

Everett, Justin and Jeffrey H. Shanks, eds. *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. 245 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1-4422-5621-7. \$80.

In his review of Tolkien criticism published since 2013, Norbert Schürer argues that with few exceptions, “Much criticism features weak, underdeveloped arguments or poor writing, and the field is overrun by niche publishers who seem to have little quality control” (“Tolkien Criticism Today,” *LARB*, Nov. 13, 2015). Justin Everett and Jeffrey H. Shanks’s collection of essays, *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror*—the most recent entry in S. T. Joshi’s Studies in Supernatural Literature series—largely falls victim to, but in a few exceptional essays moves beyond, the similarly low standards of much scholarship on the major figures of weird fiction to emerge from the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* in the period from the 1920s to the 1940s. Everett and Shanks’s collection brings together fourteen essays that address how *Weird Tales* bridged the gap between the nineteenth-century “pioneers” of weird fiction and the “modern creators in the genres of horror, fantasy, and the new weird” (xviii). However, the editors’ thesis is unfulfilled by the individual essays, which come from a range of academic and lay writers. While the majority of the collection’s essays focus on H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, the collection advances scholarship on less popular authors, such as Clark Ashton Smith, C. L. Moore, and Harold Lawlor. The collection’s greatest collective strength is in the brilliant moments when individual contributors place *Weird Tales* in conversation with scholarship on American pulp magazines.

Unique Legacy is divided into three parts, beginning with an introduction by the editors. Everett and Shanks’s introduction does little to situate the book with recent work on fantasy, the weird, or horror outside of some biographical materials on writers like Lovecraft. This sets an unfortunate precedent that is borne out in too many of *Unique Legacy*’s essays.

The first part draws together five essays under the title “*Weird Tales*, Modernism, and Genre Formation,” and includes sustained discussions of the networks between literary modernists/modernism and the pulp writers of *Weird Tales*, and the creation of a discourse community and a “weird class” of writers around the magazine. The second part of the collection presents four essays, two each on Lovecraft and Howard, though the two on Howard—the first by Shanks and the second by Everett—engage overlapping issues (racist anthropology and eugenics respectively) and reference largely the same primary and secondary sources. Everett’s essay is without doubt a helpful extension of Shanks’s argument that Howard’s story “Worms of the Earth” is symptomatic of Virginia Richter’s concept of “anthropological anxiety,” but more diversity of theme would have proven beneficial. The final section of the collection

brings together five essays on *Weird Tales* contributors Clark Ashton Smith, C. L. Moore, Robert Bloch, and Harold Lawlor—whom the title of the section refers to as the “other authors” of *Weird Tales*. Not only is each of these essays more engaged with the multiple discourses of fantasy, pulp, periodical, and modernist studies with which Everett and Shanks place *Weird Tales* in conversation, but the essays in part three throw off the yoke of Lovecraft and Howard to consider the magazine as something other than the mouthpiece of those two writers.

Heavy emphasis on Lovecraft and Howard means that *Unique Legacy* is less about *Weird Tales*’s position in the scene of interwar pulp and literary publishing—its stated purpose, according to editors Everett and Shanks (xii)—and more often about the genius of two authors. This is to the detriment of the collection. There is a tension between those essays that praise Lovecraft and Howard for their seemingly singlehanded invention of the weird subgenres of cosmic dread and sword-and-sorcery, and those essays, like Jonathan Helland’s on C. L. Moore or Sidney Sondergard’s on Harold Lawlor, that take seriously the idea that in a cultural field as massive as the pulps, no single author (and no single magazine) should be the sole basis for the study of a genre.

The tension between an author-driven understanding of *Weird Tales* and a more broadly contextualized one is nowhere more obvious than in part one. In his essay on literary modernism in the first decade of *Weird Tales*, Jonas Prida argues, for example, that, “It is more fruitful to explore how many other, more frequent *Weird Tales* contributors exploited or reflected what we now think of as literary modernism” (15) than to emphasize the contributions of a single author, even Lovecraft; relatedly, Jason Carney in his essay argues that it is “an insidious idea” “that Lovecraft was a solitary genius among pulp hacks” (13). These assertions, however, are contrasted by contributions from Dániel Nyikos and Nicole Emmelhainz. Though both Nyikos and Emmelhainz reframe Lovecraft as a collaborative writer influenced by his peers, they reinscribe his centrality, albeit in a more communally defined way, by suggesting that *Weird Tales* and its many contributors had Lovecraft as their chief influence.

