow’s stories. Everts reproduces the CAS booklet _The Double Shadow and Others_.

Mailing #11 (April 1978) is the third small Mailing in a row. Burnham demands that Everts answer Bacon’s request, from REH’s sometime-girlfriend Novalyne Price Ellis, that Everts return two photos of Howard and one of him and her that Everts had borrowed [2], or else Burnham would put Everts’s expulsion up to a vote. (Everts never does respond, apparently having had them confiscated and then lost. Fortunately other versions of the two solo REH photos still exist.) Allen runs an essay and an article about writer and REH agent Otis Adelbert Kline and his fiction.

Mailing #12 (July 1978) is the smallest ever. Indick and Bacon say they are dropping out. (Indick, a pharmacist in Teaneck, N.J. and first-rate fanzinist, was also in REHupa and EOD, would later contribute an essay to Herron’s _The Dark Barbarian_, and would die of cancer in 2009, aged 86. Bacon, currently aged 68, served as academic director at JCCC.) Four others were dropped for lack of minac. Burnham and REHupa OE Brian Earl Brown have been discussing a merger of the two apa’s and would put it to a vote of the memberships in January 1979. Mosig has a draft of his essay “The Hero Myth in the Fiction of Robert E. Howard,” but it is less than impressive. Lord presents the first such list of the books Howard owned at the time of his death. Allen argues for merging the two apa’s, saying:

THL has lost many members in the last year. REHUPA has recently lost Ben Indick and Jon Bacon is considering dropping out. I’m frankly not sure how long I can remain active in both apa’s now that I am publishing a monthly newsletter.

Both apa’s have essentially the same interests. One specifies Robert E. Howard, the other adds Clark Ashton Smith to that specification. However, both center around fantasy, the kind of fantasy that both authors wrote. Six members currently belong to both apa’s providing a joint membership of 40 people. Up until recently, even more people belonged to both. In the last THL mailing, the bulk of the speculation copies went to members of REHUPA.

Let’s face it. It simply doesn’t make much sense at all for 40 people to be beating their brains out trying to keep two essentially identical apa’s alive at the potential expense of losing both apa’s. We could have one very solid, successful apa with 40 members (plus a few honorary members) all working in the same direction for their mutual benefit. (p. 1)

The publication Allen is referring to is his _Fantasy Newsletter_, which mainly announced upcoming books. It ran 41 issues from June 1978 through December 1989 in a newsletter format and then through October 1981 in a semi-prozine format, when it was taken over by Robert A. Collins. In January 1984, it was combined with _Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Review_ and renamed _Fantasy Review_. The next month, it broadened its purview to include fanzine, comics, and movies, and its reviews became less detailed. It won several Balrog Awards and two World Fantasy Awards. Allen is still living in Loveland, Colo., aged 59.
Regarding Lord’s THL zines, in October 2000, Marek collected all six of them and published them as *Glenn Lord’s Ultima Thule*, which was an 8.5 × 11-inch, 52-page saddle-stitched softback. It sold for $12.00. Rob Roehm reprinted it in 2007 on [lulu.com](http://lulu.com), where it is still available.

The vote to merge the THL and REHupa apa’s was announced in REHupa #37 (January 1979); specifically, it was 6 to 0 in THL and 21 to 1 in REHupa. The merger took place with REHupa #38 (March 1979), with THL’s copy count (50) prevailing and REHupa’s name, minac (two pages every two Mailings) and annual dues ($3.75) prevailing. A new vote for OE would take place, the winner taking office with the July Mailing, namely Brian Earl Brown.


Herron, Lord, McHaney, and David C. Smith would join or return to the REHupa fold, joining Allen, Bacon, Burnham, Dale, Everts, Loay Hall, Hamilton, and Indick, to help carry the Howardian torch, as we shall see next time.

**BLASTS FROM THE PAST: SELECTIONS FROM THE HYPERBORIAN LEAGUE MAILINGS**

“Clark Ashton Smith: An Initial Appreciation”

by Lawson W. Hill

from his zine “The Emperor of Dreams” in The Hyperborian League Mailing #4 (July 1976)

It cannot be said of Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961) that his fiction has gained world-wide recognition in recent years; his work was simply too esoteric to ever truly gain popular status. True, his poetry gained him some reputation among literary circles in California in the 1920’s, but his fiction rarely caused a stir in his time, even among the readers of the pulps that he frequently appeared in during the early 1930’s. A frequent observation in the *Weird Tales’* Eyrie column, for example, was that Smith’s fiction was “too wordy” or “hard to Understand.” Apparently, readers were not willing to commit themselves to wading through Smith’s heady vocabulary, and preferred Seabury Quinn’s de Grandin stories, with their more jaunty prose style and realistic settings, over Smith’s bizarre trips through mythical lands of eldritch sorcerers and perverse deities. True, Smith did have his defenders. These chiefly consisted of authors like H.P. Lovecraft, August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, E. Hoffmann Price, Emil Petaja, and others who were among Smith’s circle of friends and correspondents, as well as several other admirers that were enough in number for there to be a small but devoted cult followers of his work. Today, with the help of numerous paperback reprintings of his work, this cult has grown considerably; but when this growth is compared with the proportions which the work of other fantasists like H.P. Lovecraft and R.E. Howard (who, along with Smith, are so often inexplicably considered the *Weird Tales* triumvirate) have taken on, it begins to appear that it is Klarkash-Ton, more than any of these authors, who still remains an “Outsider.”
I first “discovered” Clark Ashton Smith’s work in 1972, in paperback anthology form edited by Lin Carter, and entitled Xicarph. This was an entry into Ballantine’s famed “Adult Fantasy” series, which had previously published two other collections of Smith’s fantasies, in addition to a variety of H.P. Lovecraft collections, which were published under a variety of imprints. My reason for mentioning this is because I was largely “spurred on” into reading Smith after I had already read a couple of HPL. I immediately became aware of a subtlety not to be found in anything by Lovecraft; none of the so-called “shock-value” was present (even the customary ending-lines-in-italics) was rarely employed, a consistency which became a weak point with HPL; only continuous dream-like narratives told in a far more “cosmic” prose, much like the type illustrated in Gallardo’s exotic cover for the book that had struck me upon first seeing it.

I still see Smith as a far better craftsman than Lovecraft. Although his short stories are probably more unorthodox in their nature than Lovecraft’s, he yet manages to evict strong emotions in the reader, depending on what direction Smith wishes to sway the reader. It can be a subtle sense of humor that is found in stories like “The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoquann” or “The Tale of Satampra Zeiros”; in fact, almost all of his fiction conveys some sense of sardonic humor which tends to underline the theme of the story, even in what appears to be strictly ghastly stuff like “The Testament of Athammus.” However, in some instances, the sense of humor is more blatant, and the story may appear to be more didactic than usual, as in the science-fiction oriented “The Great God Awo.” Although not one of Smith’s better efforts, it is at least easy to see the point that Smith tries to make with the story. Perhaps a better example of this type of humor is to be found in the fine novelette, “The Monster of Prophecy.” The story tells of the civilization on an alien planet who, according to a prophecy, are to welcome a strange visitor to their planet. The visitor turns out to be “a hideous creature with two legs, two eyes, and a vertical stance.” The point appears to be the familiar “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder” theme, though it is one that is handled with a great deal of originality in this instance.

