

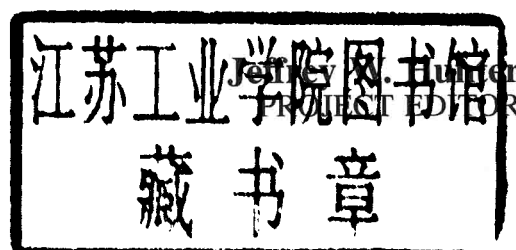
☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 205

Volume 205

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers





Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 205

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Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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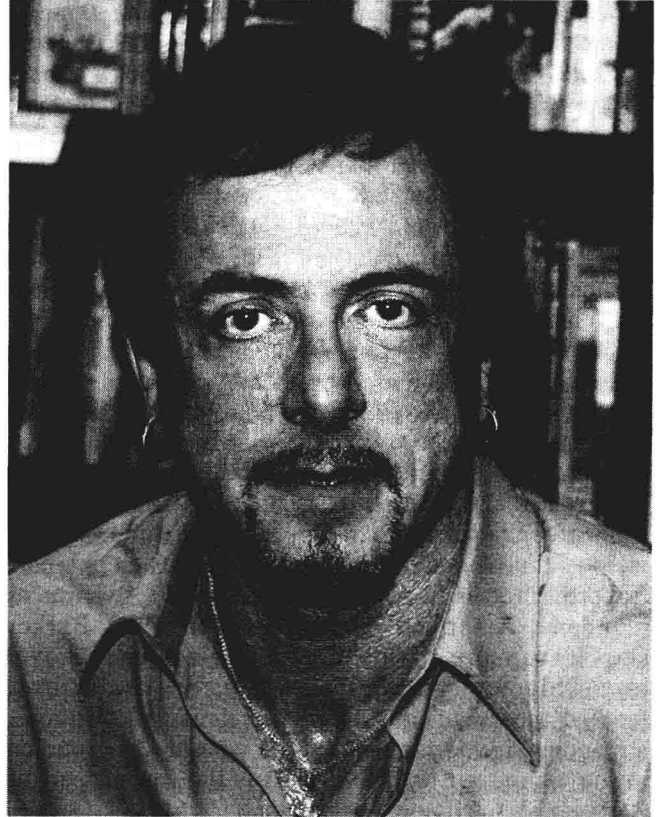
1952-

English short story writer, novelist, playwright, and screenwriter.

The following entry presents an overview of Barker's career through 2002. For additional information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volume 52.

INTRODUCTION

Barker has gained distinction within the horror genre for his sensual, often erotic prose and is highly regarded by fans, critics, and other writers within the field. Called "the future of horror" by novelist Stephen King, Barker's works address a variety of themes, including sexuality, repression, and the homogenization of society. Many reviewers have interpreted these three themes as being closely interlinked, maintaining that sexual imagery contributes to Barker's overall social and political message. Barker's fictional oeuvre does not rely completely on dark and gruesome horror, however, and includes elements from other genres as well; he has also geared several works at a young adult audience. Whether his emphasis is on horror or fantasy, Barker remains a vital creative force within the contemporary horror, science fiction, and fantasy genres.



BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Barker was born in Liverpool on October 5, 1952. As a child, Barker was influenced by such fantastical and often macabre literature as J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and the works of Edgar Allan Poe. While in elementary school, Barker began writing stories and producing plays for his friends. While taking courses in English and philosophy at the University of Liverpool, Barker spent his time drawing, painting, and absorbing literary inspiration from such sources as film director Jean Cocteau, author William Blake, and others. During this time Barker made two short films, *Salomé* (1973) and *The Forbidden* (1978), which were distributed during the 1990s. After earning a B.A. degree, Barker moved to London and formed a theatrical troupe called The Dog Company, which produced many of his plays, including *The History of the Devil* (1981). This play, along with two other early dramas, *Frankenstein in Love* (1982), and *Colossus* (1983), were later collected and published as *Incarnations* (1995). In 1984 and 1985

Barker released six volumes of short stories titled *Books of Blood*. Upon publication, these stories helped launch a career displaying a unique vision of the horror genre. Barker's interest in horror extended to film, prompting him to move to Los Angeles in 1991. Soon afterward, he made his directorial debut with *Hellraiser* (1987), a screenplay adapted from his novella *The Hellbound Heart* (1986). Since then, Barker has served as screenwriter, director, or executive producer for numerous horror films. Breaking away from conventional horror cinema, he served as executive producer of the film *Gods and Monsters* in 1998. Barker has continued to focus on the fantasy/horror genre, as evidenced by such novels as *Coldheart Canyon* (2001) and *Abarat* (2002).