Despite these issues, *Unique Legacy* as a whole offers an important meditation on the literariness of the pulps, their place in interwar modernism and periodical culture, and much on the significance of Lovecraft and Howard. Unfortunately, the quality of the engagement with Lovecraft and Howard’s fiction relies too heavily on those authors’ own interpretations of their writing, and is thus critically unimaginative. One representative essay is Bobby Derie’s “Great Phallic Monoliths: Lovecraft and Sexuality” in part two, which presents the four “faces” of Lovecraft’s sexuality that have been explored in criticism: the asexual, heterosexual, homosexual, and transsexual. The essay begins with a renunciation of the feminist critique of Lovecraft by Victoria

Nelson, and rather than addressing feminist or queer criticism in a discussion of Lovecraft's supposed sexuality and its potential influence on his writing, rejects serious engagement with theories of gender and sexuality.

Unique Legacy, however, does end on a high note—and the entirety of the third part of the collection, which is devoted to Smith, Moore, Bloch, and Lawlor, gives the collection scholarly value. The essays by Helland (on Moore), and Sondergard (on Lawlor) place their citational footholds beyond the circumscribed club of “Lovecraft studies” or “weird studies” to also consider questions of import to fantasy and sf studies, as well as to pulp studies. Helland's reading of C. L. Moore's “The Black God's Kiss” considers the story's presentation of gender in dynamic ways by addressing the multimodal interaction of women writers and readers of pulps, the art deployed on the cover and the inside of the issue to illustrate the story, responses from readers, and of course the story itself. In the final essay of the collection, Sondergard weaves together discussions of pulp history and theories of metafiction in an analysis of Lawlor's stories in *Weird Tales* to demonstrate how Lawlor shunned the influences of Lovecraft, Howard, and Smith “to create an interface between supernatural/fantasy elements and the verisimilitude of the glossy monthlies' literary fiction during the same period” (211). There is in *Unique Legacy* no better statement of the interplay between the pulps and literary modernism, and between the various approaches to the emergent genre of the weird.

As a whole, Everett and Shanks's *Unique Legacy* is confused about its larger intervention in the study of fantasy, horror, the weird, or pulps. With an \$80 pricetag, *Unique Legacy* is not a purchase for the individual scholar on a budget, but would be a useful addition to any university library.

SEAN A. GUYNES

Burton, James. *Philosophy and Science Fiction: Henri Bergson and the Fabulations of Philip K. Dick*. NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 233 pp. Paper. ISBN 978-1-4742-2766-7. \$79.99.

James Burton, in his recently published analysis of the intersections between the philosophy of Henri Bergson and the science fiction of Philip K. Dick, writes that the novelist's “fluid ability to traverse literary, philosophical, theological, political and other modes of thought and creativity ought also to be preserved in our academic and critical engagements with him” (25). *The Philosophy of Science Fiction* arguably follows this prescription, creating logical integuments between Bergson's anti-mechanistic views on human societies and the “fabulations” of PKD, with particular attention paid to roboticism and escape from (or at least “balking” at) deterministic, possibility-foreclosing structures. The figure enlisted in Burton's introduction to represent the concatenation of these two previously unassociated thinkers is a solar eclipse, as recorded by Herodotus, causing disbelieving suspension during an ancient battle between the Medes and Lydians. Burton chooses this historical/astronomical phenomenon as a symbol for the joint consideration of Bergson and Dick because, “as we superimpose each upon the other, like the sun and the moon during the eclipse, it becomes increasingly hard to see which is which” (3).

The metaphor, however, also hints at one of the text's shortcomings: After appearing briefly in the first chapter, Bergson's evolutionary philosophy is more or less eclipsed by the speculative fiction, a dense analysis of the writer's novels (and many of their critical satellites) overshadowing the French thinker's illuminating views on evolved and evolving morality. It is difficult, of course, to complain about attention being paid to PKD's corpus (Burton focuses on four early novels, with extensive consideration of *Valis* [1981] and *The Man in the High Castle* [1963]), but the subtitle “Henri Bergson and the Fabulations of Philip K. Dick” seems a bit misleading considering Bergson's lead billing but cursory treatment. Out of Bergson's work, Burton's analysis focuses almost exclusively on *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), which he calls the philosopher's “most directly ethical and arguably political work” (15), and which he believes has, unjustly, received less attention than *Creative Evolution* (1907) or *Matter and Memory* (1896). Even *Two Sources*, however, becomes eclipsed by the gnosticism Burton invokes to explain the salvific “fabulation” he sees operating in the science fiction novels.

Ultimately, Burton's project wants to use the hooks of Bergson's late, overlooked treatise and Dick's recently popularized Exegesis to pull PKD studies out of murky postmodern interpretations that emphasize the indeterminacy of his novels rather than their moral dimension and “immanent soteriology” (24), which, while necessarily incomplete and non-prescriptive, nonetheless chart an ethical trajectory.