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American Supernatural Tales (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

As Stephen King will attest, the popularity of the occult in American literature has only grown since the days of Edgar Allan Poe. *American Supernatural Tales* celebrates the richness of this tradition with chilling contributions from some of the nation's brightest literary lights, including Poe himself, H. P. Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson, Ray Bradbury, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and of course Stephen King. By turns phantasmagoric, spectral, and demonic, this is a frighteningly good addition to Penguin Classics. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

This book was published in 2007 and contained 26 short stories by as many authors. The works ranged from the 1820s (Washington Irving) to 2000 (Caitlin Kiernan). Of all the authors, three were women. From the 19th century, there were tales by Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Fitz-James O'Brien, Bierce, Robert Chambers and Henry James. For the period between 1900 and the late 1920s, nothing was included. From the late 20s through the end of WWII, there were Lovecraft, Clark

Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard and Robert Bloch. The postwar writers through the 1950s were represented by August Derleth, Fritz Leiber, Ray Bradbury, Shirley Jackson, Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont; nothing was included for the period between the mid-1950s and 1970. From the 1970s to 2000, there were T. E. D. Klein, Stephen King, Dennis Etchison, Thomas Ligotti, Karl Edward Wagner, Norman Partridge, David J. Schow, Joyce Carol Oates and Kiernan. The editor is a scholar who's published widely on the supernatural tale and its authors. As such, the collection contained informative short biographies, including mentions of writers' key works and suggestions for further reading of them. Also included was a list of many books on history and criticism in the supernatural genre, but unfortunately little on other short-story anthologies. The introduction defined the supernatural tale as something grounded in realism but focused emotionally and esthetically on a departure from nature's laws through things such as creatures (ghosts, vampires, werewolves) or events (for example, in a haunted house). This type of tale was distinguished from fantasy -- where all events would be set in an imaginary realm -- and psychological horror -- where the horror would stem entirely from aberrations of the mind.

S. T. Joshi, an expert on fantastic and horror fiction, and an editor and biographer of H.P. Lovecraft, assembled this collection in 2007, with biographies of each of the twenty-six authors and his opinions of their stories. It was republished in 2013 as part of a new Penguin Horror series edited by the famed Mexican auteur Guillermo Del Toro. The reprint includes not only a new series introduction by Del Toro but a fancy hardcover cover and black charcoal-ish coloring on the edges of the paper. Joshi didn't divide the stories by themes or schools or eras. He listed them chronologically and mentioned differences in passing. I am going to mention stories together by similarities, ignoring his ordering very slightly. I was surprised with the gruesomeness of Washington Irving's tale. He usually put humor into his supernatural tales and suggested in his most famous tale that the victim of the supernatural had been pranked. This time he gave the reader the options of regarding the German student as insane or damned. I was surprised that Joshi went with a rather obscure story of Nathaniel Hawthorne. He didn't make that mistake with Poe. So much for the golden oldies, who looked to the past and/or Europe. The next set of authors set their tales in their country and their present. Fitz O'Brien told a tale of an invisible humanoid creature captured in mid-nineteenth century New York, a tale disturbing because the narrator, far from omniscient, could not make either head or tail of it. Ambrose Bierce is of course most famous for a tale about a wretch trying to escape his fate in his mind. In this tale, a young wanderer meets his fate sleeping in the woods. In a dream, or rather nightmare, he is strangled to death by something that looks like his

mother.

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