MAJOR WORKS

Barker first gained recognition with the publication of *Books of Blood* in 1984. Written while he was known only locally as an obscure dramatist, this collection of

stories represented a strong new voice in the horror genre. The graphic imagery and gore featured within these volumes provides an element of sensuousness and a focus upon the human body. One story from *Books of Blood*, titled "In the Hills, the Cities," relates the history of two warring towns whose populations merge into two giant bodies and enact an endless battle. Another story, "Rawhead Rex," depicts a flesh-eating monster that savors the taste of children. *The Damnation Game* (1985), Barker's first novel, quickly made the *New York Times* best-seller list. The book's theme of opposing mythical figures engaging in an epic struggle is one Barker has continued to develop throughout his career. *Weaveworld*, published in 1987, incorporates more elaborate elements of fantasy than his previous works. The plot revolves around an alternate universe contained within the interwoven strands of a magical carpet. Created by a race of ancient magicians, the carpet is the last refuge from impending forces of darkness. Barker combines the horror of his early stories with the nearly romantic fantasy of *Weaveworld* for *The Great and Secret Show* (1989). Subtitled *The First Book of the Art*, this work is the first volume of a planned trilogy. The novel details the quest for a lost form of magic known as the Art. Utilizing more than forty characters and a narrative that shifts between various dimensions of reality, Barker crafts an epic tale of cosmic forces barely concealed beneath a veneer of mundane, American modern life. In 1992 Barker surprised many of his fans by releasing a novel ostensibly for children. *The Thief of Always* uses familiar aspects of the fairy tale or fable, but features a protagonist in the form of a child who has been turned into a vampire. *Everville* (1994) is the second part of Barker's Art trilogy. *Sacrament* (1996) and *Galilee* (1998) are smaller works, containing naturalistic themes and settings: in *Sacrament*, a wildlife photographer suffers a polar bear attack and is stranded in northern Canada, and *Galilee* comprises a steamy romance set in the American South. Barker compiled and published the anthology *The Essential Clive Barker* in 1999. In 2001 Barker released *Coldheart Canyon*, fusing his trademark elements of horror with a tale of Hollywood glamour and dissolution. The beginning of his most ambitious project, called *Abarat*—projected as a series of four books—was published in 2002. *Abarat* features a group of islands, with each representing an aspect of time. The work is loosely based on C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Barker's other cinematic work includes directorial and screenwriting credits for *Hellraiser*, *Nightbreed* (1990), and *Lord of Illusions* (1995).

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Barker has garnered generally positive reviews from critics for his ability to transcend the niche of popular horror fiction. His penchant for mixing genres in order