When it comes to expressing pure horror, Smith has few peers. One of the stories that I recall most vividly from Xicarph is one called “The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis,” a nighmarish tale describing an encounter by man with extraterrestrial life, a horrendous leech-like entity that attaches itself to the victim’s head and devours his brain, with the aid of “hideous pink suckers.”

Although “The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis” had more of a science-fictional orientation than anything else, Smith generally failed with his science-fictional attempts that were rooted in a modern setting. Stories like “Marooned in Andromeda” and “The Master of the Asteroid”, which were generally circulated among markets like Wonder Stories, Amazing, and Thrilling Wonder, failed miserably in being anything other than typical space opera of the period. Only a few examples tended to shine through, among them stories like “The City of the Singing Flame” and its sequel.

This occasional tendency of Smith’s to give his stories a familiar, i.e., contemporary background proved to diminish the quality of some of his straight fantasy stories as well, primarily stories like the Cthulhu Mythos entry, “Ubbo-Sathla” (pp. 3-5)

“Conan vs. Conantics”

by Don Herron

from And in His Dream #5, pp. 2-9 in The Hyperborian League Mailing #5 (October 1976)
Lin Carter, writing in the introduction to *Conan the Buccaneer* (Lancer Books, 1971), has noted that L. Sprague de Camp “… (variously working in collaboration with Howard, myself, and Björn Nyberg) has probably added more wordage to the Conan saga than Howard himself wrote originally” (page 17). Aside from the purpose of making money, de Camp did all this surplus work with Robert E. Howard’s creation Conan in order “to fill the gaps in the saga,” as he mentions on pp. 10–11 of *Conan of Cimmeria* (Lancer, 1969). Both de Camp and Carter have made statements from which readers may infer what they are trying to accomplish in their Conan imitations. For example, in an interview in *REH: Lone Star Fictioneer* no. 4 (spring, 1976), de Camp said, “I try to capture both the style and feel of REH, who has considerably influenced my own fiction. At the same time, I try to avoid his egregious blunders” (p. 37). One learns from the interview that de Camp thinks “…REH was a natural storyteller…marred by haste and slipshod carelessness, resulting in inconsistencies and anachronisms” (p. 37). De Camp does admit that he and Lin Carter fail to capture a narrative drive comparable to Howard’s forceful and gripping one, and he explains this by saying “…we are not crazy the way he was, and hence we find his emotional intensity hard to imitate” (p. 37); otherwise, however, there seems to be an assurance on de Camp’s part that his imitations are about as good as the Howard originals, if not better in some respects. Surely they would contain no egregious blunders, hasty marring, inconsistencies or anachronisms, since de Camp is serving as both editor and a writer for the Conan series and does not work under the same pressures Howard did. After all, Howard wrote all his Conan tales within four years, pounding them out at great speed for appearance in *Weird Tales* magazine. De Camp has been involved in editing and rewriting Conan tales since the 1950s—some twenty years more than Howard worked at it, although I’m sure Conan imitations have not monopolized de Camp’s writing time all these years.

Yes, a careful job might well be expected from de Camp, as his comments indicate, and even Lin Carter writes that “We have further tightened the internal logic of the saga as a whole by … using for our chief villain … Thoth-Amon of Stygia, who frequently makes an appearance throughout the saga as a whole” (*Conan the Buccaneer*, p. 17). Apparently some care was taken in writing the additional Conan tales by both these writers—but I’m unsure how much weight may be attached to what Carter writes. It was Carter, was it not?, who in *Imaginary Worlds* (Ballantine, 1973) wrote on p. 193:

> As for plucking a name out of the history book, Robert E. Howard himself was addicted to this unhappy practice, and the quality of his work suffered because of it…Howard was able to coin perfectly good original names, but all too often he was liable to borrow a name rather than invent one.

And then on p. 199 Carter offers this contradictory passage:

> Howard, who did occasionally make up a good name (such as “Kull” and “Valusia”), may have been wiser than we assume when he borrowed names from history rather than coining them himself. For generally, when he does make up a name it is a pretty uninspired one.

Personally, I don’t think Carter knows how to write; the above contradiction is by no means alone in that one volume. In this essay I’ll use de Camp as the main spokesman on what was attempted in their imitations, for obvious reasons.

Another viewpoint on the imitations may be had by turning attention to what fans of de Camp think of them. Loay Hall—publisher of *Pusad Revisited*, a tribute to de Camp, and a staunch defender of de Camp in the letters pages of such amateur magazines as *Fantasy Crossroads*—has said of the de Camp-Carter Conantics: “I find their Conan superior to Bob E. Howard’s …” Hall made this judgment in *Galatha* no. 2, a fanzine created for the eleventh mailing of the Robert E. Howard United Press Association. In that
same issue he gave a good account of what de Camp fans see in the imitations, writing specifically about the de Camp-Carter novels *Conan the Buccaneer* and *Conan of the Isles*: “True, it wasn’t the Conan REH created: de Camp and Carter’s version is more tame and worldly. It must be remembered that de Camp and Carter—while imitating REH—are also attempting to add something of their own to Conan, and to make Conan as realistic as possible.” *Galatha* no. 3 for REHupa mailing 12 added the observations that de Camp and Carter were “going deeper into characterization” and were trying to “bring the series to a more sophisticated level.”

Essentially, then, the Conantics of de Camp and Carter attempt to retain the style of the original stories and the character of Conan, but they try to avoid REH’s mistakes and add a level of sophistication and depth which Conantics followers do not believe Howard had in his stories. But do the de Camp-Carter tales actually do these things? No, they don’t. Here’s why:

First, we should realize that the de Camp-Carter method of filling in gaps in Conan’s chronology is totally artificial compared to Howard’s version of the tales. In a letter to P. Schuyler Miller dated March 10, 1936, REH wrote, “In writing these yarns I’ve always felt less as creating them than as if I were simply chronicling his adventures as he told them to me. That’s why they skip about so much, without following a regular order. The average adventurer, telling tales of a wild life at random, seldom follows any ordered plan, but narrates episodes widely separated by space and years, as they occur to him” (see *Conan*, Lancer, 1968, p. 17). Anyone who has had the good fortune to listen to the personal tales told by E. Hoffmann Price, Howard’s friend and a top-flight pulp fictioneer, will know that REH hit the nail on the head here: for a while Price will talk about his cavalry days in the Philippines, then about visiting Howard in Texas, then perhaps about H. P. Lovecraft or Clark Ashton Smith or writing or chili or anything interesting that comes to mind. Genuine stories told by a person rich in experience do skip around; for this reason I find REH’s notion of his Conan tales very realistic and vital. The fact that all of the stories he wrote collected together do not form a detailed calendar of Conan’s life hardly matters. One may presume that the storyteller departed to tell his tales in other lands and times, and just be grateful that he stayed long enough to relate what adventures he would. Howard said himself that “There are many things concerning Conan’s life of which I am not certain myself” (*Conan*, p. 18).