to create surprising new worlds has also kept him in a favorable position with critics. Though his style is sometimes seen as overly gruesome, he is praised for his attention to detail, and for "the symphonic grace of [his] prose, his loping, muscular imagination, [and] his sharp eye on the human dilemma . . .," according to Armistead Maupin in his foreword to *The Essential Clive Barker*. Critics also admire Barker's ability to transform frightening motifs into a childlike world of fantasy. Robert Ziegler, in his essay on Barker's *The Thief of Always*, explains this aspect of his work as illustrating the point that "transgression or insanity . . . are properties of the magic world of literary fantasy." Although his darker prose may not suit all readers' tastes, the depth of Barker's imaginary world continues to draw attention from both critics and the public.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Salomé* [adaptor; from the play by Oscar Wilde] (screenplay) 1973
Poe (play) 1974
The Forbidden (screenplay) 1978
Dog (play) 1979
Dangerous World (play) 1981
The History of the Devil (play) 1981
Frankenstein in Love (play) 1982
The Secret Life of Cartoons (play) 1982
Colossus (play) 1983
Clive Barker's Books of Blood, Volume One (short stories) 1984
Clive Barker's Books of Blood, Volume Two (short stories) 1984
Clive Barker's Books of Blood, Volume Three (short stories) 1984
Books of Blood, Volumes 1-3 (short stories) 1985
Clive Barker's Books of Blood, Volume Four (short stories) 1985; also published as *The Inhuman Condition: Tales of Terror*, 1986
Clive Barker's Books of Blood, Volume Five (short stories) 1985; also published as *In the Flesh: Tales of Terror*, 1986
Clive Barker's Books of Blood, Volume Six (short stories) 1985
The Damnation Game (novel) 1985
**Underworld* [with James Caplin] (screenplay) 1985
Books of Blood, Volumes 4-6 (short stories) 1986
†The Hellbound Heart (novella) 1986
‡Rawhead Rex (screenplay) 1986
§Hellraiser (screenplay) 1987
Weaveworld (novel) 1987
Cabal (novella and short stories) 1988
The Great and Secret Show: The First Book of the Art (novel) 1989
||Nightbreed (screenplay) 1990

- Imajica* (novel) 1991
The Thief of Always: A Fable (novel) 1992
Night of the Living Dead: London (Book One: Bloodline) [with Steve Niles] (novella) 1993
Night of the Living Dead: London (Book Two: End of the Line) [with Steve Niles] (novella) 1993
Everville: The Second Book of the Art (novel) 1994
#Incarnations: Three Plays (plays) 1995
***Lord of Illusions* (screenplay) 1995
††Forms of Heaven: Three Plays (plays) 1996
Sacrament (novel) 1996
Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror (short fiction) 1997
Galilee: A Romance (novel) 1998
‡‡The Thief of Always [with Bernard Rose] (screenplay) 1998
The Essential Clive Barker: Selected Fictions (short fiction) 1999
§§Clive Barker's Books of Blood (short stories) 2001
Coldheart Canyon: A Hollywood Ghost Story (novel) 2001
Abarat (novel) 2002

*This film appeared in America as *Transmutations*.

†Published within *Night Visions 3*, edited by George R. R. Martin. Published on its own in 1988.

‡Adapted from Barker's short story of the same name.

§Adapted from Barker's novella *The Hellbound Heart*.

||Adapted from Barker's novella *Cabal*.

#Includes Barker's plays *Colossus*, *Frankenstein in Love*, and *The History of the Devil*.

*Adapted from Barker's short story "The Last Illusion."

††Includes Barker's plays *Crazyface*, *Paradise Street*, and *Subtle Bodies*.

‡‡Adapted from Barker's novel of the same name.

§§Contains *Clive Barker's Books of Blood*, volumes 1-6.

CRITICISM

Kim Newman (essay date autumn 1987)

SOURCE: Newman, Kim. "Hellraiser: From Horror Fiction to Horror Movies." *Sight and Sound* 56, no. 4 (autumn 1987): 233-34.

[In the following essay, Newman surveys the film *Hellraiser* and Barker's horror writing.]

In a gutted North London mansion that, conveniently for the publicity people, is supposed to be haunted, Clive Barker was—with apparent ease—making his directorial debut. Best known as a groundbreaking

author of short (the *Books of Blood*) and long (*The Damnation Game*) horror fiction, Barker turned to direction after a disappointing foray into screenwriting.

Hellraiser resulted from a team-up between Barker and former assistant director Christopher Figg. Figg wanted to produce and Barker to direct and, after discarding several stories from the *Books of Blood*, they hit on an original idea ('three people in a house, and things happen') intended mainly as a showreel. Barker wrote it up into a novella, *The Hellbound Heart*, for an American anthology, *Night Visions 3*, which he shares with other leading lights in the current literary horror generation, Lisa Tuttle and Ramsey Campbell. New World stayed with the project after their co-financiers Virgin withdrew. In response to a suggestion that *Hellraiser* is an American film shot in Britain, Figg claims, 'It's as American as the *Mayflower*.'

Although an admirer of the baroque splatter of Dario Argento, Barker says he is not imitating any particular school of film horror. 'We're telling a strong story and therefore the rococo flourishes which distract are redundant. We're not cheating. We're not putting in point of view shots of creatures which do not exist. There are always payoffs to hints like that. We show the monsters, the horrors. That was always the thing with the short stories. We're giving the audience the goods.'

'The movie is a perverse love story, and if any element is going to deter people, it'll be the perversity. The line between pleasure and pain, between violence and desire, is so fine, and I find that an interesting ambiguity. I'm not saying this isn't a horror film. Directors will say, "*Firestarter* isn't a horror film, it's a human drama." Give me a break. This is a horror film, and unapologetically so. What we were trying to do is collide this very strange, dark, forbidden imagery with really nice pictures.'

Barker hoped that the rock group Coil would score the film (New World overruled him), and gleefully claimed that he had selected them because 'it's the only music I've heard on disc that I've taken off because it made my bowels churn,' although his publicist tactfully suggested that cinema managements might prefer it if that last quote read '... made my spine chill'.

Having turned down an offer to write *Alien 3* and completed a doorstopping fantasy novel, *Weaveworld*, Barker plans to take a budgetary step up and do a special-effects fantasy for a big studio. 'If films were my profession, I'd happily climb the ladder rung by rung and make three small pictures. But I'm commissioned to write another novel and I'm doing a children's book and a couple of other projects and I'd like to do some more theatre in the not too distant future. I want

to put the complex, metaphysical notions into books where they belong, and I want to do summer pictures, which are a different kind of thing.'

The difference between Barker's fiction and film is the difference between *The Hellbound Heart* and *Hellraiser*. A minor character in the original has been turned into the second lead in the adaptation and polished up as a more or less conventional heroine. 'I liked the fact that in the novella the girl was a total loser. You can live with someone like that for the length of a novella. You can't for a movie.'

'I think New World are hoping *Hellraiser* will appeal to a few people who wouldn't go to *House 2* or *Creepshow 2*, that word of mouth will attract people to its slight off-centredness. There are lots of monsters. We've got all the weird stuff in there, a lot of action. I believe the thing to do is go out there and scare people. But this isn't one of those pictures where you cast the twelve most good-looking youths in California, and then murder them. We've cast people because they are terrific actors, and then murdered them.'

Colin Greenland (review date 12-18 February 1988)

SOURCE: Greenland, Colin. "The Figures in the Carpet." *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 4428 (12-18 February 1988): 172.

[In the following review, Greenland compares *Weaveworld* to Ramsey Campbell's *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*, finding Barker's novel lacking in substance.]

These two novels [*Weaveworld* and *The Doll Who Ate His Mother*] by horror writers from Liverpool both take that city for background. Each selects a derelict house on the edge of a demolition site as the portal for that intrusion of chaos into the mundane that is the principle of the genre. Ramsey Campbell's chaotic agency is the influence of John Strong, a necromancer twenty years dead, which still radiates from the Amberley Street cellar where he held his peculiar sabbats. Clive Barker's anomaly is fairyland itself, a tract of marvels and monstrosities that has, for nearly a century, been magically parcelled up in a shabby carpet.

Of the two books, *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* is the less explicitly supernatural. The psychotic killer who haunts the neighbourhood of Amberley Street, taking bites out of all his victims, human and animal, may have been ruined by nothing more occult than the righteous hatred of his grandmother, who is convinced her daughter gave her baby to the Devil. The protagonist of the novel, an unhappy young teacher called Clare Frayn, hardly considers John Strong to have been

anything more than a bullying charlatan with grimy fantasies, while the man who leads her in the hunt for the psychopath, Edmund Hall, is only after copy for another in his best-selling series of slick black magic exposes, to be called *Satan's Cannibal*. Without pretending to any cynical, sensational inversion, Campbell simply presents a vampire hunter who is a less pleasant, less moral person than his prey.