Acknowledging that the de Camp-Carter method is clearly different than Howard’s, we may examine how well their system works for them. That is to say, do their imitations grow logically out of and into the Howard originals which they surround, forming a logical portrait of Conan developing from a youth to an adult, from thief to mercenary to king? The mixture of Howard and de Camp-Carter stories in the Lancer editions of *Conan*, *Conan of Cimmeria*, *Conan the Freebooter*, and *Conan the Wanderer* presents a sufficient body of work for a look into this problem. The contradictions between REH’s Conan and Conantics pop immediately into view.

In “The Tower of the Elephant,” REH wrote of Conan at the most youthful point in his character’s life that he ever dealt with. Of Conan’s religion Howard told: “His gods were simple and understandable; Crom was their chief, and he lived on a great mountain, whence he sent forth dooms and death. It was useless to call on Crom, because he was a gloomy, savage god, and he hated weaklings” (*Conan*, p. 56). Young Conan was quite superstitious; he entered the tower of Yara the wizard after “… he hesitated at the thought of the strange perils which were said to await within” (*Conan*, p. 57). In “Rogues in the House,” REH further defines Conan’s youthful fears in this passage:

Murilo shuddered. “Conan, we are in the house of the archfiend! I came seeking a human enemy; I found a hairy devil out of hell.” Conan grunted uncertainly; fearless as a wounded tiger as far as human foes were concerned, he had all the superstitious dreads of the primitive (*Conan*, p. 143).
Yet in “The Hall of the Dead,” which de Camp completed from a fragment left by REH and which he places chronologically between “The Tower of the Elephant” and “Rogues in the House,” Conan assumes a blasé attitude toward the supernatural which is out of character at that point in his life: “Although the supernatural roused panicky, atavistic fears in his barbarian’s soul, he hardened himself with the thought that, when a supernatural being took material form, it could be hurt or killed by earthly weapons, just like any earthly man or monster” (Conan, p. 88). A bit too glib, this attitude is not very far removed from similar observations made by Howard’s Conan later in life; nonetheless, it comes too early in this story, at a time when Conan has had relatively few supernatural encounters. In “The Hand of Nergal” completed by Lin Carter from a Howard outline, all hope for character continuity is shot to hell. The story opens with Conan in the Turanian army, which is being attacked by “weird shadow-things” (Carter’s Conan “thrills eerily” at sighting these creatures, incidentally). When his fellow soldiers sensibly flee from the monsters’ attack—the shadowy bat-things are cutting them down in droves—Carter’s Conan dramatically stops and urges them to fight like men. This version cannot be mistaken for Howard’s Conan, who was no leader in his early years and who was hardly brave or stupid enough to try to turn an army back to fight a supernatural menace. When one of the bat-things dropped down to attack Conan “…he—even he—stepped back from its grim, shadowy wings and the stench of its fetid breath” (Conan, p. 165). The “even he” indicates that Conan is less afraid of the monsters than the civilized Turians, although he is a barbarian and so has heightened fears of the supernatural—but Carter seemingly forgets this. Worse still, he forgets Howard’s statement on religion which I quoted above and writes: “‘Crom!’ Conan gasped. It may have been a curse, but it sounded almost like a prayer” (Conan, p. 166). Like a prayer! When it is useless to call on Crom, who hates weaklings? Even as late in Conan’s life as the events in “Queen of the Black Coast” Howard has Conan say “‘What use to call on [Crom]? Little he cares if men live or die’” (Conan of Cimmeria, p. 97). This effort by Carter to inject genuine religious fervor into the character of Conan is one of the greatest faults of the Conantics tales, one I’ll deal with in a moment.

One of the major points of difference between Conan and Conantics is that REH’s creation reacts to dangerous situations instinctively, whereas the de Camp-Carter imitation reacts logically. Of course, in a very few instances Howard will have Conan use logic instead of impulse, as in “Black Colossus,” when the first army he is placed in command of wants to descend from a hill and meet the foe men on equal ground. Trying to dissuade his troops, the barbarian says, “‘Be reasonable … We have the advantage of position’” (Conan the Freebooter, Lancer, 1968, p. 87). Howard provides a rationale for this change of character on Conan’s part in this exchange: “‘You grow sober with authority,’ quoth Amalric. ‘Such madness as that was always your particular joy.’ ‘Aye, when I had only my own life to consider,’ answered Conan” (Conan the Freebooter, p. 88). Of course, this was a special case. Most of the time we find that “…Conan had no time for conscious consecutive thought” (REH in “Queen of the Black Coast,” Conan of Cimmeria, p. 115) or “The Cimmerian, with the unerring instinct of the barbarian…” (“The Tower of the Elephant,” Conan, p. 55) or “it was Conan’s savage instinct which made him wheel suddenly: for the death that was upon them made no sound” (“Tow./Elep.,” Conan, p. 64) or “That he did not explode in a burst of murderous frenzy is a fact that measured his horror …” (“Tow./Elep.,” Conan, p. 72) or a scene of instantaneous action such as:

Waking to stupefied but ferocious life when they seized him, [Conan] disemboweled the captain, burst through his assailants, and would have escaped but for the liquor that still clouded his senses (REH in “Rogues in the House,” Conan, p. 132).

In “The Devil in Iron,” Howard writes: “‘Conan … is as crafty as a mountain lion. ‘It is more through wild animal instinct than through intelligence,’ answered Ghaznavi’” (Conan the Wanderer, Lancer, 1968, p. 90). It’s evident that Howard’s Conan was by and large a man of action.
But from the first tale in their chronological sequence that de Camp and Carter write, they make Conan a thinking man’s barbarian. In that earliest episode in the life of their Conan imitation, “The Thing in the Crypt,” they pay lip-service to the original stories by writing “Conan reacted by instinct” (Conan, p. 48), but precede this accurate touch with: “How can you kill a thing that is already dead? The question echoed madly in Conan’s brain. … Now he struck with greater cunning. Reasoning that if it could not walk it could not pursue him…” (Conan, p. 47) and so on. In “The Hall of the Dead,” de Camp puts in the following examples of logical thinking:

If he could not outrun the slug, perhaps he could tire it. A man, he knew, could outlast almost any animal in a long-distance run (Conan, p. 90).

A sword, Conan thought, would be of little use against such a monstrosity. Like other lowly forms of life, it could survive damage which would instantly destroy a higher creature (Conan, pp. 91–92).