It is Campbell's purpose, and his talent, thus to force the growth of his horror against the grain of the everyday. Normality for him is not inert but turbulent, a welter of inconveniences and dissatisfactions, misunderstandings and moods. Experienced through the clogged emotions of his characters, Liverpool itself wriggles and throbs expressionistically. "Down a side street, a drill chattered harshly in stone; next to her, the plastic cover of a hotdog stall folded open with a thick gasp of onion." Too much of this is stifling; but Campbell's rhythmic plot and his firm way with characters steer us on through.

Clive Barker's scenery, Liverpoolian or elfin, is less energetic, which is perhaps a pity, since his purpose is to show us worlds within worlds. He has certainly given himself space to do so. After one earlier novel, several plays and plenty of short stories, *Weaveworld*, at seven hundred-odd pages, is an *opus* that is decidedly *magnum*. Barker's publishers have helped by generously insulating each short chapter with a great quantity of white paper (yet without charging any more for the luxury). They have also nominated the book an epic, though it is almost classically a romance, a heraldic adventure in which figures possessed by principles, of love or greed or despair, pursue one another headlong with spells or pistols through a vague locality full of numinous things that begin with capital letters: the Fugue, the Firmament, the Gyre, and so forth. The secret land inside the carpet is threatened by a rough association of villains, all of them, on first introduction, the most promising elements in the book. They are Shadwell, the salesman, inside whose magic jacket is stowed every heart's desire; Hobart, the brutal, crusading police inspector; a loathsome trinity of weird sisters; and a mad djinn that thinks it is the angel Uriel.

On further acquaintance all these characters prove less interesting. In fairyland, Shadwell, for example, becomes a mere demagogue and tyrant. The fairies themselves are rather disappointing, their magic no match for machine-guns, and their much-prized innocence no more than routine mob gullibility. Helped and hindered by them, our heroine and hero (both human) strive, suffer and surmount. Titanic events continually sweep them apart, then together again. The plot reeks with the pathos of loss and reunion, forgetting and remembering. Barker lays on the sentiment with a palette knife, and rounds each chapter with a

plangent phrase (“‘Ah, the ladies’, said Shadwell; and Death flew in at the door”). All this, as he knows well, will endear him to the consumers of novels that are thick; but in substance it is thin, compared to the robustness of Ramsey Campbell, let alone the richness of John Crowley’s *Little, Big* or Robert Holdstock’s *Mythago Wood*, two rediscoveries of fairyland much more thorough and disconcerting.

Maitland McDonagh (essay date January-February 1990)

SOURCE: McDonagh, Maitland. “Darklands Here We Come: Future Shockers.” *Film Comment* 26, no. 1 (January-February 1990): 60-3.

[In the following essay, McDonagh discusses Barker’s foray into filmmaking, drawing parallels between Barker’s career and that of cyberpunk writer William Gibson.]

The Greenhouse Effect, computer viruses, nuclear winter, bioethics, tabloid television, space debris, AIDS, dying oceans, serial murderers, the Survivalist Right, crack wars, the population bomb, televangelist scandals, biological warfare, the Rapture, genetic patents. . . . How did real life get to sound like a scary movie, and what are we going to do about it? Well, maybe we aren’t going to do anything about it. But Clive Barker and William Gibson, cutting edge writers who’ve plunged headlong into film, are. The question is, are we ready for what they have in mind?

Once upon a time we dreamed utopian dreams, relentlessly optimistic fantasies predicated on the notion that the imperfection of this world was nothing more than the reflection of man’s own arrested spiritual and intellectual development, that to recapture the pre-lapsarian perfection of Eden was not only desirable but eminently possible. Even cautionary tales of future totalitarianism, social chaos and ecological ruin proceeded from the belief that forewarned is forearmed, constructing disastrous scenarios to instruct and warn: James Hilton’s *Shangri-La* and George Orwell’s *Oceania* are polarized sides of the same coin, heaven and hell on earth, and *let that be a lesson to you*.

These days it’s a whole other world, and the naive conventions of simpler times, the last legacy of the industrial age’s belief in better living through science, have given way to a notion simultaneously cynical and suffused with a kind of weary wonder: that terminal dystopia is coming—if it isn’t here already—and there’s no reversing or avoiding it. The only way to deal with it is to kick back and enjoy, to dance the Apocalypse and party like it’s 1999.