Please note that the first of these examples, although phrased in logical terms, is not logical; Conan cannot outrun the giant slug, but he hopes to tire it by being able to outrun it! Carter writes in “The Hand of Nergal”: “Straightening up from his fruitless quest, [Conan] gave over the search with the fatalism of the true barbarian. Time now to think of a plan” (Conan, p. 169). True REH barbarians rarely think of plans, nor is Howard’s Conan as well-versed in biological science as the de Camp-Carter imitation. In “Shadows in the Moonlight,” the real Conan displays a superficial acquaintance with a rare animal—“A gray man-ape,’ he grunted. ‘Dumb, and man-eating … These creatures always lurk in the deepest woods they can find and seldom emerge’” (Conan the Freebooter, pp. 133–134). Compare this simple account with the near textbook detail in the de Camp-Carter “Lair of the Ice Worm,” to wit: “The higher animals, he knew, radiated heat. Below them in the scale of living came the scaled and plated reptiles and fishes, whose temperature was that of their surroundings. But the Remora, the worm of the ice lands, seemed unique in that it radiated cold; at least, that was how Conan would have expressed it” (Conan of Cimmeria, p. 76). The genuine Conan certainly would not express his opinion in such terms, for he never did express such an opinion in comparable language. Even though there are many more illustrations I could use to buttress this particular argument, why belabor the point? Anyone can see that de Camp and Carter are not writing about Conan—they are not even getting close to his character as created by Howard. This use of planning and logic may be the way in which they attempt to compensate for their lack of narrative drive, but it simply does not work within the framework of Conan’s character and it is certainly not an effective substitute for REH’s greater ability to write gripping tales.

Nor are the de Camp-Carter stories free from “egregious blunders.” In “The Curse of the Monolith,” they have a bad guy trap Conan, who is wearing mail, against a magnetized pillar and then gag him. “He waited until Conan opened his mouth to bellow for help, then adroitly jammed a bunch of silk into Conan’s mouth. While Conan gagged and chewed on the cloth, the little man knotted the scarf securely around Conan’s head” (Conan of Cimmeria, p. 24). On pages 28–29 we learn that Conan has freedom of movement of a hand and forearm—enough so that he could have grabbed the bad guy as he was being gagged. The “little man” would have had to press close to Conan, who is nearly a giant, to knot the scarf, and it would have taken at least two minutes or so to knot it, considering the difficulty of standing on tiptoe and working with raised arms—quite a strain. Howard has Conan nailed to a cross in “A Witch Shall Be Born,” one of the most famous scenes in Sword-and-Sorcery literature. When a vulture swoops down onto his chest to peck out his eyes, Howard’s Conan bites its head off. The de Camp-Carter imitation—a pale imitation indeed!—cannot even grab hold of an enemy with a free hand. In “The City of Skulls,” de Camp and Carter have a rhinoceros blunder near Conan and some companions. They specifically refer to it as a “nose-horn” (Conan, p. 196), trying to get some mileage out of a notion for the legend of unicorns; that is, perhaps rhinos started the myth about unicorns. In “Hawks Over Shem,” there
is mention of “bucklers of rhinoceros hide” (Conan the Freebooter, p. 34). De Camp rewrote a Howard historical story into this “Conan” tale, so he should have made these two references coincide—either both as “nose-horn” or both as rhinoceros, since the mention of rhinoceros in the latter story makes all the pains de Camp and Carter went to with the “nose-horn”?unicorn idea gratuitous. I’ll be the first to admit that this second blunder to which I’m calling attention is quite petty. I mention it only because most of the hasty mistakes Howard made are not very much more serious or are as trivial. It is quite unfair for de Camp and Carter to talk about Howard’s blunders when they can do no better themselves. (Incidentally, the name of the city in “The City of Skulls” is Shamballah, a name taken from myth-history. According to Carter in Imaginary Worlds, this usage by himself and his collaborator is either inept—if you believe what he says on p. 193—or clever—if you believe him on p. 199. A third option of not believing him at all should not be ignored.)

“The City of Skulls” displays as well as any other imitation how little de Camp and Carter assimilated REH’s work with Conan. For all their reputed delving into character and striving for realism, the actuality of their writing and what they write about is insulting, taken alone or compared to Howard. They have a scene of Conan as a prisoner. The leader of his captors is borne in on a chair. “For all the seriousness of his plight, Conan could not repress a grin. For the rimpoche Jalung Thongpa was very short and fat, with scrawny bow legs that scarcely reached the floor” (Conan, p. 198). This sort of “humor” is abusive—making fun of someone just because they are short and fat is hardly mature, but that is what the two have done. The “joke line” is the fact that Thongpa is a stereotyped “funny” physical type. In the next paragraph we learn that he is not funny, but “…peculiarly deformed. One side of his face did not match the other. It hung slackly from the bone and bore a blank, filmed eye…” (Conan, p. 199). If he is not funny (indeed how could such a person be thought of as funny), then what was the use of having Conan “grin” upon seeing him, except to get in a cheap joke at the expense of short, fat people? Humor in Howard stories is usually done in self-mockery, at the expense of the hero, as comedy from Charlie Chaplin to Woody Allen has worked. This self-mockery is evident in REH’s Breckinridge Elkins tales and in this scene from “Black Colossus,” a Conan adventure by Howard: “Jerking aside the velvet curtains, she dramatically indicated the Cimmerian. It was perhaps not an entirely happy moment for the disclosure. Conan was sprawled in his chair, his feet propped on the ebony table, busily engaged in gnawing a beef bone…” (Conan the Freebooter, p. 74). Furthermore, “Conan” in “The City of Skulls” is alien to the real Conan. He “…prudently kept his opinion to himself” (Conan, p. 203). The real Conan was forthright, as this example shows: “Why do the guardsmen pursue you?” asked Tito. “Not that it’s any of my business, but I thought perhaps”—“I’ve nothing to conceal,” replied the Cimmerian. “By Crom, though I’ve spent considerable time among you civilized peoples, your ways are still beyond my comprehension” (“Queen of the Black Coast,” Conan of Cimmeria, p. 84). In “Black Colossus,” REH’s Conan answers a princess in his typical fashion and we learn that “…it was a new experience for a man to speak so forthrightly to her, his words were not couched in courtier phrases” (Conan the Freebooter, p. 72). One sequence in particular completely violates the character of Conan. The Conantics barbarian is cuffed by the overseer on the slave galley he is a prisoner on. Like the genuine Conan he explodes into action, but unlike Conan he “…belatedly controlled his rage” (Conan, p. 206). Then the overseer whips him. “But Conan did not scream or move a muscle. It was as if he felt nothing, so strong was the iron of his will” (Conan, p. 207). If anyone thinks REH’s Conan would sit still under a beating … well, they’d better stick to reading Carter’s Thongor of Lemuria. It is incredible to me that de Camp and Carter have no more grasp of Conan’s character—or of his type of character—than to pass such a scene off on readers. For a comparison with what a man like Conan would do under stress situations, let’s look at Agatha Christie’s novel And Then There Were None, a classic mystery. In it we find Philip Lombard, a soldier of fortune. Christie describes him thus: “He moved like a panther, smoothly and noiselessly. There was something of the panther about him altogether. A beast of prey—pleasant to the eye.” And “…his lips drew back from his teeth in that curious wolflike smile characteristic of the man.” Wolf, panther and tiger metaphors for characters like Conan and Lombard are standard. As is the case with Conan, Lombard is
forthright and honest. When he is accused of murdering twenty-one East Africans early in the novel, he answers: “Story’s quite true! I left ’em! Matter of self-preservation. We were lost in the bush. I and a couple of other fellows took what food there was and cleared out.” He also says in the book, “If I were to commit one or more murders it would be solely for what I could get out of them.” Obviously, Conan and Lombard are cut from the same cloth. Look at what happens when Lombard is faced with a crisis situation, facing Vera Claythorne who is armed with a pistol:

Death was very near Philip Lombard now. It had never, he knew, been nearer …

His quick brain was working. Which way—which method—talk her over—lull her into security—or a swift dash—All his life Lombard had taken the risky way. He took it now. He spoke slowly, argumentatively. “Now look here, my dear girl, you just listen—”

And then he sprang. Quick as a panther—as any feline creature … Automatically Vera pressed the trigger … Lombard’s leaping body stayed poised in midspring, then crashed heavily to the ground. Philip Lombard was dead—shot through the heart …

This understanding that characters of the type like Conan and Lombard act in crisis situations is one point that separates Howard and Christie, both at the top in their respective genres, from writers like de Camp and Carter. Lombard could have used a logical ploy to get out of that spot—that much is clear. He had a thinking man’s option as much as the Conantics barbarian, but he was a man of action like Conan. His action caused his death; in the Howard Conan tales there is always the feeling that Conan can die—after his battle with Thog in “The Slithering Shadow,” he is near death; his fight with Baal-pteor in “Shadows in Zamboula” is a close contest and Baal-pteor was only a strong man, unaided by the ability to become a monster or something of that sort (see pp. 71–73, Conan the Wanderer); in “Red Nails,” Conan is about to hack off his foot in order to escape from a trap so that he can save a woman’s life (when I first read “Red Nails,” the surety that Conan would have hacked off his foot was absolute; Howard’s “crazy” narrative drive and power to involve his readers is a quality not to be sneered at or one that can be worked around with any sort of success). Most irritating of all about this Conantics sequence is that it is resolved by an unnecessary use of logic: “In his desperation, an inspiration struck him. The construction of the oarlock limited the vertical motion of the loom to a height of less than five feet above the deck …” (Conan, p. 211). Conantics just squats under it and lifts, breaking it off for use as a gigantic club. Before this, he takes the whip away from the overseer by force. He could have done both these things by wild action like Conan the first time he was whipped. The galley sequence in “The City of Skulls” is an uncalled-for plot delay, excess padding—if it is judged with the idea in mind that it is supposed to be a Conan story.

Also, I never knew that REH’s Conan was a superhero like the de Camp-Carter version. Sure, in “Queen of the Black Coast” he exerts great strength to cast part of a stone column from his legs; “With a terrible cry he heaved upward, hurling the stone aside” (Conan of Cimmeria, p. 116). This effort is not so unbelievable in view of Conan’s muscular development and the adrenaline the dire situation he was in would call for. In “Shadows in the Moonlight,” he does another bit of weightlifting: “The stone was a symmetrical block … astonishingly massive. The Cimmerian grasped it … and with legs braced … the muscles standing out on his arms and back in straining knots, he … cast it from him, exerting every ounce of nerve and sinew. It fell a few feet in front of him” (Conan the Freebooter, p. 110). Notice that he threw it only a “few feet” even though he used all his strength. In “The Devil in Iron,” Conan throws “a heavy bench …, a missile few men could even lift” (Conan the Wanderer, p. 113), again in a desperate situation. Please do note that in these instances—the most extreme examples of Conan’s strength that Howard ever presents—the Cimmerian only does these deeds once and at great cost in effort. In “The City of Skulls,” Conantics “… heaved up a marble bench. Sinews creaking with the effort, Conan raised
the heavy bench over his head and hurled it at the leg … He stepped closer, picked up the bench again, and again swung it against the ankle” (Conan, pp. 217–218). De Camp and Carter actually have Conantics walking around with this great weight and picking it up twice to swing it like some kind of gigantic baseball bat! In “The Castle of Terror” they write that “At first [Conantics] had run effortlessly …” (Conan of Cimmeria, p. 144)—after a “grueling flight” through the jungle and an eight-day trek across a plains. Conantics finally gets tired after he is chased by lions for an hour on top of his previous exertions! I daresay Conantics has a huge letter “C” sewn onto his chest—certainly that would be about as “realistic” as most of the other details and incidents in a de Camp-Carter story.