At least, that’s the way it’s looking in genre fiction and movies, where the land lies dark and hectic and Barker and Gibson have struck up the band. Bookish bad boys with time on their side—they’re a youthful 37 and 41, respectively—Barker and Gibson are the black princes of the future imperfect, with death and night and blood on their brains and butter-wouldn’t-melt smiles on their faces.

Their backgrounds are a study in disparity. Barker was born and raised in Liverpool (near Penny Lane, a fact with which he charms interviewers) and later moved to London; Gibson was born in Virginia and relocated to Canada as an adult. But they have sensibility in common. They’re twisted contemporary romantics—they believe in grand passions and transcendence, in desire unquenched by the grave and the transfiguration of body and soul. Gibson borrows the language of science fiction and hears lost souls crying out from the corners of vast corporate mainframes; Barker worships the beauty in tattered flesh and the glory of love in ruin. If they aren’t high-minded, they’re idealists nonetheless, and Gibson, lanky and owlsh, with the trace of a Virginia drawl, even has a high-tech label for what he writes: cyberpunk. He thinks it’s a silly word and he’s right, but it’s too cool and evocative to resist.

Fifteen minutes into the future, think about a world caught in a great web of computerized communication links—software plugged right into the soft machine—and call it cyberspace. Imagine a decaying urban sprawl, equal parts *Blade Runner*’s Los Angeles, Manhattan via Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight* and John Carpenter’s *Escape from New York*, with a lashing of some feverish Tokyo of the mind. Now understand that Gibson doesn’t think this is a bad thing at all, and you’ve got some idea of the landscape of *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and a host of short stories. Barker’s physical locales range from the Yugoslavian countryside to the alleyways of the London underworld, but his agenda is always heavy on the hot—he’s out to redefine the term “scared stiff,” and you come away from his work asking such questions as: “Is it still necrophilia if the corpse is reanimated and wants you in the worst possible way?”

Can it be called serendipity that both published their first books in 1984, a sublimely resonant year to go public with dangerous visions of erotic delight, dark wet dreams of death, decay and dissolution? And is it any wonder that, with stunning literary success under their respective belts, both Gibson and Barker are making the move to movies? It is, after all, well and good to write books, but in the information age a picture is truly worth a thousand words.

Clive Barker is up to his ankles in a swirl of sweet-smelling smoke on the set of *Nightbreed*, his second film in as many years. Midian, his crumbling under-

ground city of the dead and the damned—constructed at Pinewood studios, a stone's throw away from *Batman's* Gotham City sets—crawls with monsters large and small. Barker, who's got the dichotomy between the nastiness of his fiction and his own sweet-faced good looks down to a science, is a happy man. "Midian is a place of the imagination," he says, hitting just the right note of winsome disingenuousness. "It's a place of dreams as much as it's a place of nightmares. Everyone thinks of me as exploring this terrifically grim material, but that's just a matter of definition, isn't it? It's the imaginative that's always fascinated me, not just the dark imaginative." 

In *Nightbreed*, Barker's imagination wraps itself around the relationship between a mad man and a madder one, then takes a flying leap into an underworld where every day is a carnival . . . *real* carnival, a no-holds-barred celebration of the grotesque and the inverse. David Cronenberg, purveyor of venereal horror extraordinaire, stars as Dr. Philip Decker, a practitioner of the healing profession with a few . . . quirks. Barker can't help but chuckle at the perfection of his vision. Hair brushed straight back off his forehead, outfitted with a pair of little wire-rimmed glasses just like the ones Jeremy Irons wore as psychopathic twin gynecologists Elliot and Beverly Mantle in his *Dead Ringers*, Cronenberg does indeed have a solid, professional gloss. Martin Scorsese pegged him as having the air of a Beverly Hills gynecologist, but Barker moves in for the kill. "I looked at David," he says, "and thought, 'Yeah, I can believe this guy could be a psychiatrist.' But I could also believe that with the moon at its fullest, he might . . . forsake his healing ways." Barker laughs.