Carter’s use of religion in the imitations is one of the major differences between Conantics and Conan, and one of the major flaws in an imitation of Howard. In “The Hand of Nergal,” Carter presents the most simple religious conflict possible—Good versus Evil. A gigantic golden god representing the Heart of Tammuz battles a gigantic tenebrous god representing the Hand of Nergal. I asked Glenn Lord if Howard, in his outline of “The Hand of Nergal,” included the golden god-defender of the Heart of Tammuz. He answered “no” in a letter dated February 2, 1974. This fact means the injection of forces for Good in Conantics stories must be Carter’s idea—an idea he repeats with de Camp in Conan of the Isles, featuring another Good vs. Evil confrontation and even a scene wherein the imitation Conan sacrifices a bullock to Crom (who hates weaklings)! Why, Crom even takes on tangible form in that Conantics novel! A reading of the Howard Conan tales reveals that REH never had Crom appear as a tangible entity, only as a religious concept. REH never had any Good Gods as real beings in his series; his Evil Gods were ancient or alien entities whom man conceived as evil because the beings’ purposes and actions usually brought destruction to men, as was the case in H. P. Lovecraft’s Yog-Sothoth Myth-Cycle. In “Queen of the Black Coast,” Conan is asked if he fears the gods and he answers, “I would not tread on their shadow …” (Conan of Cimmeria, p. 96, italics mine). In “Black Colossus,” Mitra, a kind god, orders the princess Yasmela who has come into his temple for help to “Go forth into the streets alone, and place your kingdom in the hands of the first man you meet there” (Conan the Freebooter, p. 66). Afterwards Yasmela says, “It might have been the voice of the god, or a trick of a priest’” (p. 67, italics mine). These references to priests suggest the possibility that the priesthoods may not be serving actual gods, but are perhaps using religion as a front to provide themselves with an easy way of life. If REH had intended for Good Gods to enter his fictional milieu he could have brought them in easily enough. He did not; the above reference to Mitra is the closest he ever came to admitting the actual existence of forces of Good, and he casts strong doubts on the idea immediately by having Yasmela herself doubt the certainty that she had conversed with a god. Conan the Conqueror, a novel by Howard, shows Conan aided by the cult of Asura in the one instance in which religion takes an active hand in his behalf. No god ever appears, however, and the cult of Asura can hardly be considered a force for Good, since “Conan had been told dark tales of hidden temples where intense [sic. incense?] smoke drifted up incessantly from black altars where kidnapped humans were sacrificed before a great coiled serpent…” (p. 104). Why, in his tales of Solomon Kane the Puritan adventurer, Howard never has God intervene in Kane’s behalf. Kane overcomes by his own strength and skill with weapons; occasionally he is aided by a juju man and black magic! I personally feel that REH’s treatment of Hyborian Age religion on a conceptual basis, with alien beings or beings from earth’s prime acting as evil gods, is much more realistic than the simplistic antics in some of the de Camp-Carter efforts. Once a writer admits the existence of Good gods who are willing and ready to help out the hero, he blunts all suspense with the overwhelming presence of deus ex machina. Of course, authors like J.R.R. Tolkien are able to use a Good vs. Evil conflict—without the presence of supreme beings—on various story levels and in various degrees to great achievement. A comparison of Tolkien to Carter, though, could only be facetious. Likewise, there is little reason to compare Howard with Carter with any degree of seriousness.
In the considered opinion of this writer, all the extra de Camp-Carter wordage added to Robert E. Howard’s own and mixed in with his stories in the Conan paperback books has done more damage to REH’s literary reputation than all the poor tales that Howard wrote himself. By literary reputation I do not mean an ability or artistic accomplishment which would place Howard on a level with Shakespeare or anything of that sort, but rather a clear appreciation by readers of what REH was writing. The comparisons I’ve made herein indicate what a mess de Camp and Carter have made of Conan, and this mess is what readers of the Conan books get most of the time, thanks to the flood of imitations by de Camp, Carter and Nyberg. The coinage of “Conantics” is singularly appropriate in describing the imitations. The root word “Conan” is obvious. Conan’s actions in the imitations are “antics,” nothing more. “Con” means that these stories are anti-Howard in all important respects. “Tic” means that these imitations suck the blood from the original tales by their presence in the same books; they leech off the power of Howard’s writing, because they have no power of their own. The Conantics stories are miserable additions to Sword-and-Sorcery fiction by any standard of decent writing and are certainly unworthy to be in the same books with fiction by Robert E. Howard, who is unquestionably one of the very best writers of Sword-and-Sorcery.

From a review of several issues of *Amra* in Reg Smith’s *Sardonic Worlds #3* in The Hyperborian League Mailing #7 (April 1977)

Looking at issue #2, which was published in 1959, I notice an Arkham House ad on the back. Send three dollars to AH in Sautk City and you can get a copy of *Always Comes Evening* by Robert E. Howard. *Skull Face and Others* will cost you five dollars, but of course it’s a much bigger book. . . . This issue has an article by Derleth called “The Wheel ‘Turns.’” This was before the terms “heroic fantasy” and “sword-and-sorcery” came into popular usage; Derleth in his article terms the Conan and Gray Mouser stories “the swashbuckle-magic-sex type of adventure tale.” I think you’ll agree that the newer terms are much better!

. . .

Best item in this issue [#67] is “Stirrups & Scholarship” by L. Sprague de Camp. De Camp says that when he picked up an issue of *Weird Tales* in 1930 he glanced at a story called “Kings of the Night.” He noticed that the author had given Roman horsemen stirrups, which is historically inaccurate. De Camp felt that the author didn’t know what he was talking about, so he put the issue of *WT* back and didn’t become interested in Howard until twenty years later. What you should have done, Sprague, is written a post card to Robert E. Howard, c/o *Weird Tales*, and pointed out his error to him. Then you would probably have become a pen-pal of Two-Gun Bob, who in turn would have probably introduced you to the Lovecraft circle of correspondents, including HPL himself. You would have written an article for Derleth’s *Arkham Sampler* in 1949 called “My Friendship with H. P. Lovecraft” (later reprinted in *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces*) and you could never have written *Lovecraft: A Biography* because you would have felt too close to the subject. Dirk Mosig would never have gotten mad at you, but instead would have visited Villanova one summer day, tape recorder in hand, eager for your memories of Grandpa Theobald, and about the only critical thing you would have to say about The Old Gent would be that you wish he had eaten more fresh fruit and vegetables and less sugar-saturated coffee and ice cream. (pp. 5-6)

[It helps to know that: (1) *Always Comes Evening* (1957) and *Skull-Face and Others* (1946) now sell for about $1000 each; (2) de Camp would go on to be criticized for his HPL biography by many, including S. T. Joshi; and (3) the cancer that killed Lovecraft was probably the result of his poverty-limited diet.]
REHeapa Autumnal Equinox 2017

A letter from E. Hoffmann Price to August Derleth
from Randy Everts’s Cthulhu, pp. 2-3 in The Hyperborian League Mailing #7

March 11, 1945.

Dear Derleth:

Four boxes of REH relics arrived: tear sheets of published yarns, weird, western, adventure, etc.; some high school themes, several bales; carbons of MSS; rejected originals; half finished yarns; a bound MS of 81,500 words, GENT FROM BEAR CREEK, made up of Breckinridge Elkins yarns threaded into a continuity, and put on offer by Otis Kline, and presumably returned by Kline as unsalable. There is also a scrap book of the kind popular with women in the 1880s-90s, my mother had one, years ago, I vaguely remember it. Colored pictures, sentimental occasion cards; newsclippings, verses, etc. pressed flowers after the manner of the times. Mrs. Howard’s, without doubt. In this book, loose, was a postal card sized studio picture of REH around age 5-6, or so I would deduce – the eyes, and the facial contours convince me it must be young REH.

Wallace Howard, Dr. H’s nephew, got the old man’s car, and “useful” personal effects; apparently there was no one else to whom the valuable goods could be left, so the nephew – who, like all the other kinfolk, had pretty coldly ignored Dr. H. in his declining years – seems to have been the one least subject to resentment, and hence he’s legatee.

In the batch of relics I got are also some snapshots of the house in NM from which Billy the Kid escaped; REH in front of it; usual snapshot from long range, no use as a likeness.

A few snapshots posed: two-three buckos of Cross Plains, engaged in Breckinridge Elkins type mayhem. No good as likenesses, except one, and REH isn’t in it.

A number of letters to REH: a few of yours, a few C. L. Moore, a few from fans; a couple or three I wrote him, back in 1932-33, when things were dark, ominous, and adventurous for a beginner at fictioneering. Jesus, man, how casually I took what today I’d consider major calamities. I was grateful to be alive. Still am, but perspective seems to have changed. So has my style. The “I” that wrote REH 13 years ago was not the same “I” that pawed over those relics last night. I was pretty tired, but resolved to go to the darkroom (basement) to print up some long overdue pictures; I found I didn’t have a drop of D-72, and instead of mixing some, (10 min. at the most) I sat down and gutted the 4 boxes. And sat up late, reading.