In five years he's gone from an obscure career in the British theater to acclaim as "the future of horror," in Stephen King's eminently quotable words. As if the overall high quality of the stories in the three-volume *Books of Blood*—Barker's debut, a critical and commercial triumph—weren't shock enough, Barker also proved to be incredibly prolific. Within three years he followed up with two more collections of short stories (*In the Flesh* and *The Inhuman Condition*) and two screenplays: *Underworld* (an original script) and *Rawhead Rex*, adapted from his own short story. Screenwriters are just about always unhappy with the way their work arrives on the screen, and Barker was no exception. But unlike most, he did something about it: he adapted his novella *The Hellbound Heart* and directed it himself as *Hellraiser*, in which a puzzle box proves the key to a nether world of bizarre sights and sensations. Those who toy with it—a brutal sensualist and a woman blinded by lust—soon learn they can't peep for free: he's torn limb from limb and then trapped in a fleshy limbo beneath the floorboards and she, years later, is charged with resurrecting him via a bloody ritual that could make strong men weep.

Trapped in the reductive body-count conventions of recent years ("By hook, by pick, by ax, bye-bye"), few horror movies could hope to match the sheer audacity of a picture whose protagonists are steely-eyed adventurers in the velvet underground and sadomasochists from beyond the grave. *Hellraiser's* creepy cenobites were Barker's greatest creations, demonic angels from sensualists' hell who don't stoop to stalk and slash; they seduce with the promise, "We have such sights to show you," and practically have to beat off victims with a stick.

What's this? Remember that Tod Browning's *Dracula* was released on Valentine's Day 1933 and advertised as the "Strangest Love Story Ever Told"; Universal's publicists knew you don't just shiver when you're scared. Barker's contribution to the cinefantastique isn't that he discovered the link between the erotic and the horrific; it's that he's not afraid to go all the way.

Still, conventional wisdom wouldn't have designated a whitefaced ghoul with a spike-studded skull to become *Hellraiser's* pinup fiend. "I never understood the thing with Pinhead," Barker demurs. "Truly, from the bottom of my heart, I never expected the stuff on the sneak preview cards: 'The guy with the pins in his face is real sexy.' 'Love the dude with the pins in his face.' I intended the cenobites to be elegant, strange . . . but sexy? When was a guy with pins in his face very sexy?" Well, just meditate on this: Robert Mapplethorpe's fetish fantasies may be too *outré* for Washington, D.C.'s Corcoran Gallery, but Pinhead's porcupine countenance graced America's billboards and bus shelters not once but twice, the second time back by popular demand for *Hellbound*. Score another point for genre leading the mainstream.

Cyberpunk draws water from a lot of wells, dipping into high and low culture alike: Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by way of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*; *Mad Max* and *Max Headroom*, William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, *Nova Express* et al., Survival Research Laboratory and punk rock, J. G. Ballard's *Crash* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, postmodern choreographers from Pina Bausch to William Forsythe, Michael Morecock's Jerry Cornelius novels and Max Ernst's *Une Semaine De Bonte*, Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*, the Comte de Lautreamont's *Songs of Maldoror*, Alan Moore's graphic novels *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*, and the works of Gaudi, Michael Graves, H. R. Giger, Hieronymus Bosch and the Marquis de Sade. Gibson's dense, muscular prose conjures up images like some electrochemical jolt to the brain stem: zoned-out housewives plugged right into their favorite soap operas; plastic-surgery junkies with lethal fantasy lives made flesh; crumbling housing projects-cum-war zones; the damp alleys of Chiba City. They're all images to apposite, so *immediate* you're almost certain you've seen them before.

"It's sort of a genre convention that science fiction is about the future," Gibson observes, "but it never is; it's always about the period it is written in. You just take all the weirdest things about the present and make them more extreme. I have this fantasy of my more naive readers suddenly waking up in the middle of one of my stories and saying, 'But that's . . . that's Manhattan!'"

"Most of my ideas about medical technology come from reading the back pages of *Los Angeles Magazine*, from the ads for elective surgery. Get your body chopped and channeled . . . it's incredible. I sometimes see women shopping on Melrose Avenue and catch myself thinking, 'I remember when they didn't have women like that.'"