In a certain sense, I had no right reading the letters, even though they’d been given to me by REH’s father; but in another sense, I wasn’t overstepping myself, in that they revived and renewed REH’s personality, and rounded it out in a way. And originating from writer confreres, they weren’t personal in a sense that would have made my post-mortem eavesdropping improper.

Carbons of duns launched at W.T. He sure needed $400 badly, in mid-1935. A follow up – why hadn’t they sent him $400 or even an answer? They were in him for $860.

A file of Dr. Howard’s carbons. One letter in which he stated specifically the answer to a query I’d never posed, and which I’d never been able to pose. Dr. H. stated – I forget to which correspondent – that he had not known at the time that Robt. had got from the nurse attending Mrs. H. a statement to the effect that Mrs. H. was surely done for. And that if he, Dr. H., had known at the time, he might have dissuaded Robt., as Robt. had on previous occasions set his affairs in order in anticipation the one thing I’d never had the guts to ask: “What efforts did you make to forestall him, did he evade your vigilance, waiting
until the days of worry and exhaustion had worn you down? How did you come to slip? Or did he defy and out-will you?

The inference is now clearly warranted that Dr. H., while aware of his wife’s condition, did not realize that REH had got an authoritative statement which moved him to immediate action. Actually, Mrs. Howard lived another day, and outlived REH by, I think, 8 or 12 hours. All of which you know. The only new point is, it seems that some well meant attendant’s attempt to ease the shock, prepare REH for the inevitable, really made a job of it.

I have read the book length GENT FROM BEAR CREEK. It is just too bad that REH was not a bit more mature as a writer and craftsman. MAN EATING JEOPARD is far more restrained; Breckinridge Elkins has that Paul Bunyan touch, which is good — in itself — but stringing together 12 episodes, each of which has the same gag structure, makes for repetitiousness which could never be the case if the episodes, originally published individually, were read at intervals.

Yet there is so damn much splendid characterization, regional lore, and priceless dialog! I can understand the rejection of the book, and just as sharply as I regret the rejection, I’m keeping it, not just as a momento [sic] mori, but seriously as a text or reference work. Rather, as a REFRESHER: for I’ve dealt with normal versions of those monstrously magnified and burlesqued Bear Creek folk.

REH inevitably would get monotony in stringing those stories together. Monotony of FORM I mean; monotony of chapter-denouement, monotony of resolution mechanism, let’s put it. The actual stringing together is done well enough, as to continuity, though there’s just too much of it.

There is an extravagance of immaturity, and a certain heavy-footed & self conscious humor (“I’m a peaceful person, slow to anger”) which crops out. Had REH grown up as a man, and as a writer, he could have done the same thing with more variety of movement, and with less burlesque in the truly necessary extravagance the subject demands. There is something Homeric about the work’s expression and characters; something epic. I mean, in a rudimentary way. Given 10-15 years of growing up, as a human and as a craftsman, I do believe a work based on the Bear Creek folk could have been genuinely valuable.

I don’t know how you like Jesse Stuart’s stuff, but I sure as hell did like TAPS FOR PRIVATE TUSSIE. You may say there’s no comparison. Granted. I merely mean, there is potentially a kinship. REH didn’t have any solidity to relieve his burlesque. In time, he would have had. This extravagance, these whoppers remind me ever so much of those I heard among N. California variants of the Bear Creek folk.

Hell, I can’t do anything with it. I don’t know of anyone who could. That’s what gave me a brisk attack of regrets last night. Christ, what a pity he didn’t grow up to do with art and skill what he fairly splashed out by untutored and uncontrolled instinct!

My Simon Bolivar Grimes series is put together better, and avoids the over-done burlesque; but I wish I could contrive to catch that lifelikeness and range of dialog and that touch of genuineness of detail as to dress, domestic arrangement, ways and doings and arrangements of things, the personalities and characterizations I see between one overdone Howard mayhem-cyclone and the next one. My series has done well, as such things go; but I’d make a million at it, and I’d be proud of it as workmanship, if I could get that something that REH just “flang” in, unwittingly, not realizing how good is was, as he rushed in with greater gusto to over-do what he called the main business.
Paragraph after paragraph made me howl with laughter of reminiscence: his Bear Creek-ers were so much like lumber jacks up around the Mt. Lassen country; some of the narrative has the ring and flavor of the monstrous god-damn lies troopers of the 15th Cavalry used to spin, about beating up hordes of Filipino cops, wrecking whorehouses, turning villages inside out, in the Islands, back in my time. The “natural narrative” – the instinctive story teller, depending on the instinctively right whopper, the instinctively right characterization. A sort of folk lore. Howard had this in a supreme way, but hadn’t the maturity nor discipline to utilize his gift.

Too damn bad.

I have your list for SKULL FACE, and I have nothing to say. I find nothing in this lot of relics I’d ask you to consider. Your choice of Conan yarns is beyond criticism – for as far as I am concerned, Conan could be skipped en [sic] toto, and you have clearly justified your inclusion of Conan. You’ve not skipped any of the individual yarns, non-Conan, that I’d’ve included.

There is also a file of letters from REH to HPL. This file, as a guess, amounts to 250 single spaced typed sheets. RH Barlow got them from Mrs. Gamwell, and forwarded them to Dr. Howard. It has all the while been my impression that these letters had been destroyed, accidentally, but Dr. H. must have been confused when he wrote me on that. The steel trunk he referred to couldn’t be found, Dr. Kuykendall wrote me; so the stuff came in 4 big cardboard boxes. Now, these letters were HPL’s and then Barlow’s – nearly as I can gather from correspondence I’ve read, Mrs. Gamwell’s letters etc., Barlow’s title is clear, despite recriminations and misunderstandings – and while Dr. Howard did include these letters in the things he expressly wished me to have, I am compelled to consider that since Barlow sent them to Dr. Howard only as a kindness to an old and lonely man – for Dr. H’s sad diversion during his last days – and now that these REH-HPL letters have served Dr. H., they should revert to Barlow, if he wants them.

I am writing Barlow – via carbon of this letter – to ascertain his wishes. While possession is 9 points of the law, and while I can not picture anyone’s disputing my acceptance of what Dr. H. gave me of his son’s relics, and while I knew REH man to man, which neither Barlow nor the other people did, it still seems to me that for me to retain that file would be to penalize Barlow for having been friendly and courteous to Dr. Howard, a man who set great sentimental store on any relic of his son.