Gibson's first movie project was a plum assignment, but a natural: *Aliens III*. After all, *Alien* brought together Scott and Giger and put the term *biomechanical* on everyone's lips. Copies of the first two *Alien(s)* screenplays and an extended treatment in hand, Gibson dove right in. "I didn't see there was very much that could be done with the alien—the beast, as they call it around the shop—so I tried to open out the background of the first two, exploring things about the human culture you wouldn't have expected but that didn't contradict what you already knew. You discover early on that the universe isn't run exclusively by the Company—there's a hard-bitten, Third World socialist power in space as well, this motley bunch of Latin Americans and East Asians, who are all out there doing their own thing in big space stations painted inside like Mexican revolutionary murals. I was also fascinated by hints that the alien was someone's biological weapon, and I was exploring that."

"One thing I couldn't do was take it back to earth, which is what science fiction fans always told me they wanted to see. Like, the beast takes Manhattan—it would have to have been the beast takes the *Blade Runner* set, and that would have been an \$80 million movie. They were awfully kind about the very first draft I turned in: they said, 'This is really nice, but we priced it out and it's going to cost \$70 million,' and I said, 'Is that too much?' So a few space stations and a few hundred thousand aliens were excised in the interests of economy."

Gibson's *Aliens III* script eventually fell victim to changing studio personnel and conflicting commitments, but it's not his only iron in the film fire. He's currently working on not one but two other screenplays, both adaptations of short stories from his *Burning Chrome* collection, despite reservations about translating his material from one medium to the other.

"The things I do novelistically that people think of as being very cinematic aren't appropriate to movies in terms of writing a screenplay," he points out. "A lot of

the things I write about turn out just to be art direction—nobody wants a 180-page screenplay about how frayed the cuffs of the policeman's jacket are."

First up is *New Rose Hotel*, to shoot in Tokyo with Ed Pressman producing and Kathryn Bigelow directing. Bigelow's taste for the gritty genres—*Near Dark*, *The Loveless* and *Blue Steel*—and her avowed admiration for noir aesthetics make her a natural to take charge of the Gibson vision. "*New Rose Hotel*," says Gibson, "is a weird urban fable that just happens to take place in Tokyo—or in some kind of fantasy in Tokyo—oh, maybe ten years in the future. I hope when it gets made they'll avoid time-casting it; it really takes place in an indeterminate time, in a dark place . . . like *Terry and the Pirates*, in a way. It's all about Americans in a mysterious and glamorous place they don't understand, blundering through walls and falling over themselves."

Gibson is also at work on *Burning Chrome* for Carolco. "That was the first of the *Sprawl* pieces," he says. "It's easier than *New Rose Hotel* because it's a lot less interior. *New Rose Hotel* is a doomed, silent monologue that this man is conducting with himself, locked in a coffin hotel outside of a Tokyo airport, while in *Burning Chrome* people are crashing around, breaking into other people's computers . . . doing things. The terrible thing about all the characters in my books is that there's this tremendous void inside of them. If they ever blunder out of their computer nets, if their wires are pulled, you discover that they're just lonely characters sitting in crummy little rooms."

A third story, *Johnny Mnemonic*, has been optioned by painter Robert Longo's Pressure Pictures, for production in 1990. Longo—who has directed music videos and the short film *Arena Brains*—and his associate, Victoria Hamburg, are writing the screenplay; Hamburg will produce. "For Robert and me," Hamburg says, "*Johnny Mnemonic* was the Rosetta Stone of Gibson's later work. We thought the Nighttown aspect of the story was very easy to translate into something Robert could do on film in an amazing, unique way. Robert has the eyes and William has the words to make an amazing statement."

Gibson and Longo have already collaborated on *Dream Jumbo* (title appropriated from the Japanese lottery), which was presented last year at the UCLA Center for the Performing Arts in conjunction with a retrospective of Longo's work. A postmodern mélange of performance elements featuring Gibson's original text, *Dream Jumbo* takes place, says Longo, "in the zone of confrontation between urban schizophrenia and power and hope."

It remains to be seen whether the fastidious eroticism that informs Gibson's prose will make it to the screen intact. *Hellraiser* packed a powerful carnal punch, suf-