These letters seem to be a swap of ideas on sociology, politics, the aims of art; REH defends Texas saying that it does not flow ankle deep in blood, and that there is not a corpse under each mesquite bush. He defends those HPL considers lawless and anti-social persons. And damned the well ordered east. Since HPL was never in Texas – I infer that he repeatedly queried REH as to whether a tenderfoot could safely enter Texas without being shot down, scalped, or vivisected just for pure Texan entertainment – and REH never in the east, they wrangled for some years. REH saw nothing sacrosanct about intellect or aesthetes, as such; he felt that HPL did lay too much stress on art and intellect, and not enough on the substance of a man as a whole. HPL felt that REH put too much emphasis on brawn, knives, guns. Bit by bit – I glanced at pages here and there – they got over the big hurdle caused by each misunderstanding the other’s terms.

There was of course much discussion on non controversial subjects, such as pre-history, racial origins, origins of beliefs and cults and myths, subjects on which – without disrespect to either contestant – neither knew as much as he might have, because in all probability, NO ONE actually knows, and everyone is guessing, and what the hell!

Before returning the file to Barlow, I must read it.
Much of the material must be of general interest to fantasy followers; much of it is of course repetitious in its recapitulations and rehashings toward an agreement of a sharp drawn issue. Some of it, I believe, on the basis of only a few hours skimming thru the entire lot, could with interest and value been included in SKULL FACE; but it is quite too late for that, since the 30 days which you said still remained before the deadline are now about passed.

I am not justified in telling you at this moment whether there is sufficient meat in the 250 sheets to warrant a separate post war book of REH-vs.-HPL; there are not as far as I have thus far [sic] discovered, any letters FROM Lovecraft; I have only letters to HPL. Whether the one sideness is such as to make it unworthy to edit the Howard expressions is beyond my present (and probably also future) reach of opinion.

If the stuff stacks up well, I might microfile the lot; ten rolls of 35mm. would easily do it, and more. (I refer to the letters only.)

Just why no HPL letters exist in the Howard file is beyond me. Since REH died first, there’d have been no point, emotionally, for returning HPL’s letters to Mrs. Gamwell. Or if these had on HPL’s death been returned, Barlow would surely have rounded them up. The accidental destruction of papers, which Dr. H. mentioned, accounts for a good many gaps all around.

In view of a literary verdict on REH’s published works, I do not anticipate that there are any gems, uncut-gems, lying in the tangled mess of unpublished and uncompleted works. True, great writing is sometimes rejected, and the dross published, but without unkindness or disrespect, REH wasn’t quite the kind of whom this could be the case. Neither was HPL, judging from Marginalia; though I did enjoy several essays, and the book as a whole, the loss of those relics would hardly have raped LITERATURE, or erected barriers in the pathway of Philosophy.

I got a certain melancholy pleasure out of re-reading what I’d written REH in 1930- [illegible] to return your several letters; you too have set behind you enough time to glance back, once in a while, at the origins of that which is now tall and branched widely and rooted firmly – and just so many more years nearer the ultimate uprooting. Reminiscence is a sort of self pity – [illegible], in those days when they [illegible] nose bled, and they mocked me, when they did not ignore me, I was nevertheless rich, for then I had before me many more days than I now have.

Well – best wishes, & tell you more when I know more about the 4 chests of relics.

EHP

[The boxes of Howard material are the contents of REH’s legendary Trunk of unpublished letters, typescripts, and juvenilia. This is the material Price sold Glenn Lord in 1965, except for the Gent typescript. I assume this is the same typescript that George and Toni Lee Roady of Missouri still have. George is the son of the late Bobby Roady, who was given it and an old typewriter of the Howards (not Bob’s, but probably Dr. Howard’s) by Zora Mae Bryant as reward for doing odd jobs for her. [9] Zora Mae had been married to Howard heir Alla Ray Kuykendall Morris’s cousin Elliott Bryant, so Zora Mae inherited the Howard estate from Alla Ray when the latter died in 1965. Thus, Price must have returned the typescript to the Howard heirs at some point.]
REFERENCES


23
THE ROBERT E. HOWARD BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SECONDARY SOURCES, PART XXIV

The list of articles below is complete insofar as it contains all items relating to Howard, excepting those by Howard himself (being primary references and cataloged elsewhere) and those inspired by Howard, such as poems by others (being primary references by those authors). It is in alphabetical order by author and then by title. The abstract, if any, is in brackets.

<table>
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<th>AUTHOR</th>
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Margulies, Leo


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“Chapter III. Callahan County” [from an unfinished REH bio by a friend who knew him; says both he & REH had compulsive ambitions to write; says REH had genius as a storyteller, even though his father disapproved; & gives his impressions of Callahan County & its people] in Jonathan Bacon’s *Ixion Unbound #12*, pp. 6-12 in *REHupa* Mailing #28 (July, 1977); reprinted in Bacon’s *Omnium-Gatherum #3*, pp. 6-12 in *The Hyperborean League* Mailing #8 (July, 1977) & James Van Hise’s *The Road to Velitrium #36*, pp. 11-17 in *REHupa* Mailing #163 (June, 2000) & *Sword & Fantasy #2* (James Van Hise, Yucca Valley, Cal., Apr., 2005), pp. 43-49

Price, E. Hoffmann

Letter to August Derleth, dated 11 Mar., 1945 [says 4 boxes of REH relics arrived from the late Isaac M. Howard, incl. tear sheets, typescripts, & carbons of stories, incl. A Gent from Bear Creek, fragments, poems, photos incl. ones of a 5- or 6-yr old REH & REH in Lincoln, N.M., letters to him & from him to Lovecraft (but none from Lovecraft, as if Isaac destroyed them), etc.; says *Gent* is repetitious & immaturely written, but has splendid characterization, regional lore, & priceless dialog, & is epic in a rudimentary way] reprinted in R. Alain “Randy” Everts’s *Cthulhu*, Apr. 1977, pp. 2-5 in *The Hyperborean League* Mailing #7 (April 1977) & in his *REH, Sep.*, 1977, pp. 2-5 in *REHupa* Mailing #29 (Sep., 1977)

Price, E. Hoffmann

Letter to August Derleth, undated [agrees with Derleth that REH’s best work is distinguished by authenticity, however much the folk dialect may be invented, as in “A Man-Eating Jeopard” in contrast to his stories of the “phoney” Conan, though the latter are more literate; thinks that REH was an “exaggerated
escapist” with a persecution complex & was “emotionally unstable,” killing himself out in a fit of despondency, though long in the planning; mentions that he is to get the contents of REH’s trunk] reprinted in R. Alain “Randy” Everts’s *Cthulhu*, May, 1977, pp. 4-5 in *REHupa* Mailing #27 (May, 1977); reprinted in Everts’s *The Dark Man*, pp. 3-4 in *The Hyperborian League* Mailing #8 (July, 1977)

Price, E. Hoffmann

Rogers, Wayne (writing as Bittner, A. H.)

Schonfield, Hugh

Smith, Tevis Clyde, Jr.

Terrill, Rogers

Wright, Farnsworth

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